

## DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

### Lesson 19

#### Christ As Head of the Church

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As Christians, we often throw around the word “Body” and refer to the “Body of Christ” without much consideration for what the word means. We think and act as if we were part of a headless body, a spiritual monster. For if we are a Body of Christ, then Christ is our Head.

Others take it upon themselves to be a sort of Head over the “body of Christ”, whether as to a small group or to a large group. They seek to force a Head onto the Body of Christ which is no true Head. In forcing their own human head on to the Body of Christ, they create a sort of Frankenstein’s monster.

Tonight we are going to examine the doctrine of Christ as Head of the Church.

#### I. GENERAL STATEMENTS OF CHRIST AS HEAD OF CHURCH

- A. Erickson, Christian Theology (2<sup>nd</sup> ed): “Christ is the head of the body (Col. 1:18) of which believers are individual members or parts. All things were created in him, through him, and for him (Col. 1:16). He is the beginning, the first born (v. 15). “God purposed to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ.” (Eph. 1:10). Believers, united with him, are being nourished through him, the head to which they are connected (Col. 2:19). This image is virtually paralleled to Jesus’ image of himself as the vine to which believers, as the branches, are connected (John 15:1-11). As the head of the body (Col. 1:18), he also rules the church: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority” (Col. 2:9-10). Christ is the Lord of the church.”
- B. Berkhoff, Systematic Theology: “The Bible teaches that Christ is Head over all things: He is the Lord of the Universe, not merely as the second person of the Trinity, but in his mediatorial capacity, Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:10-11; Rev. 17:14; 19:16. In a very special sense, however, He is the Head of the Church, which is His body. He stands in a vital and organic relationship to it, fills it with His life, and controls it spiritually, John 15:1-8; Eph. 1:10, 22, 23; 2:20-22; 4:15; 5:30; Col. 1:18; 2:19; 3:11.”
- C. “God the Son came into the world and clothed himself with a human nature in order to die for sinners like you and me. A divine nature and a human nature came together in one Person. And when that Person rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to take his place as the Head of the church and the King of the world, at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, it was a man who went into heaven. He was one of us. He is the same man reigning in heaven today

who ate and drank and taught and healed and suffered on earth. The very stone which the builders rejected, THIS one is now head of the corner.”—The Marvelous Rising of a Rejected Stone. John Piper March 30, 1986

- D. The Church is Christ’s body in a real though spiritual sense. He is the Head, his people the members; he the Vine, they the branches. He dwells in the Church as life dwells in a living body. He fills it with his life, replenishes it with his strength, feeds it with his body and blood, beautifies it with his comeliness, calms it with his peace, brightens it with his holiness, and finally glorifies it with his glory. [The Pulpit Commentary: Ephesians. 2004 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.)]

## II. GENERAL NOTES CONCERNING THE IMAGERY OF CHRIST AS HEAD

- A. There are several images used to describe Christ throughout the New Testament. The imagery of Christ as the Head is based upon the imagery of the Church<sup>1</sup> as the Body of Christ.
- B. Jesus never used the specific image of the Church as His “body” or Himself as the “head” of the “body.” However, He did speak of the close connection between Himself and the Church.
1. "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (Matthew 10:40)
  2. "The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:40)
  3. "[A]nd he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4).
- C. The images of Church as a Body and Christ as a Head are found in the letters of Paul. The image of the Church as a Body is used to emphasize both the oneness of the relationship between the believers and Christ; and the relationship of the believers to one another, particularly with respect to their exercise of spiritual gifts or their ability to cause injury to one-another due to sin:
1. "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ

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<sup>1</sup> The church is: “A society of men called out of the world by God’s effectual grace, according to the purpose of his election, and united to Christ by faith and the participation of his Spirit, and to one another by the band of charity – that after remission of sins obtained in this world, together with regenerating grace, they may at length be brought to eternal life.” 1 Manton 455.

according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:4-8)

2. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:15-20)
3. "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many." (1 Corinthians 12:11-14)
4. "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:26-27)

### **III. KEY SCRIPTURES RELATING TO CHRIST AS HEAD OF THE CHURCH**

- A. Prediction that Christ would be Head of the Church: "Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?" (Matthew 21:42, quoting Psalm 118:22-23).
- B. Appointed by God to be the Head of the Church: "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:22-23).
- C. Christ declared Himself to be the Head of the Church:
  1. Matthew 21:32

