

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Mediators – Real and Counterfeit" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Timothy 2:5)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/9/2012

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We are coming now to the final point in our consideration of the Apostle Paul's great statement about the evil of man-made doctrines, in Colossians chapter two. And so as we begin today let us remind ourselves of the words we find there, and these are indeed the very words of God. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. If you are able, I encourage you to follow along in your own Bible – Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen:

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head [that is, to our Lord Jesus Christ], from whom all the body [the entire true Church of Christ], nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations — "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using — according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:18-23)

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## **Man-Made Doctrines: A Fourfold Threat**

Now here, as we have seen, the Apostle Paul is warning the church against the evil tyranny of man-made doctrines. We have seen that he warns us about four things that always characterize that evil tyranny.

First of all, we have seen that he warns the church that man-made doctrines always come into the church on the basis of counterfeit authority. Sinful man, little man, setting himself up as the source of authority, instead of submitting to the unique authority of the Word of God, and of Christ the Head of the Church.

Secondly, we have seen that the Apostle Paul under divine inspiration warns us that one of the characteristic evidences of the presence of man-made doctrines in the church is the effect that man-made doctrines have on worship. Counterfeit worship – worship that is not in accordance with the clear commandments of God – this is a second key element of the evil tyranny of man-made doctrines in the church.

And thirdly, we have seen that man-made doctrines always have their roots in counterfeit revelation. Sinful man brings in that which is outside of God's true revelation as He has given it to us in God's own Book. Sinful man places his counterfeit revelation alongside of God's true revelation. Sinful man places his counterfeit revelation in authority over God's genuine revelation.

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All of these things – counterfeit authority, counterfeit worship, counterfeit revelation – were threats to the church at Colosse in the time of the Apostle Paul. And, as we have seen, these things have been threats to the spiritual life of the church throughout the centuries since that time.

And, we have taken note of the fact that these things are a very real threat to the Christian and the church in our own time. We live in the midst of an epidemic of counterfeit authority, counterfeit worship, and counterfeit revelation in the visible church.

And so, we must be on our guard against these things. We must oppose these things. We must reject these things. We must reject those who seek to bring these things into the church, those who refuse to be instructed and corrected and brought to repentance by the pure Word of God.

### **Counterfeit Mediators in New Testament Times**

And so now we come to the last of the four things that the Apostle Paul puts on exhibit before us as a key characteristic of the evil tyranny of man-made doctrines in the church. Here is that fourth key characteristic: Those who bring man-made doctrines into the church introduce various doctrines of counterfeit mediators into the church.

When the Apostle Paul speaks here in Colossians chapter two, verse eighteen of the “worship of angels,” that is what he is talking about. Angels as mediators

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between God and man. That is the form that this heresy took in the time of the Colossian church. But as we shall see, counterfeit mediators can also take many other forms.

First Timothy chapter two, verse five tells us that “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” But as we look at the history of the church, from the time of the Colossians right up to the present moment, we find false teachers always seeking to introduce counterfeit mediators, either in place of Jesus Christ, or in addition to Jesus Christ.

### **Counterfeit Mediators in Romanism**

Now, sometimes this is quite obvious. The most blatant examples are to be found in the long history of Roman Catholicism. Rome establishes human priests as mediators on earth between God and man. Rome falsely teaches that Mary the mother of Jesus is a mediatrix in Heaven between God and man. Rome claims that thousands of saints are acting as mediators in Heaven for various purposes, and dispensing the grace of God to men.

Dear friend, listen to me carefully: Rome does not have one shred of authority for any of this in Holy Scripture. Rome has established the false doctrines of these counterfeit mediators in just the ways that Paul speaks of here in Colossians chapter two. Rome’s teaching of counterfeit mediators is based on counterfeit authority, and counterfeit revelation. And Rome calls upon its people

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to render counterfeit worship to those who are supposed to be mediators alongside of Christ.

### **An Example of Counterfeit Mediators in Protestantism**

But sometimes the doctrine of a counterfeit mediator slips into the church virtually unnoticed. And it happens even among those who would call themselves Protestants. In our time, many Reformed churches are falling under the evil tyranny of a man-made doctrine called Federal Vision theology. One of the essential elements of this theology is the false teaching that salvation begins with water baptism – water baptism of an infant child.

