

## HEAD – SOURCE OR LEADER?

There is a divide in the body of Christ as to whether the Greek word “kephale” [head]<sup>[1]</sup>, used figuratively, means “source/origin/first/beginning” or “leader/ruler/chief/authority”. However, from looking at the context of passages in Scripture that use “kephale” figuratively, it is clear to me that its meaning is “source/origin/first/beginning”. It is also important to note that the “Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance” (1990) lists one of the definitions of “kephale” to be “the point of origin”. In this section, I will go over three passages of Scripture where the figurative meaning of “head” is used, so that we can see for ourselves whether the context better fits the meaning of “s/o/f/b” or “l/r/c/a”. I would like to begin with Colossians 1: 15-18 <sup>NASB</sup>. It reads:

15“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

Now as you can see, I have underlined certain words in this passage because these words show the central theme of this passage. Therefore, I would like to go over each underlined word, starting in verse fifteen with the word “firstborn”, so that we can fully understand this passage as Paul meant it to be understood. Now, to begin, the word “firstborn” was a very common word used in Paul’s day. And without exception, it always referred to the child who was born “first” or to the oldest child. The firstborn child marked the “beginning” of one’s family. The firstborn child came into the world “before” all of their siblings. The firstborn child was the “first” in chronological order and arrangement, from the firstborn to the youngest. Therefore, just as the firstborn child is the “first” of all their siblings in chronological order and arrangement, so too, Christ is the “first” of all creation in chronological order and arrangement. This is why Paul then says, in verses 16-17, that all things were created by Christ and that He is before all things. Indeed, if Christ created all things, then nothing could come before Him; He would be the “first” in chronological order and arrangement of all creation. So Christ marked the beginning. He preceded creation. He was before creation. He is the Alpha. He is first. And this is what Paul meant when he said that Christ is the “firstborn” of all creation.

Now many people try to apply the meaning of “supreme status” to the word “firstborn” in verse fifteen. However, in doing so they are giving this word an atypical meaning and are using it in a way that was not used in Paul’s day. For when the word “firstborn” is used in Scripture it never refers to the child with the “highest status”. Again, it always refers to the child who was born “first”. Even when the rights of the firstborn were given to a younger child, the younger child was still not referred to as the “firstborn”. Likewise, when the firstborn child was stripped of their status and rights, they were still referred to as the “firstborn”. (See 1 Chronicles 5: 1-3.) Now indeed, we know that Christ is of supreme status over all things as is evident throughout Scripture, but again, that is not the thought that Paul is trying to convey in this passage. Again, in this passage Paul is trying to convey the thought that Christ is the “first” of all creation in chronological order and arrangement. Therefore, those who apply the meaning of “supreme status” to the word “firstborn” are misapplying the meaning of the word.

Now to confirm that I have applied the correct meaning to the word “firstborn” in verse fifteen, I would now like to go over the word “firstborn” in the other place that it is found in this passage, verse eighteen. Again, it reads, <sup>18</sup>“...and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” Now, when we look at the way that Paul uses the word “firstborn” in this verse, it is quite apparent that he is making the point that Christ is the “first” One to rise from the dead in chronological order and arrangement, especially since he uses it in conjunction with the word “beginning”. Paul is not making the point that Christ is the “most supreme” One to rise from the dead (although true). Now in light of this, would Paul use the word “firstborn” two different ways in this passage? Indeed, he would not. Paul undoubtedly uses the word “firstborn” the same way in each verse. Furthermore, Paul had previously made the same argument, that Christ is the “first” to rise from the dead in chronological order and arrangement, in 1 Corinthians 15: 20-23; however, in this passage Paul referred to Christ as the “firstfruits”. And the “firstfruits”, in like manner, always referred to the “first” ripened produce of one’s crops. Consequently, since Paul is using the word “firstborn” in verse eighteen to symbolize that Christ is the “first” to rise from the dead in chronological order and arrangement, we can assert with confidence that Paul is also using the word “firstborn” in verse fifteen to symbolize that Christ is the “first” of all creation in chronological order and arrangement. Indeed, Paul is bringing into view the fact that Christ is the “first” in chronological order and arrangement in everything.

Now that we have established the correct meaning of the word “firstborn”, I would like to review this passage as a whole so that we can see the central theme of this passage and then properly conclude what Paul meant when he said that Christ is also “head” of the body, the church, in verse eighteen.

Note: The highlighted words define the underlined words.

<sup>15</sup>“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” (Christ is the “**first**” of all creation in chronological order and arrangement.)

<sup>16</sup>“For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.” (Christ is the “**source**”, the “**origin**” of all things.)

<sup>17</sup>“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (Christ is the “**beginning**” and the sustainer of all things.)

