

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Genuine Ministry Puts Christ First"

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/14/2010

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Introduction

We've now come to a transition point in our study of the book of Colossians. And as we prepare to move forward in our study, I want to take a few moments and review what we've learned so far.

Remember that the over-arching theme of the book of Colossians is the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ – the fact that Jesus Christ deserves, and in fact He rightfully demands, first place in everything. And remember that thus far in Colossians chapter one, we've seen three things.

First, in verses 1 through 14, we've seen that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Gospel.

Second, in verses 15 through 17, we've seen that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Creation.

And third, in verses 18 through 23, we've seen that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Church.

And now, fourthly, in chapter one at the end of verse 23, and continuing on into verses 24 through 29, we're going to find that Jesus Christ is preeminent in genuine ministry. That's the section we're coming to now.

The book of Colossians is a short book. It's only four chapters long, and we're coming now to the last section of chapter one. Colossians may be a short book, but is a powerful book. All of the Word of God is "alive and powerful," we read in

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Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 12. It is “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and it is a discerner (or critic) of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Paul’s letter to the Colossians was written with just that kind of purpose in mind. He wants to get to the heart of the issues that the church at Colosse is facing. He wants to instruct them in sound doctrine, and in righteous living. He wants to equip them to deal with the issues they’re facing as a church, and as individual believers, and as Christian families. And he wants to reprove and correct them about some wrong thinking and wrong beliefs that have come into their church.

Genuine Ministry Puts Christ First

And so Paul now is going to speak to the Colossians about the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ in genuine ministry. This is what my ministry is all about, Paul is going to tell them. I’ve been given a stewardship from God. And Jesus Christ is at the center of my ministry, Jesus Christ is preeminent in every aspect of my ministry. My ministry is nothing apart from Jesus Christ. And this is what makes a ministry genuine – the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you listen to a preacher or follow a ministry, and the preacher or leader is preeminent, or some program or philosophy is preeminent, or the building is preeminent, or the ritual is preeminent – if anything is preeminent in that ministry other than the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is not genuine Gospel ministry, rooted and grounded in the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. The preeminence of

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the Lord Jesus Christ – Jesus Christ having first place – that is what makes a ministry genuine, and not counterfeit. And Paul is going to tell the Colossians to beware of counterfeits.

There are lots of counterfeits in our day. And the way you learn to discern a counterfeit is to study the real thing, the genuine article. And that is exactly what the Apostle Paul is telling the Colossian believers to do. Study God's Word in order that you will know the Lord Jesus Christ, and give Him first place in your life.

So let me now read for you Colossians chapter one, from the end of verse 23, through the end of the chapter. Paul speaks of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, verse 23, "which was preached to every creature under heaven" – that is, to every kind of person and nation and culture in the known world, both Jew and Gentile – "of which I, Paul, became a minister." And then we read this, beginning in verse 24:

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we

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may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

And as the Apostle Paul deals with all these matters, he does so by doing one thing. He constantly points the Colossian believers to the Lord Jesus Christ. The hallmark of this book is the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is preeminent in this book. The Apostle Paul's number one purpose is to lift up and hold forth the Lord Jesus Christ.

We've seen thus far in chapter one that Paul puts up in large banners, if you will, the person of Jesus Christ — the deity of Jesus Christ — His work as the creator of the universe — His fulfillment of all of the Old Testament types and symbols pointing to the promised redeemer from sin — His work in coming into this world as the Savior of souls — His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand — His present rule over all things.

Paul has taught the Colossians that all wisdom is in Christ — He is teaching them the fact that the Scriptures are the very Word of Christ — the fact that Christ, and Christ alone, is the object of saving faith — the fact that it is with Christ that we believers have been raised from the dead — the fact that the church is the body of Christ. And he is going to remind them that genuine fellowship in the church is fellowship in Christ. Christ is the Master, the One the Christian serves. He's going to remind them that Christ lives in every believer, and "Christ in you," Paul says, is "the hope of glory." And he's going to remind them of the fact that Christ Himself is

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going to come to this earth once again, visibly and bodily, and we are going to appear with Him.

And we're going to see that Paul holds forth the person of Jesus Christ as the One who is, in His very essence, the total contradiction of the very nature of this fallen world, and the world system. He's going to hold up the wisdom of Christ as the total opposite of the way the world thinks. And he's going to hold up the life that we have in Christ, as the total opposite of the condemnation the world is under. And he's going to hold up the life that we are to live in Christ, as something that is to be the total opposite of the way the world lives.

Paul mentions the Lord Jesus Christ in nearly every one of the 95 verses through the entire four chapters of this book. The book of Colossians is one continuous exposition and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His manifold offices and aspects, and in His marvelous relationship to each and every child of God.

