

THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

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*“He is the head of the body, the church.”
Colossians 1:18*

AS if to show us that this title of “Head of the church” is to be held in highest esteem, it is here placed in connection with the loftiest honors of our Lord Jesus. In the same breath the Son of God is styled “the image of the invisible God,” “the firstborn of every creature,” the Creator of all existence, and then, “the head of the body, the church.” We dare not, therefore, think slightly of this title, nor do we hesitate to assert that any levity with regard to it would be as disgraceful as the profane use of any other name of our divine Lord.

For any mortal to assume it to himself, we conceive would be equal in blasphemy to the assumption of the mediatorial office, and we should be no more shocked to hear a man claim to be “the creator of all things,” than we are now when a mortal is designated, “Head of the church.”

What is the church? The word signifies an assembly. The church of Jesus Christ is an assembly of faithful men, the whole company of God’s chosen, and called out ones, the entire community of true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever true believers are, there is a part of the church. Wherever such men are not, whatever organization may be in existence, there is no church of Jesus Christ. The church is no corporation of priests, or confederacy of unconverted men, it is the assembly of those whose names are written in heaven. Any assembly of faithful men is *a* church.

The aggregate of all these assemblies of faithful men make up *the* one church which Jesus Christ hath redeemed with His most precious blood, and of which He is the sole and only Head. Part of that church is in heaven, triumphant, part on earth, militant, but these differences of place make no division as to real unity. There is but one church above, beneath. Time creates no separation, the church is always one—one church of the apostles, one church of the reformers, one church of the first century, one church of the latter days, and of this one and only church Jesus Christ is the one only Head.

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY OUR LORD’S HEADSHIP OF THE CHURCH?

That shall be very briefly our first subject of thought.

We understand this Headship to be *the representation of the church as a body*. We speak of counting heads, meaning thereby person. The head represents the whole body. God has been pleased to deal with mankind as a community, and His great covenant transactions have been with men in a body, and not with separate individuals.

That is to say, at the first creation God did not so much deal with each particular person of the human race as with the whole race represented in one man, namely, the first Adam. It was so ordained that the race should be bound up in his loins, to stand if he stood, to fall if he fell.

Hence, my brethren, the fall, hence original sin, hence the sorrows of this life. In order to salvation, which, perhaps, was only possible because we did not fall singly (for the devils falling singly and separately are reserved without hope of mercy unto everlasting fire), God instituted a second federation, of which Jesus Christ is the Head. The apostle calls Him the second Adam. He is the Head of that company of mankind who are His chosen, His redeemed, who are known in this world by being led to believe in Him, and are ultimately gathered into His rest.

Now, Jesus Christ stands to His church in the same position as Adam stood to his posterity. They are chosen in Him, accepted in Him, and preserved in Him, “Saved in the Lord with an everlasting

salvation.” As His own words declare it, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” In the following chapters of the epistle before us, the apostle shows that the saints are buried with Jesus, risen with Him, and quickened with Him. Even more explicit is he in the fifth of Romans, where the headship of Adam and of Jesus are compared and contrasted.

Our Lord is Head in a *mystical sense*, explained in Colossians 2:19, “The Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.” The head is to the body indispensable to life. It is the seat of mental life, the temple of the soul, even so Jesus Christ is the vitalizing Head of all His people. “He is our life.” “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

The life of every member of the mystical body depends upon the life of the mystical Head. Through Jesus Christ every living child of God derives his spiritual life, not one true member of the church lives by a life of his own. “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Separation from Christ is spiritual death, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered.”

The head mystically is not merely the source of life, and the seat of sensation, but it is the throne of supreme government. It is from the brain that the mandate is issued which uplifts the hand or bids it fall by the side. Man walks or speaks, or sleeps, or rises from his couch, according to the dictate of that mysterious royal something which finds a place for itself within the head. Thus in the true church of God, Jesus Christ is the great directing Head. From Him the only binding commands go forth.

