Constructing Euodia and Syntyche: Philippians 4:2–3 and the Informed Imagination

Robert F. Hull Jr.

On the Significance of Kephalē (“Head”): A Study of the Abuse of One Greek Word

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Book Review:
Finding Their Voices: Sermons by Women in the Churches of Christ, ed. by D’Esta Love

Dawn Gentry
In February of 2007, I attended CBE’s conference in Bangalore, India. The day after the conference, Mimi Haddad and I, together with a few other conference attendees, went out to explore the city. At the entrance to an indoor marketplace, an Indian woman—apparently a beggar—gestured to me in a manner I did not understand. She was seated on the ground, pointing upward with an open hand. Assuming she wanted money, I began fishing in my pockets for rupees. She perceived what I was doing, closed her hand, and pointed more vigorously. After a few awkward moments, I realized she was pointing at pigeons overhead. Then, when she knew I had seen the pigeons, she pointed at their droppings on the pavement. She wasn’t asking for my help; she was giving me a warning!

I think of her the first day of each semester that I teach the course, “Paul and His Letters.” I begin that course by asking students to think of someone they have met who is especially different from themselves. Answers range from difficult roommates to Maasai warriors. My own answer to the question is the Indian woman who kindly warned me about the pigeons. After fielding various answers, I make two points.

First, the Apostle Paul is more different from us than anyone we have met. Even though I am strikingly different from that Indian woman, we both understand much about twenty-first-century life that Paul would not. Paul, for example, did not know about jet planes or cell phones, English or Hindi, or four of the seven continents. This point is essential for studying Paul’s letters, for far too many Christians make the mistake of considering Paul to be a lot like themselves.

Second, I also make the point that—in spite of the differences of century, language, and culture—we can indeed understand Paul. With a bit of difficulty, I was able to understand the Indian woman’s message about the pigeons. And, albeit with a bit more difficulty, we can indeed understand Paul’s messages about grace, glory, faith, forgiveness, equality, etc.

This issue of Priscilla Papers is themed “Paul in Context.” Its articles interpret Pauline texts while taking seriously Pauline contexts. Neither biblical studies, nor Christian ministry, nor evangelical egalitarianism benefits from considering Paul apart from his context.

Robert F. Hull opens the issue with an investigation of Euodia and Syntyche, mentioned by Paul in Philippians 4:2. Dr. Hull has deftly navigated scholarship on the first-century Macedonian context of these two Christian servants. Richard Cervin then judiciously addresses the linguistic context of Paul’s use of the word kephalē (“head”). Caroline Schleier Cutler, co-winner of CBE’s 2015 student paper competition in Los Angeles, adds to our understanding of Galatians 3:28 by framing it with Paul’s understanding of inheritance as expressed in Galatians and Romans. Finally, Dawn Gentry, a member of CBE’s blog team, offers a review of the 2015 book, Finding Their Voices: Sermons by Women in the Churches of Christ, edited by D’Esta Love.

...greet you in the Lord.
Constructing Euodia and Syntyche: Philippians 4:2–3 and the Informed Imagination

Robert F. Hull Jr.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. (Phil 4:2–3 NRSV)

Of Provocation and Frustration

This essay was provoked by a sermon I heard more than twenty-five years ago. The preacher was a better-than-average homilectician with his Master of Divinity from a quality seminary. In dealing with the theme of unity and discord within the church, he took as an example, Euodia and Syntyche, “or,” he said, “as I prefer to call them, ‘You’re-Odious’ and ‘Sure-Touchy.’” I thought it a pretty creative laugh line, whether the preacher invented the names or not. At the same time, I found it troubling. It is the only comment I remember from the sermon, probably because I had by that time encountered many exemplary women students struggling to be taken seriously both by their male counterparts in seminary and the churches they hoped to serve. Even a cursory reading of the Letter to the Philippians had made it clear to me that, whatever the nub of the problem was between these two co-workers of Paul, it should not be trivialized into a “cat fight” or a “hen fight” between a couple of prickly women.1 There had to have been more at stake than personal issues.

At the same time, it is enormously difficult to say exactly what was at stake and why Paul found it necessary in such a short letter to “call out” two women before the whole congregation. Everything we know about them and their situation is divulged in only thirty-eight words. The history of the exegesis of these thirty-eight words is a record of both the ingenuity and the desperation of interpreters of the text. In the brief survey that follows, my goal is to sift out from the efforts of this train of interpreters what I regard as the most probable construction of Euodia and Syntyche of Philippi. I use the word “construction” rather than “reconstruction” advisedly, with an appreciative nod to Dale Allison and his book Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History. Influenced by modern memory studies, Allison avers that, with the best will in the world and the most sophisticated analysis of the data available, we can never reconstruct the past; rather, we select, arrange, and interpret the information we have such that we construct, not only the past, but even our memories of our own past.2 If this is true even of characters about whom we have dozens of stories and documents, how much more is it the case with figures we know only by means of a few lines in an ancient letter.

At the same time, because women get comparatively so little attention in the literature of earliest Christianity, it is critically important to attend to texts in which they are mentioned as active in the mission and expansion of the church. When we begin to notice such texts, we can never read the New Testament in the same way. For example, as Mark Goodacre points out, we can read the Gospel of Mark almost to the end without realizing that there were women accompanying Jesus and his male disciples; finally we come to Mark 15:40–41, where we find at the cross “women looking on from a distance; among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provide for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem” (NRSV). Once we have read this detail, we would be wise to imagine women among the disciples in every Markan scene in Galilee.3 The efforts of scholars, especially feminists, to give a voice to the silent partners of Paul and to tell their stories is important, but we have to remember that we, not these silent women, are the writers of the stories we tell, and it is our voices, not theirs, that we use in the telling. This requires the use of imagination, yes, but a disciplined and well-informed imagination.4

Euodias and Syntyches?

Some ways of interpreting Phil 4:2–3 either minimize the importance of Euodia and Syntyche in the congregation or write them out of the story altogether. William Tyndale (1534) rendered both terms as masculine (“Euodias” and “Sintiches”). The Authorized Version (KJV) follows Tyndale for “Euodias,” but not for Syntyche, perhaps supposing the two were a married couple. One could be excused for suspecting a masculine bias on the part of the translators. A masculine form of each of the names is known from the inscriptions, Greek sources yielding the spelling Euōdos5 and one Latin inscription attesting to Sintichus.6 One would not expect the transliterations used in Tyndale and the AV, however, for either of these forms; moreover, the two are then referred to by the feminine pronoun autais and the feminine relative haitines (v. 3). The matter is not so simple, however, because Tyndale construes v. 2 as standing alone, such that “Euodias and Sintiches” do not serve as the antecedent of autais and the relative haitines. He translates “I praye Evodias, and beseche Sintiches that they may be of one accorde in the lorde. Yee and I beseche the faythfull Y ockfelowe, helpe the autais and the relaitve haitines.” Thus he has in mind, on the one hand, two quarreling men, and on the other hand, some women who labored with Paul in the gospel. Similarly, the AV understands “Euodias” and Syntyche to be referred to only in v.2, with some unidentified “women who laboured with me in the Gospel” as the referents in v. 3. It is, of course, possible that Tyndale and the translators of the AV were influenced by a masculine bias that inclined them to think that, if two persons were important enough in the church for Paul to address them by name, at least one of them must certainly be male. Although neither translation is troubled by the reality that some women labored with Paul in
the Gospel, the circumstance that these women are not identified with the two named persons marginalizes the latter as just two persons who had a disagreement. And the grammatical construal that underwrites their translations seems quite unnatural.7 There is also a minor textual variant that could have the effect of demoting Euodia and Syntyche from the rank of sunergōi: At 4:3 Codex Sinaiticus and P16 (POxy 2009) read “Clement and my co-workers and the rest” (Klēmentos kai tôn sunergón mou kai tôn loipón), rather than “Clement and the rest of my co-workers.” In my judgment this is almost certainly an inadvertent scribal error, not an “antifeminist” alteration.

It’s All About Euodia and Syntyche

At the other extreme, rather than limiting the place of Euodia and Syntyche, some scholars magnify their importance so far as to find in their disagreement the main purpose of the letter. On the basis of a literary study of Philippians, David E. Garland judges that the Philippian church was crippled by internal disputes and conflicts. He writes, “It is my contention that Paul carefully and covertly wove his argument to lead up to the impassioned summons in 4:2. He wrote primarily to defuse the dispute between these two women that was having disastrous repercussions for the unity of the church.”9 Nils Dahl attaches a similar importance to the disagreement between the two women,10 as does Boyd Luter.11 The most thoroughgoing analysis of the letter as a response to conflict is the 1992 Aberdeen dissertation of Davorin Peterlin. Peterlin discerns allusions to disagreements about theodicy, prompted by Paul’s sufferings (1:12–26) and pagan social pressure against the church (1:27–30). He conjectures a “pro-Paul party” and an “anti-Paul party,” led, respectively, by Euodia and Syntyche, arguing that the question of Paul’s financial support was a source of controversy between these two putative “parties.”12

The value of these studies has been to draw attention to recurring emphases on unity, humility, and selflessness in the letter, such that Paul’s entreaty to the two women may be coherently related to a central theme, rather than based on a personal “feud” between the two. Against those who doubt the literary unity and integrity of the letter,13 the above studies focus on the unifying elements. Nevertheless, I do not believe those readings of the letter that identify community discord as the precipitating purpose can bear the weight imposed upon them. To be sure, the situation addressed by Paul in Philippians, such that Paul’s entreaty to the two women may be an adequate account of Paul’s chronology and ministry without the help of Acts, it is methodologically questionable simply to turn to Acts to construct the identity of persons mentioned in Philippians, but not in the narrative of Acts itself.19

The Macedonian Connection

By far the area of research most frequently exploited for its potential to help in constructing the identities of Euodia and Syntyche has to do with the social status and religious participation of women in Macedonia. Among contemporary commentators, the typical point of entry is a two-page summary found in Tarn and Griffith’s Hellenistic Civilization, beginning with this choice comment: “If Macedonia produced perhaps the most competent group of men the world had yet seen, the women were in all respects the men’s counterparts. . . .”20 The authors go on to mention Macedonian women who were prominent in government, military affairs, civic patronage, and religious cults, adding: “From the Macedonian courts, (relative) freedom broadened down to the Greek home; and those women who desired emancipation—probably a minority—were able to obtain it in considerable measure.”21 One finds references to these pages in commentary after commentary.22

Thirty years before Tarn and Griffith, J. B. Lightfoot had already called attention in his commentary to a number of funerary and monumental inscriptions from Macedonia in which women appear to be prominent, remarking, “The extant Macedonian inscriptions seem to assign to the sex a higher social influence than is common among civilised nations of antiquity.”23 A few years later William M. Ramsay expressed a similar opinion, including Asia Minor along with Macedonia as favorable to the advancement of women.24 Scholars of today who take the trouble to cite primary sources seldom, if ever, go...
beyond these same nine inscriptions culled by Lightfoot from the *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecorum.*

The most focused and extensive effort to relate the Philippian letter to the women of Macedonia, and specifically Philippi, is the doctoral dissertation of Lilian Portefaix, published under the title, *Sisters Rejoice: Paul’s Letter to the Philippians and Luke-Acts as Received by First-Century Philippian Women.* She surveys archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources in order to reconstruct the socio-cultural and religious backgrounds of women in Philippi at the time when the letter would have been received. She holds that these sources attest to a high visibility of religious cults holding special attraction for women. These findings undergird her reading of Philippians, which is based on “reception theory,” as set forth in the work of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. She interprets the letter according to the “horizon of expectations” (*Erwartungshorizont*) of the first two generations of women who became members of the Philippian church. Because Philippian women already had a keen interest in religious matters (as shown by the sources she has surveyed), they would have responded positively to Paul’s portrayal of the church as a “celestial citizenship” (*Phil 3:20; cf. 1:27*) where women stood on equal ground with men. That Philippian women were ready to make sacrifices for religion also inclined them favorably to Paul’s designation of himself and Timothy as “slaves” of Jesus Christ (*1:1*) and to the portrayal of Jesus himself as one who “took the form of a slave” (*2:7*). She writes, “The picture Paul gives of Syntyche and Euodia as struggling in the cause of the gospel (*Phil 4:3*) accords with the one we already have of Philippian women’s interest in religious matters.”

A broader concentration on the religious interests and practices of the women of Philippi is Valerie A. Abrahamsen’s *Women and Worship at Philippi: Diana/Artemis and other Cults in the Early Christian Era.* A self-described feminist study, the book offers a detailed analysis of the archaeological evidence for religious cults at or near Philippi up through the Byzantine period of many of the social strictures on women throughout the Roman world. *Prisca* (Priscilla) was, along with her husband, a noted teacher and leader of house churches in Corinth (*Acts 18:2–3*), Ephesus (*Acts 19:24–26*), and Rome (*Rom 16:3–5*); the two had “risked their necks” for Paul. Junia and her husband (or brother?) were called “noteworthy apostles” (*Rom 16:7*); they were kinfolk of Paul and converts even before him. Nympha was leader of a house church in Colossae (*Col 4:15*). If a socio-cultural explanation of the leadership of women in the Pauline churches is needed, we are on firmer ground simply pointing to a general “loosening up” during the late Republican and early Imperial period of many of the social strictures on women throughout the Roman world.

**What Can We Say About Euodia and Syntyche?**

What is the picture we can draw of them by means of a disciplined imagination? They were surely Greeks, the Greek name “Euodia,” meaning “Good Journey,” and “Syntyche,” meaning “Good Luck.” Even Paul’s address to each of the women separately—“I encourage Euodia and I encourage Syntyche”—seems to accord...
them, or at least their disagreement, special status. It is fair to surmise that they were leading figures in the congregation at Philippi, having “struggled in the gospel” (sunéthlēsan) with Paul (4:3).

That they are included “with Clement and the rest” of Paul’s “co-workers” (sunergoi, v. 3) underscores their status as missionaries, with the same standing as Paul’s male associates. Paul uses the term sunergos in his letters to refer to twenty different persons who carried out what we would today call “ministry” or “mission,” whether itinerant or local. Included are such notables as Apollos (1 Cor 3:9), Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3–4), Silas (1 Thess 3:2), Timothy (Rom 16:21), and Titus (2 Cor 8:23). He never uses the term “believers in general.”39 In 2:25–29, where Paul commends the ministry of Epaphroditus, his “co-worker and fellow-soldier,” he says the readers should “hold in esteem all such ones,” presumably including Euodia and Syntyche.40 We need not infer that Euodia and Syntyche did their work “in the gospel” in the marketplace or on the street corner, since ordinary Greek women, even in Macedonia, had quite limited opportunities to operate freely in a public setting, particularly if they engaged in teaching;41 but the power and influence of women within the home—including house churches—would have been considerable.42

It is certainly possible that they were leaders of two house churches, but nothing in the letter actually suggests this.43 It is also possible, as many scholars have noted, that the two were among the diakonoi addressed in Phil 1:1.44 Indeed, Peterlin concludes, following a quite sophisticated argument, that they were deacons (i.e., having a local church ministry similar to that of Phoebe in Corinth [Rom 16:1–2]).45 In my judgment, his construction of the status and function of diakonoi in the Pauline churches is more detailed and specific than warranted by the textual references.

As to the cause(s) of their disagreement, I do not believe we have enough evidence to identify precisely what it was they were quarreling about, although I believe it is reasonable to conclude that it was related to wider tensions within the whole church, as I have noted above.

The injunction in 4:2 for Euodia and Syntyche “to think the same (to auto fronein)” points back to the similar injunction to the whole community in 2:2 “that you (pl.) think the same (hina to auto fronēte),” a plea that is reinforced by the following participial phrase “being of one mind” (to hen fronōuntes). References to forms of fronein in both positive (2:5, 3:15) and negative senses (3:15, 19) draw the reader’s attention to disagreements within the church, but do not allow us to pinpoint the problems.

Finally, I think it is important to emphasize the function of these women as both positive and negative examples in the letter. Rhetorically, the letter contrasts models of behavior by those who are friends of the gospel (Paul [1:12–26], Timothy [2:19–24], Epaphroditus [2:25–30]) and those who are enemies of the gospel (those who preach “from envy and rivalry” [1:15]; “opponents” of the Philippians [2:28]; “dogs, evil workers” [3:1–2]; “enemies of the cross of Christ” [3:18–19]).46 Euodia and Syntyche cannot neatly be slotted into either list. They are negative examples, because they do not “think the same in the Lord” (4:2). At the same time, they are positive examples because they have “struggled together with [Paul] in the gospel” (4:3), which is precisely what Paul indicated in 1:27 as his hope for all the Philippians (“with one soul struggling together for the faith of the gospel, mia psuchē sunathlōuntes tē pistei tōu euaggelīou). But note that Paul ends on a positive note, aligning the two “with Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the book of life” (4:3).

This little exercise has uncovered no striking new evidence, framed no new theory about the place of Euodia and Syntyche in the Philippian church and in Paul’s ministry. If my imagination is more restrained than that of some of the scholars whose work I have reviewed, it is because I long ago took as a guiding premise Jacob Neusner’s dictum: “What we cannot show, we do not know.”47 But I hope I have shown that, on any reading, these two women have earned a place of honor in the roster of Paul’s companions in ministry and in the life of the church at Philippi.

Notes

3. See podacre.blogspot.com, NT Pod 65.
4. In the following, I do not deal with the question of the literary integrity of the letter. I am persuaded by the arguments in favor of integrity (David E. Garland, “The Composition and Unity of Philippians: Some Neglected Literary Factors,” NovT 27, no. 2 [1985]: 141–73 and Jeffrey T. Reed, A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity [JSNTSup 136; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997]), but the debate has little bearing on one’s interpretation of 4:2–3.
6. MM 615, citing only CIL XII, 4703.
7. It is noteworthy, however, that both translations read “Junia” at Rom 16:7, which argues against a masculine bias.
8. This is a “subsingular” reading; i.e. the scribes of the two MSS in question independently made the same error.
13. For a summary of partition theories, see Reed, Discourse Analysis, 124–52.
15. Zahn, Introduction, 522. There is inscriptional evidence for “Lydia” as an ethnic cognomen.
16. Paul Ewald, Der Brief des Paulus an die Philippiner, in Str-B 11:212. He notes also (216) the possibility that the Clement of v. 3 might be the name of the jailer of Acts 16:27–34.
19. J. Paul Sampley points to the related practice of interpreting one of Paul’s letters in a way that makes certain there is no disagreement


22. To mention only three, see Gordon Fee, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 391; Ralph P. Martin, Philippians (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976), 8; Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, Philippians and Philemon (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2005), 19. Each of these scholars quotes at least a portion of the “choice comment” mentioned above from Tarn and Griffith, Hellenistic Civilization, 98.

23. Lightfoot, Philippians, 56.


31. Many commentaries mistakenly suppose that Lydia must have been connected with the expensive purple dye extracted from a shellfish and controlled by Imperial monopoly. There were two other, less expensive, types of purple dye, the most common derived from the madder root. We have no basis for determining which kind Lydia was less expensive, types of purple dye, the most common derived from the madder root. We have no basis for determining which kind Lydia was involved in as a dealer. See NewDocs 3, 53–54.


35. I regard the old debate about whether to read “Junia” (female) or “Junias” (male) as now settled. See Eldon Jay Epp, Junia: The First Woman Apostle (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).


38. A few manuscripts read Euòdia, meaning “sweet-smelling” or “fragrant.”


41. Winter, Roman Wives, 115–16.

42. For the opinion of Celsus and other cultured pagans about how the workshop-home promoted the work of evangelism by women see Margaret Y. MacDonald, Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). That such pagan portrayals may reflect an idealized notion of the social invisibility of women in the wider world is suggested by Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), esp. ch. 10.

43. Carolyn Osiek, Philippians, Philemon (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 111–12, opines that the two were episkopoi (1:1), not in the later technical sense of officeholders, but as “heads of local house churches.”

44. See Lightfoot, Philippians, 158, and many other commentators.

45. Peterlin, 106–11, 123. Using Phoebe as a model for what the ministry of Euodia and Syntyche must have been is explaining one unknown by another, for, pace Peterlin, we cannot say precisely what is implied in Paul’s commendation of her as “diakonos of the church in Cenchrea” (Rom 16:1); but see J. David Miller, “What Can We Say about Phoebe?” Priscilla Papers 25, no. 2 (2011): 16–21.


On the Significance of *Kephalē* (“Head”): A Study of the Abuse of One Greek Word

Richard S. Cervin

There has been, and continues to be, a great deal of confusion, consternation, and perhaps grief, over the meaning of the Greek word *kephalē* (“head”) in the NT. Some claim that the word means “source”; others claim that it means “authority over”; still others have different ideas regarding the meaning of this Greek word. A great deal of ink has been spilled defending this or that position while attacking the others, yet the debate continues. There are many issues related to the understanding of words in general (semantics), and to *kephalē* in particular, that have either been ignored, downplayed, or misconstrued by various proponents of the meaning of *kephalē* in the NT. Essentially, traditionalists argue that *kephalē* means “authority over” whereas egalitarians argue that the meaning of this Greek word is “source.” Authors on both sides of this debate have committed errors in the form of arguments used, in the method of semantic analysis, as well as in the citation of their primary Greek sources. In this article, I will review some general principles of semantic analysis and some other related background issues which bear on the meaning of *kephalē* in the NT. I will also discuss how the Septuagint (the translation of the Hebrew OT into Greek in the third to second centuries BC) and some other Greek authors (notably Plato, Plutarch, and Philo) have been misappropriated in the discussion of *kephalē*. Because there are so many various passages in Greek literature which have been invoked as “proof” for this or that side in the debate, I cannot possibly review them all. Rather, I have selected only certain passages for discussion in order to illustrate the points I wish to make.

1. Issues Pertaining to Methodology

It is widely understood by linguists, lexicographers, and philosophers that words do not have one and only one meaning: they have several meanings, some of them quite distinct. Words have a variety of denotations (things they represent) as well as connotations (implied or associated meanings).

One of the many problems that are characteristic of some of the studies about *kephalē* in the NT is that some modern authors have confused possible or proposed connotations with denotations. Some claim that “source” is the primary denotation of *kephalē*; others that “ruler,” “leader,” or “authority over,” is primary. Let me illustrate the problem of denotations and connotations by discussing briefly the meanings of these words in English. It will naturally be easier for English speakers to understand my point in English rather than in Greek.

We may speak of God the Creator as the source of the universe because he created the universe and everything in it; he is its originator. However, the English word “source” does not always connote origin or beginning. The source of a river is its surface beginning point and is not necessarily the same as its origin. A river’s actual origin may in fact be underground and miles away from its apparent source. Similarly, the sources I used in writing this article consist in the books and articles, both Greek and English, that I consulted, but they are not the origin of my ideas and thoughts on this topic. Also, the English words origin and beginning are not always equivalent. The origin of a book, movie, or play is not the same thing as its beginning.

Likewise, the English word leader does not ipso facto possess the connotation of authority although such a connotation may be present, or even required, in a given context. Also, the English words ruler and leader are not equivalent. In English, ruler carries the connotation of governing in a political sense, whereas leader need not carry such a connotation. The relationship between the two terms is partitive: all rulers are leaders, but not all leaders are rulers. Lead(er) may denote someone/thing who is first (e.g., with reference to a parade); or it may denote a guide (e.g., to lead the way through a forest); or it may denote a main or prominent part (e.g., a leading part in a play) or a prominent person who is foremost in a given field of expertise (e.g., Gordon D. Fee as a leading theologian). In none of these examples can the term lead(er) be replaced with rule(r). One does not rule through the forest; the leader of a parade is not its ruler; and Fee is not a ruling theologian. Choosing to translate *kephalē* into English as “source,” “originator,” “ruler,” “leader,” “chief,” “authority over,” or whatever, is potentially misleading in English because these English words are neither exact equivalents of each other nor of the word *kephalē*. These English words possess various connotations which may or may not be present in the Greek word *kephalē*. The danger here is alleging that an English connotation is necessarily present in the Greek word because that Greek word can be translated by a certain English word. Connotations often do not translate from one language to another.