2. "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."" (Matthew 28:18-20).
- D. He instituted the Church: ""I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." (Matthew 16:18).
  - E. He is the Head of the instruction of the Church: ""But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ." (Matthew 23:8-10).
  - F. Head of men, individually: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:3).
  - G. Over the mystical body<sup>2</sup> of Christ:
    1. "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:11-16)
    2. "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body." (Ephesians 5:23).
  - H. Pre-eminence over all things:

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<sup>2</sup> The word "mystical" is a theological term which refers to the body of Christ as a group of believers, as opposed to a single, solid body of flesh. The word has nothing to do with "mysticism". See, Kurian, G. T. (2001). Nelson's new Christian dictionary : The authoritative resource on the Christian world. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Pubs. (" "mystical body The church considered as the body of Christ.")

1. "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:22-23).
  
2. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven." (Colossians 1:15-20)
  - a. Each Christian is a member of this spiritual body, and Jesus Christ is the Head. In Greek usage, the word head meant "source" and "origin" as well as "leader, ruler." Jesus Christ is the Source of the church, His body, and the Leader. Paul called Him "the Beginning" which tells us that Jesus Christ has priority in time as far as His church is concerned. The term beginning can be translated "originator."

No matter which name you select, it will affirm the preeminence of Jesus Christ in the church. The church had its origin in Him, and today it has its operation in Him. As the Head of the church, Jesus Christ supplies it with life through His Spirit. He gives gifts to men, and then places these gifted people in His church that they might serve Him where they are needed. Through His Word, Jesus Christ nourishes and cleanses the church (Eph. 5:25 - 30).

No believer on earth is the head of the church. This position is reserved exclusively for Jesus Christ. Various religious leaders may have founded churches, or denominations; but only Jesus Christ is the Founder of the church which is His body. This church is composed of all true believers, and it was born at Pentecost. It was then that the Holy Spirit came and baptized the believers into one spiritual body.

The fact that there is "one body" in this world (Eph. 4:4) does not eliminate or minimize the need for local bodies of believers. The fact that I belong to the universal church does not release me from my responsibilities to the local church. I cannot minister to the whole church, but I can strengthen and build the church by

ministering to God's people in a local assembly. [Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). The Bible exposition commentary. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Col 1:18). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.]

- I. Heretics do not hold to the headship of Christ: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God." (Colossians 2:18-19).
- J. Believers are complete in Christ as their Head: "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;" (Colossians 2:9-10).

#### **IV. ASPECTS OF THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST**

As the Head of the Church, Christ is the Head with respect to both Government of the Church and the Head of the Church with Respect to the Sustenance of the Church.

- A. Head with respect to the Government of the Church
  - 1. Christ has the right to make laws for the Church
    - a. " After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. ["If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."] When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.)" (Mark 7:14-19).
    - b. " And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the

one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves." (Luke 22:24-27).

- c. "Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. "Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:31-34)

2. Christ has the right to institute forms of worship

- a. "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

3. Christ has the right to give gifts to and appoint officers over the Church:

- a. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom

the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:4-16).

- b. Thomas Manton on the giving of officers to the Church: Christ gave "some . . . . it is his prerogative, as head of the church, to appoint the several sorts of offices and officers".

B. Christ is the Sustenance of the Church

1. Christ exercises his authority over the Church through the Holy Spirit:

- a. Christ is said to give gifts to the Church (Ephesians 4:4-16). This is an exercise of his position as the Head of the Church. (Ephesians 4:15). The gifts are given by Christ for the government, unity and building up of the Church. The Spirit is also said to be the one who distributes the gifts to the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). The gifts are given by the Spirit for the unity and government of the Church.
- b. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- c. "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."" (John 14:14-17).
- d. ""These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." (John 14:25-26).
- e. ""When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me," (John 15:26).
- f. ""I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it



to you. "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you." (John 16:12-15).

