

## THE HEAD OF THE BODY

Jesus Christ is the head of His church. He is the One who has been appointed by the Father to fulfill this important function. He has been chosen and anointed to preside over all the activities of His people. This is an extremely clear teaching of the scriptures. Colossians 1:18 states this plainly, "And He is the head of the body, the church." Ephesians 1:22 explains that God the Father "has given Him (Jesus Christ) to be the head over all things to the church." The Apostle Paul further emphasizes this in Ephesians 4:15 by affirming that Jesus is "the head, even Christ." This tremendous fact is not an obscure or irrelevant teaching.

However, even though the message is indisputable, the meaning of this message is often not well understood. What possible practical application does this truth have for us in our daily lives?

Perhaps the common understanding is that Jesus functions today in His "headship" capacity somewhat like the head of a large corporation. Probably He is there somewhere in the background, making high-level, executive decisions, holding conferences from time to time with the big, important leaders, and in general orchestrating the whole endeavor from afar. No doubt the common "worker" will see Him in the halls occasionally or even at a meeting of the whole corporation; but, in general, His job is done on a high level which impacts the daily lives of those on the lower echelons only indirectly. This conception is supported perhaps by the fact that Jesus did ascend into heaven. He is indeed "far above all" (Eph 4:10). Adding to this notion that the "Head" is somewhat remote is the fact that He is invisible. He is not perceived or understood by the natural man. These things can lead many to the following conclusion: Jesus came to earth, died for our sins and then rose to be seated with the Father. Now our job is to carry out the instructions which He has left us in the Bible until He decides to return and reward us for our labors.

This assumption brings people to a position which is perhaps the greatest deficiency in the church today. Very few believers know and experience the headship of God in their lives. Many Christians have little trouble relating to a Savior, Redeemer, Helper, or Comforter, in a personal, intimate manner. These are functions of Jesus Christ to which the human heart can readily respond. Perhaps a little more difficult is the concept of an intimate relationship with a "Lord" or a King who expects obedience. Even further removed is the idea of a "Head" who is directly affecting not only our actions but our attitudes, thoughts and feelings as well. However, if we are to enter into all that God has for our lives and become well-pleasing in His sight, this intimate, headship relationship with Him is essential.

Perhaps the best way to grasp the true meaning of this relationship is to look at

what it means to be His body. We, God's people, are the "body of Christ" (Eph 1:23). The church as a whole is the "body" and Jesus is the Head. The individuals then are seen as "members" of this body (Eph 5:30). God chose to explain things to us in this way because it is an extremely accurate analogy. In a human body, all the parts are controlled by the brain. No muscle or organ functions on its own, according to its own ideas. Neither is the head asking for opinions or ideas from the various parts. The whole works smoothly only when each part is in intimate communication with and obedience to the head. In this way, the body serves to be an expression of the will of the head. The various muscles and body parts, including the mouth and eyes, respond to the direction of the brain and form an expression of what the head has in mind.

This then is exactly what the Bible means to say when it states that we are His body and that He is the head. Each one of us is a member of this body with some kind of function to perform. When we do so according to the moment by moment impulses from the Head, we are then an expression of Him. The body of Christ is not an automaton, simply following written instructions. It is a living organism manifesting the life within it. It is an extremely serious error to suppose that we can perform our part on our own. How can we possibly express the life of Jesus acting independently or simply trying to follow a set of instructions? It is not possible. Our part is to allow Jesus to control all of our being so that when we act or even react, it is His life and nature which are manifested.

This spiritual truth of our being the body of Christ can only be experienced by maintaining an intimacy with the head. While it is true that all Christians are members of the body of Christ, this truth will do us no good unless we are experiencing day by day its reality. In a human being, when the head loses control over its own members and they begin acting independently, we identify that body as spastic. It begins behaving in an ungoverned, uncoordinated manner which is frightening and even hideous. When a person's body responds imperfectly to the orders of the head, that person is called crippled or, in today's terminology, "challenged." How often does Christ's body appear in this way?