To Him all the really spiritual yield a cheerful homage. His members delight to do the will of their Head. The whole fabric of the church actuated by His life, and being filled with His Spirit, most readily concedes to Him that in all things He shall have the preeminence.

In proportion as Christians are truly united to Jesus they are perfectly governed by Him, and it is only because of the old nature which abideth in separation from Christ that believers offend and transgress. In so far as they are spiritual men, so far doth Jesus rule them as the head governs all the members of the body.

The head is also the glory of the body. There the chief beauty of manhood dwells. The divine image is best seen in the countenance, the face is the distinguishing glory of man. Man holds his head erect, his countenance is not turned towards the earth like the beast, it glows with intelligence. It is the index of an immortal mind.

Beauty chooses as her favored seat the features of the countenance, majesty and tenderness, wisdom and love, courage and compassion, here hang out their ensigns. All the graces choose the head as their favored dwelling place. In this sense, right well is our Lord saluted as the “Head.” He is fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into His lips.

In Jesus Christ all the beauty of the church is summed up. What were all His church without Him? A carcass, a ghastly corpse bereft of all its glory, because divided from its Head. What were all the good, and great, and excellent men who have ever lived without Christ? So many ciphers upon a writing table—they count for nothing until their Lord, as the great unit, is put before them to give them power and value. Then indeed they swell to a mighty sum, but without Him they are less than nothing and vanity.

An uncomely thing would be the church of God if she were not comely with the comeliness which Jesus imparts to her. His head is as the most fine gold, His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. He is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely—glorious is that body of which He is the crown and excellence. Well may the church be called the fairest among women, when her Head thus excelleth all the beauties of earth and heaven.

Another figure which is used to describe the Headship of Christ to the church is *the conjugal*. As the Lord made Eve out of the flesh of Adam, so hath He taken the church out of the side of Christ Jesus, and she is of Him as Eve was of Adam—she is of His flesh, and of His bones. A mysterious union has been established between Christ and His church, which is constantly compared to that of marriage, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Saviour of the

body.” Jesus is the Bridegroom, His church is His Bride. They are espoused, one to another, in bonds of love they are bound forever to each other, and they are alike with sacred expectation waiting for the marriage day, when shall be accomplished the eternal purpose of God and the desire of the Redeemer.

As the husband exercises a headship in the house, not at all (when the relationship is rightly carried out) tyrannical or magisterial, but a government founded upon the rule of nature and endorsed by the consent of love, even so Jesus Christ ruleth in His church, not as a despotic lord, compelling and constraining His subject bride against her will, but as a husband well beloved, obtaining obedience voluntarily from the heart of the beloved one, being in all things so admired, and held in esteem as to win an undisputed pre-eminence.

Such conjugal headship is illustrated by the Word of God in the old prophecy, “Thou shalt call me Ishi, and shalt call me no more Baali.” Baali and Ishi both mean lord, but the sense differs, the one is a mere ruler, the other a beloved husband.

Jesus Christ’s kingdom is no tyranny, His scepter is not made of iron, He rules not with blows and curses, and threats, but His scepter is of silver and His rule is love. The only chains He uses are the chains of His constraining grace. His dominion is spiritual, and extends over willing hearts who delight to bow before Him and to give Him the honor due unto His name. These, I think, are the senses in which this word “headship” is used, but there remains one other, these former all qualifying this last, upon which I intend to dwell at some length this morning.

Christ is the Head of His church as *King in Zion*. In the midst of the church of God the supreme government is vested in the person of Christ. “One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.” The church is the kingdom of God among men. It is purely spiritual, comprehending only spiritual men, and existing only for spiritual objects.

And who is its King? None but Jesus. We can truly say, as they did of old, who proclaimed the kingship of the Crucified, “We have another King, one Jesus.” To Him the assemblies of the saints pay all regal honor, and at His throne the entire church boweth itself, saluting Him as Master and Lord. To no other do we render spiritual obeisance. Christ only and solely is King upon Zion’s hill, set there by eternal decree, maintained in that position by infinite power, and appointed to remain upon the throne till every enemy shall be made His footstool.

