

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 1 of 13

Accept No Substitutes

At the beginning of Colossians chapter two, the Apostle Paul says that it is absolutely necessary for the church of Jesus Christ to be “knit together in love.” Let me read that statement for you in its context as we begin today. The Apostle Paul says, Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse one:

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

In using this phrase “being knit together in love”, the Apostle Paul is saying that it is essential, for the church to be of one mind about the truth as it is found in Jesus Christ and in His Word alone. Now, we have been considering some of the implications of the Apostle Paul’s statement. One of the foremost of them is this: There is no room for false teaching within that unity.

The Colossian church was a young church. These were new believers. And yet their unity in the truth was already being threatened by various kinds of false teaching. Their unity in the truth was being threatened by people who said that

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 2 of 13

you needed the law plus Christ in order to be saved. Their unity in the truth was being threatened by people who said you needed some kind of so-called higher knowledge in addition to the Word of God. They said that truth was difficult or even impossible to know.

But just a few verses further down, in chapter two, beginning at verse eight, Paul says this:

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.

“Beware lest anyone cheat you,” Paul said. People in the church are being cheated today as well. They are settling for cheap substitutes for Jesus Christ, cheap substitutes for God’s Word, and cheap substitutes for the one true Gospel.

The cheap substitute will not secure eternal life for you. The cheap substitute will not redeem you from your sins. The cheap substitute will not build you up in the one true faith. In fact, the cheap substitute will lead you to Hell.

Dear friend, you must accept no substitutes for God’s inerrant Word. You must accept no substitutes for the Christ of the Bible. You must accept no substitutes for the authentic Gospel. You must cling to Christ above all. If you are truly trusting in

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 3 of 13

Him alone for your salvation, by grace alone, through faith alone, then you are complete in Him. There is no other Word from God. There is no other Savior of men. There is no other way to be reconciled to God than to come through Jesus Christ by faith.

Review: The Five Keys

Paul says that the church must be “knit together” – unified – in this truth. And he says that *agape* love, self-sacrificial love, must motivate and characterize that unity.

In our last several messages we have been dealing with the fact that *agape* love sometimes requires a believer to take a stand against apostasy in the church. So we have been considering “5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy.” Let me review those five keys briefly as we move on to some final considerations in this part of our study of the book of Colossians today.

Key number one in dealing Biblically with apostasy and false teaching is this: Make a careful identification. Make sure what you’re dealing with is really apostasy according to Scripture. In other words, be careful not to make a false accusation.

Key number two: Confront apostasy on the right basis. Be absolutely clear in your thinking about the Biblical basis for the proper response to apostasy. The basis of that response is genuine Christian love. And, the standard of that response is Biblical truth.

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 4 of 13

Key number three: Confront apostasy because God gives no alternative. Understand that before God you have no alternative but to confront and expose doctrinal error. God's command is clear.

Key number four: Be ready to answer the Scripture-twisters. Equip yourself to deal with people who will twist Scripture to try to avoid their own clear responsibility to confront apostasy, and who will try to discourage or prevent you from doing your duty.

Key number five: Follow the Biblical process. Understand the steps that God's Word tells you to follow when you find apostasy in the church. In our last message we saw that the Bible sets forth a clear process, and that the imperative is to deal with false teaching in the church decisively, and without delay.

What Are You to Do Next?

Now, last time we looked at four possible outcomes, four possible end results that may happen when you confront apostasy in the church.

First, there is the case in which the individual is found, on solid Biblical grounds, to be not guilty of false teaching.

Second, there is the case in which the individual is proved to be guilty of false teaching, and he admits his sin, and repents of it.

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 5 of 13

Third, there is the case in which the individual is found guilty of false teaching, but the individual refuses to repent, and the church acts in a Biblical way by putting the false teacher out of the church.

And fourth, there is the case in which the false teacher's guilt is clear, but he refuses to admit his sin, he will not repent, and the church responds not in a Biblical way but in an ungodly way, by not taking any action against the false teacher at all; or worse yet, the church actually protects him and allows his false teaching to gain a stronger foothold and to spread.

