

WCCC 2021

Brother Dana Congdon

The Prevailing Authority of the Head (1)

Good afternoon brothers and sisters, it's so good to be with you. I'm speaking at this afternoon from the East Coast, but welcome! It's so good to be on the West Coast with all of you together. By God's grace I was able to attend most of those 35 WCCC's. And I can personally say that almost every time I went to WCCC I found myself on higher ground. The Lord by his mercy show us wonderful things regarding our Lord Jesus Christ. And now after all these years we're still speaking of his grace.

The prevailing authority of the Head

The topic that I have been going to share on is the spiritual reality of the church, and specifically my topic is the prevailing of the authority of the Head. And I praise the Lord that we're able to share most of the time from Colossians, this wonderful epistle. I'd like to begin by looking at Colossians 1:15. Many Greek scholars say this is actually a hymn, an early hymn, written about Christ. So let's read

Col 1:15-20 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all thing, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the Head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in all things he may have the preeminence, for it pleases the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross, through him I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

And then we want to just read three verses from

Colossians 3:9-11 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge

according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor the uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythia, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Prayer

Now before we share, let's just have another moment of prayer:

Lord, we know that Your Holy Spirit alone can life is on the higher ground. We remember in the Old Testament when You wanted to speak to Your people or form a covenant with them, You took them up on a mountain and revealed Yourself. And then just the same way, we come onto Mount Zion before the throne of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray that You will lift us higher, to higher ground. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Amen!

Two dimensions of spiritual reality

Well, our theme is the spiritual reality of the church, and these Zoom times are indeed part of the reality that we're dealing with. I think we all agree that this pandemic season has been a real test of the spiritual reality of the church. Now as our brother already mentioned, reality is two dimensional. First there is the outward and objective. And so the church must gather outwardly, two or three, and testify, and worship, and witnesses for the Lord Jesus. But reality is not just outward. There's a second inward subjective reality. In the church, there must be the reality of Christ's life in the midst of the assembly, or we lack spiritual reality.

The importance of spiritual reality

Now we remember how under normal circumstances, before the pandemic, the church used together and emphasized their ongoing weekly meetings, and sometimes the Spirit of God was in our midst, and there was spiritual reality, and Christ was indeed all and it all. But there were times before the pandemic when we would meet and gather simply outwardly, without that inner reality. And we're grieved to say that today there are many so-called churches throughout the world in which there was almost no spiritual reality. We remember how concerned our Lord Jesus was for this spiritual reality in the Book of Revelations. Our Lord would inspect each of the lampstands of the seven churches, examining the see where their spiritual reality was lacking. And thank

the Lord, down through the centuries, that there has always been the recovery work Holy Spirit to bring the church back into that spiritual reality.

Spiritual reality in the midst of the pandemic

Now this timing of our present conference seems to be given to us by the Lord Himself because this time of pandemic and our limitations has tested our spiritual reality and raised questions regarding our meeting as the church. We wonder: Can a church still maintain spiritual reality when unable to meet physically together? The reality involves the outward and the inward. Is it possible to have spiritual reality without physically meeting? Or to put it another way, is the spiritual inward reality of the church of Christ so real that it can maintain our reality without physically meeting? So we asked this question: have we been meeting during this pandemic in spiritual reality or just virtual reality?

Maintaining the spiritual reality and difficulties

Now we thank the Lord for the Zoom, for YouTube, for WeChat, or anything that allow us to meet together visually and audibly during this season. This digital technology is definitely for us an emergency provision of God. And so many of us have been serving the Lord during the pandemic with all the limitations and the difficulties in Zoom meetings. For myself, personally I found it very difficult to preach the word via zoom because you can't see the audience and you don't receive any feedback. And of course, we have to admit to a spiritual problem because when you miss gathering together in person, you missed that corporate anointing that comes upon the assembly as the word of God would build up the church.

New opportunities of ministry opened through the pandemic

Now I don't know about your assemblies, but we noticed some very wonderful positive things that have happened because of Zoom. For one thing, there's been a number of younger brothers and sisters with technical facility who were once in the background and have come forward and taking up the sacrificial ministry of enabling us to meet on Zoom. And we've also noticed that we've been able to Invite in people from all over the world to speak in our assemblies, and a number of young people from our assemblies also began to take up ministry.

A real test of spiritual reality in assemblies

I can only speak for myself, but my conviction is that this season of pandemic has been sovereignly arranged by the Lord to test and to recover spiritual reality. The Lord has used this time to test our commitment, our faithfulness, our love for the Lord. My own feeling is that we had become so dependent upon outward meetings and methods. And we came to expect certain ones to do most of the praying, the preaching, the witnessing, while everybody else sort of sat back. I don't know if you agree with me, but I believe that before the pandemic the priesthood of all believers is declining spiritually our midst. And as we think of this pandemic that we've been going through; I believe it even speaks to this matter of the headship of our Lord. Because it seems to me that, through this pandemic, the Lord has really been dealing with the church, but I don't think the church recognizes it. As we have seen in Colossians, Christ has been Head of all things, and certainly this time of global pandemic has not escaped His notice. Now this pandemic has brought all very low, but I wonder if we really come in humility and repentance and ask the Lord led us to higher ground. I think we've all known in our assemblies that this pandemic has tested and proven the lack of spiritual life and strength among many of the saints. During these limitations, we have to admit some have taken a spiritual vacation. Some sit back as we attend meetings on Zoom like lazy priest on couches wearing pajamas instead of praising the Lord wearing holy garments. And some during this time we can see the initials on their screen or the name on our screen but we hear no voice and there's no contribution. There's no clicking of unmute and praying and worshipping. So, we know and grieve over the fact that some had fallen away, forsaking the assembling of themselves together, and even they have gone to the world.

