

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 271

CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

*And he is the head of the
body, the church.*

Colossians 1:18

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

271

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CHRIST'S HEADSHIP: WHAT IT IS

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

He is the head of the body, the church.—Colossians 1:18

AS if to show us that this title of “Head of the church” is to be held in highest esteem, it is here placed in connection with the loftiest honors of our Lord Jesus. In the same breath, the Son of God is styled “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15a), “the first-born of every creature” (Col 1:15b), the Creator of all existence (Col 1:16-17), and then “the head of the body, the church.” We dare not, therefore, think slightly of this title, nor do we hesitate to assert that any levity¹ regarding it would be as disgraceful as the profane use of any other name of our divine Lord. For any mortal to assume it to himself, we conceive would be equal in blasphemy to the assumption of the mediatorial office; and we should be no more shocked to hear a man claim to be “the creator of all things,” than we are now when a mortal is designated, “head of the church”...

We understand this headship to be the *representation* of the church as a body. We speak of counting heads, meaning thereby *persons*: the head represents the whole body. God has been pleased to deal with mankind as a community, and His great covenant transactions have been with men in a body and not with separate individuals. That is to say, at the first creation, God did not so much deal with each person of the human race, as with the whole race represented in one man, namely, the first Adam (Rom 5:12-21). It was so ordained that the race should be bound up in his loins—to stand if he stood, to fall if he fell. Hence, my brethren, the Fall, hence original sin, hence the sorrows of this life.

In order to salvation, which, perhaps, was only possible because we did not fall singly (for the devils, falling singly and separately, are reserved without hope of mercy unto everlasting fire), God instituted a second federation² of which Jesus Christ is the Head. The apostle calls Him the second Adam. He is the Head of that company of mankind who are His chosen, His redeemed, who are known in this world by being led to believe in Him and are ultimately gathered into His rest.

¹ **levity** – tendency to make light of serious matters.

² **second federation** – New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:8, 13; 12:24).

Now, Jesus Christ stands to His church in the same position as Adam stood to his posterity. They are chosen in Him, accepted in Him, and preserved in Him: “Saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation” (Isa 45:17). As His own words declare it, “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Joh 14:19). In the following chapters of the epistle before us, the apostle shows that the saints are buried with Jesus, risen with Him, and quickened with Him. Even more explicit is he in the fifth [chapter] of Romans, where the headship of Adam and of Jesus are compared and contrasted.

Our Lord is Head in a *mystical* sense, explained in Colossians 2:19: “...the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.” The head is to the body indispensable to life: it is the seat of mental life, the temple of the soul; even so Jesus Christ is the vitalizing³ Head of all His people. He “is our life” (Col 3:4). “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (Joh 1:4). The life of every member of the mystical body depends upon the life of the mystical Head. Through Jesus Christ every living child of God derives his spiritual life. Not one true member of the church lives by a life of his own. “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Separation from Christ is spiritual death: “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered” (Joh 15:6). The head mystically is not merely the source of life and the seat of sensation, but it is the throne of supreme government. It is from the brain that the mandate is issued that uplifts the hand or bids it fall by the side. Man walks, speaks, sleeps, or rises from his couch according to the dictate of that mysterious royal something that finds a place for itself within the head.

Thus, in the true church of God, Jesus Christ is the great directing Head. From Him the only binding commands go forth. To Him all the truly spiritual yield a cheerful homage. His members delight to do the will of their Head. The whole fabric of the church actuated⁴ by His life, being filled with His Spirit, most readily concedes to Him that in all things He shall have the preeminence.⁵ In proportion as Christians are truly united to Jesus are they perfectly governed by Him, and it is only because of the old nature that abideth in separation from Christ that believers offend and transgress. As far as they are spiritual men, so far doth Jesus rule them as the head governeth all the members of the body.

³ **vitalizing** – life-giving.

⁴ **actuated** – enlivened; moved to action.

⁵ **preeminence** – first place; highest rank.

The head is also the glory of the body. There the chief beauty of manhood dwells. The divine image is best seen in the countenance;⁶ the face is the distinguishing glory of man. Man holds his head erect; his countenance is not turned towards the earth like the beast. It glows with intelligence; it is the index of an immortal mind. Beauty chooses as her favored seat the features of the countenance. Majesty and tenderness, wisdom and love, courage and compassion here hang out their ensigns.⁷ All the graces choose the head as their favored dwelling-place. In this sense, right well is our Lord saluted as the "Head." He is "fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into [His] lips" (Psa 45:2).

In Jesus Christ, all the beauty of the church is summed up. What [would] all His church [be] without Him? A carcass, a ghastly corpse, bereft⁸ of all its glory because divided from its head. What were all the good, great, and excellent men who have ever lived without Christ? So many ciphers⁹ upon a writing table—they count for nothing until their Lord, as the great unit, is put before them to give them power and value. Then indeed they swell to a mighty sum, but without Him they are less than nothing and vanity. An uncomely thing would be the church of God if she were not comely with the comeliness that Jesus imparts to her. His head is as the finest gold, His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars; He is the chief among ten thousand, and the "altogether lovely" (Song 5:10, 16)—glorious is that body of which He is the crown and excellence. Well may the church be called the "fairest among women" (Song 1:8) when her Head thus excelleth all the beauties of earth and heaven.

Another figure that is used to describe the headship of Christ to the church is the *conjugal*.¹⁰ As the Lord made Eve out of the flesh of Adam, so hath He taken the church out of the side of Christ Jesus, and she is of Him as Eve was of Adam—she is of His flesh and of His bones. A mysterious union has been established between Christ and His church, which is constantly compared to that of marriage: "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" (Eph 5:23). Jesus is the bridegroom; His church is His bride. They are espoused one to another. In bonds of love, they are bound forever to each other; and they are alike with sacred expectation waiting for the marriage day, when shall be accomplished

⁶ **countenance** – person's face or facial expression.

⁷ **ensigns** – banners; thus, marks of distinction, rank, or office.

⁸ **bereft** – deprived.

⁹ **ciphers** – numbers.

¹⁰ **conjugal** – related to marriage.

the eternal purpose of God and the desire of the Redeemer. As the husband exercises a headship in the house, not at all (when the relationship is rightly carried out) tyrannical or magisterial,¹¹ but a government founded upon the rule of nature and endorsed by the consent of love, even so Jesus Christ ruleth in His church, not as a despotic lord,¹² compelling and constraining His subject bride against her will, but as a husband well-beloved, obtaining obedience voluntarily from the heart of the beloved one, being in all things so admired and had in esteem as to win an undisputed preeminence. Such conjugal headship is illustrated by the Word of God in the old prophecy: “Thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali” (Hos 2:16). *Baali* and *Ishi* both mean “lord,” but the sense differs. The one is a mere ruler, the other a beloved husband. Jesus Christ’s kingdom is no tyranny. His scepter is not made of iron. He rules not with blows, curses, and threats, but His scepter is silver, and His rule is love. The only chains He uses are the chains of His constraining grace. His dominion is spiritual and extends over willing hearts who delight to bow before Him and to give Him the honor due to His name. These, I think, are the senses in which this word *headship* is used; but there remains one other, these former all qualifying this last, upon which I intend to dwell at some length this morning.

Christ is the Head of His church as *King* in Zion. In the midst of the church of God, the supreme government is vested¹³ in the person of Christ. “One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Mat 23:8). The church is the kingdom of God among men. It is purely spiritual, comprehending only spiritual men, and existing only for spiritual objects. And Who is its King? None but Jesus. We can truly say, as they did of old, who proclaimed the kingship of the Crucified, “We have another King, one Jesus” (see Act 17:7). To Him the assemblies of the saints pay all regal¹⁴ honor, and at His throne the entire church boweth itself, saluting Him as Master and Lord. To no other do we render spiritual obeisance.¹⁵ Christ only and solely is King upon Zion’s hill, set there by eternal decree, maintained in that position by infinite power, and appointed to remain upon the throne until every enemy shall be made His footstool. I wish I had eloquence this morning that I might bear worthy witness to the crown-rights of King Jesus in His

¹¹ **magisterial** – dictatorial.

¹² **a despotic lord** – an absolute ruler.

¹³ **vested** – established in full legal possession.

¹⁴ **regal** – royal.

¹⁵ **obeisance** – obedience; submission.

church, for I know no subject which it is more necessary to insist upon in these eventful times. Let Jesus be owned as the only Head of the church, and the way out of the present political debate that agitates our nation is clear enough. Ignorance of this truth blinds many and makes them labor with all their heart for a bad cause, under the notion that they are doing God service. To know this truth is to hold a most weighty trust with which we must not trifle.¹⁶ Martyrs have bled for this truth...Let us not be slow with unshaken courage to declare yet again that kings and princes and parliaments have no lawful jurisdiction¹⁷ over the church of Jesus Christ, that it beseems¹⁸ not the best of monarchs to claim those royal prerogatives that God has given to His only begotten Son. Jesus alone is the Head of His spiritual kingdom, the church; and all others who come within her pale to exercise power are but usurpers¹⁹ and Antichrist, and not for one moment to be respected in their usurped authority by the true church of the living God. Some churches have not learned this lesson but are held in leash like dogs by their masters. They crouch down at the feet of the state to eat the crumbs which fall from Mammon's table;²⁰ and if they are cuffed and beaten by the powers that be, well do they deserve it; and I would almost pray that the whip may fall upon them yet more heavily until they learn to appreciate liberty and are willing to take off the dog collar of the state, and be free from human domination. If they lose a little wealth, they will win the solid gold of God's own favor and the abiding power of His Spirit, which they cannot expect to have while they are traitors to King Jesus and own not the sole and only headship of Immanuel in the church.

From a sermon delivered on Lord's day morning, November 1, 1868,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



Christ is the Head of the church. He is the source of all her life, her energy,
and her growth; apart from Him there is no church and
could not be.—*David Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

¹⁶ **trifle** – treat as trivial or insignificant.

¹⁷ **jurisdiction** – power or authority.

¹⁸ **beseems** – fits.

¹⁹ **usurpers** – persons who unlawfully seize another's position or authority.

²⁰ **Mammon's table** – in early use, the name of the demon of covetousness; money's table (from Greek; *see* Mat 6:24); wealth viewed as an idol, therefore, the idol of wealth's table.

CHRIST THE COVENANT HEAD

John Gill (1697-1771)

THERE are various characters, relations, and offices which Christ sustains in the covenant of grace,¹ among which that of a federal Head² is one. Christ is often said to be the “Head of the Church,” not of any particular congregation of saints in this or the other part of the world, but of the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven, even of all the elect of God that ever have been, are, or will be in the world (Eph 1:22, 23; 5:23; Col 1:18). And He is a Head to them in different senses: He is to them as a natural head is to a natural body and the members of it; which is of the same nature with it, superior to it, communicates life, sense, and motion to it, as well as overlooking and protecting it. Such a Head of influence is Christ to the church, the source of life to it, from Whom nourishment is derived and all the supplies of grace (Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19). He is a head in a *political* sense, as a captain general is head of his army or a king is head of his subjects (Jdg 10:18, 11:11; Hos 1:11), and in an *economical* sense, as the husband is the head of the wife, a father the head of his children, and a master the head of his servants and of his whole family (Num 1:4; Eph 5:23, 24; Isa 9:6; Mat 23:10). The headship of Christ in these several senses chiefly belongs to His Kingly office; but besides these, He is the representative Head of His church or of all the elect of God. They were all considered *in* Him and represented *by* Him when He covenanted with His Father for them. All that He engaged to do and [to] suffer was not only on their account but in their name and stead;³ all that He received—promises and blessings—were not only for them, but He received them as representing them. As Christ was given to be the covenant of the people, so to be a Head of them in it (Eph 1:22). And thus,

1. Christ was considered in election. He was chosen as Head and His people as members in Him; and so, they had union⁴ to Him and a

¹ **Covenant of Grace** – covenant among the Persons of the Godhead, consisting of God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

² **Federal Head** – representative Lord and King.

