

CHRIST, THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Colossians 1:18-20

Reader: Lee Johnston - Ephesians 3:1-12

Intro: I hope all of you are continuing to read Paul's epistle to the church at Colosse which we have been considering for eight weeks, and have only gotten down to the eighteenth verse of the first chapter. It is very important that we all be Bible readers. The words of Scripture are to our spiritual life what food and drink are to our physical life.

By looking back to Paul's prayer here in Colossians 1, you can see in verse 9 that Paul's basic request for the Christians in Colosse was, using his words, "that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will," that is, God's will, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Now I ask you, where are you going to find "the knowledge of His will? And about what do you and I need spiritual understanding?"

God's will is revealed in His Word, in the Bible. And to help us as Christians to gain wisdom and spiritual understanding each one of us has been given the Holy Spirit as our divinely appointed Teacher. Like with anything else we learn a little bit at a time. We need to read and re-read the Bible. The more we read, if we are trusting the Holy Spirit to teach us, the more we will understand.

Now we can learn a lot about the Bible by attending a church, like Trinity Bible Church, or Hillcrest Chapel, just to name a couple of churches, where the Scriptures are faithfully taught. And that ought to be what we are all looking for. You can learn from Bible teaching on radio and TV, but you need to check with some mature Christian to be sure that you are hearing the truth. And it is good to read books that help us to understand the Bible. I doubt if there ever has been a time in human history when there has been more help in understanding the Bible than there is today. *But the way to be better prepared to make sure that you are listening to the right teaching, is by faithfully reading the Bible for yourself!* I sometimes find when I am reading my Bible that my mind drifts off to something else as I read. But when that happens I go back a few verses, or to the beginning of the chapter, to re-read what I missed when my mind started wandering. Colossians is one of the shorter books of the Bible, and so it is a good one to practice reading and re-reading. The more you read it, the more the whole letter will become clearer to you. Every

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Christian ought to read the Bible through at least once every year.

When Paul wrote Colossians, the NT was just coming into being. One of the main things that they did in those early days was to read the letters of Paul, or Peter, or John, as they were being written. Gradually copies of the Scriptures were made, and today the Bible is available in more languages than at any time in human history. How blessed we are! You parents, read the Bible to your children. And as your children grow up and have their own families, daddy and mother need to continue reading to each other. Don't let TV or anything else take away your time for Bible reading. That must come first. The professing church today would be much stronger and have a greater influence in the world if we Christians were diligent in reading the Bible. That is the way for us to see God changing our lives so that we as Christians would have a greater influence in the world. You and I can only grow spiritually by reading the Bible, and by praying before we read that the Lord would help us to understand what we read. And then we need to pray that the Lord will enable us to do and be what we learn from God's Word that He wants us to do, and what He wants us to be. Spiritual growth begins by reading the Word, and it continues by continuing to read the Word.

Now when you read and re-read Colossians, you will soon realize the believers in Colosse were being influence by some false teachers, and the false teaching of those teacher was directed at Christ. Some were saying that He only became Christ at His baptism, and that He ceased to be Christ on the Cross when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me." Others were saying that Christ was not a real person, that He did not actually have a human body, that He was more like a phantom, or an illusion. These ideas came from groups that were called Gnostics because they claimed to have superior know-ledge that other people did not have. They put themselves above the apostles. These people tried to identify themselves with the Church, but they mixed together Christian teaching with Greek and Oriental philosophies.

Now no one has the time, nor is there the need, to make a study of the heretical teaching that is present in every generation. But the test to put to any teaching, or teacher, is, what does he teach about the Lord Jesus Christ? Now in order to make the test, you and I need to know what the Word of God teaches about Christ. And this is what the Apostle Paul was emphasizing in his letter to the church at Colosse. This is why he had so much to say about Christ – about Christ's work as our Savior, about

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Christ as the revelation of God, about Christ as the Creator, and now in chapter 1 verse 18 we are told that Christ is “the Head of the body, the Church.”

Actually Paul’s emphasis on this continues to the end of chapter 1, and brings us to some of the most glorious teaching in all of the NT.

This is the first time in his letter to the church at Corinth that Paul mentioned the church, as he used the word in this epistle. But you have it again 1:24. (Read.) The word Head appears again in 2:19. (Read vv. 18 and 19). The same idea appears again in 3:15.

So when Paul spoke of the church as the body of Christ, he was speaking about all who truly believed in Christ, those who had been born again and were made a part of the body of Christ.

Now Paul does use the word “church” in another way here in Colossians when he used it as he did in Colossians 4:15-16. These are local churches, like Trinity Bible Church. As in those early days when people were saved, they were drawn together by their faith in Christ, and became local churches. But after the death and resurrection of Christ, it was true that every real believer in Christ has been made a part of the body of Christ, what we might call the Church universal.

