

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Is This The Authentic Jesus?" (Colossians 3:1-4, Philippians 2:5-11)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/22/2013

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Today we are continuing our study of the great imperative that we find in Colossians chapter 3 beginning at verse one. As always, I hope that you will turn in your Bible to this passage with me if you are able. Colossians chapter 3, 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)

Before we consider this passage together again today, let us look to the Lord in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we are about to consider the most vital question in all the universe: Who is the Christ? Who is the One who is seated at Your right hand? Father, help us to understand this truth clearly today, not on the authority of man's fallible word, but on the authority of Your revealed, inerrant Word. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

The passage that we have just read gives us an imperative, a command. If indeed you were raised with Christ, if indeed you are a Christian, then "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God."

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## **The Spirit's Witness of Christ**

As we have studied this imperative over our last several messages, we have been focusing our attention on the doctrine of the person and work of God the Holy Spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the verses we just read. But as we search the Scriptures, we find that in this present dispensation of the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit has come into this world in a way that was not true under the Old Covenant. It is important to understand this as we look at these verses.

Under both covenants, God the Holy Spirit is the One who brings an individual to saving faith. The Holy Spirit is the One who regenerates the soul. He is the One who brings new life to the individual who has been dead in trespasses and sins. But in this present age, under the New Covenant, as Jesus promised and as the Old Testament prophesied, God the Holy Spirit indwells each and every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the great work of God the Holy Spirit within the believer? Jesus tells us in John chapter 16 beginning at verse 13. He says this:

... when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you... (John 16:13-14)

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## **Vital Questions**

The Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit commands us in Colossians chapter 3 to "seek those things which are above, *where Christ is.*" How do we know who Jesus Christ is? How do we know what the Bible means when it speaks of the things which are above, in contrast to the things of this earth?

These are the most vital and most basic questions that a Christian can ask. These are foundational questions. Who is the Christ of the Bible? Who is it who *reveals* the Christ of the Bible to us? The person who reveals the Christ of the Bible to us is none other than the Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Trinity.

God the Holy Spirit is the supernatural witness of the Lord Jesus Christ in this present world. God the Holy Spirit is at work in this world convicting the lost of their sin and their need of Christ. God the Holy Spirit is the supernatural witness of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ within every believer. The Spirit is the one who equips us to understand the truth. "He will guide you into all truth," Jesus said.

Furthermore, God the Holy Spirit is the supernatural witness of the Lord Jesus Christ within the church as a body. In Acts chapter 8, verse one, Jesus told His disciples to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit would be the One who would empower the church to bear witness of Christ. "You shall receive

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power," Jesus said, "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me [Jesus] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and to the end of the earth."

We cannot effectively and faithfully bear witness to Jesus Christ in a lost and dying world without the work of the Holy Spirit within us. We cannot grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit in us. And so, as we said at the end of our last message, these great truths about the presence and the operation of the Holy Spirit within the believer and within the church confront us with this very vital question: Who is the Christ of whom the Holy Spirit witnesses? Who is Jesus, truly?

A careful and proper understanding of who the Lord Jesus Christ is, is essential to genuine Christian faith. The answer to this question cannot be a matter of our own opinions. We must have solid authority for the answer. And because we do have solid authority for the answer, we need not be in doubt about the answer.

### **Confusion in the Church About Christ**

But in our time, is it sad to say that there is a great deal of confusion in much of the church concerning the true identity of Jesus Christ. There is a great deal of false teaching within the church today concerning the question of who Jesus is, and who He was when He came into this world as the incarnate Son of God. Many teachers in the church and in Bible colleges and seminaries have stopped being careful to heed what the Bible actually says on this foundational issue. They have substituted their opinions for God's revelation.

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Some very wrong answers to that question have come to be accepted as sound teaching among many who call themselves evangelicals today. We find such wrong teachings in growing numbers of Bible colleges and seminaries today. And as men have gone out from Bible colleges and seminaries where these errors are taught, and as they have taken positions as pastors and teachers and missionaries, those wrong teachings have gone with them, and they have spread.

