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## The Sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Message given at Slavanka Christian Conference Centre, 1932. Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

Reading: Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Cor. 11:5-11,13-17.

*"He is the Head of the body the church" (Col. 1:18).*

*"And in Him ye are made full who is the Head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10).*

*"And Adam was not beguiled but the woman being beguiled has fallen into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14).*

*"Jesus of Nazareth, God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit... God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).*

Now I expect after the reading of these passages you are wondering what is coming and it is quite certain that we cannot exhaust the contents, but we can indicate some of the truth that is represented by these passages, and they are in principle all related. You will notice that one common feature of these passages is that of Headship, and in the first place, what is in view is *the matter of the Sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus by the appointment of God.*

We are familiar with both the phrase and, to some extent, the meaning of the phrase, "*The eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ before the world was*". And we know that in those pre-creation times, God had a clearly defined plan in His mind concerning this universe, and that He created this

world in accordance with that; the realisation of a Divine and heavenly system in this universe. Now, at the heart of that was this essential, this necessity, that over it all there should be a sovereign Head. We must not approach this vast matter in a way that suggests God just having a kind of idea, and interesting Himself in making out a wonderful plan and design and setting to work to project that into the universe in a way in which perhaps children organise a game and say "You be so and so, and you be the leader." It is not that God has got a nice little scheme He cherishes and He is just going to put it into operation because He is interested in this thing Himself and it pleases Him to do so. We must not approach the thing in any spirit like that. I do not suggest that we have done so, but what I am trying to get at is this: that we have got to see the tremendous importance of the Divine order being established and recognised if the universe is to go on according to the Divine mind, and you begin here.

Are you going to have a universe? Are you going to have a world and worlds? Yes, that is decided in the Divine intention. Well, how shall it be made up, of what shall it be comprised? That is settled. Then, given that there must be an order that that universe may operate in conformity to the Divine mind, will, intention, there must be a regulated order, and there must therefore be someone who is the Head of that whole order, the sovereign Head of it in the sense of supremacy and government, and everything must come under that sovereign headship. And that one must be the full and final court of appeal and recognition on all matters in relation to the intention and purpose of God. And the creation must be in direct line with God through that headship in order to maintain God's system accurately and correctly that it might realise its definitely appointed destiny. And then you reach, of course, the One who in the eternal counsels of God was determined the Sovereign Head over all things. He is universal Head.

First of all He is Head over all principality and power, He is Head of the whole creation. But then within the compass of that Divine intention, from eternity God has elected to have for that Head an administrative instrument through which that Head should express Himself and govern, and within the universal purpose of God, and within the universal Headship of Christ, there comes in close relationship to Him, such very close relationship to Him as to be corporate in its nature, the church which is His Body. Chosen in Him before the world was, to be His instrument, the instrument of His Sovereign Headship through which He will administer the universe.

And so He was not only given to be Head over the universe, Head of the whole creation, but He was given to be Head over all things to the church which is His Body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all. Now within the range of the Divine principle of headship, the whole of the Scriptures are gathered up to be an illustration, a representation of that truth of headship, and what is here on the earth is ordered of God to illustrate and represent and be a testimony to what is in heaven, what is the heavenly order. And so God organised this earth system and everything here, upon a heavenly principle so that earth should reflect heaven, and heaven should have its counterpart in the earth, and all relationships Divinely ordered here are unto the representing of heavenly principles. So you get the first man, the head of the race; and then, the head, the man the head of the woman, and then the man the head of the family, the household; and then within the house of God, the heads; the heads of father's houses, the princes in Israel; all these reflecting, representing, testifying, to a heavenly order.

And then you come to the New Testament and the original thought of God is given by revelation, especially to one apostle in greater fulness, "*the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations but now made known*" the church, the Body of Christ being brought out into full view. You

find that it gathers up in itself that principle which has been illustrated and represented in the manifold way in the Old Testament, and Christ is first of all seen as universal Head, then Head of the church which is His Body, and then under Him there are those Divinely appointed headships, in order that God might have a heavenly system and a heavenly order in counterpart here, seen, reflected on the earth. And the order is so essential that God cannot realise His original purpose until that order is recognised and maintained, and the destiny of the creation depends upon the Divine order being maintained. And in so far as that order, that heavenly system is violated or ignored, you find immediately that measure of paralysis, chaos and failure in the realisation of what God has set His heart on. That law of the heavenly order works out to the most minute detail of our lives as members of Christ, the church which is His Body. And we come up against the tremendous importance of an enlightened instrument, the church.

