

THE HEAD OF EVERY MAN

Many Christians enjoy reading the word of God to discover what it is that God has done and will do for them. There is a search for the riches of God which are available to them through faith. This is a wonderful pursuit. Time spent in the presence of the Lord meditating on His word will feed us spiritually, causing us to grow. As we grow, there begins to form in us a realization that the universe is not man centered. As a Christian matures, he begins to understand that he was made for God and that God does not exist merely for his benefit.

Perhaps more profound than to learn what God can and will do for us is to contemplate why He created us in the first place. Possibly it would benefit us greatly to understand more about His divine intentions concerning mankind. For example, a deeper revelation of God's purposes for creating such a being as man may greatly help us to comprehend the work which He is doing within us and through us. Knowing why we were made will undoubtedly help us in understanding God's will for our lives. Similarly, armed with this knowledge we can more easily go through the tribulations and trials used by Him to accomplish His ends. With this in mind, let us examine a few passages of scripture together.

When God made man in Genesis, He said: "Let them have dominion" (Gen 1:26). This reveals something. Our Creator made us in His image and likeness to be rulers—to reign over the earth. Part of His intention was that human beings would be more than servants. They were to be kingly rulers over the newly created world. In another passage, the psalmist David—no doubt meditating on this very truth—exclaims, "What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? You have made him a little lower than the angels, You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands" (Ps 8:4-6). When someone is crowned, this speaks of royalty and kingship. It speaks of authority and ruling. And who has done this to man? It is God Himself who has set man in this position, reigning over His creation! This is not a small consideration. The Almighty God has made man, crowned him with glory and honor and then set him to rule over the world.

Not only is this plan revealed in the Old Testament, but also in the New we discover that this is the ultimate plan of God. We are to become, through the work of Christ, "kings and priests" unto God (Rev 1:6). We are to "reign on the earth" (Rev 5:10). We are to "reign in life" through Jesus Christ (Rm 5:17). These scriptures demonstrate beyond a doubt that God does have this wonderful intention for man. When our Father created us, He had in mind this very thing—that we would rule over His creation.

Now we all know that the Lord is the supreme ruler of the universe. He is still sitting on the throne of heaven. Furthermore, He is not giving up this position. So how

are we to understand this fact that He formed another being similar to Himself (in His image and likeness) and set him up as a king? It is evident that this was not done because the Ancient of Days has gotten old and ready to retire and therefore created a substitute. No, our Lord has no intention of relinquishing control of the universe. He is not going to turn everything over to us.

GOD IS NOT A SHOWMAN

Part of the understanding of this mystery must lie in the fact that our God is not an exhibitionist. Isaiah declares, "Truly, You are God, who hides Yourself" (Is 45:15). This is part of the Divine nature. It is our Creator's character not to do things in a showy, conspicuous manner, but to remain hidden. (By the way, how does this truth reflect upon the work that you are doing in His name?) Even the present creation is an example of His secret work. Although the creation reveals Him, only those who are really open to Him can see it. Also, the present glorious work which He is doing in His sons is a hidden thing.

The invisible God, the creator of the universe, has chosen to remain in the background and reveal Himself through a being whom He created—man. This God revealed Himself in Christ Jesus two thousand years ago. Today, He desires to be expressed through His many sons. He is manifesting Himself to us so that He can be revealed through us to the world and even to the unseen universe. In the future, this will also be true. Those believers who are faithful to Him will be crowned with glory and honor and set to rule over God's creation.

So we see that our God's purpose is (and always has been) to remain hidden, choosing to reign through this representative whom He created. Men, filled with God and under His control, are to be manifesting His authority over the earth. This is not their own authority. They are not choosing and acting according to their own will. Rather, they are acting by the Spirit of God to exercise His authority. He in them is ruling through them. They are to be a manifestation of both His nature and His authority.

This understanding that God intends to reign and rule through man harmonizes perfectly with what we have been seeing in the foregoing chapters. Man's role in the Divine plan is to be a vessel, a conduit through which the authority of God flows. A man never becomes the authority himself, but is simply a channel through which supernatural authority is transmitted. We are now in a time of preparation and training. Someday soon, the sons of God will be manifested (Rm 8:19). Praise God for His marvelous design!

ARE WE REALLY SUBMITTED?

In the previous chapters we have been discussing how it is that God uses men to be vessels of His authority. His will is revealed through those who are intimate and open with Him. These men and women then are channels for Divine authority and serve as leaders among the flock. Through such leaders, God's people can be directed by the Most High and move in harmony with Him to fulfill His plans.

