

The Church: How Jesus Builds It #2 - the Head and the Body

by Bob Hoekstra

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing Jesus Christ as the head of the church and holding fast to Him for spiritual growth and nourishment.

Duration: 46:11

Scripture: Acts 2:47, Ephesians 1:22

Topics: "Church Growth", "Spiritual Authority"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of quantitative growth in the church. He highlights that the Lord adds to the church by saving people and bringing them out of sin and darkness into Christ. The speaker also points out that many churches have members who do not know the Lord, emphasizing the need for true spiritual growth. The sermon explores the relationship between Jesus as the head of the church and the church as His body, emphasizing that the authority, direction, and growth of the church lie with Him.

Transcript

We are in our second study now of six studies on this wonderful subject of the church. The subtitle of our study really is, How Jesus Builds His Church. Remember, Jesus promised, I will build my church.

The question that comes to us is, how does the Lord Jesus Christ do that? And in our six visits together in the Word, we're asking the Lord to tell us about that. Our first study, we saw that the church is His body, the body of Christ. And since the church is a body, it's a spiritual organism, not a religious organization.

And since a body needs a head, praise God for the wonderful, glorious, majestic head given to the body of Christ, even Jesus the head. Now in a body-head relationship, the key in the body to authority, to direction, to development and growth, it lies with the head. And in this visit in the Word, we're going to look at the issue of the head and the body in this wonderful body of Christ relationship.

It is a strategic, fundamental issue about the nature of the church that even begins to unfold more of how the church is to function. In Colossians 1, verse 18, we see our first issue, and that is the headship of Christ. In Colossians 1, verse 18, the first part of the verse reads, and He is the head of the body, the church.

The church of Jesus Christ, here referred to as the body of Christ. And of course, the body needs a head, and we have that glorious head, the Lord Jesus. And there's insight into how Christ the head and His body are to function and relate as we consider the physical body and the physical head.

The Lord is so good to take physical, visible realities and unfold them for us to open up the unseen realm of the Spirit. In the Scriptures, the physical body is an illustration of the head of His body, the church. Think of the physical head and our body.

Jesus is to be to us, the church, what our physical bodies are to the physical. Physical head is to the physical members of the body. The head in a physical body is the one who is to be in charge of the body, not the foot, not the arm, the head.

The head is to be leading, guiding, planning, coordinating, settling issues of timing, arranging the affairs for the body, directing, deciding, evaluating, making necessary adjustments, informing, changing, maintaining, and the list goes on and on. If our head physically were not doing this for our body physically, we would be in major trouble. Well, often the church world is in major trouble because the head is not allowed to be functioning in this way in many parts of Christendom that is in the religious church world.

Jesus is the head of the body, the church. You may recall in Ephesians 1.22 where we visited last time, we had an insight into the totality of Christ's headship. Good to think on that for a moment before we proceed further and consider the body and its relationship to the head and to one another.

Ephesians 1.22, and he put all things under his feet, under Jesus' feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church. Jesus Christ has been put in authority in every arena. The head of the church is the king of kings and the Lord of lords.

And Christ is the head of the body. He's the head over church leaders, over leadership roles, leadership meetings, and congregational gatherings. He's head over all things to the church.

He's head over things when we gather together like this. He's head over things when we scatter out into the world to our workplaces or our homes. He's still in charge.

He's still the head. We don't cease being the body and he does not cease to be the head. This is the very nature of who we are.

We're the body, he's the head. We're joined to him, he's in authority. The great need in many churches that are spiritually weak and perhaps increasingly worldly at times is Jesus is not allowed to function as the head of the body.

Now until the Lord Jesus Christ returns, he only leads and heads up affairs where he is invited to, allowed to, trusted to. Someday every knee will bow. Every tongue will say Jesus is the Lord.

But meanwhile, the choice lies in every heart. Will we acknowledge him as such? It lies with every church. Will we look to the Lord to be the head? And in many members of the body of Christ and many collection of members, many local churches, Jesus is not allowed to be head.

