

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 1 of 13

Let me call your attention once again to the passage of the Word of God that is our focal point at the present time, Colossians chapter three, verses one through four. If you are able, please join me in reading these verses in your own copy of the Scriptures. Today we shall also be considering two other passages, one from the Gospel of John, and the other from First Corinthians. Those two passages are critical to our understanding of these words in Colossians. So let us begin today at Colossians chapter three, 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)

Why must we seek those things which are above? Because, as Paul declares in Colossians, Jesus Christ is the Way. Because, as Paul declares in Colossians, Jesus Christ is the Truth. Because, as Paul declares in Colossians, Jesus Christ is the Life. No man can come to the Father, except through Jesus Christ.

Why are these things so? Why are these truths so vital? Why is there no salvation and no sanctification and no glorification apart from Jesus Christ? It is because of the singular fact that He is God from Heaven. He came from Heaven, He has returned to Heaven, and He will come again from Heaven.

Why is the Heavenly position of the Lord Jesus Christ so important? How,

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 2 of 13

specifically, is it vital to us? We see the answer throughout the four Gospels. The word "Heaven" appears 153 times in the Gospels. Often, the word appears in passages in which the Word of God asserts the Heavenly position and the Heavenly authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. And one of the places where we see this in particular is in John's Gospel, in chapter three.

A Dispute Over Purification

John chapter three is where Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless you are "born again" – literally, "born from above" – you cannot see the kingdom of God. You cannot be saved. But today I want to call your attention to the event that appears in John chapter three immediately after Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus. Please turn with me to John chapter three, beginning at verse twenty-two. John chapter three, beginning at verse twenty-two. This is what we find:

After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they [the people] came and were baptized. For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified — behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 3 of 13

The Nature of John's Baptism

Friends, I want to stop here for a moment and make a very important point. We need to understand the nature of John's baptism. Notice that we are told here that the dispute regarding the baptism that John was administering, as well as the baptism that Jesus' disciples were administering, was a dispute "about purification."

If there were any place in the Word of God where the Holy Spirit could tell us that baptism with water saves the soul, this would be the place. But God does not tell us that water baptism saves a soul. He does not tell us that baptism saves here in John chapter 3, and God does not tell us that baptism saves the soul anywhere else in His Word. Even the Jews understood that the baptism of John and the baptism administered by Jesus' disciples before Jesus ascended to Heaven was a baptism of purification. A baptism of preparation.

We read in the 19th chapter of Exodus that God commanded the people of Israel through Moses to prepare themselves to meet with God at Mount Sinai. They were to sanctify themselves. They were to wash their clothes. They were to prepare themselves, because God was going to come down upon Mount Sinai and meet with all the people, and declare His holiness to them, and declare His holy law to them.

In the same way, both John the Baptist as the forerunner, and Jesus himself come down from Heaven as the promised Messiah, both declared to the people, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." And so the people needed to prepare themselves. And that preparation involved purification. It involved repentance from

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Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 4 of 13

sin. God himself was coming. Christ Himself was coming. And so, the people must prepare.

And so, there was a dispute about this matter of purification. We are not told the exact nature of the dispute, but it is clear from what we find in the rest of the Gospel accounts that the Jewish religious leaders did not consider any religious observance to be valid unless they had commanded it. And so, the Jewish leaders, for several centuries prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus, had built a huge complex of man-made regulations concerning purification.

And so, it seems quite likely that the dispute that is spoken of here was a dispute concerning the authority by which John the Baptist, as well as Jesus' disciples, were calling the people to a baptism of purification in preparation for the imminent appearance of the kingdom of God.

John the Baptist's Testimony

And so, we need to take careful notice of John the Baptist's answer in this dispute, and we find that answer in the Gospel of John, chapter 3, beginning at verse 27. Please notice what John says, John chapter 3, beginning at verse 27:

John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and

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Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 5 of 13

hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

"He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from Heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony [that is, the Jewish religious leaders did not receive His testimony; they refused it. Verse 33 –]. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:22-36)

Why did John the Baptist respond in this way? What is the significance of his response? And in particular, how does this relate to the subject that we are presently considering in the book of Colossians? And indeed it does relate, very directly, and very vitally.

