

# Keep the heid

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Date: 26 June 2011

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[ 0 : 00 ] I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to the first chapter of 1 Corinthians. And as you do so, let me say a word of prayer.

Make the book live to me, O Lord. Show me thyself within thy word. Show me myself and show me my Saviour.

And make the book live to me. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Whether you've stayed in Glasgow all of your life or you've only been here for a short time, I'm sure you're already aware that Glasgow is a city that is passionate about its football.

And I'm sure you know that Glasgow is the home of two great football teams. Celtic and Celtic Reserves. I'm only joking.

It's home to both Celtic and Rangers football clubs. And this past season saw these two great rivals face each other an unprecedented seven times. And the league.

[ 1 : 14 ] The league cup. And the Scottish cup tie that went to a replay. These games are always fiery. But the Scottish cup replay tie between them was particularly so.

Three players were sent off. Ten players were yellow carded. The referee was manhandled. And even the coaches were squaring up to one another in the touchline. Now there are many qualities that are required to make it as a professional football player.

But playing in a Celtic Rangers match is different to any other game. And I'm sure if you had to ask my good friends Stephen Grant or Ross Duncan, who unlike me both support Rangers, if you had to ask Stephen and Ross, what is the biggest quality a football player must possess in order to play in the hostile environment that is an old firm match?

I'm sure that Stephen and Ross wouldn't say ball control. Although ball control is very important. Nor would they say timing or tackling ability.

Again, these things are very important. Nor, I doubt, would they say passing ability or great individual skill. Though these things are so important. But I'm sure that they would both answer that the single most quality that a player must possess to be a success in the hostile environment of an old firm match is the ability to keep the heat, as we say in Glasgow.

[ 2 : 40 ] The ability to keep the head. The ability to remain calm under pressure. Not to be sucked in by the crowd or the atmosphere of the occasion. But to be able to keep the head.

And that was the problem in the match that I referred to. Too many of them lost the head. And friends, if it's vital in the hostile environment of an old firm match to keep the head, then how much more so for us, the church of Jesus Christ, to keep the head in the hostile environment that is the world.

In reading through 1 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 it's clear Paul is indicating to this group of believers that the reason they were in such a mess was that they'd lost all focus of Christ's headship and 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 today.

[ 3 : 47 ] People meeting in church buildings, but without giving any consideration or thought whatsoever to the headship and authority of Jesus Christ. If Christ's headship isn't recognized in a church or a denomination, then that body of that church or denomination will no longer be recognized by God.

And it will inevitably fall apart. In several occasions in his letters, the apostle 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've lost focus of this, and they begin to replace Christ with people. The passage that we're going to focus on this evening is 1 Corinthians 1, verses 10-31.

And I want to draw out three consequences that take place within a church where focus of Christ's headship is lost. Firstly, it will lose its unity among its people, verses 10-17.

Secondly, it will lose its message, verses 17-25. And thirdly, such a church will lose its memory, verses 26-31.

[ 5 : 02 ] That is, its people will forget the wicked state that God found them in. And they will forget that it's only by the grace of God that they are 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's headship will lose unity among its people. There's nothing more tragic than seeing a group of people divided who have got so much to unite them.

Recently in Scotland, the Scottish Socialist Party, who seemed more united than any other political party, were publicly shamed as their former leader went through a perjury trial at Glasgow High Court.

This group, who at one time had so much in common and so much to unite them, one by one appeared on TV to slag each other off. It was a pathetic and pitiful sight.

Even more tragic than this is when a group of Christians do likewise to brothers and sisters in Christ. In chapter 1, verse 2, Paul tells the Corinthians, they are a group of people sanctified in Christ and called to be holy.

[ 6 : 08 ] In verse 90, he reminds them they've been called into fellowship with Christ and with each other. In light of such a high call, the last thing they ought to be doing was dividing themselves into factions and cliques, all doing their own thing.

Yet this is exactly what was happening in Corinth. Think of Paul as he wrote this letter. He must have looked back to when he planted the church at Corinth, the joy he saw in the faces of new converts who for the first time knew God's love, and who for the first time knew it in Christ.

They were forgiven and free of sin. Acts chapter 18 tells us 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 couple of years, and here we have the same group of believers, divided and quarreling among 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, and so that they may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

[ 7 : 21 ] One of the things that this chapter reveals is that a church whose people are not united end up putting people in a position God has adorned for Christ alone. And we see this in verse 12, where some followed Paul, some Apollos, others Kephas, that is Peter, while still others followed Christ.

Now it's bad enough when a church has two warring factions, but the Corinthians excelled. They had four. The Gentile believers, they followed Paul.