However, this marvelous plan can only work under one condition. In order to receive true spiritual authority from another, we all must be genuinely submitted to God ourselves. He must become our "head." When our knees have been bowed and our will bent so that we are really willing to obey God in whatever circumstance, we

will be able to hear His voice speaking through others. If, on the other hand, we are secretly resistant to the Lord's direction (especially if it contradicts our own) or we are not sincerely wanting to know the will of God; all exercise of spiritual authority will be in vain. When people cannot or will not submit themselves to God and hear from Him individually, most certainly they will never submit themselves to another speaking to them with spiritual authority.

This is especially true if we are one of those many brothers (or sisters) who cannot listen to anyone else. There are many Christian men today who fit into this category. They simply cannot be humble enough to receive anything through another man. It is an insult to their pride. They imagine that God will speak everything directly to them "through the Spirit" not needing to use anyone else. Therefore, the thought of teaching or direction from another rubs them the wrong way and they are constantly resisting any input which another brother might have for their life. These are rebellious brothers who, although they may have a superficial appearance of Christianity, are not very open to the leadership of God.

This, my dear brothers and sisters, is not a small consideration. In fact, it is of the utmost importance. Why did God institute governmental authority on the earth? He did it because mankind was unwilling to obey Him directly. Why did He allow Israel to have a king? It was because the people did not wish to follow Him (I Sam 8:7). And why do we have so much human, earthly authority in the church of God today? It is a result of stubborn, rebellious believers who refuse to respond to true spiritual authority.

When we refuse the inward speaking of God, the only option which presents itself is an outward kind of control. If we are not responsive to His Spirit, then we must be subdued by His law. This is an all-important truth. Unless all of us can arrive at a place where our entire being is completely submitted to God, we are not yet ready to walk with the Lord and be sensitive to spiritual authority. Lacking this we will only be led about by superficial ordinances, "New Testament principles," "spiritual guidelines," and earthly leaders. In this way we may produce something which appears to be an orderly, disciplined group or church but it will lack an essential ingredient—true, from the heart, submission to the Lord.

THE LORD OF ALL

When bringing people to the Lord, or coming to Christ ourselves, we must affirm a truth which is often neglected. When we receive Jesus Christ, we must receive Him for who He is. And who is He? He is the LORD. He is the "head of the body." He is not only the Savior but the Master. In short, He is the absolute authority in the universe. Therefore, if we are in any measure whatsoever unwilling to submit every aspect of our being to His control, we are just playing games with God. We are hypocrites. We honor Him with our words, but our heart is not really His.

In talking about submission to Jesus, we mean this: He must be permitted to control our actions, our words, our thoughts, our feelings, our opinions, our desires and every other aspect of our lives. This does not mean that we occasionally do a few things which the Bible says or that we don't do a few things which are against the rules. No such superficial submission is in view. Every Christian must, sooner or later, come to the place where they make a decision to open every corner of their heart to Jesus and give Him complete control over it. This is not an option. It is an essential part of real Christianity. Unless and until we do this we are not really moving anywhere

spiritually. God will never do anything inside of us against our will. Consequently, any resistance in us to His authority will keep us from spiritual progress.

Spiritual growth cannot take place in a resistant believer. I personally knew someone who became born again but never really opened their heart to God's control and inspection. For twenty years the battle raged. For twenty long years God called and this person rejected the idea of complete openness to His Spirit. Then, miraculously the day came when Jesus began to conquer this, His child. The resistance began to crumble and a new openness to the Lord appeared. The gates opened up and the walls came down to welcome in completely the Lord Jesus Christ. What a change took place! What a marvelous new spiritual growth appeared! This full, total yielding to God brought a whole new chapter into the life of this individual. A new infusion of Divine life took place. Real spiritual progress began. Hallelujah! It is never too late to really open your life to Jesus and let Him take complete control. This is the beginning of real Christianity.

By the way, if you are not growing spiritually, or you are beset year after year by the same old problems, sins and weaknesses, this is the reason. You have not yet opened your being completely to God. You are secretly resisting and refusing to allow Him access to every part of your heart and life. You are unwilling for certain aspects of your nature or past to be exposed and treated. The answer of course is to do it, honestly, sincerely by faith. Make your whole being a living sacrifice. He is able to save completely those who come to Him (Heb 7:25).

Jesus must be our head. The scriptures teach that "we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor 2:16). This is a wonderful doctrine. Unfortunately, for many it is no more than that. In their day-to-day existence their mind is full of their own thoughts, with perhaps an occasional insertion of God's will into the process. However, this marvelous teaching is meant to be our experience. Believers can actually experience the Spirit of God taking control of their thinking processes. Their thoughts and opinions can become those of Jesus through yielding control of their mind to Him.

