

Keep the Head

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[0 : 0 0] turn to our bibles and to the new testament and to paul's first letter to the corinthians if you have a church bible you'll find that on page 952 if not near the beginning of the new testament after the gospels and acts and romans you find the first of two letters to the church in corinth and terry mccutcheon is going to be preaching to us this morning from this first chapter and so we'll read that whole chapter together paul writing around the mid 50s probably about ad 55 to one of the early churches that you read about in acts 19 where paul planted that church and from his missionary journeyings from ephesus a bit later he writes back to the church these words paul called by the will of god to be an apostle of christ jesus and our brother sostenes to the church of god that is in corinth to those sanctified in christ jesus called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our lord jesus christ both their lord and ours grace to you and peace from god our father and the lord jesus christ i give thanks to my god always for you because of the grace of god that was given you in christ jesus that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge even as the testimony about christ was confirmed among you so that you're not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our lord jesus christ who will sustain you to the end guiltless in the day of our lord jesus christ god is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son jesus christ our lord i appeal to you brothers by the name of our lord jesus christ that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment for it's been reported to me by chloe's people that there is quarreling among you my brothers what i mean is that each one of you says i follow paul or i follow apollo or i follow kephus or i follow christ is christ divided was paul crucified for you or were you baptized into the name of paul i thank god that i baptized none of you except christmas and gaius so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name i did baptize also the household of stephanus beyond that i don't know if i baptized anyone else for christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel and not with words of eloquent wisdom lest the cross of christ be emptied of its power for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of god for it's written i will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning i will thwart where is the one who is wise where is the scribe where is the debater of this age has not god made foolish the wisdom of the world for since in the wisdom of god the world did not know god through wisdom it pleased god through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe

for jews demand signs and greeks seek wisdom but we preach christ crucified a stumbling block to jews and folly to gentiles but to those who are called both jews and greeks christ the power of god and the wisdom of god for the foolishness of god is wiser than men and the weakness of god is stronger than men for consider your calling brothers not many of you were wise according to worldly standards not many were powerful not many were of noble birth but god chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise god chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong god chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of god he is the source of your life in christ jesus whom god made our wisdom our righteousness and sanctification and redemption therefore as it is written let the one who boasts boast in the lord amen may god bless to us this his word i invite you to take your bibles and to turn with me again to the first chapter of one corinthians which you will find in page 952 of the pew bible one corinthians chapter one and as you do so a word of prayer father we thank you indeed for your word your life-giving word father we thank you for the faithfulness in which your word has been preached to us from this pulpit in previous years and father we ask that as we enter this year of grace 2016 that the faithfulness from the pulpit would continue beginning today and so to that end we pray that what we know not you would teach us

what we have not you would give us and what we are not you would make us in jesus name amen i don't really watch a lot of television these days but there is one program i never miss i always record it to ensure that i always see it and it's a program called the dragon's den and it's a great show if you've never if you've never never seen it let me quickly explain it the dragons are these five multi-millionaire business people and these bidding entrepreneurs um come into the the dragon's den and they stand in front of these um dragons these millionaires and these entrepreneurs pitch their business ideas to these millionaires with the hope of securing capital investment in their idea or their business and an equity stake or a percentage of the businesses is then given in return tough environment eh the entrepreneurs have two minutes to sell their business ideas to the dragons and they're not allowed to use notes and it's hard and nerve-wracking as getting through the pitches that's the easy part after the pitch comes the interrogation of the dragons

