

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Christ's Church: Whose Purpose?" (Colossians 3:1-4, 1 Corinthians 1-2)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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Today we are continuing the study that we began in our last message, concerning the tests of authenticity that we find in the early New Testament church in the book of Acts, which continue to apply to the church today, as they have through the centuries, and will apply to Christ's true church until the end of time.

Before we consider some additional passages that declare these things to us today, let me call your attention once again to the theme passage of this series of messages, which is found in Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse one. Please open your own copy of God's Word to this passage with me, if you are able to do so. Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse one. Here we have the imperative of the attitude and the outlook that is to be the controlling factor, for the individual believer and for the church as a body, in all periods of history:

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)

In our last message, we observed that these verses 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 the eyes of God. We will fail to please our Lord Jesus Christ, because we will fail to understand who He truly is, and what He requires of us as His servants. We will also fail to lay hold of and appropriate the great resources that are ours in the heavenly realms because of

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Christ. We will rely upon the perishing and corrupted and corrupting resources that are to be found on this sin-cursed earth, and in this present world-system that is under the sway of Satan. The church will be corrupted by the world.

### **A Heavenly Attitude Based On Heavenly Principles**

We find an entirely different attitude from this as we carefully examine the life and ministry of the early church in the book of Acts. Jesus taught His disciples what they were to do and how they were to think in great detail. And through the course of the book of Acts, He opened these things up to them even more through further visions and revelations before the full canon of the Scriptures was completed.

And so, as we saw last time, the great principles that the Lord Jesus taught His disciples before He returned to glory are now implemented in the book of Acts. The heavenly imperative that we find in Colossians chapter 3, that we must set our minds on things above where Christ is, rather than on things on earth, this begins to shine forth in the early church in the book of Acts.

As we saw last time, we find that there are three great principles, three great imperatives, that God implements in the life and ministry of the early church.

The first principle is that the *business* of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the business of Heaven.

The second principle is that the *power* of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the power of Heaven.

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The third principle is that 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. During our last message, we considered the first two, that the business of the true Church of Jesus Christ and the power of the true Church of Jesus Christ must have their origin, and their source, and their goal, in the things of Heaven and not in the things of earth.

### **Great Commission Business**

The business of the church must be the business of Heaven because nothing delights our adversary the Devil more than for the church to be distracted from the business of Heaven by taking up the things of earth and concentrating on those things. Politics, social justice, psychology, many other things which are not the things that Christ has defined as the business of His church.

The only business of the true Church of Jesus Christ is the Great Commission. Scripture tells us that the Great Commission has two parts. The church is given two tasks. The first task is to preach the Gospel to all people everywhere. The second task is to build up those who believe the Gospel in the knowledge and the practice of the truth. Salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone. Sanctification by the work of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Dear friends, this may sound like an overly strong statement, but I believe that it must be said, on the authority of the Bible: Any other business that the true Church of

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Jesus Christ does is Satan's business and not Christ's business. All of the other things that we might do as the church may seem to be very good things in terms of this earth, in terms of this life. But they are not the things of Heaven. They are not the things of the life to come. The church is to be about the business of being Christ's instrument for the redeeming of a people out of this present sin-cursed world for life in the eternal New Heavens and New Earth to come.

### **God's Capital vs. Man's Capital**

In our last message, I mentioned Jesus' parable of the nobleman and his servants in Luke chapter 19. I mentioned that in verse 13 the nobleman, who is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ, said to his servants, "Do business until I come." Or, as it is rendered in the King James Bible, "Occupy until I come." I mentioned that the word that is translated "do business" in the New King James and "occupy" in the Old King James is the Greek word from which we get our English word "pragmatism".

This Greek word is a very interesting word. It means, literally, "to put capital to work." To invest capital in some enterprise.

Much of the present-day Evangelical church practices an evil form of pragmatism. This pragmatism is based on the false idea that visible results are the yardstick by which we must judge whether or not something is true or useful. In other words, the attitude of much of the church today is that "the ends justify the means."

But there is a double fallacy at work in this kind of thinking. The first fallacy is

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that sinful man can decide and define what the ends are, the goals are, that the church is to pursue. Men can decide and define these things instead of Christ. And in many cases today, men in the church redefine and twist Christ's Great Commission for their own ends, their own purposes. This is the first great fallacy of the Purpose Driven Church Movement in our time.

The second great fallacy that characterizes the attitude of much of the nominally Evangelical church today is this: that sinful man can not only define the ends that the church is to achieve, the purposes of the church, but that sinful man can also define and decide what means will be used to achieve those ends.

Let me put this back into the terms of the Greek word for pragmatism. It means that sinful man in the church is working not with the capital of Heaven, not with the resources of Heaven, not with the resources that are to be found at the throne of God in Christ, but the resources of this world.

And what kind of a result will such resources yield? Earthbound resources will yield earthbound results. Reliance upon the arm of flesh will yield that which pertains to the sinful flesh, and pleases the flesh, and upholds the flesh.

But we must take careful note of something in the parable of the nobleman and the servants in Luke chapter 19. We must note that the nobleman, who is a picture of Christ, gave *his own resources* into the hands of his servants. And he said to them, "Do business until I come." Do business with *My* resources. Do business to achieve *My* goals.