³ **stead** – place or position.

⁴ See FGB 214, *Union with Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

representative being in Him before the world began. They did not then personally exist; but Christ, Who represented them, did. Therefore, [they] were capable of being chosen in Him, as they were (Eph 1:4).

2. Christ stood in such a relation to them in the covenant that was made, not with Him alone but with all the elect of God, considered in Him as their Head and Representative. Hence, we read of “the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ” (Gal 3:17); which God made sure and firm with His covenant people in Christ as their Head before the foundation of the world, when as yet they had not an actual being, [but] only a representative one in Christ. Hence, the covenant was made sure to them in Him before the manifestation and application of it to Abraham and his spiritual seed, spoken of in the preceding verse; so that “the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after” that revelation and manifestation of the covenant to Abraham, “cannot disannul,⁵ that it should make the promise of none effect”; for what commences in time can never make void what was confirmed in eternity.

3. The promises of grace and glory, made to the elect of God in covenant, were made to them as considered in Christ their Head and Representative. For whereas these promises were made before the world began (Ti 1:2), they could not be made to them in their own persons, but as represented by Christ. Therefore, [they] were made to Him their Head and to them in Him. Hence, the promise of life is said to be “in” Him (2Ti 1:1); and indeed, all the promises are Yea and Amen “in him” (2Co 1:20). The apostle having said that “to Abraham and his seed were the promises made,” observes, “he saith not” and “to seeds, as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16); Who is the Head and Representative of all His spiritual offspring, and in Whom they are all collected and considered; all the promises made, manifested, and applied to Abraham and his spiritual seed were originally made to Christ, the everlasting Father of His spiritual offspring, the common Head and Parent of them (Gal 3:16).

4. All the blessings of grace and grants of them in the covenant of grace, given and made to the elect in it, were given and made to Christ—first in their name and as representing them, and to them in Him as considered in Him, their Head and Representative. For when these grants were made and blessings bestowed, they were not in actual being; [they] only had a representative one in Christ their Head. Hence, grace is said to be given them “in Christ Jesus” before the world began; and they [were] to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in

⁵ **disannul** – cancel; declare to be invalid.

heavenly places “in Christ,” as they were chosen in Him before the formation of the world (2Ti 1:9; Eph 1:3-4).

5. Christ, in the everlasting covenant, engaged in the name of His people, to obey and suffer in their stead. Accordingly, He did both in time as their Head and Representative. He obeyed the law and fulfilled all righteousness, not as a single individual of human nature and for Himself, but as the Federal Head of His people, as representing them. “That so the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us,” says the apostle (Rom 8:4); that is, in the elect of God, they being considered in Christ their Head, when He became the fulfilling End of the law for righteousness unto them. And so they were made or accounted the righteousness of God “in him” their Head (Rom 10:4; 2Co 5:21), in like manner as He engaged in their name to suffer for them; so in time, He suffered in their room and stead,⁶ as their Head and Representative; insomuch that they may be truly said to suffer with Him; they were all gathered together, recollected in one Head, “in Christ,” and sustained and represented by Him when He hung upon the cross, and are said to be “crucified with” Him (Eph 1:10; Col 2:12).

6. In consequence of Christ’s covenant engagements and performances, when He rose from the dead, He rose not as a private Person but as a public Person, as the Head and Representative of all those for whom He obeyed and suffered. Therefore, they are said to be quickened and raised together with Him, as they were then also justified in Him, when He Himself, as their Head and Surety was (Eph 2:5, 6; Col 3:1; 1Ti 3:16). Yes, Christ is also gone to heaven, not only as the Fore-runner of His people, but as their Head and Representative. He has taken possession of heaven in their name, appears in the presence of God for them, and represents them as the high priest did the children of Israel in the holy of holies. Hence, they are said to be made to sit together in heavenly places “in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

7. The federal headship of Christ may be argued and concluded from Adam being a federal head and representative of all His natural offspring. In [that,] He was “the figure of him that was to come” (Rom 5:14), that is, Christ. For it was in that chiefly, if not solely, that he was a figure of Christ; at least, that is the chief, if not the only thing the apostle has in view (Rom 5:14), as appears by his running the parallel between them, as heads and representatives of their respective offspring: Adam, through his fall, conveying sin and death to all his

⁶ **room and stead** – *room* and *stead* mean “place”; so, Christ took the place of His people as their Substitute: He suffered in His broken body and shed blood on their behalf.

natural descendants; and Christ, through the free gift of Himself, communicating grace, righteousness, and life to all His spiritual seed, the elect, the children His Father gave Him. Hence, these two are spoken of as the first and last Adam, and the first and second man, as if they were the only two men in the world, being the representatives of each of their seeds, which are included in them (1Co 15:45, 47).

Now, as Christ stands in the relation of Head to the elect, He has all things delivered into His hands—in honor to Him and in love both to Him and them and for their good. God has given Him to be “Head over all things” to the church (Mat 11:27; Joh 3:35; Eph 1:22). All persons and things are under His command and at His disposal to subserve⁷ His interest as Head of the church; even angels and men, good and bad, and all things in heaven and in earth; all power therein to protect and defend His people, and to provide for them; all fulness of grace, and the blessings of it to supply them. The government of the church and of the world is on His shoulders, Who represents them; and therefore, their persons, grace, and glory must be safe in Him. The covenant and all its blessings and promises are sure in Him, the Head and Representative of His people in it.

From *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, in the public domain.

John Gill (1697-1771): Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar; born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England, UK.



To His chosen He is as the most fine gold, a guide, a governor, a glorious Lord, God, the true God, God over all blessed forever. He is the Head of the church, the health the hope, the husband, the heritage, the habitation of His people. He is the horn of their salvation. He rides upon the heavens by His name *Jah*. He is the Jehovah, the inheritance, Judge and King of His saints. He is their light, their life, their Lord, their leader, their lawgiver, their atoning lamb, the lily of the valley, the lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the man Christ Jesus, the master, the mediator, the messenger of the covenant, the minister of the true sanctuary, which the Lord pitched and not man. He is the mighty God of Isaiah, the Michael of Daniel, the Melchisedek of David and of Paul, the bright and morning star of John, and the Messiah of all the prophets.—*William S. Plumer*

Christ, and Christ alone, is the Head of the church. There is only one King in the church, it is King Jesus, as the Scotsman Andrew Melville said in the 16th century. The Pope is not the head, neither is any earthly prince or monarch. No man or woman can ever be the head of the church. Christ in the church is the Head of the church, and wherever two or three are gathered together in His name He is there in the midst.—*D. M. Lloyd-Jones*

⁷ **subserve** – serve as a means to further a purpose.

AS THE HEAD GOVERNS THE BODY¹

Jean Dail  ² (1594-1670)

*And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have
the preeminence.—Colossians 1:18*

IT is not without just cause, beloved brethren, that, speaking of the union of Jesus Christ and His church, which was represented at the beginning of the world by the marriage of Adam and Eve, the apostle Paul affirms it to be a great secret (Eph 5:32). For truly there is nothing in this mystery—whatever view you take of it—but what is most grand and worthy of the admiration of men and angels.

First, if you regard the thing itself, is it not wonderful, astonishing, and unheard of in the world that the Creator should unite Himself with the creature—the Lord of glory with worms, the King of heaven with dust and ashes, the Saint of saints with sinners?

Then again consider the *foundation* of this union: what can be conceived of more ecstatic than the birth and the death of the Son of God on which this divine alliance was contracted? This mystical Spouse having had so vehement³ a passion for the church that, to make her His own, He made Himself a man like us and poured out His blood upon a cross!

Contemplate the *nature* of this union: it is so strict⁴ and intimate that it perfectly commingles⁵ the parties whom it unites and makes them only one body, one flesh, and one spirit; combining their persons and their affairs, and in such manner identifying their interests, that Jesus Christ is wholly His church's, and the church wholly her Christ's.

The *firmness* of this union is no less admirable, being such that all the powers of earth, of hell, or of heaven are not able to dissolve it; and while nature has bound nothing in the whole universe that time does not in the end separate, innumerable ages will never dissolve, as they roll on, the sacred ties of this eternal union of the church with her Lord, either in this world or that which is to come.

¹ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** This article has been edited more than usual for clarity.

² Pronounced "Dah-YAY"

³ **vehement** – extremely powerful or deep; passionate.

⁴ **strict** – close.

⁵ **commingles** – joins together.

Finally, behold its *effects*. What can be mentioned more glorious and beneficial than the fruits that it produces? It fills our understanding with light; it purifies our affections; it sanctifies our hearts; it keeps the peace of God in them; it changes slaves of devils into children of the Most High; it transforms earth into heaven; and instead of the death and curse that we deserved, it gives us eternity and glory. From this only flow all those divine graces that we enjoy in this world, and all the advantages and felicities⁶ we hope for in the other. No wonder, therefore, that Scripture employs so many different similitudes⁷ to figure out⁸ to us so excellent and so rich a subject; [not one is] by itself sufficiently perfect to represent [to] us all the wonders of it. For this cause, it borrows all the unions that nature, art, or human society affords us to express this *one* union: comparing it sometimes to the union of a vine with its branches or of an olive with the scions⁹ that are grafted on its stock; sometimes to that of a foundation with the building that it sustains, or of a cornerstone with the two walls that it binds together; at other times to the conjunction of a prince with his subjects, of an elder brother with the younger, or of a husband with his wife.

But, my brethren, among all these sacred pictures of our union with the Lord, none are more expressive or more simple and beautiful than the two similitudes which the Lord now sets before you: the one in those words of His apostle that we have read to you, and the other on that sacred table whither you are invited to the feast of His Lamb.¹⁰ The first is drawn from the natural union of the head with its members; and the second, from the union of bread and drink with the bodies that they nourish. According to the one, Christ is our Head, and we are His body. According to the other, He is called our bread, our meat, and our drink, and we the creatures whom He feeds and quickens.

And though in other respects these two images are very dissimilar, yet in this they agree: they excellently represent to us both our union with the Lord and the life that is thence derived to us; for it is evident that the head and food give life, though in different manners, to the bodies with which they are united...

These are the three points that we purpose, the grace of God assisting, to treat in this discourse...

As for the first of these three points, it is not only here that the

⁶ **felicities** – blessings; happiness.

⁷ **similitudes** – comparisons drawn between two things; resemblances.

⁸ **figure out** – portray; represent.

⁹ **scions** – shoots or twigs, especially for grafting.

¹⁰ This sermon was preached as the congregation was preparing to take the Lord's Supper.

apostle calls Jesus Christ the “head of the church.” He uses the same language in divers other places of his epistles: in that addressed to the Ephesians, he says that the Father hath set His Son above all things, “to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:22-23); again, “...the head, even Christ: 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” (Eph 4:15-16). And a few verses after our text, we find him repeating that the church is the body of Christ (Eph 5:22-33); and in the First Epistle to the Corinthians speaking to believers, “Now ye are,” says he, “the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1Co 12:27). Indeed, it is a figure very common in all languages, to call [one] who guides and governs a society the head, or who, at least, possesses the first place in it. As you see that everyone calls a king the head of his estate, and a general the head of the army that he commands, and those the heads of their regiments or companies who conduct them. Hence is derived our common word *captain*, which signifies nothing else but the head. The master of a household is in like manner termed the head of it, and so in all other societies of whatever nature...The word is very justly used to express, by way of similitude, whatever holds the first place in any society. Consequently, [it] has, in this respect, a manifest resemblance to the head, properly so called. It is not therefore strange that this holy apostle makes use of this figure to express the superiority, the dignity, and imperial power that Jesus Christ has over the church, saying that He is its Head. And certainly, if there is a superior in the whole universe, who may and ought to be called head of the society that is under him, Jesus Christ merits it infinitely beyond any other; for in no other do there conspire the same abundant reasons and respects that are necessary to confirm this appellation¹¹ as in Him. For all the qualities, actions, and functions proper to the head of the body of man, which give it its name and dignity, Jesus Christ possesses and exercises much more nobly and magnificently than any general does in reference to his army or any monarch in reference to his state.

