

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 1 of 13

A Famine of Expository Preaching

Today, there is a major crisis in the Evangelical church. There is a famine in the Evangelical church. It is a famine of larger dimensions than anything the church has seen in the last 500 years. There is a famine of expository preaching in the church today. As a result, there is a famine of Biblical literacy among Christians today. As a result, there is growing famine of sound doctrine among Christians today – a famine of knowledge of what the Bible actually teaches.

The theme of the television broadcast of the largest "Evangelical" church in the United States (and I put the term "Evangelical" in quotes) – the theme of that program is – "Discover the Champion in You." Over 7 million people watch this program every week. But the focus of the service each week is not on the Word of God. The focus is not upon Gospel of Jesus Christ. The focus is on being materially and psychologically successful in life. The focus is on what has come to be known as the "prosperity gospel" – if you do certain things and have certain attitudes, God will give you health, wealth, and happiness.

And each week, the pastor of that church leads the 16,000 people in attendance as they hold up their Bibles, and they repeat this mantra. They say, "This is my Bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do. Today I will be taught the Word of God. I'll boldly confess. My mind is alert. My heart is receptive. I will never be the same. In Jesus' name."

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 2 of 13

But then, for the next half hour, these 16,000 people, and the millions in the worldwide television audience, do not hear instruction from the Word of God. What they hear is a psychological pep talk that has little or nothing to do with the Word of God, and is often contrary to the plain teaching of the Word of God. Scripture is rarely mentioned, much less quoted. The name of Jesus is rarely mentioned. The Gospel is never preached.

You wonder why these people bother to bring their Bibles to the service, except to hold them up while they repeat this deceptive mantra on television each week. The focus of this pastor's pep talk is all about you – your abilities, your capabilities, your self-esteem, your happiness, your material and financial success in life.

Not long ago, this pastor of the largest Evangelical church in the United States was interviewed on the CBS television program *60 Minutes*. The interviewer, who was certainly not a Christian himself, asked this pastor some pointed questions. He asked this pastor, "Why so little use of the Bible in your sermons and your books? Why is it that you hardly ever mention Jesus Christ?" The pastor's response was that he does not believe that it is his calling to explain the Bible to people. His calling, he says, is to be a "life coach" – to help you, according to the title of his latest book, to be "A Better You."

We Don't Want Doctrine!

Dear friends, this is more and more typical of the nominally Evangelical church in our day. Sound doctrine, communicated through expository preaching, is

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Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 3 of 13

increasingly absent. Doctrine divides, they say. Doctrine is a de-motivator. We don't need doctrine. We need motivation, they say. We don't want doctrine. We want to feel good, they say. We don't like doctrine. Doctrine is a negative message, they say. We want to be nothing but positive. We don't benefit from doctrine, they say. We just need to learn how to live the kind of lives that God will bless with health, wealth, and happiness. So the church becomes little more than a social club, a social activity center, with a little bit of religion mixed in.

Spiritual Junk Food

This is a deep problem for individual Christians. It is a deep and serious problem for the church as a body. Much of the Evangelical church today is on a diet of spiritual junk food. High short-term emotional energy, but little or no lasting spiritual nutrition. Many professing Christians have become spiritual junk food addicts.

Now, you may be able to get a physical or emotional high from junk food. You may get a temporary energy burst from that afternoon candy bar at work. But you can't live on junk food. You can't be healthy on junk food. If that is all you consume, sooner or later, you will be seriously sick. A steady diet of junk food is disastrous for the physical body.

The Results of the Spiritual Junk Food Diet

In the same way, the Bible makes it clear that spiritual junk food is disastrous for the spiritual body of the church, and for the individual Christian whose body is the temple

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 4 of 13

of the Holy Spirit of God. I could give you a mountain of statistics about the state of the Evangelical church today that prove my point. But let me give you just two.

The first is this: Nearly two-thirds of Evangelicals today do not believe that Jesus Christ is who He says He is – the only Way to eternal life. In today's Evangelical church, the Biblical Gospel isn't necessarily the only Gospel. Christ isn't necessarily the only Way. The diet of spiritual junk food that we find in so many churches today has brought us to this crisis. We have many unsaved people in the church today – people who are being made comfortable in their sins, people who think they are alright, when they are really eternally lost.

The second statistic is this: The rate of divorce and broken homes among Evangelical church members today is the same as it is in the world at large. One of the most basic indicators of right living says that Evangelicals aren't living any better than the rest of the world. That is what happens when you have a steady diet of spiritual junk food in the church. You cannot learn about right living without learning right doctrine. You cannot learn right living unless God through Scripture puts the finger on the things in your life that aren't right.