I wish I had eloquence, this morning, that I might bear worthy witness to the crown-rights of King Jesus in His church, for I know no subject which is more necessary to insist upon in these eventful times. Let Jesus be owned as the only Head of the church, and the way out of the present political debate which agitates our nation is clear enough. Ignorance of this truth blinds many, and makes them labor with all their heart for a bad cause, under the notion that they are doing God service.

To know this truth is to hold a most weighty trust, with which we must not trifle. Martyrs have bled for this truth. Scotland’s heather has been stained in ten thousand places, and her waters have been dyed crimson for the defense of this weighty doctrine.

Let us not be slow with unshaken courage to declare yet again that kings and princes and parliaments have no lawful jurisdiction over the church of Jesus Christ, that it beseems not the best of monarchs have no right to claim those royal prerogatives which God has given to His only begotten Son. Jesus alone is the Head of His spiritual kingdom, the church, and all others who come within her pale to exercise power are but usurpers and Antichrist, and not for one moment to be respected in their usurped authority by the true church of the living God.

Some churches have not learned this lesson, but are held in leash like dogs by their masters. They crouch down at the feet of the state to eat the crumbs which fall from Mammon’s table. And if they are cuffed and beaten by the powers that be, well do they deserve it, and I would almost pray that the whip may fall upon them yet more heavily, till they learn to appreciate liberty, and are willing to take off the dog collar of the state, and be free from human domination.

If they lose a little wealth, they will win the solid gold of God's own favor, and the abiding power of His Spirit, which they cannot expect to have while they are traitors to King Jesus, and own not the sole and only Headship of Immanuel in the church.

II. We shall now, therefore, in the second place, come to look a little into this headship of Jesus Christ in a regal sense, as to WHAT IT IMPLIES.

Since Christ is the Head of His body, the church, He alone can determine doctrines for her. Nothing is to be received as divinely warranted except it cometh with His stamp upon it. It is nothing, my brethren, to the faithful servant of Jesus Christ that a certain dogma comes down to him with the grey antiquity of the ages to make it venerable.

Like a sensible man, the Christian respects antiquity, but like a loyal subject of his King, he does not so bow before antiquity as to let it become ruler in Zion instead of the living Christ. A multitude of good men may meet together, and they may, in their judgment, propound a dogma, and assert it to be essential and undoubted, and they may even threaten perils most abundant to those who receive not their verdict. But if the dogma was not authorized long before they decided it—if it was not written in the Book, the decision of the learned council amounts to nothing.

All the fathers, and doctors, and divines, and confessors put together, cannot add a word to the faith once delivered unto the saints. Yea, I venture to say that the unanimous assent of all the saints in heaven and earth would not suffice to make a single doctrine binding upon conscience unless Jesus had so determined.

In vain do men say, "So did the early church"—the early church has no supremacy over us. It is to no purpose to quote Origen or Augustine, quote the inspired apostles, and the doctrine is established, but not otherwise.

In the church of God it is never sufficient to say, "So thinks Martin Luther." Who was Martin Luther? A servant of Jesus Christ, and nothing more. It is not sufficient to say, "So teacheth John Calvin," for who is John Calvin? Hath he shed his blood for you, or is he your master? His opinion is to be respected as the opinion of your fellow servant, but in no respect as a doctor or authoritative teacher in the church—for Christ alone is Rabbi, and we are to call no man Master upon earth.

Suppose I have received a truth from the very man who was the means of my conversion. I am bound, in candor and affection, to give all respect to him because of the relationship which exists between us, but I must take heed lest this declines into idolatry, and I become nothing more than a receiver of truth as the word of man, instead of accepting it as the Word of God. I am, therefore, in the most candid manner, but none the less solicitously, to bring to the test every truth which I have received, whether from my father or mother, or my minister, or from some great man of olden times, whose name I have learned to respect, seeking all the while light from above to direct me aright.

