

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "What It Means to Preach Christ" (Colossians 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/28/2010

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Introduction

In our study of Colossians chapter one, we've come now to verse 28. Let me remind you once again that Paul's theme here in Colossians chapter one is the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ – the fact that Jesus must have, and that Jesus rightfully deserves, undisputed first place in everything. Paul has told us that Christ is preeminent in the Gospel because He is the Savior. Paul has told us that Christ is preeminent in the Creation, because He himself is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. And Paul has told us that Christ is preeminent in the Church, because the Church is His body, and Jesus is the Head.

In our last several messages we've been seeing that Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is preeminent in genuine Gospel ministry. If a church or a ministry is a genuine Gospel ministry, it is because Christ is preeminent in that church or ministry. Christ and His Word have first place, and the authority of Christ and His Word must be unrivaled. There must not, there cannot, be any competing authority.

A genuine Gospel ministry preaches the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the center. He is the focus. And as we come to verse 28, Paul is going to tell us what it really means for a church or ministry to preach the Lord Jesus Christ. Lots of churches say they preach Christ today. But fewer and fewer of them really do. So we need to look carefully at this question: What does it mean to preach Christ? So that is going to be our theme in the next four messages, beginning today.

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The Context

As we begin, I want to read not just verse 28 of Colossians chapter one, but also the verses that lead up to it, because it's going to be important for us to have the whole picture of what Paul is saying about Jesus Christ in our minds as we consider this question. So I'm going to begin reading Colossians chapter one, verse 13, and if you're in a position to do so, I hope you'll open your Bible and follow along as I read. Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse 13:

He [God the Father] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

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And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

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What It Means to Preach Christ: Four Propositions

I want to focus your attention in particular on verse 28: "Him we preach," – Jesus Christ – "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

I want to state four propositions for you from this verse, and those four propositions are going to form the outline of four messages beginning today.

Proposition Number One: Christ must be preached, because He is the only hope of sinners. To preach Jesus Christ is to proclaim the person and work of Jesus Christ as the Creator of the Universe, the Savior of sinners, and the Lord of the Church.

Proposition Number Two: Christ must be preached, because every Christian needs to be warned.

Proposition Number Three: Christ must be preached, because every Christian needs to be taught.

And finally, Proposition Number Four: Christ must be preached, because every Christian needs to become mature in Christ.

The Problem of Spiritual Paranoia

As we begin considering these four propositions, I want to talk about a problem that we find in the church today. And it was a problem in the early church as well. Today, many people, even experienced Christians, think that there are different

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classes of people within the kingdom of God. Different classes of people within the church of Jesus Christ.

But here in the first chapter of Colossians, the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells us that there are no spiritual elites in the eyes of God. Notice how he puts it in verse 28: "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

Warning every man – teaching every man – that we may present every man. And Paul is talking about Christians here. Every Christian needs to be warned. Every Christian needs to be taught. And every Christian needs to be presented perfect, or complete, or mature. There are no spiritual elites in the church of Jesus Christ.

Some Christians think they are spiritual elites. They think they are spiritually superior to other people. They think they have arrived. They think they have a special "in" with God that others just don't have. So they feel superior. Perhaps you're listening to this message, and you know that deep down inside, that's the way you think about things. I'm spiritually superior to this person or that person.

Let me tell you right now that you are wrong if you are thinking that way. The Apostle Paul warns against that kind of thinking in the 12th chapter of Romans, beginning at verse 3. He says this:

"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to

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think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

There are no spiritual elites in the kingdom of God. Elitist thinking within the church leads to spiritual captivity, and we’re going to see that as we go along.

On the other hand, some Christians think that someone else in the church has an elite status with God that they don’t have, so they feel inferior. Perhaps you’re listening to this message, and you fall into that category. You think you’re inferior in the eyes of God. You think you’re a second-class citizen in the body of Christ. You look at your life, and you know your life could be more pleasing to God. Now, that’s a good thing. We should all be asking God the Holy Spirit to speak to us through His Word about the areas in our lives where we need to become more like Christ. But that need in your life does not make you spiritually inferior in the eyes of God.

We find the same kind of elitist thinking among mankind as a whole. Often, people in the unbelieving world think they are elites. They think they are “above” religion. Or, they want a “designer religion” of their own making. They go to a certain church because it appeals to their flesh and to their pride, not because it is a church that preaches the one true Gospel.

This is the mindset we read about in the first chapter of Romans, beginning at verse 18. We find in that passage that every man knows about God, because God has

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revealed Himself to every man – not just some vague notion of God, Paul says, but even His eternal power and Godhead. And so all men are without excuse.

Why? Because although all men know God – all men, even the man who claims to be an atheist – they refuse to glorify Him as God. The unbeliever, whether he claims to be an atheist, or he believes in a “God” of his own making and not the God of the Bible, the unbeliever thinks he can get along without bowing the knee to the one true God. He thinks he can be his own god, because His foolish heart is darkened. That is also a form of elitism, just of a different kind. Men profess themselves to be wise – wiser than God. But in doing so, they become fools. Among unbelievers, this kind of elitist thinking leads to damnation.

