

Christ: The Head of Every Man

Romans 5: 15; 1 Corinthians 11: 3.

Notes of an address by W. H. Westcott, 1929.

Before speaking directly of Headship, I may say that our ideas of the gospel are very contracted. In our contact with people we think if we can only get them "over the line," that is all our present business. But the gospel is comprehensive. The facts that lie at its basis are simple yet grand; how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that He was buried, and was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures; then was seen by several on earth, and finally by one who saw Him in heavenly glory. The epistle to the Romans is the orderly exposition of the meaning of the facts. First, the explanation of the state in which the gospel finds men; then of how that state was met, and of the new state that has been brought about by the grace of God. In Rom. 16: 25, you are reminded, as those who have received the gospel, that God has power to establish you; so that every part of the gospel should be wrought livingly into your souls, that you might know the deliverance spoken of, and which has been wrought for you; and have a practical, powerful, entrance into all the blessing of which It speaks. The gospel, when it lays hold of you, and is wrought into your souls, prepares you for the understanding of "the mystery." That is what was in the mind of God in providing the gospel. It is really therefore a basis laid in your soul for the intelligence of all the mystery.

In Romans 14: 17, we read, we have been brought under the sway of God, in contrast to the dominion of sin. You are under God's will, the sway of God in grace; the kingdom of God is set up in your soul. When one is saved and put under the will of God, what is begun in the soul is but the forecast of what is going to be established in a world-wide way by and bye. When the kingdom of God is outwardly manifested, and Christ has come as God's King over the whole earth, there will be three great marks which everybody can recognise: — (1) It will be a righteous rule, all wrongs will be righted, and the reign of that wonderful King will be righteous. (2) There will be peace. The nations will not learn war any more, nor will there be international strife, nor class war, but the will of God will be dominant; and in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, it will be absolute autocracy linked with absolute justice, what has never been known on earth yet; the effect of righteousness will be peace; (3) There will be joy. The ransomed will return with songs to Zion, everlasting joy will be upon their heads, and the sounds of sorrow will be hushed. These are the three great marks of the coming kingdom of God, which will then be universal. But the Holy Ghost dwelling in you sets up the rule of God in your heart, and these three marks are exemplified in the Christian now. The Christian under the rule of Christ is righteous, (*i.e.*, speaking of him characteristically, and as subject to the will of God), he is peaceful, and happy. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink"; it does not consist in your being a vegetarian, but the Holy Ghost brings you under the sway of God in grace, making you righteous and peaceful (*i.e.*, you are not a disturber of the peace), and happy. The gospel lays the foundation in your soul for the kingdom of God. Yet while the kingdom of God is referred to, the doctrine in its immensity is not developed.

From Romans 12: 4, those who have believed the gospel are one body in Christ, organically joined together. It is not a matter of agreement (*i.e.*, not we will join one body; nor different gatherings federated to form one body; nor that the gatherings of Christians are individual members of the body of Christ, and that the whole body comprises all the gatherings; but every Christian is a member of the body of Christ). The fact is stated; the basis is laid in your soul for the understanding of the doctrine when it is unfolded; but it is not unfolded here!

"*The mystery*" is referred to in another way in Rom. 11: 25. God instructs us even in this primary epistle as to the order of His ways. All Israel will be saved; they will all be brought into national blessing; but at present God is visiting the nations to take out a people for His Name He has postponed the kingdom in its outward form, and the blessing of Israel, but He has not forgotten it. Everyone saved at the present time is brought into a new circle of blessing.

From Rom. 8: 28-30, we see that in the gospel there is a basis laid in the soul for the fulfilment of the purpose of God (i.e., the first time in this gospel epistle that "purpose" is mentioned. You may be quite a young Christian, but when God laid hold of you, He had a purpose in it, viz., that you should be conformed to the image of His Son, that He may be the firstborn among many brethren. It involves Sonship for us; and in order that we may have its enjoyment now, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son whereby we cry "Abba Father." The foundation is laid in your soul for the understanding of the purpose of God. Having begun the work, He sees it right through. What God has purposed will infallibly be fulfilled.

From Romans 7: 1-4, we see that it would not be legal for you to leave the law if under the law, you are bound to that husband; but having died in that wherein we were held, having come under the benefit of grace, we have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that we should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead. That is being delivered by the death of Christ from the law, we have a right to love Christ, to be wholly for Christ. "That we should be married to another, even to Him that is raised from the dead." You have, beloved, a right in heavenly courts, to be truly for Christ, loving Him, even as a wife who is a true woman loves her husband. So the foundation is laid in your soul for union with Christ. This is individual in Romans 7, but the foundation is laid, not merely a love of gratitude, but a love of attachment to Christ! That foundation prepares you for the unfolding of the mystery when the church as a whole is united.