- g. Note that the entire Trinity is involved in the process of making Christ the effective Head of the Church through the sending of the Holy Spirit: "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6).
  - h. The power of the Holy Spirit, through the resurrected, ascended Christ, is available to all Christians—by faith. His power is to "us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:19). It is grace that supplies the wealth, but it is faith that lays hold of the wealth. We are saved "by grace, through faith" (Eph. 2:8–9), and we live "by grace," through faith (1 Cor. 15:10). [Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). The Bible exposition commentary. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Eph 1:19). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.]
  - i. We must now see in what way we become possessed of the blessings which God has bestowed on his only-begotten Son, not for private use, but to enrich the poor and needy. And the first thing to be attended to is, that so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us. To communicate to us the blessings which he received from the Father, he must become ours and dwell in us. Accordingly, he is called our Head, and the first-born among many brethren, while, on the other hand, we are said to be ingrafted into him and clothed with him, all which he possesses being, as I have said, nothing to us until we become one with him. And although it is true that we obtain this by faith, yet since we see that all do not indiscriminately embrace the offer of Christ which is made by the gospel, the very nature of the case teaches us to ascend higher, and inquire into the secret efficacy of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings. . . . The whole comes to this that the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually binds us to himself. [Calvin, Institutes, 3.1.1]
2. Cyprian, also, following Paul, derives the fountain of ecclesiastical concord from the one bishopric of Christ, and afterwards adds, "There is one Church, which by increase from fecundity is more widely extended to a multitude, just as there are many rays of the sun, but one light, and many branches of a tree, but one trunk upheld by the tenacious root. When many streams flow from one fountain, though there seems wide spreading numerosity from the overflowing copiousness of the supply, yet unity remains in the origin. Pluck a ray from the body of the sun, and the unity sustains no division. Break a branch from a tree, and the branch will

not germinate. Cut off a stream from a fountain, that which is thus cut off dries up. So the Church, pervaded by the light of the Lord, extends over the whole globe, and yet the light which is everywhere diffused is one” (Cyprian, de Simpliciter. Prælat.) [Calvin’s Institutes, 4.2.6]

3. The headship of Christ, through the administration of the Holy Spirit and the given word of God in the Bible is sufficient to govern the Church, "Now, therefore it is a part of Christ's office, as head of the church, to maintain verity of doctrine, purity of worship, and a lawful order of government, for all which had hath plenty of spirit. The papists think this cannot be without some universal visible head to supply Christ's office in his absence . . . ." Thomas Manton.

## V. ERRORS CONCERNING THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

- A. There is no Head of the Church.
- B. Every individual is a Head of the Church.
- C. Every man is a Head of the Church.
- D. The pope is the Head of the Church.
- E. Therefore, if anyone says that blessed Peter the apostle was not appointed by Christ the lord as prince of all the apostles and visible head of the whole church militant... let him be anathema. First dogmatic constitution on the church of Christ, Chapter 1, § 6.
- F. And this is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful . . . .Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter III, § 25, ¶3.

## VI. APPLICATION OF THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

*We must no longer remain as children, but grow up in everything and in every respect. But we are to grow and to develop ‘into him who is the head, even Christ’, . . . It means that, as individual members and parts of the body, we should all grow up into a conformity to Christ the Head. In other words, Paul is saying that every part of the body ought to be worthy of the Head, ought to correspond to the Head. The head is the pattern and standard, and the Head is ‘even Christ’. Every part of the body, even the smallest parts, however small or apparently insignificant, should be in conformity to, should be worthy of the Head. There should be no clash or defect. We are all familiar*

*with a lack of proportion and symmetry in nature. You may see a very beautiful face but ugly hands, or a beautiful body but ugly legs. The Apostle says that there should be no such clash or lack of correspondence, but that the entire body in every part should be perfectly proportioned and balanced, with nothing standing out as a kind of oddity or eccentricity. Everything should fit together perfectly and in due proportion. This should be the result of our speaking the truth in love as we deal with one another. We should all be growing up together, at the same rate if possible, with the same kind of maturity, so that the body shows a delightful proportion and beauty, and perfection of form; and we should especially seek that there should be no clash between the head and the various other parts of the body.*

*There is also another aspect of this truth which is important, namely, that every part of the body should be so developed as to be always ready to respond to the Lord. We are not only to be conformed to Him, but to be at His disposal and at His service; so that when He, the Head, desires something, there will be no hindrance, no restraint, no failure to respond in any part of the body. This becomes yet clearer in verse i6 where the apostle, having reminded us that the Head is Christ, proceeds to add, 'from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love'.*

– Martin Lloyd Jones.