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"BEHEADED FOR THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS."

"And I saw the souls [persons] of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God;...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." – Rev. 20:4.

ALL constituting the Kingdom class are here referred to as beheaded – every member of the glorified Church must, eventually, have this experience, whatever it signifies. But we reflect that our Lord was not beheaded and, so far as history shows, few, if any, of the apostles were literally beheaded; indeed, very few, if any, of the Lord's saints, from Pentecost to the present time, have died by decapitation. We are to remember, however, that this statement is from the symbolical book, and is therefore a figure of speech, a word-picture, and its meaning must be sought for accordingly.

The Apostle gives us the key, saying, "The head of every man is Christ; the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3.) [R2845 : page 227] As a woman who becomes a wife accepts her husband as the head of the family, so the Church accepts Christ as its head, and each member of the Church thus comes into relationship with the Lord as a member of his body – not the head; and all of these, to be acceptable as members of the figurative body of Christ, must be will-less, headless: their own wills must be surrendered, so that, like their Lord, they can say, "Not my will, but thine, be done." They must be headless in the sense of ignoring their own wills, being dead to self and actuated henceforth by the will of the head of the body, Christ Jesus. His will, his mind, his spirit, must dwell in each member of the body, and abound, if it would abide a member of his body, the Church. Thus, as the wife loses her own name, and accepts the name of her husband and his headship, so each member of the bride of Christ must lose his

or her individuality in order to be accepted as the Bride of Christ. It is this self-surrender to Christ on the part of his Church that is represented in the symbolism of the text before us.

One of the prime hindrances to Christian growth is the failure to discern the completeness of the sacrifice requisite in those who would be accounted as members of the elect Church, the body of Christ. No one can be of this elect number, to live and reign with Christ in his Millennial Kingdom, who has not been thus beheaded. We often think of this when we hear well-meaning Christian people say, "I have a mind of my own; I do my own thinking." It is certainly better, in many instances, that one should do his own thinking than that he should let another man or another woman do it for him; than that he should allow a body of men to make a creed for him, even tho that body of men, professing to be his head, be called a Synod or a Presbytery or a Conference, and desire that the individual shall submit himself to its headship, and become a member of some earthly church. Such sectarian systems – heads and members – are false bodies of Christ, which the real Head never recognized.

It is required of every one who would be counted in as a member of the true Church, that he should be not only beheaded (lose his self-will), but that he shall be *united to the true Head* of the Church and recognize himself as a member of the *true body of Christ* – "the Church of the living God, whose names are written in heaven." Membership in the Presbyterian *body*, or in the Methodist *body*, or in the Lutheran *body*, or in the Baptist *body*, or in any other human institution, does not count anything, for the simple [R2845 : page 228] reason that Christ never recognized any of them, never founded any of them, never joined or agreed to join any of them as *their head*. There are not *many* bodies of Christ, but only *one*, the Church of the living God – there is one body, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The Lord is not the head of these

human institutions, which call themselves his bodies, and membership in them will avail nothing as respects the reward of joint-heirship with Christ in the Kingdom; but rather (as intimated in the words of this verse which we have omitted), the worship, reverence, of these human systems, when once they are seen to be counterfeits of the true body, would be a barrier to a place in the true body and in the Kingdom glories.

As Jesus was not the founder or institutor of these bodies, neither is he their head; neither were the apostles members of any of these human sects or parties, and all of the Lord's true saints who, under Satan's misrepresentations, have been led to consider these human institutions as bodies of Christ, and to join them, while really in heart holding an allegiance to Christ as far above them, as the only true authority and Head – these are now urged to come out of all these various systems; and the light of present truth is for the purpose of showing them where they are, and permitting them to renounce their allegiance to the human systems, and to declare their allegiance only to the *one* Head and to the *one* "Church which is his body." These systems are so numerous, and their theories so diverse and confused, that the general term "Babylon" (confusion) is applied to them as a general or family name, and God's true children are admonished, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." – Rev. 18:4.

In Israel God gave a typical representation of his Church in Aaron, the high priest, and his sons, the under priests. So, says the Apostle, we are "a Royal Priesthood," and again, "Consider the high priest of our profession [or order of priesthood], Christ Jesus." Now, be it noted, that in the type the beheading of the under-priests was fully illustrated in the fact that the under-priests were required to wear "bonnets," while the high priest alone was without the bonnet and wore the mitre. The high

priest was thus proclaimed to be the *head* of the priesthood; and in covering their heads the under-priests said in the type, We are headless; look to the high priest; he is our head. So, in the antitype, the spiritual Royal Priesthood must all be headless, must all, in the language of the hymn, say: –

"O to be nothing, nothing,
To him let all voices be raised;
He is the fountain of blessing,
He only is most to be praised."