The people of the Lord are suffering a very great deal of something of which they know nothing, and the Lord cannot prevent them from suffering because there is His order; He has sent the Holy Spirit to make it known. They do not know it, therefore there is a failure somewhere for which He is not responsible, and so His people suffer because they have not the knowledge which they ought to have, which they can and may have. And if there is any value about times like these, when we the Lord's people are gathered together, it ought to be in the realm of enlightenment of the heavenly order for the people of God in order that they, coming into the heavenly order, may be delivered from much suffering which will come because they do not know. Very much of the arrest and paralysis and defeat, and to use a strong word - abortion - follows spiritual ignorance. You may think it is hardly fair and just of God to allow people to suffer for what they do not know! The Lord does not let them suffer in that sense for what they do not know, but for what they might know. And we shall see in a moment that the Lord's people might know a very great deal more than they do. "My people are destroyed through lack of knowledge" and "*Where there is no vision the people perish*". The word in the original is "disintegrate", go to pieces, and one does feel that the knowledge of this heavenly order is a tremendously important thing for the Lord's people, unto the full measure of effectiveness and deliverance from spiritual arrest in life and service, and for salvation from a great deal of suffering. If I were to stay there and put my finger upon certain passages of Scripture you would see how the thing works.

Ananias and Sapphira did not simply do something that was humanly wrong. Ananias sinned against the Holy Spirit. In what way? The Holy Spirit had just set up the church to be the expression of the heavenly order, and the Holy Spirit had come in order to set up that order and to maintain it, and He was jealous for the eternal purpose of God. And with the first stretching out of the hand by which that heavenly order was violated, the Holy Spirit had to be met and for all time there had to be established an example of the devastation of violating a heavenly order when you profess to be practising that heavenly order. And so Ananias and Sapphira violated something that had been introduced from heaven and they had to reckon with heaven on that matter. You see, it was a heavenly system that they interfered with, "*You have not lied unto man, you have lied unto God*" said Peter, "*Why hath Satan enticed your hearts to lie against the Holy Spirit?*" You see, here is the coming in of something else against the heavenly order, that very thing of which we have been speaking in these messages. And you will see before we are through, the importance of the Sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus bringing to us a cover from that other thing which would lead to our own destruction and undoing. You must have a Head over you to cover you and the Lord Jesus must, therefore, be established as Sovereign Head over the Body in every member, and everything must be to Him. And if for a moment we act contrary to that sovereign Headship, we forsake our covering and become exposed and Satan therefore, can bring us under judgment.

Another instance of this same thing is in the Corinthian assembly. You remember how in 1 Corinthians 11, the apostle is saying that he had received of the Lord that which he also delivered unto them concerning the Lord's table. He had been saying in the previous chapter that the cup which we bless is the common participation in the blood of Christ, and the loaf which we break is our common participation of the body of Christ, for we being many are one loaf. Now, he says, I received that from the Lord, this has come from heaven. And then he goes on to outline what he received from heaven; that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was betrayed took the loaf, and took the cup, and then he goes on. "Wherefore," because, this is our participation in the blood and body of Christ. And because this represents a heavenly order as in the body of Christ, we are one loaf and one body, "*Wherefore, if anyone drink the blood the life in an unworthy manner, if anyone eat or drink in an unworthy manner he eats and drinks judgment to himself because he discerns not the Lord's Body.*" "*For this cause many are sick and some even die*"; this is judgment which manifests itself in sickness and death because a Divine order has been violated. A heavenly system has been overlooked, damaged, and the Holy Spirit is there to see to it that that sort of thing is not done with impunity.