Romans 5: 15 brings us to the subject of the Headship of Christ, the foundation for which is laid in the believer's soul, but the doctrine of which is not unfolded in this epistle. We can see in these chapters from the 3rd onward, how that God in sovereign grace and through the death of Christ is the source of all blessing; but that it has been so wrought, and so seen in Christ, and the administration of it is so put into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all the blessing that we have by believing the gospel is administered through Jesus Christ our Lord. One blessing after another is presented as it has been wrought out in Christ Jesus. In Rom. 3, we have a summing up of our guilty estate. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We might well despair as far as we are concerned. But, speaking to believers, the apostle at once says, we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The name "Christ Jesus" is applied to our Lord Jesus Christ where He is now. There has been wrought out a redemption the full power of which is seen in Christ Jesus. It does not direct us to look to Jesus on the cross (because He is not there); nor as buried (He is not in the grave); nor is redemption in Him only as risen from the dead (He is up there in glory). The full expression of the redemption is seen in Christ Jesus; it is all set out in Him. He was charged with the sins on the cross, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God." But through whom, and on what ground? "Through our Lord Jesus Christ." He is the great Administrator of these favours of God. But not only so, we have a standing in Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of promise in the 5th chapter. God thus draws our attention to this glorified Person to whom we are indebted. From Rom. 5: 12 he goes on to speak of Headship. "As by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." "Through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God and the gift by grace which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." The sin in which we formerly were found, the sins which we had committed, and the death

and the condemnation that were the result of these things, are all traced up to the sin of one man Adam, our head. The head of that race was the one who fell through sin; and so death has passed on all for all have sinned. In Romans 3 "All have sinned," sums up our *guilt*. But in Ch. 5, the same three words sum up our *state*. The old state was that we were of a sinful nature under a sinful head, and condemned therein. But now we are translated from all that was connected with Adam; we are free of condemnation, have a new life, and in Christ. God now takes account of each Christian as under the headship of Christ, just as formerly under the headship of Adam. All connection with Adam has been judicially annulled by Christ's death for the believer, but that followed by His resurrection has involved for him the beginning of a new order of man altogether; as we have seen our redemption is in Christ Jesus on Whom we find the love of God eternally resting; and that the love of God rests upon us in Christ Jesus our Lord. "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one: much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one." There are three things in that verse — grace, righteousness, and life. God takes account of us as having been transferred from Adam to Christ. We are linked to Christ, the Head, in risen life, partaking with the Head in all His wonderful position of grace, righteousness and life. At the end of the chapter "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound, that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord," i.e., grace, righteousness and life!

In 1 Corinthians 2 the subject is carried a step further. There is a difference between Romans and Corinthians. The former grounds us in the truth of the gospel, as the Apostle says, "To establish you according to my gospel." Every individual believer should get established in the gospel. "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1: 2). He is not now addressing individuals, to respond to that gospel, but he is addressing them as an assembly; to all in their localities. Lest any should say, "that applies to the Corinthians, God has not given it to us," the apostle adds, "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's." The state of the assembly at Corinth was the immediate cause of writing the epistle, but it was the opportunity of unfolding to the assembly of God in every locality; the constitution of the assembly, its privileges and functions, and ways of carrying it on. To say, "that is Paul's teaching or opinion" is nothing but ignorance; and that is exactly what Paul says.

The 1 Cor. 11: 3 opens the subject in three directions: — (1) The head of every man is Christ. That everybody is under the Headship of Christ is true, but the apostle is addressing the Christian assembly, the immediate application is clearly thereto. (2) "The head of the woman is the man." (3) "The head of Christ is God." The Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son ever seen in His own unique relation in the Godhead, has become Man, and He looks up in dependence and subjection to God. Even though exalted it is for the carrying out of the purpose of God. By and bye when He takes the Kingdom it is to bring everything into subjection to the will of God. In the end when the Kingdom has run its course, as far as that form of it is concerned, and the Lord Jesus has brought Israel through every peril, He will deliver up the Kingdom to God and His Father, that *God* may be all in all. He takes His place as subject. He has taken that place as Man that in Manhood He might carry out all the purpose of God! Then "the head of the woman is the man," is elaborated in the chapter. In the Christian assembly God has a certain order suitable to Himself, and this is part of the order. When assembled as a christian assembly men remove their hats, and women remain covered because the head of the woman is the man! Man was made in the image of God, in His likeness, and his office in creation is that he stands in the image and glory of God, he is the head of the lower order of the creation; hence it would not do to cover up the glory of God! The woman was given to the man to be his help-meet. The woman is the glory of the man! So that, when coming into the presence of God, the glory of man is covered.

Then, the head of every man is Christ. In Romans, that all the blessing for man is headed up in Christ underlies all; the fulness of God is in Christ. But when the assembly comes together, we are to look to Christ for direction, for wisdom, for support. The assembly is carried on, while the Head is invisible, but nevertheless real. If everyone understood that he has immediate access to Christ, and Christ has immediate access to him, he would not be asserting his own will, or pushing forward, but everyone would look to Christ for direction. In the assembly there is not the appointing of a minister, to direct or control the service. That is not ministry of the truth in individual service, but of the assembly gathered in one place in recognition of Christ, as the one living, personal, active, controlling Head!