

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church - Colossians 1:18

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (v.18 NKJV).

Dear Congregation, if you were to gather your little grandchildren, or children of a young age and during family devotions ask them to describe who Jesus is what would they say? I imagine that some would say Jesus is God! Jesus died for my sins! Others would speak of his life, his death, and his resurrection. These are all wonderful answers.

But, one of the most common answers that you will hear from young children about who is Jesus Christ, is he is king. Have you ever noticed this? Why is that? Well, the answer is quite simple, Christ as king is one of the most uncomplicated concepts to grasp.

And it's so true, the more we think about it. This is a doctrine that we all were able to understand at a young age and that we have taught our children at a young age. Especially in our Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 31) which says, “Why is he called Christ, meaning anointed?” And in summary it says, “Because he is our chief prophet, priest, and king.” It's simple to grasp yet so deep in its magnitude.

Now, we all believe that Christ is king, you can't be a Christian if you deny Christ kingship... But the question for us this morning is what is the nature of Christ kingship? Now in general Christ is king over the whole universe (vv.16-17). But we must also say that Christ has a special and spiritual relationship with his church. He is our spiritual king.

Lesson: Jesus Spiritual Kingship consists in Him being the Head of the Church

Herman Bavinck, the Dutch theologian from Leiden said, “The Kingship of Christ over the church consists in that by his Word and Spirit he gathers and governs his own and protects and keeps them in the redemption acquired” (RD.4.372). Brothers and sisters Paul makes that exact point in verse 18.

We have three points from the Apostle this morning:

1. Christ is the Head of the Church.
2. Christ Redeems the Church.
3. That Christ might have Preeminence in the church.

Point 1: Christ is the Head of the Church (v.18a).

“And he is the head of the body, the church” (v.18a).

It goes without saying that the head is the most important part of the body. When I was a young lad, believe it or not I was often quite silly and mischievous, and one of the things I remember my grandmother on my mother's side saying when the little ones got too rowdy, “it's like you lost your head!” What she meant by saying that was that my brothers, my cousins, and myself (5 Grandsons no girls), had lost our senses. That we had lost the seat of your reason and your mind.

This is just a silly example, but the point that I am attempting to make is that the head is the most important part of the body because from it comes what one needs in order to function properly. Without a head the body could not function. There would be no sight, hearing, thought process, intelligence, or direction...

In the same way the church without Christ is a lifeless corpse. The point of the Apostle Paul is making is that Christ is indispensable. Just like how you cannot survive without your head, so New Horizon Church, the Colossian Church, the whole universal church, cannot survive without Christ.

The reason we cannot survive without Christ as our head is often broken down into two doctrines by theologians. First, Christ is an organic head, and second a ruling head.¹

1.1 - Organic Head

Now what does Christ as an organic head mean? Almost seems abstract to us. But organic simply means living. And a living or organic head is essential to our growth as human beings.

Advances in modern science have uncovered the pituitary gland, which is located in a small cavity at the base of the skull. And from this gland comes the growth hormone, among other hormones, which is what causes your body to grow. Simply put, you need your head to grow.

And so it is the same with Christ. It is Christ that causes the church, the body to grow. Paul makes that very clear in Colossians 2:19, *“and not holding fast (lost connection) to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.”* It is God who causes the body of Christ to grow. Thus, if we want our churches to grow in maturity, in holiness, in love, even in size we must grow in Christ our head, and focus on being part of the functioning body of the church (Eph. 4:15-16).

1.2 - Ruling Head

¹Hendrickson, William. *Colossians, New Testament Commentary*. Pg. 77.

The second way we speak of Christ is that he is a *ruling head*. And this refers to the guidance that our head gives us. It is in the head that the organs of special sense are mainly located. The brain receives impulses from the outside world and from inside the body. It organizes these impulses and then reacts. Thus, it guides and directs the individual. In the brain is located the cerebellum which has been called “the coordinator and harmonizer of muscular action.” The medulla controls actions like coughing, winking, chewing, swallowing, etc. In your brain is the cardiac center which regulates your heartbeat. The respiratory center which controls your breathing. When the Triune God created the human body with its organic and ruling head he created it as an excellent symbol of the Organic and Ruling head of the church.

