

Christ Loved the Church: And He Gave Himself for Her

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References: **1 Corinthians 11**, Colossians 1:18; Colossians 2:9-10; Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 5:23-25; Acts 13:2-4; Romans 6:3-4; Genesis 24:64-65

Christ loved the church. And then the subtitle of my message is, and He gave Himself for her. The church is so important to the Lord, and the measure of His love for it is found in that second phrase: He gave Himself for her.

The Testimony of the Local Church

So, the local church. This is my fourth message on the local church, the universal church and the local church. And the local church is a replica, or should be a replica, of the universal church. And it should give testimony to some seven fundamental truths. This doesn't exhaust the topic, but last time that I was with you, we looked at: there is **only one body**. All who trusted Christ as Savior down through the centuries and all who are alive today are joined to that one body. We saw around the world, we see many denominations, but there's only one body, and that's the body of Christ, made up of all true believers.

And Christ is the **head of the body**, and that's the subject that we're going to look at today.

We'll run through the rest of the seven quickly:

- All believers are members of that one body.
- The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative in the church. These are truths that are very important that the local assembly should give a testimony to.
- The church is holy, and therefore it's a place of discipline as well as worship.
- Gifts—we're going to look at gifts later on.
- And then the last of the seven important testimonies are that all believers are priests of God.

The Three Headships of Christ

But today we want to look at the subject of the headship of Christ. And He has three headships.

The first of all is the **head of all creation**. By the decree of God, "This day You are My Son," and He has inherited all things. If you turn to Colossians chapter 2, verse 9, we see that there for us. Colossians chapter 2 and verse 9:

[Colossians 2:9-10 NKJV]

⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

So He's the head of all the powers and principalities, the governmental agents in the universe, the head of all creation.

And secondly, He's the **head of every man**. Now, this is every redeemed man. We read in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 3—and you can turn there if you like, or I'll read it for you:

[1 Corinthians 11:3 NKJV]

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

The head of every man is Christ. And so He's the head of every man because Adam was the head of the human race; he fell, and the human race fell with him as the head. Christ has come now, and He died, He rose again, and now He is the head of a new creation. All who are in Christ are a new creation. So He's the head of all redeemed men and women, of mankind. He's the head of a new race, a spiritual race born again of the Spirit of God.

Lastly—and this is what we're going to look more closely at today—He is the **head of His church**. He's the head of the body, the church. Colossians 1:18. We read there, Colossians chapter 1, verse 18:

[Colossians 1:18 NKJV]

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.

So He's the head of the church.

Now, as the head of the body, I want you to turn again with me to another scripture found in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 22 and 23. Here, laid out for us, is another description of His headship, which is—I would call, and I don't use any extended language here—it's awe-inspiring. Chapter 1, verses 22 and 23:

[Ephesians 1:22-23 NKJV]

²² And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

And this is the phrase that is astounding, awe-inspiring: "the fullness of Him"—that is the church, the body of Christ—is "the fullness of Him that fills all in all." There is a mysterious way in which Christ is not complete without the church. Now, He gave Himself for her, and now He's claimed her for Himself to be part of Himself.

What Headship Means

Now, headship—it speaks of three things, does it not?

Authority, first of all. Power, authority. In other words, the Lord Jesus said, "All power and authority has been given unto Me," as He was raised from the dead. And He's seated at God's right hand in the place of authority, and it's all given to Him. So the head, of course—in the analogy of the body, the head controls all of the body. Unless there's something wrong with the body, some illness or disease or something where the head can no longer control part of the body; there you find paralysis or some other type of disability. But in a normal, healthy body, the head controls everything. And so that speaks of control and authority, **leadership**.

Also, the head is the one who makes the plans for the foot, where to go; for the eye, which direction it's going to see. And also it's the seat of the **intellect**, where the wisdom of God is personified in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the head. He knows all, and He makes plans for His body. Just like we take care of our body—it's our minds that make the decisions to care for our body—so Christ also cares for His own body.

Now, the head and the body share the same life and the same interests. You can't separate the two. It's almost inane to make that statement. This idea of headship is one that's very little acknowledged in Christendom. It's given lip service to, perhaps. But the head and the body are vitally connected to one another, intimately. They share the same life and the same interests. They operate as a unified whole. And the head is not complete without the body.

We talked about that concept a little earlier: that the church is the fullness of Him that fills all in all. The body completes the head. A head without a body is incomprehensible. The head needs the body in order to be able to function properly, to be able to live, to be able to act, to be able to move, to be able to interact with the world around.

Testifying to Headship in the Local Assembly

So the vital point that I want to make is that the head and the body are one. Now, how can believers testify to this fact today in the local assembly? How can we, as a local assembly meeting here at 16th Avenue—on 16th Avenue near McDonald's—how can we actually testify to this truth?