The first and most well-known service which the [human] head performs for the members is to direct and guide them in their operations and [to] govern their motion and their rest by the light of its eyes and the perceptions of its other senses. Now, princes and captains have

¹¹ appellation – title.

some shadow of this perfection, in that they observe and reconnoiter¹² those things that concern the communities they govern, watching, viewing, and scenting¹³ afar off whatever respects their interests. Their people, in mean time, quietly laboring each of them in his own employment. But Jesus Christ doth these offices to His church much better and more perfectly. For all the light of this mystical body resides in Him. He considers not only its interests in general but knows all that concerns the least of His members. “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa 121:4). His eyes and senses are always open. He sees all the parts of this His state and discerns the posture and disposition of all, whether its friends or foes, whether nearer hand or further off. He carefully preserves it by His providence; and [He] so prudently governs it that there is no danger from which He does not deliver it, nor any difficulty but He [overcomes] it. It is He Who conducts His people’s wars, overrules their battles, dispenses their truces, and will one day give them an entire and eternal peace.

The second duty that the head performs to its body is that of infusing¹⁴ impulse and sensation into all its members. [It does this] by means of the [vital forces within the body],¹⁵ which, issuing [from the head], spread themselves through the whole body, flowing in the nerves as in so many channels that nature has cut out and laid forth for the maintenance of this communication...But it is far inferior to what we find in the conduct of the Lord Jesus towards His church. For He enlivens all its members, from the greatest even to the least; and gives them not power and authority only as princes give their subjects, but the very strength and ability to act. [He gives] to each of His faithful ones such a measure of His Spirit as is necessary for sensation and motion, and all the other functions of heavenly life. Paul teaches us [this] in the epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 4, and more at large in the first [epistle] to the Corinthians, chapter 12.

Moreover, the head hath this advantage above the rest of the body: it is more exquisitely constituted and attempered¹⁶ than the other members, according to the rule that nature prudently observes in general, that is, to frame those things best that are designed for the most eminent purposes. Kings and captains also deserve the name of heads in this respect, their dignity being very elevated above their subjects. But

¹² **reconnoiter** – make military surveillance to gather intelligence about enemy territories.

¹³ **scenting** – hunting down by scent; pursuing as in a hunt.

¹⁴ **infusing impulse and sensation** – stimulation to action and perception by the senses.

¹⁵ Author’s original word was *animal spirits*.

¹⁶ **exquisitely constituted and attempered** – carefully and precisely made and well-balanced.

their advantage in this particular is nothing in comparison of that which Jesus Christ has above His church: not only by His being incomparably holier, wiser, and more powerful than any of all the faithful, but especially in that He is “God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5).

Finally, as you see, the head is placed highest in the body of man. This situation [is] necessary for its commodious¹⁷ exercise of the functions of its government, a thing that kings and princes imitate, dwelling ordinarily in palaces, sitting on thrones, raised above the houses and seats of their subjects. Jesus Christ has this advantage but in a far greater degree. For He sits on high in the heavens, on the throne of God, above the whole church, both militant and triumphant. And if He conversed of old on the earth,¹⁸ that was only for a while and by dispensation¹⁹ for the good of His body [the church], which obliged Him to do it. Even the head sometimes bows itself down when the necessity of any of its members requires it. But the proper and natural place of Jesus Christ is that lofty sanctuary of immortality, where He now appears in highest glory; [from there, He is] governing by His Spirit all the parts of this mystical body, the church, both those that are in heaven and those that are yet on earth.

Thus, my brethren, you see wherein this dignity of our Lord Jesus consists, and with how much reason Paul expresses it here and elsewhere by saying that “he is the head of the church.” Whence evidently follows what the apostle expressly says that the church is the body of Christ. For if Jesus Christ is called the Head thereof, for having and exercising towards it all the functions and prerogatives of a natural head towards its members, then certainly the church must also be called His body; [for] this whole divine society depends on Jesus Christ and receives of Him all the light, all the aptitude,²⁰ all the sense and motion that it possesses.

From *An Exposition of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Colossians*, ed. James Sherman, trans. F. S. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.), 118-133, in the public domain.

Jean Daillé (1594-1670): French Huguenot minister and commentator; born in Châtellerault, in the Nouvell-Aquitain region, France.



¹⁷ **commodious** – profitable; convenient.

¹⁸ **conversed of old on the earth** – lived a long time ago on planet Earth.

¹⁹ **dispensation** – ordering of events by divine Providence.

²⁰ **aptitude** – fitness of something for a particular purpose.

THE HEAD OF THE BODY

Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley

THE apostle Paul also develops [a] word picture of the church as the “body” of Christ.¹ Paul says, “As we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office [*praxis*, practice, function]: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5). The idea of a “member” here is not membership in an organization but being a part of a living body, such as a hand or an eye (*cf.* Mat 5:29-30). This metaphor communicates both unity of life and diversity of service (*cf.* Rom 12:6-8).

When used of the church, the word *body* is always singular, never plural. Paul several times emphasizes the unity of the church with the phrase “one body.”² The oneness of the body derives from the union of every believer with Christ by the Spirit: “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?... He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:15, 17). Paul explains, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (12:12-13).

We would expect Paul to say, “so also is the church”; that he says, “so also is Christ” reminds us that the church is one body because it is one with Jesus Christ. Augustine said, “Let us rejoice, then, and give thanks that we are made not only Christians, but Christ. Do ye understand, brethren, and apprehend the grace of God upon us? Marvel, be glad, we are made Christ. For if He is the head, we are the members: the whole man is He and we... Head and members, what is that? Christ and the Church.”³ Of course, we do not *literally* become Christ, but so close is the mystical union between Christ and His body that Paul can speak in this way.

The body of Christ is one in “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3). The Holy Spirit empowers every member of Christ’s body to serve one

¹ A possible reference to the church as the “body” outside of the writings explicitly attributed to Paul is Hebrews 13:3, but the statement “as being yourselves also in the body” is subject to varying interpretations. There is no indication that the Old Testament saints ever viewed Israel as the “body” of the Lord or the Messiah.

² Rom 12:4-5; 1Co 10:17; 12:12-13, 20; Eph 2:16; 4:4; Col 3:15.

³ Augustine, *Tractates on John*, 21.8, in *NPNF*, 7:140.

another effectively, though with different gifts (1Co 12:4-7). God has caused each member to depend on the others and every member to have a significant function in the body (vv. 14-25). The members share one life, so that if “one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (v. 26). “There is one body, and one Spirit” (Eph 4:4). Understanding this new relationship should control how members of Christ’s body treat one another. Paul says that believers must not lie to one another but speak the truth, “for we are members one of another” (v. 25). God has made them one and created peace among them in Christ (2:14-16). They must let that peace rule them, for to that peace they are “called in one body” (Col 3:15).

Christ is “the head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18). On occasion, Paul uses “head” or parts of the head—such as the “eye” and “ear”—to refer to one member in the church (1Co 12:16, 21). However, he often uses “head” as a special title for Christ, sometimes independent of the metaphor of the body. “Head” (*kephalē*), when used of one person in relation to others, is a title of authority.⁴ Christ is “the head over all things” by virtue of His exaltation to God’s right hand (Eph 1:20-22; cf. Col 2:10). He is specifically “head” over His “body” in its submission to His authority (Eph 5:23-24). Paul also says that Christ is the “head” that influences His body for its health and growth (4:15-16; Col 2:19). This is because Christ exercises His power over His body for its good, as its Savior (Eph 5:23), showing it the tender concern that a man naturally shows his own flesh and husbands should give to their wives (vv. 28-30). Godefridus Udemans⁵ said, “We know that the Lord Jesus Christ will care for us and keep us soul and body because we are His bride; indeed, we are members of His body. Thus, He will not leave us.”⁶

The union of Christ and His body is not a hypostatic or incarnational union, but a spiritual union of distinct persons who share one Spirit. Wayne Grudem⁷ cautions that though the church is Christ’s “body,” we should not think that “the church is the ‘continuing incarnation’ of

⁴ Judges 10:18; 11:8–11; 2 Kingdoms (2 Samuel) 22:44 LXX (Septuagint, the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament). See also the Hebrew term translated as “head” (*rosh*) in Numbers 10:4; 13:3; 14:4 (“captain”); 25:15; 30:1. See O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 145–46; and Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 201–9.

⁵ **Godefridus Cornelisz Udemans** (1581/82-1649) – Dutch Reformed clergyman, a founder of the Further Reformation.

⁶ Udemans, *The Practice of Faith, Hope, and Love*, 99.

⁷ **Wayne Grudem** (b. 1948) – American New Testament scholar, professor of theology and biblical studies at Phoenix Seminary, Phoenix, Arizona, USA.

the Son of God on earth today.” He adds, “The church is not the Son of God in the flesh, for Christ rose in His human body, He ascended in His human body into heaven, and He now reigns as the incarnate Christ in heaven.”⁸ The incarnation is unique and is not continued or extended in the church.

Paul specifies that God makes the body one by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:13), the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Christ performed at Pentecost (Act 1:5) and now gives to every regenerate believer (Ti 3:5-6). This may explain why the Old Testament saints and the Lord Jesus did not speak of the church as His body—it involves a measure of blessing and an extent of gifts not granted to the church until Christ ascended into heaven. Though believers of all ages have been united to Christ through the Spirit—there is no other way to be saved—it is only with the accomplishment of Christ’s redeeming work and His baptizing of His people with the Spirit that they have become the body of Christ.⁹

Of course, in God’s election, everyone whom Christ redeemed is Christ’s “body” under Him as “head,” for Christ died for them as His church even before many of them were born (Eph 5:23, 25). However, the union of Christ and His body is also a “mystery,” for it remained hidden until God revealed it in the fullness of time (vv. 30-32). Paul says that God revealed to him “the mystery of Christ...which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel” (3:4-6). The body of Christ, then, is an aspect of the new creation formed by Christ out of Jews and Gentiles through His death and resurrection: “for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross” (2:15-16). The metaphor of “the body of Christ” most fittingly applies to the people of God united to Christ and one another in the last-days fullness of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1053.

⁹ “The doctrine of baptism with the Spirit displays the great spiritual advance that God granted to His people by the humiliation and exaltation of His Son. Formerly, the Spirit usually worked among godly Israelites in relatively hidden ways; now the Holy Spirit inundates the people of God. Once the Spirit empowered only a limited number of people, especially covenantal officers, to serve God’s kingdom; now the Spirit of Christ empowers every saint to build up the body. In previous times, the Spirit focused His activity upon the nation of Israel; now He powerfully evangelizes and unites individuals from all nations and social classes to form one body in Christ.” (*Reformed Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, 142).

William Ames¹⁰ (1576-1633) summarized the meaning of calling the church the “body” of Christ by saying it expresses “the closest union that she has with Christ...the dependence that she has from Christ...[and] the union and communion that the faithful have among themselves in Christ [by the bonds of] the Spirit, faith, and love.” This truth, Ames said, offers believers great consolation for the dignity and hope that they are given in Christ, and presses them to conduct themselves in a manner “worthy of those who have such close communion with Christ and His most holy servants.”¹¹

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“And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col 1:17-18). In this striking and beautiful passage, Jesus is declared to be before all created things. Could this be true if He Himself were a created being? Christ is either created, or He is uncreated. He is a creature or the Creator. If a mere creature, then it [is] absurdity to suppose Him creating all things; for He must have been created before He could create: then He could not have been before all created things. If, too, He were a mere creature, how could He uphold all things? For He would need an upholding power for Himself. No mere creature ever has, or ever can, sustain itself. The angels could not, for they fell. Adam could not, for he fell. And Christ could not have sustained Himself in the solemn hour of atonement, when standing beneath the mighty load of His people’s sins, had He not been more than creature—the uncreated Jehovah. His humanity did indeed tremble, shudder, and shrink back; but upborne by His Godhead, secretly, invisibly, yet effectually sustained by His Deity, He achieved a complete triumph, made an end of sin, and brought in a new and everlasting righteousness...All spiritual life is from Christ, and all spiritual life is sustained by Christ—

“Christ who is our life”—the life of the soul, the life of pardon, the life of justification; the life of sanctification, the life of all the Christian graces—the life of all that now is, and the life of all that is to come.

