

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Person of Christ: Jesus the Head

A body without a head! "What a gruesome sight," you will say. But the point for us is not what it looks like, but its uselessness. It has no life, no activity, nothing works. The head which imparts life and co-ordination has been severed. What we are saying is that the head is indispensable to the body because it controls every function. The Bible tells us that our physical bodies are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Psalm 139. Now, the human body is an illustration of the close relationship between the Head (Christ) and His body (the Church) on earth. Our subject today is Jesus Christ the Head. It will be difficult to talk about this without thinking about the body, but we must focus our attention upon Him. It is one of the glories of our Lord Jesus Christ that "He is the Head of the body, the church".

In our study today the starting point will be the letter of Paul to the Colossians. There are three references to Christ as Head in this letter. Firstly, the writer goes out of his way in chapter 1 to tell of the greatness of the Head. It becomes obvious on reading the letter that these believers were in danger. They had been brought under the influence of teachers whose teaching detracted from the greatness of Christ. In chapter 2, the apostle warns them lest they be beguiled by such teaching; it was all very subtle. These false teachers wouldn't say anything detrimental about Christ; of course, they were too crafty for that. Possibly they said, you need something more that will suit your intellect. In this chapter the apostle cautions against "enticing words"; they were not to be taken in by these. Further on in the same chapter, he warns of "philosophy and vain deceit". It might sound very attractive but he says it is "not after Christ". Attempts were made to put the Colossians under law, such as restrictions about meat and drink, keeping of holy days, even keeping the Sabbath. Paul writes these things are just shadows; you have the substance in Christ. Then there were even greater attractions, "worshipping of angels, intruding into things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind..." The whole bent of these false teachers was to say, "It is very good to cling to Christ, but you need something more." These dangers are still around us in 1999; we must be on the alert. In chapter 3:11, Paul emphasises "but Christ is all". Another translation of this is "He is everything".

It is, therefore, not at all surprising that the apostle Paul goes to great lengths to describe the greatness of the Person of Christ. There are three outstanding passages in the New Testament which are taken up with this subject. They are Hebrews 1, John 1 and Colossians 1. Believers should get to know these. Let's think about Colossians 1. There are some wonderful glories of His Person here. At first glance they may be hard to understand but the words of the Lord Jesus in John 16:14 should encourage us. Referring to the gift of the Spirit, He said, "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you". Let us think then of some of these glories of Christ.

Paul begins in verse 15 and says that Christ is "the image of the invisible God". The meaning of this expression "image" is that He represents God and also makes Him known. He is able to make God known because He is God! Do you believe that? You might be surprised to find that many don't. It is very important that we do. The writer goes on to say that Christ is "the firstborn of every creature". This means that He is first in rank and in dignity. He became a man; this is wonderful grace! If He came into His own creation, surely we would agree He must be first. Then we learn that He is the Creator, not only of things visible, but also things invisible. Let us read the expression as it is: "All things were created by Him, and for Him". The writer continues "He is before all things, and by Him all things consist..." The apostle says that as firstborn from the dead, "He is the head of the body, the church". There is not another! Do you give Him this place, or do you look to some other head? Christendom all around us has very largely dropped into a condition of lethargy and disunity because it has appointed men as heads.

In chapter 2, we have the second and third references to Christ as Head. The second reference is in verse 10. Christ is said to be "The Head of all principality and power". This emphasises the thought of His pre-eminence which we have just been considering. We have already thought of the dangers to which these believers were exposed. How dangerous it was, particularly when it undermined the greatness of the Lord's Person. Earlier we saw that these teachers were very proud of their knowledge. Listen to verses 18 and 19 "... vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head..." This is the third mention of Christ as Head in this letter. Another rendering of this verse says, "not holding fast the Head". Although the expression is put in a negative way, the message is loud and clear. The body of Christ is altogether dependent upon the Head for direction, control and nourishment. This needed vitality comes through joints and bands. Let's listen to verse 19 in full, "the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God:" Who are these joints and bands? God has given particular gifts to the church, but joints and bands are not gifts! In other words, every member

of the body can function in this way. It must be noted that it is for the profit of all. In the parallel passage in the letter to the Ephesians, the joints are called "joints of supply". It is obvious that the bands have to do with knitting together. The real vitality comes from Christ the Head, but every believer must play a part in diffusing that power to the whole. Let's just try and visualise a company of believers who gather together on a regular basis. Every member is holding fast the Head. All take their place as joints and bands. What power and unity there would be! You might say that this is idealistic, but this is God's mind for the church now. The question may occur in your mind, "how do we hold the Head?" The answer must be "keep in close contact with the Head". When the apostle writes of the "increase of God", he is referring to normal growth.