Now, I have just taken two illustrations of the working of this principle and of the necessity for recognising a heavenly order, with Christ as the Sovereign and inclusive Head of that order. And there is another one who all the time is trying to take His place as head, and when we in any way fail to recognise the absolute sovereignty of Jesus Christ in every detail of life and conduct, we get out from our cover, from our headship, and are exposed and by deception are brought under judgment. I believe this is the meaning of that familiar phrase "because of the angels". I think that refers to fallen angels, and if there is a getting out from under your Divinely ordered covering, you expose yourself to deceiving spirits, and that is exactly what Eve did. The man was, in the heavenly system, the head to cover her. She acted independently from her head. God's order was that even if she were attacked she should have gone to the man and asked, "What do you think about this?" "This is what I am told, what do you think?" and probably the situation would have been saved, but it is vain to imagine what might have been. But she went out of her order, got out of the covering of her definitely appointed head.

These Scriptures mean something. There are Divine principles here and she got away from the heavenly order as represented here on the earth and Paul says, "*Adam was not deceived but the woman*". She exposed herself to the enemy, to the fallen angels, and was deceived, with the awful result. She did the thing, it was done; Adam became involved not in a temptation, but in something that was done. It was not that they both went and did it together, it was done already and could not be undone, and it was a disorder that brought it in. This judgment and chaos now has to be recovered and restored in relation to the church and Christ. "*As the man is the head of the woman so Christ is the head of the church*" you see; and, "*Husbands love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.*" You see, the earthly relationship is a reflection of heavenly reality and now the church has to come in all its members right under Christ as her Head, so that everything is submitted to Him, everything is taken from Him, everything is under His authority and nothing whatever along the line of personal activity. Individual, separate movement never has a place among the Lord's people. Again we are back into very largely generalities. God has never invested man with the ability to realise his own destiny independently and without reference to Himself. God has not put it into man to be able to realise the Divine destiny for him by having the state of knowledge and wisdom, understanding, power within himself as man. God has always held within His own right and prerogative the essentials for the realisation of His purpose and He constituted man upon that

principle. That is where we were at the beginning of this series, that God made man so that by his spirit he could have fellowship with God, a link with God; he was adapted to God by his creation.

### **The Spiritual, the Natural, the Carnal**

Stopping just for a word study for a moment - this is borne out in three words with which we are familiar in the New Testament. The spiritual, the natural, the carnal.

Now, in the Greek each of those words concludes with a suffix *ikos*. We know the word 'icon' which is an image, likeness, representation, something formed to represent, conformed to, something else. Now the soulish, the *natural* in the Greek is *psuchikos*, after the soul, that is conformed to the soul. The *carnal*, fleshly, is *sarkikos*, after the flesh, after the body, sometimes the physical body, sometimes the flesh as a principle, conformed to, made suitable, adapted to the flesh, the body. "*They that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh.*" They are adapted to. The *spiritual* is the *pneumatikos*, adapted to the Spirit. Now "God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth". So God made man originally adapted to Himself, for His government, and man was to come under God to receive everything for the working out of his Divinely appointed destiny from God by his spirit. And God never put the centre in man himself, He always retained that in Himself but made man capable. What the devil suggested was that man could have that in himself and be as God - knowing good and evil - and therein his deception. God's order is that man is not an independent personality and that the body of Christ is constituted according to the Divine law, not of so many units, but of so many united in one Spirit, members receiving everything from the Sovereign Head, the Lord Jesus, and not working independently without the Head but working in unison with the Head. Now that is a specific point to be tremendously emphasised.

We may know, and should know the Lord for ourselves as we say so often, and not another for us. That is true, but God will never give us a personal knowledge of Himself in order to constitute us independent people, that is, independent of others spiritually, or to make us in ourselves authorities on spiritual things, to make us freelances in the Lord's work. The Lord is against that and whenever that comes in, you will find limitation and defeat sooner or later. That thing can go just so far but it never reaches the fulness of Him that fills all. Now if that is a principle of the church, and Paul was especially elect as a vessel for the revelation of the church, the body of Christ, you expect to see in the instrument or vessel the principle specifically set forth, and you study the life of Paul and see. The very first movement of the Lord with him was based on that principle. The Lord appeared to him in glory, He broke through the heavens and revealed Himself to Paul on the road. Now, that is a tremendous thing for any man and that might seem to constitute that man as a sort of independent, special kind of man with a revelation all tied up in himself. But when Saul (as Paul was known then) in the presence of that revelation tried to get his instructions immediately, the Lord knew the perils of this man, and knew His own heavenly principles, and in effect He said, "No, I am not going to tell you straightaway. You go into Damascus and there you will find the people whom you were going to throw into prison. And you will find someone I know, not an important, ecclesiastical man, not even an apostle, someone who has never been mentioned before, an unknown man called Ananias. You go there among those people whom you despised, counted the off-scouring of all things, and it shall be told you there what you shall do."

