

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Christ Given As Head To The Church

by Dan Trygg

“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Ephesians 1:22-23

Paul has been emphasizing how God “has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus”. This is the main message of this entire letter. To help us understand this, he made a list of things God has already done for us, before we ever came on the scene. These were things he determined ahead of time that He would do in the lives of those who would be “in Christ”. He decided that we would be holy and blameless, that we would be adopted as full heirs. In Christ, we have been purchased out of bondage by His blood, obtaining forgiveness and release from our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He abundantly-lavished upon us. He made known to us His previously unknown, but now revealed, desire, according to His good intention which He purposed within Himself, to sum up all things in Christ, ...both the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth. In Him, we have been given an area of calling, having been designated ahead of time according to His purpose, who is inworking all things according to the counsel of His will, in order that we, who have hoped in Christ, might be unto the praise of His glory. Basically, **God has saved us out of the darkness and brokenness of sin, and has a purpose to make our lives bring honor to Him by virtue of His inworking in and through us in the area He has called us to serve.** Having heard the message of the truth, and having trusted in Christ and choosing to serve Him, we have been marked and sealed by the Holy Spirit to be His. This is a down payment and guarantee of our inheritance and future full redemption, which will, again, be to the praise of His glory. **This is the “big picture” of what God has done, what He is doing, and what He will do for us.**

These overwhelming, expansive glimpses into God’s great grace need to be understood, embraced and internalized by us. So, in the case of the believers of his time, **Paul was praying and asking** God to give them a spirit of skill in knowing Him, and an uncovering of these hidden truths and possibilities to their awareness, so that they could discover and implement them in their lives. **He prayed for three areas: (1.) that they might know what they are called to, i.e., what they are supposed to be doing; (2.) they might perceive the allotted portion given to them as both their “field of work” and the resources given to them to accomplish His purpose; and (3.) they might know the incredible, “thrown-above-and-beyond” greatness of His active power that is available to them to accomplish His will.** These three things: our calling, our assigned area of service, and the power God is making available to us, are to be understood against the backdrop of what God did in Christ, raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand, far above any other ruler, authority, power or lordship. **Clearly, Paul wants us to expect and believe God for some “larger-than-life” things. We are to look beyond ourselves, ...our self-perception of what we are here for, the reach and impact of our lives that we might have expected for ourselves, or the limited ability that we may think we could do. He wants us to think in terms of what He can do in and with us.**

The final couple of verses in this chapter only heighten this idea even further. Unfortunately, many of us do not get the whole impact of what Paul was attempting to communicate. **The problem comes down to a faulty grasp of what the NT word for “head” means.** It looks straightforward enough, doesn’t it? God put all things in subjection under Jesus’ feet, and then gave Jesus as “head over all things” to the church. It sounds like it is all about power. Like, God made Jesus the “Boss” or “Ruler” of all things, and “gave Him to the church”. (What would *that* mean, exactly? Jesus is the “Boss” of all, ...but He has been “gifted” to the church? Does that mean that the “Boss” of all is to serve us?) While we kind of get the idea, it is somewhat murky.

The confusion comes down to a common problem in dealing with translations. Many times, a word in one language does not have the same range of meanings as a word that would seem to be a natural substitute in another language. If you look in a dictionary, it is common for a word to have several meanings. Often, there is a more literal meaning, and a number of metaphorical usages as well. **For example, the English word for “head” refers to the literal portion of our body where our brain is, and where our eyes, ears and face are. But our English word has a number of metaphorical meanings, as well.** From the literal “head”, we easily go to “head count”, where “head” can refer to whole people, not just their “brain boxes”. **We refer to the “head” of a column, referring to the “top”; or we speak of someone being the “head” of the class, meaning he or she is “first” or the “best”. We use the word to describe the “source” or “origin”, when we speak of “headwaters” of a river. We also use the word “head” to describe the top leader or “boss” of a company or group of people. In English, our word “head” can refer to someone of “superior rank”, or someone “in authority over” another person, ...someone who is the “chief”. The Hebrew word for “head” (*rō’sh* – ראש) has a very similar range of meanings as our English word does.**

BUT, and here is the key point, the NT Greek term (*kephalē* - κεφαλή) does *not*! Specifically, the Greek word, *kephalē*, does *not* mean “boss” or “authority”! Furthermore, it also has another meaning, which we don’t typically ascribe to our English word in terms of our relationship to others. *Kephalē* can also mean “source of life, origin, enabler, and one who brings another to completion.”