And if you are listening to this message today and you are thinking like that, let me say to you, with all love and respect, that your elitist thinking is going to land you in Hell for eternity. You need to abandon that kind of thinking. You need to repent of it, turn from it. You need to bow the knee before the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Savior of sinners.

We also find the other kind of thinking out in the world, just as we do in the church. Many unbelievers remain unbelievers because they have an inferiority complex. “I’m too great a sinner. God could never save me. I’ve gone too far down the wrong road.” Well the Bible tells us that there is nothing too hard for the Lord. And Hebrews chapter seven, verse twenty-five tells us that Jesus Christ “is able to save to the uttermost” – completely and forever – “all” – not just some, but all –

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“who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

The power of the blood of Christ to save sinners has no limit. There is no such thing as a person who is “too great a sinner” to come to Christ. No one has gone too far down the wrong road. So if you are listening to this message today, and you have never trusted in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal salvation from sin and Hell, I encourage you and I plead with you to put your faith in Him without delay. Ask Christ to save you. Ask Him to place a new heart within you. He has promised to do it. “Him who comes to Me,” He says, “I will in no wise cast out.”

There are no spiritual elites among the lost. Every sinner must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved from eternal death. And there are no spiritual elites among those who are trusting in Christ. As Paul says here in Colossians 1:28, every Christian needs to be warned. Every Christian needs to be taught. And every Christian needs to become complete, or mature, in Christ. No exceptions.

“Him We Preach” – The Person First, Then His Work

And that, Paul says, is why we preach Christ. “Him we preach,” he says. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” “We preach Christ.” Paul says in verse 28, and the word “preach” here means, “We tell about Christ everywhere, and we tell about Him with conviction.” And it’s something we do continually, we never stop.

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This is Proposition Number One: Christ must be preached, because He is the only hope of sinners. To preach Jesus Christ is to proclaim the person and work of Jesus Christ as the Creator of the Universe, the Savior of sinners, and the Lord of the Church.

Notice that Paul says that it is "Him" that we preach. The primary focus is on the person of Christ. The primary focus is on *who He is*. Listen carefully to what I'm about to say: The primary focus is not on what Christ has done. The primary focus is on who Jesus Christ is. And here's the reason for that. Jesus Christ could not have done what He has done, unless He is who He is. Only God could create the universe. Only God could sustain the universe at this present moment. Only God could do what was necessary to save sinners. Only God could be the Head of the Church, and bring all of His redeemed people to glory and perfection. No one else could do what Jesus Christ has done because no one else is who Jesus Christ is. Jesus Christ is God Himself.

That is why we preach Him, Paul says. That is why we preach Jesus Christ. He is the One who is the image, the exact representation, of the invisible God. He is the One who existed before anything else existed. He is the One for whom everything was created, and that includes you and me.

As we read the historical record in the early chapters of the Bible, we find out how we began. And before we read very far at all, we find that the human race was not always in its present condition.

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Genesis tells us that God created a perfect universe. He made the first man, Adam, and placed him in the perfect creation along with his wife, Eve. There was no sin, suffering, or death in the world. Our first parents were created in the image of God. They had direct fellowship with their Creator. He gave them the mandate to exercise dominion over the earth, to populate it, and to care for it. God also gave our first parents the command to be perfectly obedient to Him. Since God is absolutely holy, nothing less would maintain unbroken fellowship between God and man.

But man, made in the image of God, was not a robot. God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to choose, to obey Him or to rebel against Him. God warned our first parents about the consequences of rebellion. But the Bible tells us that our first parents chose to rebel against God. Their disobedience brought physical and spiritual death upon themselves. It also introduced disorder, suffering, and death into the human race, and the entire creation.

The Bible tells us that because of Adam's sin, death has passed on to all of his descendants (Romans 5:12). We read in Isaiah 59:2 that our sins have separated us from God and have hidden His face from us. Left to ourselves in our rebellious state, we face the inevitable consequence of our sins: eternal separation from God in Hell (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, Revelation 20:12-15). Because God is perfectly holy and just, our sin demands the ultimate penalty.

But God has reached out to us in our state of hopelessness. He has made the way for us to be redeemed and restored. We read in John 3:16 that "God so loved the

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world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

We read in Philippians chapter two that God the Creator condescended to be the Savior of men. God Himself came into this sin-cursed world in human form, in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived the perfect life that we cannot live, and He was therefore qualified to offer Himself on the cross as the perfectly innocent sacrifice that would satisfy the righteous demands of God's holiness and justice on men's behalf. Jesus Christ not only died to atone for sin, but rose again from the dead, conquering death forever. And He could do all of that because of who He is – God Himself.

Everyone who truly repents of his sin and trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation from the wrath of God is no longer subject to God's condemnation. Believing on Christ means passing forever from eternal death to eternal life. His perfect death satisfies the righteous wrath of a holy God on your behalf. His perfect, sinless life is credited to your account so that God the Father no longer sees your sin, but His Son's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). God the condemning Judge becomes God your loving Father.

The key to receiving eternal salvation in Jesus Christ is to believe on Him. John 3:18 tells us that "He who believes on Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Acts 4:12 tells us that Jesus Christ is the only way. "Nor is

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there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

About the Broadcast

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