This holy convocation of WCCC, I believe has been called by the Lord, even though virtual, to regather his church onto higher ground. I believe it's been the Lord, who scattered his people, and the Lord who now regathers His people. The Lord looked upon the condition of the church. He saw the old wineskins. He saw the church rich and proud, organized and energized, busy, doing things by the hands of man. And just like the Lord scattered the people before the tower of babel, I believe that the Lord has scattered the people who aren't really wanting to see the Lord glorified in spiritual reality. Now for most of us, the outward effects of the pandemic has not been so disastrous, but the church as a whole in Christendom has gone through a real time of shaking. According to some who study what's going on throughout the United States, 20% of the church buildings in the United States are now permanently closed through the pandemic. And for the churches throughout the United States, it seems, presently, only a third of the former members assembling are assembling in the churches, either by zoom or by hybrid. I believe every time we have a shaking such as this happened in this season, we need to be before the Lord in great fear because it may be the

final shaking, the beginning of the final shake as the Lord gathers His children and He comes back in His kingdom.

The 4 burdens of the conference

Now within this topic, this theme of spiritual reality of the church, there four brothers sharing on four different topics which could be a guidebook book to gathering and recovering spiritual reality. For myself I've been asked to speak on the prevailing of the authority of the headship of Christ. Our brother Ted Pang has been asked to share upon the abundance of the life of Christ. Our brother Godwin son will share on the presence of the Holy Spirit. Our Brother Timothy Kwok will share on the perfection through the cross.

The greatness of Christ in Colossians

Now in this first session, I just want to take a broader view of the headship of Christ according to the Epistle to the Colossians. In this letter to the Colossians, Paul presented tremendous revelation of the preeminence of Christ. And while you read Colossians, you're struck by the sheer contrast of the greatness of Christ with the smallness of the saints meeting in Colossi. According to church historians, Colossians was probably the smallest church that Paul wrote an individual letter to. But to this little church, Paul shared, out of the love of God, this cosmic gospel presenting the love and the greatness of Christ to them.

We read that hymn in Colossians 1, this tremendous words in this hymn, would eclipse all of the problems of the Colossians if they understood what they were singing. As an example, some of them were becoming interested in gnostic doctrines of the hierarchy of God. Right here Paul shares with us that all things were created through Christ, both of those things in heaven and those things on earth. So, by the greatness of who Christ is as creator, there is no other God who is over Him. He alone is God and these other gods of Gnostics have no place in their theology. And then were amazed by the contrast within this hymn. Because Paul declares that this creator of the heavens and earth came to earth as a man in the recent history and died on the cross to redeem heaven and earth by his death. If the Spirit of God is allowed to reveal these things that Paul is sharing regarding the preeminence of Christ, all of their false doctrines of the devalued Christ and the devalued gospel will vanish. So also, for us, such a heavenly vision of who Christ really is would expose all that hinders us from spiritual reality in the church. We have such a large and comprehensive Christ. So may the Spirit, in these days, increase our understanding of who He is. This is spiritual reality.

The prison epistles

Now we know that, historically, Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison along with other prison letters. And when we read, especially Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, we see that Paul has developed even a new vocabulary to explain the greatness of Christ. We see in these letters 3 new words, the heavenly, fullness and complete. So we see that spiritual reality comes, as when the church is not only here on earth, but also connected with the heavens. And we also see that the church lacks nothing, but has found itself full and complete through Christ Jesus. Also in these 3 prison epistles, we each see another dimension of the fullness of spiritual reality of Christ. In Philippians, we see that Christ is our personal fullness. To me, to live is Christ. In Ephesians, we see that the fullest of Christ is expressed in the church which is His body. And then in Colossians, we see the preeminence of Christ is displayed throughout the whole cosmos. Also, when we look at this precious hymn at the beginning of Colossians, we see that Christ is the Head over three different realms, not just one.

Christ is the Head over the whole kingdom of God

So, as an example, in Colossians 1:13-14, we see that Christ is the head over the whole kingdom of God. It says in those verses He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Just think of that, we've been transferred out of the devil's hands and brought into the kingdom where Jesus is king and head over all. So, we see that Christ Jesus is Lord and King and Head over all in his kingdom.

Christ is the Head over all creation

But then we see that Christ is Head in a second realm, the whole of creation. We read in verse 16, for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible, invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authority, all things have been created through Him and for Him, and He is before all these things, and in Him all things hold together. This song of worship says that He is the firstborn of all creation, meaning He is the heir of all creation. And look at the greatness of his headship in creation. All things were created in Him. All things are created through Him. He is the logos, the word, for which all of creation came into being. All things were created for him, it says. He is the purpose of creations being created. And in terms of creation, He is before all

things, and all things hold together by His power. Oh, this is a magnificent gospel, as Paul is telling us of these dimensions of Christ.

