

Series: *Christ's Preeminence Demonstrated*

Title: "The Tragic Absence of Preaching Against Sin" (Colossians 3:1-11)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/24/2017

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We come once again today to the book of Colossians in the New Testament. Together we are studying the great truths that we find at the beginning of chapter 3. And so I invite you, if you are able as you are listening, to turn in your own copy of God's Word to Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 1. This is the Word of God. Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 1:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

⁵ Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

⁸ But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰ and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹ where there is neither Greek nor Jew,

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circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. (Colossians 3:1-11)

Thus ends the reading of God's Word.

Truth for All Believers

Dear friends, this broadcast reaches a worldwide listening audience. Some of you hear us on radio stations in the United States and overseas. Some of you hear this program via the Internet. We know that we have listeners in over one hundred countries. And we know, from the e-mails, letters, and phone calls that we receive from you, that our listening audience is a very diverse one.

We know that some who are listening right now are pastors. We know that many who are listening are actively involved in the ministry of a local church. Some of you are Sunday school or Christian school teachers. Some of you are deacons or elders. Some of you attend a local church each Lord's Day. Some of you do not have a sound, Bible-believing church in your area, and so you turn to broadcasts like ours in order to hear the Word of God preached.

We also know that there are people listening to this program who have no church background. We also know that some of you who are listening are serving a sentence in prison. But even in a prison, by God's grace you are able to listen to this program. We know that some of you behind prison walls are Christians, but some of you are not.

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But dear friend, it does not matter if you are a pastor who has been in the ministry for twenty years, or you are a prisoner serving a sentence of twenty years – if you are a Christian, the words that we have just read in the book of Colossians apply to you, whoever or wherever you may be.

The sins that are described in Colossians chapter 3 verses 5 through 9 are sins that every Christian deals with. And yes, such sins – fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, lying – yes, these sins can lead to acts that can put a man or woman behind bars for years.

But these same sins can also torment the man who stands behind a pulpit every Sunday, they can torment the Christian father, the Christian mother, the Christian child. These things may manifest themselves outwardly, or they may not.

But no Christian is immune to these things. And thus the Apostle Paul writes these words to the Corinthian church in First Corinthians chapter 10 beginning at verse 12:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

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And so, Paul says in the next verse, "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." And in the same passage he says, "nor let us commit sexual immorality...nor let us tempt Christ" (verses 8-9).

No Christian is beyond temptation. No Christian, this side of Heaven, is free from the old nature that still desires to pull us down into sin. We must be honest with ourselves about this. Moreover, we must be honest with God about this. In First John chapter 1 beginning at verse 8 we read these words:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He [God the Father] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.

Truth That Requires Definition

And dear friends, not only do the words that we have just read in Colossians chapter 3 apply to all Christians, they are also words that require careful definition. We live in a time in which there is woeful ignorance among confessing Christians of the sinfulness of sin. Woeful ignorance of what constitutes sin in the eyes of God, and why it is a problem – why it required the death of Jesus Christ, God the Son, in order for our sin problem to be dealt with.

Why is this? I believe there are several reasons.

First of all, there is a tragic lack of preaching in the church today on the subject

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of the holiness of God. If we do not understand the holiness of God, we cannot understand what it is that violates His holiness, what it is that offends His righteousness, what it is that will automatically produce a wrathful reaction from the hand of God simply because of the nature of God.

Our God is not a sadistic God. The one true and living God is not an arbitrary being. But He is holy, and He is just. He is righteous. We, by nature are not. But there is little preaching of these facts in many churches today, and so most people who sit in what is called an Evangelical church today never hear, or rarely hear, about God's claims of righteous conduct upon them – the fact that He has commanded us to be holy, because He is holy.

Secondly, many of the postmodern Bible versions that have been produced in recent decades water down the force and the meaning of words such as those we find here in Colossians chapter 3 verses 5 through 9.

Thirdly, there is the difficulty for many people today because the words that are used in the English translation of these verses and other similar passages in the King James Bible use words that have either changed in meaning over the centuries or have fallen out of usage over time. Very few English-speaking Christians truly understand, for example, the meaning of the word that is translated "fornication" here in Colossians chapter 3 verse 5. Even fewer people understand what the Authorized King James Bible means when it speaks of "inordinate affection" or "evil concupiscence."

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And dear friends, there is another matter related to this that is really glossed over in much of the church today. In much of the Evangelical church today, when sin is dealt with from the pulpit at all, usually the discussion of sin is the discussion of the *outward* act of sin. That does not get to the root of the matter.

In Matthew chapter 5, the Lord Jesus began His discourse that we often speak of as the Sermon on the Mount. If you are able to do so, please turn with me in your Bible to Matthew chapter 5 beginning at verse 21. Matthew chapter 5 beginning at verse 21. Jesus spoke these words:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." ²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

And notice verse 27:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not commit adultery." ²⁸ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

What is Jesus saying here? What is the point? The point is that God requires not merely *outward* obedience to His righteous requirements, but *inward* obedience. *Heart* obedience. And why does God require that? He requires it for two reasons.

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First of all, He requires it because His holy Law stands unchanged, eternally. Notice Matthew chapter 5 verse 17. Jesus says this:

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. [More accurately, do not think that I came to overthrow or to dissolve or to repeal the Law or the Prophets.] I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [that is, to bring it to its full effect].¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till Heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled.

And secondly, dear friend, God requires not only outward righteousness but inward righteousness from His people because we are His witnesses in this world. Notice Matthew chapter 5 verse 13. Jesus says,

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

What is the point? The point is that if we, believers in Christ, do not live and think and act in this world in a way that is in keeping with our citizenship in Heaven, then we become, as Jesus puts it here, salt that has lost its flavor. What does that mean? This was a metaphor that was used in the time that Christ was on earth to signify the fact that someone has acted foolishly. It signifies the fact that someone has behaved in a way that is distasteful before others. The words in the original speak of behaving in a way that deserves reproach.