We can also imagine someone who is confined to an iron lung, or is completely paralyzed. The tissues and organs present comprise what is termed the "body" of that person. However, it has ceased to respond to the direction of their head and therefore is no longer an expression of themselves. Could it be that the body of Christ, although it is His because of the shedding of His own blood, is not truly responding to His direction and therefore not exhibiting His life and nature to the world?

Dear brothers and sisters, these are very serious considerations. Perhaps we have supposed that we can act for God and that will be enough. But God is not wanting us to act on His behalf. He does not wish us "to do things" for Him. Instead, He greatly desires to act through us. His will is for us to submit ourselves to Him in such a way that He has control over all of our being and can use us as vessels to manifest Himself. Only in this way can we experience what it really means to be His body.

What is at issue here is not "who is the body of Christ." All believers are certainly part of this group. The crux of the matter is "who" is animating this body. Who is in control? Whose life and nature are emanating from each and every member? Perhaps we as Christians take comfort in the fact that we have become members of Christ. We are secure in our membership and believe that this is enough. However, now we see that this fact is not sufficient to fulfill God's will and satisfy His desires. No doubt He intends for His own body to be an expression of Himself. We are to be His witnesses not simply by saying things about Him but by actually expressing Him. God has called

us and redeemed us so that we can form a corporate manifestation of all that He is. His life and nature, which were so clearly and powerfully portrayed in His person when Jesus walked this earth, are to be now on display through those whom He calls His body.

God's will is to manifest Himself to the world. He greatly desires that all men could see Him and know Him. This responsibility has now been put upon those who comprise His body. This can never happen by our own efforts. We cannot try to imitate God and suppose that this will be good enough to convince the world of sin. The only possibility is that we will submit ourselves to His headship so that we will be filled with His life and be animated by His direction. When He is living through us, we are an exhibition of Himself. When we are merely trying to live for Him, we inevitably can only express our own concept of what He is like. True righteousness, peace, joy, victory over sin, and all the things which comprise an actual manifestation of the nature of God are only possible when He is our head.

How we need this experience today! How essential it is that the headship of Christ be much more than some remote doctrine to us. We must experience the reality of this headship to be pleasing to God. Our heavenly Father is in some respects a very narrow Person. There is only one thing in the universe which truly pleases Him: His Son. When He sees His Son manifested through us, He is greatly pleased. Nothing less than this will ever satisfy Him. If we say that we are His and that we want to do His will, this is the way: allow His Son Jesus to dominate our personality and be our head. When He is the One initiating our words, attitudes and activities, then—and only then—we will please the Father.

In the scriptures we will encounter the phrase "the mind of Christ" (I Cor 2:16). This is something which the Bible tells us that we have. Unfortunately, for many this is nothing more than a nice teaching which has no real impact or influence in their life. It is not their daily experience. Possibly their minds are instead dominated by their own ideas, thoughts and opinions.

There is also in the scriptures something called the "renewing of the mind" (Rm 12:2). Here we read that we can be transformed by this process and that the result will be something which is "that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." How exciting! Here is a way to be changed so that we will be pleasing to God. And how is this accomplished? It is simply by allowing the Holy Spirit of God to dominate our cerebral processes. We can experience Jesus as our Head. This is exactly what the scripture means which speaks about being "renewed in the spirit of [our] mind" (Eph 4:23). This speaks of the Holy Spirit filling, changing and then using our minds to express Himself in all His fullness. This is truly a wonderful salvation.

As you can see, experiencing Jesus as our head is much more than an obedience to His occasional directions or to some scriptural mandates. Instead, it is submitting our entire being to His control. When Jesus dominates our mind, He controls us completely. Through this transforming process, we, individually and corporately, will become a living expression of Himself—His body.

