

Our Place at His Place

Be Headed

November 1, 2020

Welcome to where we're learning how screw our heads on straight!

Because I'd forget mine if it wasn't attached. Last Sunday at the end of Q&A, a His-Placer in Arizona texted that the first sermon they heard when they moved to Mount Vernon, years ago, was the headless chicken one. So I dug it out and saw that it was from June of 1999! Funny how a striking analogy can stick like that. And then Noah said, "I remember that sermon!" He said he was 17 and rebellious and gave in to his parents and came to church. And the image stuck!



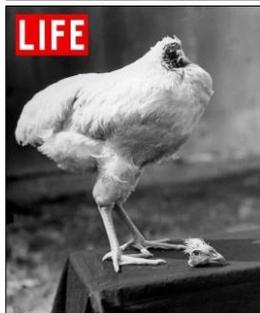
So, today I'm asking a simple but direct question: **Is your head attached?**



No doubt you've heard the expression: Running around like a chicken with its head cut off. But, have you ever actually witnessed it for real? I have. And I was going to show a video; but it's too disturbing. Cheryl told me how, as a child, she was horrified by the sight. These poor birds don't seem to realize they're dead; because: **motion doesn't always mean life.**



One of the weirdest sagas with headless chickens began on September 10, 1945, in Fruita Colorado, when farmer Lloyd Olsen beheaded 50 fryer roosters. As usual, they flapped and kicked a bit; but one, now known as Miracle Mike, refused to give up the ghost! In fact, he fluffed up his feathers and went back about his business as usual ... *for 18 months!* When Olsen saw Mike going through the motions of pecking for food, he realized he had an oddity, and began dropping grain and water down his *opening*. I'm glad that photo is black and white!



And after an examination at the University of Utah, Mike was featured in Life magazine, Time magazine, and countless headless headlines. He even made a stop in Seattle on his world tour. Olsen described Mike as "a robust chicken; **a fine specimen – except for not having a head.**" And just last June, Fruita's annual "Mike the Headless Chicken Festival" and 5K run had to be canceled because of the Virus. Mike is celebrated they say, not because he was a freak, but because he overcame extreme difficulties.

Now, I just want what Paul wanted:

I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ ... - 1 Corinthians 11:3 NIV



Here's what I want you to connect – the striking analogy I want to stick: **That disturbing thought of a headless chicken going through the motions of pecking for food, is you and me without Christ as the head of our life. It's just activity without reason or direction or purpose.**

Picture yourself going through the motions of pecking away at the cares of this world. Gross. Reminds me of a Groucho'esq insult: What do you do for a *living*; if you can call *that* living?

We can ruffle up and strut around, but **when we're severed from our Head** (the Lordship of Jesus) **we're dead and don't know it**. And I suppose that's because **it doesn't take brains to go through the motions**, of life, of marriage, of faith, of *whatever*. That's when we do something perfunctorily, mechanically, without enthusiasm or *actual* commitment; or at best, make a feeble effort to keep up appearances. Mostly to deceive ourselves. So **don't let life become a habit**. Mike was dead when he lost his head; just took him longer to stop breathing than most. Likewise, **activity in a church doesn't mean life in Christ**. Jesus warns us that there's just the one and only way to *actually* love the Lord your *God ... if* that is, that's *what* He really is.

[He said, the most *important* thing is to] Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your mind and with *all* your strength. - Mark 12:30 NIV

Is that humanly possible?! Yes. How? What's that even look like? Ever see kids caught up in a video game? Immersed. Absorbed. Riveted. Engaged. Impassioned. Determined. And having the time of their life! Their one singular, driving, desire: to advance and finish as conquerors! It looks like *that*. Or any other positive, passionate, obsession.



"But pastor, that's totally *different*. Those are ... *fun*, and exciting and exhilarating and rewarding and relational and relaxing and fulfilling." Yeah, that's what I said; it's a very clear picture of someone loving something with all their heart (their **devotion**), soul (their **emotions**), mind (their **thoughts**), and strength (their **time, talent, treasure, and tenacity**). Remember your first love? It's not like we don't know what this looks like, and that it's very doable. So how would you rate on the headless-chicken versus heart-soul-mind-and-strength meter?

We can't earn or add to our salvation; we receive it by faith through God's grace. But we *must* **make every effort to be conformed to the character of Christ**. That's the one effort, in partnership with the Spirit, that Jesus demands that we make. Because, there's only two paths a believer can take: **become more like Jesus**, or **make Jesus more like me**. You see, we were created in God's image; and we've been trying to return the favor ever since! That's why everyone's "Jesus" thinks so much like them. Twinning! Well, **we've either perfected the mind of Christ or corrupted it**. Speaking for myself, it ain't so much the former.



We must envision Him as He really is. Which means we must constantly be conforming our *understanding* of Him by *defining* Him by His *Word*; or **we'll unconsciously craft a caricature of Him in our image**. And, boy-oh-boy, *that* doesn't end well.

