

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Who Says the Church Isn't In Trouble?"

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/6/2011

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## **Satan's Triple Threat in All Ages**

At this point in our series of studies in Colossians chapter two, we are focusing on verses six through ten. As we begin today, let me read those verses once again:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

The second chapter of Colossians teaches us that there are three main threats to the true church of Jesus Christ, and they are the same threats in all times and in all places. This triple threat to the church consists of worldly philosophies, legalism, and man-made doctrines. This was true in Colosse 2,000 years ago, it was true at the time of the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago, and it is also true in the church in our time.

### **In the Early Church**

In the early centuries of the church, the threat of worldly philosophy came in the form of the mingling of pagan Greek philosophy with Christianity. The threat

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of legalism came from the Judaizers who said that you had to keep the Old Testament law in order to be saved. The threat of man-made doctrines came mainly from the Gnostics. These people said that there was such a thing as a knowledge that was higher than the knowledge of Christ found in the Word of God, and, they said, you have to have this "higher knowledge" in order to gain eternal life.

### **At the Time of the Reformation**

At the time of the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago, the church was also in the grip of worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines.

The teachings of the pagan Greek worldly philosophers Plato and Aristotle had a great deal of influence on the teachings of the church in the Middle Ages.

The church was also thoroughly immersed in legalism. The people were being told that they could purchase indulgences with money. These indulgences were declarations by the Pope that an individual's sins were supposedly forgiven by the payment of money, or the performance of some work. And so the Roman Catholic church used legalism to gain great wealth. The people who were under the darkness of Roman Catholic legalism did all sorts of acts of penance in order to supposedly pay for their sins, and they would often spend themselves into poverty to pay for indulgences.

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The church was not only in the grip of worldly philosophy and legalism. The church had also been carried away captive by man-made doctrines. Aristotle was a great influence on Thomas Aquinas, who had become the leading philosopher of the Roman Catholic church. In fact, the basic philosophical system of the Roman Catholic church, ever since the Middle Ages, down to the present time, is the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. This philosophy came to be known as Thomism.

Thomas Aquinas is considered to be the "prince of theologians" by the Catholic church, and when the Catholic authorities met at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century to try to suppress the teachings of the Protestant Reformers, the Pope laid Thomas Aquinas' writings next to the Bible, indicating that the church viewed Thomas Aquinas' philosophy as having equal weight with Scripture. And in 1880, the Catholic church declared that Thomas Aquinas is the patron saint of all of its educational institutions.

And what was the result of all of this? The result was a doctrine of Scripture that is wrong, a doctrine of Jesus Christ that is wrong, and a doctrine of salvation that is wrong.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of Scripture is wrong because it says that the Pope of Rome, and the teachers of the church, have authority over the Word of God, and that their writings and their pronouncements have equal authority with Scripture, and even greater authority than Scripture.

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The Roman Catholic doctrine of Jesus Christ is wrong because it says that Christ did not make one sacrifice for sins, once for all, once forever, on the cross. The Roman Catholic doctrine of Jesus Christ says that each celebration of the Mass is a fresh sacrifice of the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ for sin. The Roman Catholic doctrine of Jesus Christ says that He is not the all-sufficient Savior.

And therefore, the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation is also wrong, because it says that human beings need to do more, human beings must add to what Christ has done, human beings must add their good works, human beings must add their own penance as additional payment for sin.

All of this is damnable heresy, and it leads souls to Hell. These were the heresies that the Protestant Reformers rebelled against, and preached against. Many of them gave their lives for the truth – the truth that the Bible alone is the Word of God, that Jesus Christ alone is the all-sufficient Savior, and that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, totally apart from any works that man can do.

### **The Church Today**

And what was true of Roman Catholicism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is still true of Roman Catholicism today. In our own time, the Roman Catholic church continues in the same kind of captivity to worldly philosophy, to legalism, and to man-made doctrines. The Roman Catholic church is still in darkness, and that darkness has

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only increased over the centuries. The Roman Catholic church is still following the philosophy of Thomism today. The Roman Catholic church is still engaging in its legalism today. The church is still issuing indulgences today – most Evangelicals don't know that. The Roman Catholic church is still telling people that they have to add to what Christ has done in order to pay for their sins.

