

# † Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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## Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 2:19

*Keeping an Undiminished View of Christ in the Church*

***19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.***

This past week I took my son to the oral surgeon to have his wisdom teeth removed. Of course to make that an easier process, he was put under anesthesia and by the time he was finished and back in the car for me to take home, he was pretty "out" of it. It just so happened that this very day a huge line of thunderstorms was pushing through the area. So, as I was driving Luke home, who was in his state of semi-consciousness, I was driving at times in an utter deluge. As we were on I-540, where the speed limit is 70 mph under optimal conditions, we found ourselves in anything but such conditions. The rain was coming down so hard; I could hardly see much beyond a car length or so. I had reduced my speed to 40 mph to be "safe". Then, looking in my side view mirror, I saw a truck, one of these big four-door, extended bed truck come flying up on my left side. For some reason he thought the condition warranted the optimal 70 mph speed. I no more got the words out of my mouth questioning the sanity of this man (okay, maybe not quite in those words) when just literally a car-length in front of me, he began to hydro-plane. That truck began to sway back and forth and all I could do was try to slow down (there were cars behind me) and hope he got control and that he did not hit us. Well, he totally lost it and spun his truck a full 360 degrees in front of us and then lost it again and slid from the left side of the highway across in front of us again and off toward the off-ramp, where he spun again and started back toward our vehicle. The only thing that stopped him was that having slid toward the off-ramp, there was now a portion of grass and dirt that halted the truck.

I was completely overwhelmed and grateful that we were not in an accident. Luke, when I finally looked over to see how "freaked-out" he was, was still leaning back in his seat, eyes mostly closed. "Did you see that?" I asked. He grunted, "sort of and closed his eyes again." I found it interesting that all the cars behind me that had wanted to drive faster were now driving my pace and playing it safe.

I share that story because it reminds me, spiritually speaking, how easy it is to think that we don't have to play by the rules; that what is good and right and safe for other people isn't necessary for some of us, because we think we won't spiritually hydro-plane; that we won't fail; that we are good drivers and can handle the worst of conditions whatever way we see fit. I am grateful for the outcome of our little scene, that neither the people in that truck, nor Luke or I were hurt. But I wonder if that man had hit us, if he would have been devastated by the thought of hurting others because he felt the rules didn't apply to him or because he felt he was fully capable of doing things his own way without problems.

When we consider the church, the body of Christ, we need to remember that God has called us, placed us, and grouped us together not just so that may passively display His glory in saving us; but rather that we might actively, fully and individually participate in seeing the body of Christ grow in grace, grow in the truth and knowledge of God, and grow in its proclamation of the gospel, that Jesus saves sinners and places them in the church, not just for safe keeping; but also for a great working.

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*“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).*

The Word of God teaches us that our Lord Jesus Christ so deeply and effectually loves His church that He gave His very life for His church and in addition, He has given to each individual member of His church, gifts to use for the building of itself up in the faith and love of Christ Himself until the time He returns to take the church to glory.

**Ephesians 5:25** – *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...”*

**Acts 20:28** – *“Be on guard for yourselves [elders/pastors] and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

**Ephesians 4:7** – *“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.”*

**John 14:3** – *“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”*

In other words, a benefit of being transformed by the gospel message is that we are saved out of the thinking of the unbelieving world along with the condemnation and wrath of God the unbelieving world deserves; and we are placed into the body of Christ, the community of believers that have had their hearts made like that of Lydia in Acts 16:14, who, as she was hearing the gospel, *“the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”* As Paul communicated the simple gospel of the work of Christ on the cross to redeem her and provide her forgiveness of sins; and of the merits of the perfect life of Christ to be given to her so that God sees her as if she had lived the life of Christ, God opened her heart to believe and receive these truths and be transformed. This beloved is the gospel.

As we have been studying Colossians 2:16-23, we have seen that whatever was being taught outside the church in that city, it was an attack on this very gospel of Christ alone and sought to include something of the work of man by which man makes himself right before God and therefore makes himself qualified to be a part of the church. Let me tell you something, God does not call the qualified, but rather He qualifies the called. The church are those who although being unqualified to be part of God's community, have been made qualified by the righteous work of Christ on their behalf. Any teaching that modifies this, diminishes the person and work of Christ.

So then, one of the questions we might have is this; how do we, as the community of the redeemed, as those purchased by Jesus and placed into the church, maintain the highest view of Christ? Of course we can easily answer that by saying, meditate continually on the work and person of Christ; and this would be true; but in addition to this, I submit that our text, this one verse in Colossians 2:19, reveals three things that each of us must do if we are to avoid the potential dangers of spiritual hydro-planing [because we are doing what we want to do, how we want and when we want]; of falling into the trap of adding something of ourselves to make ourselves right with God rather than trusting in Christ alone; to avoid such things...