Well what does it mean that Christ is the ruling head? It means that he guides the body. He directs the body. As the ruling head, Calvin says, Christ alone has the authority to govern the church.

Brothers and sisters, it means that Christ alone determines the offices of the church. Christ alone has the authority to teach us about the sacraments. He alone is our instructor in worship. Whatever function that takes place in the church we must look to his guidance, his desires, and his rule.

Application:

Too often, in the church we hear of congregations and people making decisions based on our feelings and not based on the solid foundation of God’s Holy Word. To use this analogy that Paul has given us, Christ is the head, so what does that make you?

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:12-25. He says we are the body. You are an eye, a foot, a hand, an ear, say the Apostle. Now what right does your hand have to tell the head, the brain what to do? What right does your ear have to boss you around?

Beloved do not think you are smarter than Christ. Do not think because you are a hand, an eye, an ear, or a foot, that you may do whatever you please. Instead, be a valuable member of the body and be the best that you can be in service to your head, Christ the king.

- Serve Christ the head by being the best mother and wife you can be. That’s what God has asked of you.
- Serve Christ as the best member you can be. He doesn’t call all to be an elder or deacon.
- Serve Christ as a child of the congregation, or a young person, and enjoy your youth.

Point 2: Christ Redeems the Church (v.18b).

“who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,” (v.18b).

We have established this far that Christ is the organic and ruling head of the body. He is truly the Spiritual King of the church. But no king is truly a king without subjects. The question we must ask then is ‘How is it that Christ has received this Spiritual nation?’ What is it that makes Christ the head of the church, and not ministers, or popes, or kings and queens?

The answer is that Christ is not only our High Priest and Redeemer, our King and Lord, but he was given to us by God to be a servant. The King of the entire universe, the one whose glory Moses could not look upon, Elijah needed to cover his face, even Angels cover their eyes, and in John 13 we are told that this very same king tied a towel around his waist, took a basin of water, and washed the feet of his disciples. Even Christ himself said in Mark 10:45, *“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

Brothers and sisters, Christ wins for himself a spiritual nation, not by his glory and honour but by humiliating himself even to death upon a cross. In Revelation 5 at Jesus’ coronation, when he receives the glory that he is due as the Lion of Judah and the Root of Jesse the angels sing, *“You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; **For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.**”* (Rev. 5:9-10). It is through the shed blood of the Son of God that he secures salvation for his people.

“Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (v.18b). Now, by using the words *beginning* and *firstborn* the Apostle is signifying to show not only that Christ arose first, but that he is to his church the beginning and fountain of salvation in this life. We can extrapolate two doctrines from this truth:

2.1 - *Christ Himself Arose from the grave*

The assertion of the scriptures is that our saviour is not in the tomb any longer, but is alive forever more at the right hand of the Father. The narrative of the Bible is that mankind fell into sin by willful disobedience to God. That we are dead in our trespasses and sins, children of wrath, our righteousness nothing but rags. But God in eternity past loved his church, he sends his own Son, very God and very man. Lives a perfect life yet is still condemned to die. He is hung on a wooden cross, upon that cross is forsaken by God as the sins of the church are laid upon him. He is buried in a bared tomb. But by the power that was intrinsically his, God rose him from the grave.

Brothers and sisters, this is the heart of the gospel. Your saviour is not dead, but is alive. The *“firstborn from among the dead”* meaning that he is the first and only to rise from the grave by his own power.

2.2 - *We too shall Arise*

The second doctrine that we gather from this text is that we also will not remain in the grave, but we too shall also arise from death. Beloved, one of the most comforting doctrines in the scriptures in the believer’s resurrection. The Bible talks about it in two parts.