Let's think now of the way the apostle Paul deals with this theme of Christ the Head in his letter to the Ephesians. There are obvious differences, but with the same end in view. The striking thing is the way the subject of Christ as Head in chapter 5 is inter-twined with Paul's teaching as to right marriage relationships among believers. Consider what is said of the husbands, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body". In no place is it ever said that a husband is lord of his wife. It is equally true that Christ is not Lord of the church. He is Lord to every individual believer and His authority must be obeyed, but to the church He is Head. He gives with an ever open hand for the good and the profit of the church because of His love, as we read, "as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (verse 25). We can illustrate this from the scriptures. Biblical illustrations are best. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is recorded in each one of the four Gospels. Miracles are said to be signs in John's gospel. These signs all reflect the greatness of the Person of the Son of God. We are told in Mark's gospel that He had compassion toward the multitude and also that the disciples distributed the food to them. However, in the account given in John, it is the Lord Jesus Himself who distributes to the multitude. Every translation of the scriptures shows this difference. It is His plentiful giving moved by His compassion that is emphasised. He is not the Lord here, but He is Head. The apostle goes on to explain the care and love that Christ exercises toward the church. "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (verse 26).

The apostle refers to the union between husband and wife as "one flesh". This is something little thought about in our day. Keeping this union in mind he writes, "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it even as Christ the church" (verse 29). This gives some further indication of the love of Christ for the church of which He is Head.

In the fourth chapter of Ephesians the truth of Christ as Head is again referred to. The passage there is very similar to Colossians 2:19 where we thought about the function of the joints and bands. It says in verse 15, "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ". Where love is active among the members there will be growth. The passage quoted here says that we are to grow up into Him. That means that the body of Christ is to represent Him here in this world. One other mention is made of love in verse 16. "...maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love". Another translation of this verse says, "self-building of itself in love". In right conditions growth will be effortless.

Another reference to Christ as Head is in chapter 1 of the letter to the Ephesians. The verses 19-21 describe the mighty power of God that raised Christ from among the dead, and "set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places". When we were thinking of the Lord Jesus Christ in Colossians we thought of His Deity. But in Ephesians we must think of Him as a Man. Although this is the case, every power is under Him. In this letter all men are said to be dead in sins, and even Christ lay in the grave. What a sight it must have been for God to look down upon! Let's see the place that God has given to Him now, "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Does it not give you great joy to think that One so great is your Saviour? And although we were dead in sins, now as believers we live in Him.

Let us see what Paul says in Ephesians 1 about Christ as Head. Don't let us forget that this is our theme. "And gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church," Earlier in our talk, we noted that the Lord Jesus was never said to be Lord of the church. It is equally true that He is never referred to as "Head over the church". He is "Head over all things" now, but this is not publicly recognised. Colossians 3 tells us He is now hidden. But when He appears in glory it will be evident that He is over all. The part of this verse which is difficult to understand is "over all things to the church". What does this mean? When the time comes and Christ is seen publicly over all things, the church will share it all with Him. The last verse is striking; what of the church? "Which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all". The church is part of Him, His body and His bride. The word fullness may be rendered complement. The Lord Jesus Christ as a Man is not complete without His body. Isn't this a remarkable thing?

Another scripture which refers to Christ as Head is 1 Corinthians 11:3. Let's listen to it: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." These distinctions have been true from the beginning of time. The various changes in God's dealings with men during past ages make no difference, these facts remain. The first of these is "The head of every man is Christ". It is man as distinguished from the woman. In the church, when gathered together, these principles should be respected. This

respect is seen in the matter of uncovering or covering of the head. The man must not be covered. The woman must be covered. We are to remember that it is not a custom, but a matter of obedience to the Lord.

To follow our theme, "Christ our Head," we are going to think of one Old Testament Scripture. Long before the incarnation of the Son of God at Bethlehem, many prophets had foretold that event. Many of these prophecies are found in the book of Psalms. Listen to one from Psalm 118. "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes". It was by the Holy Spirit that the prophets were able to foretell these events. This verse is quoted in the New Testament, even by the Son of God Himself. The head stone was that which gave security, strength and permanence to the building. The Lord Jesus told a parable in each of the three synoptic gospels concerning a certain man who planted a vineyard and let it out to husbandmen. At the right time he sent servants to receive the fruits. The servants were ill treated by the husbandmen. The first was beaten, the second was wounded, the third was killed. Then, concerning the owner, the story goes, Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, "They will reverence my son". Instead of giving the son respect, they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard. Judgement would come upon these wicked men. When the Lord Jesus had finished the parable, He said to the leaders of Israel who at that very time were plotting to take His life, "And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner". They were busy fulfilling the very words of Psalm 118:22.

Another reference to this Psalm is in Acts 4. Peter, addressing the leaders of Israel, charges them with their guilt in crucifying their Messiah, and applies the words of the Psalm to the truth that God had raised Jesus from the dead. As he quotes from the Psalm he makes it more pointed and instead of saying "the builders", he says "you builders ". This was addressed to their conscience. In being raised from the dead, He is "become the head of the corner." This is, however, only a partial fulfilment of the verse. Its completeness awaits the future reign of the Lord Jesus. They were building without the head stone. How futile this is! They cast aside the corner stone as worthless. He didn't fit in! There are many who build their lives without any security today. Are you building without Christ? Listen again to Peter! "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved". Make sure the Lord Jesus is the headstone in your life!

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