The Head of the body, his Church (text Col 1:18)

Text: Colossians 1:18a

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**Scriptures:** Acts 1:6-10; Colossians 1:15-20

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 122; 533; 325; 391; 531+532

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (LD19Q and A50)

Theme: The supremacy of Christ in re-creation.

Proposition: The Church is the dependent, living body of the Risen Christ her Head which He is progressively recovering in order to her to perfection.

**Introduction**

Many people have some idea of what a church is and of who is in charge of her; however these ideas about the church are often incorrect. A local church is defined in some people’s eyes by the activities which are organised there: worship meetings, groups, ministries etc. Church are seen by many today as an institution with some social value; perhaps as a supplier of community programs, but nothing more. Or a provider of friendship and support for needy groups of people. Or maybe a social club like bowls, RSA, etc. Some people today definitely see the church as being an odd relic of the past, well past her ‘use by’ date in the 21st century.

Some people when they move to a new area searching for church look very much as consumers of a product might, desiring a particular mix of “religious goods and services”. Others, who grow up in churches like this, just accept church as “part of what you do”, it’s woven into the fabric of their life. They never probe deeper into the question – what exactly is the church?

The answer is that the Church is the Body of the Risen Christ.

* It is Christ Himself who defines the church.
* It is Christ Himself who sustains the church.
* It is Christ Himself for whom the church exists so that He may be seen to be, as He is, Lord of All.

1. **The church - A dependent Body**

Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 19 Q and A50 describes the connection between Christ and the church in answering the question about the words in the Apostles Creed “And sits at the right hand of God”? The answer being: “*Christ ascended to heaven, there to show that he is head of his church, and that the Father rules all things through him*”.

To sit ‘at the right hand’ was the highest mark of honour that a king could give to someone. This implied a sharing of the rule. When someone sat at the right hand of the king, he received a very noble position in government (cf. 1 Kings 2:19; Ps 110, Matt 20:21; Heb 1:3). The Father rules all things through Christ - (cf. Matt 28:18, John 5:22). v15-17 Christ is the One through Whom and for Whom everything was created with no exceptions. Christ is the One in Whom everything holds together – that is to say doesn’t disintegrate.

Christ is also described as being the head over a body. Col 1:18 “*And he is the head of the body, the church*”. This is an image from anatomy. The picture is clear and vivid: Just as the head exercises controlling and directing influence over the whole body, So, Christ, as Ruler, has authority over His body. The “body” here does not mean the physical body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul makes this clear to the Colossians by saying ‘of the Body: the church’. This means “the body: which is the church”. The church is Christ’s body on this earth. She is a single entity with many different parts having diverse functions “*For the body is not one member, but many*” (1 Cor 12:15). The church is a living organism and she is totally dependent on Christ, her Head.

Paul writes to a church which is organically attached to the Lord Jesus v2 *“To the saints and faithful brethren IN CHRIST”.* But also, Paul writes to a church in danger of decapitation; a body in risk of losing its connection to its head. Have you ever seen a headless chicken? – its body runs all over the place, tripping over unseen obstacles and running into hard objects. The local ‘church’ without Christ is like that for a short time before she keels over and dies.

There was a danger in Ephesus of Christ being replaced by other another authority: e.g. teachers/leaders deluding people with persuasive arguments (2:4). Equivalents today include the wealth and prosperity false gospel. These teachers/leaders were deceiving others with ideas based on the traditions of men (2:8). Equivalents today include the Roman Catholic view of sacraments as automatically infusing grace. The true church of the Lord Jesus is dependent on Christ, not man, as her Ruler.

What is the Headship of Christ like for the church? Not hard, harsh, domineering, self-centred and proud. Christ rules the church out of his deep love for her. The church depends upon Christ for love. In Him there is no fear. We need not fear anything, for nothing and nobody can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39). His rule is not hard, but firm and gentle. Under the Loving Headship of Christ the church is the place where sinners like you and me may find rest for our souls. Christ loves His Body, the church.

The true church (i.e. invisible church) is a community of believers who are in willing submission to Christ as their Lord. God loves you Brothers and Sisters in the church so much that if you desire what is pleasing to God, but you are unable to keep the commands of Scripture, the He will forgive you through His Son Jesus, whose blood was shed so that the church could be holy and blameless in the sight of God.