2.2.1 - *A Spiritual Resurrection*

The first way the Bible speaks of the resurrection is a *spiritual resurrection*. We experience the blessedness of the resurrection even now. Our Lord Jesus tells us in John 5:24, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*” Now I have done enough funerals to know that we still experience death on this side of heaven. Christ here is speaking of Spiritual life. You see, when Adam took that fruit and ate of it he transgressed the commandment of God it was promised by God that he would die. Not only physically but that he would have spiritual death. Christ, our king gives us spiritual life.

If you are a Christian today you are no longer a servant of Satan, no longer bound to your sins, no longer a citizen of the kingdom of darkness. But you have been spiritually raised with Christ, and as Paul says in Colossians 3:1, we are already seated with Christ even now in this life. The application of this is you must seek those things that are above.

2.2.2 - Physical Resurrection

We experience that first resurrection now in this life by regeneration. But we will also experience a real, physical, bodily resurrection in the life to come, *he is the... firstborn from among the dead*” (v.18b). Meaning that he has gone before us as the forerunner, but we are following him. With that same power that Christ was raised with, we too shall be raised. You will not remain in the grave. You will hear that trumpet sound, and Christ descends with a shout, in the twinkling of an eye, and we will be raised up from the grave to be with him, bodily, forever.

Application:

1. Look at Christ's humility. He is the Prince of Heaven, and came to earth to serve such lowly people such as us. Who can we serve this day? Maybe there is someone in your family, this congregation, at your work, who is simply unlovable... Remember Christ's great love for you and how he was even willing to die for sinners like us. How can you extend that Christlike love to others around you this week?
2. Look to the resurrection. Know that through all of the trials and terrors of this life that Christ will never abandon his church, even beyond death. When we give up our final breath we should know that it is not the end. Take heart, knowing that your saviour beckons you.

Point 3: That he might have Preeminence (v.18c).

“*And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence*” (v.18 NKJV).

The Apostle Paul says that in all things Christ does, his living, his dying, his rising from the grave, he does it all that he might have the *preeminence*. Preeminence meaning that all the world would know that he is superior. In short, that the world would hear that he is King of kings and Lord of lords, the head of the church. And he does this by way of his cross.

3.1 - Through Jesus' Humiliation he is made Honourable and Glorious

The death of a man by crucifixion was a nasty and gruesome thing. When he hung upon the cross it says that men shouted to him and mocked him. We appeared before them naked, bruised, beaten, and in pain. Seemingly full of weakness and disgrace, yet in the cross Paul finds a reason for glory and praise. Although Pilate, the Pharisees, or the crowd did not know it as they saw him there upon the tree that Christ did it all for his glory.

Though he died there upon that cross the tomb could not keep him and three days later he would rise from the dead. And for anyone to die and then to raise himself from the dead and then to deliver the church from death by the power of his death and resurrection is preeminently honourable and glorious.

So why would Christ humiliate himself? Why would he leave heaven and condescend to earth and ultimately fastened to a cross by nails through his hands and feet? The answer is this; not only is he the creator and chief of all that lives but by his death and resurrection he is *firstborn* that makes the dead alive, that he might have the supremacy being worshiped by the church beginning now and for all eternity.

Application:

1. We may suffer humiliation in this life for our faith in Christ. University campuses, workplaces and even family life is becoming more militant against Christ. Know that if you are humiliated with him you will also be glorified with him (1 Pet. 4:13). Count you humiliation as joy for its evident of the salvation given to you.
2. Notice the words, *all things* (v.18), meaning all things. He is preeminent over heaven and earth (Rev. 5) including you. Search your heart this day and discern, “is Christ preeminent over our home? Our children? Our work? If not, let us humbly confess and ask the Lord Jesus to take his rightful place on the throne of our hearts and lives.

Conclusion:

The scriptures teach us that Jesus is King over all but he is especially near unto his church. Give thanks this day that you are not ruled any longer by that tyrant Satan, but as Christians are united with Christ our head who has accomplished all that we might be his now and forevermore.