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Dear Christian, your testimony before a watching world – both believers and unbelievers – depends upon your obeying God's command to "put to death your members which are upon the earth." To put to death the sin that is within you. Not only the *outward* manifestations of sin, but the *root* of sin which lies in the heart, which lies in the mind, which expresses itself in inward thoughts as well as outward deeds.

Many professing Christians today live and think with an attitude that says this: "Now that I am saved, now that I have, as it were, my fire escape from Hell, I can live as I please, it really does not matter." That is a lie of the Devil. In Romans chapter 5, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul declares to us that we have indeed been justified by faith, that we do indeed have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We do have access by faith into the grace in which we stand.

But then, at the beginning of Romans chapter 6, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul asks this vital question: "Shall we continue in sin [so] that grace may abound?" And the resounding answer comes, "God forbid!" "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

You Do Not "Make" Jesus Lord

Let me ask you a question: If you profess to know Christ as your Savior, do you understand that He is also your Lord? You do not *make* Him Lord of your life by some action subsequent to your conversion. That is a lie that is unfortunately taught in many churches.

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No, dear friend. Jesus Christ *is* Lord. In Acts chapter 2 verse 36, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared that God the Father himself has made the ascended Jesus who is seated at His right hand "both Lord and Christ." What does it mean that "Jesus is Lord"? It means that He has full authority *right now* over your life and conduct.

The tragic fact is that in many churches today people never hear these things from the pulpit. The attitude of most churches today is not only that you can "come as you are" but that you can also "stay as you are" – you can continue to live in your sins. No, dear friend. God's Word commands us to "put to death" the sin that is still within us.

Sin and Repentance

Far too often today, churches focus on "acceptance" and "affirmation" of *everyone* and *anything*. What does that mean in practical terms? It means that churches that operate in this way turn a blind eye to mankind's total depravity; they turn a blind eye to the eternal consequences of sin; they devalue the immense price that had to be paid in order for sinners to be redeemed by the Son of God himself.

In churches like these, the Bible's clarion call to repentance from sin coupled with faith in Christ is replaced by a therapeutic false gospel that leaves people feeling better about themselves, but they are still eternally lost.

Dear friend, if you are in a church like that today, if you are in a church where the operating philosophy says that you can be a Christian but then live as you please

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– on the authority of the Word of God I must strongly encourage you to leave that church. It is obvious that the one true Gospel is not being preached there in its fullness. It is obvious in such a place, and under such conditions, people are being made comfortable in their sins as they continue on their way to Hell.

True repentance means a complete change of mind. It means an about-face from the life of sin. It means an active warfare of the Spirit against the flesh within the believer. If there is no such active warfare within an individual, then there is every reason to believe that God the Holy Spirit is not living within that person. That person is not saved. That person is not a Christian. In Second Corinthians chapter 13 verse 5, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul says this:

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.

Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.

In other words, unless, indeed, you do not *pass the test of what it means to be a Christian*. The test of whether you are a Christian or not, is this: Is your life changing; is your thinking changing; is your speech changing; is your behavior changing – because God the Holy Spirit is doing His sanctifying work within you?

Are all these things in your life coming more and more into conformity with the righteous standard that we find in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who “knew no sin” – who, literally, had absolutely no connection of any sort with sin?

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Second Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21 declares to us that God the Father made His only begotten Son Jesus "to be sin for us" – in other words, He took our sins upon Himself and took the punishment for our sins that we deserve – for this reason: In order "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Ephesians chapter 1 verse 4 declares to us that God the Father "chose us in Him [that is, in Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

The Standard Remains

That is the standard, dear friend. God's righteous standard remains. God's Law has not changed. And it is a standard not merely of outward conduct but of the inner man, of the heart. In First Samuel 16:7 we read that "the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." And in Jeremiah chapter 17 beginning at verse 9 the Word of God declares to us that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

And in the next verse, we have the answer:

I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings

How does God search the heart? How does God test the mind? We have the answer to that question in Hebrews chapter 4 verses 12 and 13:

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For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Christian, God the Holy Spirit living within you uses His written Word to search your heart, to reveal your thoughts. Let me remind you once again, as I have on many other occasions, that when Hebrews 4:12 speaks of God's Word as the "*discerner* of the thoughts and intents of the heart," the word "discerner" in the original language is actually the direct equivalent of our English word "*critic*".

And that is exactly what we have before us here in Colossians chapter 3. God is searching our hearts. God is asking the critical questions: Do you recognize your propensity toward sin? Do you recognize that in light of the fact that you have now been raised with Christ, you have the high calling to live a righteous life, to put to death that which displeases and discredits Him in your life?

The World is Watching You

Dear friend, the world is watching you. Other professing Christians are watching you. But the unsaved world is also watching you. What do they see? Do they see a life that is different, or do they see a person who lives and thinks and talks just as they do, in their sin and their spiritual darkness?

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Dear friend, if that is the case with you, there is reason to question whether you are truly a Christian. God's Word certainly puts a huge question-mark over a life that is lived for the flesh. And that question mark will certainly, and very rightly, be in the minds of unsaved people who look at your life.

And so, dear friends, for these reasons I think it is appropriate for us to take the time to carefully examine together the terms, the descriptions of sin, that we find in Colossians chapter 3. We need to understand exactly what it is that God requires us to "put to death" within ourselves. And the Lord willing, that is where we shall continue in our next program.

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.

For more information, please visit our website, www.teachingtheword.org.

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**May the Lord richly bless your personal study
of His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word.**

TeachingtheWord Ministries

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