And this headless or will-less condition is not merely a sentiment; it must be a reality, so far as the new creature is concerned. All those who are really "members of the *body* of Christ" must in their hearts reach that condition where they can say with the greatest sincerity of heart, The Lord's will be done, Teach me thy will, O Lord. They must reach that attitude of relationship to Christ that will be continually seeking to know the will of the Head, and seeking to do it. True, the new creature must operate through, and think with, the human organism; and the latter being imperfect, through the fall, the result may frequently be an imperfect apprehension of the will of Christ, as well as an imperfect doing of that will. However, the imperfections of the *flesh* are not imputed against the *new creature*, if the heart be loyal in seeking to know and in seeking to do the will of Christ.

"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy;" and the intimation of our text is that it will be fidelity to this spirit of the truth, the spirit of Christ working in us, in conjunction with the Word of God, the "exceeding great and precious promises," that will work upon us to effect the change from our own wills to the will of Christ – beheading us, making us dead to self and alive toward God through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is no intimation here of dependence upon sectarian arrangements and

institutions; each "*soul*" (individual) must be beheaded for himself, and must be individually united to Christ, the Head of the Church. There is no intimation of the acceptance of sects and parties. On the contrary, sectarianism, in every sense and degree, is opposed to the Scriptural arrangement of union, direct and complete, between the Lord and the individual alone.

What an honor and dignity are thus given to the Word of God – and the testimony of Jesus, – not in his own words only, but especially in his life and example, the spirit of which all members of the body must partake of, ere they can have fellowship in his sufferings, walking in his footsteps in the same narrow way of self-sacrifice – thus to be made meet for a share with him in the Kingdom. However, nothing in this should be understood to imply that there are no helps, no assistances, to be rendered and to be accepted and appreciated in the body of Christ, as between the various members; indeed, other Scriptures show us that if one member of the body rejoices, other members are comforted; and if one member suffers the others share the injury. And the Apostle makes very clear to us that our Lord, the Head, communicates with the members of his body by using certain of their own number as his representatives – so that one member may serve the body as an eye, another as an ear, another as a mouth. (1 Cor. 12:12-31.) Nevertheless, we must **[R2845 : page 229]** always consider the headship of the Lord; and the provision which he makes for the body is what in every instance is to be sought, and not what men may scheme or do in self-exaltation and as would-be teachers in the body of Christ.

Dear brethren, let us consider well the force of this strong symbolic statement. Let us ask ourselves, (1) Have I in obedience to the spirit and example of Jesus, and the testimony of God's Word, given up my own self-control, self-will? (2) If I have, to whom did I give it? – to a large denomination,

professing to be the body of Christ, or to a little denomination, professing the same? (3) Am I looking to these as my head, my instructors, guides to my conscience, the directors of my spiritual energies? Or have I renounced my own headship and fully accepted the headship of Christ Jesus, – to the ignoring of all other contrary heads and authorities – to be taught of the Lord, guided of the Lord, used of the Lord, and given such experiences as his infinite wisdom sees best for me? (4) And am I fully content to be thus a member of *his body*, cut off from all others, and to be used according to his will as I find it recorded in his Word? Or am I, so to speak, a double-headed man, seeking to go through life acknowledging the headship of Jesus, but at the same time having another head or will of my own – and thus what the Apostle James called "a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways," [R2846 : page 229] attempting to follow my own inclinations at times, and the Lord's directions at other times, and thus unstable, unreliable, as a member of his body, and unsuitable to be used by him, but in a condition to be ultimately repudiated if I do not become entirely beheaded as respects my own will? (5) Or have I, still worse than this, three heads, or parts of three heads, – some of my own head, or will, not fully cut off; some of the head or will of Christ, incompletely attached; and some of a sectarian, man-made head – a confusion worse confounded, which renders me utterly unfit to comprehend and obey the mind of the spirit?

Dearly beloved, the time is short, the great prize we seek is near, the "mark" or standard of character to be attained is plainly set before us, and the Scriptures are luminous with illustrations of the necessity for complete consecration to the Lord, – showing us that it means deadness to self. Shall we not each see to it that by the grace of God every other head and authority is completely cut off and cast aside, and that henceforth, as the Apostle expressed it, "For me to live is Christ" – as a member of the body of Christ, guided by his will as discerned through

his Word and providence and example? This is another picture of full completion of character-likeness to our Lord. Did he not fully give up his own headship, his own will, to the Father's will? He surely did; and as that full consecration was rewarded by the Father, so we have the assurance that our full consecration (and nothing less than this) will be fully rewarded by our Lord and Head in the Kingdom.
