

Bible Basics Conference 2011: “Christ the Lord, Christ the Head, Christ the King”

Part 9

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[00:00:00] We're now coming to the third and last session on Christ the Head.

And the title for this session is The Importance of Holding the Head. Now let's start by reading the passage in Colossians 2, the only passage in the New Testament where this expression, holding or holding fast the head, occurs. I'm reading from Colossians 2, starting verse 16.

Let none therefore judge you in meat or drink, or in matter of feast, or new moon, or sabbaths, which are a show of things to come, but the body is of Christ. [00:01:05] Let no one fraudulently deprive you of your prize, doing his own will in humility and worship of angels, entering into things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh, and not holding fast the head, from whom all the body, ministered to and united together by the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God.

Holding fast the head.

I believe this was the only session of the twelve for which no brother volunteered.

[00:02:02] I also believe it's not the easiest verse, so there may be a reason, but I do believe it is an extremely important verse.

Let's start off with some questions.

First of all, this concept seems a little strange. Have you ever seen anyone holding his head, or feeling that this is something you need to do? Then you note that the verse actually speaks about not holding, or not holding fast the head. So some questions.

Who is referred to here in the first instance? Who was doing this, or not doing this?

And what exactly was he doing, or for that matter, what was he not doing? And then we come to the

application. [00:03:01] What can we learn from this today?

Now the answer to difficult questions, whenever you come across a difficult verse in the Bible, I dare say, the best place to look for an answer is in the context. And this is the case here. The first thing to realize is that this expression, holding fast the head, does not occur in Romans, and not in Corinthians, and not in Ephesians, it occurs only in Colossians. So that's the first hint. It must have something to do with what was going on in the assembly there in Colossae.

Now, the Colossians had many features that were very commendable. Paul could speak to them as to holy and faithful brethren in Christ. He doesn't say that in all epistles. He could speak of their love towards all the saints. [00:04:03] And they had not only received the gospel, but he could say that the gospel was actually bearing fruit among them. He could speak of their love in the Spirit, of their order, and of their firmness of faith in Christ. And you might say, what an assembly. This was a good assembly. And it was a good assembly.

And yet, it was not without problems.

There was a danger that the Apostle Paul saw on the horizon. And this danger had to do with what I would call admixtures, with substances or things that were being offered and presented to the Colossians, basically saying, you have accepted Christ, that's good. You need Christ. But also, you need a few other things. [00:05:02] You need Christ plus.

Christ plus a few things we'll tell you about, and then you'll not only be Christians, you'll be model Christians, you will be superior Christians.

And so this assembly was under attack. And by the way, we shouldn't be surprised about this. If there is an assembly where the Lord has worked and it's going well, there are encouraging things, don't be surprised if such an assembly comes under attack. Now here, the enemy attacked in a special way. And the Apostle Paul uses four pictures that describe this danger.

And the first picture is that of a delusion.

The second picture is the picture of an abduction.

Come back to that in a moment to be less cryptic. [00:06:03] The third picture is that of judgment.

And the fourth picture is that of a scam, a fraud.

Now let's just look at where the Apostle speaks about these things. And when we get a little bit of an understanding for what the threat was in Colossae, perhaps it helps us to understand what the encouragement means to hold the head. As to the delusion, he speaks about this in chapter 2, verse 4, that no one may delude you. Then in verse 8, he speaks about the abduction, and he says, let there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey.

In verse 16, he says, let none therefore judge you in meat or in drink, etc.

[00:07:11] And in verse 19, he comes to the scam, comes to the fraud, and he says, let no one fraudulently deprive you of your prize.

This is what the Colossians were up against, perhaps unsuspecting, perhaps not aware of the dangers that were there. But this is why Paul writes to them and warns them.

Now delusion, point number one. A delusion is a false belief held with absolute conviction despite superior evidence.

So basically, and you can see this from the picture, this man has the eyes closed and can't take anything in. He is deluded.

[00:08:02] And the delusion offer was that believers need Christ, but they need other things as well, and then there will be better believers. And the technique or the means used was persuasive speech, language, argument, rhetorics, and so forth.

Now the abduction, you might say, is the next step. If somebody is deluded, that's happening in his mind, but here the feet get involved and Paul sees the danger that even these faithful believers in Colossae might be led astray. And the features of these teachings are they are teachings of men according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ.

Judgment.

Let therefore no man judge you. [00:09:03] Now anything would go for judgment. It could be some Jewish rules or it could be any other rules. It could be mysticism, it could be asceticism, saying this is what you can eat and this is what you can't eat, and these are all the things you must do, and then you will be top class Christians.

And then you come to the scam.

I don't know whether you ever get these emails sent to you saying we're so pleased for you, you've just inherited \$5 million, and just send us your bank details and your passport number and the money will start flowing in. Well, that is a scam.

Don't answer.

Now Paul says, beware, don't let them con you.

This is a scam.

Now what exactly was the scam? And this is where the expression comes in, not holding fast the head. [00:10:06] He speaks of a possibility more than an actual person who was already there, but he warns of this.

