

## *Christ, the Head Of the Church*

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An old story tells of a group of boys who came running into a store. They bought a few things and rushed out. Within minutes they topped the hill just beyond the store and went out of sight. A few minutes later, another boy came running into the store, out of breath. He excitedly asked the store clerk, "Have you seen a group of boys come by?" The store clerk said, "Yes. They were here not more than fifteen minutes ago. They were in a big hurry and didn't stay long." The boy said, "Which way did they go? I'm their leader!"

This boy, the group's leader, is an example of the kind of leadership all of us have seen too often—a leadership which is not out front leading but is behind wondering which way the followers went! The trouble with human leadership is its frailty and faults. Human leadership, at some time or other, brings disappointment. People are always going to be people.

Does the church also have poor leadership at

times? Does the ship bound for heaven have a captain who is subject to human weakness and failures? As the church journeys from earth to the eternal shore of the great forever, must its members depend upon a broken compass?

Such fears are relieved by the words of inspiration which assert that the head of the church is none other than Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23–25). He is the head of the church because He loved it and died for it. Jesus has a right to lead the church because of His great sacrifice. Let the phrase "Christ also is the head of the church" enter deeply into your thinking. Seeing Christ as the head of the church gives assurance to those who are members of Christ's church, for it reminds them of the unerring guidance they receive. It should also be a reason for non-Christians to enter the church—so that they might come under the infallible leadership of Christ.

Let us contemplate the reassuring theme of "Christ, the Head of the Church," by considering the ways in which He is the head of the church.

### **HE IS THE HEAD IN AUTHORITY**

First, Christ is the head of the church in authority. He is the Lord, and He leads by His law.

After His resurrection from the dead and His ascension to heaven, Christ was seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:21). God "put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave

Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, . . ." (Ephesians 1:22, 23). Paul emphasized this same truth in Colossians, when he said, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him" (Colossians 1:18, 19). According to the writer of Hebrews, God will speak to us through His Son during the last days, or the Christian dispensation (Hebrews 1:1, 2). He has highly exalted Jesus and has bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, . . ." (Philippians 2:10, 11). The Scriptures assure us that Christ will reign as head of the church or king of the kingdom until the end of time, and then, when all rule, authority, and power are abolished, He will deliver the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:23, 24).

Jesus' church lives under His authority and leadership. Even in a "me"-focused age, people in Christ's church cannot demand their own way. They cannot say "Me first" and acknowledge Jesus as Lord at the same time. Every decision a Christian makes is a spiritual decision, guided by obedience to His Lordship.

### **HE IS THE HEAD IN EXAMPLE**

Second, Christ is the head of the church in example. He is a perfect pattern in obedience to God. He leads by His sinless life.

Peter said that Christ committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When suffering, He uttered no threats (1 Peter 2:21–23).

Christ never needed to apologize for a mistake He had made. No need ever arose for Him to retract a misspoken word. His heart never knew a sinful thought. His enemies scrutinized His life but were unable to find a single sin.

The head of the church is perfect in character even as He is perfect in authority. His church is to heed His commands and imitate His life. John wrote, “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:6). Because of the unique leadership Jesus gives to the church, Paul could charge others, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

From one viewpoint, Christ *became* our perfect Savior. By living a perfect life before God, He became perfectly qualified to be our Savior and could offer to God a sinless life for the atonement (payment) for sin. The writer of Hebrews argued, “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the story “The Great Stone Face” which reminds us that we become what we behold; we imitate what we admire. A gracious face, chiselled in the side of a mountain, overlooked a valley where a village of oppressed people lived. The community believed that someone with a face similar to the great stone face would one day come

as their deliverer. A boy of the village continually thought about the stone face with aspiration and desire. In time, through his beholding and admiring the stone face, the youth grew into the likeness of the face, and the community soon recognized him as their deliverer.

The truth that we become what we behold is especially true of the church. Paul said, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The church of Christ looks to His life as a model of how to live. He is our head in example. Not only do its members look at Him, but they also look unto Him (Hebrews 12:2) as He ever leads the church with His perfect life.

### **HE IS THE HEAD IN LOVE**

Third, Christ is the head of the church in love. He leads and commands His people with His wonderful love.

The evening before His death, Jesus told His disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, *even as I have loved you*, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34, 35; emphasis mine). He further told them, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, *just as I have loved you*" (John 15:12; emphasis mine).

This love which Christ shows for people leads His followers in three ways. First, it causes them *to love Him*. John said, "We love, because He first

loved us" (1 John 4:19). Second, His love causes Christians *to love each other*. John wrote, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). Third, His love causes His followers *to do His will*. Christ said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

As the angels watched the earthly ministry of Christ, they must have been in awe. The day before His death on the cross, He took a basin and a towel, and in love and humility washed His disciples' feet! The King of kings knelt before His disciples in loving service. Christ not only became a man, but He became a servant of men. He took the form of a man and lived the life of a bondservant (Philippians 2:7).

John introduced this important scene with these words: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God" (John 13:3). In other words, at a time when Christ was especially conscious of His authority, position, and future, He condescended (lowered Himself) to do the work of a servant in harmony with the life of a servant which He had lived. He did not flaunt His supremacy and strength, His power and position. In love, He used it to teach His disciples the lesson of humility.

As the head of the church, He lovingly serves with His power and authority! He did not relinquish His position as Lord when He washed the disciples' feet; He used His position as Lord to serve them and to build in them the spirit of service. He said to them, "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and

you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you" (John 13:13-15).

Jesus has portrayed in the highest possible way what love is and how true love is manifested. He leads His church with His love. As Christians live in the atmosphere of His love, breathe that atmosphere, and respond to it, they are remade into His image. No wonder John said, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7, 8).

### CONCLUSION

Assuredly, Christ is the head of the church in authority, in example, and in love and service. He leads His church through His Lordship, through His perfect life, and through His compelling love.

The head of any organization or body should give the credibility, authenticity, and strength he possesses to the organization or body he leads. This is certainly true of Christ and the church. The Christ, the divine Son of God, gives His spotless perfection, infinite wisdom, matchless integrity, and almighty strength to the church with His headship and leadership.

The church of Christ was founded by Christ, is led by Christ, and wears Christ's name. Whatever Christ possesses, He imparts to His church; whatever future Christ has, the church has. He promises to sustain His church today and to sanctify her for her future, "that He might present to Himself the

church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27).

If Christ has created the church, imparted to the church His love and salvation, and has crowned the church with His promise of eternal glory, who would not want to be in His church?

Are you part of the church led by Christ?

## STUDY QUESTIONS

*(answers on page 268)*

1. Give examples of leadership that does not really lead.
2. How is Jesus the head of the church in authority? Give passages of Scripture which teach that Jesus has all authority.
3. How long is Christ to reign as head of the church? (See 1 Corinthians 15:23–25.)
4. How did Jesus become our perfect Savior? (See Hebrews 5:8, 9.)
5. Conversion to Christ is an event in time, but transformation into His image is a process over time. Discuss this process of transformation. (See 2 Corinthians 3:18.)
6. What does Christ's washing of the disciples' feet teach us about daily living for Christ?
7. How do Christians "wash each other's feet" today?

## WORD HELPS

**purchased**—bought. When we say that Christians have been "purchased by the blood of Christ," this refers to the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins.

**transformed**—changed. The Christian is to change in order to take on a new character in the image of Jesus. Romans 12:2 says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."