Glorious truth this, to the saint of God!—*Octavius Winslow*

¹⁰ **William Ames** (1576-1633) – English Puritan theologian and philosopher.

¹¹ *A Sketch of the Christian’s Catechism*, trans. Todd M. Rester, intro. Joel R. Beeke and Todd M. Rester, *Classic Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 109.

THE SOURCE OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

*And gave him to be the head over all things to the church,
Which is his body.—Ephesians 1:22*

THE...principle that is particularly emphasized by the apostle here is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. He says that God “hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:22-23). This is notoriously a difficult statement to expound,¹ and there are many different views regarding its exact interpretation. Let us start with considerations of which we can be quite certain. Paul says that the Lord Jesus Christ is “the head of the church,” “the head of the body.” He is not thinking primarily here of authority or government. Of course, it is true that Christ as Head of the church is the sole authority, and we must recognize no other. There is no head of the church save the Lord Jesus Christ; and it is of the essence of the Reformed position that we assert this truth. We recognize no human being as the Head of the church; Christ alone is the King and the Head of the church.

But that is not what the apostle is emphasizing at this point; he is concerned to say that Christ as the Head of the church is the source and the center of the life of the church. This is made quite clear by the analogy² of the body. In the body, the head is the source and the center of power. The body derives its vital energy from the head. Nothing provides greater proof of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures than the way in which the Apostle Paul and others were led to use this analogy. They did not possess the knowledge we now have of anatomy and physiology; but the analogy is quite perfect in such terms. There is not a part of the body that is not controlled by nerves and the nervous system. The life in every muscle and in every part is conveyed to it by nervous energy and power. And all the nerves ultimately can be traced back to the brain, which is in the head. It is the center and the source that controls all the nervous energy of the whole body and of every separate part and particle of the system. When the apostle says that Christ

¹ **expound** – explain; interpret.

² **analogy** – figure of speech involving a comparison between one thing and another.

is the Head of the church, he means that He is the Head of the church in that sense. We have no life apart from Him; all the energy and power come from Him. To state it negatively, we can say that we have no independent life as Christians. He is the Vine, and we are the branches; branches would never have existed without a vine. All comes from Him. The Apostle John says: "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (Joh 1:16). The life of the whole body and every individual part comes from the head, and that is what is particularly meant by saying that Christ is the Head of the church.

Another obvious deduction is that the same life is found in every single part and portion of the body, and that it is this that gives unity to the body. A man's body is a single unity because of this intimate connection, because of this interrelationship.³ No part of the body has an independent existence; all parts are bound together and are made sensitive to one another because of this principle of organic unity. At a time such as this, when there is so much talk about the unity of the church and of a world church, let us remember that unity conceived of in terms of a mere joining of external organizations is completely *unscriptural*. To amalgamate⁴ a number of denominations cannot produce spiritual unity. There have been many attempts to do so, but they have never actually succeeded and never will succeed. But whether they succeed or not in terms of organization, they cannot succeed spiritually. It is the Holy Spirit that makes and constitutes the unity; it is the common life and energy that make us one. It is this essential living quality in the nervous system and in the blood that flows through the whole human body that accounts for the unity of the body. Precisely the same principle obtains in the life of the Christian church. That a number of people should meet together in a conference and agree to say that for the sake of unity they will no longer emphasize the virgin birth, or the substitutionary theory of the atonement, or a belief in miracles, or various other doctrines, cannot produce the unity of which the apostle speaks. The only unity is a unity in the Spirit, a unity that is made by the Spirit, dictated by the Spirit, and sustained and maintained by the Spirit. And as He is the Spirit of truth and has revealed that truth as we have it in the New Testament, unity must result from accepting that truth and cannot be produced by any common denominator farmed by subtle ecclesiastics.⁵

³ **interrelationship** – way in which each of two or more things is related to the other or others.

⁴ **amalgamate** – combine or unite to form one organization.

⁵ **common denominator farmed by subtle ecclesiastics** – artificially manufactured unity cultivated or produced by manipulative church leaders or theologians.

Our third deduction is drawn from the statement, “the church which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” These words tell us that Christ fills the body with His own life. We are told in the Scriptures that in the Lord Jesus Christ dwells “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9), and here we are told that in the same way, and by the same analogy, the fulness of the Son is in the church which is His body.

Once more analogy of the human body is helpful. There is a sense in which every part of my body is full of my life and of me. My life and being are in every part of my body; indeed, the moment I cease to be, every individual member of my body will die. If you sever the main nerve or the blood supply to a finger, for instance, it will soon cease to be a part of my body. The whole of my life is in every single part. Such is the astounding statement made here about the Christian church and about ourselves as members of the Christian church. His “fulness” is in her, in us. The whole life of the vine is in the branch. It is all there, in a sense, while in another sense, of course, it is not all there. But in this organic, vital sense it is all there. So, as Christian people, we must realize that however much we may be conscious of our weakness, and of the strength of sin within us and without, and of the world and the flesh and the devil—we must realize that all attributes and power and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ are in us as members of His body. All His life is in us; we are made “partakers of the divine nature” (2Pe 1:4). He is the source of all power in us who are the members of His body. He gives us the energy that is necessary for us to play our individual parts.

The body is one, and yet it consists of a number of individual members of parts. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians: “Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (12:27). In the human body, as he points out, the hand has one function and the foot has another; the nose and eyes and the ears and various parts of the body all have their individual parts to play. There are “comely⁶ parts” and “less comely parts.” But they are all essential and they all work together to the one common end of the proper functioning of the whole body. But what we have chiefly to remember is that, as members of the mystical body of Christ, and having our individual parts to play, *the energy and the power we exercise all comes from Him*. He Himself made this quite clear when He said, “Apart from me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5). We may be very active and busy, but that is not of necessity doing His work. The Apostle Paul

⁶ comely – pleasing to the eye; beautiful.

warns preachers in particular in the third chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians that some people, in putting up a building, use “wood, hay and stubble” (v. 12). It may have all the appearance of a good building, but when it comes to be tested by fire, it will be entirely burned and destroyed. The work that is of value, the work that lasts, is the work that He, and He alone, enables us to do in His way and using the materials He provides. Without Him we can do nothing; but with Him all things are possible. So, we may say with Paul, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13).

All this is implicit in the idea that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church; and so as we contemplate life and all its difficulties, and as we are tempted by Satan to feel that all is impossible, and that we cannot go on because we are so weak and the difficulties so baffling, we must remind ourselves of this truth and say: I am a very small and unimportant member, but I am a member of the body of Christ; I am “in him,” and therefore, whatever may be true of me personally, the life of the Head is in me, I am related to that nerve center, I am in touch with Him, His vital energy is in me. The apostle prays that the Ephesians, and we with them, may come to understand this. He wants us to have “the eyes of our understanding enlightened” that we may know “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward that believe” (Eph 1:19). So, we must not think of Christ as some kind of great powerhouse to which we can occasionally be connected and sometimes not connected, as if by a switch. We are always “in him,” we are members and there is this vital, indissoluble connection between us. As our eyes are opened to this truth, we can take fresh courage and take up our task again and say, “In Christ I cannot fail, I must not fail, He will not allow me to fail.”

I almost hesitate to mention the next great principle that is taught here in the phrase, “The church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” We have just seen that one interpretation of “the fulness of him that filleth all in all” is that His fulness is in the church, His body. However, I agree with those who say that it also means that there is a sense in which we as the church are His fulness. But let us be clear as to what this means. The Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God is eternally self-sufficient and independent and has no need of us. But when we think of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Mediator, as the God-Man, as the One Who has come to achieve redemption and to present His people to His Father, then in that sense He is joined to the body and needs it. A head alone is not complete. A head needs a body, and you cannot think of a head without a body. So, the body and the

head are one in this mystical sense. As such, we Christian people are a part of “the fulness” of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the amazing New Testament conception of the church, and since the Lord Jesus Christ ascended and returned to heaven, this body of His, the church, is being perfected. Think of a newborn babe. In a sense the child is perfect; but it can grow and develop, and it will attain a certain maturity. The same is true of the Christian church. From the ascension to the second advent, the body of Christ has been growing and developing; and there is a day coming when she will be complete and perfect. Then the “fulness” of the Gentiles will have come in, and the fulness of Israel will also have been saved. Then the body will be complete and entire and will have attained its fulness. So, I must learn to think of myself—humble, unworthy, insignificant Christian as I am—as someone who is essential and vital to the “fulness” of the mystical body of Christ. What an idea! To the extent to which we grasp this idea, we shall receive strength not to sin. It will enable us to see sin in a new light. A member of this mystical body continuing in sin? Impossible! There is no way which leads so directly to holiness and sanctification as the understanding of this New Testament doctrine of the church as the body of Christ. We are a part of “his fulness,” of His mystical completeness as the Mediator, as the One given to the church by God to be its Head.

But let us proceed to certain conclusions. One of the most glorious is that in view of the fact that the church is the body of Christ, and that He is the Head, we are entitled to say that what is true of Him is true of us. The clearest exposition of this is found in the fifth and sixth chapters of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. As we were all “in Adam,” so all we who believe in Him are now “in Christ.” Adam sinned and we all sinned with him. We were all in Adam as it were, in the loins of Adam, and when he acted [he did so] for us all as our head and representative. We are responsible for Adam's sin—that is, original sin. But we must look at the other side. We are now “in Christ”; He is the Head of the body of which we are the parts. Whatever the Head does, the whole body does also. So, we have been “crucified with Christ.” When He was crucified, I was crucified; my old man, the man I was in Adam, was crucified. I, the man that was born in sin, have died with Christ. In that sense I am as dead as He was. I am “dead to sin,” I am “dead to the law.” I have finished with both. Crucified with Him, dead with Him, buried with Him! But, glorious fact, the thing the Apostle emphasizes is that I am also risen with Him. Even as the power of God raised Christ from the dead, He also raised me with Him. The apostle

argues in the Epistle to the Colossians: “If ye then be risen with Christ ...set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (3:1). In Romans 6:11, he states it thus: “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God.”

All this follows inevitably from the truth concerning the church as the body of Christ. In the second chapter of this Epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle actually tells us that we are already “seated in the heavenly places” with the Lord Jesus Christ—“Even when we were dead in sins he hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (vv. 5-6). We are there already because of our mystical union with Him. Because He is the Head, and we are the body, what is true of Him is true of us. Do you believe this truth? Are you living in the holy consciousness of it? Is this to you the most exhilarating thought you have ever met? It is true. This is not mere theory; it is fact. We are already “in Christ” in all these respects. We have finished with the law that condemns. We have finished with the death that finally leads to perdition,⁷ the “second death” so-called. We have no relationship to it because we are in Christ, risen with Him, and seated in the heavenly places with Him.

That brings us to a final thought. Many Christians are often perplexed and in difficulty regarding the exact relationship of the Lord’s working in us and our working. They are confused about the doctrine of “abiding in Christ,” and it has generally been represented as something entirely passive, and in terms of “let go and let God.” I suggest that this analogy, this metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, should save us from such confusion and enable us to see the relationship between His working and our working. Paul’s statement in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians states it clearly: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do” (v. 13). This cannot possibly mean that if we want to have victory in our life we must cease to work; the mistake we make is that we do too much and are too active. We must do nothing but look to the Lord; He will do it for us! Such is the theory! But Paul issues a specific command telling us that we must work and must do so “with fear and trembling.” He also adds, “For [because] it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.”