He says, let no one fraudulently deprive you of your prize.

And he gives these six features, the last of which is that such a person would not be holding the head.

Now they're marked by self-will, doing his own will. Humility you might say is a good thing, but I'm sure this was an outward show of humility. Worship, the word is reverence of angels, that sounded

very humble as well. Oh, don't speak directly to the Lord, reverence some angels. Now this was putting something in between the believers and Christ the head, and we've [00:11:03] just learned that we are directly linked with Christ the head.

There was also speculation entering into things which he has not seen. There was pride, vainly puffed up by the mind of the flesh. And then this final point, not holding fast the head.

Now let's pause here for a moment before we continue on the subject of not holding fast the head.

The question is, what is the remedy? And perhaps you just think for a moment about what you would have done. Perhaps write them a letter, tell them how wrong they are.

With the first line, dear Colossians, I hear that you accept all these false teachings or they are being brought to you, and this is completely wrong. [00:12:03] You are going off track. Well, perhaps you noticed that all the four pictures, all the four warnings we spoke about occurred in chapter two of that letter.

Now why?

Why not in chapter one?

That is because Paul starts by presenting the remedy.

Really skillfully, you might say step by step, he works himself forward. He presents the truth positively, but you can see if you have read the rest of the epistle how he prepares the ground for the warnings he wants to give later on.

Now the remedy he presents is Christ, and it is Christ in a very special way.

It is remarkable that in Colossians, and this has been touched on, there are three references [00:13:06] to Christ as the head. In chapter one it says, and he is the head of the body, the church.

In two verse ten, the head of all principality and authority.

And then here in two verse nineteen, the matter of holding fast the head. And what Paul does is he presents the Lord Jesus in his personal glory as head to the Colossians before saying anything about the dangers they faced.

Now let us think about this, one is almost a little reluctant to even try and do this in the time we have, but just to perhaps start you off in the contemplation of these glories [00:14:01] of Christ as the head.

There are two times seven glories presented of the Lord Jesus, first as head in the first creation and then as head in the new creation.

And if we want to benefit from the practical exhortations about the head, we need to first take in something of the greatness of this head. He is the image of the invisible God.

Adam was made in the image of God and made.

Christ was the image of God because he was true God himself. He was the only full and true representation of God, the firstborn of all creation. As man he entered the ranks of creation, but in rank he was the highest. He wasn't the first man, that was Adam, but he was the firstborn, the highest. [00:15:07] And then it says that by him were created all things, all things have been created by him and for him.

Now this is not mere repetition. There are three different prepositions used, en, or in, dia, or through, and eis, or for, unto, direction.

And this tells us that the Lord Jesus is not only the one in whom the creation originated and in whose power the creation was brought about, but he was also the instrument who executed the plan and he is the ultimate purpose.

Have you ever thought why God felt it good to create our solar system in a galaxy that [00:16:11] extends over about a billion of light years? Why he felt it good to create about a billion, or more than a billion, of galaxies so remote that man will never reach them? There's one purpose.

It's for him.

It's to show the greatness of our head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all things subsist together by him, whether it's the movement of planets, whether it's the breathing of your body even when you sleep. All things subsist together by him.

But this is not all the glory presented here. Then there are seven features of Christ the head in the new creation. [00:17:04] And the emphasis here is on the word he. It's this one that we've just considered in those seven features, and he is the head of the body, the assembly.

It's not a pastor, it's not a bishop, it's not a pope, and it's not a queen. He is the head of the church who is the beginning.

The new creation starts beyond death in resurrection, and it starts there with Christ. He is also the firstborn from among the dead. And this is very important in connection with Christ's headship of the assembly.

When Christ created the world, he could say, let there be.

Let there be light, and there was light. [00:18:01] But to make the church, he could not say, let there be a church, and I'll be the head. In order for the church to come about, he had to go into death and redeem us.

That he might have the first place in all things, the absolute preeminence. For in him, all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell.

And by him to reconcile all things, not all beings, but all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross.

Now each one of those is worthy of spending time on to dig deeper and to enjoy. But my point is this.

The remedy for the Colossians was the presentation of the greatness of Christ as the head.

[00:19:07] And if they only got back to appreciating fully the greatness of their head, then they would be equipped against these dangers that were looming. And the question is, to what extent are we taken up by the glory of Christ? Have these features starting to become great for us? Have we started seeing something of this glory of Christ that really transcends all and everything?

Now let us see how this remedy is now applied to those four dangers.

Where it speaks about the delusion, Paul says, he speaks about the full knowledge of the mystery of God in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [00:20:04] If I had asked someone to read this, probably, maybe not, but perhaps one or two would have read, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge. But the point is all.

The message for the Colossians is, wake up, there is nothing outside him. If you want wisdom, don't listen to the philosophers, because all the wisdom and all the treasures of knowledge are in him.

Then it says in verse 9, and again you have the word all, for in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

No need to speculate, no need to look for something else. Now what about those rules?