We follow the guy who planted the church. While the Jewish converts, they follow Peter. We follow the guy that hang about with Jesus. And perhaps some of the intellectuals, they chose Apollos, due to his eloquent preaching, which we read of elsewhere.

And to top it all off, we have a group who thought they were 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.

[ 8 : 35 ] They had lost sight of the one thing that united them, namely Christ. Now friends, these divisions were not over the gospel or over doctrine. These divisions were about hero worship.

something that we too can easily fall into. In a world of internet, access to sermons and blogs, we can so easily elevate men to a position of worship that they don't deserve and is not helpful for us.

And I witnessed this myself a couple of years ago. A couple of years ago, I was at a conference. A conference for Christian pastors. And some of the speakers were household Christian names.

And after each session, these Christian pastors surrounded one of the speakers in particular. They totally surrounded him, hero worshipping him.

Some of them were coming up with their Bibles and asking them, could you sign my Bible? It was horrible to watch. And the pastor, who I won't mention, he looked really uncomfortable with the whole thing.

[ 9 : 37 ] And just to make sure, us being Glasgow boys, we went up and we asked him, could we have a photograph taken with him? Well, and Ewan Dodds positioned himself to this side of him and I positioned myself on this side and Richard Henry took the photograph.

And while I was getting ready for Richard to take the photograph, I threw my arm around this pastor who'd been receiving all this hero worship and I said to him, what a tremendous privilege this is for you.

I'm not even sure if he understood a word I said. But friends, it's so easy to elevate people into the position reserved only for Christ.

Now, hear what I'm saying. I'm not saying that we're not to have our favourite preachers. I've got mine and I'm sure you have yours. But this had gone beyond having a favourite preacher.

It went right into idolatry and was dividing the church. Friends, we always need to remember even the best of men are men at best. But the Corinthians, they had become a body without a head.

[ 10 : 46 ] And it doesn't take a medical professor to work out that if this is the case, then the body will not stand. When the headship is lost in a church, its people fall apart and so too does their unity.

The second thing that chapter 1 reveals, if a church loses its focus of the headship of Christ, it loses its message. Verses 17 to 25.

And this appears to be what happened at Corinth, which is why from verse 17 onwards, Paul goes on to emphasise the importance of the Gospel. We've already seen from verses 10 to 17 that the Corinthians were happy to draw dividing lines through the church.

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 drifted from the message of Christ, which Paul says in verse 18, is the power of God to those who are being saved.

[ 11 : 53 ] I want to take a minute just 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 are told that the word of the cross, that is, the message of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and what it 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 that Paul says here that it divides all humanity into two categories. The perishing and the saved.

And friends, every person in here tonight, without exception, falls into one of these two categories. We're either perishing and looking at a lost eternity in hell, or we're saved.

And friends, we owe it to ourselves that before we leave this bold in the night to ask ourselves which category we're 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 is unpopular, offensive, and politically incorrect.

[ 13 : 12 ] It's unpopular because it tells us we need to change. And friends, you might not want to hear this, but that's the truth. By nature, we don't want to hear it. We think we're okay.

It's offensive because it says we all need forgiveness for our sins which are committed against God. And friends, again, this confronts us with the fact that we're not as good as we think we are.

And again, we don't want to hear this. The gospel is also politically incorrect because it is clear that the change in the forgiveness that we all need can't come by multi-faith groups and world religions all agreeing and saying that all roads lead to God.

Instead, the message of the cross says this, change, forgiveness, salvation, hope, joy, and peace with God come by Jesus Christ alone whose broken body and spilled blood is the only thing to make God accept us.

This is the Christian message. And it's a travesty when churches turn from it and lose confidence in it. And this has been all the way through the history of the Christian church.

[ 14 : 25 ] 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.

I remember a few months ago I was on the building evangelism team and I was sitting up in those soft chairs in the corner there. I was probably reading a Bible looking pious. And that particular day Ruth Hodgson who's playing the piano tonight, Ruth was on the building evangelism team and I overheard her speaking to someone and she was speaking to someone about the building and stuff and it was great.

And she said, Yes, you will see from the building that there are many things that are new but it's an old message that we proclaim. And my heart was warmed to hear Ruth say that.

The old paths. Tell me the old, old story. Tell me the old, old story. Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love. We need the preaching of the old paths not something new and modern and contemporary.

[ 15 : 40 ] It's foolish. But friends, not all churches agree with this. Some act like the Gospels had its day and that they try to replace it with things that they think will make the Christian faith more interesting and more acceptable.

They convince themselves that the way to get people into church is to spice up the church a little bit with lots of contemporary ideas. And we see church people getting more excited about some converted gangster or some drug addict that's become a Christian.

