

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Is Christ Preeminent In You?" (Colossians 3:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 7/7/2013

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The portion of God's Word that I want to call to your attention today is found in the book of Colossians chapter three, beginning at verse one. If you are able to do so as you are listening, I trust that you will open your own copy of God's Word and follow along as I read these verses – Colossians chapter three, beginning at verse one:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

We have now reached a major turning point in our study of Paul's epistle to the Colossians. We see that turning point in the opening words of the passage we just read.

Notice once again the first words of chapter three, verse one: "*If then you were raised with Christ...*" In that brief phrase, the Apostle Paul sums up all of the tremendous things he has presented to the Colossian believers thus far, in chapters one and two. "*If then you were raised with Christ...*" Actually, a more precise translation of the Greek would be, "*Since it is true that you were raised with Christ.*"

This is a logical statement, a logical transition. It is the kind of language that is so typical of the Apostle Paul as he makes his case in each of his epistles. Under

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divine inspiration, Paul always builds one point upon another. Paul's words are always logical – and that is because the Spirit of God, the Author of all of Scripture, is logical.

God is the God of reason. The Christian faith is the faith of reason. It is a reasonable faith. And that is what Paul has been presenting to us in the first two chapters. He has been presenting the revelation of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ, set forth in a logical and reasoned manner. In chapter one, Paul has *declared* the preeminence of Christ in all things. In chapter two, he has *defended* the preeminence of Christ against Satan's attacks. And now, beginning in chapter three, he will call upon the Colossian believers to *demonstrate* the preeminence of Christ in all of their thinking and all of their living.

Because Christ is who He is, Paul is saying; because Christ has done what He has done; because you as believers are what you are in Christ and because of Christ – because these things are true, I Paul am now going to show you your only reasonable response, the only reasonable course for your life and your thinking.

In view of these things, Paul is saying, the only reasonable course is for you yourselves to demonstrate the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ in your own lives. This will be Paul's emphasis in Colossians chapters three and four – the preeminence of Christ in the life and thinking of the believer.

If you want to remember the outline of the book of Colossians, you only need to remember these three words. Chapter one is the preeminence of Christ *declared*.

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Chapter two is the preeminence of Christ *defended*. And chapters three and four, where we are now turning, set forth the preeminence of Christ as it is to be *demonstrated* in the life and thinking of every believer. That is the essence of the book of Colossians: *Christ's preeminence declared, defended, and demonstrated*.

Christ's Preeminence Declared

And so, Paul begins chapter three with this transition: "If then you were raised with Christ..." Everything Paul is now going to say hinges on these words. Who is this Christ? Who is the Lord Jesus? Paul has given us the answer in chapter one. In that first chapter, he has set forth the person and work of the Lord Jesus. He has *declared* the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

First of all, in Colossians chapter one, verses 1 through 14, Paul has declared that *Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Gospel*. The central focus of the Gospel, and the central focus of the Christian life, is genuine knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you do not understand who Jesus Christ is; if you do not understand why Christ's coming to earth was necessary; if you do not understand that God the Father in His Son Jesus Christ has provided the only way of reconciliation for condemned sinners; if you do not understand that it is by will of God through the finished work of Christ that you are saved - if you do not understand these things, you do not understand the Gospel. Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Gospel.

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Secondly, in chapter one, verses 15 through 17, Paul has declared that *Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Creation*. He is the pre-existent Second Person of the Godhead. He is eternally existent. He had no beginning. He was before everything. He created everything. He sustains everything – the entire created order, the entire universe. And, He is going to restore all things to their original state, and to an even more glorious state than the original creation.

That is the ultimate purpose of God's plan of redemption. That is the ultimate purpose of Christ's coming into the world. Our salvation is part of that great restoration. And Paul is emphasizing the fact that the Christ who came into the world to save sinners is no mere man. He is fully God and fully man – two natures, unmixed, in one body. And it is because Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Creation that He was able to come into this world, into the world that He created, and accomplish our salvation.

Thirdly, in chapter one, verses 18 through 23, Paul declares that *Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Church*. We who were by nature the enemies of God have now been reconciled to God by the death of Christ.

The end goal of that reconciliation is that Jesus Christ will, in the consummation of all things, present us to the Father, holy, and blameless, and above reproach. Jesus Christ is now building His Church – the true Church, those who are truly His because they have by the work of the Holy Spirit believed on Him, and their sins

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have been paid for, paid in full, once and for all, by His blood. Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Gospel, and in the Creation, and in the Church.

And fourthly, in chapter one, verses 24 through 29, Paul declares that *Jesus Christ is preeminent in genuine Christian ministry*. There is no genuine Christian ministry unless Jesus Christ has first place in it. He alone is the Head of the Church.

The *focus* of genuine Christian ministry is Christ and His Word – nothing else, and no one else. The *message* of genuine Christian ministry is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" – chapter one, verse twenty-seven. The *purpose* of genuine Christian ministry is "that we may present every man perfect [or complete] in Christ Jesus" – chapter one, verse twenty-eight. And the *power* of genuine Christian ministry is the power of Christ – "His working which works in me mightily," Paul says in chapter one, verse twenty-nine. Jesus Christ has first place in genuine Christian ministry, and that is because He has first place in the Gospel, in the Creation, and in the Church.

Christ's Preeminence Defended

Paul in chapter one has declared these tremendous facts of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then in Colossians chapter two he has *defended* the preeminence of Christ. In doing this, Paul has focused our attention on three particular things, three particular threats, which Satan has always used to attempt to lead the Church away from the preeminence of Christ.

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You see, dear friends, Satan hates the preeminence of Christ. Satan, the great angel created by God, was banished from Heaven because he sought to exalt himself above Christ. Satan desired to have the preeminence in Heaven. And throughout the centuries of history, Satan has desired to have the preeminence on Earth. And so, Satan seeks to undermine and destroy the life and testimony of the Christian as an individual, and the life and testimony of the Church as a body. Satan does this by seeking to undermine the preeminence of Christ. And so Paul *defends* the preeminence of Christ in chapter two by invalidating these three devices of Satan.

First, in Colossians chapter two, verses one through ten, Paul defends *the preeminence of Christ against the evil of worldly philosophy*. Pagan philosophy was a threat to the Church in the time of the Colossians, and pagan philosophy is just as much of a threat to the Church today. Man's word, man's wisdom, man's methods, and man's idols, in place of Christ's Word, Christ's wisdom, and Christ's ordained methods, and the person of Christ Himself. Because Jesus Christ is and must be preeminent in His true Church, there is no place, no room for worldly philosophy in His true Church.

Secondly, in chapter two, verses eleven through seventeen, Paul defends *the preeminence of Christ against the evil of legalism*. In the time of the Colossians, there were those who wanted to drag the church back under the burdens of the Law. And we have many people in the church who want to do that today.

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There are those who want to effectively deny that Christ has put the requirements of the Law to death. There are those who wanted to effectively deny that Christ has nailed the requirements of the Law to the Cross, because He has fulfilled those requirements on our behalf, and He has atoned for our repeated and continual violations of God's Law. And so, these people want to drag believers in Christ into the bondage of legalism. But just as there is no room for worldly philosophy in Christ's true Church, there is no place for legalism in Christ's true church.

And thirdly, in chapter two, verses eighteen through twenty-three, Paul defends *the preeminence of Christ against the evil of man-made doctrines*. Counterfeit authority in place of Christ's authority. Counterfeit human headship in place of Christ's rightful headship over the Church. Counterfeit mediators in place of the one true Mediator between God and man. Counterfeit worship in place of the true worship of Christ in spirit and in truth.

Just as there is no place for worldly philosophy in Christ's true Church, just as there is no place for legalism in Christ's true Church, there is also no place for man-made doctrines in Christ's true Church. The preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ is absolute. It is all-encompassing.

There is no dark corner of Christ's universe, and there is no dark corner of Christ's true Church, in which any man or angel has the right to assert preeminence. And likewise, there is no dark corner of the heart of man in which we

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have the right to assert our preeminence. All things must be yielded up to the preeminence of Christ.

Christ's Preeminence Must Also Be Demonstrated – *In You*

That is the point to which the Apostle Paul now comes, beginning in chapter three. He has *declared* the preeminence of Christ in chapter one. He has *defended* the preeminence of Christ in chapter two. And now, beginning in chapter three, he will show us how the preeminence of Christ, declared in chapter one and defended in chapter two, must furthermore be *demonstrated* in the life and thinking of every true believer.

Christ's preeminence demonstrated – the preeminence of Christ in you, the believer – that is the theme of the remainder of the book of Colossians. "If then you were raised with Christ," this is how you are to think, and this is how you are to live. Your life is to be a constant demonstration of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And how *are* we to think and live? Look at the opening verses of chapter three once again:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

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"Seek those things which are above." "Set your mind on things above, not on things on earth." These words are a tremendous statement. These are words that run completely counter to the mindset of the unbelieving world. These words are in total opposition to the flesh, total opposition to human intuition, total opposition to human judgment and human wisdom.

The unbelieving world lives for the things of this world. People live for the moment. They live for the immediate. "I will do what pleases me now, and not be concerned about the consequences, because, after all, right and wrong are relative terms, and I am only answerable to myself. I am only a product of time and chance, not special creation. There is no ultimate and singular standard. There is no ultimate Lawgiver. I make my own standards." That is the thinking of the unbelieving world in this postmodern age.

The life of the unbelieving world is a very superficial life. It is a very shallow way of thinking. And if there is any thought for the future, it is only in terms of the future on this earth. How can I make things more comfortable for myself here and now? How can I be successful in this world's terms? How can I guarantee that I will have enough of this world's wealth and this world's goods to last me until the end of my days, and perhaps provide an earthly legacy for my children?

That is the way the world thinks. But dear friends, it is sad to say that this is also how most of the church thinks in our time. But what does the Holy Spirit say to us through the Apostle Paul? He says, "Seek those things which are above." "Set your

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mind on things above, not on things on earth." Is that what we find in the church today?

By and large, it is sad to say that the answer is No. The church has adopted the thinking of the world. How can we make people feel more comfortable? How can we be successful in this world's terms? How can we avoid talking about right and wrong? How can we avoid confronting ourselves with the issues of God's moral law, the commands of God's Word? How can we avoid offending people in that way? How can we be more like the world so that we can be attractive to the world?

Dear friends, is this what the preeminent Christ demands of us? Is this how God's Word instructs us? Does God's Word tell us that the true Christian will *ever* be comfortable in this world? Does God's Word tell us that the true Christian will *ever* be loved and embraced by this world? Does God's Word tell us that our *goal* is to lay up treasures on earth?

No – God's Word tells us to think and to live in a way that is completely counter to the life and thinking of the fallen world. Completely opposite. Completely counter-intuitive. Listen to the words again:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

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Why? "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." If you are truly a Christian, if you were truly raised with Christ, if you have truly passed from spiritual death to spiritual life – then you are dead to the things of this present world. You are dead to its way of thinking. You are dead to its way of living. You are dead to its philosophy. You are dead to its goals and pursuits. You are alive *in Christ*. You are of an entirely different order from those who can live only for the present, because they have no future except an eternity of death.

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