

The Head of the Body, the Assembly' (1)

by H.J. Vine

H.J. Vine's sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing Christ as the Head of the assembly and the source of spiritual fullness and growth for believers.

Scripture: John 6:40, Romans 10:20, Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 1:18, Colossians 2:10

Topics: "Christ's Preeminence", "Church Unity"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches on the importance of recognizing and praising the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, rather than focusing solely on the activities of the church. Believers are saved by grace, justified by faith, and sealed by the Spirit, finding rest and peace in Christ's finished work. Colossians 1:18 emphasizes that Jesus, the Son of God, is the Head of the body, the assembly, holding pre-eminence in all things and bringing reconciliation and fullness to believers.

Transcript

Colossians 1:18

There is much laudation of the church and its activities in Christendom, but where is heard the praise of its Head? Many voices and pens proclaim the worth and works of the churches, but where is to be discovered the Holy Spirit's grace which glorifies Him who is the Head of the body, the assembly? To exalt the church with ecclesiastical pride at the expense of our glorious Head must greatly grieve Him. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), "and the Spirit of Truth glorifies Him who is the Head of the body" (John 16:14).

Believers on our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, are saved by grace and justified by faith. They are sealed by the Spirit and Christ is their righteousness. In Him too they stand in divine favour. In "the Beloved" their acceptance is eternal and changeless, but the righteousness of God, and not their own, is their glory and joy. Rest and peace are theirs also, through faith in the finished work of the Saviour of sinners. Blessed now within the impregnable bulwark of God's righteousness, they are at leisure to behold the beauty and perfectness of the Lord; at liberty to rejoice in the exalted Head of the assembly; to praise the One who is rejected and slighted on earth, but highly honoured in heaven--"Heaven's beloved One."

THE HEAD OF THE BODY is definitely named for us in Colossians 1:13. There "His dear Son" should read "THE SON of His love." The connecting passage says, "Give thanks to THE FATHER, who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light, who has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and

translated us into the kingdom of THE SON of His love: IN WHOM we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (N.Tr.). This One, "THE SON," is "THE HEAD of the body, the assembly" (v. 18). In the intervening verses great and glorious things are said concerning Him,--reaching from eternity down into time, then up into glory, and on again to eternity; but it is THE SON--so beautifully named the Son of the Father's love--who is the Head of the body. This is of immense importance.

Other names, titles, offices and distinctions are elsewhere given by the Spirit. Here, where the personal glory of the Christ is pre-eminent, THE SON, by whom and for whom all things were created, is named as the assembly's Head. He is the Head and Centre of all. Because He is Creator, He is the Firstborn in the Creation, i.e., the pre-eminent One; He is the image of Him who is invisible, because He is the Son of the Father's love, the One by whom the invisible God is made known; thanks now to the Father, because we have been set in the kingdom of the Son of His love, and He has given us fitness to share in light and love as liberated from the authority of darkness; because the Son is to hold pre-eminence in all things, He is the glorious Head of the assembly--the first place thus is His consequent upon His resurrection; because full reconciliation is to be brought to pass by the Son, all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him.

The Son is the One in whom, through whom and for (unto) whom "all things were created" (v. 16), and the holding of all things together in counselled order and blessing is by the Son, who the Spirit tells us is "BEFORE ALL" (v. 17). Now in resurrection He holds pre-eminence in all things as the Head of the body, the assembly, having brought us already into reconciliation "in the body of His flesh through death" (v. 22). The Son is the Head in the creation because He created; the Son is Head in the reconciliation because He is both Creator and Reconciler. And He is the Head of the body, the assembly, thus.