Others are in charge. One of the reasons I love taking part in this fellowship and church family is so many here and the leadership and the pastor is committed to this truth, Jesus is the head of the church. You can't have true spiritual leadership if the leaders are not committed to the headship of Jesus Christ.

A pastor of previous years actually pastored in a downtown church in Chicago, A.W. Tozer, a man mighty in spirit and powerful in the word of God, taught in it deeply by the spirit of God, wrote a little pamphlet called *The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches*. Someone gave it to me back in the seventies, I believe it was. It was probably written in the fifties or sixties before he went to be with the Lord.

I was pastoring then and it touched my heart deeply. It has a lot to do with this matter of the headship of Christ and the totality of his headship. In this little booklet, *The Waning Authority of Christ in the Church*, I brought along a couple of paragraphs to read.

The present position of Christ in the gospel churches may be likened to that of a king in a limited constitutional monarchy. The king or queen, sometimes depersonalized by the term the crown, is in such a country no more than a traditional rallying point, a pleasant symbol of cultural unity and loyalty, much like a flag or a national anthem. The king or queen is lauded, ceremonially celebrated, and supported, but their real authority is small.

Nominally, the king or queen is head over all, but in every crisis, someone else makes the decisions. On formal occasions, he or she appears in his or her royal attire to deliver the tame, colorless speech put into their mouths by the real rulers of the country. The whole thing may be no more than good-natured make-believe, but it is rooted in antiquity, it is a lot of fun, and no one wants to give it up.

Now, to apply this parable to the church. Among the gospel churches, Christ is now, in fact, little more than a beloved symbol. All hail the power of Jesus' name is the church's national anthem, and the cross is her official flag.

But in the week-by-week services of the church, and the day-by-day conduct of her members, someone else, not Christ, makes the decisions. Under proper circumstances, Christ is allowed to say, quote, come unto me all that labor and are heavy laden, or let not your heart be troubled. But when the speech is finished, someone else takes over.

Those in actual authority decide the moral standards of the church, as well as all objectives and all methods employed to achieve them. Because of long and meticulous organization, it is now possible for the youngest pastor just out of school to have more actual authority in a church than Jesus Christ has. Oh my goodness, I wonder what Brother Tozer would say if he were rewriting this today.

Oh may the Lord wake us up, remind us who is the head of the church. When I started pastoring, I thought I was the head of the church. We'll be unto our church.

But we'll be unto me. They thought I was the head of the church. And when we had our leadership meeting every month, we thought we were in charge of all these matters.

And we knew just how to handle it. I mean, we had Robert's Rules of Order right there on the table. Oh, I remember the day when we replaced Robert's Rules of Order with the Word of God.

For years we met as leaders in that first church I pastored without our Bibles. Why did we need them? We had our ideas, our motions, our seconds, our discussion, our vote. And if we got into quagmire, dear Robert would sort us out by his rules.

The church cannot be the church unless she sees Jesus as the head of the church. The wonderful headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's not make him just a symbol figurehead among us.

In Ephesians chapter 4 verse 15, we see that this glorious head of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be the standard and expression for the body. We are to grow up into him, like him, and then allow him to be expressed through us. Ephesians 4 verse 15, but speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ.

It is the will of God that we the people of God grow up in all things, in every arena, into him, the head, Jesus Christ, to be more and more like him, maturing in his life unto his likeness. Then as that is taking place, he becomes the one who is expressed through us, his people. That's the way it's to work again in a physical body.

What is going on in my head gets expressed through my physical body. I'm not saying that's always great, but that's the way it works. Of course, the more that Christ is going on in our lives, in our head, our thinking, our perspective, and our minds being renewed, the more Christ is expressed through us individually.

But the whole body is to be like that. All of us are to grow up into the head, more and more like him, and then he is the one that gets expressed through our churches. I wonder when the world looks on us as the church of Jesus Christ or individual churches, I wonder if early in their thinking they think of Jesus Christ.

I wonder sometimes do they ever think of Christ when they look at us. That should be what provokes their heart. Oh, those people are what they are because of this relationship with Jesus Christ.