The Imperative of Expository Preaching

And for that reason, the Word of God demands expository preaching. The Word of God tells you why you need to hear expository preaching. The Word of God tells you how you will benefit from expository preaching. That's the focus of what the Apostle Paul is saying in the passage we're presently considering, Colossians chapter one,

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 5 of 13

verse twenty-eight: "Him we preach," – Jesus Christ in all His fullness – "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

That is expository preaching. Christ must be preached, because He is the only hope of sinners. Christ must be preached, because every Christian needs to be warned. Christ must be preached, because every Christian needs to be taught. Christ must be preached, because every Christian needs to become mature in Christ.

That is the nature and the eternal purpose of expository preaching. God did not call anyone to be a preacher of the Word or the pastor of a church, who is not an expositor of the Word. That is the preacher's job.

In 2nd Timothy chapter four, verses one through five, the Apostle Paul challenges Timothy about the absolute necessity of expository preaching. He says this:

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables [to man-made stories rather than the reality of God's truth]. But you be watchful in

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 6 of 13

all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Paul says this to Timothy: Preach the Word of God and nothing else! Stand ready to do it at all times and in every kind of situation – “in season and out of season.” The force of the original language is this: “Preach the Word when the Word is welcome in the ears of your hearers, yes; and also preach the Word when that Word is unwelcome in the ears of your hearers.”

But always, the Word! Your preaching, Timothy, is not about felt needs. Your preaching, Timothy, is not about success in human terms. Your preaching, Timothy, is not about self-esteem. Your preaching, Timothy, is not driven by what people want to hear or don't want to hear. Your preaching, Timothy, is to be Scripture-driven preaching. Expository preaching. Preach the Word, Timothy! Preach that, and nothing else!

And Paul's challenge to Timothy comes immediately on the heels of those words we have read several times in this series of messages, that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

And here in the beginning of 2nd Timothy chapter 4, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 7 of 13

The word translated “reprove” means to expose error. The word translated “rebuke” means to denounce error, to express strong disapproval of it. The word translated “exhort” means to earnestly beg and plead with people, to encourage them, to urge them in the right direction. “Reprove, rebuke, and exhort.” How? “With all longsuffering and doctrine.” Do it with patience. Do it without ceasing. Do it unflinching. And do it with doctrine – instruct the people of God from the Word of God. Make sure your preaching of the Word, make sure your reproof, your correction, your instruction in righteousness, is from the Word of God, and not the word of man. Not junk food, but solid, nourishing spiritual food.

Why Expository Preaching Is So Vital

And why is the preacher to do this? Because, Paul says in verse 3, “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.” The time will come when people will want spiritual junk food. They won’t want to put up with sound doctrine. They will want to hear what they want to hear. They will want the service and the preaching to appeal to the natural man, the man who cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God because the Spirit of God isn’t living in him. They will want to be the purpose-driven church, driven by man’s purposes, not by God’s purpose.

The Apostle Paul says in Colossians 1:28 that the preacher and the church need to be about the business of “teaching every man.” What does that mean? What is teaching? The Greek word that is translated “teaching” here in Colossians 1:28 is the same word that is translated “doctrine” in 2 Timothy 3:16. All Scripture is profitable

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 8 of 13

for teaching, for doctrine, or if you will – for indoctrination. All teaching involves indoctrination. What you need is indoctrination of the right kind. You need *sound* doctrine.

What does Paul mean by “sound” doctrine? The Bible tells us that the key characteristic of sound doctrine is that it is “healthy” doctrine. When the Apostle Paul speaks of “sound doctrine” he uses the word from which we get our English word “hygiene.” The word in the Greek has the meaning, “healthy.” And it also carried the meaning of “accurate.” The sense of the phrase “sound doctrine” is, “teaching that is free from any mixture of error.” Sound teaching. Healthy teaching. Not junk-food teaching.

And what is the source of sound doctrine? The source of sound doctrine is Scripture alone. “All Scripture” – and nothing else – “is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...”

And what is the purpose of sound doctrine? The purpose of sound doctrine is the salvation of the sinner, and the maturity of the believer. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for” – here’s the purpose – “doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness.”

Right Doctrine Produces – And Demands – Right Living

Doctrine, teaching, instruction. That is the preacher’s job. That is his life’s work. And as you search the pages of the Word of God you will find that doctrine,

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 9 of 13

teaching, instruction always has two parts – there's the doctrine itself, and then there's the application of the doctrine. The pattern you will always find in the Bible is doctrine first, then the application for living. You can't have proper application until you have a proper grasp of sound doctrine.