Paul says you don't need these, you are already complete in him who is the head of all principality [00:21:09] and authority, and you are identified with him in his death and in his resurrection. And if Christ has died to the world and you have died with him, then why do you want to subject yourself to these elements of the world? That means man-made rules.

And then the scam.

The thing to realise is, he is the head. And if they realised this, they would be on safe ground and they would not fall for this fraud.

Now what does it involve then to hold fast the head practically? We have to deduce this from the negative features of the person who was not holding the head. [00:22:01] It means that we recognise the glories of the head first of all, and that we receive nourishment from him and that we follow his directions. So there is no room for the pride, for example, we heard about, there is no room for self-exaltation, no room for putting something between the believers and Christ.

And what are the results? If we read on into the next verse, it says that the whole body is ministered to, is united together by the joints and bands, and the result is increase. And it's not just increase in some man-made way, but it is growth with the increase of God. That is increase that comes directly from the head.

Now this poses some practical challenges of course, and I'm convinced we need to do both. We need to be occupied with the doctrine, the glories of Christ as they are presented, [00:23:04] but then we need to translate this into what does it mean for us on a day-to-day basis. Now the first one perhaps goes without saying now, that the idea of some man-made denomination is really in direct contradiction to the truth of the headship of Christ. Because what a denomination does is it separates

out some believers, typically gives them a new head, and they are separated from those they should be united with, and express that they are united with them in one body. It's not a new idea, the idea of a denomination is very old, surfaced already in Corinth where they said, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, and so forth.

Now if we are clear in this, then we are safe, aren't we? [00:24:05] Well perhaps it's not quite that easy. If we are walking together as assembly, we're seeking to express the unity of the body of Christ, we need to be conscious of the headship of Christ, and how will it show itself. It's beautiful to see how in the early days of the church, assemblies already walked together in unity even before the doctrine was given on the assembly.

If you look at Acts 11 and Acts 8, you find examples for this.

We also seek to express the unity of the body of Christ in the breaking of bread. We heard about this already. The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? Why can't we take part of the bread? [00:25:01] Because we are members of the body of Christ, not of denominations.

Recognizing assembly decisions, it was the Lord himself who said, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.

If it's bound in heaven, it's certainly also bound in a neighboring meeting, or in a meeting anywhere else on the earth, for that matter. And even Paul said to the Corinthians, to whom you forgive anything, I forgive also. If we forget about such things, can we then claim that we are conscious of the headship of Christ and seeking to practice this?

The result will be harmony. Paul made the point repeatedly in 1 Corinthians that his instructions were not just for them, but they were for all the churches, for all believers.

[00:26:06] And if we hold fast the head, we will be directed by him. We will walk in harmony. What would you think if my right hand took this glass, and the next thing my left hand did was to basically beat it and throw it away?

You would say those two hands are not directed by the same head, are they? Otherwise they would work together in harmony.

And this is important for our testimony as assemblies. We should express this. Paul says to the Corinthians, ye are body of Christ. Not their body, but you have this character, ye are body of Christ. The members should be seen and should be working together in harmony, linked to one another [00:27:05] and directed by the same head.

Now lastly, the point of order. Perhaps you would connect this more with lordship. However, it might be worth mentioning that if we recognize the headship of Christ, I'm sure there will also be order, as things are well ordered in a human body that is directed by a head.

And you find this in 1 Corinthians 14, emphasized that God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Now, having thought about these things, what can we take away about this subject, holding fast the head?

The root problem in Colossae was that at mixtures were offered, things were brought in between [00:28:05] Christ and themselves.

And they were presented as valuable additions.

And I think that's why they were so dangerous, because these people didn't say, we'll take something away. They just said, we offer something in addition. The remedy was the presentation of the personal glories of Christ the head. And I sometimes wish for myself, I could learn something of this art of the Apostle Paul or this skill as directed by the Holy Spirit to reach the hearts. I'm sure that if he had started his epistle with chapter 2, the Colossians probably wouldn't have listened.

But he first reached the heart. He warmed the hearts for the greatness of Christ the head. [00:29:03] And when the ground was prepared, he had open ears. Then he could give the practical exhortations that were needed. So let us consider the personal glory of Christ the head.

Let us be conscious of the vital connection that we have with him, receiving nourishment and direction from him, being joined together, growing and increasing with the increase of God. And I'm sure that the more, this is the case, the more we are taken up with the glory of our head, the easier we will find it to walk together in harmony.

The brother mentioned something and I'll close with that in the next 30 seconds, I promise. There was a meeting and on a Lord's Day morning, there were some visitors coming. [00:30:08] And a brother from the local meeting was at the door and said, oh, good morning. It's nice to see you here. What takes you here?

And I said, oh, we'd like to break bread here today. You know, we've been having trouble in our whole meeting. We'd like to break bread here today. And this brother said, oh, that's very nice of you to come here. You're very welcome to break bread with us. But please, before you do, go back to your whole meeting and sort out your troubles. I think this brother had understood something of the headship of Christ. He had understood something of what it meant for believers and for assemblies to walk together in harmony. And may the Lord help us to do this for the glory of the Lord.