

Christ is the Head of the Church (1)

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Ephesians 1: 8 – 12

In all wisdom and insight, He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1: 19 - 23

And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Colossians 1: 17 – 18

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

We thank our Lord our brothers have arranged for me to share in this conference these aspects and especially on ‘Christ is the Head of the Church’. Brothers and sisters may have heard these verses many times. But what does it really mean that ‘Christ is the Head of the Church’? We really thank our God that from our brothers’ sharing in the past few days, we are brought into the knowledge of the fullness of the Son of God. The Lord’s word always brings us to one fact – Christ is all; He dwells in us and He is our all.

When God has so decided to work in us according to the counsel of His will, to what extent is He going to bring us into? We thank our God that He has prepared abundant grace for us. Thus naturally there arise a thought in us when we come before our Lord: we are a vessel that holds God’s grace. We came to this understanding because we look at God’s work in us from our own perspective. We thank God that He is pleased to have us as His vessels. I believe that each of you

when you had this experience of God's grace, you all can easily grasp the fact 'For God so love the world that He gave us His only begotten Son'. We have received the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior according to the word of God. And according to the promise of the word of the Lord, we enjoy the various spiritual blessings that He gives us. We have received these blessings the moment we are saved and throughout the times we have grown in Him. Looking at this from the outside, we are indeed solely vessels receiving His grace. And the fact that we are vessels to receive grace from God is not wrong. But we need to admit that we cannot always remain at that stage. God will progressively lead us to a point where we will gradually understand why God wants us to receive this grace. Brothers and sisters, you must have noticed that this year the theme of the conference is Christ is our all. We all must ask why God has bestowed such abundant grace on us. So when the brothers arranged to have me share on 'Christ is the Head of the Church', it seems that we need to change directions and look at it from God's point on view on the purpose of His redemption.

The Purpose of God's Creation of Man

Whenever we touch on the subject of Christ is the Head of the Church, there is no way that we will not touch on the question of why God wants to save us. What is the purpose of His redemption? When we go back to this, we can see a big thing. Even though I will not go into the details of all the things that happened in the past, yet we still need to review the purpose of God's creation of man. We all know clearly that the creation of man is according to the counsel of God's will. So what is the counsel of God's will? We do not need to guess because God has proclaimed the counsel of His will. And when we read the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, we can clearly see why God created man. We realize that at the very beginning when God created man, He proclaimed that He gave His image to man; He entrusted His authority to man. But we never ask God 'Why do You create man according to Your image? Why do You entrust Your authority to man'? Maybe we have never asked the Lord these questions. But we thank and praise our God. Even though we have not asked these questions, yet He told us why. It is a very obvious fact. God wants to use the men He created to express Himself; not only to express who He is, but also to express His authority over all things.

What is God's purpose in this? Even though God has not told us explicitly in His words, yet in His revelation to man, God shows that His purpose for creating man was to resolve a very severe fallen situation in the universe. Whenever we come across this matter, then we will have to pay attention to the image and authority of God. And what do these two things speak of? It clearly speaks of who God is and what His position should be in all things.

I would like to review with brothers and sisters one thing. God put man in the Garden of Eden after He created man. God had made different provisions in the garden. Among them, God had a special arrangement: there were two trees in the garden. One was the tree of life; the other one was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then God declared to man: 'you can eat of every tree in the

garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The day you eat of it, you will die'. This seems to be what was recorded. But brothers and sisters, is this story or is it history? Is this history or is it what God expressed in His counsel. Maybe brothers and sisters have not really thought about it.

When we read God's words, we intentionally or unintentionally take it as a story. If it was just a story, why would God tell us? This is not a story, but a very serious spiritual matter. Sometimes I think that if our forefather Adam would just ask God after God told him His command, 'God, why is it that we can eat of the fruits of any tree except for the fruits of the tree of knowledge and evil', I am sure God would clearly explain to him the reason. It was a pity our forefather did not ask that question. He just knew that it was a command.

