

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Tests of the Authentic Church: Heavenly Work Done By Heavenly Power"
(Colossians 3:1-4, Acts 2 and 3)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 10/27/2013

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If you are able to do so, I trust that you will open your own copy of God's Word as we begin today. Let me call your attention once again to our theme passage for this series of messages, which is found in Colossians chapter 3. Let us once again hear the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of the Lord from Colossians chapter 3 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.

A Test for the Church

The verses that we have just read form a test for the true Church of Jesus Christ. If our focus is on the things of this earth, we will fail miserably in God's eyes. We will fail to please Christ because we will fail to understand who Jesus Christ, God incarnate, truly is, and what He truly requires of us as His servants. We will fail to lay hold of the great resources that are ours in the heavenlies because of Christ, resources that are not to be found on this earth. Our minds will be corrupted by the things of earth. The church will be corrupted by the world.

Our Lord spent the days of His ministry on earth, and the days between His resurrection and His ascension to Heaven, explaining these things to His

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disciples in great detail. And as we come to the book of Acts, we find this same heavenly emphasis that we found in the words and works of our Lord and Savior.

We find the truths that our Lord had taught His disciples now beginning to be implemented. The heavenly imperatives begin to shine forth in the early church. Let me submit to you that there are three great principles, three great imperatives, that we find being implemented in the life and the ministry of the early church. Let me first state them for you, and then we shall take up each one and consider it together.

- Principle number one is this: The business of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the business of Heaven.
- Principle number two is this: The power of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the power of Heaven.
- And principle number three is this: The authority of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the authority of Heaven.

These were the three great tests of the authenticity of the early church. So let us now take up each of these principles in turn as we find them presented to us in the life and ministry of the early church in the book of Acts.

The Church's Business Must Be the Business of Heaven

First of all, the business of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the business of Heaven. Why is it so crucial for us to understand this and to lay hold of this? It is so

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important because Satan will do everything that he can to distract the church from doing the business of Heaven. Satan has no problem with the Church of Jesus Christ doing many apparently good things. Satan has no problem with the Church of Jesus Christ getting involved in politics, or in social justice, or in psychology, or in many other things that man will do in order to try to make this world a better place.

Satan has no problem with that. In fact he is delighted if he can subvert the church in such ways. The essence of these temptations that Satan places before the church is the same as the temptations that he laid before the Lord Jesus Christ in the wilderness. Our Lord did not succumb to these things, and we must not succumb to them either.

In a previous message we have already looked in some detail at our Lord's last conversation with His disciples in the first chapter of the book of Acts. Even after all the time that Jesus had spent in teaching them that their business was to be the business of Heaven, they were still asking Him if He was going to overthrow the rule of the Roman Empire and establish an earthly kingdom.

But Jesus told them, in Acts chapter 1, that this is the wrong focus. You are focusing on earthly things. Remember what I have told you. Remember what I have taught you. Your focus must be a heavenly focus. Wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Wait for the coming of heavenly power to do heavenly business in this world. That is what you are to be doing. You are to be witnesses for Me.

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Dear friends, in our time the church is caught up in a great deal of earthbound thinking. The church is engaged in doing many, many things that may be good things, but they are not God's *commanded* things.

The business of the true Church of Jesus Christ is not politics. It is not civil government. The business of the true Church of Jesus Christ is the business of Heaven, the redemption and the preparation of a people for the world to come; the proclamation of the Gospel to the nations, the edification of those who believe.

Jesus taught His disciples many times about the true nature of the kingdom of Heaven. He did much of this teaching through parables. In one of the parables of the kingdom of Heaven, in Luke chapter 19, the master of the kingdom said to his servants, "Do business till I come."

The word that is translated "do business" is the Greek word from which we get our English word pragmatism. The wrong kind of pragmatism is a great problem for the church today. The kind of pragmatism that we find in the church today is based on the false notion that the ends justify the means. It is based on the false notion that *we* can decide what the business of the church is, that we can ignore what God says is the business of the church. But the master who received the kingdom in the parable said to his servants, "Do business" - do *my* business, and do it my way - "until I come again."

The master of that parable is a picture of Jesus Christ. He has received the kingdom. We are His servants. We must be doing His business, not ours. When He

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comes again from Heaven, He will examine each of us to see what we have done with the resources He has committed into our hands — not merely material resources, but above all the spiritual resources that He has given into the hands of His church.

Today much of the church is like the wicked servant of that parable, making little or no use of the spiritual resources that Christ has committed to His church, but operating instead in the flesh and in fleshly thinking. The true Church of Jesus Christ must return to its New Testament mission, the Great Commission given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Power of the True Church of Jesus Christ Must Be the Power of Heaven

This brings us to the second principle that we find in the book of Acts, and that principle is that in order to do the business of Heaven, the power of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the power of Heaven. Jesus said to His disciples, Acts chapter 1 verse eight, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..."

God himself, the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven, the Holy Spirit indwelling each and every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit operating within the Church of Jesus Christ as a body - He is the source of the power of the church. The power of the church is heavenly power, not earthly power.

Today so much of the church effectively rejects the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Much of the church today seeks power in impressive buildings, power in

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services that focus on entertainment, power in organization and management structures. Most of the leading seminaries in our day spend far more time training men how to be effective managers, how to be effective CEOs of the church, how to be effective businessmen in the world's terms - far more time on that, than they do on teaching them to be preachers of the Word of God. A great preacher of the last generation said this [and I quote]:

...[T]he life-and-death issue is the Bible. More than ever these days we evangelical ministers and leaders and Christian educators need to be men who really believe the Bible, and know the Bible, and preach the Bible, and love the Bible and live the Bible, and if need be, are ready to die for the Bible. Our Protestant churches are needing a new generation of Bible prophets, not just pulpiteers...