Moreover, in the NT when Christ is called *kephalē*, the word is used as a metaphor: “A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison.” This is important because some modern authors have disregarded the use of *kephalē* as a metaphor. In their zeal to “prove” that “source” or “authority” is a legitimate meaning of *kephalē* in extra-biblical Greek, some have provided citations of *kephalē* in other Greek authors where the actual use of *kephalē* is in fact literal, not metaphorical at all. One cannot prove that a metaphorical use of a word is legitimate by citing literal uses of that word. The English word *chair* is an interesting parallel. One the one hand, chair denotes the thing that you sit on; on the other hand, chair as a metaphor also denotes the leader (but not ruler) of a department or board (another metaphor). *Chair* is in fact an abbreviated form of *chairman*, chairwoman, *chairperson* and is common in English. Every college and university in the country has departments and every corporation has boards, and there is a designated chair (not the thing, but the person) for each one. Using a word such as chair (or *kephalē*) literally does not make it into a metaphor, which by definition is an extension of the literal use of a word.
Another problem that some modern writers have had in their discussions of kephalē is that they have disregarded the periods of Greek literature. Greek is a living language, and as with all languages, it has undergone considerable change over the centuries. Modern Greek is considerably different from ancient Greek. All languages change with respect to grammar, word forms, and meanings. In fact, there was considerable change even in ancient Greek. Thus, arguments which may appear significant or convincing to readers who have little or no grounding in ancient Greek literature are in fact either misleading at best or downright deceptive at worst. For this reason, one cannot simply lump “ancient Greek” together as a single entity, especially since the term “ancient Greek” covers a vast period of time, about 1,500 years. Languages change a great deal during such a time period, and Greek did as well. The Greek of Homer (eighth to ninth centuries BC) is considerably different from Plato’s (c. 429–347 BC) which is also very different from St. Paul’s (first century AD). One cannot therefore assume that a particular Greek word has the same meaning in the NT as it does in Homer or even in Plato (or any other author of a different time period), and yet such an assumption has been tacitly assumed by some modern authors regarding the meaning if kephalē.9

Modern Classics scholars have traditionally divided ancient Greek into the following general time periods:10

- Archaic 10th–5th centuries BC
- Classical 5th–4th centuries BC
- Hellenistic 4th–1st centuries BC
- Roman 1st century BC–5th century AD
- Byzantine 5th–15th centuries AD
- Modern 15th century–present

These demarcations are modern conveniences, not hard and fast divisions of the language or the history of the Greeks. Language change is always gradual. Plato (classical period) would certainly have been perfectly intelligible to Alexander the Great (Hellenistic period) because their lives overlapped; Plato was about seventy-three when Alexander was born and Alexander was about nine when Plato died. Paul, in the first century, would have had little trouble reading Plato (roughly analogous to our reading Shakespeare today, although that is becoming increasingly difficult for modern English speakers). However, St. Paul would have had considerable difficulty reading Homer (roughly analogous to our reading Chaucer).

Authorship is another important issue that must be considered. Various authors may use the same word in quite different ways. For example, the Greek word theos (“god”) while always denoting supernatural beings in Greek, may encompass widely divergent ideas or connotations. Context is the deciding factor for determining what a given author means by using particular words in particular ways. For Homer, a polytheist, the theoi (“gods”) are personal, supernatural beings who are quite active in human affairs. However, in Plato, who was also a polytheist, the theoi are more abstract, philosophical constructs.11 On the other hand, for St. Paul, a monotheist, theos is the God of Israel, the God of the OT, and in fact Jesus is God incarnate. Thus, Homer’s, Plato’s, and St. Paul’s understandings of the word theos are quite distinct and these distinctions can be seen in the ways each author uses the word.

In the same way, authorship is also relevant in determining the connotation(s) of kephalē. It is simply misleading to imply, as some modern authors have done, that kephalē means the same, or nearly the same, thing in most Greek authors. The meaning of kephalē in Church Fathers such as Chrysostom (ca. AD 350–407), Athanasius (ca. AD 296–373), Basil (ca. AD 330–379) or any other writer more than two centuries after the NT is irrelevant in determining what kephalē meant to St. Paul in the first century AD. As I said earlier, languages change, and it is entirely possible that there was a shift in the connotation of kephalē after the NT, perhaps even because of it. In principle, to import Athanasius’s connotation of kephalē, or Plato’s, onto St. Paul would be as foolish as me addressing a group of men as girls because that is what Chaucer would have said. Whether or not there has in fact been any shift in the connotation, implication, or metaphorical extensions of kephalē is beyond the scope of this article. To the best of my knowledge, no historical study of the connotations and uses of kephalē has ever been done. Such a study would best be undertaken by classically trained lexicographers, not theologians.

2. On the Meaning “Source”

Catherine Clark Kroeger12 has argued that kephalē commonly meant “source” in ancient Greek. One of the major drawbacks of her article is that she mixes authors and time periods and that many of the authors she cites discuss either physiology (thus kephalē is used literally with reference to the head), or philosophical systems in which kephalē is often used literally as well.13 Other authors Kroeger cites lived after the NT period (second century AD or later) and are thus irrelevant to the discussion. Most of the authors cited by Kroeger do not in fact use the word kephalē as a metaphor for “source.” As far as I know, there are only two occurrences in pre-biblical Greek of the alleged use of kephalē as a metaphor for “source.” However, this notion is not at all firmly fixed in either passage. Following are the texts in question with a brief comment.14

1) The Orphic Fragment 21: Zeus is the beginning (arkhē), Zeus is the middle, and by Zeus everything is accomplished. Zeus is the foundation both of earth and of sparkling heaven.15

This is a fragment of a poem whose date is uncertain. It may be as early as the fifth century BC, although a great deal of Orphic literature is much later. The word kephalē does not occur in this fragment; however, there is a variant version of this poem, Fragment 21A, which does use kephalē in place of arkhē (beginning): “Zeus is the head, Zeus is the middle. . . .” The use of “source” as a translation for arkhē may be misleading. Arkhē is another Greek word which is fraught with ambiguity. The word means “1. beginning, origin; first principle or element; end, extremity; 2. first place or power, sovereignty; magisterial office.”16 What then is the best translation for the phrase, “Zeus is”? Out of context, all of the following are good translations: “Zeus is the beginning/origin/source/first principle/end/power/sovereignty.” All of these ideas are true of Zeus’s characteristics as understood by pagan Greeks. Which one is the best translation
for the phrase in Orphic Fragment 21A? Due to the presence of
the word messa (middle) and the overall context, arkhē is best
translated as “beginning.” Neither “source” nor “authority over” is
relevant here. At best, the meaning of kephalē here is disputable,
although it most likely means “starting-point” or “beginning.”16
The mere equation of kephalē = arkhē; arkhē = “source”; therefore,
kephalē = “source” is both a logical and a semantic fallacy.