Christ is the Head of the church

But then in this third realm of our concern, Christ Jesus is Head of the church, his body. It says in verse 18, He is the Head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. It says He is the beginning because it was through his death and resurrection that the church life came to birth. Regarding this body, He was the firstborn from the dead. His resurrection life has become the eternal resurrection life that the church now lives by. So in all of these things, whether creation, or the kingdom, or the church, Christ is to have the preeminence.

The problems in the church at Colossi

Now, when we see such a presentation, we ask why Paul is presenting this preeminent Christ to these little people in Colossi. Now Paul is not trying to present a theological lecture on Christ's divinity. That's not Paul's aim. This is a key to spiritual reality. Paul is presenting this tremendous vision of Christ to shine the light and expose the errors of these false teachers who are devaluing Christ and the gospel. After presenting these great things, Paul in Colossians 2:8 says, see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy or empty deceit, according to human traditions, according to the elemental principles of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossi was a church in whom there were many Greek Gentiles who had this desire to climb higher up into the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and eat the fruit of philosophies and secret knowledge called mysteries. And then there were others that are trying to capture these Colossians by the power of religious spirits and zealous self-righteousness.

The absolute headship of Christ

So we cannot miss Paul's larger point that Christ has been made the absolute head of all the realms of our life. We are creatures in this creation. He rules over every breath we take, every decision and purpose in his created realm. We are children of the kingdom, and He is head, king over the kingdom. Our response should be to seek Him first before any vocational or personal choices are made. He is our king and the king of the kings. And we are members of His body, the church, so that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the life and the messages and the ministries, all of the members together need to move according to as the head wishes. The preeminence of his headship is very exclusive.

Christ is the only source

The only source of spiritual reality is Christ our head. Now, no doubt when Epaphras first preach the gospel in Colossi, those believers came to the Lord and immediately touch spiritual reality. But we know from the letter that Paul was now wrestling spiritually for the Colossians, for them to go deeper and fuller into this reality. We see in Colossians 1:27 his positive wrestling. Now these saints are saved, spiritual reality must find the springs from the abiding mystery of Christ in you, the hope of life. So, Paul is wrestling that these Colossians may come to an experience of reality of the indwelling Christ. Or as Paul says in Galatians, I am again in labor until Christ be fully formed in you.

Holding fast to the head

And then in Colossians 2:19 we discover once again he is wrestling regarding headship. He's wrestling against these false teachers who are causing the Colossians not the hold fast to the head, which is the source of their very life. You know, the fullness, the glory, the preeminence of Christ is such a contrast to the smallness of religion that those people are coming in trapped by. We read that [in] Colossians chapter 2:17-19. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and the worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body nourished and knitted together through its joints and ligaments, grows with the growth that is from God. First we need to see Christ in you, the hope of glory. Then we need to hold fast to the head to maintain spiritual reality. If we were honest, we would admit that within many churches, our worship, our prayers, even our preaching is often in the religious shadows and missing spiritual reality. Christ is to be the substance, not the shadow, is the substance, of our worship, of our prayers, of our ministry.

Application

So, we have to conclude now. Our time is about all gone, but we ask how does all this apply to us? Lord willing, we want to talk next time about His being head over the body. But today, our emphasis is this, that our spiritual reality must come, as we individually turn and repent of our independence and rebellion, and hold fast to our head. It's possible, unfortunately, for us to study the word of God as carnal knowledge, as intellectual pride, and not as the reality, spiritual reality of Christ the living word. We cannot be a church that pursue shadows, that divides over things like masks, or politics, or conspiracy theories, or

vaccines, or reformed theology, or end time prophecy, or the style of worship music. All of this is shadows but the substance is Christ.

Individual applications of headship of Christ

What does it mean that he is to be the head over us individually? First it means that Christ has the exclusive rights over all that goes on in our lives. Second, it means He is head over us His new creatures, and in which everything has to be reconciled to our creator until we radiate his glory. Third, it means He is head over the kingdom of God, and that means he has exclusive direction of all kingdom service, preaching, witnessing, Sunday school teaching.

We've heard the famous saying of Hudson Taylor, either He is Lord of all, or not Lord at all. Now we're being re-gathered by the Lord, and perhaps our assemblies are opening up, people are returning, but we need to return on higher ground. I pray that the Lord truly has been stripping us [who] have a lot of external baggage and shadows during this pandemic season in order to restore us to spiritual reality. So may we come and humbly draw near to this great Christ, over creation, over the kingdom, over the church, and bow down before him as we go through these conference days. Praise the Lord let us have a word of prayer.

Prayer

Oh Lord, we want no small Christ when our portion is such a grand and preeminent Christ. Oh Lord, do pour out Your spirit upon us in these days, that we may be filled for the greater spiritual reality than we've known here before. Give us real, heavenly vision of the greatness of our Lord. We bow before Him in worship and praise. And we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen!