

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Heavenly-Minded Living" (Colossians 3:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 7/14/2013

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If you are able to do so as you are listening today, please turn in your Bible with me to the book of Colossians chapter three. I want to begin by reading the first four verses, but today we shall also read other parts of this chapter as we move forward. Colossians chapter three, 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. (Colossians 3:1-4)

In our last message, we saw that the words of this passage form the great hinge point in Paul's letter to the Colossian believers. In the first two chapters, the Apostle Paul has established and defended the great and central fact of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ over all things.

And in so doing - in proclaiming the preeminence of Christ in chapter one, and in defending the preeminence of Christ in chapter two - Paul has defined and proclaimed the Gospel in all of its fullness: Deliverance from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Forgiveness of sins. Restoration of fellowship with God for sinners who were alienated and enemies in our minds through wicked works. And, a radical change of mind, away from the thinking of this present world, away from the thinking of those who remain under the bondage of Satan.

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Christianity Is Nothing Without a Change of Mind

You see, dear friends, Christianity is nothing without a change of mind. Regeneration does not happen apart from a change of mind. A regenerated mind is a changed mind. Changed by the power of God. No one is saved unless he exhibits a change of mind – more and more forsaking sin, and forsaking the thinking of this present evil world, and more and more embracing the way of thinking in which God's Word instructs us.

Even the dying thief, hanging on a cross next to Jesus, exhibited a radical change of mind when he acknowledged that Jesus was innocent of all wrongdoing, and he said, "Lord remember me when You come into Your Kingdom" (Luke 23:42). In those few words, the dying thief acknowledged that this life is not the end, that there is an eternity to come.

Furthermore, the dying thief acknowledged that Jesus Christ is Lord. He understood that Jesus was to have a kingdom. He understood that that kingdom was not a kingdom of this present world. He acknowledged his sin, and he acknowledged Christ's ability to save him from his sin, and to admit even a dying thief into His kingdom, on the basis of repentance and faith.

And so the dying thief, even in the last moments of life on earth, even in a sentence of just nine words, gave the strongest possible evidence of a change from having his mind set on things on earth, to having his mind set on things above, where Christ would soon be seated, and where he himself would soon be.

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Is It Possible To Be Too Heavenly-Minded?

And so Paul says that each and every believer in Christ must exhibit that same change of mind.

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.

Now, someone may object to this. You may be saying, "Well, we can't get too carried away by this, can we? After all, it is possible to be so heavenly minded that we will be no earthly good. So let's not put too much emphasis on this. We shouldn't be carried away by this thought, should we?"

Well, dear friend, if you are thinking that way today, I hope that you will think again. I submit to you that it is impossible for a Christian to be too heavenly-minded, and thus be of no earthly good. It is impossible.

Now, you may be asking, How can you say that? How can you say that it is impossible for a Christian to be too heavenly-minded, and thus be of no earthly good? What I am saying is simply this: The Christian who is no earthly good is not truly heavenly-minded. Let me give you an example of what I mean. I once knew a man who spent all of his time, night and day, going around, witnessing for Christ, handing out tracts and Bibles and Gospel booklets. But while this man was

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doing these things, he was neglecting his wife and children. He did so much of this that he could not hold a job. He did not provide for his loved ones. He was often not even at home except very early in the morning and very late at night.

Dear friends, the same Apostle Paul who tells us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to set our minds on things above here in Colossians, also tells us in First Timothy chapter five, verse eight that the man who "does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household...has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

That was the case with this man. He thought he was doing the work of heaven. But the fact is, dear friends, he was neglecting the work of heaven. His first work was to make sure that his family was provided for. His first work was to hold a steady job. His first work was to pay his bills.

Most certainly, he could have and should have taken advantage of opportunities to witness for Christ. But our witness for Christ begins in the home. The man who is not providing for the needs of his own household is a shameful witness for Christ. Such a man puts the Gospel to shame in his own home, in his own family, and in the eyes of the watching world. And that was the case with the man of whom I am speaking. Such a man causes the name of Christ to be blasphemed.