They get more excited about that. About somebody like that getting their testimony and saying how bad and immoral he was. or the latest converted celebrity who's booked for a fee to come and entertain crowds on a Sunday morning with stories about rubbish relating to the showbiz industry.

All the while the gospel message of Christ crucified, the power of God is put on the shelf. And we wonder why 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 that he read in his local newspaper and it read of, can you believe it, a church that needs an initiative to make its place of worship more interesting to people.

[ 16 : 58 ] Can you believe that? To make its worship more interesting to people. What could be more interesting to people to die in men than there being a cure? What could be more interesting to condemn sinners than there being a saviour to take their place?

Dorothy Campbell bought me this book from the bookroom. It's called Atonement. And every chapter of the book is worth the price of the book. I'm sure Dr. Dodge would be willing to sell you a copy though I cannae guarantee that Dorothy will buy it for you.

But one of the chapters is written by our good friend Alistair Begg. And the chapter is entitled Preaching the Cross. And here's what Alistair Begg 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 it has done them some good but if we have not really explained to them the meaning and 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.

[ 18 : 13 ] How can God pardon sinners without encouraging sin? How can he 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 the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, 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's headship we subsequently lose the only message that we have the message of the cross.

If we don't preach this message what else will we preach to those coming through the door? Will we tell them stories to please them? To tell them so that we might not offend them and that they might remain with us a little longer?

Will we stop telling them that they must repent and throw themselves upon the mercy of Jesus or else be lost forever so that they might like us a little better? Friends, a church without the message of the cross and the pulpit is not a church in the eyes of God.

[ 19 : 33 ] But friends, what about us publicly? Are we ashamed of the cross? Are we ashamed to name Jesus before men? Jesus says if we are ashamed to name him before men he will be ashamed of us when he comes in his father's glory.

Friends, I don't know about you but certainly for me there are two things that will stop me and will make me ashamed of the Lord Jesus to name him in front of men. Rejection and ridicule.

I don't know about you but I always want to be seen as one of the boys. I want to fit in. Sharing the gospel, you think, I better not share it. People will reject me or they'll make a fool of me.

They'll think I'm a crackpot. They'll say, that crackpot, he actually believes that Jesus stuff. That Jesus died to bring him forgiveness. That he died and rose again. They ascended into heaven and he's coming back all the angels of heaven to judge the living and the dead.

He actually believes that. Crackpot. Friends, think of the reward. The Lord Jesus Christ said, he will name you before the angels.

[ 20 : 41 ] When you feel tempted to be ashamed of the cross because of rejection and ridicule, think of the reward. Lord Jesus will name you before the angels.

When we share the message of the cross, we have no reason to stammer or stutter or hesitate or apologize. There is absolutely nothing in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ for which we should be ashamed.

Let's be like Paul who told the Romans he wasn't ashamed of the gospel for it's the power of God for all who believe. And that's why the apostle Paul when he was with the Corinthians decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Friends, let's never stop preaching the cross so we can live peaceful lives in our communities and so that church numbers might go up. They won't. Martin Luther said that 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 that 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?

[ 21 : 59 ] If they are, there's a good chance we've stopped mentioning the message of the cross which is a stumbling block and a rock of offence to those who are perishing and they will despise us for proclaiming such a message.

The final thing I want to look at from the first chapter of 1 Corinthians is the third consequence of losing focus of Christ's headship. It will make us lose our memory and we will 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 attempted to do after God has found us and cleaned us up.

They started to think that they weren't really that bad, which had made them lose their appreciation of God's free gift of grace in Christ. In 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.

[ 23 : 07 ] 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 swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

And he concludes by saying these words, and such were some of you. The Corinthian church comprised 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 the spiritually elite.

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, and the only way we would get to heaven is by God's grace?

Or have we deceived ourselves to thinking that before knowing Jesus, we weren't too bad? God? If God was to show us every thought, word, and deed we've ever done, and if it was revealed not only what was in our hearts before becoming Christians, but what's came to the surface since, we'd be thoroughly ashamed, and we would never want to see each other again.

[ 24 : 31 ] Paul can say to all believers, not just the Corinthians, and such were some of you. And it's for this reason he ends chapter 1 by reminding us all 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, 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 stand before God saying how good they've been about the amount of good that they've done. Again, to quote Luther, he rightly said, we're 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.

[ 25 : 46 ] Friends, that should keep us humble. So to conclude, in all we've looked at this evening, Christ is the head of the church. If we keep this in heart and mind, we won't meet the three consequences the Corinthians experienced.

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.

Secondly, we won't lose our message. We'll stick to the message of Christ crucified, a message which we always know will be foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God.

And finally, we won't lose our unity. We'll be a collective body called by God and to 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.

Amen. Amen.