Far too many ministers are so busy with secondary matters that they have not time to become the Bible masters and teachers which they ought to be.

When the minister's study becomes [merely] an office, the prophet has degenerated into a manager and the pulpit becomes an impertinence. The crying need... is for prophets, not just preachers; for ministers, not just managers; for men with a passion to put [the] Bible back where it ought to be in the Christian faith, in the Protestant pulpit... and in the life of the people. [unquote]

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This principle of heavenly power is the principle that we find in the Biblical record concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2. We find, first of all, in Acts chapter 2 verse two, that the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was marked, first of all, by "a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they [the waiting disciples] were sitting." And we find in Acts chapter 2 verse six that it was, first of all, this sound that brought a multitude of people together, to find out what was happening.

It was after God had brought this multitude of people together by the sound of the coming of the Spirit, the sound of this rushing mighty wind, that the multitude began to hear the 120 disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit (verse four) beginning to speak with other languages, all of the languages that were represented in this multitude from many nations. The multitude marveled, verse 11, that "we hear them [these disciples anointed by the Holy Spirit] speaking in our own languages the wonderful works of God."

It was the power of the Spirit, not the eloquence of man, not the methods of man, not the attractions of man, that brought a multitude together. It was heavenly power, not earthly power, that enabled the church to begin to do the business of God.

And so Peter, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, responded to the question of the multitude, who were saying to one another, Acts chapter 2 verse 12, "Whatever could this mean?" Peter responded by pointing them to Heaven. He told them, "this is all about Jesus Christ." He said, Acts chapter 2 beginning at verse 32:

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This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore [notice] being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He [Jesus] poured out this which you now see and hear.

Verse 36:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

And we are told, verse 37, that when the multitude

heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for [that is, because of] the remission of sins, and you [you also, as well as us] shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Notice the emphasis on Heaven. Notice the emphasis on the present exalted, heavenly position of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice the emphasis on the heavenly origin of the church's source of power, God the Holy Spirit.

We find the same thing in Acts chapter 3, when God through the apostles Peter and John healed a man who was begging at the Temple, a man who had been lame from birth. We read this, Acts chapter 3 verse six:

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Then Peter said [to the man who was lame from birth], "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

What was Peter saying to this man? Was it simply a matter of saying, "I'm sorry, I don't have any money, I can't help you"? Of course not, not at all. There is much more here, and the rest of the text of the passage shows it. Peter's words and actions were about to demonstrate a great deal about the business of the church and about the power of God. This man's deepest problem was not his poverty. This man's deepest problem was not his lameness. Mankind's deepest problem is not economic. It is not even physical.

Mankind's deepest problem is not a problem of this life. Mankind's deepest problem is not a problem of this present world. Yes, this man had great problems in terms of this present world. And God for His glory was about to free this man of his physical distress. But this man's deepest problem, his root problem, the problem of all mankind, is a problem not of this life but of eternity. Will you spend eternity in Hell, or will you spend eternity with Christ in glory? This man needed Christ. Mankind needs Christ. Christ above all. This man, any man, could be healed and even made rich in the things of this world, but still be bound for Hell. In eternal terms those things would accomplish nothing.

And so we read in Acts chapter 3 verse 11 that the people who saw this happen to this man, who saw him healed, ran together in the Temple area, greatly amazed.

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But then Peter explained the great significance of what had just taken place. In verse 12 he said, "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" And then he went on to explain that this had been done by the power of the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Life, the Holy One, the Just One, the One God raised from the dead.

And then Peter continued, in verse 16:

and His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him [Jesus] has given [this man] this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

And, then verse 19, Peter calls upon the people:

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom Heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

The power by which God performed this miracle through His disciples was not the power of silver and gold. It was not the power of earthly things. It was the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was heavenly power.

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Does Your Church Meet These Tests?

Dear friend, how is it with your church? Does your church meet these tests? Is your church doing the business of Heaven, or the business of man and of earthly things? Is your church operating by the power of Heaven, or by the power of earth — the power of man in his earthly philosophies and earthly resources?

In our time it is sad to say that the churches that are doing the business of Heaven by the power of Heaven are a shrinking minority. Oh, how ineffective and ineffectual so much of the church is today because the church is not doing the business of Heaven by the power of Heaven. And the great reason why that is so tragically the case in so much of the church today has to do with the third principle, the third test, that we find at work in the early church in the book of Acts.

Not only did the early church recognize the imperative of doing the business of Heaven, not only did the early church recognize the imperative of that work being done by the power of Heaven, the early church also recognized the necessity of operating under the authority of Heaven.

This last principle is so important that I do not want to rush to take it up today. I want to take up this issue of heavenly authority in the church, the Lord willing, in our next message so that we can devote to it the time and attention that it deserves.

In much of the church today, the leadership is saying, in effect, "We will not submit to the authority of Heaven. We will operate under our own authority."

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Effectively they are saying, "We know better than the Spirit of God. We do not need the Spirit of God. We do not need the Word of God. We need our methods, our expertise, our talents and abilities, and those things are enough."

Dear friends, those things fall far short of God's standard. Those things, God's Word tells us, are "wood, hay, and stubble" that will be burned up in the fires of God's purifying judgment. And so as we continue next time, let us be careful to understand the great necessity of complete and unmixed submission to the authority of Heaven within the church of Jesus Christ. Amen.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is that of the Great Commission: to preach the Gospel to the world, 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.

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