Now in a very special way this was Paul’s ministry. Notice his words in verse 24 about what he said about the church, and then he went on in verse 25 to speak of his ministry. Notice how he described the word “mystery” in verse 26, and then how he spoke of his ministry in the last three verses of chapter 1.

Now let me take you to the first time the word church is used in the Bible. It is found in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, immediately following Peter’s confession of the Lord where it is recorded that Peter responded to the Lord’s question, “But whom say ye that I am?”

And Peter responded by saying, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Then the Lord said this in Matthew 16:17-18,

17 . . . Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

From this I need to take you to 1 Corinthians 12:13 where the Apostle Paul wrote these words:

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Now if the Church, the body of Christ, was a secret that God withheld in His revelation in the Bible, and believers are all in the body of Christ, where do we find the first instance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps you remember that John the Baptist spoke of the baptism of the Spirit when he said of himself and of Christ the words which are recorded in Matthew 3:11:

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire.

Now the question is, where it is recorded the first time that believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit?

To answer that question we need to go to Acts 1 where we have the last words our Lord spoke to His disciples after His resurrection, and just before He ascended back to heaven. There we have these words found in Acts 1:4-5:

4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

It does not say in Acts 2 that the saints were baptized with the Holy Spirit because it is not something that we experience. But those who have commented on these first two chapters believe that that is when those who were truly saved, and that ever since then, when people have been saved, a part of their salvation has been that at the time they were saved they have been baptized by the Spirit. It is not an experience that we seek, but a part of the wonderful gift of our salvation. And what does the baptism of the Spirit do for us? According to

1 Corinthians 12:13 it is that work of the Holy Spirit which has made us members of the Church, the body of Christ. And this, is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the saints at Corinth,

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

The baptism of the Spirit is a different work of the Holy Spirit from the filling of the Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit takes place at salvation for all believers, and is permanent. The filling of the Spirit can vary according to our walk as believers in fellowship with our Lord.

But going back to Colossian 1:18, what does it mean that Christ “is the Head of the body”? I want to read to you what Bishop Handley Moule, who was a Bishop in the Church of England back in the 1800's when there were many godly men in the English Church. Here are his words about Christ as our Head in the Church:

“The Head of the Body.” This is his “preeminence” with relation to His people. In that word Head much lies involved. It betokens of course primacy of authority; the right of supreme direction. Over “His Body” the Son of God Incarnate, Sacrificed, Glorified, absolutely presides; and so over every limb of His body; and so over my reader, and over me. In everything, at every moment, I am under my Head, Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). He is my Sovereign, and I His vassal, His bondservant, His implement, to the uttermost. The more entirely I recognize this, and the more I love it, the greater the freedom and the less the friction of my life. But along with all this, the word “Head” tells me that He is my life as well as my law; my secret of energy, my power to do His will. He lives in me; He carries out His glorious life, in true measure, through me. And in that face thee lies an inexhaustible secret of rest and strength for the “limb” as it yields itself. And as for the limb, so for the whole organism [body] (*Colossian and Philemon Studies*, pp. 85, 86).

And then he concluded with this verse of poetry:

To know, to do the Head's commands,
For this the Body lives and grows;
All speed of feet, all skill of hands,
Is for Him spent *and from Him flows*.

“Who is the beginning” declares that He is the Creator and the source of all of the blessings that the Members of the Body will ever experience. He is also “the firstborn of the dead.” Others were raised from the dead, but He was the first to be raised never to die again. “Death hath no more dominion over Him,” and His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of His body. So it was the plan and purpose of God that in His Son, the Head of the Church which is His body He alone has the preeminence in all things. God has ordained that in all things His Son, the Head of the

Church should be the One Who is first in salvation, first as the final and complete revelation of God, and first in the Church which is His body. In every way and in all things, it pleased the Father that all fulness, total sufficiency should be in His Son and only in His Son, Who became a Man without ceasing to be God, and who was raised to His original glory while continuing to be a Man.

Nothing can possibly be added to the glory of Christ. All the fulness of God dwells in Him even though He became a Man, and it continues to be in Him as the resurrected Son of God. There is nothing wiser or safer that we can do than to submit completely to our Lord's authority that we may enjoy from Him the fulness that dwells in Him.

Concl: We will need at least another session in order to deal with the truth that the Spirit of God revealed through the Apostle Paul. This is the foundation of the great and unspeakably glorious truth of our union with Christ. This is one of many major points in which fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ as members of His body surpasses all other religions, and is the one and only way of complete acceptance with the God of heaven and earth, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Surely such truth should cause us to worship at the feet of our dear Savior, and devote our lives to doing His will for His glory.