Now, that is enough of an error all by itself. That is damnable heresy. The water of baptism is no substitute for the shed blood of Christ to cleanse the soul of sin. Hebrews chapter nine, verse twenty-two tells us clearly that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” of sin. But there is actually a deeper error behind this more obvious error.

The deeper error is this: Federal Vision theology establishes the man who administers water baptism to that infant child as a saving mediator between God and man. Federal Vision theology makes salvation a cooperative effort between God and man, mediated to the sinner by the hand of a man applying water to the head of a child.

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## **Counterfeit Mediators Are Antichrists**

Dear friend, listen to me carefully: The man who takes it upon himself to do this, the man who believes that he is bringing about the regeneration of a soul by the application of water, that man is a counterfeit mediator. He is a deceiver. He is putting himself in the place of Jesus Christ. He is, therefore, an antichrist.

What is an antichrist? Well, the word as we find it in the Greek of the New Testament literally means, "against Christ" – or even more accurately, "in place of Christ." An antichrist is anyone who sets himself up in place of Christ, or anyone who teaches that there are mediators other than Christ.

In First John chapter two, verse eighteen, the Apostle John warned the early church that "even now there are many antichrists." What was true in the time of the early church is true in epidemic proportions today. Roman Catholicism and Federal Vision theology are but two examples. We live in a time of "many antichrists."

We must be careful to recognize them. True believers must guard their souls, and the souls of their loved ones, against them. Many Christians are busy looking for antichrists out in the world. We must never forget that the most dangerous ones, in eternal terms, are within the visible church.

Paul exhorts us, "Let no one cheat you of your reward" that is in Christ (Colossians 2:18). We must not give any standing, in our minds, in our homes, or

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in the church, to those who are "not holding fast to the Head [literally, those who are not in possession of the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ], from whom all the body [the entire true Church of Christ], nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God" (Colossians 2:19).

We must take hold ever more tenaciously of the pure Word of God, and let it take hold of us: "But you," Paul says to Timothy, "must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of...the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

### **The Legal Nature of the Biblical Mediator**

And so, we need to understand what the Word of God says about the nature of a genuine mediator, in contrast to all false mediators.

The word that is translated "mediator" in our English Bibles in the New Testament is the Greek word *mesites* (me-SEE-tace). And this word literally means, "a go-between." A go-between. The picture that is painted by this Greek word is that of a person who goes between two other individuals, to transact legal business between them. In the Greek of New Testament times this word *mesites*, or mediator, was a legal term, a term of the law courts.

Dear friends, in our time there has been a movement among some theologians to suppress or to downplay the legal significance of terms like this one that we

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find in the pages of the Word of God. One of the main motivations behind that movement is that these people, these apostate theologians, want to do away with the doctrine of justification by faith alone. They want to do away with the Biblical teaching that God declares believing sinners not guilty, once and for all, because they have placed their faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ as their legal substitute in enduring the just wrath of God for their sins.

But the book of Romans in particular is filled with this kind of legal language about the transaction that has taken place, on behalf of believers, between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. But many present-day theologians and preachers want to do away with this kind of teaching. They want to teach salvation by faith plus works. They want to bring sinners under their control, and make them submit to them as mediators, to trust in them as mediators. Dear friends, we must reject this.

There is one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. And this Greek word for mediator, this word *mesites*, speaks very clearly and very strikingly about what Christ has done.

### **Christ's Authority to Act As Mediator**

In the New Testament world, a mediator was, first of all, one who had been given the legal power, the legal authority, to act as one who intervenes between two parties who are in dispute with each other. Our Lord Jesus Christ most

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certainly was given that authority. Jesus said this, in John chapter twelve, beginning at verse forty-four:

He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.

And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

For I have not spoken [notice] on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life..." (John 12:44-50)

And after Jesus had paid the price for our sins, after He had endured the wrath of God the Father, and after God the Father had raised Him from the dead, Jesus declared this, Matthew 28:18 – "All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on earth. Go therefore," and preach the Gospel to the nations – the Gospel of reconciliation through Me. Jesus had the power, the authority, to act in the office of mediator between God and man.