as they scrutinize the proposed investment with all their business acumen i suppose the biggest quality that is needed by the entrepreneurs at this point is not knowing their figures back to front nor is it knowing what their gross and net profit will be whatever that is or knowing their projections for the next three to five years although all these things are are vitally important if the entrepreneurs hope to receive the investment they so wish for no as vital as these things are i would say the biggest quality that is needed at this point in the proceedings is the ability to keep the head to keep the head to remain calm under the the barrage of questions and the scrutiny of the dragons many folks have been in the den and they've had great ideas and they have pitched perfect but their inability to to keep the head has often resulting in it resulting in them hearing these fateful words i'm afraid this is not for me i'm out as the dragons declare themselves out now friends i i share this because if it's vital for an entrepreneur to keep the head in the hostile environment of the dragon's den then how much more so for us the church of jesus christ to keep the head in the hostile environment that is the world when i say for us to keep the head i don't i don't mean to keep her calm or to keep her cool but we should keep our captain to keep her head the lord jesus christ in reading through first corinthians we discover the apostle paul was writing to a church that had lost the head christ's name is mentioned no fewer than nine times in the opening nine verses and i think it's clear here that paul is indicating to this group of believers that the reason they were in such a mess was that they had lost focus of christ's headship and his authority although the letter reveals the church at corinth still met together for things like communion and general worship they were simply going through the motions just as many will have done in churches all last year and all this coming year people meeting in church buildings but without giving any consideration or thought whatsoever to the headship and the authority of christ if christ headship isn't recognized in a church or a denomination then the body of that church or denomination will no longer be recognized by god and it will inevitably fall apart on several occasions in his letter paul takes up this theme that christ is the head of the church and in him the whole body is joined and held together perhaps the reason why many churches and denominations dwindle and die is that they have lost focus of this and they have tried to replace christ with people although we've read all of chapter one our focus this morning will be on verses 10 through 31 and i want to draw out three consequences three consequences that take place within a church where focused on christ headship is lost and friends as we begin a new year a very important year in the life of our church as we have aspirations to plant the gospel in different locations around this city it's important for us to listen and to ensure that we apply as a congregation all that paul teaches here lest we fall into the very same errors as the corinthians three consequences then that take place within a church where focus on christ headship is lost firstly it will lose its unity amongst its people verse 10 to 17 secondly it will lose its message verse 18 to 25 and thirdly such a church will lose its memory verse 26 to 31 that is its people will forget the wicked state god found them in and they will forget that it's only by the grace of the lord they have been saved lose its unity lose its message and lose its memory so let's look at each of these a church that loses focus of christ headship will lose unity amongst its people there's nothing more tragic than seeing a group of people divided who have so much to unite them and even more so when this group of people are christians who are brothers and sisters in christ there's nothing more tragic than seeing a group of people divided um sorry i've lost my notes there in chapter 1 verse 2 paul tells the corinthians they are a group of people sanctified in christ and called to be holy in verse 9 he reminds them they've been called into fellowship with christ and with each other in light of such a high calling the last thing they ought to be doing was dividing themselves into factions and cliques all doing their own thing yet that is

exactly what was happening at corinth think of paul as he wrote this letter he must have looked back to when he planted the church at corinth and the joy that he saw in the faces of the new converts who for the first time knew god's love who knew for the first time that in christ they were forgiven and free of sin acts chapter 18 tells us that a whole household at that time believed in the lord and were baptized these must have been happy times for there's nothing better than seeing a life changed by jesus but fast forward a few years and we have the same group of believers divided and quarreling amongst one another in verse 10 we get a sense of how this broke paul's heart for he appeals to his brothers that in the name of christ they all agree so that there be no division among them so that they may be perfectly united in mind and thoughts one of the things that this chapter reveals is that a church whose people are not united will end up putting people in a position that god has ordained for christ alone and we see this in verse 12 where some followed paul some followed apollo other kiphas that is peter while still others followed christ now it's bad enough when a church has two war infractions but the corinthians excelled they had four gentile believers well they followed paul we follow the guy who planted the church while the jewish converts maybe follow peter we follow the guy who was with jesus during his earthly ministry and perhaps some of the intellectuals chose apollo due to his eloquent preaching which we can read of elsewhere and to top it all off we have a group who thought they were superior spiritually superior to the rest who boasted they were of christ all of these groups were in the wrong paul makes this clear in verse 13 by asking is christ divided they were behaving like christ himself had been cut up into sections and parceled out to each faction they had lost sight of the one thing that united them namely christ now friends these divisions were not over the gospel nor were they over doctrine these divisions were about hero worship hero worship something that we can so easily fall into today in our world of internet sermons and blogs it can be so easy to elevate men into a position that they don't deserve and it's certainly not helpful for us either i witnessed this myself a few years ago in america i was at a christian conference for pastors and there were three speakers at this conference and each one of them was a well-known household name in the christian world and as i say this conference was for pastors some 1500 of them which makes what i'm about to tell you all the worst at the end of every