Nothing is doctrine to the church of God—nothing which has not been taught in the Scriptures. To Christians it is nothing to say that certain doctrines are taught in books of common prayer, or of conference discipline, or of systematic theology. To us it is of small account that either Presbytery, or the Episcopacy, or Independency, have put their stamp upon a certain form of teaching. Authority is no more to us than the snap of a man's finger, unless the truth thus commended derives certainty from the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Head of His body the church.

So next, since He is the Head, He only can legislate as to the church. In a state, if any knot of persons should profess to make laws for the kingdom, they would be laughed at. And if they should for a moment attempt to enforce their own rules and regulations in defiance of the laws of the country, they would be subject to punishment.

Now the church of God has no power whatever to make laws for herself, since she is not her own Head, and no one has any right to make laws for her, for no one is her Head but Christ. Christ alone is the law-maker of the church, and no rule or regulation in the Christian church standeth for anything unless in its spirit at least it hath the mind of Christ to support and back it up.

Such and such a thing has been thought to be right in the church, and therefore it has been laid down, and made prescriptive, the tradition of the fathers has established a certain custom. What then? Why this—that if we can distinctly see that the custom and prescription are not according to the tenor of Holy Scripture, and the Spirit of Christ, neither of them are anything to us.

But what if the custom be supported by all the good men of every age? I say that matters nought if the Lord hath not taught it. Our conscience is not to be bound. If a law were backed up by fifty thousand times as many as all the saints, it would have no authority upon the conscience even of the weakest Christian if not laid down by our King Himself. And the violation of such a commandment of men would be no sin, but might indeed become a Christian duty in order to let men see that we are not the servants of men, but the servants of Jesus Christ the Lord.

In spiritual things it is of the utmost importance to keep this fact clear, that nonconformity is only sinful when it refuses to conform to the will of Christ, and conformity itself is a great sin when it obeys a rule which is not of the Lord's ordaining. When we meet together in church meeting we cannot make laws for the Lord's kingdom. We dare not attempt it.

Such necessary regulations as may be made for carrying out our Lord's commands, to meet for worship, and to proclaim the Gospel, are commendable because they are acts needful to obedience to His highest laws. But even these minor details are not tolerable if they clearly violate the spirit and mind of Jesus Christ.

He has rather given us spiritual guidances than legal rubrics and fettering liturgies, and He has left us at liberty to follow the directions of His own free Spirit. But if we make a regulation, thinking it to be very wise, if it be contrary to the Spirit of our Lord, the rule is itself evil, and is not to be borne with. In such a case the church has trenched upon the rights of her Head, and has done what she ought not to have done. She has, in effect, snatched from His hand the scepter, and set up a schism.

Law-making in the church was finished in that day when the curse was pronounced on him who should take from or add to the Word of God. Christ alone is the legislator of His church—none but He.

But I go further, and venture to say that Christ is not only the legislator of the church, and has left to us His Statute-book, sufficient to guide us in every dilemma, but He is also the living administrator in the church. He is not here, it is true, but as monarchs often administrate through lieutenants, so the Lord Jesus administereth through His ever living Spirit, who dwells in the hearts of His people.

You are not to think of Christ as of one who is dead and buried. If He were here on earth I suppose nobody would claim to be the head of the church but Himself. His presence would at once overawe every pretender, and now, though He is not here in person, yet He is not dead. He liveth, He sitteth on the throne prepared for Him at the right hand of the Father. In spirit He is here. "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

And what must the true Head of the church think when He sees another put up into His throne, and impiously called by His title! What must the living Head moving in the midst of the church feel in regard to such a blasphemous intrusion as that? He, the Holy Ghost, is the Vicegerent of Christ, the representative of the absent Son of Man.