In Exodus, the law comes first, that great thundering standard of God. That's doctrine. God says, "People, this is how you are supposed to live. Here is My moral law." And then in the rest of the Pentateuch comes the civil law for Israel that is rooted in and based upon that moral law. That civil law is the application of the moral law to the circumstances of the nation of Israel, and God's plan and purpose for them. And then also comes the sacrificial system to deal with violations of God's moral law, and violations of the civil law code.

We see the same pattern in the teachings of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels. We see the same pattern in the teachings of the apostles in the book of Acts. And we see the same pattern in the epistles, and in Revelation. It's always doctrine first, then the application for right living.

It is always interesting to note how the Apostle Paul presents his arguments under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The pattern is always the same. His standard procedure is to begin with right doctrine. He reminds Christians of what they already know. Then he teaches and instructs Christians further. He takes them deeper into the truth. He constantly draws from other Scriptures to make his points. And he

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 10 of 13

constantly uses the conjunction “therefore” to lead you on, point by point by point – 105 times in all.

But as he leads you along, you always come to a vital “therefore” that indicates that Paul is moving from the presentation of doctrine to the application of doctrine. Let me give you some examples.

Romans 12:1 – “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice...”

Galatians 5:1 – “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.”

Ephesians 4:1 – “I, therefore...beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

Colossians 3:5 – “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

Colossians 3:12 – “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.”

2nd Thessalonians 2:15 – “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions that you were taught [by the Word of God]”

It is always, “therefore.” In light of all these wonderful truths, in light of these great doctrines of the faith – in light of all that, therefore this is how you are to live.

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 11 of 13

That is the pattern. If you truly believe these doctrines, if you really believe that this is true and that the alternatives are not, then the inevitable next step is that you must start living according to these doctrines. Right doctrine produces right living. Right doctrine demands right living.

Right living is not based on mere feelings. It is not subjective. Right living is objective – there is a standard of measurement. But it is not comparing yourself with yourself, or comparing yourself with someone else. It is comparing yourself with the Word of God – objectively.

Crucial Questions

A preacher who is not preaching sound doctrine from the Word of God, is no preacher at all. Ephesians 4:11 tells us that the role of the pastor is that of shepherd/teacher. The job of the shepherd is to lead the sheep in the path of sound doctrine. A man who is not doing that either needs to learn how to do it and start doing it, or he needs to get out of the ministry, because he is in fact a danger to the people of God.

Dear friend, on the basis of what we've seen in the Word of God today, let me ask you some questions, and I hope you will answer them honestly: Are you seeking after sound doctrine, or are you looking for something else? Is your church preaching sound doctrine, or is it giving out spiritual junk food? Are you seeking the benefits of being taught and instructed in sound doctrine – the benefits of maturity and completeness in Christ? Don't go after spiritual junk food. Don't go after preaching

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Today's Evangelical Preaching: Sound Nourishment or Spiritual Junk Food?" (Col. 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 12 of 13

that doesn't nourish. Don't settle for preaching that doesn't feed the genuine hunger and need of your soul. Seek after expository preaching – the kind that brings true spiritual nourishment.

And on the basis of what we've seen in the Word of God today, let me also say a word to any pastors who may be listening. Let me ask you some questions, and I hope you also will answer them honestly: What kind of spiritual food are you giving to your people? Are you instructing them in sound doctrine? Are you exegeting and setting forth the actual message of Scripture, what the text actually says? Are you doing that for your people? Are you explaining those eternal truths to the people God has placed under your care as His under-shepherd?

Are you leading them in applying sound doctrine to daily living? Are you doing that not only by exposition of the Scriptures but also by your own personal life and example – because you yourself are being built up in sound doctrine? If this is an area in which you need to grow and change, I urge you to call upon the Lord to enable you for this great and awesome task, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It will make a difference in the lives of your people and the life of your church and your witness to the community around you, as nothing else can.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, the things that we have considered today place the bright spotlight of Your Word on every one of our hearts. All of us, Father, are falling short of these things, most certainly in small ways, and perhaps, if we are honest about it,

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/9/2010

Page 13 of 13

in very large ways as well. Father, I pray that the Holy Spirit would do a work in each one who is listening today. I pray that individual lives would be different. I pray that pastors' preaching would be transformed. I pray that churches would seek and experience a level of maturity in Christ that they have perhaps never known before. And all, Father, for the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I pray these things in His name that is above every name, Amen.

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.

The prayers of our listeners and supporters are vital to this ministry. Thank you for praying for us.

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of His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word.**