How can we reconcile the two statements? Let us return to the illustration of the human body. Think of a muscle, or a group of muscles in

⁷ **perdition** – eternal damnation; hell.

a man's arm. In every muscle there is life and power, supplied, as we have already seen, by the nerve that goes to it. It comes originally from a center in the brain from which the nerve which goes to that muscle derives its power and strength. The muscle is not isolated, it cannot do anything in and of itself; but it is alive because it is receiving energy and life from the brain through the nerve. In its normal state it is relaxed and flabby. In that state it can achieve little, if anything; it cannot enable you to lift weights, for instance. Before that muscle or group of muscles can be of value or help to us, they must be exercised and developed. If we fail to exercise and develop them and simply wait for some sudden great accession of power, we shall be sadly disappointed. To develop a muscle, we must exercise it. And the more we exercise the muscle, the greater will be the energy and the power supplied to it. These two things work together at the same time. We must not say that it is all from the brain, or that it is all in the muscle; the muscle makes use of the power that it receives from the brain through the nerve. The brain acts through the developed muscle.

This illustrates a vital truth about our Christian life and warfare, about our development, about our growth in holiness and in sanctification. The two extreme schools of thought are patently quite wrong in their teachings and conclusions. Those who maintain that believers do everything in the Christian life are wrong; and those who say that believers have nothing to do but just "look to Christ" and "wait for Him to do it" are equally wrong. Because the church is the body of Christ, and every single part and portion is vitally connected to Him as the life of all, every Christian has this power in Him. But we must *exercise the power*; and as we exercise the power, we shall inevitably receive more power. If therefore you are conscious of failure and constant defeat, do not pray only that you may have strength and power; "resist the devil" (Jam 4:7), and "mortify your members which are on the earth" (Col 3:5). Do not expect the Lord Jesus Christ to take your lusts and passions out of you; do not expect Him to do all for you while you simply "abide" in Him. Exercise the power that is in you. As a Christian the life of Christ is in you; realize this and begin to use it and to exercise it. Make use of your spiritual muscles, mortify the members of your body that have been used as instruments of sin; do all you can with all your might; and as you are doing so, increased power and energy will flow into you.

What is true of the physiology of the body is equally true spiritually. The way to receive more power is to use and exercise the power you have. As a Christian you are not lifeless; you are connected to the Head.

The spiritual nervous power is there in Him. You say, “My muscles are flabby,” and I reply, “Exercise them.” Similarly, do not wait for a sudden blessing of sanctification; do all you can, and the blessing will come. You will be conscious of greater power, and the Lord will reveal Himself to you in the power and the wonder of His might.

Let us never forget that “the energy of the strength of God’s power” is in us because of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ Who is the Head of the body, of which we are parts. There is no excuse for sin, there is no excuse for failure; the energy is there, and I must use it, I must exercise my faculties, and I shall then find that there is infinitely more energy available. I shall go on “from strength to strength,” “from glory to glory,” until eventually I, with all other Christians, attain unto that perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. May God, by the Holy Spirit, so enlighten “the eyes of our understanding” that we may know that we are members of His body!

From *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 427-435.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



Oh, we ask, is it not a glorious and precious announcement to the church that her Savior not only lives, but that He fills the central throne in heaven, that all beings bend before His majesty, and that He has power over all flesh? Is it not a precious truth to you that Jesus, once “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” once spit upon, insulted, tempted, crucified is now exalted a Prince and a Savior, the triumphant Head of the church, and is preparing to appear again in His glorified kingdom? Yes! It is a precious truth that “God also hath highly exalted him,” and that in that exaltation and glory, you who believe shall share!—*Octavius Winslow*

There is only one way whereby God forgives us; it is because He sent His only begotten Son from heaven to earth and to the agony and the shame and the death on the cross: “In whom we have redemption through his blood.” There is no Christianity without “the blood of Christ.” It is central, it is absolutely essential. There is nothing without it. Not only the Person of Christ, but in particular, His death, His shed blood, His atoning substitutionary sacrifice! It is in that way, and that way alone, that we are redeemed. We are chosen in Him, called by Him, saved by His blood. He is the Head of the church...He is “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.” He is “the Head of the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”; and He is at the right hand of God with all authority and power in heaven and on earth. Jesus our Lord is supreme; He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

—*David Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

CHRIST'S BODY, THE CHURCH

Thomas Manton (1620-1677)

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.—Colossians 1:18

DOCTRINE: That to be Head of the church is the honor appropriate and peculiar¹ to Jesus Christ.

1. What 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 charity²—that after remission³ of sins obtained in this world, together with regenerating grace, they may at length be brought to eternal life. Let us open this description a little. By effectual calling, God worketh faith, which uniteth us to Christ, and that effectual calling is the fruit of election; and the effect of this union is remission of sins, and the necessary consequence of this communion is salvation or eternal life. This society of men is called a church in the text. The word *church* is taken in divers acceptations.⁴

First, and most properly, it signifies those whom I have now described: the universal collection of all and every one of those who, according to the good pleasure of God, are, or may be, called out of a state of sin into a state of grace to obtain eternal glory by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven (Heb 12:22)—that chosen generation, that royal priesthood, that holy nation, that peculiar people, whom to show forth His praises God hath called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1Pe 2:9). This church, most generally and properly taken, is the kingdom of God, the body and spouse of Christ: “My dove, my undefiled one, is but one” (Song 6:9). This is that one fold under one shepherd (Joh 10:16). And it was prophesied of Christ that He should die to gather in one the children of God that were scattered abroad (Joh 11:52).

Secondly, of this universal church there are two parts—one of

¹ **peculiar to** – exclusively belonging to.

² **charity** – love.

³ **remission** – forgiveness.

⁴ **acceptations** – generally recognized meanings.

travelers,⁵ the other of comprehensors,⁶ or the church militant and triumphant. They both belong to God's family: "Of whom the whole family, whether in heaven or earth, is named" (Eph 3:15; Col 1:10). That part of the family that is in heaven triumpheth with God there—that which is in earth is yet warring against sin, Satan, and the world.

Thirdly, this part, which is the military, comes in the second place to be called by the name of the *universal church*. Being scattered and dispersed throughout the whole world, it comprehendeth⁷ all and everyone that belongeth to Christ's flock, which are found in several folds. They are known to God and to themselves and do indeed belong to Christ's body and His kingdom. This is often and deservedly called the invisible church because, as far as it is the church of God, their reality and sincerity are rather believed by faith than seen by the eyes of the body. This church, this kingdom of God, though it be yet in this world, yet it is not of the world, neither doth it come with observation, for the faithful have this kingdom of God within them (Luk 17:20). The world knows them not, other believers know them not, but God knoweth those that are His (2Ti 2:19).

Fourthly, the universal visible church. While they are in the way and amid their conflicts, it is possible many hypocrites may take up the profession, as in the great house [there] are many vessels, some to honor, some to dishonor (2Ti 2:20). From these ariseth an external promiscuous⁸ multitude, who also are called the catholic church, for the sake and with respect to those holy ones among them who truly belong to Christ's mystical body. We often read that the kingdom is like a net wherein are good and bad fishes (Mat 13:47-48); to a threshing-floor wherein is chaff and wheat (Mat 3:11-12); to a field wherein groweth good corn and tares (Mat 13:24-25). Now, the universal church is taken all these ways.

Fifthly, there are particular churches wherein the ordinances and means of grace are dispensed, as the church of Corinth, Cenchrea, Galatia, Greek, Roman. None of these particular churches contain all believers or the elect of God, that out of them or any of them there should be no salvation. Again, the universal church may remain in the world total and entire, though these particular churches, one or other of them, may successively be destroyed, as it hath often fallen out. And it

⁵ **travelers** – Christians living on Earth in a state of spiritual pilgrimage and warfare against sin and temptation (the church *militant*).

⁶ **comprehensors** – Christians who have already reached heaven (the church *triumphant*).

⁷ **comprehendeth** – includes.

⁸ **promiscuous** – consisting of various kinds grouped together.

is a great sin so to cry up a particular church as to exclude all the rest from saving communion with Christ; and for any one particular church to arrogate⁹ power over the others, they being but members.

This church is called a body in two respects: (1) In regard of the union of all the parts; (2) Dependence upon one and the same Head.

(1) With respect to union: As in man, all the members make but one body, quickened by the same soul; so, in the mystical body of Christ, all the parts make up but one body, animated by the same vital principle, which is the Spirit of Christ. And [they] are joined together by certain bonds and ligaments—*faith and love*; and all is covered with the same skin—the *profession of the faith of Christ*. Look, what the soul is in man, the form in the subject, life in the body, and proportion in the building; that in the universal church of God is the union and communion of the several and single parts, with the Head among themselves. Take away the soul from man, the form from the subject, life from the body, proportion and conjunction from the parts of the building, and what will man be but a carcass, and the building but ruin and confusion? So, take away union and communion from the universal church...and for life there will be death, and for salvation eternal destruction. How else shall all that come out from one, return to one, and all and every one have all things in one that at length they may acquiesce¹⁰ in the enjoyment of one—that is God—as their chiefest good? Alas! Without this union with the Head and among themselves in necessary things, what can they expect but wrath, the curse, and everlasting destruction?

(2) With respect to dependence on one Head: “We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another” (Rom 12:5)—that is, all things make up one body, of which Christ is the head, and [all] are fellow-members in respect of one another. As necessary and as desirable as it is to be united to God, to life and glory everlasting, so necessary and desirable it is to depend upon Christ, the Head. For no man, after the entrance of sin, can return to God or enjoy God without Christ the mediator: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me” (Joh 14:6), “There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved, but only Jesus Christ” (see Act 4:12); “Other foundation can no man lay, but that which is laid, Jesus Christ” (1Co 3:11); “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1Jo5:12); God proclaimed from

⁹ **arrogate** – claim as one’s own without right to do so.

¹⁰ **acquiesce** – consent and submit.

heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17).

He being one God with the Father and the Spirit, of the same substance and essence, He only can procure merit and effect our union with God. He first assumed our nature and united it to His own person and so became one flesh with us. But then all those that belong to that nature, if they believe in Him and enter into His covenant are not only literally one flesh but mystically one body, and so also one Spirit (1Co 6:17)—that is, by the bond of the Spirit He hath brought them into the state and relation of a body to Himself. To gather up all: man’s return to God is necessary to his blessedness that he may be inseparably conjoined to Him as his chiefest good. To this purpose, the Son of God assumed our nature in the unity of His person and thereby bringeth about the union of the church with Himself as our Head, and our communion with one another in faith and charity, if we desire to be blessed. [That] is according to Christ’s prayer: “That they may be all one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (Joh 17:21). “I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (v. 23). So that as “there is one God, and one mediator between God and man” (1Ti 2:5), and one church united to Christ as His body, to this church every one of us must be united, if we mean to be saved and in the church with Christ and by Christ with God; therefore, [outside] of this mystical body, there is no salvation.

From *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, Vol. 1 (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1870), 454-463; in the public domain.

Thomas Manton (1620-1677): English Presbyterian Puritan preacher; born in Lawrence-Lydiat, Somerset, England, UK.