Our study of those four possible outcomes last time led us to a final question that I promised we would take up today, and it is a question for you personally, as a believer. The question is this: What are you to do next, in each of those four outcomes? What are you to do next? That is the question we are going to answer today. And this, I believe, is going to be the most important part of this study on how to deal with apostasy. Why do I say that? The reason is that today far too many people are doing the wrong thing, the ungodly thing. But the Bible is absolutely clear in telling you what you must do in each case. So let's take up each case, with this question in mind.

When a Person is Legitimately Found "Not Guilty" of Heresy

First, how are you to respond in the case in which the individual is found, on solid Biblical grounds, to be not guilty of false teaching? This, above all, is the time when you need to demonstrate *agape* love.

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 6 of 13

The first thing you need to do is to thank God for His mercy. "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is [God's] mercy toward those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:11). Thank God for His mercy upon this individual. Thank God for His mercy when a person who, as it turns out, was wrongly accused, is vindicated. Secondly, thank God for His mercy upon His church. Thirdly, thank God for His mercy upon you, if you were the one who brought the charge, and it turns out you were wrong.

And in that connection, something else you need to do is to apologize publicly for having wrongly accused someone of false teaching. You owe that to the individual, and you owe it to the church.

The one thing you must not do under any circumstances is to worry about your own reputation. As soon as you start worrying about your own reputation, you will fall into temptation. Your reputation is in God's hands. Do what will honor Him, and He will take care of the rest.

And last, but not least, if the man you accused, who as it turns out was innocent of the charge, is your pastor or an elder in your church, you need to make it clear that you are willing to submit to his proper spiritual authority, by both word and action. The Apostle Paul said this to the Thessalonian church: "We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves." (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 7 of 13

When the Guilty Person Repents

Now let's take up the second case. How are you to respond in the case in which the individual is proved to be guilty of false teaching, and realizes his sin, and repents? Once again, many of the same things are true.

In this case you also need to thank God for His mercy upon the individual who had fallen into the sin of false teaching. Thank God for His mercy when an individual who has gone off into apostasy realizes his sin, and truly repents, and can be restored to fellowship and service.

You also need to thank God for His mercy upon His church, and upon you as an individual, if you were the one who brought the charge.

Also, you need to pray for this man. Pray that he will not fall into error ever again, and that God will use this experience to grow and strengthen this man and the church. Pray as David prayed in Psalm 68, verse 28: "Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us."

One thing that you must not do is to assume a superior attitude over the person who has repented. The Apostle Paul called to mind a similar circumstance in the history of Israel when he was writing to the Corinthian church, and he warned them thus: "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition... Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 8 of 13

You need to respond to what God has done in humility – especially if you were the one who brought the accusation, but this is also true for the person who had gone off into false teaching and has now repented. For an example of this, we need to look no further than the case of Paul and Peter after Paul confronted Peter about his departure from the Gospel at Antioch, as we find it recorded in Galatians chapter two.

The interesting thing is that we never find Paul mentioning this again in any of his epistles. We never find Paul holding this incident against Peter after he had repented. And likewise we find Peter, near the end of his life, in his second epistle, at chapter three, verse fifteen, speaking of Paul as his “beloved brother” and commending the epistles of Paul to the church as Holy Scripture, and condemning false teachers who tried to twist what Paul was saying. Peter and Paul both acted with great humility, and we can do no less in similar circumstances.

And thirdly, in these cases, you need to work all the harder to seek to preserve the only basis for genuine unity – unity in the truth. And again, we can do no less than to follow the example of Paul and Peter.

When the Unrepentant False Teacher is Put Out of the Church

This brings us to the third case. How are you to respond in the case in which the individual refuses to repent and is found guilty, and the church acts in a Biblical way by putting the false teacher out of the church?

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 9 of 13

You certainly once again need to thank God for His mercy in purifying His church. It is also right and proper for you to thank God, in humility, for using you as a channel to bring about such a cleansing of His church, if you were the one who confronted the false teacher. And once again, you need to guard against the sin of spiritual pride. Remember, the victory was God's, not yours.