"GROW UP TO HIM in all things, who is the Head," are the words of Ephesians 4:15. And we are to speak the truth in love in view of this. That the body may be edified He has given gifts from above, till "we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of THE SON OF GOD" (v. 13). This is of great importance, for the danger is that babes in Christ become ensnared in "systematized error." The sleight and cunning of unprincipled men scheme to this end (v. 14). Colossians 2:8 shows too that danger lies in "philosophy and vain deceit"--in what is "not after Christ." The fact is, the One who is the Head of the body is also "the Head of all principality and power." "In Him dwells all the FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD bodily, and in Him ye are FILLED FULL" (v. 9). Our completeness is there! What folly then to turn elsewhere! to cease "holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, ministered to and united together by joints and bands, increases with the increase of God" (v. 19, N.Tr.). Mark, "the increase of God." Through one and another the vital supplies which are complete and perfect in Him reach us to this end. May we never be diverted from Himself! The recent revival was through saints being recovered to the truth of the Head! Declension is from that. Pompous ecclesiasticalism boasts of "one body," but the Holy Spirit glorifies the Head; and faith leads to "holding fast the Head." It is thus that the vital organism, His body, is nourished. All that diverts from Him in whom all fullness resides is hurtful. To depart from the exercise of faith is not good. Organizations soon take the place of the living organism when faith is forsaken. Committees, traditions, councils, funds, unions, officials, man-made fellowships and regulations from some earthly headquarters multiply, and displace faith in the living all-sufficient Head of the body, the assembly. Things and men present to sight loom largely, and the hidden Head in heaven is forgotten. Like the school boy, who begins well when his eye is on the copy-head; but becoming pleased with his own writing, and copying that, he loses light of the headline and copies his own copy with increasingly bad results; so, with the eyes closed to the perfection and all-sufficiency of the living Head of the assembly, many are copying church copies, studying church histories for guidance, instead of progressing diligently

in "the faith once delivered to the saints," "holding fast the Head." There is no need to turn elsewhere, but to speak the truth in love, as we are told, and to "GROW UP TO HIM IN ALL THINGS," not merely in some things.

"COMPLETE IN HIM" (Col. 2:10). In Ephesians the assembly according to God's gracious purpose is seen; but be it specially noticed, in Colossians the true Head of the assembly Himself is named. The infinite greatness of His personal glories are stated. The One who is the assembly's Head is made known. It is here where the eternal Spirit speaks so beautifully of Him as THE SON of the Father's love (1:13, N.Tr.), "by whom and for whom all things were created," and states His various distinctions both from before and in Creation; in revelation, in resurrection, and in the reconciliation; showing us how He brings all into blessing, order and glory; for all fullness was pleased to dwell in Him in view of this. "Before all" and the Creator of all, He is the Reconciler of all, and the Head of the body, the assembly; holding the pre-eminence in all this, and holding all things together, as we have said. All this because of the glorious grace and greatness of the Son Himself. All is brought into reconciliation to the fullness in Him, though the irreconcilably wicked find their assigned lot in the place prepared for the devil and his angels.

It is because of the Son's personal grace and greatness that reconciliation takes place for the divine pleasure. How equitable and satisfying to see the Creator Son bringing His creation into reconciliation! What joy and praise arise as we see that the Son who does this is our glorious Head! How infinite is the fullness which is in Him. How immense are the blessed results! Glory, glory to His wondrous Name!

"Joyful shall the wide creation

Rest in undisturbed repose,"

The fullness was pleased to dwell in Him in view of this. But we also are filled full (so "complete," should read) in Him, in whom "the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily," More than satisfying to the spiritual heart and mind, this causes glad worship and blessing to flow forth.

It was Jesus who said, "No man knows the Son but the Father." He also said, "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." What a mighty contrast to a harsh world of boastfulness and pride! In Him dwells the fullness! He is the Head of the body, the assembly! We are reconciled, as we have said, to the Fullness "in the body of His flesh through death!" Soon He will come again! Then we shall be glorified together with Him! Then all things will be reconciled by Him! He has laid the righteous foundation in the blood of His cross! He is over all to the assembly the glorified Head already! Soon His body will be glorified also! But the unmeasured fullness in Him is for His body now! We repeat, in Him is the fullness.

Growing up to Him, we better know how to appreciate that fullness. Complete in Him--filled full in Him, its all-sufficiency and blessedness are ours. To know Him, to know Himself, preserves from broken cisterns, and causes the revived heart to worship and adore, and the revived spirit to glorify His holy Name. REVIVED, the Father and the Son are honoured and magnified! The Unction from the Holy One fills the gladdened soul! Rivers of living water flow out to the thirsty! Our glorious Head fails not to sustain the vital supplies which flow forth! Our exalted Head, the Son, is all-sufficient. Exceedingly significant is God's last invitation in the inspired Volume: "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the WATER OF LIFE freely."