Christ loves you Brother and sister in our Lord.The Christ through whom all things were created loves you. The Christ through whom all things hold together loves you. The Christ for whom all things hold together loves you. The True Church, the Body of Christ, is dependent on Christ her Head and knows His unfailing love. She is alive. Which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **The church - A living Body**

Colossians 1:18 states that “*And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead*”. Here Christ is described as the “beginning”. Paul is not talking about creation here but explains the meaning in the next phrase “the firstborn from the dead”. The word ‘firstborn’ here conveys the idea of being first in a series. God raised Christ, who had died, to new life. Christ is therefore the beginning of new life.As we saw in Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 18, from 1 Cor 15, His past resurrection guarantees the future resurrection of others.

Christ is the founder of a new humanity, a new creation. He is head over the church: an assembly of those who are this new humanity, this new creation. The church is a living body of those who share in the risen life of Christ. Like branches on a plant which receive all their life giving nutrient from the bush/tree of which they are a part. Jesus said "*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing*”.(John 15:5). The body of Christ is not a dead corpse or a dead vine, but she is alive. It is alive with the risen life of Christ.

Paul writes to a church in Colossae where there is life! e.g. 2:13 “*And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses”.* The Church is a living body dependent on Christ.

This life comes from the Head, Jesus Christ Risen Lord. John 3:36 "*He who believes in the Son has eternal life*”.

Christ has purchased eternal life for you Brothers and Sisters in our Lord so that you could become a part of his living body. The Christ through whom all things were created gives life to His church. The Christ through in whom all things hold together gives life to His church. The Christ for whom all things hold together gives life to His church. The True Church, the Body of Christ, is dependent on Christ her Head for the life which He gives to her. This is a restoring, rejuvenating love.

1. **The church - A recovering Body**

For what purpose is Christ the head of His Church? Why is He the founder of a community of new creatures who love and serve God? v18b “*that in everything he might be preeminent*”. So that Christ would be Lord above all else, of first importance.

The Church, the Body of Christ is not only a dependant, living organism: She is being restored to be a perfect body, without blemish: “*without spot or wrinkle*” (Eph 5:27). The human body is able to rebuild after disease and following some injuries. The process of recovery takes time, sometimes it is not completed before the end of life on this earth. Cells are constantly being renewed in the human body to ensure health.

In a similar way, as the church depends upon Christ and receives restoring life in the Spirit from Him, she grows in holiness, in godliness towards full maturity which is perfect health. There was clear evidence of the restoring work of Christ in the Colossian church: Epaphras had reported their faith in Jesus Christ (v4). He had reported their love for all the saints in the Spirit (v4,8) and of their hope in Christ’s future inheritance (v5).

Paul writes to the Colossian church to warn them about limiting/halting growth by seeking to replace Christ as head: (v2:18) e.g. pretending to be humble or pious in order to attain to a higher plane of religious experience; relying on mystical experiences as way of access to God. Equivalents today may include, people having visions with claims of extra-Biblical revelation from God. Detachment from Christ as Head of the church stops growth: for there is no longer any life. Remember a headless chicken doesn’t run for long and never runs straight.

God in Christ is restoring, reconciling all things to Himself: v20b: “*Having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven*”. How has Christ brought restoration to a dead world? Through the peace/reconciliation he made on the Cross. How is Christ the Head, now bringing about the restoration of all things? Through His Body, the Church! This is a work of universal, cosmic significance and importance.

The Church is Christ’s instrument for changing the world! Not just some of the world. This is not just a slight change, but a fundamental one. The Church is used by God in the work of restoring creation through the functioning of the body. Members of the body are agents in the restoration of the world. For example through Christian Schools, Christian Universities, Christian Businesses, individual members in their workplaces, neighbourhoods.

So Paul writes to The Body of Christ at Colossae. (4:5-6) “*Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*”. As the Church reveals Christ to the world, God uses the church’s faithful witness to transform the world.

Give thanks and praise to God for the church: not because she is to be a center for fellowship, activities, and outreach (although these are good), but because she is the dependent, living Body of the Risen Christ who is progressively recovering her in order to bring her to complete perfection.

He has the authority and power to do so, because He sits at the right hand of God. Brothers and Sisters, He is our glorious ascended Lord and Saviour.

AMEN