Such a man is no earthly good because he does not have a clear and proper view of heavenly imperatives and heavenly priorities. And that is what the Apostle Paul gives us in the last two chapters of the book of Colossians. He gives us a pattern

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of life on earth that is governed by our Lord in heaven, by His Word which comes from heaven, and by His Spirit whom He has sent from heaven to indwell each one of us.

Today's Far Greater Danger

But dear friends, what we have much more often in the church today is not this kind of a case, the case of a man who is neglecting the first priority God has given him because of a false view of Christian service. No, what we see far more often is the case of the individual and the church where the focus is not upon heaven at all. The focus is on the things of this earth.

One of the most shameful ways in which we see this in our time is in so-called prosperity theology, the name-it-and-claim-it or health-and-wealth teaching that is prominent in so many places today. You will find it all over television and on the Internet.

Here is the picture: The preacher up front is wearing a two thousand dollar watch and a three thousand dollar suit and five hundred dollar shoes, and he's driving a seventy thousand dollar automobile, and he's flying around the country to various meetings and crusades in a private jet. And spiritually gullible and ignorant people – often very poor people - are sending this television preacher the money to support this extravagant lifestyle, based on the false promise that God will bless them with health and wealth if they maintain the preacher's wealth.

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The entire focus is the opposite of the focus of Colossians chapter three. These false teachers have effectively re-written the first verses of Colossians chapter three to read like this: "If you want to have health and wealth, seek those things which are to be found on this earth. Set your mind on things on earth, not on things in heaven. For you are entitled to health and wealth, here and now, and you can have it if you give enough to the church that teaches the 'prosperity gospel.' "

The pursuit of health and wealth, not Jesus Christ, is preeminent in the lives and thinking of the people who promote this teaching and follow after it. Christ is not preeminent in and among these people. Covetousness is preeminent. Idolatry is preeminent. Another Jesus is preeminent - not the Christ of the Bible, but an Antichrist. Another spirit is preeminent in such teaching, not the Spirit of God. Another gospel is preeminent in such teaching – the false gospel of earthly riches and success, not the one true Gospel of salvation from eternal Hell by grace through faith in Christ.

Dear friends, it is so easy for any of us to be deceived, in so many ways. Our problem is not that we are in danger of becoming so heavenly-minded that we will be no earthly good. Our problem is that we are in constant danger of being so earthly-minded that we will forget about our Savior. Our constant danger is that we will be so earthly-minded that we will forget that we are the temples of the living God, that God the Holy Spirit sent from heaven lives within us. Our constant danger is that we will forget that we can grieve the Spirit and quench the

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Spirit by thinking and living in a way that is focused on the things of this world, and not on the tremendous fact of the world to come.

Christ must be preeminent in us. In our very minds. In our very being. In every aspect of our thinking and our living. The life of the individual believer, and the life of the Church as a body, is to be one continual, visible demonstration of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How are we to do that? What are the keynotes of this continual, visible demonstration of the preeminence of Christ? We find in Colossians chapters three and four that Paul declares to us that the preeminence of Christ must be demonstrated in the believer's life, and in the life of the church, in six areas of our living and thinking.

The Christian's Conduct

First, Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's conduct. We have that in Colossians chapter 3 verses 5 through 11.

Verse 5: We are to "put to death...fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

Verse 7: We are to "put off...anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth."

Verse 9: "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to

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the image of Him who created him" because, verse 11, "Christ is all and in all." Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's conduct.

The Christian's Character

Secondly, Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's character. We find that in chapter 3 verses 12 through 17.

Verse 12: Just as we are to put off the evil ways of the old nature, we are, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, [to] put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

Verse 14: "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

Verse 15: "And let the peace of God rule in your heart, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."