## **HEAD OF THE BODY**

Not only does Jesus intend to be the head of each individual member, He is also the head of the church as a whole. What then does this mean? It signifies that when we gather together in His name we are not free simply to do our own thing. Again, He is not eager to watch us go through religious rituals for Him. His intention is to be the

leader of all that we do. In order for the church, His body, to be an expression of Himself, He must be in charge. Think about this for a moment. If we do not follow the moment by moment leading of the Holy Spirit in our gatherings, we are not expressing Jesus Christ. If we only occasionally allow Him room to move as He wishes, then we are manifesting Him in a very limited way. This then brings us back to our analogy of a cripple, spastic or paralytic. While we may be the church of God in a positional sense, our experience of this fact is too often lacking. Although we will never cease to be His body, the actual church which Jesus is seeking can never be realized while He has only a little influence over it.

Jesus Himself explains this truth to the Samaritan woman whom He met at Jacob's well. She was inquiring about the proper location for worship. Naturally, she was curious to solve an age-old dilemma about which place was right. So many times today we also are preoccupied about which format is most scriptural, which method is best or which day is chosen by God. Hopefully, you can see how none of this has any bearing upon fulfilling the will of the Father. Jesus responded to her by saying that true worship could only occur in the Spirit. This means that it is only when the Spirit of God is filling and directing our worship that the Father is satisfied. How we need to experience such worship today! How our Heavenly Father is longing for us to fulfill His will.

How then should we meet? This is a question which must be decided by listening to the direction of the Holy Spirit. How, when and where are all questions which He can answer if we are only open to listening to Him. First of all, however, we must empty ourselves of all our own ideas and opinions. We must free ourselves of religious tradition and practice. Simply copying what others are doing or have done for centuries will not enable us to arrive at God's best. In fact, doing so will guarantee that we do not. Why is it that we trust God so little to lead and direct us in these simple, practical things? How is it that the One who holds the universe together by His power could be incapable

of leading His people in their meetings together? We must humble ourselves before God and open our hearts to Him. We must repent of doing our own will, supposing that it will satisfy Him. He can and will build His church if we only let Him be the Head of everything.

No doubt, the Lord will lead us by speaking through those who are intimate with Him. If we truly have ears to hear His voice, He will guide us in every practical step. The use of His money, for example, is one way in which He can guide us concerning a place to gather. The amount of space is another consideration. Has He actually led us to arrange something special for the children? Has He Himself instituted a choir? How about the arrangement of the seating? Have we really heard from Him? Perhaps you think that all these things are too petty to require His attention. Absolutely not! The Bible states that "in all things He is to have the preeminence" (Col 1:18). Additionally, we must always be ready, as were the Children of Israel in the wilderness, to change anything at any time. As the body grows, or other considerations arise, Jesus can and will lead us day by day in these details. In this way we begin to provide Him a place in which He can do His work.

### **MEETINGS LED BY THE SPIRIT**

Once we have heard from God concerning the practical questions of when and

where we should meet, we are left with determining exactly what will go on during the meeting. This too must be left open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible we read that when we come together each one may have a song, hymn, tongue or interpretation (I Cor 14:26). Also we learn that all can prophesy according to the leading of the Spirit (I Cor 14:31). When we come together, Jesus Himself comes into our midst. He comes there, not as an observer but as the Leader. He can and will motivate each member of the body to contribute their portion of Himself in an orderly and coherent manner. Since each member has been in intimate contact with Jesus during the week, many of them will have something

fresh to share from their fellowship with Him. All of this activity is led by the Holy Spirit and overseen by those who are known to be channels of spiritual authority because of their intimacy with God. It is not some kind of lawless free-for-all but an exhibition of the body of Christ orchestrated by the Holy Spirit.

In this way, Christ can be manifested in His body. In this way, "every joint" will supply the others with their portion (Eph 4:16). In this way, all will grow together into what God wants them to be. Teaching, preaching and exhortation can certainly have a place in a Spirit-led meeting. In fact, God could also lead us to arrange special meetings just for these purposes. Times for prayer, special ministry to new believers, intensive teaching sessions, evangelistic outreaches—all these things can be arranged by our Head if we are attentive and open to Him. God is able to lead His body. He is able to build His church. We only need to empty our hands of our own programs and plans and humble ourselves before Him. Jesus is able to fill our church experience with Himself.

