

The Body: His Plan, Our Part

Part One: Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church

Ephesians 1:15-23

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on March 10, 2024.

Jan Huss and Why You Go to Church

This morning, we begin a four-week series in which we look at the Lord's plan in establishing His Church. We begin with asking you a specific, pointed question and then we will consider further our main text with several supporting passages along the way. First. Why do you go to church? Specifically, why are you here at First Baptist Church? Why do you attend First Baptist Church? We will answer that question together this morning. And while you all may think you have various, wide-ranging answers, we actually all share the same one.

But first, Jan Huss was a 15th century Bohemian and a pre-Reformation Reformer. Huss was martyred by the Catholic Church on July 6, 1415. That day, he was taken to the cathedral in Prague. He was dressed in his priestly vestments and when he arrived, they brought him before all of the people. Then they stripped him of his priestly garments, one garment at a time. He was then tied to a large stake. His biographers wrote that Huss said, "Lord Jesus, it is for you that I patiently endure this cruel death. Have mercy on my enemies."

Huss was then set on fire and was heard reciting the Psalms as the flames engulfed his body. His Catholic executioners were so determined to rid the earth of Jan Huss that they would eventually scoop up his ashes and toss them into a lake so that nothing of Jan Huss would ever remain on this earth.

The main 16th century reformer, Martin Luther, was rummaging through stacks in a library when he discovered a collection of sermons by Huss. Luther wrote, "I was overwhelmed with astonishment. I could not understand for what cause they had hurt so great a man who explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill."

In fact, Huss teachings became foundational to the Reformation of the church. During a stretch of intense persecution that led Huss to retire into solitude, he wrote the work that would inspire Luther and others called *The Church*. This writing contained radical views.

One, that the church was made up of all the believers of all ages. At that time, the official position of the Church was that the true church was made up of only the Pope, the cardinals, the bishops, and the priests. Common lay people were not real members, but only communed with the true church as they received communion.

Two, Huss said that the Bible is the ultimate authority, higher than any other in the church. This is the main reason Huss was martyred. He claimed that Jesus Christ himself is the Head of His Church, and for that, they burned him alive. Huss argued the Christ was the head, not the Pope. This idea that Christ is the Head and leader of any true church may seem somewhat of a benign fact. But it is not. The establishing and preserving of this Biblical truth has come to us through the ages on a sea of blood.

The *1647 Westminster Confession of Faith* says, “There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ.” This truth has been battered and fought against for centuries. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Church. He is its Head. Every true church must be Jesus led. I invite you to Ephesians 1:15-23 as we continue to explore the headship of Christ and answer why you attend First Baptist Church of Martinsburg.

Jesus is Lord of All

In the history of the church, when a truth becomes embattled, true believers dig into that truth to explore the richness of it. In fact, without the battle, sometimes you wouldn't discover some aspects of that truth.

Much as been written about the Lordship of Christ. To even be saved, Romans 10:9-10 tells us we must confess Jesus as Lord. But here we are talking about more than just that. His Lordship extends over each believer but it also extends over the church. There are people sitting in churches this morning all over the world for whom Jesus is their personal Lord but He is not ruling in many churches as He would desire to do.

When you confess Jesus as Lord, you have surrendered to Christ rightful sovereignty over your life. You are committing to be His servant, submitting to His will and yielding obediently to His commands in Scripture. You make Him Head of the church. But what does that mean? What does “head” mean in this context?

Ephesians 5:23 tells us that “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church.” 1 Corinthians 11:3 says, “that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

Theologian Wayne Grudem exhaustively studied that idea of “headship” as lined out here in these texts. He examined 2336 examples of that word’s usage in Greek literature. He began with Homer through the church fathers – from 800’s BC to 400AD. When that word – *kephale* – was used describing a person and not the body part of the head, it always meant governing or ruling authority. That is what it means to say that Jesus is the Head of the Church. Scripture uses that word to mean that Jesus is the Head, the Lord, the Ruler, the Leader of the Church.

To admit that Jesus is the Head of the church means that each believer is to bow to and the church as a whole is to bow to His sovereign rule. Jesus said in Matthew 28:18 that all authority has been given to him. That is what it means to be head. It means Jesus is in charge. He has been given sovereign authority over everything. Jesus Christ is the leader of the Church. He is the Head.

God Established Christ as Head

Who made Him head? Who established Jesus as the head and leader of the church? Let’s now consider our text this morning in Ephesians 1. The Apostle Paul is praying and his request is that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.” Paul intended the Ephesians and all believers understand what is important about Christ.