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"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

- I. We must "hold fast" to the authority of Christ
- II. We must function according the anatomy of the Church
- III. We must give all adoration to God

In this one verse we see Paul's passion for the Church; remembering that Paul was so committed to the Church because he saw His Saviors utter commitment to the Church. And if Paul and Christ were so committed to the Church how much ought we? And perhaps, more importantly for us this morning, how can we be more committed to the Church? Let us answer these questions after we consider our three points.

## I. We must hold fast to the authority of Christ (2:19a)

*"...and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body..."*

The words "hold fast to" mean to cause a state to continue on the basis of some authority or power — "to hold, to keep, to cause to continue." It can mean to adhere to; to stick with like glue. God expects us to acknowledge, to depend upon, and to trust explicitly our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the "head" — the "*kaphale*" — speaks of two primary issues; first, the "head" is "the person who is in authority over others" and second; the "head" is the one who is the source of provision. This word was used to speak of "chiefs" of a city or of a state; it speaks of the position of a general over an army or of a king over his kingdom. And like, but to an even greater degree, in which a kingdom is dependent upon the provisions of its king for protection and guidance for the welfare of the people; so ought believers to look to Jesus. Beloved, a person can live without an arm but he cannot live without a head. We cannot live the Christian life without Christ as our head. It is the head that gives the orders as so we must look to our Head. How is this done? Beloved, the only way we can do that is by a continual intake and a systematic study of the Word of God. When we try to live the Christian life any other way, we are in danger of spiritual hydroplaning.

The failure of false teachers to hold fast to the Head of the church is the foundation of false doctrine. False teachers do not want to submit to the way of God as offered by the authority of Christ. Therefore, they seek to be detached from the head and the result is, they have no life. It does not matter if they have had visions of angels or some other self described vision, when Christ is not everything, Christ eventually becomes nothing.

Every error of believers relates to this as well. If you do not have a healthy relationship to the Head, the life that flows from the Head will be anemic. Spiritual fruit directly depends upon the health of our fellowship with the Head. This is what Jesus meant when He said to His disciples in John 15:4-5

***Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 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.***

The only way we can grow in the Christian life is to be abiding in Christ, connected to Him, first by our experience of salvation; have you been saved by Him; and then, if you have been saved, such a salvation ought to reveal itself by seeing your life submitted to His Word. Do you, like a new born baby, long for the pure milk of the word? May I say to you that what a wedding

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band is to the finger of a spouse; the Word of God is to the believer. A wedding band is to be an indication to other potential suitors that they are to stay away. It speaks and says, “Hands off, I’m taken!” The believer’s communication of both the very verses as well as the principles of the Word of God is to communicate to others, “Christ is my Lord, my Captain, my General, so hands off, I’m taken!”

And why are we so committed to Christ? Because it is “from” [Him] that the entire body – that is the Church has all its source of life and growth. The church is to find all that it needs in Christ; not from the world, but from Christ and His Word. Are you holding fast, clinging, griping tightly to Christ alone; His authority alone; His Word alone as your only guide and source for all things in life? Notice beloved that it is the “entire body” – each and every part, each individual that must see Christ in this way. When we start thinking we can do things our way, without it hurting or harming the others in the body, we actually bring both hurt and harm on the body and ourselves. In a moment we will speak about how we can work on holding fast to the head more effectively.

## **II. We must function according to the anatomy of the church (2:19b)**

*...being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments...”*

I find this to be a most intriguing part of the verse. For we are first to understand that Christ is the head, the chief and captain and the one from whom the body receives everything necessary for life. But then we read in these verses that the very means by which he accomplishes this is via the individual members of the body, called here, the joints and ligaments. This is made even more clear in the companion passage of Ephesians 4:15-16 where we read;

***15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***

The point being made here and in Colossians 2:19 is that the church functions best when each one of us who are believers, does what each one of us is responsible. And here is the kicker, each one of us is responsible. Responsible for what? We are responsible to use whatever gift or gifts we have received from the Lord to both supply and hold together the body. Joints and ligaments supply the framework, the anatomy by which body supplies itself as well as the strength by which that body holds itself together.

The word **“supplied”** means to nourish fully, to abundantly supply resources. Each of us is responsible in a variety of ways, to provide something besides what already exists, or to make available whatever is necessary in order to help or supply the needs of the body. The verb here is in the passive voice, meaning that all the supplies are coming to the body, that is the church, directed by the head, that is Christ, via the joints and ligaments, that would be each individual believer. What are you supplying your church? We will give you some practical considerations about this in a moment.

