

# The Head of the Church



"If the church goes wrong on Christ it goes wrong on everything."

**JOHN R.W. STOTT**

## REFLECTION and PREPARATION

Dr. Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, tells the story of the late, wealthy newspaper publisher, William Randolph Hearst. He spent a fortune collecting art treasures from around the world. One day he found a description of some valuable items that he felt he must own. So, he sent his agent abroad to find them. After months of searching, the agent reported that he had finally found the treasures. They were already in Mr. Hearst's warehouse. Hearst had been searching for treasures he already owned.<sup>7</sup>

If you are a Christian, God's mighty power is already yours, but perhaps—like Mr. Hearst—you are not aware of what you possess. Are you experiencing God's mighty power to overcome temptation and live a holy life? If not, entreat God to open the eyes of your heart to see *"the surpassing greatness of His power toward you."* (Eph.1:19)

## LESSON AIM:

- To gain an understanding of the nature of Christ's headship (Lordship) in the church and to discover what it means for us individually and corporately.

<sup>7</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich*, p.30

## DISCUSSION: Are the following statements true or false? (circle one)

- You can know Christ as Savior but not as Lord. T F
- You can be united to a church but not united to Christ. T F

## THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

There are five passages in the New Testament that teach us about the headship of Christ in the church (*1 Cor.11:3; Eph.1:22-23; 4:15, 5:23; Col.1:18*). Paul is the only Apostle to use this picture. Each context unfolds various elements of Christ's role as head of the church. The metaphor of the "head" denotes:

- That which *governs* and *directs* the body
- That upon which the body *depends*
- That which is under His *guidance* and *authority*

As we consider each text, we learn five truths about Christ as head of the church:

1. Christ's headship is God's order of **authority** over us. (*1 Cor.11:3*)
2. Christ's headship is God's gift of **supremacy** to us. (*Eph.1:22-23*)
3. Christ's headship is God's desire for **maturity** in us. (*Eph.4:15*)
4. Christ's headship is God's picture of **security** for us. (*Eph.5:23*)
5. Christ's headship is God's **power** of life in us. (*Col 1:18*)

In this lesson, we will cover the first truth.

### 1. Christ's headship is God's order of authority over us.

- **1 Corinthians 11:3**—But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

In the context, Paul begins in verse 1 by inviting the Corinthian believers to *"be imitators of me, just as also am of Christ"* (v.1). **Two observations** should be noted: 1) *Paul prescribes nothing to others that he had not practiced himself.* 2) *He directs himself and others to Christ as the only pattern of right behavior.*

These are two observations worthy of application in our lives today. Stop for a moment and examine if you practice these principles in your life.

- *Do you prescribe to others that which you have not practiced yourself?*
- *Do you direct yourself and others to Christ as the only perfect standard for doing what is right? Why not?*

In verse 2, Paul commended the church because they had remembered how he conducted himself honorably with respect to appropriate behavior between men and women.

- "Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you."

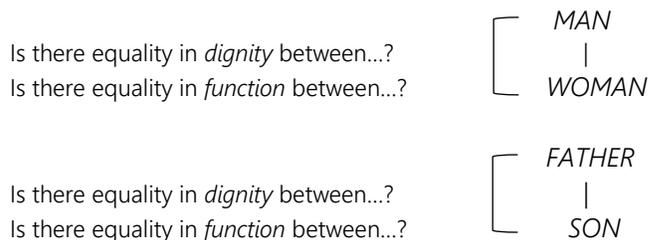
**The traditions** Paul taught (*apostolic teaching*) were connected to the church's order, government, propriety, and decorum so that things might "*be done properly and in order.*" (1 Cor.14:40; Cf. 2 Thess.2:15; 3:6; 1 Tim.3:14-15; 2:8-15).

