

Series: *Remembering the Reformation*

Title: "Today's Un-Protestant Church: The Problem" (Romans 11:33-12:2)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 1 of 10

---

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*  
(Romans 11:33-12:2)

We hear a lot in our society today about transformations, makeovers. We hear and see lots of advertising about "makeovers." They used to call it "home remodeling" or "home redecorating" – but now it's "an extreme makeover for your house."

Many women go to a spa to get a makeover. And even some men do it these days. People go and get a new look. A new hairstyle. New makeup. A new wardrobe. A makeover. A transformation.

A number of passages in the Bible speak of transformations. But these aren't the kinds of transformations that the marketing gurus of Madison Avenue invent and try to sell to us.

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Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 2 of 10

---

There are negative kinds of makeovers in the Bible. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans chapter one about the unbeliever who changes the glory of the incorruptible God into images of various kinds and worships them. Man tries to do a "makeover" with God. Man wants to create a God in his own image.

### **An Extreme Makeover in the Church**

And today, the Evangelical church is getting an extreme makeover. The major movements among Evangelicals today say that we need to redefine the church. They say that we need to stop focusing on building up the people already in the pews, the saints that we have. They say that we need to go to unbelievers and ask them what the church should look like. We need to ask them what the church should preach. We need to ask them how the church should worship. We need to find out what will please and impress unbelievers. And then we need to give it to them.

The modern makeover movements among Evangelicals go by various names. The Purpose-Driven church, the emergent church, the new paradigm church – these are all makeover movements. Forget what the Bible says. Do the things that will bring greater numbers. In the last few years, over 400,000 Evangelical pastors and church leaders have gone to seminars and workshops that tell them how to give their churches that kind of an un-Biblical makeover.

And in the process, the church's message has gotten an extreme makeover. Much of the Evangelical church no longer preaches that the Bible is totally accurate in everything it says. Much of the Evangelical church today does not preach the one

---

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 3 of 10

---

true Gospel in its fullness – the Gospel that saves souls. Much of the Evangelical church today does not train and instruct people to have Biblical discernment – to test everything against the authority of Scripture. Praise God, I know that it's different here at Reformation Bible Church.

### **How Evangelicalism Became the Un-Protestant Church**

But what happens when you do those things? What happens is that the Evangelical church becomes the church unplugged. The church disconnects itself from its Source of true power and authority, the Word of God.

And the church unplugged – the church that has disconnected from its true Source of power and authority – soon becomes uncertain what it believes. It becomes ineffectual in fulfilling its genuine mission of preaching the Gospel to the world and building up the saints in sound doctrine. And the church unplugged from the Word of God becomes ill-equipped to do battle, and it finds itself retreating in the battle against the enemies of the truth. The church unplugs itself from the wisdom of God that we find only in His Word, and instead, it plugs into the word of man and the wisdom of the fallen world.

The church that reinvents itself to meet the specifications of unbelievers may attract hundreds or even thousands of them. But it doesn't truly lead them to Christ. It has no Gospel message to offer. And while it seeks to please the unchurched, it neglects the saints. The saints aren't fed. The saints aren't built up in sound doctrine.

Series: *Remembering the Reformation*

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 4 of 10

---

A church that adopts this “new paradigm” places itself in a deadly downward spiral. Here is what happens, and you can see it in Evangelical churches all over America today. As the church caters more and more to the way unbelievers want the church to look and feel, and preach, the percentage of unsaved people in the congregation continually goes up. But at the same time, the percentage of genuine Christians in the congregation continually moves toward zero. And within a surprisingly short time, sometimes just a few years, the thinking and practices of an unsaved super-majority dominate the church.

Notice that thus far this morning I’ve talked about the Evangelical church. I haven’t used the word Protestant. And I’ve done that deliberately, because much of the Evangelical church, even much of the Reformed church, has forgotten what it means to be Protestant. The church today - the vast majority of the nominally Evangelical church, the vast majority of the nominally Reformed church, is going back to the pre-Reformation position. And as we commemorate the great historical fact of the Protestant Reformation, and all that it means, let me submit to you that it is important for us, first of all, to go back and understand the state of the church before the Reformation. Because that is the state to which the nominally Evangelical church is rapidly returning.

What characterized the pre-Reformation position? What was the church like, 600 years ago? Let me briefly name four things.

Series: *Remembering the Reformation*

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 5 of 10

---

## **A Church Built On Biblical Illiteracy**

First, the pre-Reformation position was built on Biblical illiteracy. Before the Protestant Reformation, the Bible was un-translated. The Bible was literally chained to the pulpit. People couldn't read the actual Word of God in their own language. The modern movements among Evangelicals today are also built on Biblical illiteracy. And it happens in two ways.

The first way is through the deception of the Bible paraphrase. The modern church makeover movements encourage Biblical illiteracy by using and promoting so-called Bible versions that are not faithful translations of the Word of God, but man-centered paraphrases. One that has become quite popular through the modern church makeover movements is called *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Tens of millions of copies of *The Message* have been sold. But it's actually not a Bible at all. It's a paraphrase. And the author of this Bible paraphrase is Eugene Peterson, a man who for thirty years was a pastor in the liberal Presbyterian Church, USA. He founded and pastored a church just a few miles from here, in Bel Air, Maryland. That's the first way that the modern church makeover movements are encouraging Biblical illiteracy, a return to the Pre-Reformation position. They give people something to read that says "Bible" on the cover, but it's not the authentic Bible inside.