In John's answer, we find six propositions concerning the Heavenly nature of truth, the power of that truth, and the response that it demands. Six propositional statements, in the passage that is before us.

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 6 of 13

All Truth Is From Heaven

Proposition number one: All truth is from Heaven. John says, verse 27, "a man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven." All truth is from Heaven. I would not be doing what I am doing, John says, without the authority of Heaven. And by implication, John was saying, and Jesus often said to the Jewish religious leaders, that their authority was an earthly authority that they had erected, and was not from Heaven.

John the Baptist speaks here with great humility. John the Baptist speaks here with a keen awareness of the sovereignty of God and the authority of God in all things. And this being the case, and knowing that all truth is from Heaven, and that the faithful preacher, the faithful witness, "can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven," John, knowing this to be the case, stands on this authority, and on this authority alone. All truth is from Heaven. That is proposition number one.

Jesus Christ: The Faithful Witness of the Truth From Heaven

Proposition number two is this: Jesus Christ is the faithful witness of the truth from Heaven. Notice what John says about Jesus in verse 32: "and what He [Jesus] has seen and heard, that He testifies." Verse 34: "He whom God has sent speaks the words of God." Jesus himself declared this later in the Gospel of John, in chapter 7, verse 16. In that passage, the Jewish leaders were asking, as they did so many times, by what authority Jesus said and did the things that they heard and saw. And in John chapter 7, verse 16, "Jesus answered them and said, 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 7 of 13

who sent me... He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.' "

And in Matthew chapter 17, when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, God the Father spoke out of the cloud that surrounded them and said, "This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" Hear My Son, hear Jesus Christ, hear Him in distinction from all others, because He is the faithful witness of the truth from Heaven.

In fact, Jesus Christ is the very *embodiment* of the truth from Heaven. John chapter one tells us that Jesus Christ is the Word, the *Logos*, truth Himself. In John 14:6, Jesus declares, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In chapter 1, verse 14, the Apostle John declares that Jesus, the Word, the *Logos*, was revealed to John and to the other apostles in glorious truth. "We beheld His glory," John says, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace [and full of] truth." Literally, what John is saying in that sentence, when he says that Jesus Christ was full of truth, is that Jesus Christ *is* complete truth, is *fully* the truth, is *permeated* with truth, is *the truth in a body*.

And so, in this passage in John chapter 3, we find first of all that all truth is from Heaven, and secondly we find that Jesus Christ is the faithful witness of the truth from Heaven.

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 8 of 13

Heavenly Words vs. Earthly Words

Proposition number three is this: All men, apart from Christ, speak in an earthly way. Notice the sharp contrast, the great divide, of which John the Baptist speaks in John chapter 3, verse 31: "He who comes from above [He who comes from Heaven] is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth." There is a sharp divide between Heavenly spiritual authority and earthly spiritual authority. There is a sharp divide between legitimate authority and illegitimate authority. All legitimate spiritual authority is from Heaven – through Jesus Christ who has come from Heaven, through the Holy Spirit who has been given from Heaven, and through the written Word of God which is our only written authority from Heaven.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this great divide in First Corinthians chapter 2. In the book of First Corinthians, Paul is correcting the great and fatal defect that had cropped up in the Corinthian church. That great defect was a reliance upon the word of sinful man from earth in place of the Word of the holy God of Heaven.

Turn with me, please, to First Corinthians chapter 2. The words we find there are very important. In fact, I am not sure that there is any more important passage in the Word of God for the nominally evangelical church in our day than this passage. First Corinthians chapter two addresses not only the great defect of the church at Corinth nearly 2000 years ago, it also addresses the great defect of the church in our time.