How often have we substituted our own ideas, agendas and desires for the true leading of the Holy Spirit! Suppose for example, we notice a need among the young people. Often our first thought might be to find some kind of program for them and then choose someone to carry it out. This method however will not ever arrive at a truly spiritual goal. What if instead of this we spent some time in prayer opening ourselves to God and seeking His solution? Perhaps He would raise up someone with a special gift and anointing to minister to these young people. Then, instead of a program, we would have a spiritual ministry operating in the church. We would have someone with a true anointing and burden to fulfill this ministry. This is really what we need. We do not need more entertainment, programs and "support groups" in the assembly. We need the presence of the Holy Spirit! We need God Himself! If and when we seek Him with all our heart, we will find a new, living kind of church experience which will deeply satisfy not only our own longings but God's as well.

### **RESERVED FOR THE HEAD**

As you can no doubt understand from the foregoing discussion, all authority in the church is reserved for the Head. There is no room for any other. Any other authority will simply substitute for or get in the way of the flow of authority from Jesus. Unless the "leadership" in the church is simply a manifestation of God's own authority, it will hinder instead of help the process. Dear friends, this is a very serious consideration. Jesus' body is His! We are not free to construct some kind of imitation. We simply cannot set up any other kind of authority in our meetings besides that which the Father has already instituted. We must allow Jesus to be our Head. Only in this way will we experience the reality of church and satisfy God's requirements. Only in this way can the body grow and minister to itself in the way which God has designed.

Perhaps now the reader can more easily understand the great need in the church today for genuine spiritual authority. Also, it becomes clear why merely human authority can never achieve God's ends. It is only when the Head is animating His body that His life and nature are expressed. When someone else is in control, no matter how well-intentioned they may be, the result will never be an expression of God. This then is the unalterable principle of headship. In Christ's body there can be no other authority, no other head. When we place someone else in this position, we contaminate Jesus' expression, we introduce a foreign element into the church of God. Interestingly, one of the principle meanings of the prefix "anti" in Greek is "instead of" or "in the place of." This then leads us to a new understanding of the word "antichrist." Perhaps we have always thought of an antichrist as someone who is against Christ or opposed to Him. Here however we see that simply taking His place as the true authority and Head also qualifies as being "antichrist."

The place then for leaders in the church meetings could best be understood as a kind of supervisor. Those who are mature and intimate with God watch over the proceedings. In fact, the Bible uses the word "overseers" to indicate this function. Those who are less mature are free to exercise their gifts and abilities because there are qualified members who can gently correct any problems. True spiritual leadership can be exercised in a very unobtrusive way. A mere word or prayer at the appropriate time, spoken by the leading of the Holy Spirit, can bring the meeting back from some sidetrack it has taken. Those who would wish to dominate the meetings with their ideas and opinions can be carefully admonished. The leaders are present not to control or use the meetings as a forum for their own ministries, but to serve the body by helping everything be done according to the leading of the Head.

Of course, no meeting is going to be perfect. There will always be times when someone is praying or testifying from their own heart. A leader who has been truly broken and qualified by the Holy Spirit will know from God when it is necessary to say or do something or when the Lord would simply allow an imperfection to go uncorrected. All of us have imperfections in our lives and God alone knows the time and place for these deficiencies to be addressed. This wisdom is a result of experience and maturity. Perhaps this is why the scriptures use the word "elders" to describe such people. Notice how Paul exhorts that no novice should be expected to function in this capacity (I Tim 3:6). There is a great need for patience, forbearance and love to be wrought into the character of someone who is a channel for Divine authority. If the character of God is not displayed in those who are leading, the manifestation of God will be contaminated by natural personalities.

The leadership in the church is an awesome responsibility. It is not something which anyone should try to take upon themselves. There is a great temptation for young, gifted men to imagine that they are qualified to lead the church. They hear from God. They are anointed by Him and therefore they suppose that they are qualified to be leaders. However, nothing can substitute for brokenness and years of experience under the hand of God. Those who are "leading" will be judged by God for their work just as every one of us will be. If we have taken upon ourselves the mantle of "authority" and led the church of God according to the initiative of our own heart, we will be shown to be fools in front of everyone and be held accountable to the Judge of all.