But in our time, we have a worse problem. Today, the Evangelical church has forgotten what it means to be Protestant. The postmodern Evangelical church is in a headlong retreat back into the darkness of the Middle Ages.

Now, it's clear to me that many people are surprised that I would make such a statement. Many of you simply do not believe it. So let me tell you why it is true.

First of all, the Evangelical church today is more and more captive to the philosophy of postmodernism, the philosophy that says that there is no one, eternal, and objective standard of truth. And so, increasingly, the Evangelical church in our day is abandoning the sole authority of the Word of God.

Postmodern Evangelical church leaders say that we need more than the Bible. In fact, not long ago I was in the audience as an observer at a pastors' conference, when I heard a postmodern Evangelical leader tell 3,000 pastors and church leaders that he believes that expository preaching from the Bible is actually a sinful thing for a pastor to do, in our time. His message was that we need to entertain people in order to get them into the church. We need to reduce the preaching of the Word of God because it drives people away. The Evangelical

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church today is being carried into captivity by this kind of worldly philosophy. The Word of God and Jesus Christ are no longer enough.

Some leading men in Evangelical and Reformed churches and seminaries today are embracing the Roman Catholic philosophy of Thomism. They are embracing Thomas Aquinas and his philosophy. Some very popular radio preachers are doing this. A man who is a leading professor of theology at a major conservative Reformed seminary is promoting the Thomistic philosophy. And it's not surprising, because this man, who says he is a Protestant, went to a Roman Catholic university to get his doctoral degree. More and more Evangelical men are doing that. This particular man has been so active in promoting the Thomistic philosophy that he was actually awarded a large cash prize by a Roman Catholic educational foundation for his work. And this man was the head of a study committee in a major Reformed denomination that took a compromise view on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. That is the kind of thing that happens when leading men in the church buy into the philosophies of the world, and seek the approval of false religions.

Now you may ask, why are men doing that today? Here is the reason: Evangelicals today think that they need the acceptance and approval of the world, and the acceptance and approval of other religious groups. This striving for the wrong kind of acceptance is most noticeable in Christian colleges and seminaries, but it also affects the church.

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Now I’m not the only one who is saying this. Here’s a quotation from a man who is a professor in Christian academia, but this is a man who has remained true to the Word of God. He says this – and I’m quoting him now — “Large numbers of Christian scholars, with few and precious exceptions, have chosen to walk the path of scholarship in general, choosing acceptance by the world as their highest priority. This may seem a sweeping generalization, but the assertion is all too easily proven...even Christian scholars have adopted the methodologies of secularism. Most importantly, even conservative Christian scholars have adopted a view of the foundation of the Christian faith [that is, a view of Scripture] that is not derived from a Christian worldview but from a secular paradigm.”

Another man in Christian academia talks about the fact that Evangelicals are “scared of being viewed as a ‘fundamentalist’” by their colleagues. And so they engage in compromise.

And worse yet, many of the men and women who are now on the faculties of purportedly conservative Christian colleges and seminaries have gotten their high-level academic degrees from apostate seminaries and graduate schools. And eventually those influences show up in their teaching and preaching.

Now what does the Word of God say about this? The Word of God condemns it. Listen to me carefully: Scripture commands believers not to seek the acceptance, approval, or counsel of the secular world or to join together in any way, for any purpose, with false religions. We must recognize that if anyone is

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not regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and if any individual or organization is not in submission to the Word of God, then they have absolutely nothing to say to the true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ about what its theology is or should be, or how it should train men for the ministry, or what it should teach, or how the church should function.

That is the message here in Colossians chapter two. We also find the Apostle Paul saying the same thing to the church at Corinth, First Corinthians 3:18-23:

Let no one deceive himself [Paul says]. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness,' and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.' Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours...and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

In so many ways, the Evangelical church today is being carried off into the captivity of worldly philosophies. And in addition to this, the Evangelical church today is also being carried away into the captivity of legalism. Most Evangelical church members today believe that they need to do good works in order to get to Heaven. That's what happens when the church no longer preaches the truth of the Word of God, that salvation is through the sinless sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and through Him alone.

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That's what happens when the Evangelical church no longer preaches the proper place of good works in the life of the believer. And so we have more and more people in Evangelical churches who aren't truly saved because they aren't hearing the one true Gospel, and they aren't living like Christians because they aren't being told what it means to live like a Christian.