He is the standard and the expression for the body. This takes place as we are walking together in truth and love. Speaking the truth and love may grow up in all things into him who is the head, even Christ.

Truth and love, as we are walking together in those two realities, we're becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. Why? Because he is truth and he is love. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and God is love.

This is who the Lord is. As we are relating to him, we'll be speaking the truth and love. We'll be wanting to live in truth and love, both of them, not just one or the other.

It seems like individuals and churches tend to gravitate toward one or the other. It's like being involved in both is such a stretch, such a test. Truth, God's absolute reality.

It's good to have a passion for that, but without love, it becomes something that puffs up or that produces self-righteousness. Love is critical if we're going to deal with truth. It's a temptation just to deal with what's true.

Hey, be right. Hey, we are right. In fact, you're wrong, we're right.

The Pharisees were very much into that. But there's the temptation to go the other way. Hey, we're just into love around here.

That's all that matters. You know, and I mean lovey-dovey kind of love. We don't care what people say or do.

I mean, after all, we just love each other. That's not love. That's something on a human plane that fulfills the lust of the flesh, but it's not divine love.

Real love cares much about truth, wants people to know reality. And of course, the two have joined together in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the truth.

He is the Son of God. He is love. And as we minister to one another in truth and love, we're growing up into the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4.16 continues to develop this theme of the head and the body. And we see that the head is the source of all for all of the body. Speaking of Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Here, the head is the source for all of the body. Note the phrases, from whom, from whom. All that you and I need as members of the body of Christ comes from the head, even Christ himself.

He is our life. He is the resource we need to walk and grow and serve and have fruit and bountiful works. That resource comes from the Lord Jesus Christ.

From whom. And notice it's not just some drawing from there. It's not just a pastor or some leaders or a group of committees or a few teams here and there.

From whom the whole body. If you know the Lord Jesus Christ, if he's your Lord and Savior, you're a member in the body of Christ, your sins are forgiven, you've been born again with new life from above, the life that's given to you as a share in the life of Christ, you're in his body living by his life together, and you and I and all of us are to be drawing everything we need from the head, from whom the whole body, every one of us are to be looking to the Lord Jesus to find what's needed for life and godliness. But notice then, we'll be those who are joined and knit together.

Interesting words. It is the will of the head of the body that the members be joined and knit. That's not the way of the flesh.

The way of the flesh? Stay aloof. Touch lightly. Drop in on a meeting or two a month.

I mean, after all, you could end up involved. You could end up praying for someone or asking them to pray for you. Or, lo and behold, you might even have to let it be known you actually have weaknesses.

Standing aloof, we can kind of hope they'll think we're just like Jesus Christ. No need to grow, no problems, hey, what a walk. In fact, they're doing so great, they only have to come around once or twice a month.

Our daughter, when she was young, she's now married and a mother now. She invited her gymnastics coach to church one Sunday when I was pastoring at Calvary Chapel Irvine. He never went to church anywhere.

He came and I noticed he was quite riveted. We had him over for lunch after he said, Bob, that was so clear, that was so helpful, I'll never need to come again. Some of us act like we got it all together, you know, we don't need that much.

God wants to join us and knit us together. Sounds like there might be some friction in moving parts, huh? Sounds like there might be some edges chipped off, sanded down, to join us and then knit us. It is the will of the Lord.

We're not just a religious gathering to go through religious ritual and then scatter and do our own thing. We're the body of Christ. I'm so thankful God ordained physically that our body members would be joined and fitted and knitted together.

It is amazing, isn't it, how the physical body is so joined and knitted together, member to member. It's astounding. It's like every part was designed to be there and right next to the other part so that the whole might work as a unit.

My goodness, there must be a parable here. No wonder the Lord draws on the physical body so often to instruct us in the spiritual unseen things. The Lord wants to join us and knit us together, really build us into each other's lives in relationships of caring, sharing, getting to know each other and ministering to each other.

Too many of us have been tempted too many times to relate to Christ in a rather bizarre manner. That is, directly to Him and Him alone, I don't need the body of Christ. Now, how grotesque that must be spiritually when God looks on.