But how does this Spirit administrate the laws of God? I answer, through His people, for the Holy Ghost dwells in true believers, and when they meet together as the Lord's servants, and ask His guidance humbly, they may expect to have it—and opening the Statute-book and seeing plain directions as to their course of action, they may be quite sure that what they do has their Master's sanction. If they look first of all for the direction in their Lord's Law-book, and next seek to be instructed as to its meaning by the Holy Spirit, though they are many minds, they shall be led as one man to choose that course of action which shall be after the mind of Christ.

Acting humbly and obediently, not on their own authority, but in the authority of Jesus Christ, who by His Spirit still rules in His church, believers practically show Christ still to be the only Head of His church as to actual administration as well as to legislation.

The sole authority of Jesus Christ in all respects must be maintained rigorously, but churches are very apt to be guided by something else. Some would have us guided by results. We have heard a discussion upon the question whether or no we should continue missionary operations, since there are so few converted!

How can the question ever be raised while the Master's orders run thus—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"? Spoken by the mouth of Jesus our ruler, that command stands good, and the results of missions can have no effect upon loyal minds either one way or the other as to their prosecution.

If from this day for the next ten thousand years not a single soul should be converted to God by foreign missions, if there still remained a church of Christ, it would be her duty with increasing vigor to thrust her sons forward into the mission field, because her duty is not measured by the result, but by the imperial authority of Christ.

Equally so the church is not to be regulated by the times. We are told by some that this age requires a different kind of preaching from that of a hundred years ago, and that two hundred years ago, in the Puritan times, doctrines were suitable which are exploded now. The minister must keep abreast of the age, this is a thoughtful and philosophic period, and the preacher must therefore philosophize, and bring forth his own thinking rather than "mere declamation," which is the learned name for a plain declaration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But sirs, it is not so, our King is the same, and the doctrines He has given us have not been changed by His authority, nor the rules He has laid down reversed by His proclamation. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, let the times be polished or uncouth, let them become philosophical or sink into barbarism, our duty is still the same, in solemn loyalty to Jesus Christ, to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

But the discoveries of science, we are told, have materially affected belief, and therefore we should change our ways accordingly as philosophy changes. No, it must not so be. This is a stumbling stone and a rock of offense against which he who stumbleth shall be broken. We have the same King still, the same laws still, the same teaching of the Word still, and we are to deliver this teaching after the same sort and in the same spirit.

Semper idem must be our motto—always the same, always keeping close to Jesus Christ and glorifying Him, for He and not the times, not the philosophy, and not the wit of man, must rule and govern the church of God. If we shall do this, if any church shall do this, namely, take its truth from Jesus' lips, live according to Jesus' Word, and go forward in His name, such a church cannot by any possibility fail, for the failure of such a church would be the failure of the Master's own authority.

Brethren, He has told us if we keep His commandments, we shall abide in His love. He will be with us always, even to the end of the world, and He has given to His church His Holy Spirit according to the fulness of those words which He uttered when He breathed on His apostles, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." So that a church acting for Christ, with His authority denouncing the judgments of God upon sin, shall find those judgments follow. And opening the treasure house of God's mercy to those who seek Jesus Christ by faith, those treasures shall be freely given according to the church's declaration, which she made in her Master's name.

Go in her own name, and she faileth. Go in her Lord's name, and she succeedeth. Take with her His sign manual, walk in obedience to His Statute-book, and deliver herself from the lordship of men, and the church's history shall be written in some such lines as these, "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

I have in these words, I am afraid, rather confusedly stated what I believe Scripture teacheth with regard to the Headship of Christ, namely, that He is the only teacher of doctrine, the only maker of spiritual laws, that He is the living administrator of the laws of His own spiritual kingdom, and therefore that no authority is to be yielded unto the church, but that of Christ, and when we have that authority, and are obedient to it, we need entertain no fear as to the result.

III. Thirdly, ON WHAT DOES THIS HEADSHIP REST?

Very briefly, it rests on the natural supremacy of Christ's nature. Who could be Head but Jesus? For He is a perfect man, which we are not; He is the firstborn among many brethren, and we are but the younger and weaker. He is God over all, blessed forever and ever. Surely, none but He should be King in Zion since there is no part of the church which is divine except its glorious Head. The Headship of Christ is the inevitable and necessary result of His work.