The church derives her power entirely and solely from God and in no sense from the state or from the law. If there is one thing about which we should be more jealous than anything else, it is that within the church we recognize no law, no leader, no ultimate king save the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the sole head of the church—no state, no man, no monarch, no one else, but the Lord Himself.—*David Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

How precious is Christ in all the offices and relations which He sustains to His people. Precious as the Head, the “covenant surety” Head, of His people, the source of life, the seat of power, the fountain of all blessing. Reader, hold fast the headship of Christ. Acknowledge no legislative head, no administrative head, no authoritative head, no reigning head of the church, but the Lord Jesus Christ.—*Octavius Winslow*

MONARCHY, ARISTOCRACY, DEMOCRACY

Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley

CHURCH authority is human authority, though it is divinely instituted. Human authority typically takes the form of *monarchy* (the rule of one over all), *aristocracy* (the rule of those regarded as best able to govern), *democracy* (the rule of the people), or often some combination. John Calvin said, “I will not deny that aristocracy, or a system compounded of aristocracy and democracy, far excels all others.”¹ When we examine the New Testament’s teachings about church government, we discover three basic principles that reflect aspects of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, though radically modified by the character and office of Jesus Christ as the Servant of the Lord.

In the church, there should be no selfish and tyrannical monarch but the perfect monarchy of Christ alone; no elitist aristocrats who pass their power and wealth on to their children but the humble aristocracy of ordained servants qualified by their Christlikeness and Spirit-giftedness; and no mob rule driven by the whims of public opinion but the democracy of the saints in submission to Christ and His servants.² Church government should be shaped by the following principles.

First, *Christ rules His church as a mediatorial monarchy.* The Lord Jesus Christ is the King of His church, the only Mediator of God’s saving reign in the lives of His people. Hence, the church is properly called a monarchy, but it is the monarchy of God the Son incarnate, not any mere man on earth. The church’s Great Commission to make disciples of all nations comes from the One Who said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18-19). The duty of the church

¹ **John Calvin** (1509-1564), *Institutes*, 4.20.8. On Calvin’s application of this assertion to church polity, see John T. McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin’s Thought,” *Church History* 18, no. 3 (September 1949): 168-69 (full article, 153-71).

² **Francis Turretin** (1623-1687) said, “It is not controverted whether any government should be established in the church.... Rather the question is what that is and what is its nature: monarchical or aristocratic. The question is not whether in the church any monarchy may have a place to which all men should submit from the necessity of salvation. For this no one denies to be proper to Christ, who was constituted by God the head and supreme King of His church, Who governs it monarchically.” Turretin then quoted Luke 22:25-26 and 1Peter 5:2-3, saying, “In both passages, domination in the church is prohibited and only ministry and service are left.” *Institutes*, 18.16.2-4 (3:146-47).

consists precisely in this: obeying all that He commanded and teaching others to do the same (v. 20). Though this King ascended into heaven, He is not absent from His people on earth, for He promised, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (v. 20). Therefore, no mere man is king in Christ’s church. The God-man alone is King.

James Bannerman said,

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church... The Church, as a society, owes its origin to Christ: it derives from Him its government and office-bearers; it receives from Him its laws and constitution; it draws from Him its spiritual influence and grace; it accepts at His hand its ordinances and institutions; it acts in His name and is guided in its proceedings by His authority.³

Some ministers of the seventeenth century stated, “Jesus Christ our Mediator has laid down in His Word a perfect and sufficient rule for the government of His visible church under the New Testament, which all the members of His church ought to observe and submit unto till the end of the world.”⁴ That is not to say that every detail of church administration is divinely revealed; rather, as the Westminster Confession of Faith (1.6) states, “There are some circumstances concerning the...government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word.”

The ascended Christ actively reigns in His church. He appoints the ministers of the Word and works through them to grow the church to maturity (Eph 4:10-16). Whenever a minister preaches the gospel, Christ is speaking through His ambassador (2Co 5:20). He is building His church and granting it the power to overcome the forces of death and evil (Mat 16:18). Christ gives the officers of the church “the keys of the kingdom” to admit or exclude people from its membership (v. 19; 18:18). He rebukes churches that disobey His Word and disciplines churches that do not repent of their disobedience (Rev 2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:3, 19).

Paul says that Christ is the “head” (*kephalē*) of the church. Christ’s headship refers to His sovereign power: God “put all things under his feet” so that He is “the head over all things” (Eph 1:22), “the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10). Yet there is no tyranny on Christ’s part; He exercises His power to graciously save and strengthen

³ James Bannerman (1807-1868), *The Church of Christ* (2015), 202-3.

⁴ Anonymous [Sundry Ministers of Christ within the City of London], *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici, or the Divine Right of Church Government*, ed. Chris Coldwell (Dallas, TX: Naphtali Press; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 98.

His people through their union with Him: “Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body” (Eph 5:23), “the Head, from which all the body...increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19; cf. Eph 4:15). Hence, Christ exercises sole mediatorial monarchy over His church. He has supreme authority, and any subsidiary authority in the church comes only by His institution and delegation.

Jeffrey Johnson says, “The church does not have permission to create its own objectives, to carry out its own desires, and function by its own self-made rules. The church has no right to bind the conscience of its membership to manufactured rules and objectives.” Negatively, this means, “without Christ, the church has no authority.” Positively, “with Christ, the church has authority. Though the church has no authority and power in itself, the church has divine authority and power when it is submissive to God’s Word.”⁵

Second, the eldership leads Christ’s church as a ministerial aristocracy. This principle protects the first principle from distortion by those who claim to live in submission to King Jesus while embracing radical individualism. Christ’s church, over which He reigns by the Word and Spirit, consists of believers united in churches under the ministry of human officers. These men act as shepherds who “feed the flock of God” under the supervision of “the chief Shepherd” (1Pe 5:2, 4). Paul says to them, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Act 20:28). These leaders have authority; they are called “them which have the rule over you” (Heb 13:7, 17, 24). Christians must “obey” and “submit” to them (v. 17).

Hence, we may speak of an aristocracy in the church, but we must immediately qualify it as a *ministerial* aristocracy, which means “the rule of servants.” Officers in the church are servants and stewards of the Lord (1Co 4:1-2; Ti 1:7). They are never to use their authority as if they were “lords” over the church (1Pe 5:3), though that is the way of leaders in this world (Mar 10:42-43). Edmund Clowney said, “The church is not like the kingdoms of this world, for it is organized for service, not dominion. All government in the church is stewardship: i.e., its leaders are servant-managers, who use their authority only to advance the interests of those they represent and serve.”⁶ Their authority over men’s consciences extends only as far as Christ speaks in the

⁵ Jeffrey Johnson, *The Church*, 90, 92-93.

⁶ Edmund Prosper Clowney (1917-2005), *The Church*, 202.

Holy Scriptures. Louis Berkhof wrote, “He is ever present in the Church when it meets for worship, and speaks and acts through its officers. It is Christ the King that warrants them in speaking and acting with authority.”⁷ Thus, the principle of mediatorial monarchy limits the principle of ministerial aristocracy, so much so that some people might be more comfortable describing the eldership as a “servantocracy.”

Elders have real authority but possess no mediatorial or monarchical authority—they are not even mediators or monarchs in their own limited realms. “Church government is either: 1. Magisterial,⁸ lordly, and supreme, and so it is primitively⁹ and absolutely in God (Mat 28:18); dispensatorily¹⁰ and mediatorial[ly]¹¹ in Jesus Christ our Mediator only...2. Ministerial, stewardly and subordinate. And this power Jesus Christ our Mediator has committed to His church—guides and officers in His church (2Co 10:8; 13:10).”¹²

The New Testament refers to ruling church leaders primarily with two terms: “bishop” (*episkopos*) and “elder” (*presbyteros*). The word *episkopos* means “overseer” (Neh 11:14, 22 LXX)—that is, someone who watches over people and goods as a protector or a supervisor (Num 31:14; Jdg 9:28 LXX). Christ is called “the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1Pe 2:25). The office of apostle is called a “bishoprick” or office of oversight (*episkopē*, Act 1:20; cf. Num 4:16 LXX). However, there is also a particular office in the church, “the office of a bishop” (*episkopē*, 1Ti 3:1), in which a “bishop” (*episkopos*) or “overseer” is a man of sound faith and blameless character who teaches and governs the church (vv. 2-5; Ti 1:6-9). God commissions elders/overseers to exercise authority over churches for their good, like fathers over households (1Ti 3:4-5) or shepherds over flocks (1Pe 5:1-4).

In the New Testament, a bishop or overseer of the church is the same as an “elder” (*presbyteros*). Paul called “the elders of the church” in Ephesus to meet him and said to them, “The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers” (Act 20:17, 28). It was the apostolic practice to ordain “elders in every church” (14:23), and Paul addressed one of his epistles to “the saints in Christ Jesus...with the bishops and deacons” (Phi 1:1), evidently the only office bearers in that church. Paul instructed Titus to “ordain elders in every city” and then told him [about] the

⁷ Louis Berkhof (1873-1957), *Systematic Theology*, 582.

⁸ magisterial – showing great authority.

⁹ primitively – originally.

¹⁰ dispensatorily – able to give or dispense laws.

¹¹ mediatorially – functioning as a mediator, that is, a go-between.

¹² Anonymous, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici*, 90-91; cf. 94-97.

qualifications for a “bishop” (Ti 1:5, 7). Peter wrote to “the elders” and commanded them to be “taking the oversight” (*episkopeō*) of the flock (1Pe 5:1-2). Witherow also noted, “If the offices of bishop and elders were quite distinct—if a bishop were an office-bearer bearing rule over a number of elders, it does seem strange that no passage of Scripture speaks at the same time of bishops and elders.”¹³ Hence, we conclude that *episkopos* and *presbyteros* pertain to the same office.

The elders govern the church as members of a council of elders (*presbyterion*, 1Ti 4:14; cf. Luk 22:66; Act 22:5). The New Testament pattern is a plurality of elders in each church because they exercise authority jointly as a body, not as individuals. The apostles ordained “elders in every church” (Act 14:23; cf. Ti 1:5), and we constantly read of them exercising their ministry as a plurality—“the elders of the church” (Jam 5:14).¹⁴ Similarly, we read of “overseers” (plural *episkopoi*) in the church in Ephesus (Act 20:28), and so also “bishops” (*episkopoi*) in Philippi (Phi 1:1). Just as every city in old covenant Israel had elders who ruled over its civil life (Deu 19:12; 21:3-4; 22:15-18), so every local church in new covenant Israel should have elders who rule over its ecclesiastical life.

Therefore, the authority of elders is *conciliar*—that is, exercised in partnership with the other elders. Each elder is under the authority of the church’s eldership as a whole, and by this means, the authority of each overseer is limited by checks and balances. John Murray said, “Elders are not lords over God’s heritage; they are themselves of the flock and are to be examples to it...Elders are members of the body of Christ and are subject to the very same rule of which they are the administrators.”¹⁵ There is much more to say about the kinds, qualifications, and functions of elders, but here we simply introduce the basic principle of eldership as Christ’s means to govern the church.

Herman Bavinck said,

Christ alone is the king of the church...From the standpoint of its invisible side, its government is strictly monarchical. And Christ was not only king in the past, but He also is that still. From heaven He governs His church on earth by His Word and Spirit...On the visible side of the church, His government is...aristocratic and presbyterial...By [the office bearers] He takes care of the spiritual and material interests

¹³ Thomas Witherow (1824-1890), *The Apostolic Church*, 26.

¹⁴ See the plural “elders” in Act 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1Pe 5:1. The singular “elder” is used only of a church officer with regard to accusations of an elder’s misconduct (1Ti 5:19) or as a title assumed by an apostle (1Pe 5:1; 2Jo 1:1; 3Jo 1:1). See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1122-24.

¹⁵ John Murray (1898-1975), *Collected Writings*, 1:262.

of His church.¹⁶

Third, *Christ's church regulates itself as a mutually accountable democracy.* The democratic principle of church government is based on the common profession of faith by church members and the priesthood of all believers (1Pe 2:5, 9), who each have access to God through Christ (Eph 3:12; Heb 10:19-22). A fundamental unity and equality are shared by all who are in Christ (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Hence, they share the responsibility to exhort and encourage one another to repent of sin, obey God, and do good works.¹⁷ The democratic principle balances the aristocratic principle in Christ's church, prohibiting the eldership from asserting itself as a class of kings or priests over the people, standing as mediators between them and the Lord, and claiming to be exempt from exhortation by or accountability to the people. Furthermore, the eldership also practices a kind of democracy in holding each officer accountable to all the elders in the church.