<sup>18</sup>“He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” (Christ is the “**beginning**”, the “**first**” in chronological order and arrangement to be raised from the dead, so that He Himself will be “**first**” in chronological order and arrangement in everything.)

So, if we notice the highlighted words we can see that the whole theme of this passage, from beginning to end, is that Christ is the “first,” the “source”, the “origin”, the “beginning” of all things. Therefore, when Paul states in verse eighteen that Christ is also head of the body, the church, Paul is keeping with the central theme of this passage and he is saying that Christ is the “source/origin/first/beginning” of the body, the church. Otherwise, his statement regarding the church lacks continuity with the rest of the passage. Therefore, it is clear by this passage that “head”, used figuratively in the Greek, means “source/origin/first/beginning”. Truly, Christ is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end in everything.

Now the second passage that I would like to go over where the word “head” is used figuratively is Acts 4: 11 <sup>NASB</sup>. It reads, <sup>11</sup>“He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, *but* WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*.” (Note: The Greek literally reads as, <sup>11</sup>“...WHICH BECAME THE HEAD, WHICH IS THE CORNER.” The NASB translators have translated the word “head” as “chief” and have added the word “stone”.) Now, in beginning this passage I would like to say that when Peter speaks metaphorically of Christ, he is referencing the “cornerstone” of a building, not the “capstone” as some translations have rendered. For it is written in Isaiah, <sup>16</sup>“...Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly **cornerstone for the foundation**, firmly placed.” (Isaiah 28: 16 <sup>NASB</sup>) Hence, the question is, “What is the cornerstone of a building?” Well, by definition, the cornerstone is the “first” stone set (laid at a corner) in the construction of a masonry foundation in which all other stones are set in reference to it, thus determining the position of the entire structure.<sup>[2]</sup> And as we can well see in this passage (Acts 4: 1-12), the builders (the rulers and elders) rejected Christ because they wanted to lay their

own foundation for what they deemed was righteous. However, Peter tells them that Christ, being the first to be raised from the dead by God, is the “first” stone laid in which all other stones (believers) are set in reference to Him, thus determining the position of the entire structure (the church). In other words, Peter is informing the rulers and elders that they are not the foundation for the church, but rather that Christ is the foundation for the church, because there is salvation in no one else. As a result, a translation of “CORNERSTONE” (or “FIRST CORNER”) would be correct; however, the translation of “CHIEF CORNER *stone*” is incorrect because it gives the false impression that there are numerous cornerstones. But indeed, there is only “one” cornerstone set in each structure — and that’s the “first” stone which is set. Therefore, “head” in this passage means “first”.

Now, to better understand the next passage, namely the metaphorical picture that Paul is painting for the saints at Colossae, we need to understand “head” (when it is defined as “source”) in a twofold manner as they did. And a good way to do this is to picture a water tower. A water tower is an elevated tank used for water storage and for maintaining equalized pressure on a water system.<sup>[3]</sup> And the “source” of water that is kept at the elevated height is actually called the “head”. (Note: This is where we get the term “head pressure”. Head pressure is the same as discharge pressure/water pressure.) Furthermore, the head “supplies” (and maintains) all of the pipes and waterways that go to each home. So the head is the **source** of the water and the head **supplies** the water to each home. In similar fashion, we can also picture the head/body relationship of a person. The head of each person is the “source” of where the oxygen, water and food come from. And the head “supplies” oxygen, water and food to the body so that it can grow and thrive.

The third and final passage that I would like to go over where the word “head” is used figuratively is Colossians 2: 19 <sup>NASB</sup>. It reads, 19“...and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.” So in this passage, we can plainly see that the head [Christ] is supplying the body [the church] so that it can grow and thrive. For in just the same way as the “head” of a water tower supplies all of the pipes and waterways that go to each home, and the “head” of a person supplies oxygen and nourishment to their own body, so also, Christ, being our “head”, supplies each member of His body. He is our “source” and He “supplies” us. Therefore, “head” in this passage means “source”.

## **HEAD - SOURCE/ORIGIN/FIRST/BEGINNING**

<sup>15</sup>“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [first in chronological order and arrangement] of all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>He is also head [source/origin/first/beginning] of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn [first in chronological order and arrangement] from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

(Colossians 1: 15-18)

<sup>11</sup>“He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE HEAD [FIRST], WHICH IS THE CORNER.”

(Acts 4: 11)

<sup>19</sup>“...and not holding fast to the head [source], from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”

(Colossians 2: 19)

## **References**

<sup>1</sup>Goodrick, E. W., & Kohlenberger III, J. R. (1990). *Strongest NIV exhaustive concordance*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>2</sup>Cornerstone. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved July 1, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornerstone>

<sup>3</sup>Agnes, M. (Ed.). (2006). *Webster's new world college dictionary* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). Cleveland, OH: Wiley Publishing, Inc.