Real Christianity is when Jesus Himself is in complete control of our lives. Anything else is just an imitation. God's desire to rule and reign through us can only be realized when we are submitted to His authority. His plan will only come to fruition in us as we yield every area of our life to Him.

HEAD COVERINGS

In I Corinthians, chapter 11 we encounter what has come to be in Christian circles a very controversial subject—head coverings. Here Paul is teaching about the use of veils, hats or some form of covering for the women during church gatherings. Based upon their interpretation of this passage, some believe that it is essential for women to use a physical covering in public meetings. Others think that long hair on a woman is the "covering" about which Paul is speaking. Still others reason that this admonition is a result of ancient culture and has no place in our society today. These and many other opinions have resulted in no small dispute in the church of God.

Even though many people hold varying opinions, I believe that most will agree upon one key point. Paul is teaching about the necessity for a woman to have an attitude of submission toward her husband, or lacking a husband, to a father, leader or other man in authority. The physical covering, whether we may believe it to be necessary or not, is only a symbol of an inward heart attitude. Surely all would concur that any covering, whether hair or hat, which is not accompanied by an attitude of

submission is simply adornment, or worse, hypocrisy. The primary focus of the teaching then is that a "covering" is an outward evidence of an inward position. It is the sign or symbol of the fact that the woman has decided to submit herself to a man and that this man is her "head." She is covering her own head, whether with hair, veil, or simply with a reverent, submissive attitude to signify that another "head" is recognized as being supreme.

With this in mind, let us examine another part of this passage together. Paul teaches that "the head of every man is Christ" (vs 3). Further, he states that for a man to pray or prophesy with his head covered dishonors his true Head. When a man uses a "covering" he dishonors Jesus Christ (vs 4). While it is not a common thing in the world today

to encounter men wearing hats in church meetings, there is I believe a deeper, more serious lesson to be learned from these verses.

We have concluded that the essence of the "head covering" teaching is a heart attitude. It is an inward decision to put oneself in the position of being in submission to a man. Therefore, if a man puts himself in this position, he is acting like a woman. He is behaving in a manner which shows that he has taken another man to be his head. He is choosing to submit himself under a human authority. This position, my dear brothers, is clearly against the scriptures. According to Paul's teaching, this activity dishonors Christ. It is an insult to Him and His headship over each and every man.

Although men's hats in church is really a non-issue, the practice of being in submission to a man or group of men, or being under the "covering" of some man or men is very common indeed. It is, in fact, something which a significantly large portion of the Christian churches insists upon. If you are not "in submission" they say, you are out of the will of God. If you are not "covered" by some other man or ministry, you must be a rebel of the worst variety. Ideas such as "coming under," "umbrella" and "looking to for direction" are all extremely popular in today's church. The thought that somehow there is a kind of safety in adopting this position of submission is quite prevalent.

While all this is currently so popular and has perhaps an aura of being "right," let us stop and think about it critically for a minute. If a woman uses a covering, she is stating publicly that she is in submission to a man. If therefore a man states publicly that he is in submission to another man, he in fact is "using" a head covering. He is taking a position of being in submission to another. Therefore, whether a physical veil is present or not, he is assuming an attitude which is dishonoring to his true Head, Jesus Christ. Surely it is plain that in the case of the woman, the attire is not at the core of the issue but rather the attitude of the heart. So also, in the case of the man, the real crux of Paul's teaching is not about sombreros or baseball caps but the position of the inner man.

DISHONORING CHRIST

Here the scripture is quite clear. If a man prays or prophesies (meaning that he is functioning in some capacity in church meetings) with his head covered, he is insulting Jesus. He is humbling himself before another man instead of God and relying upon this other person for direction and supervision. This man is indicating that Jesus is not sufficient. His leadership and headship are not adequate and therefore he must look to a human being for covering. Although Jesus may be his head in some kind of mystical, distant way, he is choosing a more "real," tangible human being to whom he can submit himself and whom he can follow. If you were the Lord of the universe and your child

acted in this way, would you be dishonored? Jesus is. The Bible plainly tells us so.

Why is this so important? There are several very clear reasons. The first is that God created man to fulfill a marvelous plan. If man is to be God's representative, He must be in intimate daily contact and communication with Him. When another head or "covering" is placed between the Christian man and Jesus, this hinders the proper flow of authority. No man can adequately transmit to another all that God would want to say and do. Since all men are finite, so also our comprehension of God's will is circumscribed. Therefore, it is impossible for a man or even a group of men to ever come close to expressing the will of God to another in a complete fashion. For a man to place himself "under" the authority of man severely interrupts the flow of authority from the Head into and through his life.