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## **Christ the Peacemaker – The Propitiation for Our Sins**

Secondly, in the New Testament world in which this Greek word for mediator was used, the mediator served in the role of a peacemaker between two parties who were in conflict with each other, or at war with each other.

Romans chapter five, verse one gives the precise picture of how that peace was accomplished through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul writes, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And again, in Ephesians chapter two, beginning at verse thirteen: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace...” (Ephesians 2:13-14).

The mediator is a man who has been given the authority to make peace, and makes that peace between parties who are at war. Man is at war with God. Man is in rebellion against God. And so “the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” – Romans chapter one, verse eighteen.

But Christ the mediator has propitiated the wrath of God. In Romans chapter three, verse twenty-two we are told that “God set [Him] forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith.” First John chapter four, verse ten: “Herein is love, not that we loved God” – we were at war with God – “but that He first loved us, and

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sent His Son to be the propitiation” – the appeasement of the wrath of God – “for our sins.” First John 2:2 – “He Himself” – Jesus Himself – “is the propitiation for our sins.”

### **Christ the Guardian of God’s Oath**

And thirdly, in the New Testament world in which this Greek word for mediator was used, the mediator was one who stood as the surety for the peace that he had mediated. The one who guaranteed it. The Greek *mesites*, the mediator, was, as a secular writer of that time put it, “the guardian of oaths.” The guardian of oaths.

In God’s redemptive covenant promise to Abraham in Genesis chapter fifteen, the promise, the oath, of full and final atonement for sin, the promise of the end to the warfare between God and man, God took an oath to fulfill the promise of the covenant for both parties – for God and for man.

Only by the incarnation – only by possessing both deity and humanity – could God provide a mediator who would embody both the just claims of a holy and righteous God, and the deep need of fallen and sinful man. Only One who as a man proved Himself to be sinless, could be qualified to offer Himself as the sacrifice that would bridge that great gulf between God and man.

Only such a One, only the God-Man Jesus Christ, could secure for us the peace that was otherwise absolutely and eternally impossible. Christ is the

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guardian of the oath of God. Second Corinthians chapter five, verse eighteen – “God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” He has committed, by the Great Commission, the “ministration” – the presentation, the proclamation – of that reconciliation through Christ, to a world that is at war with God.

### **No One Else Can Replace Christ As Mediator**

Dear friends, no counterfeit mediator can do all of that. No counterfeit mediator has the authority to bring about reconciliation between God and man. No counterfeit mediator could ever pay the price for our sins to bring about that reconciliation. No counterfeit mediator could act as peacemaker between God and man.

No angel before the throne of God can do that. No minister or priest with the water of baptism in his hand can do that. No priest consecrating bread and wine can do that. No sinful human mediator has the ability to act in that capacity. Paul said to the Corinthian church, “Was Paul crucified for you?” (First Corinthians 1:13). Do you owe your salvation to Paul? Of course not, he says. You owe your salvation to the Christ of the cross, and that is why I preach the message of the cross, the message of reconciliation through Jesus Christ alone.

Mary the mother of Jesus cannot do that. Mary cannot act as a mediatrix of salvation, as Rome claims. Mary herself, when she came to understand from the angel Gabriel that she was to be the earthly mother of God’s great Mediator,

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Mary said this: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary understood that she herself needed a Mediator. She needed a Savior.

### **Do Not Be Deceived – Trust Christ for Everything**

Dear friends, do not be deceived by any teaching of a counterfeit mediator. The Apostle Paul was compelled to warn the Colossian church about this two thousand years ago, and I as a minister of Jesus Christ must warn you against the evil of counterfeit mediators today. Listen, dear friend, to the warning of the Apostle John in Second John, beginning at verse seven:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh [in other words, they do not confess Christ in His office as mediator]. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him [literally, do not say a single word of encouragement to him]; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 John 7-11)

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Dear friend, do you see? It is really quite simple. God has left no doubt about this great issue. No room for confusion. A counterfeit mediator, and the one who proclaims a counterfeit mediator – are both antichrists. There is only one true Mediator. His name is the Lord Jesus Christ. All others are counterfeits. All others are antichrists. Dear friend, "Let no one cheat you of your reward" in Christ. He is your all-sufficient Mediator at the throne of God. Trust everything, for this life, and for the life to come, to Him.

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