Therefore, in Christ's church, we see the principles of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy all operating together. William Ames said, "The form of this polity is altogether monarchical in respect to Christ as the king and the head. But in respect to the visible system of administration, it is of a mixed nature: partly aristocratic, so to speak, and partly democratic."¹⁸ However, the way these elements come together in the church is unique, given the special character of the kingdom of God. All church authority comes from God through Christ and is rightly used in obedience to His Word by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Christ is the Head of the church and the source of all its authority...All human officers in the church are clothed with the authority of Christ and must submit to the control of His Word.—*Louis Berkhof*

Because the Head of the body rises and conquers death, all of us who constitute His mystical body must also share in that conquest by rising from the dead.—*Joel Beeke*

¹⁶ **Herman Bavinck** (1854-1921), *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:388. Interestingly, Bavinck here stated that church government "is not democratic." Elsewhere [he] affirmed that Christ invests the congregation with the authority to elect its officers but denied that it is... "a democracy in which a people governs itself," for the congregation elects officers under the guidance of existing officers and in submission to the Word of Christ (4:379-80).

¹⁷ Mat 18:15; Rom 15:14; Heb 3:13; 10:24-25.

¹⁸ **William Ames** (1576-1633), *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.33.20.

CHRIST ALONE DETERMINES DOCTRINE

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

SINCE Christ is the Head of His body, the church, He alone can determine doctrines for her. Nothing is to be received as divinely warranted except it cometh with His stamp upon it.

It is nothing, my brethren, to the faithful servant of Jesus Christ that a certain dogma comes down to him with the grey antiquity of the ages to make it venerable.¹ Like a sensible man, the Christian respects antiquity, but like a loyal subject of his King, he does not so bow before antiquity as to let it become ruler in Zion instead of the living Christ. A multitude of good men may meet together, and they may, in their judgment, propound a dogma,² assert it to be essential and undoubted, and they may even threaten perils most abundant to those who receive not their verdict; but if the dogma was not authorized long before they decided it—if it was not written in the Book, the decision of the learned council amounts to nothing. All the fathers, arid doctors, divines,³ and confessors⁴ put together cannot add a word to the faith once delivered unto the saints. Yea, I venture to say that the unanimous assent of all the saints in heaven and earth would not suffice to make a single doctrine binding upon conscience unless Jesus had so determined.

In vain do men say, “So did the early church”; the early church has no supremacy over us. It is to no purpose to quote Origen⁵ or Augustine⁶: quote the inspired apostles and the doctrine is established, but not otherwise. In the church of God, it is never sufficient to say, “So thinks Martin Luther.”⁷ Who was Martin Luther? A servant of Jesus Christ, and nothing more. It is not sufficient to say, “So teacheth John Calvin,”⁸ for who is John Calvin? Hath he shed his blood for you, or is he your master? His opinion is to be respected as the opinion of your fellow servant, but in no respect as a doctor or authoritative teacher in

¹ **venerable** – deserving honor and respect.

² **propound a dogma** – put forward an authoritative principle or doctrine for consideration.

³ **fathers, arid doctors, divines** – church fathers, dull medieval schoolmen, theologians.

⁴ **confessors** – priests who hear confessions.

⁵ **Origen** (c.185-c.254) – Greek philosopher, theologian, and biblical scholar.

⁶ **Augustine of Hippo** (A.D. 354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian.

⁷ **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German monk, theologian, and Reformer.

⁸ **John Calvin** (1509-1564) – influential French theologian, preacher, pastor, and Reformer.

the church—for Christ alone is Rabbi, and we are to call no man Master upon earth. Suppose I have received a truth from the very man who was the means of my conversion; I am bound, in candor and affection, to give all respect to him because of the relationship which exists between us, but I must take heed lest this decline into idolatry, and I myself become nothing more than a receiver of truth as the word of man, instead of accepting it as the word of God. I am, therefore, in the most candid manner, but none the less solicitously, to bring to the test every truth which I have received, whether from my father or mother, or my minister, or from some great man of olden times whose name I have learned to respect—seeking all the while light from above to direct me aright. Nothing is doctrine to the church of God—nothing which has not been taught in the Scriptures. To Christians it is nothing to say that certain doctrines are taught in books of common prayer, or of conference discipline, or of systematic theology. To us, it is of small account that either Presbytery,⁹ or the Episcopacy,¹⁰ or Independency,¹¹ have put their stamp upon a certain form of teaching. Authority is no more to us than the snap of a man's finger unless the truth thus commended derives certainty from the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself, Who is the Head of His body the church.

So next, since He is the Head, He only can legislate as to the church. In a state, if any knot¹² of persons should profess to make laws for the kingdom, they would be laughed at; and if they should for a moment attempt to enforce their own rules and regulations in defiance of the laws of the country, they would be amenable¹³ to punishment. Now, the church of God hath no power whatever to make laws for herself, since she is not her own head; and no one has any right to make laws for her, for no one is her head but Christ...Christ alone is the legislator of His church—*none but He!*

From a sermon delivered on Lord's Day morning, November 1, 1868,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.



Christ rules the church, not by force, but by His Word and Spirit.—*Louis Berkhof*

⁹ **Presbytery** – church government by a body of elders (especially in Presbyterian congregations) that represent all the local congregations in a geographical district.

¹⁰ **Episcopacy** – church government by an order of bishops, which believe that the bishops are the successors of the apostles.

¹¹ **Independency** – church government that believes each local congregation is self-governing, free from external control, and responsible to Christ alone.

¹² **knot** – small group or cluster.

¹³ **amenable** – legally subject; answerable.

CHRIST'S HEADSHIP AS IT RELATES TO THE OLD & NEW CREATIONS

Richard Barcellos

THAT Paul views Christ as head of all things created is clear from Ephesians 1:22, "And [the Father] hath put all things under his [i.e., the exalted Redeemer's] feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church." According to my understanding of Ephesians 1:10, the exalted Christ has been stationed by the Father as the chief executive officer of the entire interadvental¹ era, which finds its terminus² in the summing up of all things. Upon Christ's ascension into heaven, He assumed the office of authoritative head of all things, something He hinted at while on earth as recorded in Matthew 28:18: "All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth." This was something He did not possess during His state of humiliation. He had also taught His disciples that entering into glory was something the Scriptures of the OT taught concerning the Messiah (Luk 24:25-27; 44-47). Though He did not spell out all the details and implications of entering into glory, the seed of the doctrine was present in His teaching. What we see in Paul, primarily, is the teasing out of the implications of Christ's entrance into glory and even the foundations upon which Christ enters into glory. The implications include universal sovereignty over the entire created realm. The foundation upon which He enters His glorious status includes His relationship to creation both as the eternal Son of God (Joh 1:3; Col 1:16) and as the Mediator,³ Redeemer, and Reconciler of all things (Col 1:20), as the Last Adam, and, of course, the Father's good pleasure (Eph 1:9).

The first Adam was the first human son of God (Luk 3:38). He had a unique relationship with the first creation. He was created in the

¹ **interadvental** – time between the first and second comings (advents) of Christ.

² **terminus** – point at which something ends.

³ **Mediator** – *literally*: "one who goes between"; "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1) See also Free Grace Broadcaster 183, *Christ the Mediator*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

image of God as God's vice-regent in charge of the earth. Adam's vocation as image-bearing vice-regent included being fruitful and multiplying (sons of God) and filling the earth and subduing it (Gen 1:26-28). The garden was the beginning, the starting point. The end or goal was an earth filled with image-bearing sons serving their Creator, living in harmony with fellow image-bearers and the entire created realm. But, as we know, the Fall into sin affected both Adam and his seed and the creation itself (Gen 3:1-19; Rom 8:18-25). The old creation is cursed, along with its crown jewel, male and female in the image of God. Nothing less than a radical transformation is needed both for animate creatures (i.e., image-bearing sons) and the inanimate creation.

This is exactly what the incarnate Son of God provides. Since the old creation was made for Him (Col 1:16), He is its rightful Lord. However, when He comes on the world's scene, though He gives us glimpses of His universal sovereignty over the created realm, He comes veiled in human nature in the likeness of human flesh. He comes as a humble, suffering servant (Mar 10:45). Adam failed his call to service. His delinquency affected the entire human race and the created realm. Christ comes as the hero of redemption. He serves God perfectly. He suffers the wrath of God due to sin. And once His life of probation is complete, His wrath-exhausting death occurs, and He is rewarded for His obedience by being raised from the dead on the first day, which inaugurates a new creation, just like the old creation was inaugurated on the first day. His resurrection was an advance upon His incarnation. He entered into His glory upon the resurrection. He entered into an exalted status. His human nature became what it was not prior to the resurrection (Rom 1:4). Human nature was meant to attain to a status of immutability. It was not so via creation. The proof of this is the fact that Adam fell from communion with God. In Christ, there can be no future fall into sin. The resurrection of Christ insures an immutable status of sonship for those in Christ.

The resurrection is seen as an epoch-changing event in the New Testament—the beginning of the new creation. Believers are united to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection through faith.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that

our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom 6:3-6).

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (Col 2:11-12).

Union with Christ brings believers into the orbit of redemptive privilege. They may know "the power of his resurrection" (Phi 3:10) because they are united to Him through faith. God "made us alive together with Christ...And raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:5-6). Being in Christ unites us to Him, making us citizens of heaven (Phi 3:20).

Union with Christ also involves existence in two ages at once: this age (the old creation) and the age to come (the new creation). The age to come is the age of the resurrection.

And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luk 20:34-36).

Christ's resurrection is the first bodily resurrection of the age to come because it was "the firstfruits" (1Co 15:20).

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1Co 15:20-23).

Christ's resurrection was the first of similar resurrections to come. But being "the firstfruits," it is not totally other than those that follow. It is different in time; but it is part of the same resurrection. It is part of the same harvest; just the first of the much greater end-time harvest to come. Richard Gaffin, commenting on "firstfruits" says:

The word is not simply an indication of temporal priority. Rather it brings into view Christ's resurrection as the "firstfruits" of the resurrection-harvest, the initial portion of the whole. His resurrection is the representative beginning of the resurrection of believers. In other words, the term seems deliberately chosen to make evident the

organic connection between the two resurrections. In the context, Paul's "thesis" over against his opponents is that the resurrection of Jesus has the bodily resurrection of "those who sleep" as its necessary consequence. His resurrection is not simply a guarantee; it is a pledge in the sense that it is the actual beginning of the general event. In fact, on the basis of this verse it can be said that Paul views the two resurrections not so much as two events but as two episodes of the same event.⁴

Christ's resurrection is the most powerful sign of the presence of the age to come (i.e., the new creation). His resurrected body took on qualities it did not possess prior to the resurrection (Rom 1:4). It was an age to come body, existing in this age for a brief time on the earth and now in heaven. In Christ's resurrection, then, we see the age to come (i.e., the new creation) eclipsing this age. This is why Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2Co 5:17). This is not only true of personal renovation but also a state of existence in the new creation brought in by Christ. In Galatians 6:15, Paul says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." The age to come has eclipsed this age with the resurrection of Christ. Hebrews 6:5 says that some "have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come." "The great realities of the age to come have in some sense broken into and become operative in this age."⁵ Waldron's comments are helpful at this point:

The New Testament teaches, therefore, that there is a new creation in Christ (Gal 6:15; 2Co 5:17; Eph 2:10). The idea of new creation is frequently associated with Christ's resurrection (cf. Eph 2:10 with 2:5, 7; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10 with Rom 6:1-6; Col 1:15-18). By union with Christ in His death, the old man is destroyed. By union with Christ in His resurrection, the new man is created. When He rose again, He became the firstborn of God's new creation. As He was the beginning of the old creation, so He is now the beginning of the new (Rev 3:14). Thus, the memorial of Christ's resurrection is of necessity a memorial of the new creation. Thus, the Lord's Day, like the Sabbath and unlike any other religious observance, points to both creation and redemption.⁶

Christ's resurrection is the apex of all of God's redemptive work on the earth. It is an epoch-changing event. It ushers in the new creation

⁴ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1987), 34-35.