2) Herodotus’s Histories 4.91: The headsprings (kephalai) of
the Tearus give water that is the best and most beautiful of all
rivers.18

Here, kephalai (plural) appears to be a synonym of pēgai
(springs) and refers to the apparent source of the Tearus River.
However, it is more likely that kephalē here in Herodotus
connotes “either extremity of a linear object” because the word
is used in Greek to refer also to the mouth of a river as well as
its source.19 “Source” is a possible translation here for kephalē
given the context because it is the proper English word to use,
but kephalē is not here a metaphor for source.

Of other passages claimed to mean “source,” some are from
Philo (to be discussed below) and others from the Oneirocriticon
by Artemidorus Daldianus, a second century AD author, or from
various Church Fathers. Because Daldianus and the Fathers are
late, their use of kephalē is irrelevant to its meaning in the NT.

3. On the Connotations of “Prominence” or “Preeminence”

There has been some objection to the connotations of
prominence or preeminence as they apply to kephalē.20 Even
even these English words are not found in LSJ,21 they are used
in other NT dictionaries. Thayer uses the word “prominent:”22
“Metaph. anything supreme, chief, prominent; of persons, master,
lord.”22 The word “prominent” is also used in the TDNT: “But
this leads us to the second aspect, i.e., not merely what is first,
or supreme, at the beginning or end, but also what is ‘prominent,’
‘outstanding’, or ‘determinative.”’23 Nida and Louw use the word
“preeminent:” “one who is of supreme or pre-eminent status,
in view of authority to order or command.”24

Following is my rationale for claiming that “prominent” is a
valid aspect of the meaning of kephalē. Grudem states that the
notion of “authority over” is primary with respect to the meaning
of kephalē, and that the notions of prominence or preeminence,
if they are valid at all, are mere “overtones” of that metaphor. He
further states that preeminence “without any nuance of leadership
or authority” flies in the face of the facts.25 However, I suggest
that the opposite is the case. What is the distinction in English
between “prominent” and “preeminent?” The American Heritage
Dictionary of the English Language defines “prominent” as
follows: “1. Projecting outward or upward from a line or surface;
protuberant. 2. Immediately noticeable; conspicuous. 3. Widely
known; eminent.” The same dictionary provides the following
definition for “preeminent:” “Superior to or notable above all
others; outstanding.” The notion of authority is absent from these
definitions, but that is not to say that authority could not be
present in a particular context. Contrary to Grudem, it is not the
case that the notions of prominence and authority are intrinsically
linked together. Things, as well as people, may have prominence
without authority (e.g., the mass of entertainment celebrities in
American culture who, while they do exert influence in society, do
not have any “authority over” society). Also, authority may exist
without prominence—the police forces in any given community,
for example, do have authority within those communities, but
they are not necessarily prominent parts of them. The same is
true of the metaphorical use of the Greek word kephalē; authority
is not a necessary entailment of the metaphor, but I suggest that
prominence is.

I take the Greeks’ metaphorical use of kephalē to have a rather
physical and vertical orientation. Just as the head is the topmost
part of humans’ and animals’ physiology, and due to the fact that
the head contains the organs of aisthēsis (sense-perception), so
the head is the most prominent part of our bodies. This notion
of topness/prominence was then projected onto other objects,
such as trees, mountains, and waves where the top is the most
prominent part, especially at a distance; thus the Greeks could
speak of the head of a tree, of a mountain, or of a wave. Then if
the vertical orientation is turned on its side, i.e. horizontally, the
notion of kephalē can be applied to the ends of things, since the
head is at one end of a body which is lying down. Other specific
metaphorical uses of kephalē can then be derived by further
extensions of this vertical/horizontal orientation; e.g. Herodotus
could speak of the source of the Tearus river as being the heads
(kephalai) because the beginning of a river is one end of a line so
to speak.26

One may wonder what the difference between “prominence”
and LSJ’s definition of “end, extremity” is. The difference is
partitive, i.e., that “prominence” includes “extremity” (prominent
parts are also ends of things), but “extremity” does not include
“prominence” (not every end point is prominent), e.g., the “head”
of a mountain or of a person’s body is not merely its “end point,”
but is also its prominent end. I think that this explanation of
the metaphorical use of kephalē is superior both to LSJ’s definition
based on “end point,” and to Grudem’s suggestion that “authority”
is the “primary meaning.” The top of a mountain, or the sources
of the Tearus River do not possess authority over the mountain or
river itself; “authority over” is not even relevant in this regard, but
“prominence” is.

4. On Kephalaion (“sum, total”) as a Supporting Argument

In support of his contention that kephalē is a common metaphor
for authority in Greek, Grudem has suggested an argument based
upon semantic change. He notes that the noun kephalaion does
denote a personal metaphor (LSJ: “of persons, the head or chief”)
in an earlier period” of the Greek language; that the noun kephalē
could not have functioned in that capacity in classical Greek; and
he suggests that there may have been a semantic shift whereby kepĥalē
took on the sense of kephalaion as a personal metaphor by the
NT period.27 As persuasive as his argument may appear to those
who have not studied the Greek language, it is dead wrong, and is
terribly misleading to anyone who does not have a background
in classical Greek language and literature. First of all, the noun
kephalaion means “chief or main point, sum, total” and is never
used of persons as a metaphor for authority in Greek literature
until the fourth century AD. Under the entry in LSJ for kephalaion
referring to persons as the “head” or “chief,” there are nine citations
from five authors, but only two of those authors antedate the NT:
Eupolis (fifth century BC) and Menander (ca. 344–392 BC). The
other three authors lived after the NT was written; thus their use of *kephalē* is irrelevant as supporting evidence for any alleged semantic change which occurred before the NT period.28

Eupolis was a comic poet of the classical period whose writings survive only in fragments. The relevant passage is actually quoted by Plutarch (ca. AD 50–120) in his *Pericles*. It was common knowledge to Greeks that Pericles, a Greek statesman (ca. 495–429 BC), had an abnormally shaped head, and Plutarch quotes several of the quips and gibes that various comic poets had made regarding Pericles’s odd-shaped head. The last quotation Plutarch includes is the following from Eupolis:

> And Eupolis, in his “Demest,” having inquiries made about each of the demagogues as they come up from Hades, says, when Pericles is called out last:—“The very head (*kephalē*) of those below hast thou now brought” (*Pericles* 3.3–4).29

It is clear from this context in Plutarch (and this is the only context in extant Greek literature where this fragment occurs) that this use of *kephalē* by Eupolis is a joke on Pericles’s anatomy and was never intended to be taken as a serious metaphor denoting a leader. Eupolis does not in fact call Pericles the *kephalē* of Athens, nor does Plutarch.