The Path to the Completion of the Will of God

Now we see the gravity of this problem. The purpose of why God created man draws out the arrangement of this matter. God said you are to express Me; you are to be the one who will exercise My authority. But the problem is: how can one who was created out of dust execute what God has entrusted to him? We also clearly know the authority that God has entrusted to man is to be used against an adversary that cannot be easily dealt with. If our forefather had asked God, maybe God would tell him that to be able to complete what was entrusted to him, he needed to learn that he had to unite with God. He already was created in God's image. He had also received the authority that God gave him to rule over all God's creation. Now on what basis could he succeed and complete what God has entrusted him? God seemed to lay down two choices before him. One was that he would go and deal with the problem based on what he had. And how could he go about knowing all that he needed to do? He just had to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But God already commanded him not to eat of that fruit. In other words he should not choose this way. He should only choose the way of the fruit of the tree of life. That way, when he partook of the fruit of the tree of life, the result would be that he would have a complete union with the life of God. Then he would have no difficulty in executing what God has entrusted him. If he did not choose this but instead, choose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then he would have a lot of knowledge and a lot of strength. However, he had no qualifications that would enable him to complete what God has entrusted him. He would be finished once he ate of that fruit. All his wisdom, authority and power would be empty and in vain.

Brothers and sisters, if we return to the garden of Eden and review the history, we find a very serious spiritual question. You will see that the creation of man is for the purpose of completing God's will. But on what basis can man depend on to complete God's will? God has already revealed the way. The question is what choice will you make? Our forefather was deceived and he made the wrong choice. He was cheated and the result was that man became very capable. Our God acknowledged

this fact. And when we look at that time in history, God closed off the path to the tree of life. God said one thing: they have eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they became very capable; if they were able to eat the fruit of the tree of life it would be a serious problem. So God immediately closed off the path to the tree of life. Even though the path to the tree of life was closed but then men also have various knowledge and abilities. In man's point of view, it is a pretty good thing because we now are capable and knowledgeable and can solve all the problems. It is not important whether we have God or not. This is a result brought on by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This phenomenon became the nature of men. Even for us who know the salvation of God, believed and were saved by grace, we cannot escape its influence.

Brothers and sisters, when we review the history of the creation of man by God, we notice one problem. When we were saved, we do not realize that God is going to lead us to a point where we, as the body of Christ, let Christ be the head. But gradually the Lord leads us to see that fact. It is accurate that we have received a lot of God's grace. But the grace that God bestowed on us is for God to be able to work in us and lead us back to the original purpose of why God created man.

The Fall of Man and God's Redemption

When we go back to the center of this question, then we come across another problem. What was the reason for the fall of man? From history and from our practical experience, we can simply say the reason is because we depend on ourselves and we do not want God to be our head. And from the spiritual perspective, our receiving God and the Son of God as our head is bothered by a spiritual principle. And this principle is brought about by the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Man fell and lost the glorious arrangement that God had originally planned for him. But we thank our Lord that His will has not changed. And because His will has not changed, there came the redemption. Again I repeat regarding the redemption, we know that initially God has mercy on us; He loves us and He does not want to see us die in our sins. So He saved us. But redemption is not the end. Rather it is the starting point of God's work in us. And because God has the starting point, He can now continue to work in us and lead us back to His original plan.

When we read the Book of Ephesians, we can clearly see from the first chapter the many spiritual blessings that God has prepared for us. Then it goes on and points out that God did all these according to the counsel of His will. We receive all these grace because the will of God has so arranged for it. Why does God want us to receive grace? The Book of Ephesians clearly tells us the reason. It is according to God's will that for the administration of the fullness of times, God will cause Christ to head all things in Him. In plain words, God causes all rebellious things including man

to return to the Lord's presence, to prostrate before the Lord and proclaim, 'God, You are the God of all'.

Brothers and sisters, now what are our problems and our difficulties? The problem is that we have not accepted the authority of God. But thank God that He works so that He can bring all these rebellious things to an end. So that we all come to God and acknowledge to Him 'God, You are right, You are righteous, You are holy; all things come from You and according to You. And it is absolutely right that all things come back to You and prostrate before You'.

The Starting Point of Summing Up All Things in Christ

When we read the Book of Ephesians, we see that it does not stop at this point because our Lord still have words to say. He leads us onward in His words to see one thing. Where is the starting point of this matter of all things being summed up in Christ? Now we see the word of God said that the appearing of this matter is based on God having found a group of people and put them in Christ. The Book of Ephesians calls these people 'those who were the first to hope in Christ'. Brothers and sisters, you have to pay attention to the words 'the first to hope'.