And then we have the problem of man-made doctrines in the Evangelical church today. We have a cult that is prominent right now among Evangelicals, where people are following one particular man, and that man says that the world is going to end in October of 2011. Now this same man said the world was going to end in 1994, and he was wrong. He is a false prophet. But people are still following him, and he raises millions of dollars from his followers.

And this is to say nothing about the self-esteem "gospel" that is so prominent today, or the prosperity "gospel" that so many people are following. And this is to say nothing about Evangelical church leaders who are openly realigning themselves with the Roman Catholic church, and going back to the realm of darkness that the Protestant Reformers fled from, 500 years ago.

Dear friend, don't try to tell me the Evangelical church is not in trouble today. Don't try to tell me that the Evangelical church is not in retreat today. Don't try to tell me that the Evangelical church is not moving back into the spiritual darkness of the Middle Ages. Look at the evidence. The evidence is all around, the evidence is abundant, this is exactly what is happening.

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## **The Imperatives of This Passage**

The words, the warning, the exhortation, that the Apostle Paul gave to the church at Colosse 2,000 years ago is also the warning and the exhortation to the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is the warning and the exhortation to us. Paul says, you need to maintain a solid front against this triple threat to the church. To put it in terms that are more appropriate for our time, the Word of God is telling us that we need to restore a solid front against this triple threat to the church, because that solid front has disintegrated.

And so the question we are facing in our present study is this: What must Bible-believing Christians do, in order to restore the church’s united, solid front against the world’s onslaughts – Satan’s triple threat? Paul gives us the answer in Colossians chapter two, verses six through ten. And we have seen that we have, in this passage, four imperatives – four things that the true Church of Jesus Christ must do in order to restore the broken battle front, four things that Christians must do in order to get the soldiers of the army of the Lord back into their positions for battle, and back to the great work of maintaining a solid and fortified front against the enemies of our souls.

First, we must walk an enlightened walk – Colossians chapter two, verse six: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

Second, we must grow upon a firm foundation – verse 7: “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith.”

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Third, we must trust in a complete Savior – verse 9: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

And fourth, we must rest in a complete salvation – verse 10: “and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

### **Imperative #1: An Enlightened Walk**

In our last message we focused our attention on the first of these. We are to walk an enlightened walk – “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” First of all, we saw that receiving Christ means receiving the authentic Christ, and not a counterfeit. And we saw that the way an individual receives the authentic Christ is for the individual to be taught the authentic doctrine of Christ.

We find the authentic doctrine of Christ in only one place, and that is in the pages of the Word of God. Don’t look for it anywhere else, because you won’t find it anywhere else. You won’t find the true Christ in worldly philosophy. You won’t find the true Christ in legalism. You won’t find the true Christ in man-made doctrines that add to the Word of God, and take away from the Word of God, and contradict the Word of God.

### **Imperative #2: A Firm Foundation**

And so now we take up imperative number two. The Apostle Paul says that in order to restore a solid front against Satan’s threats, the church must grow upon a

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firm foundation – verse seven: “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

There is a great deal we need to say about this, and we’re going to need to continue our consideration of this verse in our next message. But let me briefly tell you what lies ahead. What does it mean for Christians to grow on a firm foundation? In this verse we find six things. Let me state all of them for you first, and then in our next message, I am going to come back and take up each one in detail:

- 1.) Growing on a firm foundation involves putting down strong roots in sound doctrine, in order that we may grow upward in Christ.
- 2.) Growing on a firm foundation involves cultivating stability in the truth.
- 3.) Growing on a firm foundation requires the constant instilment of sound teaching.
- 4.) Growing on a firm foundation results in a rootedness in Christ that is an abundant rootedness – and I’m going to explain what that means.
- 5.) Growing on a firm foundation involves gratitude for Christ and for the truth.
- 6.) All of this – all of these aspects of growing on a firm foundation – all of this is a continual, unending process.

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This, then, is the second imperative for the church, if we are going to restore a solid battle front against Satan. The first imperative is that the church needs to walk an enlightened walk in Christ. The second imperative is that the church needs to build upon a firm foundation, Colossians chapter two, verse seven. And as we continue in our next message, we're going to look in depth at each one of these points about that firm foundation.

#### **About the Broadcast**

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