You say, what do you mean? Well, let me illustrate it physically. What if every member of my physical body was related only to my head and not to one another? Can you see the picture? Yes, it's very gross. I'd be standing up here.

No, I wouldn't be standing. My head would be hanging on a hook up here somewhere and every member of my body would be dangling from the head. That looks monstrous.

Well, often the church looks monstrous because of that. Praise God we're related to the head. Glory be to God, there'd be no life at all without that reality.

But in that reality, the head wants to join us and knit us together. So much of the lack of fruitfulness, so many of the struggles and the barrenness of life and the lack of purpose relates to those who name the name of Jesus Christ but want to relate only to the head and not to the body. It's disastrous personally and the whole body pays a price for it.

If any part of my body physically wanted to behave that way, the rest of the body would suffer from it. The Lord wants to join us and knit us together. How? By what every joint supplies.

Joints in the body of Christ. What are they? Well, let's think again of the physical body. Easy one to think of is the joint, the elbow.

What is the elbow? It's the place, it's the relationship in which the upper arm and the lower arm relate together to function together. Joints are critical in a physical body. What if we had no joints? Well, we're back to Frankenstein's monster.

The joints are critical. So they are in the body of Christ. Where member relates to member, developing a relationship to function together, there is a spiritual joint established and we can all be parts of many of them.

Notice though, by what every joint supplies. Every joint in the body of Christ, every time a member relates to a member, there is spiritual supply for the rest of the body. It doesn't source in either member or the joint, but the supply is there in the relationship, the joint.

Where does it source? In the head. But as we draw from the head what we all need in our lives, then in the developing of joints and relationships, we minister that to one another. There is a supply from the head that goes out through the body.

What a beautiful picture this is. All drawing from the head, ministering what we receive to one another. That's the way the body is to function.

And also involves this, by which every part does its share. The physical body, every part in it has a purpose and is to do its share and basically generally does. If not, we say, oh, I'm ill today.

What's wrong? This part isn't functioning properly. Oh, what does that matter to you? That's not you. No, this is part of me.

So it is with the body of Christ. When parts don't function, the whole body suffers. Oh, the personal implication questions, application questions that are stirred by this.

If you know the Lord Jesus Christ, if we are His, we're in His body. Are we living in truth and love? Are we growing up in Christ? Are we drawing from Him all that's needed for life and growth and service? Are we letting the Lord join us and knit us to the body of Christ? Are we involved in developing spiritual joints in the body? Developing relationships, member-to-member relationships which supply the things the head provides to minister to others in the body. Every part does its share.

Are we? Lord, what is my part, my place? I want to walk in it, Lord. This causes the growth of the body for the edifying of itself, building up of itself in love. Oh, thank God for that love.

If we do not have the fruit of the Spirit, love, all of this joining and knitting would create a major fever of friction in the body. Can you imagine all this joining and knitting without love? We're talking scraping, knitting, irritating, but the body gets built up in love. This same picture of the head, the source for all of the body is elaborated on in some other dimensions in Colossians chapter 2 verse 19, a parallel passage, Colossians 2.19. The context is a list of those who had spiritual problems and were off in wrong paths.

Verse 19 picks it up. They were not holding fast to the head. The obvious implication is members in the body of Christ need to be holding fast to the head from whom all the body nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments grows with the increase that is from God.

Again, Christ, the head, the source of what the body needs. Oh, how we need as members of the body of Christ, we need to be holding fast to the head, just like it's critical for a physical body. I'm so glad my physical body is holding fast to my head.

It works so much better that way. How about the body of Christ? We must be holding fast to the head. It is essential.

It's irreplaceable. Nothing can take the place of us holding fast to the head. We need to stick close to the Lord Jesus Christ, stay in intimate contact with Him, pay strict attention to Him, count on Him, draw from Him, be those seeking Him, serving Him, listening to Him, obeying Him, trusting Him, holding fast to the head.

Why? Because it's from Him that all the body receives what it needs. From whom all the body, every member of the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments. Nourished, nurtured in the life of

the head, Christ.