How should you deal with the one who refuses to repent? First of all, you should pray for him. Pray that God will yet bring that person to repentance. But at the same time, you are to have no fellowship with him. It is up to God to bring the individual to repentance. This is a person who needs to be evangelized, not fellowshiped with. Paul said this to the Corinthian church: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (1 Corinthians 5:4-5)

You also need to pray for those who are left behind in the church, for those who have remained true to the faith, that they would remain true.

When the Church Sins By Not Putting Out the False Teacher

This brings us, finally, to the fourth case, and it is the one in which Christians most often fail to do what the Word of God tells us to do. How are you to respond in the case in which the false teacher's sin and guilt are clear on Biblical grounds, he refuses to admit his sin, and he will not repent, and the church acts in an ungodly

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 10 of 13

way by not taking any action against the false teacher at all, or worse yet actually protects him and allows his false teaching to gain a stronger foothold and spread?

Here is the Biblical principle you need to follow. God says that you need to get your priorities right: Your fellowship with God comes first. Your fellowship with people comes second. Your ability to have legitimate fellowship with other people is based on their relationship with God. You cannot have fellowship with people who are false teachers. You cannot have fellowship with people who act in an ungodly way by not taking any action against the false teacher at all, or worse yet actually protect him and allow his false teaching to gain a stronger foothold and spread. As soon as you do that, you are no longer in right fellowship with God.

Today, most people are unwilling to follow this principle, and that is why so many churches are in such a sad condition. We find this principle stated for us in no uncertain terms, in Second Corinthians chapter six, beginning at verse fourteen:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial [or Satan]? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 11 of 13

Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty." Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

Dear friend, God's commandment to you could not be more clear. When you find yourself in this last kind of situation, where the church is clearly in the grip of apostasy, the worst thing you can do is to ignore God's clear direction. You must leave such a church. You cannot stay. God's Word simply does not permit it. God cannot possibly bless you if you stay.

Notice how God describes those who do not remain in the truth, in verse 17. He describes them as "unclean." The sense of that word in the original language is that these are people from whom you must separate yourself, because they are corrupt in their way of thinking and living, and being around them will corrupt you.

So what must you do? First of all, thank God for making the issues clear. Thank God for exposing the situation for what it really is. Thank God for clear direction. Thank God for protecting you and your family. And come out from among the apostates, be separate from them. Separate yourself unto the God who redeemed you. Separate yourself into the fellowship of others who are knit together in the unity of the truth in love. Seek to re-associate in fellowship and worship with

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 12 of 13

those who hold to the truth. Find another church. Or help to start one, if you need to. That is the imperative.

Note what God promises *only* to those who obey His command to separate. He says, "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people. Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Seek Honor From God, Not Men

If you really love Christ, if you really love His church, and if you really love His truth, this is what you will do when you find that there is false teaching and apostasy within the church, and the church refuses to deal with it. Before God, you cannot ignore the problem. Tolerance is not the answer. Neutrality is a myth. God's commandment is clear.

You may not receive honor from men, but you will receive honor from God. You need to have the same attitude that our Lord Jesus himself had. He said this in John chapter eight: "I do not seek My own glory...If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me" (John 8:50, 54).

Let me close today with this admonition from the book of James, chapter five:

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "5 Keys to a Biblically Loving Response to Apostasy" (Part 6)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/12/2010

Page 13 of 13

endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

(James 5:10-11)

If God places you in the difficult circumstance of confronting apostasy in His church, remember that your all-knowing, all-wise Savior is in charge of the situation. He is compassionate and merciful. Do the right thing, and put your trust in Him for the result.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to preach the Gospel to the lost, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The prayers of our listeners and supporters are vital to this ministry. Thank you for praying for us.

The broadcast is supported entirely by the gifts of God's people. If the Lord leads you to help us, you can do so in any of these ways:

- Call us toll-free at 888-804-9655 to give a gift using your credit card
- Give a gift by credit card at our secure website, www.teachingtheword.org
- Mail your contribution to TTW, Box 2533, Westminster, Maryland 21158

TeachingtheWord Ministries is recognized as a tax-exempt religious organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the U. S. Internal Revenue Code. Your gifts are fully tax deductible.

**May the Lord richly bless your personal study
of His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word.**