The peril of Saul's nature for one thing, and God was out against that. And the liberating of the heavenly principle of the corporate nature of the body of Christ as being the vehicle of Divine revelation and of commission. Years after, this same man was caught up into the third heaven and

shown unspeakable things which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Surely that constituted Paul something apart from the rest, a man who might well have independent ministry and be a great authority. Oh, again Paul's old man had got to be safeguarded against, and again the principle of the body had got to be looked after lest he should be exalted. Exaltation is taking headship, supremacy, making something of the man. It is a violation of the principle of subjection which is a Divine principle in the heavenly order. With the greatness of the revelation there was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, and the Lord refused to relieve him of that because He was looking after His principle. What was the effect of Paul's thorn in the flesh? The effect was, wherever he went, "*Brethren pray for me, I cannot give expression to this ministry, I have got this, but pray that utterance may be given to me that I may know how to open my mouth in speaking the mystery.*" It threw him back upon the church, the body of Christ, for spiritual co-operation in the whole of his ministry. His revelation did not constitute him one who was able to fulfil his ministry without the spiritual fellowship of the saints, so that the issue was that it was the church fulfilling the ministry through Paul and not Paul fulfilling a ministry in the church.

Consider that extraordinary thing in Troas: "*A door was opened to me of the Lord, an open door, but my spirit had no rest because I found not Titus my brother, and taking my leave...*". A door opened and not entered! Was this a breakdown? An opened door not entered because "*my spirit had no rest not finding Titus my brother*". Imagine that such a man as Paul cannot take advantage of an open door because he is alone! That is not the only occasion when Paul had a bad time because he was alone; he had very bad times, terrible times because he was alone. It is not the Lord's will that a man should be alone in this ministry. The enemy has far too much power when a Divine order is not maintained. And Paul needed Titus, and Paul needed Timothy, Paul needed them with all his revelation because the Lord had made this necessary to him. And if we go out in any kind of independence as freelancers, ourselves the centre, the authority, we may expect sooner or later to be smashed. The Lord cannot protect; He must bring us back to His own order. Things may have a great vogue, and a great apparent success within a certain expression which violate this very principle, but in the long run it will be discovered that it was only within a limited compass and the Lord's larger thing was never reached because that thing was something in itself, out of relation to the Divine purpose.

### **The Anointing**

You see that brings us immediately to the whole matter of anointing. We see headship and the anointing. We read finally in Acts 10:38: "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit... and God was with Him.*" Those two things go together, the anointing is the involving of God in a life, it is God being committed, it is the joining of that life with God and the joining of God with that life. "*Jesus of Nazareth whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him*". We are talking about Jesus of Nazareth now, not Christ as God. Jesus of Nazareth; God was with Him in the anointing; the anointing was always upon the Head. He is the anointed Head and types of the Old Testament all bear that out.

The anointing upon the Head constituted Headship, or implied Headship, and implied God committed and involved. That is a truth you can work out in the Old Testament and see. We recognise it as to the Lord Jesus, but what about ourselves? We have such passages as 2 Cor. 1:21. "*Now He that establisheth us with you in Christ and anointed us, is God.*" Really the translation is not quite accurate, but put it this way, which would be more accurate - "*He that establisheth us with you in Christ and anointed us in Him.*" That is the meaning of it, you see. We are together in Christ

established and anointed. You have passages like that and then such as come in John's first letter, the familiar words 1 John 2:20: "*Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things*", then verse 27, "*As for you the anointing which ye have received of Him abides in you and ye have no need that any teach you for the anointing teaches you all things.*" You see what has happened, Christ the anointed Head and we anointed in Him and with Him. Where are we anointed? What do you mean when you ask for the anointing of the Holy Spirit? Do you want some great effusion of Divine influence, power, feeling to come down upon you, upon your body or upon your soul to give you extraordinary sensations and emotions and so on? That is not the Lord's way at all. Our spirit is the anointed man, the anointing which you have received abides in you. The anointing is inward anointing now. Everything is inward now in the heavenly order. What was outward in the representation is inward in the reality, and the anointing is inward, it is the inner man where the Holy Spirit has all His operations in the first place. Paul prayed, "*Grant you to be strengthened into the inner man.*" "*The anointing which ye have received abides in you. The anointing which is in you.*"

