

PART 1

**Philosophy of  
Disestablishment**

by James Wright

*"The conclusion of the whole matter, therefore, is, that the government of Christ is radically different from all the governments on earth, forming, of itself, a divine Christocracy. By a Christocracy, I mean nothing more than a government of which Christ is law-giver, king, and judge, and yet so arranged, that each congregational church is a complete republic of itself, not to be controlled by civil government or hierarchy. Let this government be called by what name soever, it is not of the world, and therefore, the rulers of this world have nothing to do with it, in their official capacity. It is distinct from the government of state, and consequently, should never be mixed with it. It is complete of itself, and disdains the assistance of human laws."*

*John Leland*

*"And yet we do not cry out, That our church is in danger; for we know it is founded upon a Rock of Ages... Thanks be to God, our churches are established by the laws of heaven."*

*A True Protestant - 1736*

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## Approval by God

**Colossians 1:18** - “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”

**Ephesians 5:23** – “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”

In the matter of a local church’s approval by God, the question of headship over a church is not a viable issue. Christ not being the head of His church is an impossibility, for He has established His headship as truth in the Scriptures. In Colossians 1:18, we see that “*...he is the head of the body, the church...*” In Ephesians 5:23, “*...Christ is the head of the church...*” The wording Paul used in establishing Christ’s headship over His church is that of a declaration – and as it is God’s Word, we have no choice but to accept it as undeniable truth. No man may change the fact that Christ is the head over His local church, as it is a truth established by the Scriptures.

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Such an assertion may seem to be an elementary issue; however, the issue of Christ's headship over His local church has engendered considerable argument throughout the annals of church-state history. There are those who argue that it is possible to replace Christ as head over His local church. But if Christ has affirmed that He is the head of His church, by what power may any usurp His headship? It must therefore be concluded that if Christ is not the head of a church, it is not His church.

In contrast to the Scriptural claim of Christ's headship over the local church, His preeminence over that church is not stated as a certainty. Quoting Colossians 1:18 again, *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."* Notice that the Biblical pronouncement, *"...he is the head of the body..."* leads to a very different kind of statement: *"...that in all things he might have the preeminence."* The Greek word *hina*, "that", means "with the intent that". Christ's headship is established *with the intent that* He might have the preeminence over the body. Preeminence in the church is the purpose of His headship, but not necessarily the practical reality. Christ's headship over His local church, however, is established regardless of any external conditions; therefore, Christ can be the head of the body, even if He does not have preeminence in the body.

The distinction between the position of Christ in regard to His church, and the relationship of the local church to Christ, is an important one. Headship speaks of position, whereas preeminence speaks of relationship.

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Scripturally, it is God's intent that the local church have a relationship of preeminence with Christ, the church being obedient to His leading. The Biblical picture of this relationship is that of a husband and wife. As the wife is to be obedient to her husband, in submission to his leading, and under his lordship, so is the local church to be obedient to Christ, in submission to His leading, and under His lordship.

Wives are to be in submission to their own husbands and no other. In the context of the church as the bride of Christ, it is understood that the local church must be in submission to Christ and no other. Charles Spurgeon said, in a speech on disestablishment, "Happy shall be the day for them when they dare to come out with this upon their banner: - Christ alone is our Master, and the Word of God is our great law book."<sup>1</sup> He continued: "The Church must be free, and Christ must be her sole Master, cost what it may, in England, Scotland, and everywhere else."<sup>2</sup> Spurgeon equated the Word of God with Christ, for if the two were separate, there would be a great conflict. It is impossible to be under a "sole Master" and a "great law book", except the law book were given by the Master.

In theory, the preceding concepts seem easy to accept. Biblically, it is easy to acknowledge the local church's position of being under the lordship of Christ as the sole Master, and His Scriptures as the great law book. In practice, however, this position becomes much more difficult to reconcile, for to accept that Christ is the sole

<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, Charles, C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Ultimate Christian Library, AGES Software, Rio, Wisconsin, 2000, pg. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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Master over His church is to acknowledge that there can be no other master over His church. By definition, if there is a “sole Master” over anything, there can be no other master over that thing, as it destroys the concept of a “sole Master”. Thus, establishing any authority over the local church, other than Christ and His Scriptures, is to reject Christ as the “sole Master” over His church. Restated, establishing any authority over the local church other than Christ and His Scriptures, is to reject Christ’s lordship over His church.

The Bible says it is sin to reject Christ’s lordship over His church. Christ has established His headship over His church with the intent that He have preeminence in the church. Christ has established that preeminence in the church is a matter of divine honor. For any honor that is to be Christ’s and Christ’s alone is a divine honor. According to the Oxford English Dictionary of 2002, idolatry is defined as “The worship of idols or images ‘made with hands’; more generally, the paying or offering of divine honours to any created object.” Through the act of giving preeminence in the church to any one or any thing but Christ, the local church offers “divine honours” to a created object, for only Christ our God is not a created object. By definition, the giving of preeminence in the church to any one or any thing but Christ is to commit idolatry. Is it possible for a local church involved in idolatry to be approved of God?

Further, idolatry in the Scriptures is identified in Galatians 5:19-21 as being a work of the flesh. Galatians 5:19-21: *“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness,*

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*lasciviousness, (20) Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, sedition, heresies, (21) Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*” Paul goes on in this passage to contrast the “works of the flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit”. The phrase “works of the flesh” speaks of carnality. The word “carnal” as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary of 2002 means “1. Of or pertaining to the flesh or body, 3. fleshly, sensual, 4. Not spiritual, in a negative sense; material, temporal, secular, 5. Not spiritual, in a privative sense; unregenerate, unsanctified, worldly.” Therefore, works of the flesh, such as idolatry, are the outward expression of carnality.

Concerning carnality, the Scriptures state in Romans 8:7, *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”* Here carnality is defined as a mindset – a matter not of the external, but a matter of the internal. Only God is capable of judging what is in a man’s (or a church’s) heart and mind, but God has given man a list of the “works of the flesh” so that he may see the effects of a carnal mind. It is because man can see the outcome of a carnal mind, that Paul was able, in I Corinthians 3, to address the Corinthian church as carnal. Paul says in I Corinthians 3:1-4: *“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. (2) I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. (3) For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is*

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*among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? (4) For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"* Paul spoke to the Corinthians as a carnal people, not because he possessed a God-like ability to see into men's hearts and minds, but because he could see the works of the people and of the church. The Scripture asserts that idolatry is a work of the flesh, that works of the flesh are the outpouring of a carnal mind, and that a carnal mind is enmity against God. Is it possible for a local church with a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, to be approved by God?

Christ's preeminence over His church is vital to His approval, and the rejection of His preeminence by subjecting the local church to another authority is sin. The critical question is this: Is the establishment of a church by the state subjecting the church to an authority other than Christ?