Well, number one: **we should accept no human leader as the head of our church or churches.** There are some denominations that have certain heads, and they actually have names; some of them are long dead. But the Roman system that we see today, that great ecclesiastical governmental thing that's in the Vatican—they have their head there seated on a throne in Rome. We don't. As a local assembly testifying to the fact of the head, our living head, we have no human leader as head of the church. There are shepherds, there are guides, there are leaders in the church. They are plural, and they take no prominent role beyond shepherds in the church.

The second thing we can do is to **allow Christ to direct and control all of our activities.** In other words, we don't use human ideas. We take everything to the Lord Himself. And how do we do that? Through, number one, spiritual exercise. That sounds kind of vague, does it not? What do you mean by spiritual exercise? Well, waiting on the Lord.

"But I don't want to wait. We must make decisions! The board of governors of this church must make the decisions." That's man's way of doing things. What if we wait upon the Lord?

Look at Acts chapter 13. The church had come to a kind of critical point in its ministry. It had spread now; it had begun to spread to Gentile cities. And there was a question: Where do we go from here? What do we do? Well, you might say, "Well, we could go into all the world and preach the gospel just as the Lord commanded." But instead, what they did, they said, "Well, how are we going to do that? And when is the Lord's timing? And are we the right people?" and so on. There were questions that they had in order to fulfill the commandment of the Lord to go into all the world.

It says there in verse 2:

[Acts 13:2 NKJV]

² As they ministered to the Lord and fasted,

these various leaders of the church there at Antioch, they ministered to the Lord and fasted. Ministering there means to wait on the Lord. Then the Holy Spirit, we read, said:

[Acts 13:2-4 NKJV]

"Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

³ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

So they were waiting on the Lord. It was a spiritual exercise. And it's called an exercise because they denied themselves their necessary food while they waited on the Lord. There was an exercise there; it wasn't a human decision.

Also, **we are given instructions in the New Testament.** We can testify to the fact of the head of Christ directing all the activities in the assembly because we have the New Testament here given to us. The apostles' doctrine has outlined for us the New Testament principles of gathering together. And those principles can apply in Kolwezi, Africa, in a grass-roofed hut with semi-literate farmers in the middle of the night. Those same instructions can inform a sophisticated assembly in New York City or anywhere else. Or in the middle of China, whether in Shanghai or in one of the little villages far out in the backcountry. Those principles are as flexible and as wide as God has allowed them to be, and they are all we need. We don't need to rely on human ingenuity, on human thoughts.

Another thought is: **the headquarters of the church is in heaven.** If the head is in heaven, then that's our headquarters. We have no other controlling organization over the local assembly. Right? There is no group of men or churches telling us how we ought to carry on. Each local church is directly responsible to its head in heaven. And we see that in the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, when the Head Himself walks among the candlesticks of the churches: He speaks to each church individually, and they all are responsible directly to the Head. No one should become a dictator in the church either, or the assembly—no one person. It's a positive denial of the headship of Christ.

Headship and Its Symbol: The Head Covering

Now, headship and its symbol, the head covering. We'd like to just cover that briefly here this morning.

In the New Testament, we're given three ordinances. We often emphasize the two, which is baptism and the breaking of bread. But there are actually three ordinances that have been given to us.

First, **baptism**. Romans chapter 6, verses 3 and 4—we don't need to turn to that, it's well known to us. The symbol is water. The meaning is identification with Christ in His death—going down into the water, and then buried, and then coming up out of the water, the resurrection.

Second, **the Lord's Supper**. The symbol: bread and wine; they are still on the table before us. The meaning is a continuing reminder of Christ's death for us:

[1 Corinthians 11:26 NKJV]

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Now, the headship of Christ also has a symbol. The symbol is the **head covering**. And the meaning is the visible recognition of the authority of Christ as head in the assembly. That's what the head covering does: it's visibly recognizing Christ's headship.

Now, an essential idea to keep in mind—because this is sometimes a contentious issue for some, and people really have little understanding what it means, but we're going to go through that very briefly in the short time we have—here's the essential idea to keep in mind: **The head covering is symbolic of the covering and uncovering of the various glories when believers meet in the presence of Christ our head.**

Now, that's kind of a mouthful, isn't it? But there are various glories associated with headship.

1. Christ's Glory Unveiled

Christ as head has the glory, and that glory should be shown in the assembly. Man's glory should not be shown and should be covered, and that's the symbolism of the head covering.