The fall of the universe and the fall of man brought everything into hopelessness. But thank God, in His redemption, He clearly explained one thing. He wanted to gain a group of people and He put them in Christ. Of course, it is Christ who came into them first. And they became those whom the bible said 'were the ones who were the first to hope in Christ'. We need to pay attention to the words 'the first'. That is to say, they were the ones who were the first to hope. This means that God does not want this hope to stop in these people who were the 'first'. But He wishes to use this small group who had first hope in Christ to expand the realm of those who will receive blessings. It is to increase continuously until that day when everything is summed up in Christ. This is the eternal will of God. We thank and praise our Lord. Because of the grace of redemption, we are brought back by God to be those who became the first to hope in Christ – the Church. And these people who are called the Church become the body of Christ. And not only are they the body of Christ but they will be led, dealt with and built up to become the bride of Christ. Brothers and sisters, if we review the history up to this point, we will clearly see that the purpose of God's redemption is for us to free ourselves from the consequence of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and to return to the end result of the fruit of the tree of life.

Why is Christ the Head of the Church?

So when we read the first chapter of the Book of Acts, we learn of a fact from God's words. After our Lord's resurrection but before His ascension, He sent out His disciples. When He sent out these disciples, He spoke some very serious words to them. 'I go and the Spirit will come. And when the

Holy Spirit comes, you will receive power. God will start His many works in you. And all these works lead to one fact: you are My testimony'. This brought out a clear conclusion. Today when we look at the matter of Christ being the Head of the Church, we cannot but pay attention to why Christ is the Head of the Church. Is it not very good already that the Lord Jesus saved us and we are reconciled to God? Why do we need to accept Christ as our head? The answer is very simple. God wants the Church to be Christ's testimony and to be God's testimony.

Brothers and sisters, when we pay attention to the entire world, we can see that its stand is enmity to God. We who believe in our Lord, who are called those the first to hope in Christ, we know that we should choose our Lord. But because of the influence of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we are not that willing to choose the Lord. This is the problem that we face every day. God wants to bring us to the point where we can be His testimony. But men in their natural state, including us who believe in God, always stand in opposition to our Lord. Now the problem comes. If God wants to use us, who 'are the first to hope', to be His testimony and if we are in such a dire condition, how can we be His testimony? How can we manifest Him?

To Be His Testimony

Whether we are the testimony of God or the testimony of Christ; the Church or the children of God should at least testify to two things. First, we are to testify to the unbelieving world that God is the one true God; everything is from Him, through Him and will be to Him in the future. This is what we should testify to the unbelieving age. Besides this, we should testify concretely and practically who God is and what He has done. Secondly, we should not only testify that there is a God, but we should also let people know what kind of a God He is. Now let us look at these two requirements. If we do not totally submit to God's authority and accept His governance, then we should ask ourselves what we are manifesting.

The sharing of our brothers clearly shows us that, if left to ourselves, we would never choose God. We will always consider the price that we have to pay if we decide to choose God; what we have to forsake for choosing God and whether it is worth it or not. But we thank and praise our God; He leads us to see that the Church is Christ's testimony. If the Church is to be Christ's testimony, she has to accept the fact that Christ is the Head. Only when Christ is the Head, can we then have the qualifications to let Christ be our fullness. If we do not let Christ fill us, or if we just lower our standard a little and let Christ partially fill us, then how much of Christ can we manifest? You can manifest Christ only according to the measure of how much of Christ you have in you.

God would not let us stay at this point. He wants us to be a complete expression of Christ. When God created man, He already destined to give all that He is and all that He has to man without reservation. When God restored us through His redemption, how did we come to know about His

salvation? Is His redemption only for us not to perish but to have everlasting life? This understanding is accurate but not complete. Why is it not complete? It is because the redemption of God not only brings us out of that danger but also so bring us back to His original will for creating man. It is what I just said about those who are the first to hope in Christ. God wants to use those people to bring all the fallen things back to the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, you remember that God told us that when He saved us He has given us abundant grace. One of these is that we became children of God. But is that all? If we remember Hebrews 2: 10, we clearly know that in the arrangement of God's salvation, He wants to do one thing and that is Christ is to bring many sons into glory. This is the purpose of God's creation of man. And this is also the end result of His redemption. So now we come to a concrete problem. What we have shared to this point is knowledge. How are we going to bring this knowledge into reality? We not only need to know that Christ is the Head, but practically in our lives we need to let Christ be the Head of the Church. We not only know that God had so arranged, but we need to live out this arrangement of God so that it is a concrete testimony. And so brothers and sisters need to know the degree of defiance of this age towards God.