The only other pre-NT occurrence of *kephalē* which LSJ cites is from Menander, another comic playwright (ca. 342–293 BC). The word occurs in the play *Perikeironomē* (*The Girl Who Gets Her Hair Cut Short*) and involves a love triangle. Both the soldier Polemon and Moskhion love Glykera. In the relevant scene, Polemon, who is temporarily away, sends his slave Sosias to check up on Glykera who had recently moved into Moskhion’s household. Daos, Moskhion’s slave, sees Sosias enter the scene and exclaims:

> The hireling has arrived, [i.e., Sosias]. A sorry state of things Is this, yes, by Apollo absolutely so. Not even yet I reckon in what’s chief (*kephalē*) of all: If from the country soon his master [i.e. Polemon] comes again; How great confusion he will cause when he turns up.30

The *kephalē* in this context is the “chief” or “main” difficulty of the situation and refers to “the master,” Polemon, should he return unexpectedly. While the noun *kephalē* does refer to the master, it is not a metaphor for “ruler, one with authority over;” but rather refers to the master (Polemon) as the main or chief cause of the difficulties which are about to explode in the play when he discovers that his girlfriend is living in his rival’s household.

All the other occurrences cited by LSJ (Lucian of Samosata, a satirist; Appian, a historian; and the Emperor Julianus) occur after the NT was written, and so it is nonsense to use these authors to argue that a semantic shift had occurred prior to the writing of the NT. Thus, Grudem’s argument that there has been a semantic shift in the meaning of *kephalē* based upon the prior use of *kephalē* is groundless.

5. **Plato**31

In classical Greek, there is only one passage wherein *kephalē* is alleged to mean “authority over.”32 This passage is found in Plato’s *Timaeus* 44d.33 Due to the nature of this particular passage with respect to Plato’s philosophy, and also due to the fact that Plato yielded immense influence among later philosophers (both Plutarch and Philo, to be discussed later, were Platonists), this passage needs to be discussed.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato details his version of the creation of the universe. Regarding the universe, we are told that soul was created before body and was given precedence and rule over body (34c); that soul is the best part of creation, which partakes of reason and virtue (36e–37a). We are also told that the sphere is the intrinsically perfect and uniform shape, and hence was chosen by the creator to be the shape of the universe (33b). The creator then modeled the divine form after the sphere (40a–b). It is clear from the *Timaeus* that Plato believed the spherical shape to reflect the epitome of divinity and perfection. After the creator created the universe and the lesser gods, he told them to fashion mortal creatures by using the structure of the universe as a blueprint (41a–d). The gods then linked the best part of creation, the soul, to the best shape, the sphere, made the sphere a head, and they then created the body to go with the head so as to provide it with the means for movement within the physical world (44d–45a).

Our sensory organs were then created so that we may experience the physical world in which we live and thereby gain knowledge by means of philosophy (47a–d). While it is true that Plato speaks of the spherical body, i.e. the head, as the most divine and ruling part (44d), a few lines later he speaks of our body which carries at its top the receptacle of our most divine and holy part which is the soul (45a). The relevant passage in *Timaeus* 44d is as follows:

> Copying the revolving shape of the universe, the gods bound the two divine orbits into a ball-shaped body, the part that we now call our head (*kephalē*). This is the most divine part of us, and master of all our other parts. They then assembled the rest of the body and handed the whole of it to the head, to be in its service.34

In Plato’s overall philosophy, it is not the head (*kephalē*) which is the governor or ruler, but rather it is the soul (*psychē*). Soul governs the entire universe (*Phaedrus* 246c), is the only thing capable of intelligence (*Timaeus* 46d), and is immortal (*Phaedrus* 245c–e; *Republic* 608c–612a; see also the *Phaedo*). In his *Phaedrus*, Plato employs an analogy of a charioteer in order to describe the soul. Plato says that the soul is the “ruling power” (*arkhōn*) which drives the chariot, the two horses of which typify our good and bad qualities (*Phaedrus* 246a–b). Plato further states that the mind or intellect (*nous*) is the governor of the soul (*Phaedrus* 247c–d). Elsewhere, Plato explains his doctrine that the soul has three parts: reason, desire, and spirit or passion (*Republic* 435–442, 580d–581e; see also the *Timaeus* 69–73 where greater attention is given to physiological details within the scope of Plato’s philosophy).

For Plato, it is clear that the soul, rather than the head itself, is the best, most divine, most holy aspect of our being; and reason, which he locates in the head of the mortal body, rules the soul. Thus, this passage in the *Timaeus* can only be fully understood in the light of Plato’s overall teaching of the soul. This is a far cry from either using the word *kephalē* as a personal metaphor for “ruler” or “leader” or from understanding it as such. Nowhere
does Plato ever use kephalē as a personal metaphor for “ruler” or “leader.” In fact, there are so far no clear and unambiguous instances in native Greek literature before the NT where kephalē (nor kephalaión, as was noted earlier) is so used. It is not a native Greek metaphor. The use of kephalē as a personal metaphor for “ruler” or “leader” first appears in the Septuagint (discussed below) and then only a relatively few times. If this metaphor is allegedly so common in the classical or Hellenistic periods before the NT, why are there no clear examples of it in the native literature of those periods?

6. Where in the Body Does the Mind Reside?

There has been some disagreement regarding the locus of the controlling part of the body in Greek literature; some modern writers claim that it was in the head (hence, “authority” is readily understandable), others in the heart, kardia (thus, by implication, divorcing authority from the head). However, the fact of the matter is that both views were widely held in the ancient world. Plato located intelligence and reason in the head as was clearly seen in the above discussion. Aristotle, on the other hand, located reason in the heart. Both Plato and Aristotle were highly influential philosophers. The Jewish Neo-Platonist philosopher Philo (1st century AD), interestingly enough, states quite clearly that both views were held. Note that the word kephale in the following passage is used literally, not metaphorically:

And where in the body has the mind (nous) made its lair? Has it had a dwelling assigned to it? Some have regarded the head (kephalē), our body’s citadel, as its hallowed shrine, since it is about the head that the senses have their station, and it seems natural to them that they should be posted there, like bodyguards to some mighty monarch. Others contend pertinaciously for their conviction that the heart (kardia) is the shrine in which it is carried. (On Dreams 1.32)

Philo apparently remained somewhat uncommitted in his own view, for on at least three occasions he refers to the “ruling principle” or “mind” as residing in either heart or brain (The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain 136, The Worse Attacks the Better 90, and On the Posternity and Exile of Cain 137), and in his Allegorical Interpretation (1.62) he makes the uncommitted statement that the ruling part of the soul is located in the body.