Paul is praying that God will equip believers to clear view of Christ. “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.”

Understanding Christ’s headship over the church is a key component of Christology. Paul is praying that we would have our understanding of Christ completed and whole. “And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.”

Paul is referring to the majestic, exalted, transcendent Christ, “far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” And then in verse 22, “And *he subjected everything under his feet* and appointed him as head over everything for the church, which is his body.”

Let’s look carefully and closely at what Paul writes. The Sovereign God in heaven who offered us salvation and called us to Him, the Sovereign God who has given us an eternal inheritance and empowered and renewed us, the Sovereign God who continues to sanctify us and one day will glorify us, that God wants us to understand fully the glory of Christ.

God raised Christ from the dead and seated Christ in glory. Verse 21: “Far above” – the Greek here means super higher up or infinitely above all beings, all rule, all rulers, all authority, above all those who have the supreme rights, above all powers, above all dominions, above all lordships. Jesus is not just above these – he is FAR above, SUPER HIGH above, infinitely above them all. Verse 22 tells us that he subjected all things under his feet. Jesus over everything. He reigns forevermore. Our song for all eternity. Jesus Christ is Lord.

Our song not for a while, but for eternity. Now and forever, Jesus is Lord. Now and forever, He is Head of His Church. Colossians 2:19 says that Christ is the head from whom the entire body is being supplied and held together and it grows with the growth which comes from God.

Paul is being very careful here in Ephesians 1. Paul writes that Jesus puts all things in subjection under his feet and that God “gave Him as head over all things to the church.” Did you catch that? Paul did not just write that God gave Christ as head to the church. Paul wrote that God gave Christ as head over all things to the church. Did you catch that? God gave the One who was ALREADY head over the universe to the church to be her head.

God gave His beloved redeemed church the King of the universe to rule and lead the church. What an extreme expression of love from God for the church!

God didn’t give us the angels Gabriel or Michael to be the head of the church.

He didn't provide ten thousand really powerful angels to lead the church. He didn't give us an army of creative, wonderful, great angels to be the head of the church.

God didn't provide gifted preachers, teachers, theologians, prophets, and evangelists to be the head of the church. God didn't give deacons to be the head of the church. God didn't give committees and ministry teams and organizations and boards and councils and diocese to be the head of the church. He gave us the King of the universe to be our head and our shepherd. We are His body. He fills us with His headship.

The church is meant, according to the Scriptures, to be Jesus led. Not pastor led. Not elder led. Not deacon led. Not congregation led. Christ led. To allow any pope or king or queen or government official or any person or groups of people to be the head is to deny His Word and to silence Christ in His own Church.

This church is His bride, not yours, not mine. I have heard some people over the course of my life claim, "This is my church." No it isn't. It is not your bride. You are not its head.

Some think that a church is a democracy and that this bunch over here is intended to check and balance out that bunch over there. Wrong again. This is not a democracy. It is a monarchy and Jesus is the King. This is His bride and He is preparing her, getting her ready for the ultimate wedding day.

Jesus Christ is the Head, the supreme authority in this and any other true church. God the Father provided the Son who was the Supreme authority of the universe to also be the supreme authority of the church. And how does He rule?

Ephesians 5:22-29 tells us. "Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless...for no one every hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church..."

Jesus rules sovereignly. He sovereignly saves His church. Verse 23. He saved the church by loving her and giving himself up for her. He sovereignly supervises His church. Verse 24. "The church is subject to Christ." He sovereignly sanctifies His church, verse 26, "to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word."

He sovereignly secures His church, "to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless." Jesus sovereignly supplies all His church will need. "He provides and cares for the church."

No other leadership, no other headship, can provide for a church like that. It is no wonder that Paul would later write to the Colossians, "see that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world rather than according to Christ, for in Him all fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete and He is the head."

The truth of Christ's headship over the church has been fought against long before Jan Huss and will continue to be long after Huss has been gone. But we must remember that Christ is the Head of the church. God established Him to be that. Only Christ can lead it as it is supposed to be led.

So, why are you here at First Baptist Martinsburg? Some may say it is because you grew up here. You've been here all your life. Others married someone who grew up here. Maybe you moved here and found this place because you were looking specifically for a Baptist church. Perhaps you are here because you like the music, or you like the preaching, or you have friends here. Maybe you found it welcoming. Whatever you think the reason is, let me tell you why you are here. God brought you here. You are here because, for whatever reason you came, God used that to bring you here. It is his divine authority that has you here just as it was his divine authority that established Christ as the head of the Church.

Submit to God's authority by surrendering fully and completely to Christ.