The World Defies God

I want to give a couple of examples. About six months ago, a professor in Astronomy in the University of California, Berkeley, announced a discovery. She discovered two super massive black holes which are a lot bigger than the black hole that was discovered before. This is a sensational discovery. So someone went to interview her. She said 'yes, we discovered these black holes'. And the interviewer asked, 'what is a black hole'? She answered, 'I do not know. It is a pitch black patch'. 'Can you get some material from the black hole and test it'? She said, 'No, because inside the black hole, there is a fast swirling vortex. Its velocity is faster than the speed of light or the speed of sound. There is no way we can get any substance out'. 'Just what is a black hole?' She said, 'I do not know. I can only say it is some dark matter'. I laughed when I read this news because I never knew what dark matter is. When I was a student, I only knew what matter is; I do not even know there is something called dark matter. Nowadays even the high school students know what dark matter is.

The interviewer again asked, 'So what really is dark matter?' She said, 'We do not know anything about it except that there is such a phenomenon. We know there is a hole. Even though we are not able to touch it or come into contact with it, yet we come to this observation from some mathematical equations'. After I watched this interview, I had a thought. They are not able to come into contact with the matter; nor can they measure it directly or listen to it. They only calculated this black hole solely based on some equations. Why is it that they cannot use the same principles and base on the creation of God and derive some equations to let people know our God? Of course, I do not have an answer, nor do they have an answer. The highest level of explanation they give is that it is

intelligence design. They can accept such a controversial intelligent design but they cannot accept the position of God.

There was another incidence that happened about a week ago. It was also about a debatable topic in astronomy. They have always been looking for the source of life. I cannot express this clearly since I am an outsider. I read in the newspaper that they found the tiniest element in the makeup of the universe. They were very excited about it. They said, 'Now that we have discovered this element, we can explain a lot of theories that we were not able to explain before'. Although I am not in the field of astronomy, yet I have this thought: why is it that they are not able to see the God who creates all things in all their discoveries? Otherwise what good it is even if they discover the tiniest element? They are looking only at the process and not the beginning. Even if it is the beginning, how does it happen? They do not want to tackle this problem because if they do then they have to come across the question of something coming out of nothing. They keep going round and round on the outside of things. But they have not been able to find the origin. This is the attitude of this generation towards God.

And it was because of this discovery the newspaper carried a short, interesting news. There is a famous physicist in England. He is the one who came up with the Big Bang Theory. He once made a bet with an American professor that there is absolutely no chance that any physicist would discover the tiniest element. But the American professor said this discovery is possible. So when the above discovery came out, this English physicist had to give the American professor a hundred dollar. So brothers and sisters, do you see the problem? Even though this is a small thing, it still shows men like to go in circles outside of God. They are not willing to prostrate before God and say, 'You are a true and living God!' This is the kind of generation that we are living in.

God put His church in this age to testify that God is a living God. This is not only to testify to those who oppose God, but also to testify to all people what kind of a God He is. And the children of God have to face a question: God wants us to testify Him, how can we manifest Him? We just mentioned if we are not fully filled by Him, then we cannot fully manifest Him. How are we to be His testimony? We fall too far short of how God is. But thank God that He has already destined one thing. And that is we are the ones who are the first to hope in Christ. So we definitely will be His testimony. Our being Christ's testimony is directly related to when the purpose of God will be accomplished.

Christ Completes All Things

The Book of Ephesians said that in the fullness of time, all things will be summed up in Christ. This matter starts from those who are the first to hope in Christ. In another word, if those who are the first to hope in Christ have not completed what they should do, then there will be no basis for 'all things to

be summed up in Christ' to appear. But thank and praise our Lord. He has revealed Himself as the Head. This fact is clearly seen in the Book of Colossians. If we look at the appearing of all things, we know Christ is the One who accomplished this fact. And that is why God lets Christ be the Head of all things. On this matter of redemption, God lets His Son went through death and resurrection to reveal the outcome of redemption. On one hand, He ended the bondage of the power of death over us. On the positive side, it shows that now He comes and dwells in us and He is our life. Now we have the qualifications to manifest Him.

Thank and praise our Lord. He Himself already has that qualification. When you look at all things, you see Christ is the Lord of all things. You know He is the Lord of life when you experienced redemption. His position, identity, and all His undertaking show that He is the head. Today God wants us to have a total union with this Christ who is the Head. Even though today, we fall far short of the total union in reality, yet God has already put us in that position, so that we are united with the Head of all things, who is Christ. Then Christ works in us to a certain extent that the original purpose of why God created man gradually will be realized in us.