Another important consideration here is that those who are channels of God's authority and functioning as "overseers" must have an intimate relationship with one another. They must be knit together in the spirit by God. This requires a willingness on

the part of these individuals to open their hearts to one another—to have a kind of godly transparency. They must have a unity which the Bible describes as having "one heart and one mind" (Acts 4:32). In this way, they can act together as one in exercising Divine authority. If there is any disunity or disagreement among the leaders, it will lead to disaster for the flock. If those in leadership cannot or will not act in harmony with one another in the Lord, shipwreck will result and the testimony of Jesus will be lost. It is impossible to preserve the authority of the Holy Spirit when there is mistrust, disharmony and argument among the leaders.

This then is an essential place to begin when thinking of meeting together. At least two or three men whom the Lord has prepared and chosen must come together in some kind of agreement on these issues. It is absolutely imperative as a place of beginning for this kind of unity among leaders to be established. If this is not in place, the result will only be confusion. Many others will try to enter in and take over. "Authority" from every direction but God will be manifested. And the leadership, in a weakened, divided condition will not be able to deal with it according to the direction of God. Over the years I have seen many groups in this condition. They slip haphazardly in and out of the will of God. From week to week it is anybody's guess if the meeting will be full of the Lord or not. What we desperately need today is not "no leadership" but truly spiritual oversight from those who are prepared by God. Only plural (more than one), united, spiritual leadership will result in a Christian gathering which is a manifestation of God Himself.

Why is it today that Christianity appears so weak? Why are so many believers' lives still full of various bondages and sin? Why is it that we are having so little effect upon the world around us? The early church within 30-40 years "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). On the other hand, in our day with all the money and materials at our disposal, comparatively little is being done. Now I am not saying that there is not a lot of activity. There certainly is. However, the impact of this activity seems strangely less than it did two thousand years ago. Has God changed? Absolutely not! However, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that something seems to be different. Perhaps therefore, it is worth our time to pause and consider if there is a part of God's plan which we have missed which could be hindering His power and His will.

## A LIVING TEMPLE

The Bible teaches us that we individually and the church corporately are the temple of God. God Himself, we are told, dwells there. Now what could be more powerful or effective than the presence of the Almighty? What could change lives more than a face to face encounter with Jesus Himself? But let us for a moment be completely honest with ourselves. Does God actually dwell among us? Is the palpable presence of the Lord Himself the chief feature of our meetings? Is the awesome majesty and glory of God the main attraction for us and others? Is He permanently resident among us or merely an occasional visitor? Truthfully now, is this "temple doctrine" our daily experience or just another one of those nice Bible teachings which sound great but have very little place in our daily lives?

I believe the great need of our day is for the Head, Jesus Christ, to be restored to His rightful place in His body. For far too many years Protestants and Catholics alike have substituted formulas and forms, rites and ceremonies for the true leadership of the Holy Spirit. We have put mere men in the place of God and supposed that this could

produce the results which He seeks and which we so desperately need. How we need a great repentance! How we need to turn from our own ways and humble ourselves! How we need to admit that we have been standing in God's way and blaming Him for the lack of results which we crave for our own glory and enjoyment.

Let us be the ones who usher in the King. Let us be among those who are the first to submit to Him as our true Head and allow Him to manifest Himself among us. How we need to fulfill His will so that He can be all in all. Jesus is the Head. He is the one who can direct and fill His body if only we will give Him the opportunity. Our church experience which, if we are honest with ourselves, has until now been weak and at best only partially effective, can be changed to be a powerful manifestation of the presence of God. All we must do is submit ourselves to Him. We have only to empty ourselves of what we have been substituting for His headship and allow Him to lead us in all things. In this way, God Himself will be with us. His presence will permeate our gatherings and our daily lives. His glory will fill His temple. It is clear that God does not dwell in a temple made with human hands (Acts 7:48). If what we have been doing is a product of our own labor, God will never bless it. On the other hand, when we humbly co-operate with Him in building His church, He will fill it with Himself. His power, glory and majesty can be our daily experience.