⁵ Samuel E. Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2003), 49.

⁶ Waldron, *Lord's Day*. Unpublished notes.

in part: first in the resurrection of Christ, then in the renovation⁷ of the souls of believers, then in the bodies of believers at the Second Coming, and finally in the renovation of the old creation (Rom 8:18ff.; 2Pe 3:13; Rev 21-22). The resurrection of Christ affects everything.

Christ as the eternal Son of God and as the theanthropic⁸ Mediator occupies an office of headship over all things in heaven and upon earth and over the old and new creations. His headship extends to all men (saved and unsaved [Eph 1:10, 22; Col 1:18]), all angels (elect and non-elect [Eph 1:10, 22; Col 2:15; 1Jo 3:8]) and the entire inanimate creation—the universe (Eph 1:10, 22). His headship has a universal, cosmic element and a particular, soteriological⁹ element. This makes Christ's headship both like and unlike Adam's.

From "Christ's Headship as It Relates to the Old and New Creations,"
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cbtseminary.org; used by permission.

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The church, as a society, owes its origin to Christ: it derives from Him its government and office-bearers; it receives from Him its laws and constitution; it draws from Him its spiritual influence and grace; it accepts at His hand its ordinances and institutions; it acts in His name and is guided in its proceedings by His authority. In the expression that the Lord Jesus Christ is Head of the church, and in the fact that He is the only source of church power, there is much more implied than that He is the founder of the Christian society. He is both its founder and its administrator—being the ever-present source of life and influence, of ordinance and blessing, of law and authority, of Word and doctrine within the community. Through His Spirit, His Word, and His ordinances, alike of government and grace, Christ both originates and administers His church upon earth.—*James Bannerman*

What does it mean that Jesus is the only Head of the church? It means that He rules over His church by His Word and by the Spirit. He has placed the Bible in the hands of the church through His apostles. The Bible tells us what Christ would have us believe and how Christ would have us live. Jesus has also sent His Spirit to indwell believers. It is the Spirit's delight and commitment to equip believers to walk in the paths that Christ has set for them in His Word.—*Guy Waters*

⁷ **renovation** – renewal effected by the Holy Spirit.

⁸ **theanthropic** – from two Greek words, *theos*, “God,” and *anthropos*, “man,” is the word used to describe Jesus Christ as two distinct natures—deity and humanity—in one holy person; God-man.

⁹ **soteriological** – having to do with soteriology, the doctrine of salvation.

WHY WE NEED CHRIST AS OUR HEAD

Thomas Manton (1620-1677)

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

—Colossians 1:18

ACCORDING to what nature doth this office belong to Christ—divine or human? I answer both. For it belongeth to Him as God incarnate.

(1) **He must be man that there may be a conformity of nature between the head and the rest of the members.** Therefore, Christ and the church have one common nature between them. He was man as we are men—bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh (Eph 5:30; *see* Gen 2:23). We read of a monstrous image that was represented to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream, where the head was gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, and the legs and feet part of iron and part of clay (Dan 2:31-35): all the parts of a different nature. In every regular body there is a proportion and conformity. So it is in the mystical body of Christ. Because the brethren took part of flesh and blood, He also “took part of the same” (Heb 2:14). The Godhead, which was at such a distance from us, is brought down in the person of Christ in our nature that it might be nearer at hand and within the reach of our commerce,¹ and we might have more encouragement to expect pity and relief from Him.

(2) **He must also be God.** None was fit to be Head of the church but God, whether you [consider] government or influence.

First, for *government*: To attend all cases, to hear all prayers, to supply all wants, defend us against all enemies, to require an absolute and total submission to His laws, ordinances, and institutions, so as we may venture our eternal interests upon His Word: “He is thy Lord; and worship thou him” (Psa 45:11).

Secondly, for *influence*:² None else hath power to convey the Spirit

¹ **commerce** – means of our communication.

² **influence** – power and authority that God alone possesses to impart spiritual life by the Holy Spirit.

and to become a vital principle³ to us, for that is proper to God to have life in Himself and to communicate it to others: “I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things” (1Ti 6:13). Whatever men may think of the life of grace, yet surely, as to the life of glory, He is the only life-making Spirit (1Co 15:45). Now, this honor is not given to the angels; much less is it due to any man, nor can it be imagined by him, for none can influence the heart of man but God.

(3) The reasons why this body must have such a Head.

[1] *Every society must be under some government, without which they would soon dissolve and come to nothing.* Much more the church, which, because of its manifold necessities and the high ends to which it is designed, needs it more than any other society.

[2] *The privileges are so great, which are these:* pardon of sins, sanctifying grace, and, at length, eternal glory. (1) Pardon of sins. By this union with Him, He is made “sin for us...that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). A sacrifice for sin, that we might be justified and accepted with God. (2) Sanctifying grace by the communication of His Spirit. We not only agree with⁴ Him in the same common human nature, but the same holy nature may be in us that was in Christ (Heb 2:11). (3) At length eternal glory followeth. For what the condition of the Head is, that is also the condition of the members. First Christ, then they that are Christ’s. Also, Christ is set up as a pattern to which the church must be conformed (Rom 8:29). Bating⁵ the preeminence due to the Head, we are to be glorious as He is glorious.

[3] *The duties are far above bare human power and strength;* therefore, we need the influence of our Head (Joh 15:5). To obey God, to believe in His name, to deny ourselves in what is most dear and precious to us in the world, to be fortified against all temptations are duties not so easily done as said.

[4] *We have so foully miscarried⁶ already that He will no more trust His honor in our hands, but hath put the whole treasure of grace into the hands of Christ for our use* (Joh 1:16). So, John 3:35-36 says, “The Father...hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life.” God would not leave us to ourselves to live apart from Him but hath put all things that belong to our happiness into His hands, that, being united

³ **vital principle** – cause of life; life-giving agent.

⁴ **agree with** – resemble; are like.

⁵ **bating** – excepting; apart from.

⁶ **foully miscarried** – shamefully failed.

to Him, virtue might be communicated to us, even all the gifts and graces of the Spirit. They are not entrusted to us, but to Him; and we shall have no more of pardon, grace, and glory, but what we have in and from the Son of God.

Use: [As] information, to show how much we are bound⁷ to God for putting this honor upon us: that Christ should be our Head. Christ is over the angels in point of superiority and government, but not properly said to be a Head to them in the strict notion that implies relation to the church. As to influence, He is not a Head to them. You will say they are confirmed by Him; but the mediation of Christ presupposes the Fall of Adam, for Christ had not been mediator if Adam had never fallen... Christ merited for those that have benefit by Him, and the consummate act of His merit is His death. But where is it said that He died for angels?...

Use: To persuade you to accept Christ as your Head. We are to preach Him as Lord (2Co 4:5); you are to receive Him as Lord (Col 2:6); our consent is necessary. God hath appointed Him, and the church appointeth Him—God by authority, the church by consent. We voluntarily acknowledge His dignity and submit unto Him, both with a consent of dependence and subjection. Some God draweth to Christ and gives them to Him, and Him to them (Joh 6:44). All that live within hearing have means to seek this grace, and if they do so, they shall not lose their labor. God sets not men about unprofitable work...

Use: To put us upon self-reflection. If Christ be your Head—

1. You must stand under a correspondent relation to Christ. [You must] be members of His mystical body, which is done by faith and repentance.

2. None can be a true member of Christ's body who doth not receive vital influence⁸ from Him (Rom 8:9). It is not enough to be members of some visible church; they that are united to Him have life. There is an influence of common gifts according to the part we sustain in the body. A common Christian hath common graces, those gifts of the Spirit which God gives not to the heathen world, as knowledge of the mysteries of godliness, ability of utterance about heavenly things (Heb 6:4).

3. If Christ be our Head, we must make conscience of the duties that this relation bindeth us unto, [such] as obedience and self-denial.

[1] *Obedience to His laws and the motions of His Spirit.* His laws: "Why

⁷ **bound** – strongly attached; indebted by covenant.

⁸ **vital influence** – regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luk 6:46). The motions of His Spirit: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14).

[2] *Self-denial*. Christ spared not His natural body to promote the good of His mystical body. He exposed His life for our salvation; we should hazard all for His glory. Nature teaches us to lift up [our] hands to save the head.

4. There must be suitableness and imitation: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1Jo 2:6).

5. If you are planted into this mystical body, you will make conscience of love and tenderness.

Use: Let us triumph in this Head, depend on Him. There are two arguments—His ability and His sympathy.

1. His ability. He can give us life, strength, health: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16). "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness" (Col 1:11).

2. His sympathy. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). The Head is concerned for the members.

From "Christ's Eternal Existence and the Dignity of His Person Asserted and Proved," in *The Works of Thomas Manton*, Vol. 1; in the public domain.



We gather that Christ, although seated in heaven, is yet the living Head of, and really united to, the church, which is on earth. For as the natural head diffuses sense and motion through its body; so Christ, the spiritual Head of the church, communicates the vital power of His Spirit to all His members.—*John Davenant*

Inasmuch as Jesus Christ is very God of very God, let Him reign, let His kingdom come, let Him in all things have the preeminence! Bow down, ye creatures of His hand, and do Him homage, for the Lord is King forever and ever. Hallelujah! Let His opposers tremble at the unchangeable decree, for the Son of God must reign, until He hath put all enemies under His feet; for it is not to be endured that God should not be King in His own world; neither will it forever be suffered that God in the earth that He has fashioned should be forgotten or blasphemed. He Who is God over all, blessed forever, shall yet be worshipped by every knee, while every tongue shall confess that He is Lord.

—*Charles H. Spurgeon*

IS CHRIST YOUR HEAD?

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

DOES not [this] make each of you enquire, “If the entire church is thus to yield obedience to Christ, and to no one else, am I yielding such obedience? I claim to be a Christian, but am I a Christian of that prejudiced sort who follow that which they are brought up to, and so acknowledge the rules of mothers and fathers instead of the rule of Christ? Have I brought what I avow to be truth to the touchstone of Scripture? Did I ever spend a quarter of an hour in weighing my cherished opinions?” I am afraid the great mass of Christians have never done this but have sucked in their religion with their mother’s milk and nothing further.

Again, if I be a Christian, am I in the habit of judging what I ought to do by my own whims and wishes, or do I judge by the Statute-book of the King? Many say they do not like this and do not like that, as if that had anything to do with it! What are your likes and dislikes? You are a servant and bound to give up your own will to the Master. If Christ gives a command, which you imagine to be hard because it does not chime in with your love of ease—my brother, will you not, as a servant of the Master, put your whims aside and endeavor to follow Him? Oh, it is a blessed life to lead, to be no longer the servant of men and of self, but to go to Christ daily in prayer, and say, “What I know not, teach Thou me.” Then you may laugh at Satan’s rage and face a frowning world, for the Master will never leave those who cleave to Him. If a man loves the testimonies and commandments of the Most High, God shall be his buckler, his shield, and his high tower; but if he turns aside to his own imaginings, his fall shall be certain. The Lord keep the church in this matter, and her day of victory shall soon come. May Christ be her only Head, and her triumph draweth near. I can see the morning breaking; yonder are the first streaks of light upon the sky: the Master is coming because the church begins to own Him—and then shall her happy days begin, and the days of her mourning shall be ended forever and ever.

From a sermon delivered on Lord’s Day morning, November 1, 1868,
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The church is not her own head; she has no right to act upon her own judgment apart from the statutes of her King; she must come to the Book—
everything is there for her.—*Spurgeon*