session these pastors would surround one of the speakers in particular i won't name him but these pastors would surround this fellow and they were getting photographs taken with him they were getting up to sign books they were even getting this guy to sign their bibles you know i'm sure i heard somebody say i know you didn't write this but i sure wish you did it was absolutely over the top it was horrible to witness and the speaker who himself was a pastor looked totally uncomfortable with the whole thing but us being glasgow boys wanted to make sure so we went down and asked if we could have a photograph taken with him and he said yes sure so a former staff worker ewan dodds positioned himself on one side with a friend i positioned myself on the other side and richard henry our church manager well he got himself ready to take the photograph and while i was waiting for richard getting ready to take the photograph with this christian pastor who had just a few seconds earlier been receiving all this hero well i just threw my arm around him and i said to him can i just tell you what a tremendous privilege this is for you i'm not even sure if you understood a word i said but friends hear what i'm saying i'm not saying that we're not to have our favorite preachers i've got my favorite preachers and i'm sure that you have yours we can have our favorite preachers but this had went well beyond having a favorite preacher into idolatry and was dividing the church we always need to keep in mind that even the best of men are men at best the corinthians have become a body without a head and it doesn't take a medical professor to work out that if that's the case then the body will not stand when the headship of christ is lost in a church its people fall apart and so too does their unity the second thing that our past our passage reveals a church will lose if it loses focus in christ's headship as it will lose its message it will lose its message verse 18 to 25 and this appears to be what happened at corinth which is why from verse 18 onward paul goes on to emphasize the importance of the gospel the corinthians were happy to draw dividing lines through the church verse 10 to 17 but here paul reminds them that the real dividing line is not through the church but around the church between the church and the world and taking their eyes off christ the corinthians inevitably inevitably drifted from the message of christ which paul says in verse 18 is the power of god to those who are being saved i want to take just a minute to look at verse 18 for it contains such amazing truth truth that the church needs to be reminded of time and time again we're told that the word of the cross that is the the message of christ's death burial and resurrection and what it's signified and accomplished is the means by which god either

brings someone to know him or to become more hardened against him the message of the cross is so powerful says paul and that it divides all humanity into two categories the perishing and the saved and every person in this building this morning without exception falls into one of these two categories we're either perishing and looking at our lost eternity or we're saved and we owe it to ourselves to ask ourselves before we leave this place this morning which category we are in are we perishing those who resist the gospel or are we saved those who submit to it the gospel message of the cross is a joy for the saved believer but for the perishing unbeliever it's unpopular it's offensive and it's politically incorrect

[20 : 13] it's unpopular because it tells us we need to change and folks by nature we don't want to hear this it's offensive because it tells us that the forgiveness that we all need the forgiveness that we all need can only come through our lord jesus christ and it's also politically incorrect because it's clear that the change and the forgiveness that we need can't come by multi-faith groups and world religions all agreeing and saying all roads lead to god instead the message of the cross says change forgiveness salvation hope joy peace with god comes by christ jesus alone whose broken body and spilled blood is the only thing that will make god accept us this is the christian message and it's a travesty when churches turn from this and lose confidence in it and friends this has affected the church all through the history of the church bishop ryle writing in a previous generation wrote this the longer i live the more convinced i am the world needs no new gospel as some profess to think i am thoroughly persuaded the world needs nothing but a bold full unflinching teaching of the old paths the old paths tell me the old old story of unseen things above of jesus and his glory of jesus and his love tell me the story simply as to a little child for i am weak and weary and helpless and defiled tell me the old old story tell me the old old story tell me the old old story of jesus and his love now friends when a group of us make the journey one mile west later this year to plant the gospel at tron kelvin grove it will be a a new congregation and a building that's new to them but it will be an old old message that is proclaimed the message of the gospel the same old story a bold full unflinching teaching of the old paths but friends not all churches agree with this some act like the gospel has had its day and they try to replace the gospel with new things things that they think will make the christian faith more interesting and acceptable and appealing they convince themselves that the way to get more people into church is to spice up the church a little bit with lots of contemporary ideas and so as we see church people getting more excited about the use of a smoke machine during church that would not be out of place in some nightclub or for the church carol service to employ a nightclub setting with roaring 20s flappers and rock bands hoochie-coochie dancers laser light shows and women on the stage half naked makes our lessons in carol service with only willie up front seem very boring and outdated doesn't it but these things i have described are what churches in our city and in our country are adopting in their services all the while all the while the gospel message of christ and him crucified the power of god is sidelined and put in the shelf and we wonder why church numbers are going down and we see so little of god's power moving in our lives and in our communities a friend told me of an article he read in his local newspaper it read of can you believe it a church that needs an initiative to make its place of worship more interesting to people what could be more interesting to dying men than there being a cure what could be more interesting to condemn sinners