Well, you might ask, “How do we know that *kephalē* doesn’t mean “authority, ruler, or boss”? When I was initially made aware of this issue, this was the first question I asked. I needed to know that this was not just someone’s opinion or fanciful idea. How can we verify that this is an accurate claim? It turns out that it really is not too difficult to demonstrate. **The Hebrew word, *rō’sh*, occurs over 600 times in the Hebrew OT. About 250 BC, Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, because so many Jewish people were no longer able to read the Hebrew. They naturally substituted the Greek word, *kephalē*, wherever *rō’sh* occurred. They did this consistently, except where *rō’sh* was being used to describe a position of authority, like “chief, ruler, leader” (ca. 180x). When the translators came to situations like this, they consistently used other Greek words, which specifically meant “ruler, chief, leader or authority”. They clearly and regularly did not use *kephalē* in these passages, because they felt that it did not mean “boss, chief, ruler or authority.” It is important to see the consistency of this. This did not just happen in one or two incidents, or even a handful. The translators avoided using *kephalē* in place of *rō’sh* in 180 passages where the Hebrew word, *rō’sh*, was used to describe a position of leadership or authority, and they used a different Greek word in those contexts. The Greek word *kephalē* clearly does *not* mean “boss, chief, leader or authority”. So, when we read our New Testaments, we need to be careful *not* to read our English ideas of authority into these passages. We are not faithfully interpreting the text, if we do that. We are reading a foreign idea into the text.**

So, how does this change what Paul is saying in Ephesians 1? Clearly, God wants us to see and acknowledge the power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above and beyond every other power and lordship. Jesus was dead. Now, however, not only has He been raised above and beyond all other authorities, God Himself has subordinated all things to Him. Christ is preeminent. All things are under His authority. That much is indisputable. It is the next part we tend to misunderstand.

God “gave Him as Head....” What does that mean? It is a metaphorical use of the word, not referring to a literal “head”. It doesn’t mean “Boss, Ruler, or Authority”. What could it mean that would fit this context? God gave Christ as the Source of Life, ...the Empowerer and Enabler, ...the One who can and will bring us to completion.

The word translated as “over” in this verse does not typically mean that. First, of the 152 times the English word “over” occurs in the NASB, Eph. 1:22 is the *only* time the Greek word in this grammatical structure is translated that way. Second, of the 150 times that this Greek preposition occurs in the NT, there are 15 times where it is in the same grammatical structure as in this sentence (Matt. 10:24,37; Lk. 6:40; 16:8; Acts 26:15; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 11:23; 12:6,13; Gal. 1:14; Eph. 3:20; Phil. 2:9; Philem. 1:6,21; Heb. 4:12). When you work through these passages, it becomes clear that the prevailing meaning is “beyond, more than”. If we try that definition here, we have “God gave Him as Head (the Source, Empowerer, Enabler and One who brings others to completion) beyond or more than all things...” Whatever anything or anyone else in all creation could offer to us, Christ the Supreme and Preeminent power has *more*.

The word, “head”, is a functional term. That means that we can have more than one person in our life that may have this role, in different parts of our lives. While we have only one physical head on our body, we may have a number of people in our lives who invest in us, help us, encourage us and guide us to our potential.

Christ, however, can do this above and beyond what any other so-called “resource” or “power” might be able to offer. And God, ...our Great Blessing-Giving God..., has given the Preeminent, Risen-and-Exalted Jesus to be our Source, our Supply, our Empowerer, Enabler, and the One who will bring us to completion.

Do you see how well this fits the context? We were talking about coming to perceive our calling, our inheritance (field of work), and the power that God has for us, ...and then God has Paul drop *this* word picture on us! Christ, who has been risen and exalted above all, and to whom God is arranging everything under His feet, ...He is the One who has been given to us to be our Source, Empowerer and the One who will lead us to completion. He is given as our “Head”, and we, the church, are “His body”. He will use this word picture again, but just as our natural heads take on the responsibility of caring for our physical comfort, health and well-being, so Christ will fulfill that function in a much greater way for the Church. As His body, we are “the fullness (full-measure or full-expression) of the One filling all things in every way.” As “the Church”, this is a corporate reality. God wants Jesus to be expressed and seen through the corporate life of His people. The company of the “called-out ones” is to become something “together”. It is like Romans 12:1, “I beseech y’all, by the mercies of God, to present the bodies of y’all to be a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God.” Individually, we present ourselves to be a corporate entity, a living community of people who are laying their lives down together, in service to one another and dedication to God. In a similar way, Christ has called us, assigned us our areas of endeavor, and is willing to be our Life, Power and Leader to accomplish the will of God. As we do this together, Jesus fills us all, and His grace and truth become uniquely visible to others.