In addition to supplying the body, each joint and ligament, that is every believer in Christ in his or her local church, is to be a means of holding the body together. The phrase **“held together”** means to bring together, to unite, to compress into one. The body of Christ is held

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together then by the working of each joint and ligament, by what each member does to supply the church with what it needs. The body of Christ grows as each member, each part, each individual, supports and ties one another together to one another. Beloved, when someone leaves a congregation, the first question each joint and ligament must ask is not necessary, “what’s wrong with that person” but rather, “have I done everything God has called me to in order to supply them and hold them to this body.

Often times this responsibility of supply and holding together the body is seen as a pastoral or elder task. But according to this text, this responsibility is a congregational task while the task of the pastors and elders is to teach and guide the people in how they can supply and hold together the body. How can I say this? Look with me at Ephesians 4 and let us look at this companion to Colossians 2 again in larger context:

## ***Christ’s Headship; Leadership for the Church***

*11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,*

## ***The Purpose of this Leadership***

*12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity [held together] of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

## ***The Benefits of this Leadership***

*14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*

## ***The Responsibility to this Leadership***

*15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

Beloved, we must take ownership and do everything we can as individuals to supply whatever is need and do whatever is necessary to hold the body together in the love and faith of Jesus Christ. We just function according to the anatomy of the church, that is as joints and ligaments who provide strength, nourishment and everything necessary for each one to be connected. How can we do this? Just hang on and I will share some means with you.

## **III. We must give all adoration to God (2:19c)**

*...grows with a growth which is from God.*

We need to remember that we are never alone in our journey toward being spiritually mature. It all starts with what Jesus Christ has done and provided as our Head. It moves into what each of the **“joints and ligaments”** supply and holds together for the benefit of the body. This reminds us that each one of us are essentially gifts to one another; and as we minister to

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one another and we see spiritual maturity as well as spiritual birth, then we are to give all the glory, all the praise, all the acknowledgment and all the adoration to God because ultimately every victory toward Christ-likeness; every verse memorized; every bible chapter read; every burden carried, every need met is a growth which is from God. It is God who provides for His children exactly what they need to minister to one another and to grow in grace and glorify God. Listen to that again, it is God who provides for His children exactly what they need to minister to one another in order to grow in grace and glorify God.

Beloved, I call you to be a supplying and unifying joint and ligament of this body whose Head is Christ. But sometimes we fail to think of just how we can do something like this. Let me walk you through a number of ways in which you can be a contributing joint or ligament; by these means (and many others) you can be what God has called you to be; a functioning member of the body. Let me preface this by saying I did not come up with these, but have adapted them from a book entitled "Life in the Body of Christ" by Curtis Thomas. Under his first section called "Personal Responsibilities" Thomas encourages believers to remember that God works through His people to achieve great ministries. Here then are some of the responsibilities you have as joints and ligaments to supply and hold together the body, whose Head is Christ so that it may grow with a growth which is from God:

1. Encourage the leadership by written, verbal, and prayer support (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)
2. Encourage the leadership and membership by your faithful and regular financial support (1 Timothy 5:17-18).
3. Encourage those with special gifts and abilities to use them to the fullest for the good of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11)
4. Use whatever gifts and talents God has given you for the Body (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11)
5. Ask for the opportunity to serve; do not wait until you are approached (Romans 12:6)
6. Encourage with sick or non-attending by visiting or calling them regularly; pray for and with them (1 Thessalonians 5:14)
7. Encourage the Body by faithfully attending the services and ministries – with punctuality (Philippians 2:3-4)
8. Encourage the leadership and the membership by exhibiting a genuine, positive outlook (Matthew 5:16)
9. Refrain from criticizing the leaders and other members (Ephesians 4:29)
10. Verbally encourage people to trust in their sovereign God who loves them, who knows all things and who controls all things for their good (Romans 8:28)

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11. Exhibit this same trust yourself when hurtful events occur in your life (Proverbs 3:5-6).
12. Know the Scriptures and encourage others with the words of Scripture (Proverbs 15:23)
13. When a death occurs, encourage others by talking about the blessed hope we have in the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)
14. Encourage other members to support the church leadership and ministries (1 Corinthians 16:18)
15. Speak positively about other worthwhile ministries within the body (Proverbs 12:14)
16. Share with others about someone within the body who has been a blessing in your life (Colossians 4:12-13)
17. Be the first to volunteer for needed ministries (Titus 3:14)
18. Offer to help people with particular and special needs (Titus 3:14)

This is just a short list of all that we can do in order to be the “**joints and ligaments**” that supply and hold together the Body, whose Head is Christ and whose growth is from God. Will you prayerfully consider what you might improve from the list we covered? What other things can we do to fulfill this responsibility to the body of Christ. Let us pursue such things to the glory of God.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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