

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "A Hymn About Christ in Colossians"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 10/11/2009

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A Transition Point

Today in our study of the book of Colossians, we've come to a transition point. This transition happens as we reach chapter one, verse fifteen. And before we begin looking at verse fifteen and the verses that follow, I want to remind you of the outline that I gave you back at the beginning of this series.

When you're on a journey, every once in awhile you have to stop and get your bearings. You have to think about where you've been, and where you are, and where you're going. And so that's why I want to remind you of the outline of the book of Colossians once again. I want to remind you of where we've been so far in our study, and I want to explain where we are now, and also where we'll be going in the messages that are coming, the Lord willing.

First of all, I gave you an outline of the main sections of the book of Colossians. And I phrased that outline as a series of propositional statements – a series of declarations.

So for those of you who may be taking notes, the first main point, which we find in Colossians chapter 1, is that Jesus Christ is the Way. Jesus Christ is the Way. Or to put it a different way, Colossians chapter 1 is Christ's preeminence declared. Christ's preeminence declared.

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The second main point, which we find in Colossians chapter 2, is that Jesus Christ is the Truth. Jesus Christ is the Truth. Or to put it a different way, Colossians chapter 2 is Christ's preeminence defended. Christ's preeminence defended.

The third main point, in Colossians chapters 3 and 4, is that Jesus Christ is the Life. Jesus Christ is the Life. Or to put it a different way, Colossians chapters 3 and 4 are Christ's preeminence demonstrated. Christ's preeminence demonstrated.

So once again, in chapter 1, Jesus Christ is the Way. His preeminence is declared. In chapter 2, Jesus Christ is the Truth. His preeminence is defended. And in chapters 3 and 4, Jesus Christ is the Life. His preeminence is demonstrated.

Now that we have that framework in our minds once again, I want to remind you of where we've been so far in chapter one, and where we are, and where we're going. Now under the main heading in chapter one – that Jesus Christ is the Way, His preeminence is declared – there are four sub-headings.

First, in verses 1 through 14, we found that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Gospel. Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Gospel. That is where we have been in our study so far. And we came to the conclusion of that section of Colossians chapter one in our last two messages, where we talked about the fact that we have been redeemed, we have been rescued, we have been set free from bondage, we have been declared not guilty once and for all before the judgment bar of God. And it is all because of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ – that and nothing else.

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Secondly, in verses 15 through 17, we find that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Creation. Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Creation. And that is what we're going to be studying next.

And then thirdly, in verses 18 through 23, we find that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Church. Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Church.

And fourthly, finally, in chapter one verses 24 through 29, we find that Jesus Christ is preeminent in genuine ministry. Jesus Christ is preeminent in genuine ministry.

A Hymn About Christ

So today we're moving into a new section of chapter one, beginning with verse 15. And if you look at the original language of Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse 15, you find something very interesting. In the original Greek, Colossians chapter one, verses 15 through 20 are in the form of Greek poetry. Many scholars think that these verses were actually used as an early Christian hymn, because they are in that form in the Greek. It is a hymn that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. It explains who Jesus is, and what He has done, what He is doing now, and what He will be doing in the future. Let me read those verses for you. Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse 15:

**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on
earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or**

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principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

This is a hymn about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the very image of God. He is the Firstborn over all creation. He is the Creator of the universe. He is the Head of the Church. He is the firstborn from among the dead. He is the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in a body. He is the Reconciler of all things. These verses are perhaps the most doctrinally-packed passage about the Lord Jesus Christ in the entire Word of God. And it is fitting that this should be so, because Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe.

A Hymn That Puts Today's Church to Shame

Dear friends, before we move on, I want to digress for just a bit, but yet what I'm about to say isn't really a digression. It's very much to the point. It very much has to do with the person and the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me ask you a question: When you look at a hymn like this, in Colossians chapter one, verses 15

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through 20, doesn't it really put the modern church to shame? The contemporary Evangelical church rarely sings hymns like this anymore.

Today, the contemporary church sings a lot of what are called "praise songs" and "worship songs" that are empty of really meaningful content. They're what I call "seven-eleven songs" – seven words, repeated eleven times, and then start over again. That kind of singing has always been popular in pagan religions. Depending on the kind of music you put with those seven words repeated eleven times, you can put the audience in whatever kind of frame of mind you want. You can use a driving beat to put people on an emotional high. You can use a slow-dance tempo to put the audience in a pliable frame of mind. The words that are endlessly repeated cease to have any meaning.

And frankly, I believe such singing in the church becomes the devil's tool. In Matthew chapter six, verse seven, Jesus told his disciples, "When you pray, don't use vain repetitions, as the pagans do" – and since God is the One whom we are to be addressing in our worship singing as well as in our praying, the same principle applies. "Don't use vain repetitions, as the pagans do."

In everything the church is, and says, and does, the thing that must be first and foremost our minds is this question: Is it Biblical? Is it Biblical? Dear friends, if it is not Biblical, it is wrong. If it is not Biblical, God is against it. If it is not Biblical, it has no place in the church. And if your church is doing what is not Biblical, God by His very nature is against what your church is doing, because He will not, He cannot,

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deny His own Word. And one of the primary examples of that today, is the songs that the contemporary church is singing. Empty little choruses instead of hymns that are rich in Biblical truth, hymns that praise and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ as He should be praised and exalted – not as some rock star, not as “Jesus Christ Superstar,” but as the holy, all-powerful, all-knowing God of the universe.

God-Centered or Man-Centered?

What I’m really talking about here is this question: Is your church’s worship God-centered or is it man-centered? I’m going to bring in a verse here that you might think doesn’t apply. But we’ll see that it does. Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18: “Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” “Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” Now the context of that verse is a discussion of the fact that Christians need to conduct our lives carefully. And in the very next verse, Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 19, Paul is talking about worship – “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

Reverence in Worship, or Loss of Self-Control?

Now in that context, in the context of a careful Christian walk, in the context of proper Christian worship, Paul says this: “Be not drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” And the idea of the word “dissipation” in the original is the idea of the loss of self-control. The underlying principle is this: Don’t come under the influence of anything that would cause you to lose your God-

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given self-control. Don't come under the influence of anything that would cause you to do things, or say things, in the church, that are contrary to the mind of the Spirit of God as revealed in His Word.

Now, let's put that principle in the context of the contemporary church. The contemporary Evangelical church often equates drummed-up emotion with the moving of the Spirit of God. And so the goal of much of contemporary worship is to get people on an emotional high – to manipulate their emotions, and thus manipulate their minds.

Now don't get me wrong. I am not against emotion in church. I think a preacher whose heart is on fire with the Word of God will preach with fire. And I think that as we sing the great hymns of the faith, there is a proper emotional response. Dear friends, I submit to you that if you are truly a believer, if the Spirit of God is truly living in you, you cannot read a hymn like the one that is before us here in Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse 15, and you cannot sing words that are based upon and closely follow a Scripture text like that – you can't do that without having a proper emotion response that says, "Glory to God!"

But that's not the kind of emotion I'm talking about. That's not the kind of emotion you see in most contemporary Evangelical church services. What you see is manufactured emotion. Worked-up emotion. Everything is geared toward getting people to let down their guard emotionally – getting people drunk with emotion, if you will. The loud, worldly music; the driving beat; the same lyrics repeated over

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and over again; the so-called worship leaders performing up front; the lights; the visuals; all these things are geared toward working up emotion. And with that working up of emotion comes loss of control – the kind of loss of control that Paul warns against in Ephesians chapter 5. And it's the kind of loss of control that Paul is going to warn against later here in the book of Colossians.

The Dangers of Drummed-Up Emotion

Dear friends, this kind of drummed-up emotion is not the work of the Spirit of God. It is contrary to the Spirit of God. Go to one of these services, or watch one on television or on the Internet, and you'll often see exactly what I'm talking about. The crowd sings its "seven-eleven song" – it repeats the same words, over, and over, and over again. And the emotion rises and rises with the pace and the passion of the music. And in a moment of drummed-up emotion, in a moment of loss of God-given restraint, a "worship leader" up in front will say something about God, or about Jesus Christ, or about worship, or about the Christian life – he'll say something that is completely un-Biblical. But in the passion of the moment, the ecstasy of the moment, in that moment of un-restraint, a thousand people in the congregation will shout "Amen!" and they'll be led astray, swept away, from the truth on a wave of emotion.

Genuine Worship is Not a Performance

Dear friends, genuine worship is not a performance. Genuine worship is not the product of drummed-up emotion. Biblical worship is not the loss of God-given restraint and self-control. Genuine, Biblical worship is not man-centered. It is God-

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centered. It is reverent. We are not adoring a rock star. We are worshipping the living and holy God. We are worshipping the consuming fire. We are worshipping the King of universe. We are worshipping the crucified, risen, and glorified Savior.

You know, one thing that surprised me a great deal was to find that very few English-language Christian hymns have been written based on the text of Colossians chapter one, verse 15 and the verses that follow. There is one, but I don't think you'll find it in any contemporary hymnal. It's called *Let All That Breathe, Jehovah Praise*, and it was written in the 1760s by the great hymn writer Charles Wesley. Let me read the words to you:

Let all that breathe Jehovah praise;
Almighty, all-creating Lord!
Let earth and Heaven His power confess,
Brought out of nothing by His word.

He spoke the word, and it was done;
The universe His word obeyed;
His Word is His eternal Son,
And Christ the whole creation made.

Jesus, the Lord and God most high,
Maker of all mankind and me!
Me Thou hast made to glorify,
To know, and love, and live to Thee.

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Dear friend, those are the kinds of words that the church of Jesus Christ needs to be singing today. These are words that exalt the person and work of Jesus Christ. These are words that teach the people who sing them about the truths of the faith. These are words that demand careful attention, and deep reverence, as you sing them.

“No Rules, Just Right”?

A popular American restaurant chain used to advertise using the slogan, "No Rules, Just Right." That's a good short definition of what you find in the singing and worship and preaching of many churches today. It's pure pragmatism – do what appeals to the world. Forget that God, not man, is the audience for our worship. Now, “no rules, just right” might be an appealing catch phrase for a business where customer taste is the highest standard. But where Christ's church is concerned, the Bible warns us against falling into the trap of this kind of vain philosophy:

Galatians chapter 4, verses 3 and 9: “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world...But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?”

Colossians chapter 2, verse 20: “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 such things]?”

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Colossians chapter 2, beginning at verse 8: "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." Much of the singing in the contemporary church is philosophy and empty deceit. It is according to the basic principles of this world. It is not according to Christ. It does not sing about and exalt the One in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body. "Seven-eleven" words won't do that. They can't do that, no matter how many times you repeat them, no matter how emotional you get when you sing them.

What About You?

Dear friends, in future messages, I'm looking forward to expositing for you this great hymn about the Lord Jesus Christ that we find in Colossians chapter one. And today, if you are a believer, if you have received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin and wrath, I trust and pray that you will not be caught up in the weak elements of the world, but that it will be your desire to be in a church where Christ is worshipped with reverence and dignity, where Bible-rich hymns of the faith are sung to the glory of the Savior, with fervency and conviction.

And if you are not a believer on Christ today, I invite you to call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. And if you would like to know more about what it means to become a Christian, how to become a Christian, how to know that your sins are

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forgiven, how to be set free from the bondage of sin – we would be happy to be in touch with you, and to explain these things to you from the pages of God's Word.

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