The church in our time has forgotten that all truth is from Heaven alone. The church in our time has forgotten that Jesus Christ is the faithful witness of that truth

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 9 of 13

sent from Heaven. The church in our time has forgotten that in contrast to the faithful witness, the Lord Jesus Christ, that man speaks in an earthly way, sinful man is an unfaithful witness.

Much of the history of the Evangelical church over the past several decades has been the replacement of what God has *decreed* will work with what man *thinks* will work, because it sounds good. The results have been disastrous. For over thirty years, the nominally Evangelical church has been producing many people who have, at best, remained spiritual children, even if they now have adult bodies.

And so, many people in the church today sadly continue to want things within the church to be as children would want them, not the things that those who are mature in Christ should want. And that is because in so many cases they have not been taught the truth as we find it from above, in Christ alone.

Paul's Testimony

First Corinthians chapter two give us the remedy for this. The Apostle Paul is writing to the church at Corinth, and he says this, beginning at verse one:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.

And here Paul is speaking of the earthly wisdom of the Greek orators of that day, the men who sought to impress others with their gifts of impressive speech. No, Paul says, verse two –

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 10 of 13

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

I determined not to know anything among you, Paul says, except to the One who is the faithful witness from Heaven. Verse three –

I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom [earthly wisdom], but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power [Heavenly power], that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men [on earth] but in the power of God [in Heaven].

And then notice verse nine:

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

And that is because those things are of Heaven and not of earth. But, verse 10 –

God has revealed them to us through His Spirit [His Spirit sent from Heaven]. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, [not the spirit of the things of earth] but the Spirit who is from God [the Holy Spirit – Why?]

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 11 of 13

that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

As John the Baptist said in John chapter 3 verse 27, "a man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven." And then notice First Corinthians chapter 2, beginning at verse 13:

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches [not in words of earthly wisdom], but [in words which] 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.

This is what John the Baptist is speaking of in John chapter 3 when he says that "He who comes from above is above all; [but] he who is of earth is earthly and speaks of the earth." The earthly man, the natural man, the unsaved man, man apart from Jesus Christ, man who does not have the indwelling Holy Spirit, man who is therefore incapable of understanding spiritual things, can only speak of the things of earth.

Living Certificates of the Truth

And this is why, Colossians chapter three verse one, we must, if we have truly been "raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 12 of 13

at the right hand of God." Christian, you must "set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

This is why John the Baptist says, in John chapter 3 verse 33, that "he who has received His testimony" – Jesus Christ's testimony – "has certified that God is true." John is saying that the life and the witness and the testimony of the individual who has received Christ's testimony, the individual who has laid hold of that truth as his own, the individual who has seized upon that testimony and will not let it go, who believes that Jesus is truly who He says He is, who believes that Jesus does truly what He says he does, in Heaven and on earth, that individual literally sets his seal on the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The fact that that person has been saved by the blood of Christ certifies that Christ's testimony is true. The fact that that person is being sanctified and brought into conformity to the image of Christ certifies that Christ's testimony is true. The believer in Jesus Christ, frail as we are in these present bodies of flesh, we are living certificates of the fact of the truth of God that is found only in Jesus Christ.

Well dear friends, in this message we have only had time to examine the first three of the six propositions concerning the truth of Heaven that we find in John chapter 3. We have seen that all truth is from Heaven. We have seen that Jesus Christ is the faithful witness to the truth from Heaven. And we have seen that all men, apart from Jesus Christ, speak only in an earthly way. They are incapable of truly understanding and truly witnessing to the truth from Heaven.

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: From Heaven Alone" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:22-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/11/2013

Page 13 of 13

But there is yet more for us to see in John the Baptist's testimony. John gives us the very definition of the truth from Heaven. John declares to us the power of the truth of Heaven. And John the Baptist also declares to us that the truth of Heaven demands a response, and that there are only two responses, and there is no middle ground between them.

We must "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." Eternal life and eternal death are at issue, dear friends. And as we continue on our next broadcast, the Lord willing, we shall see in an even more urgent way the absolute necessity for each of us to "seek those things which are above."

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