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## **Whose Might? Whose Power?**

That is to be the pattern for the true Church of Jesus Christ. "Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." (Zechariah 4:6). "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."

In First Corinthians chapter 3, beginning at verse 11, we read this:

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day [the Day of Judgment] will declare it [will show it for what it truly is], because it will be revealed by fire [the purging fire of God's judgment]; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

If anyone's work which he has built on it [that is, on the foundation of Jesus Christ] endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved [if he is truly a believer], yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)

The refining fires of God's judgment will reveal which of His servants' works consist of the things of this earth – wood, hay, and straw that will be burned up – and which things consist of the things of the world to come – gold, silver, and precious stones that will be refined and will last into eternity. It depends, dear friends, on

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whether we are concentrating on serving man's ends by earthly means or we are concentrating on serving Christ's ends by heavenly means. That is the test of authenticity for the works of the church.

That is why the business of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the business of Heaven, and that is why the power of the true Church of Jesus Christ must be the power of Heaven. The true Church of Jesus Christ must reject and abandon the pragmatism of this postmodern age.

The pragmatism of the present day is a philosophy which says that visible results are the criterion by which we must judge whether or not anything is true or useful. In the Evangelical church today, this philosophy of pragmatism translates into a way of thinking that says, "If we see visible results – such as growth in attendance, larger offerings, a bigger building, a wider range of church activities, a better reputation in the eyes of the world – then God must be blessing us."

Employing this philosophy, the Purpose-Driven Church movement, the Emergent Church movement, and other movements that are attempting to do an un-Biblical makeover of the church and a makeover of the Gospel, these movements base their message and methods on the study of human management philosophy and market studies of the unsaved, rather than on the study of the Word of God.

The actual result is not the "healthier" churches that these movements advertise. Instead, churches that fall prey to this kind of philosophy have increasing numbers of

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unsaved people (who often think that they are saved), and the true believers within these churches are a shrinking number of people who are on a spiritual starvation diet.

Rick Warren, the leader of the Purpose-Driven Church movement, says in his handbook for that movement that Jesus Christ was this kind of pragmatist. But in saying this he completely ignores the plain teaching of the Word of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ was not operating according to a model that said that man justifies his own ends by his own means. The Lord Jesus Christ was carrying out the eternal plan of the triune God. He was acting in obedience to His heavenly Father.

If we were to measure the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ by Rick Warren's yardstick, we would say that Jesus' "strategy," as Warren calls it, was as ineffective as any could possibly be. The Jews rejected their Messiah. They crucified Jesus. They persecuted His disciples to the point where they were driven out of Jerusalem and scattered among other nations.

By human standards, by the standards of the Purpose-Driven Church movement, this was abject failure. But in the eternal plan of God, these things brought salvation to mankind and spread the Gospel throughout the world.

### **Repeated Warnings & Admonitions**

In Galatians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit warns us against falling into the trap of this kind of vain philosophy:

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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? (Galatians 4:3, 9)

In Colossians chapter 2, as we have seen earlier in our messages on this book, the Apostle Paul says this:

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 these things]? (Colossians 2:20)

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of this 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. (Colossians 2:8-10)

The Apostle Paul says this to the church at Corinth, a church that had compromised with the world in these ways. He said this, First Corinthians chapter 2, beginning at verse four:

... [M]y speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

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However we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. (1 Corinthians 2:4-6)

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:13-16)

The Apostle Paul also declares this, in First Corinthians chapter 1, beginning at verse 18:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased

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God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things [the lowly things] of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not [things which man regards as nothing], to bring to nothing the things that are [the things that sinful man considers to be something - Why? so], that no flesh should glory in His presence.

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

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## **What Kind of Business Is Your Church Doing?**

Dear friends, let me ask the question that I asked at the end of our last message: How is it with you? How is it with your church?

Are you, are your church, doing the business of Heaven and of the world to come, or the business of this cursed and perishing earth? Are you, are your church, appropriating the power of Heaven to do the work of Heaven, or are you relying upon earthly power which produces earthly results that will not last for eternity?

Or to put it in the terms of the Day of Judgment, are you, are your church, building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones, or with wood, hay, and straw? Is your church's glory in man, or in the Lord?

In order for God's people to do Heaven's business by Heaven's power, we must rely upon and take our stand upon Heaven's authority. That authority is the authority of Christ at the throne of God, the Holy Spirit on the throne of the heart of the believer, and the Word of God, implanted in the heart of the believer and submitted to by the believer and the church.

As we examine the work of the early church in the book of Acts, we find the people of God appropriating the power of Heaven to do the work of Heaven. We find them continually seeking and relying upon and declaring the authority of Heaven for all that they did and said. We find repeated supernatural confirmations of that

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authority in the early church before the Scriptures were completed as the church's full and final authority on earth.

And so, the Lord willing, in our next message, I would like to point us to examples of this pattern of thinking, and activity, and blessing, and growth that we find in the early church in the book of Acts. Today's church must return to that New Testament model. And so, the Lord willing, we shall examine these truths together so that we might more clearly learn the truth, and evermore willingly obey the truth.

#### **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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