"While rejoicing with joy unspeakable in the Personal greatness and eternal glory of the Son as revealed by the Spirit, let our glad hearts however not neglect to behold the lowly grace which brought Him down so

near to us; let our opened eyes feast upon the beautiful perfections which shone in Him here; for we are to "arrive at the unity of the faith and of THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON or GOD; and the four precious Gospels are given which show Him thus to us.

TO "KNOW HIM." Backslidden Israel might boast in her own distinctions, yet be insensible to her own true condition, while the Lord through Amos calls to Israel again and again,--"Ye have not returned unto Me" (4:6); "Ye have not returned unto ME" (4:8); "Ye have not returned unto ME, SAITH THE LORD" (4:10-11). Seek not your most venerated places, He says; but "Seek ye ME, and ye shall live" (5:5-6). "Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion . . . The Lord is His Name" (5:8). They had actually forgotten that Israel's true Sovereign Head and Lord was the Creator. Is it forgotten now that the living Head of the body, the assembly, is the Creator Son? And may we know Him? Is not true ministry given that we might "arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God"? It is true, "No man knows THE SON but THE FATHER" (Matt. 11:27). The Father only fully comprehends the Son in the infinitude of His glorious Person; but Matthew 16:16-17 shows that the Father revealed Him to Peter as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." To "know Him" is our proper objective.

Israel has not yet sought and found Him; but He has been found, as He says: "I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest to them that asked not for Me" (Rom. 10:20). Far off sinners of the Gentiles have found Him! He sought them! He came into the world to save sinners! Reconciled to God by the death of His Son, they are now baptized into one body by the Spirit; and the glorious Head of that body is the Son of the Father's love. He came from above that "Everyone who sees the Son, and believes on Him, should have life eternal" (John 6:40, N.Tr.). John the Baptist did not know Him until the Father's voice and the Spirit's coming pointed Him out. Then he bore witness that "this is the Son of God" (John 1:33). Later he said, "He who comes from above is above all" (3:31), and "He who comes out of heaven is above all" (N.Tr.). Then in verse 36 we read, "He that believes on the Son has life eternal" (N.Tr.). That which is eternal was brought here by the Son, who is Himself eternal. He is "ABOVE ALL," said John; but when revealed to be the Son of the Father's love--the Head Of the body, the assembly, as we have seen--He is said to be "BEFORE ALL" also. Moreover, "all the fullness" was pleased to dwell in Him, to bring about a reconciliation pleasurable to the Father's holy nature, and for our blessing.

Son of His bosom, come from heaven above,

We see in Thee incarnate God is love.

"No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." It is this glorious Person, who is "the Image of the invisible God," the Revealer of the Father, who is now the assembly's living Head on high. We have good reason to rejoice that He who is "before all," who came down "out of heaven," and who has reconciled us to the Fullness, "in the body of His flesh through death," is now our exalted Head in heaven.

While joy unspeakable may well be ours, we need to know Him as He was seen here on earth. Also to know the Father as seen in Him. To know Himself as the Spirit of Truth shows Him to us in the Gospels. The Spirit of Truth gives power for this. Our faith rejoices in the glorified Head of the assembly. The Spirit given produces the desires we have to know Himself and His love increasingly. The Son of the Father's love came right down to where we were for this. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him." Then it is to be remembered, "He that descended is THE

SAME also that ascended up above all heavens, that He might fill all things." Praise His Name.

The Son is the Holy One, and the Holy One is the Son. "Thus says the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is HOLY. I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to REVIVE the spirit of the humble, and to REVIVE the heart of the contrite ones"--a revival from Him whose Name is Holy!--a revival of the spirit and heart of the humble and contrite!--A revival immediately from Him who inhabits eternity!--from Him who is said to be "before all" (Col. 1:17). Who shall tell the results of such a revival?

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