Hear how His members sing—

*“Thou hast redeemed our souls with blood,
Hast set the prisoners free;
Hast made us kings and priests to God,
And we shall reign with Thee.”*

Who could be head but He to whom such praise can be awarded? He has washed us in His blood—He must be Head. He has loved us from before the foundation of the world, He must be Chief. His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory—let Him be crowned King of kings, and Lord of lords. That winepress wherein He trod His enemies alone, till His garments were dyed with blood, was the guarantee to Him that He should sit on His Father's throne and reign forever and ever.

Moreover, the decree of God has decided this beyond dispute. Read the second psalm, and learn that when the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together against the LORD and against his anointed, the LORD sitting in the heavens laughed at their conspiracy, and scorned the gathering of His foes, “Yet,” saith He, “have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.”

How gloriously the promise reads, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” It is part of the eternal purpose which constituted the church that Christ should be made its Head, and if there be a church of the living God, it is also inevitable that of that church Christ should be the sole Head.

Moreover, brethren, and but once more, is not our Lord the Head of the church by universal acclamation and consent of all the members of that church? We have never set up a rival candidate, no heart renewed by His grace can desire any other king.

*“Let Him be crowned with majesty
Who bow'd His head to death;
And be His honors sounded high
By all things that have breath.”*

Rivals in His blood-bought dominion? Rivals against the Son of David! Let them be swept away as the smoke. Let them be as driven stubble to His bow! King Jesus! All hail! Long live the King! Bring forth the royal diadem! See you not how the angels crown Him? Hark ye not to the songs of cherubim and seraphim, “For thou art worthy, thou art worthy to take the book, and loose the seven seals thereof”?

Hear ye not the everlasting chant of those who have overcome through His blood, “Thou art worthy, thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood”? while the church on earth joins in the selfsame solemn canticle, “Crown him, crown him, crown him LORD of all, for worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” By the supremacy of His nature, by the necessity of His accomplished work, by the decree of the Father, by the universal assent of all the blood-washed, He is the only Head of His own church.

IV. What then, brethren, WHAT THEN DOES THIS CONDEMN?

What does it condemn? It condemns the villainous pretence of a Papal headship. Forsooth, a priest at Rome is the head of the church of Jesus Christ! Well, if the Pope be head of the church—if he be so—

then see what, according to Scripture, he is. This Pio Nono is this—he is the head of the body, the church “*who is the beginning.*” Was there nothing, then, before this aforesaid Pius IX? “*The firstborn from the dead!*” does he claim to have risen from the dead? “*That in all things he might have the pre-eminence,*” is this also the old Italian’s right? “*For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell,*” blasphemy dares not apply this to the tottering prince whose exchequer needs replenishing with Peter’s pence. Yet this is the description of the person who is the Head of the church, and if Pius IX be not all that, he is no head of the church!

But perhaps he is the second head? Then Christ’s church is a monstrous being with two heads. They may make it out to be three one day, perhaps, and then we will call the thing Cerberus, and helldog, and we shall not be far off from the true idea of Popery.

Nay, but he is the delegated head. What for? Why should Christ delegate authority which He can wield Himself? But we need a delegation, for Christ is absent. But the Holy Spirit is that delegation, and is here. Of all the dreams that ever deluded men, and probably of all blasphemies that ever were uttered, there has never been one which is more absurd and which is more fruitful in all manner of mischief than the idea that the Bishop of Rome can be the head of the church of Jesus Christ. No, these popes die, and are not, and how could the church live if its head were dead? The true Head ever liveth, and the church ever liveth in Him.

But it is affirmed that there must needs be a visible headship, and just now we are told every day that we must choose in church matters between the headship of the monarch of England and the headship of the pope at Rome.