Christology is Not Merely Abstract Theology

But Paul does not hold forth all of these wonderful things about the Lord Jesus Christ as just theological facts in the abstract. That is never Paul's way. And that is never God the Holy Spirit's way, throughout the pages of the inspired Word. If we ever deal with Scripture as just so much abstract theology, then we have severely and tragically missed the point.

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Yes, we need sound theology. We need to understand who God is. We need to understand who Jesus Christ is. We need to understand who God the Holy Spirit is. We need to understand who we are – individuals created in God's own image. We need to understand what has happened to us – that our first parents fell into sin, that the image of God in us was severely marred and distorted, and that as a result the entire human race has fallen under God's wrath. And we need to understand that Jesus Christ is the creator God made flesh, and that God the Father sent Him into this world to redeem lost sinners through the shedding of His own blood on the cross.

But it does us no good to just understand these things as abstract facts. James chapter 2 verse 19 tells us that the devils understand these things, and they believe them at a certain level. Romans chapter one tells us that every human being understands the basics of theology, including God's eternal power and Godhead, simply by observing the created universe.

But that kind of knowledge, even that kind of belief, does not save a person. Theology rooted in Scripture is God's special revelation to us. Theology is of no use at all if it is not practical. Knowing that you are a sinner in need of salvation, and knowing that Christ died to save sinners, is not enough. You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, put your faith in Him and Him alone, in order to be saved. Theology must become practical. And that is the work of God the Holy Spirit, indwelling the believer, illuminating His Word for us as we hear it preached, and as we read it and study it for ourselves.

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The Practical Focus of Sound Christology

And that is exactly the kind of approach we find here in the book of Colossians, and in fact throughout the New Testament. Paul is constantly interweaving his exaltation of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, with practical instruction about how the Colossian Christians are to think, what they are to believe, how they are to live, and how they are to deal with the problems they are confronting in life.

In Colossians chapter one, Paul is addressing these issues, these questions – Do you want to be fruitful in every good work? Then grow in your knowledge of Jesus Christ. Do you want to be strengthened spiritually? Then seek to understand more about Jesus. Do you want to understand the depths, the wonders of your salvation? Then learn more about what Christ has done for you.

In chapter two, Paul is going to address these questions: Do you want to have God's protection against the deceptions of false teachers? Then learn more of Christ, because in Him and hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Do you want to live before God in a manner that is fitting for a believer? Then seek to be rooted and built up in Christ. Do you want to be on your guard against those who say you need more than Christ's work in order to be saved? Then understand, Paul says, what it means when I tell you that you are complete in Christ. Do you want to understand the nature of Christian liberty? Then understand who you are in Christ; understand the bondage from which Christ has liberated you.

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In Colossians chapter three, Paul is going to deal with these questions: Do you want to understand how to develop Christ-like character? Then let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom. Do you want to have a godly Christian home, and right relationships within the home between husband and wife and between parents and children? Then understand that Christ is the Head of your house.

And at the end of chapter three and on into chapter four, Paul is going to deal with these questions: Do you want to understand what your attitude should be as an employee in the workplace? Do you want to understand why it's important for you to do the best job you possibly can for your employer and for your customers? Then understand that your ultimate head, the authority in all these relationships, the One you ultimately answer to, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you want to understand how and why you should deal fairly with your employees or subordinates in the workplace? Then understand that you have a Master in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And further on in chapter four, Paul will ask: Do you want to know how to pray for me, Paul, and for my fellow laborers in the Gospel? Do you want to know how to pray for pastors, for the leaders of your church, for missionaries? Then pray that God would open the door for us to speak the mystery of Christ that God has now revealed. Do you want to have fellowship with others in the body of Christ, whether it's the people in your local church or others who are far away? Then understand that the focus of true fellowship with other believers is the Lord Jesus Christ.

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The Word of Christ

There is a single phrase, in chapter 3 and verse 16, that really sums up Paul's answer to all these questions, all these issues. He says there, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Literally, Paul is saying, let the Word of Christ be at home in you. Let God's Word live within you. Let God's Word settle down and be at home in you. Let the Word of Christ inhabit you. Let your relationship with the Word of God be that kind of intimate, continual, ongoing relationship that you would desire to have with the person who is closest to you in your own home.

And, Paul says, let the Word of Christ dwell in you "richly". In great abundance. Feast upon it. Take in everything that God's Word has for you. It's foolish to starve to death in a house full of the best food available. And that's what you have between the covers of your Bible. Feast upon the Bread of Life. And, Paul says, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly "in all wisdom." Every area of life. Every area of knowledge.

We've already seen that Paul told the Colossians in chapter 1 and verse 9, I "do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power."

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The preaching of the Word – the preaching of Christ – is the foundation of genuine ministry. And as we continue our study in Colossians chapter one in our next message, we're going to go more deeply into this great truth.

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.

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