A second reason that men of God should not place themselves "under" another is that we cannot keep our attention focused in two directions at once. No man can serve two masters. God has designed man so that he can only give his allegiance to one principal at a time. This is an unalterable truth. When we turn to look to man for direction, we automatically divert our attention from Jesus. Doing this, we bring ourselves under a curse from God. He says, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man, who makes the arm of flesh his strength, departing from the living God" (Jer 17:5). You see, trusting in man and departing from God are inexorably linked. There is just no way that we can look to a leader and not look away from our Lord. Could this be the reason that Jesus taught us to call no man "father," "teacher" or "leader" (Mt 23:8-10)?

When we try to divide our attention, the direction which is easiest will usually win out. There is no doubt that a tangible, physical, human leader is simpler to follow than an invisible Lord. The natural tendency of human nature is to want someone to lead it. This is exactly the situation which Samuel encountered with the children of Israel. They came to him wanting a king. Consequently, he became very upset. He tried in vain to explain to them the plan of God. The Most High was already their king. They did not need a human one. Although their leader was invisible, He was very real. Nevertheless, Israel rejected the counsel of Samuel and demanded a leader to rule over them. God gave them their wish, but it was not His will. In the same way today, God tolerates our earthly systems and even uses them to further His purposes, but it is not His design.

A FUTILE EXERCISE

A third reason that placing ourselves "under" another to help our spiritual life is erroneous is that it simply does not work. No one besides our God sees clearly into the depths of our soul. Men can observe our outward actions and words. Sometimes they even have small glimpses into our heart. But only the Spirit of the Lord really searches out what is hidden in our innermost being. Therefore, at best the disciple of another man will have only a superficial dealing with the thoughts and intentions of his heart. It is possible for a person to be very obedient to his overseer's will but have within his heart deeply hidden areas in which he is strongly rebelling against his true Master.

Furthermore, there is a great danger of becoming a pharisee. Under the guidance of a human being, the outward appearance of a person can perhaps be cleaned up or controlled. By pleasing a human "leader," this person then imagines that he has made spiritual progress or is growing in the Lord. When he has become very obedient to his "discipler" he could then suppose that he has become mature and ready for spiritual service. But if we are submitted to some man are we really more submitted

to God? Has a great change taken place in our intimacy and relationship with our Lord? If we were not really given to God before we submitted ourselves to a leader, how has our true heart attitude really changed? We must remember that the goal of spiritual authority is to bring people into an obedience to God, not to the servant of God or a superficial standard.

On the other hand, when and if a believer is truly submitted to God, he will gladly submit to anyone and everyone who is speaking from God. This will be especially true toward those who are known to be channels of God's authority. Therefore, if we can minister to Christians a deep, genuine submission to the Lord, all problems with rebellion in the church can be resolved. Instead of covering the problems with a band-aid of superficial attitudes and actions, spiritual ministry can help expose and eliminate the root of the problem. How the church of God today needs such ministry! How we need to become genuinely submitted to God!

As believers we have the responsibility to rightly divide the word of truth. There is such a thing as true, spiritual submission. There is also the error of submitting to men instead of God. Yes, I do remember the verses about those who are "over" us in the Lord. What a terrible translation of the Greek word "PROISTEMI" which means "to stand before, hence to lead" according to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. It has nothing to do with domination, control or being "over" in the commonly understood sense. Christians down through the centuries have suffered much because of this mistranslation, which has led to wrong concepts. Also, I know about the Centurion, the "man under authority" (Mt 8:9). He did recognize Jesus' supernatural authority because he himself had earthly authority. However, he was certainly not giving a teaching about church government, nor should we understand it that way.

Of course we should be respectful and submissive. That is what this entire writing is about. However, wrong submission will get us nowhere. Only genuine submission to God will work. May we prayerfully seek God for His will and way in this all-important question.

ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Perhaps the real reason that so many embrace the idea of submitting themselves to another man is that it releases them from much responsibility. This is the same reason the ancient Israelites wanted a king. They wanted someone else to fight their battles, make the important decisions and set the direction. In this way, they were free to go about their own pursuits unhindered by spiritual responsibility. They could just sit back and coast.

Now there is a certain fleshly appeal to this idea. To trust a leader whom we respect and be free from responsibility is what many people want. However, to do so is to give up the priesthood and kingship for which God created us. By adopting another "head" we reject the true One. Each of us has a responsibility before God as a priest and king to seek His will, practice daily intercession, maintain a relationship with Him and be involved in leading others into His kingdom. What a temptation it is to let others do the hard work. How easy it is just to trust in the abilities of another. But God is asking more than this. Each man must wear the priestly garments and bear the kingly responsibilities for his own household, friends and brothers in the Lord. Brethren, it is God's will for you to reign with Him. Do not trade this privilege for the broad, easy way. Let no man take your crown (Rev 3:11)!