We also see some of these wrong teachings about Jesus infiltrating some of the leading apologetics ministries today. It is truly ironic that some of the ministries that are claiming to do the greatest work in defending the authority of Scripture are proclaiming things about the incarnate Christ that are simply not true, according to Scripture..

Now, I know that these are strong words. But I would not say them unless I could prove them. Let me give you just a few examples.

We have preachers today who claim to be evangelicals saying that Jesus had to learn the Bible, He had to learn the Old Testament Scriptures, in order to be prepared for His earthly ministry. We have so-called evangelical pastors today saying that Jesus had to overcome His Jewish prejudices in order to deal with the woman of Samaria in John chapter 4, and the Syrophenician woman in Mark chapter 7, and the centurion of the Roman army in Luke chapter 7.

We have so-called evangelical preachers today saying that Jesus gradually became aware that He was God as He grew up. We have so-called evangelical

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preachers today saying that Jesus learned things during the course of His life that changed Him and changed His outlook and even changed His teachings. And often today, we hear from Christian apologists the false idea that we should be considering Jesus' "opinion" – as they put it – of the Scriptures in order to form our own opinion of the Scriptures. I could go on. I could cite many other examples, but we must move on.

### **We Must Be On Our Guard Against "A Little Leaven"**

These and many other falsehoods about Christ have come to be accepted teaching even among nominal evangelicals today. Dear friends, let me emphasize to you on the authority of the Word of God that these kinds of teachings are indeed wrong. Some of these teachings are very obviously wrong. But some of them are much more subtle. And so, it is essential for us to understand that these kinds of wrong teachings about Jesus are cropping up in Christian colleges and seminaries, and in churches, and in other Christian ministries and institutions today. We must be prepared to guard ourselves and our loved ones and our churches against them.

We are not splitting hairs when we call these teachings into question. We are not simply being technical when we call these teachings error. There is no more critical issue for the individual Christian or for the church than to understand who Jesus Christ is, and who He was while He was on this earth. This is an area of Christian theology in which Satan delights to sow the seeds of confusion. Satan

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delights in deceiving people into believing in a counterfeit Christ.

Jesus told His disciples to be on their guard against the things that false teachers would say, because false teaching acts like leaven. In Galatians chapter 5, the Apostle Paul warned that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." A small amount of false teaching can corrupt our entire body of doctrine. And that is especially true when it comes to false teaching about the foundational doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ.

This is an area in which it is so easy to stray away from sound doctrine. We must be especially careful when we think and speak about Jesus Christ. If you mingle the slightest bit of error into the theology of the person and work of Jesus Christ, if you put the slightest wrong slant or spin on what the Bible plainly says about the person of Jesus Christ, you are headed for the deepest kind of spiritual trouble.

We cannot be too careful in this area. The church's efforts to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world depend on careful teaching, solidly Biblical teaching, totally accurate teaching, concerning who Jesus Christ is. If we are proclaiming a false Christ in any way shape or form, then by definition we are proclaiming a defective "gospel" message. The authentic Gospel is founded on the authentic Christ, and on Him alone.

You don't have to go very far off the straight and narrow path of sound doctrine concerning the person of Jesus Christ before you will find yourself in a situation in which you are proclaiming a false gospel, because you are proclaiming a false

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Christ. The church can so easily stray into a position in which it is in fact proclaiming a false Jesus who is not God the Son, a counterfeit Jesus who is not the one Person in the entire universe who is qualified to be the Savior of men.

Now once again, those are strong words. But I would not say them if Scripture did not back them up one hundred percent. We can never be too careful in understanding exactly what Scripture says about who Jesus is. We must understand exactly who this One is who we are to seek, who we are to believe in, who we are to trust in, who we are to go to as our intercessor with God the Father, and who is the One who is coming to judge the world. We cannot, we must not, proclaim and put our trust in a counterfeit Jesus. And the possibility of doing that is a very real danger in the church today.

### **A Matter of Divine Revelation, Not Human Opinion**

"Seek those things which are above," we are commanded. Seek those things which are "where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." As we have seen in a previous message, the "things which are above" are the things that have to do directly with the person and work of Christ. In order to seek those things, in order to lay hold of those things, we must carefully and properly understand those things.