The second way these makeover movements encourage Biblical illiteracy is through their attitude toward Scripture. The man who wrote *The Message: The*

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 6 of 10

---

Bible in Contemporary English, says this: "Christians...should be studying [the Bible] less, not more. You just need enough to pay attention to God." One wonders, how can you pay attention to God unless you read His authentic Word? Well, the modern Evangelical makeover movements say that you pay attention to God by going to a church service that's not a worship service, but a staged entertainment event. And that brings us to the second way the church is returning to the pre-Reformation position.

### **A Church Built on Emotional Experience**

The pre-Reformation position emphasized going to church as an experience. In the 15th century it had to do with the pomp, the ceremony, the robes, the ornate altars and statues, the incense, the procession. In the 15th century, you didn't hear the Word of God preached, you didn't really worship God, but you had an experience.

Well, today, the church is going back to the pre-Reformation position of emphasizing the church experience. Today, going to many Evangelical churches is going to a carefully produced "show." The emphasis is on performed music, often in the style of "American Idol" or MTV, rather than congregational singing. The emphasis is on the stage setting, the lights, the sound system, the special effects. There's a magazine called Church Production magazine, that tells churches how to do this. Every year there is a convention – actually a trade show – where thousands of Evangelical pastors now go to spend a week finding out how they can turn their

Series: *Remembering the Reformation*

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 7 of 10

---

church services into a multi-media entertainment production.

I might also add that more and more churches are adding the trappings of Rome back to their services – the robes, the altar, the incense, the banners, the processions, and all of that. So you have two different cases in the 21st century, but both of them emphasize experience.

The 21st century experience is different from the 15th century experience, but the emphasis is once again on experience, not on the preached Word of God. This is the second way the church is returning to the pre-Reformation position.

### **A Church Built On Pluralism**

Third, the pre-Reformation position was pluralistic. Rome was, and is, the great chameleon. Over the centuries, even today, Rome is quite willing to adjust its message and methods, even bring pagan practices into the church, in order to get people under the authority of the Catholic church. Let me give you just one example. Today, Roman Catholic churches in Indonesia and other parts of the Muslim world, use the name "Allah" in the mass, instead of "God" or "Jesus Christ." They do that quite comfortably. The goal is to gain numbers.

Today, the Evangelical church is moving back to this pre-Reformation position of inclusivism. The church is bringing in all sorts of worldly practices, just to get people to come. And the Evangelical church makeover movement is pluralistic about beliefs. And we see the results today. 57% of Evangelicals in America today

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 8 of 10

---

do not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life. Dr. Timothy Keller said in a television interview that there may be some "back door way to Heaven" other than Jesus Christ. I intend to say more about these things later in our conference, but today I must move on.

### **A Church Built On Man's Word, Not God's**

Fourth, the pre-Reformation position emphasized deeds instead of doctrine. The 15th century position was that good works and penance will get you to heaven. Don't worry about doctrine. Just do what we tell you to do.

And once again, the Evangelical church is returning to the pre-Reformation position. Let me quote Rick Warren, the man who is the acknowledged world-wide leader of the Purpose-Driven church movement. He says this:

"You know, 500 years ago, the first Reformation with Luther and then Calvin, was about creeds... [the new reformation that we're bringing about through the Purpose-Driven church] will be about deeds... The first one was about what the church believes... This one will be about what the church does.

"The first Reformation actually split Christianity into dozens and then hundreds of different segments... This [new reformation] is actually going to bring them together. Now, you're never going to get Christians, of all their stripes and varieties, to agree on all of the different doctrinal



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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 9 of 10

---

disputes and things like that, but what I am seeing them agree on are the purposes of the church. And I find great uniformity in the fact that I see this happening all the time. Last week I spoke to 4,000 pastors at my church who came from over 100 denominations in over 50 countries. Now, that's wide spread. We had Catholic priests, we had Pentecostal ministers, we had Lutheran bishops, we had Anglican bishops, we had Baptist preachers. They're all there together and you know what? I'd never get them to agree on communion or baptism or a bunch of stuff like that, but I could get them to agree on what the church should be doing in the world."

What this man is actually doing is advocating and leading a return to the pre-Reformation position. One church, under one head – and that head is not the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **What Is the Answer?**

The Evangelical church has largely forgotten what it means to be Protestant.

Today's focus is on giving the church an extreme makeover. The focus is on man's power to transform things. But this morning, we have before us a passage of Scripture that talks about God's power to transform. This is power of an entirely different kind. And it was by this transforming power that God took men from among those who had been conformed to the Roman Catholic pattern for centuries. The pattern of the world. The pattern of false religion. And he took those men, the

---

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

Page 10 of 10

---

Reformers, and He renewed their minds by the power of the Holy Spirit. And through those men – Calvin, Luther, Beza, Zwingli, Knox, and all the rest – through those men God kindled the flames of Reformation that swept across Europe, and brought a faithful remnant of God's people to the truth.

**Message to be continued on our next broadcast.**

#### **About the Broadcast**

*The Scripture-Driven Church* airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to obey Christ's Great Commission: preaching the Gospel to all, and equipping believers in Christ to live every area of life by the sole authority of Scripture, to the glory of our Lord and Savior.

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