than there being a savior to take their place dorothy campbell bought me a book a few years ago it's called atonement and it looks at the the atonement from different angles and um there's chapters given by different contributors and every chapter is worth the price of the book but one of the chapters is written by our dear brother and friend alistair beg and the chapter is entitled preaching the cross and here's what beg writes without the cross of jesus christ there is no gospel there simply is no good news without the cross indeed any attempt to preach the gospel minus the cross is to offer people a placebo rather than the very medicine that they require to be sure in the taking of the placebo they may feel that has done them some good but if we have not really explained to them the meaning and the purpose of the cross then we have neither convinced them of their problem nor have we been able to convey to them the biblical solution how can god pardon sinners without encouraging sin how can god simultaneously show justice and punishment but mercy and pardoning how can he turn his enemies into his friends and bind them to him in eternal love how can he admit men and women into heaven without spoiling the holiness of heaven the answer to all of these questions is found in the cross of our lord jesus christ as foolish as it seems to those who are perishing to those who are being saved it is the very power of god as our text demonstrates

when we lose focus of christ headship we subsequently lose the only message we have the message of the cross if we don't preach this message what else will we preach to those who come through the door this year will we tell them stories to please them so that they are not offended and might remain with us just a little longer will we stop telling them that they must repent of their sin and throw themselves upon the mercy of the lord jesus christ or else be lost forever will we stop telling people this in order that they might like is just a little better to do these things must be surely the cruelest and evil things that a christian church can ever be involved in offering people a placebo rather than the very medicine that they require as we seen last week from 2 timothy not teaching from the scriptures to make people wise for salvation having people forever learning but never arriving at the knowledge of the truth that is surely the most evil thing that a so-called christian church could ever be involved in friends are a church without the message of the cross in the pulpit is not a church in the eyes of god so friends please keep praying for all the ministry staff that they would unflinchingly keep preaching and teaching the truth because the days are coming and are already here when to do this can end us up in the wrong side of the law and in serious trouble we need the cross in the pulpit but what about in the pews are you ashamed of the cross are you ashamed of the words and the works of the lord jesus christ listen to what the lord jesus christ himself said in matthew chapter 10 everyone who acknowledges me before men i will also acknowledge before my father who is in heaven do you sometimes get ashamed to share the gospel i must admit sometimes i do get ashamed to acknowledge the lord jesus christ before men and it's usually because one of two because of one of two things ridicule or rejection i don't know about you but i like to fit in i like to be seen as as one of the boys and and i don't really like to rock the boat because to be honest i don't really have many friends as it is and i know that if the opportunity to bring jesus or his words into the conversation arises then i know there is a good chance of me and jesus words being rejected and i don't like that i don't like being rejected nor do i like being ridiculed and laughter for holding to jesus and his words people telling me i'm a fundamentalist that religion has got me off my head that hey terry you're a dinosaur no one believes in those things anymore come on man it's the 21st century get out of the dark ages i hate being rejected and ridiculed but the only thing that gives me courage and the love to keep sharing is the reward that the lord jesus christ promised if i acknowledge him before men he will acknowledge me before the father in heaven what a reward so friends as we go into this new year remember that reward every time you get the opportunity to share jesus before men 50 reasons will come into your head as to why you shouldn't usually due to rejection or ridicule but at those times remember the rewards if you acknowledge him before men he will acknowledge you before his father who is in heaven when we preach christ or share christ and him crucified we have no reason to stammer or stutter or to hesitate nor apologize there is absolutely nothing in the gospel to give us any cause to be ashamed let's be like the apostle paul who told the romans he wasn't ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of god for all who believed and that's why i'm sure the apostle decided to know nothing amongst the corinthians except christ and him crucified friends let's never stop preaching the cross so we can live peaceful lives in our communities and so church numbers might go up because they won't martin luther said this whenever the true message of the cross is abolished the anger of hypocrites and heretics eases and all things are in peace this is a sure token the devil is guarding the entry of the house and that the pure doctrine of god's word has been taken away are our lives nice and cozy if they are there's a good chance that we've stopped mentioning the message of the cross which is a stumbling block and a rock of offense to those who are perishing those who will despise us for proclaiming such a message the third and final thing i want to look at from one corinthians chapter one is the third consequence of losing focus of christ's headship lose our unity lose our message but thirdly it will make us lose our memory and forget ourselves many within the church at corinth were proud and arrogant seeing themselves as being among some spiritually elite group they did what all of us are tempted to do after god has found us and cleaned us up they started to think they weren't really that bad after all which made them lose appreciation of god's free gift of grace and christ verse 26 paul reminds them to think of what they were when they were called not many of you were wise by human standards not many were influential not many were of noble birth in chapter 6 we get more details about the former lives of the corinthians paul says neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor prostitutes nor men who practice homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor revilers nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of god and he concludes by saying these words and such were some of you and such were some of you the corinthian church compromised of immoral