And knit together, we've looked at that. By joints, we've looked at that. Relationships, member to member.

But notice this one, and ligaments. And ligaments. This is the end of side A. To listen to the rest of the message, please turn the tape over now.

Nourished, nurtured in the life of the head, Christ. And knit together, we've looked at that. By joints, we've looked at that.

Relationships, member to member. But notice this one, and ligaments. And ligaments.

Yes, just like in a physical body, there are ligaments, so in the spiritual body of Christ, there are spiritual ligaments. What are they? Well, let's go from the visible to the invisible. In the physical body, the ligaments are critical to hold those joints in place together so those members can function together without popping out a joint.

What would the physical body do without the ligaments? Well, the joints, which are so useful, would become almost inoperative. At the least little pressure of problem, they just pop. Do you know that happens too regularly in the body of Christ? People popping out of joint on the least little pressure? Why are you so upset with her? Well, you noticed how she walked by me like I didn't even exist last Sunday.

Well, maybe she did, maybe she didn't. Maybe she was very ill and running for home and or maybe she did run right past you. In fact, maybe she was super irritated with you.

Does that mean we pop out a joint? Too often, it doesn't take too much pressure in the body of Christ just to pop members right out of joint. So the body again is stiff, sore, not functioning. We need ligaments developed in the body of Christ.

What are the ligaments in the body of Christ? They are the strong love bonds between the members, strong love bonds. Hey, maybe he didn't treat me the greatest at that last meeting. Maybe he did forget to show up that day when I was moving and needed him so badly.

But you know what? I love him. It's not that big a deal. Maybe he did say something about me that wasn't nice.

But you know what? Actually, I deserve worse than that anyway. Sure, he was wrong, but it was God's mercy that it wasn't worse. I mean, who do we think we are? Love covers a multitude of sins.

Without those love bonds, every little irritation pops. Boy, you get a few joints popped out in a physical body. I mean, that person, they're inoperative.

How often is the body of Christ virtually spiritually paralyzed? Because they've not been developing spiritual ligaments in the love of God. And every little pressure among them, you know, sometimes the Lord lets you down. Let's the flesh in some brother or sister be revealed against us so we can have the opportunity to develop a stronger ligament there.

Hey, if everything just goes rosy and perfect and they are just like you in every desire and thought, hey, no problem. And sometimes it goes like that for a while with folks, but sooner or later, the flesh will rear its ugly head. What do we need? The ligaments of the love of God.

So, holding fast to the head from whom all the body nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments grows with the increase that is from God. It is the will of God that His body grows. Just like physical bodies are supposed to grow, develop, mature, so the body of Christ is to grow.

It's the will of God. But what we need is a growth which is from God. In the American church world, one of the great fads that just seems to hang on and on and get bigger and bigger is the modern American church growth movement whereby sometimes well-intended Christian leaders have come up with all kinds of ideas, techniques, programs, methodologies, attitudes, do's and don'ts by which you can add numbers of people to your religious organization.

And listen, it works on that level. Man can add men to religious human activities, especially if you're careful not to offend the flesh. I mean, that's why we want the user-friendly church.

The convicting power of the Spirit, oh man, that could wreak havoc with attendance, you know? And sure, there's an increase. There are some gigantic churches in America. But there are some little assemblies of 20, 40, 50, 100, 200 people that are spiritual powerhouses compared to some that might be 10, 15,000.

Who is bringing the increase? It is the will of God that we grow with a growth which is from God, the increase that is from God. As we conclude, we'll sort of look at two verses in Acts that illustrate growth from God for the church. And we'll see it both quantitatively as well as qualitatively.

When most American church folks talk about church growth, what are they characteristically thinking about? Quantitatively or qualitatively? They're thinking usually about growth that's taking place quantitatively. We almost have an obsession with numbers in the American church world. Now, the interesting thing is, God does not view numbers as a great thing or a bad thing.

It's just a way to describe reality, what's going on. In Acts you find, and 3,000 souls were added to the church. Wow, look at that attention to numbers.

Yeah, but notice the difference. The next verse doesn't say, and next week we're aiming at 4,000. It just accounts what God did.