I beg the gentlemen’s pardon, we have no such choice, for when we are asked which we will have to rule us in spiritual things, we say, “Neither—neither for a single moment.” We make no bones about the matter, kings and queens are no heads of the church to us. We will no more brook spiritual domination from an English premier than from a Romish pope.

We are equally opposed to both—all human headship must go down. To our well beloved queen all honor and reverence as to one of the best of rulers in civil affairs, but in spiritual affairs in the church of Christ she has no ruling power, what she may have *in the Church of England* is another question. To us it makes no matter whether it be man or woman, whether it be prince or priest, we will have neither czar, emperor, queen, pope, seraph or angel to reign in the church of Jesus Christ.

The church hath no lawful governor or supreme Lord but Jesus Christ Himself. Our Lord, as it seems to me, puts this so plainly in the Word, that I marvel men who believe in the Bible should think the state could be at the head of the church. The State-church party have placed a Bible with a crown and a scepter upon their bills!

It is suggestive that the Bible is closed, for if Englishmen were once to read it, it would be fatal to the cause which now claims it, since one of the truths they would read would be this, “My kingdom is not of this world.” And they would hear Christ say, “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s”—that is, yield all civil obedience to the civil authority, “but unto God the things that are God’s.”

Leave the Lord to rule in the kingdom of mind and spirit, and let Caesar keep his kingdom of civil government. Let the state do its work and never interfere with the church, and let the church do her work and never interfere with, or be interfered with, by the state. The two kingdoms are separate and distinct. Broad lines of demarcation are always drawn throughout the whole of the New Testament, between the spiritual and the temporal power, and the mischief is when men cannot see this. Christ is the Head of the church, not anyone who represents the state.

Brethren, just think for a minute what mischief this doctrine of the headship of the state has done. Time was when men could hardly be parish beadle without coming to take the Sacrament at the established church. Oh! the multiplied hypocrisies which were perpetrated every day by graceless men who came to qualify themselves for office by taking the emblems of our holy faith when they knew not Christ! Such things are more or less inevitable to the system.

Think, again, what persecutions have risen out of this error. You cannot put any sect into a position of ascendancy but it falls into persecution, all sects have persecuted in turn when so tempted. There is not a pin to choose between one and the other, except, as I sometimes say, the Baptists have never persecuted because they have never had an opportunity. But I will not insist even upon that.

It is in human nature to do ill when the civil arm is ready to crush conscience, and therefore Christ has taken the temptation out of the way, and put it out of the possibility of His people, if they keep close to His rule, so much as to touch the carnal weapon. The weapons of their warfare, He tells them, are not carnal but spiritual, and therefore mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

What a degradation to the church of Christ to think of having any other Head but Christ! Ah! brethren, if the monarch were the most holy and godly person that ever lived, I should tremble for him exceedingly that such a person should in any sense be styled the head of the church. How could such a person pray? How could a poor sinner—and such the best man still is—come before Christ and pray to Him and say, “Lord, Thou knowest I am the head of Thy church”?

It seems to me to be such an atrocious claim, such a horrible profanity! I would not, for twice ten thousand worlds, touch that title with so much as the tip of my finger, if I hoped to be saved. I dare not expose my friend, or even my enemy, to the awful risk he must run assuming such a title.

I judge no one, God forbid I should, but if I saw in this world a man absolutely perfect, full of divine knowledge and light, and I were asked by him, “Shall I assume that title?” I should go down on my knees and say, “For God’s sake, and for your own soul’s sake, touch it not, for how can you, with your light, and knowledge, and love to Christ, take from Him one of His grandest names?”

But what shall I say when the monarch is the opposite? And such cases have occurred. I need not take you far back in history. The name of George IV has no remarkable odor of sanctity about it, and the same may be said of Charles II—I never heard historians say that he was eminent in godliness. But yet these men were heads of the church! I shudder at being compelled to remember such an infamous fact. Men, whose character is not to be thought of without a blush on the cheek of modesty, were heads of the church of Jesus Christ!