What does that carry with it? First of all it establishes this fact, that the Sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus is established in our inner man, is brought down, so to speak, onto our inner man, that in spirit we are under the Headship of Christ. That is perfectly simple, but that thing right at the very centre of our being is the sovereignty of Christ established, so that out from the centre all other parts of our being are governed by the sovereignty of Christ established in and over our spirit by the anointing. And then that carries with it what is here, that with that inward anointing Christ would be sovereign over our spirit or in our spirit, and over our whole being. From our spirit there comes the knowledge of the Lord, His mind - "*ye know all things*". "*Ye have need that none teach you, you need not that anyone teach you*". Well, that is surely a contradiction of what we have been saying; makes us independent of being taught! No, you want the context, do not read the passage without the context. The context is about antichrist and false Christ's, all that context deals with the false Christ's and antichrist and the question is, "How are we going to know when the antichrist comes?"; the antichrist the false Christ, such a perfect imitation; how are we going to know that they are not Christ, that this is not truth? The anointing which is in you teaches you all about these things. Someone comes along to you and brings a story of a wonderful movement, conversions have been seen, and so on and it is all according to the New Testament. Well, you do not rush off at once swallowing it all, jumping in headfirst. You tarry with the Lord and if the absolute sovereignty of the Lord Jesus has been established in your life, you will not move without consulting Him. You open the way for the Spirit of the anointing within you to say, "*Be careful.*" He will not say it in words; you will just have an inward arrest.

There is that which spiritual believers know of, which when they go into something which is very much like New Testament teaching and activity, makes them know that this is not it. There is something about this that is just not it. You cannot intellectually define it, but you know in your heart, you have a question, you cannot breathe freely, you feel a bit uncomfortable somewhere and you cannot explain it. The anointing is teaching you and the only safeguard from deception is the establishment of the Divine sovereignty of Jesus Christ in your spirit; under the anointing, by which you are joined with Him, to know the things of God. The anointing is for that. It is a tremendously important thing for us to recognise the nature of our anointing with Christ, and how impossible it is for the Divine plan, purposes, to be worked out, wrought out, accomplished, only as Christ is Head of every man, and of the church, His Body, and that every member comes under the anointing that is upon Christ and upon their spirit, unto spiritual intelligence, spiritual knowledge that does not constitute them authorities or independent parties. It does not make them set aside help through servants of the Lord to whom the Spirit has given the gift of teaching or of wisdom, but it does make

them know the truth of the things of God, and the untruth of the things which are not of God which seem to be like those of God. You see, the Lord, while He does not put within us the state of knowledge, comes very close to us in the anointing of the Spirit to make us able to know, if only we will defer and refer to Him in all things.

You can see how necessary it is to have Divine order established, and that Divine order is to come down into all the relationships of the Lord's children, nothing is private, nothing apart. It has got to be in our homes. If a husband and father does not take under the anointing his place as head in the home, that home will soon be in chaos, disorder, and under arrest. And he himself will be in a state of confusion and the Lord cannot fulfil all His purpose through him. If one ordained of God and gifted to be a head in the House of God does not take his place, sooner or later that thing will be in disorder and under arrest. The Lord is jealous for His order. If someone goes out in the Lord's work a freelance, setting aside the Lord's order of covering in the Body, the House of God, sooner or later they will come to a point where they can proceed no further. So the Lord is very jealous and if He gives us light by which His order is re-established, may He give us also grace to come to the place where we let go everything that is individual and personal, and live only unto the Head, " *Holding fast the Head*" and live in relation to His people, the Body of Christ.