The only place in which those things are explained to us, the only foundation and authority in such matters, is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. The nature of the person of Jesus Christ is not a matter of human opinion. It is a matter of *Divine revelation*. We can be especially grateful that God has not left us in



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doubt about such a monumental matter. He has not left us to our own fallible wisdom. He has given us the breathed-out words of God the Holy Spirit in the pages of Scripture to tell us exactly who Jesus Christ is.

### **The Great Incarnation Passage**

One of the central passages concerning the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is found in the book of Philippians, in chapter 2. If you are able to do so, please turn with me in your own copy of God's Word to the book of Philippians, chapter 2, beginning at verse five. Philippians chapter 2, beginning at verse five:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in Heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5–11)

God the Holy Spirit, who is the Author of every word of the Bible, chose every

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word of the Bible. He moved the human writers of Scripture to use exactly the words He intended, to convey exact meaning. The passage of Scripture we have just read is no exception to that. God the Holy Spirit has used particular words in this passage in order to convey very important facts to us about the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the word "form" (f-o-r-m) in verses six and seven. The Holy Spirit tells us, in verse six, that Jesus was "in the *form* of God," and in verse seven the Holy Spirit tells us that Jesus came into this world, "taking the *form* of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men."

The word that is translated "form" in our English Bibles is a very specific and rich word in the original Greek. It is a word that means that something has an outward appearance that truly reflects the inward nature. An outward appearance that truly reflects the inward nature. In other words, what you see on the outside is an accurate representation of what is on the inside. It is the word that would be used to describe a cup that looks clean on the outside and is also clean on the inside.

When the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit speaks of Jesus as "being in the *form* of God" it tells us two things. It tells us that Jesus' deity is the outward expression of His inward nature. And the word "*being* in the form of God" – that verb tells us that Jesus' deity is a *continuous state*. Past, present, and future. In other words, Jesus did not empty Himself of His deity, He did not in any way diminish His deity, when He came into this world in a body of flesh. Jesus

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was still the God of the universe while He was in this world.

## **The Suffering Servant**

And as we come to Philippians chapter 2 verse seven we find Jesus "taking the *form* of a servant." The word that is translated "form" is the same Greek word that we find in the previous verse. It tells us three things. First of all, it tells us that servanthood was also an outward expression of Jesus' inward nature. Secondly, it tells us that Jesus' deity remained fully intact when He took on the form of a servant, when He came, as verse seven tells us, "in the likeness of men." Thirdly, it tells us that humanity was the means by which Jesus manifested His servanthood.

These words in Philippians chapter 2 echo Jesus' own statements in the Gospels:

Matthew 20:28 – [He said,] "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

John 5:30 – [Jesus said,] "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."

John 6:38 – "For I have come down from Heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting

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life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

When Jesus came into this world in a human body, He took on the form of a servant. This also reminds us that Jesus is the Suffering Servant who was spoken of in Isaiah's great prophecy in chapter 52 at verse 13. The Lord through the prophet Isaiah declares this: "Behold, My Servant [Jesus] shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high."

And then, the prophecy of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, who would live a life of complete obedience and then be put to death as a substitute for guilty sinners – Isaiah's great prophecy builds to a climax with these words, Isaiah chapter 53, verse 11: "My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."

### **Incarnate Deity**

The deity of Jesus Christ and the servanthood of Jesus Christ both reflect His true nature as God. His outward appearance changed, but His inner nature did not change. The God of the universe is also the Suffering Servant. Jesus Christ was and is fully God and fully man at the same time. Charles Wesley stated this so well in his great hymn that we sing at the Christmas season, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. He wrote:

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!*

*Hail the incarnate Deity!*

That is who Jesus Christ is. That is who He was when He was on this earth. In our

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next message, we are going to see this in a very vivid and striking way as we consider the account of the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 17. And then, the Lord willing, we are going to look further at this question of the true identity, and the true nature, and the true attributes of the incarnate Christ. And the Lord willing, we will answer some of the false teachings about Jesus that have become common in much of the church today. We must seek, and we must trust, and we must proclaim, the authentic Christ who is now seated at the right hand of God. We must be sure that we are not seeking or embracing or proclaiming a counterfeit Christ, in any way.

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