Now, if you turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 11—we'll need to refer to a number of verses here as we proceed—1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 3:

[1 Corinthians 11:3 NKJV]

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

So Christ is the head of the man. The man, therefore, uncovers his head symbolically to honor his unseen head in heaven. So men don't wear a head covering because his head in heaven is Christ. We don't want to cover the glory of Christ. It's a symbol. That's very simple and straightforward.

2. Man's Glory Covered

Secondly, all other glories—the glories of man—need to be covered. And the woman represents the glories of man.

First of all, verse 7—if you have your Bible still open to 1 Corinthians 11, verse 7:

[1 Corinthians 11:7 NKJV]

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

He's the image and glory of God. So that glory should be uncovered, as we mentioned. But the woman—she is covered. Man's glory as her head, verse 5:

[1 Corinthians 11:5 NKJV]

But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

That's not her own head; that's her head referred to in verse 3, which is the man. And as such, the glory of man as the head of the woman must be covered. Does that make any sense? Because man is made in the image and glory of God, that glory of man should be covered. And so she covers her head to hide the glory of her head, which is the man.

3. Woman's Created and Physical Glory Covered

Secondly, she covers her own personal glory as a special creation of God. Verse 7 again: "the woman is the glory of man." The early part of that verse says that the man is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man.

What does that mean? The woman was a special creation. You know, Adam was created from the dust, just as all the animals and all the rest of the created beings on the earth were all created from the dust of the earth. Woman was not created from the dust of the earth; she was, as one has put it, "dust refined." There's a special glory in that she was taken out of Adam—a special creation, unique in all the creation of the earth. A special glory! And she's the glory of man; she was taken out of man. So she covers not only her head to cover the man's glory, but the very fact of woman's glory she covers. It's a little known fact, this one.

Also, she has been given a physical glory—her hair—as a physical glory. Verse 15:

[1 Corinthians 11:15 NKJV]

But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.

Now, that's not the covering that's spoken of earlier. It's a different word altogether. The word "covering" in verses 4, 5, 6, and 7, that's the Greek word *katakalyptomai*, which means something external coming down and placed on the head. The word in verse 15 is *peribolaion*, an entirely different word, meaning something cast around, like a veil or natural hair—two different words entirely. But the hair that was given to the woman is her glory, her personal glory, and that should be covered as well.

Now, some have tried to make the argument and say, "Well, the head covering is the woman's hair. See, it says right there, 'it is given to her for a covering.'" Well, as I mentioned earlier, they're different words. But also, if that were true, then man, to be uncovered, would have to shave his head! All men would have to be bald every time they come into the presence of the Lord—no hair!

So, all these glories must be covered.

A Picture of Submission and a Witness to Angels

And it's a beautiful picture, too, of obedience. The woman is a picture of the church. There in Ephesians chapter 5, please turn with me to verse 23:

[Ephesians 5:23-24 NKJV]

²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

As the church is subject to Christ, the idea of covering the head, the glories, is a beautiful picture of submission.

And so therefore, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, one of the reasons that's given there for the head covering is because of the angels:

[1 Corinthians 11:10 NKJV]

For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

And the reason for that is that mankind, having sinned and rebelled against God's word, dishonored the head of creation. However, the church, now being subject to Christ, no longer rebels but is subject to Him. And that head covering is a visible symbol to the unseen watchers, the holy watchers that watch now this new body of people that have been called out of the world that are now subject to Christ. And they see the man uncovered—the glory of their Lord unveiled—and they see the glory of man covered by the head covering of the woman. And the angels are being instructed in grace and in righteousness. They see this; it's a visible school for them to watch the obedience of the church.

Rebekah: An Old Testament Picture

Lastly, there's an Old Testament picture there in Genesis chapter 24, and I close with this. Genesis chapter 24, verse 64:

[Genesis 24:64-65 NKJV]

⁶⁴ Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; ⁶⁵ for she had said to the servant, "Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took a veil and covered herself.

We read there a beautiful picture of the submission of Rebekah. She had long ago decided to go to meet a man that she'd never met and to a land she'd never been to, to become the wife of this one that the servant had only spoken about. But she went in obedience. When she saw him, she covered herself, her glories; she submitted to him. That's the picture of Christ to the church.

And the idea of head covering for the women, as we meet together in the presence of our Head, is a visible symbol of our obedience—man and woman—to the Lord Himself.

One last thought, and that is: you know, we can be very correct in all our doctrine and our practices, but our hearts can be in the wrong place. May the Lord help us in true obedience and true love for the Savior to carry out this ordinance that He has laid down for us in the Scripture, even though in Christendom it's one that's passed over completely in this so-called modern age. May the Lord bless our word today.

Father, again, we thank You for Your grace to us and Your mercy. Bless our time together in fellowship and the food and refreshments that will be given to each one. And Father, we ask Your blessing upon us in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.