God have mercy on this land for having fallen so low as this, for I know not that heathen countries have ever blasphemed God more than we have done in allowing heartless debauchers to take upon themselves the name of “Head of the church of Christ.” No, my brethren, this cannot be endured by us in any church with which we commune. We repudiate it. We shake off the abomination as Paul shook off the viper from his hand into the fire.

The same rebuke is due to that which has been tolerated in many churches, namely, the headship of great religious teachers. Sometimes great teachers while yet alive have been practically regarded as the supreme arbiters of the church. Their will was law, apart from the Book. Their decree stood fast, apart from the Scripture. All this was evil.

There are certain churches at this day which reverence extremely the names of dead men. “The Fathers”—are they not by some thought to be as great as the apostles? and the names of John Wesley, and John Calvin, and others, I fear very often occupy the place which belongs to Jesus Christ. Let every church of Jesus Christ now declare that she follows not men but obeys her Master alone.

Mark you, brethren, the truth which I have brought out somewhat strongly equally applies to the church itself, for the church is not her own head, she has no right to act upon her own judgment, apart from the statutes of her King. She must come to the Book—everything is there for her. She has no right to use her own judgment apart from the Master. She must go to the Master. She is a servant, and the Master is supreme.

The church’s power is twofold. It is a power to testify to the world what Christ has revealed. She is set as a witness, and she must act as such. She has, next, a ministerial power by which she carries out the will of Christ, and doeth His bidding as Christ’s servant and minister.

A certain number of servants meet in the servants’ hall. They have an order given to do such work, and they have also orders given them how to do it. They then consult with each other as to the minor

details, how they can best observe the Master's rule and do His bidding. They are perfectly right in so doing. But suppose they began to consult about whether the objects proposed by the Master were good, or whether the rules which He had laid down might not be altered! They would at once become rebellious, and be in danger of discharge.

So a church met together to consult how to carry out the Master's will, and how to enforce His laws, does rightly. But a church meeting to make new laws, or a church meeting to rule according to its own judgment and opinion, imagining that its decision will have weight, has made a mistake and placed itself in a false position. The one doctrine which I have sought to bring forward is this, that He alone who bought the church, and saved the church, is to rule the church, and surely our hearts, without exception, bow to this.

V. But if so, WHAT IS THE LESSON WHICH IT TEACHES TO EACH ONE HERE?

Does not it make each of you inquire, "If the entire church is thus to yield obedience to Christ, and to no one else, am I yielding such obedience? I claim to be Christian, but am I a Christian of that prejudiced sort who follow that which they are brought up to, and so acknowledge the rules of mothers and fathers instead of the rule of Christ? Have I brought what I avow to be truth to the touchstone of Scripture? Did I ever spend a quarter of an hour in weighing my cherished opinions?"

I am afraid the great mass of Christians have never done this, but have sucked in their religion with their mother's milk, and nothing further.

Again, if I be a Christian, am I in the habit of judging what I ought to do by my own whims and wishes, or do I judge by the Statute-book of the King? Many say they do not like this and do not like that, as if that had anything to do with it! What are your likes and dislikes? You are a servant, and bound to give up your own will to the Master. If Christ gives a command, which you imagine to be hard because it does not chime in with your love of ease—my brother, will you not, as servants of the Master, put your whims aside and endeavor to follow Him?

Oh, it is a blessed life to lead, to be no longer the servant of men or of self, but to go to Christ daily in prayer and say, "What I know not, teach Thou me." Then you may laugh at Satan's rage, and face a frowning world, for the Master will never leave those who cleave to Him. If a man loves the testimonies and commandments of the Most High, God shall be his buckler, his shield, and his high tower. But if he turns aside to his own imaginings, his fall shall be certain.

May the Lord keep the church in this matter, and her day of victory shall soon come. May Christ be her only Head, and her triumph draweth near. I can see the morning breaking, yonder are the first streaks of light upon the sky, the Master is coming because the church begins to own Him—and then shall her happy days begin, and the days of her mourning shall be ended forever and ever.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—COLOSSIANS 1

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