Living Out the Union with Christ

When we pay attention to this matter, we will notice the extent of God's redemption for us - those who are the first to hope in Christ. Even though we have not arrived at that end, yet God has already told us what that end is. When we read 1 John, we clearly see that 'how the Son of God is, that is how we will be'. Why would we have this result? It is because He now is our life and we are united with Him. If we can live out the reality of this union, the result will be that Christ is our Head and what we manifest is Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we can clearly see that if Christ does not fill us up first, if He is not governing us; if our life, actions, thoughts and emotions are governed by our old nature, how can we manifest Him? We do not have the qualifications to manifest Christ. Today God let us first see that Christ is the Head of the church. And whether the church can manifest Christ depends on the relationship between the church and the Head.

When we talk about this matter, brothers and sisters can see that He is the Head. To put it in plain language, He is our Head. Brothers and sisters, when you see a man, you need to see the complete man and not just a heap of things. You cannot just see the body without the head. The sisters will be so scared. How can you have a person there without a head? For a live person, very clearly the head cannot be separated from the body. Structurally, it cannot be separated. Functionally, it cannot be separated. We know in reality that all our actions, thoughts and feelings come from the head. The head and the body have to be in a total harmonious union. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 tells us the members in the body connect naturally together and each functions accordingly because there is the

head. It is not just the appearance of the head but in reality the head governs our thoughts, actions and tendencies. We act according to the governance of the head.

Brothers and sisters, think about this. If Christ is our head, what will we manifest? It will be entirely all Christ. If our head is not, then what we manifest is us. Individually, it is like this. Corporately the church is even more so. If we come back to this point that Christ is the Head of the church, then we see what our pursuit is: that Christ has to be our head.

The Growth of the Church

Brothers and sisters, we are now saved. Our life has to grow. The church has to grow. But then problems come again. How does the church grow? How do we know the church is growing? Is growth measured by the spiritual terms that we can say? Or is the spiritual growth measured by the amount of service that we have in the church? Those can only be used as reference. We cannot base on the outside appearance and say the church has growth. To determine whether the church has growth, we need to look at whether the church can bring out the testimony of Christ. How can we bring out the testimony of Christ? Simply put, who is the head of the church? If it is Christ, then we are on the right path. If it is not entirely Christ, then we are not completely on the right path.

Apart from that, we can also look at the relationship of the children of God in the church to gauge the growth of the church. Within a body, if all members are under the authority of one head, they will live and work in harmony. If this harmony cannot be lived out among the children of God, then you can ask why it is not. The answer is very simple. It is because we do not let Christ be the head. If I let Christ be the head; if the sisters let Christ be the head; and if the brothers let Christ be the head; if we all let Christ be the head, then all our rules, our decisions and our tendencies express Christ. And the result is that we are all fitted harmoniously together. We need to see that on one hand, Christ is the head; on the other hand, we need to see that we are the body. And this body carries the testimony of God and the testimony of Christ.

We thank and praise our Lord. In the grace of His redemption, He not only solved our spiritual problems, but He also brought us back into His original arrangement. How do we go back to His original arrangement? In the Garden of Eden, just as how God revealed the function of the tree of life, today, we still stand on the principle of the tree of life to follow Him. Everything is according to Christ. We are dependent on Christ. We are towards Christ and we express Christ. May the Holy Spirit help us on this point so we know how to follow the Lord so as to bring us to the end, which is, Christ is our head. If there is no interruption, I will share with brothers and sisters how we can concretely live out the fact that Christ is the head of the church. We thank and praise our Lord. Let us pray.

Prayer

Lord, we thank Thee. In Your grace of redemption, You have been so gracious to us. You not only solve our problem but You brought us back into Your pleasure. Just as how You have originally decided, today, You bring us back to Your counseled arrangement. Lord, we prostrate before You in worship. Lord, we know the extent of how low we have fallen; we know the extent to which we have rebelled against You. Lord, no matter how far we have fallen, when You manifest Your salvation in us, You want to bring us back to Your original will. Thus we prostrate before You in worship and admit You are our Lord. Not only are You our Lord, You are our all. You will be our head so that we will be filled by You and can manifest You on earth. And also in eternity we will manifest that You are the glory, honor, authority and power. Lord, whenever You let us see the counsel of Your will in us, we need to bow our head to worship You and say You are worthy of all the glory and authority into eternity. We pray in the Lord's name. Amen.