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. *Many* will say to *Me* on that day, [when they can't enter] "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" – Matthew 7:21-23 NIV

Yikes! “But we called to the Lord of Lords! So if it wasn’t *You* we were praying to, then who was it?” “Go look in a mirror.” **Exchanging Jesus for a self-image is subtle.** We *all* do it to some degree. So thank the Lord for forgiveness. But, for instance, would *your* Lord-of-Lords **vote** like you, **post** like you, or **protest** like you? If you’re thinking, “Well ... not 100%,” I’ll assume you’re making *every* effort to correct things on *your* end. If you’re thinking, “Yeah, pretty much 100%,” then you got more wrong than *this* sermon can fix. Even His twelve couldn’t tell “what would Jesus do,” or why the Dude did what He do’d! But at least *they* were *honest* with themselves.

If my attitude isn't **“Lord, help me be like You,”** chances are I’m well underway to assembling a “Jesus” that’s resembling *my* nature and temperament. And *that’s* called vain religion.



Emile Durkheim, a turn-of-the-century social scientist studied how various aboriginal tribes formed different religions. And he found that each had specific traits and values they held in high esteem, like **strength and conquest**, or **freedom and liberty**, or **industry and hard work**. And each chose symbols to represent them: a lion for strength, an eagle for freedom, etc. I’m pretty sure no one chose a finger-lickin’ chicken.



Emile coined the term **“totem”**. And a stack of these symbols became known as a totem pole. Myths were created to teach each symbolized trait. And over time they came to identify with and worship the spirit, or trait, personified. But, if totems were chosen to embody what they revered in themselves, what were they *really* worshipping? Themselves! Just like us! We each arrive at it in a different way, but that’s one of only two destinations that’s ever been offered to and embraced by mankind.



Although they *knew* God, they neither glorified Him *as* God nor gave thanks to *Him*, but their *thinking* became futile and their foolish *hearts* were darkened. Although they claimed to be *wise*, they became fools and *exchanged* the glory of the *immortal God* for images made to look like *mortal man* and *birds* and *animals* and *reptiles*. – Romans 1:21-23 NIV



“That’s so primitive. We don’t connect our spirit-identities to animals and birds anymore.” Well, just keep it in mind the next time you drive your Ram to show your spirit for the Broncos, or your Bronco to the Rams, or your Jaguar to the Falcons, or your Falcon to the Jaguars, or your Mustang, Firebird, Thunderbird, or Colt, to show your *spirit* for the Colts, Ravens, Eagles, Panthers, Lions, Bears, or Seahawks. Now, I’m not saying that’s a sin; just that it’s subtle. And that, over time, **believers can turn the cross into a totem pole of their own.** And that sometimes we’re more interested in supporting our own convictions and causes with Scripture, than we are supporting Scripture with our convictions and causes. Oh, who am I kidding? **We’re into tribal ways more than Bible ways except maybe on Sundays!** And even then, not so much.

Vain religion consumes itself with legal questions, like how often do I need to pray, or fast, or read my Bible; and how much do I need to tithe – and is that on the net or the gross? Peck. Peck. Peck. Gross. **True faith concerns itself with loving questions**, like what was Jesus really like? How’s He speak to people, and treat people? And what can I change to become more like *that*?

True faith won't allow us to look the same next year. Because, **true faith seeks God's face** with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Whereas **vain religion just keeps us too busy to notice our lack of change ... or head.**

John Calvin said: **"We recognize Jesus because He comes to us clothed in His Gospel."** Well, if that's true, **it only works to the degree we know His Gospel;** and we'll only really know it to the extent we **read it, hear it, embrace it, and apply it.** After all:

It was He who gave some to be apostles ... prophets .. evangelists, and ... pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for **works of service [not for salvation; but transformation]**, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach *unity* in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become *mature*, attaining to the *whole* measure of the fullness of Christ. *Then* we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching ... *Instead*, speaking the *truth* in love, **[especially to ourselves and to one another]** we will in all things *grow up* into Him who *is* the *Head*, that is, Christ. – Ephesians 4:11-15 NIV



When it comes to Jesus' character and nature, we like to pick and choose the traits that best suit us. So, let's try to keep in mind kids, that **we come to the royal throne, not the Royal Fork. Belief in Jesus isn't a buffet.** And **the cross isn't a totem pole.** It only takes the twinkling of an eye to receive Him as Savior; but it takes every day to know Him and follow Him as Lord of Lords, and ...

... to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. – Ephesians 4:23-24 NIV

Otherwise we'll rally around a Lord-of-Lords that's nothing more than a mere image. So ...

Examine yourselves [especially right above the neckline] to see whether you *are* in the faith; **test yourselves. [Is your Head attached? If so]** Do you *not* realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? – 2 Corinthians 13:4-5 NIV

Is it your desire and goal to attain **"to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"**?

If not, why not? Maybe it's time to take a *good* look in the mirror, and talk with Dad, and **find three areas in your life that could use some improving in reflecting His character and nature.** That's just what we do when He's actually the head of our life; because ...

[God] appointed *Him* to be *head* over everything for the church, which *is* His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. – Ephesians 1:22-23 NIV

Know the best way to keep from making Jesus your totem? Quote Him. He's your head, so bow yours by putting *His* thoughts in it. Otherwise you'll *be* headed in all the wrong directions.

And then, even if you're in LIFE, you can't call that living.