Verse 16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

Verse 17: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

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The Christian Home

Thirdly, Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's home. We find that in verses 18 through 21.

Verse 18: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

Verse 19: "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them."

Verse 20: "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."

Verse 21: "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

Dear friends, no one is left out of the picture here. Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's home.

The Christian's Work

Fourth, Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's work. Paul addresses this in Colossians chapter 3 verse 22 through chapter 4 verse 1. These verses speak of bondservants and masters, but the same principles apply to employees and employers.

Verse 22: "Bondservants [or employees], obey in all things your masters according to the flesh [your employers], not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers [in other words, not just when the boss is watching, but at all times]... in sincerity of

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heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." Your ultimate master is not an earthly employer, but your Heavenly King.

And by the same token, chapter 4, verse one: "Masters [employers], give your bondservants [your employees] what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." Christ must be preeminent in every aspect of the employer-employee relationship when one or both of the parties involved is a Christian.

The Christian's Witness

Fifth, Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's witness. We find this in chapter 4 verses 2 through 6.

Chapter 4, verse 2: "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" and pray for those who are involved in the work of preaching and evangelism.

Chapter 4, verse 5: "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside [toward those who are unbelievers], redeeming the time [in other words, taking advantage of every opportunity to live a life that bears witness to the preeminence of Christ]. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." Paul repeats this thought in Ephesians 4:29 – "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary

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edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's witness.

The Christian's Service

And finally, number six, Christ must be preeminent in the Christian's service. We find this in the rest of chapter 4, verses 7 through 18. Paul mentions eleven individuals by name, and he mentions three specific local churches, who are faithful servants of Jesus Christ in various places and in various ways. Some were Jews, others were Gentiles, but all were in Christ, and all were, Paul says, "fellow workers for the kingdom of God" (verse 11). And that kingdom is not of this world. Their focus was not on the things of this earth, but on things above. Christ was preeminent in their service.

Our Peace Is Not of This Earth

Your conduct, your character, your home, your work, your witness, your service – every aspect of your living and thinking – must be a daily, practical demonstration to your fellow believers and to the world, of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. He must be preeminent in all these things, because He must be preeminent in you yourself.

I want to remind you of one other point today. We need to remember the circumstances of the people to whom these words were written. These detailed instructions on Christian living were written to people who would soon struggle

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for their very survival, and probably in many cases would lose their lives.

These words were written to the church at Colosse in about 57 A. D. In the year 60 A.D. - only about three years after Paul wrote his epistle to them - Colosse was destroyed by a massive earthquake. Many of its inhabitants were killed. The site of the city was eventually abandoned, and Colosse literally disappeared from the map for centuries. It was not until the 1830s that archaeologists rediscovered Colosse's exact location. The site where the city once stood is an unoccupied wilderness area, to this very day.

Now, of course the Apostle Paul did not know that this calamity was about to come. But God the Holy Spirit, the omniscient God who inspired Paul to write his letter, knew exactly what was about to happen, and God the Holy Spirit ordained Paul's words.

And what did God do? Did God through Paul instruct the Colossian believers in physical survival? Did He counsel them on how to protect their finances and worldly possessions? Did God tell them to evacuate their city? No. God through Paul instructed the Colossian believers to "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."

No message could be more relevant for Christians in our time in much of the world. Religious bookstores and websites are filled with books and videos on how to have "peace" by accumulating and protecting the wealth and prestige of this world.

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Now God's Word says there is nothing wrong with making a living and saving for the future, But God repeatedly warns us that these things are not the source of peace. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

What is that peace? We need only look to the preceding verse, John 14:26: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." True peace is to be found by setting our minds on things above, not on things on earth.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to obey Christ's Great Commission: preaching the Gospel to all, and equipping believers in Christ to live every area of life by the sole authority of Scripture, to the glory of our Lord and Savior.

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TeachingtheWord Ministries
Box 2533, Westminster, Maryland 21158 USA
In North America, toll-free 888-804-9655