**Two issues needed correction.** One was the *unseemly cultural expressions of women* who appeared in the public assembly with their heads uncovered and even shaved (11:5-6). This was a way of showing contempt for male leadership. The other was the abrogation of male leadership in the church. Men who prayed (*which was part of the public teacher's role*) or prophesied (*declaring the mysteries of God for the edification of believers*) with their heads covered was problematic (11:4, 7). Why? Because it denied the role and responsibilities which was assigned by God in the home and in the church.

The way Paul addresses these issues is by *teaching* them what theologians call, **creation order** in verse 3:

- But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

Creation order describes a *functional subordination that has to do with roles*. Look at the verse and notice the correct order.



Although there is *equality in dignity* between the Father and the Son, there is a *difference in function or roles*. The same is true between the *men* and *women*. They are *equal* in the sight of God, however; they serve *distinct* functions in the *home* and in the *church*. There are two principles that we ought to understand and one application.

### The two principles:

1. There is a proper order of subordination and submission—because God is a God of order. Subordination is not a concept that came about through *sin*. It was already present *before creation* in the relationship between *the Father* and *the Son* in the Trinity. We see *subordination* and *submission* in both creation and salvation (Cf. 1 Cor.15:20-28; John.5:18-24).

2. The proper order is not in conflict with *equality* and *mutual dependence*. Equal but different. Subordination or subjection is not to be regarded as *inferior*, or as being *disrespectful* to those whom are in any way subordinate. God intends the differences in gifts, personalities, and roles to be *complimentary*, not *competitive*. Together, as a man and a woman submit to God's purpose, they enjoy harmony.

**The application:**

Just as the man as the head of the woman is to hold first place—not in the sense of *dictatorship*, but in the proper order of things in *leadership* and *spiritual authority*—Christ's headship expresses the truth of His leadership and spiritual authority over the church.

Problems in relationships, both inside and outside the church, are handled correctly by first determining one's relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Is He central in your life right now?

- How about in *your thoughts*? *Your desires*? *Your attitudes*? *Your actions*? *Your schedule*? Take a moment and conduct some spiritual inventory. Share two ways the headship of Christ is seen in your life.



## HART-TO-HEART

*Jody Hart, Editor and Director Mountaintop Resources*

### **The Beautiful Head**

Saying the word "lead" may bring a heart to cringe,  
Even more the word "submit" can bring disdain within.  
Some may say, "their hearts are hard. They just don't want to obey!"  
But, before you judge too quickly, will you listen to what I say?

Misused and abused has the role of headship been,  
Power trips and wrong views have overtaken men.  
Treating women as their property, to use as they please.  
Lording over them, all to fulfill selfish needs.

Women have not been innocent in the matter  
Responding in ways to show, "I am better."  
Refusing to even accept chivalry,  
Lording over them, it's all pride, you see?

We will not accept what true headship means  
If we try to explain it before we look to the King.  
Jesus, Lord Jesus, the beautiful Head,  
Our prime example, here is what He said:

I came to serve, and not be served,  
To die the death that you deserve.  
My love for you is so great, so grand  
Do you see the nails in my feet and my hands?

I lived for you. I died for you. I live for you again.  
Victorious over death, did it all for you even when  
You did not love me. You hated me.  
My sacrifice, your debt freed.

Why would I now lead you in a cruel and harmful way?  
I am still gentle. Still lowly. Ever here for you when you pray.  
I love you. I love you...I love you  
And I lead you in that love, this is true.

We may only exercise headship in Christ's stead.  
Change it, we may not. We must follow what He said  
And what He did, how He lived, and how He's leading now.  
This beautiful, meek, exalted One is before whom we bow.

All dignified in Christ, yet distinct in our roles  
If we don't resist, a beautiful picture unfolds

For the whole world to see! Contrary to what's been told.  
Christ, our merciful head, has more room in His fold.

Hear Him call. See Him walk. Taste His love, so sweet.  
If you have not yet, this dear Savior is who I want you to meet.  
And if you have, see this standard of fierce love He embodied.  
Follow His lead. Embrace the Head. You're part of His body.

## ANSWER KEY:

## DISCUSSION

- False
- True

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