And praise God the church to grow quantitatively. The Lord does want to reach out and bring the lost, the dead, those who are only in Adam, bring them out of sin and death and darkness into Christ, life eternal, and make them members in the body of Christ. The Lord is interested in quantitative growth.

Acts 2.47, in the middle of the verse, and the Lord added to the church daily those who are being saved. The Lord adds to the church by saving folks. Men can add people to human membership roles.

In fact, that's why there are many churches in the land and around the world where a great number of the folks do not even know the Lord. They're religious church members. They signed up.

They can prove it. But they're not in relationship to the head. They don't have life from Him.

They're not a member of the body of Christ. The growth came from man. Thirty years ago, this past December, the last week of 1966, I spent weeping in broken repentance before God.

Ten years of rebellion just came crashing down upon my life. That first Sunday of the new year, 1966, last week of 1965, I was broken. The first Sunday of 1966, invitation time in this independent Baptist church, and I walked the aisle.

Oh, man, what a moment for me. For them, I think they thought, well, here's one more to sign up. They just hand me a card, sit down, fill this out, well, that's fine.

I sat down, filled it out. I didn't care. I knew what was going on.

I was dead last week. I am alive today. God knew that.

He was adding me to the church. They were adding me to the membership role. They didn't give attention whether I was saved or not.

I mean, you know, we don't want to be too picky. But praise God, the Lord adds to His church. That's what we need, a growth that is from God.

But the Lord is not only interested in quantitative growth. He's interested in qualitative growth. In fact, of the two, what would you say, biblically speaking, is the more critical? Oh, absolutely, the qualitative growth.

Qualitative spiritual development will lead to God using us to make quantitative additions to the church as the gospel gets out. Acts 4, 31, the Lord giving qualitative growth to the church. And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they spoke the word of God with boldness. They were being persecuted, told to stop witnessing. And they came to God and prayed.

He filled them with His Spirit, and the result was they went out with boldness, sharing the word. The same issue, almost, is related in a different term in verse 33. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

The Spirit of God came upon them, and they went out boldly sharing the word. Another way to say that, they gave a powerful witness of the resurrected Lord how great grace was upon them. Two ways to say the same thing.

Qualitative growth in the church takes place when the Spirit of God is given room to work upon and in and through the lives of the members of the body of Christ. Another way to say that is powerful spiritual life goes forth in effective work and ministry when members of the body of Christ are letting the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ just pour upon them as members of the body of Christ, as they hold fast to the head. The Lord is very interested in the growth of the church, quantitatively and qualitatively.

But the word of God make it very clear. God's word has told us the growth is to come from God. Again, we're back to holding fast to the head.

We want quality and quantity of growth in the church. It comes from the work of the head, by His Spirit and His grace upon the lives of His people. In all of this that we're going to be looking at, even four more visits the next two Wednesday evenings and a few more Sundays.

In all of this, how Jesus builds His church, this truth, this picture, this unseen reality of the head and the body is vital. These are the unseen spiritual realities, the dynamic that causes the church to be the church and protects her from being one more dead religious human institution. May the Spirit of God stir our hearts, giving us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to receive, faith to stand on and walk in these things,

that we might be His body.

The potential is unlimited. Why? Because of who is the head? Jesus, the head of the body. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we come acknowledging You, bowing down before You. We do not want You to be some symbol or figurehead. Lord, we want You to be the Master, the Lord, the one in charge of our lives, our homes, the ministries You've given us, our walk at work.

Lord Jesus, we want to hold fast to You, draw from You everything that's needed for life as You intended it in the body of Christ. Lord, You just fill our hearts with hope. You fill our hearts with faith.

Lord, how great You are, how glorious You are, how believable, how trustworthy. And the just shall live by faith. We ask You, Lord, convict us of arenas in which we have been mistaken on what the church is and how we are to function.

And if we've grieved Your Spirit, resisted, quenched, Lord, just forgive us this day. We humbly bow before You. Be who You are to us, among us, in us, and through us.

We pray in Your mighty and holy name. Amen.

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