greedy law-breaking drunkards who had no position no power and no pedigree it's in view of such a low

social standing it becomes all the more absurd that they had become proud and now believed they were among a spiritually elite group that was them but what about us what has god saved us from what's in our closet do we acknowledge that when god found us we were hell deserving sinners that the only way we would get to heaven is by god's grace or have we deceived ourselves into thinking that before knowing jesus we weren't too bad if god was to show us every thought word indeed we've ever done and if it was revealed not only what what was in our hearts before becoming christians but what's come to the surface since we would be thoroughly ashamed and we would never want to see each other again paul can say to all believers not just the corinthians and such were some of you it's for this reason he ends chapter one by reminding us that there's no place for boasting within the christian church for only in christ are we called out of darkness into light in verses 27 to 29 the apostle paul writes god chose the foolish things of the world the corinthians and us to shame the wise god chose the weak things of the world the corinthians and us to shame the strong he chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are why so that no one may boast before him no one will ever stand before god saying how good they were or how good they've done again to quote luther he rightly said we are all just beggars showing other beggars where to find bread the only righteousness holiness and redemption we can boast about paul says in verse 30 is in christ as someone put it many years ago the only thing we contribute to our salvation is the sin that we bring and this should keep us humble well friends just to conclude and all we've looked at this morning christ is the head of the church if we keep this in heart and mind we won't won't meet the three consequences the corinthians experience we won't lose our memory instead we'll keep in mind what and who we were when god found us and this will produce continual thanksgiving and gratitude towards him in our hearts we won't lose our message we'll stick to the message of christ crucified the message that saved us and changed us a message that we know will always be foolishness to those who are perishing but to those who are being saved it's the power of god and finally we won't lose our unity we will be a collective body called by god into his fellowship with his son to the praise of his glory and the world will look on and by our love for one another they will know that we are christ's disciples let us pray father we thank you indeed that you have given us a head in the lord jesus christ and we pray that as we enter this year of grace 2016 we pray that you would help us to to keep the head in order that we might keep our unity lord a unity that's founded in the truth of the gospel a gospel that we won't be afraid to proclaim throughout this city and help us lord also never to forget our memories help us lord to to know that we are only beggars telling other beggars where to find some food so lord as we enter this new year we do and pray pray indeed that you would grant us your grace to work these things into our lives we ask in jesus precious name amen