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A Way of Growth

by T. Austin-Sparks

Chapter 3 – Subjection to Christ as Head

“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full” (Col. 2:9-10).

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18).

“Who is the head of all principality and power” (Col. 2:10).

“...not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col. 2:19).

“...where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11).

Christ’s Absolute Headship

Colossians 1 is the greatest and most magnificent statement in the Bible concerning the Lord Jesus, and, in a word, it sums up all things in Christ. It is a very wonderful unveiling of the place which Christ occupies in relation to all things, and of course that is the standpoint from which everything has to be viewed as to the Lord Jesus – His relationship to all things; and what the Apostle is seeking to make very clear, because of that which had arisen to call forth this letter, is that Christ is at no point, in no way, second in God’s universe. He does not come in the slightest degree below the place of absolute pre-eminence, however great might be the position accorded Him by those against whom the Apostle was writing. They were quite prepared to say very good and great and wonderful things about Him, and to accord Him a very high place; and yet that place was less than absolute pre-eminence. So the Apostle wrote this letter in the first place to reveal and declare that the Lord Jesus is in every realm supreme.

You notice the above passages touching upon His headship, and that headship is seen in the several connections as complete. There are no two heads or three heads in God’s universe; only one head is possible, and Christ occupies that in every realm. So it is stated here – “that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.” You cannot get outside of that. When you say ‘all,’ that is final. He is head over all things.

Our Position in that Headship

Chapter 2 brings us firstly to our position in that headship. Verses 9 and 10 are a statement of our position. “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full.” Now, that is a positional fulness. That simply means that, by our being in Christ, we come into the place of fulness, and we are made to stand in the fulness of Christ; we are positioned there.

Our Progress in the Position

But when you pass to verse 19 of Chapter 2, it is a matter of progress, progress in the position and by reason of that relatedness. “Holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God.” “In him ye are made full,” but in Him you have got to increase. That is not

a contradiction. Made full by reason of your position, but increasing in that fulness by reason of your spiritual progress. Progress is a matter of making good all that is in your position. We see in Ephesians the correspondence between that letter and the book of Joshua. When the people came into the land, they were in the land flowing with milk and honey, they were in the place where all the fulness dwelt, but they had to do something about it; and so we find that it was a matter of making good all that was theirs, progressing in the fulness into which they had been placed positionally; and that is exactly what is here. "Increaseth with the increase of God" is a matter of going on in that position to appropriate, apply and make ours the fulness which we have inherited in Christ; or, to put it more closely to the figure of the Body and the Head here in this letter, it is taking everything from the Head.

Now the temptation which was being presented to these Colossian believers was to let go of Christ as supreme, and the Apostle made it perfectly clear that to let Christ's supreme position go was to let the fulness go, and that only as they held fast, not simply to Christ personally – all these people were prepared to hold fast to Christ and not to let Him go – but also to Him as Head, and so recognized that everything came from the headship of Christ, only so would they come experimentally to His fulness.

The Practical Application of Christ's Headship

That is a statement, but what it means is shown in Chapter 3 –

"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory."

That is the practical application of headship. "Ye died" – that is necessary to put Christ in His place. "Ye were raised together with Christ" – not apart from Him; not leaving any place for self-government, self-direction, self-sufficiency, self-assertiveness, or any other expression of self at all. "Ye died"; your own headship of your life died with you. All other governments of your life died when you died. You died to all other authorities, to all other rule; to every other kind of direction, government, headship in principle; you died to all except to the headship of Christ; and, being raised, you were raised with Christ. It is "together with Christ"; and now in resurrection it is Christ Who is Head of the Body, the Church.

While this has a personal and individual application, it is the Church which is in view again. This elect body of people called the Church died to all other governments, just as Israel were set aside and buried in Babylon. It was the crucifixion – the death and the burial – of Israel when the captivity took place. They were sent away, out of the place of covenant blessing, the place where the Lord was, the place of the inheritance, the place where everything had been provided for their very existence. They were sent right out of it and were for that time dead and buried, simply because they had let in other headships. Idolatry was the cause; that meant that another headship, that of Satan mediately through the gods of the nations round about, had taken God's place, and God would not tolerate any other headship of any kind at all. So He slew them and buried them in Babylon, and when there was a raising from that grave of a company that came back, it was under the absolute headship of the Lord, and that alone. That is the principle of it. It was a corporate thing, a corporate resurrection, and under one head. From that time, whatever Israel became, however they failed, never again was idolatry found among them. There is that about it; it cured them of idolatry – that is, of another headship. You see the principle.

Now here it is the Church, an elect people, having died and been buried to all other headships; and to be in the Church in resurrection carries with it that which is not optional at all. It is not an option – whether we like it or not, whether we will have it or not – it is an established thing, that you cannot be truly in the meaning of the Body of Christ and have any other government than the government of Christ, any other headship than the headship of Christ. It is implicit in resurrection. So then, "If... ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God." Here Christ as Head is seated at the right hand of God. That means He has taken the seat of absolute authority. There is nothing more to be done about this, nothing to be added to it. It is finished, it is final. He sits down in the complete authority which is His. He is on the Throne. And that is the position of the Church, and

the Church in every part has to be brought to that place where all direction, all government, all decisions, are taken from the Head, everything is referred to the Head, the whole life has to come right under the Head. There is to be no self-will, no self-choice, no self-direction, nothing at all that comes out from any other quarter. There is no division in the mind of God between our natural will and the will of Satan – they are the same. Satan has put his very will into the fallen creation. It is a self-willed creation working against God, and it comes from the devil. So everything now has to be transferred to the Head and taken from the Head if there is going to be any spiritual enlargement.

It is practical. “Ye died”; “ye were raised”; “Christ who is our life.” Those are statements of fact, utter and absolute. Therefore “seek the things that are above”; therefore “put to death your members which are upon the earth... seeing that ye have put off the old man and have put on the new man” (Col. 3:5-10). You see the things that are to be put away because you put on the new man. It is a new position with a government altogether in all matters, and a complete subjection to Him at every point. That is the way to progress in the fulness to which we have been brought positionally.

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