The Platonist philosopher Plutarch (ca. AD 50–120) rejected the notion that the parts of the soul could be naively placed in various parts of the body: “Or is it ridiculous to allot to local positions the status of first and intermediate and last… so the parts of the soul must not be constrained by location or nomenclature but by their function and their proportion must be scrutinized.” Later still, the Skeptic philosopher Sextus Empiricus (second century AD) also acknowledges philosophers’ lack of agreement: “For we see certain fluids belonging to each of the regions in which the doctrineholding thinkers believe that the commanding-faculty is located—be it the brain, the heart, or whatever part of the animal one may care to put it in.”

As for St. Paul, his ideas on this subject must be derived from his usage of kardia. From some translations of passages such as Rom 1:21 (“… and their senseless minds (kardia) were darkened” [RSV]) and 2 Cor 9:7 (“Each of you must do as he has made up his mind (kardia)…” [RSV]), it would appear that Paul held to the Aristotelian view. For an ancient Greek, the matter would boil down to one’s philosophical allegiance, whether one is a Platonist, an Aristotelian, a Stoic, etc. Therefore, this issue is of no real value in determining the implied meaning(s) of kephalē in the NT.

7. The Septuagint (LXX)

The first clear occurrence in the Greek language of kephalē as a personal metaphor for leader is in the Septuagint (henceforth LXX), the translation of the Hebrew OT into Greek in the third to second centuries BC. The LXX has been invoked both as undermining the notion that kephalē means “authority over” as well as supporting that notion. The arguments basically run as follows: the Hebrew word for “head” is ro’sh and is also used as a personal metaphor for leaders and for those in authority. Of the approximately 180 occurrences of ro’sh denoting “leader” in the OT, the translators of the LXX rendered most of them into Greek as arkhōn (leader) or some other term denoting leaders, but not typically as kephalē. In fact, kephalē is only used in the LXX for ro’sh eight times. Such a practice clearly shows that the LXX translators understood that kephalē does not entail authority, otherwise they would have used it more often. Not so, says the other camp; ro’sh is translated as kephalē sixteen times, not eight. Such a practice clearly shows that kephalē is a common and viable metaphor for leader in Greek. Grudem states “what it actually means to have sixteen (or even eight) instances of a term used in a certain sense in the Septuagint. It is really a rich abundance of examples.”

What are we to say to these arguments, and to the fact that different numbers are invoked regarding the occurrences of kephalē = ro’sh = “leader” (eight versus sixteen)? There are several problems with using the LXX as evidence for the meanings of Greek words in general, and of kephalē in particular. First of all, simply counting words can be a problem. There are two modern critical editions of the LXX—Cambricgés’s and Göttingen’s (the minor edition edited by Alfred Rahlfs)—the latter readily available from the United Bible Society. These editions are not identical. Also, there are thousands of variant readings among the many manuscripts which were used to produce these editions; hence many words, such as kephalē, will occur both in the main text as well as in the critical apparatus. In addition, in English translations of the Bible, the word “head” may be used in a given passage where the Greek word kephalē does not occur in the LXX. Grudem ran into this problem a couple of times in his original article. Furthermore, scholars may not always agree on the exact connotation of a given word in a given context. Thus, the existence of various manuscript readings, various editions, and various translations all result in counting procedures being rather fuzzy.

Secondly, the LXX is a translation, not an original Greek composition, and therefore runs the risk of Hebraic influence. There are many cases of overt semantic and syntactic contamination in the LXX (i.e., the words may be Greek, but the meaning or syntactic construction is Hebrew). Indeed, J. A. L. Lee states, “The language of the LXX is plainly not normal Greek in many places.” Lee also states, with good reason, that one
“cannot make the bald assumption that ‘the LXX made sense to Hellenistic Jews.”45 It is for this reason that the LXX is potentially a “biased witness,” as it were. Thus, the LXX is not a primary Greek witness to the meaning of kephalē in this regard because it is a translation. Its value must be regarded as secondary, and at every point abnormalities of any kind (syntactic or semantic) must be weighed against the possibility of Hebrew influence. It is entirely possible that the relatively few occurrences of kephalē = rošh = “leader” (8–16 out of 180 = 4–8%) is due to an occasional literalistic translation.46 This would explain why kephalē occurs so infrequently as a translation of the metaphor rošh = “leader.” On the other hand, if we assume that kephalē were a common and prevalent Greek metaphor for leader, then that same well-established Hebrew metaphor (rošh = “leader”) should be perfectly transferable into Greek and we would expect a nearly 100% translation rate: rošh = kephalē (leader). However, this has simply not occurred. It strikes me as very odd that the translators of the LXX would choose to disregard a metaphor which is allegedly perfectly translatable from Hebrew to Greek, especially in light of the many literalist, and sometimes un-Greek, translations which were foisted on the Greek text of the LXX elsewhere. Those who argue for “authority” have not adequately explained this problem.

Third, there is the problem of the proper weight and value to be assigned to variant readings. Egalitarians tend to dismiss those passages in the LXX which have variations whereas traditionalists tend to include them; hence, the competing claims of eight versus sixteen occurrences of kephalē (leader) in the LXX. The arguments on this point from both sides are misleading. To the best of my knowledge, there are four passages which contain variant readings with kephalē:

1) Judg 10:18: “And each of the leaders (hōi arkhontes) of Gilead said to his neighbor, ‘Who is the man who will begin the fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall indeed be head (A: eis kephalēn; B: eis arkhonta) over all the inhabitants of Gilead.’” The manuscript Alexandrinus (A) reads “as head” while Vaticanus (B) reads “as leader.”

2) Judg 11:8–9, 11 (OSB 11:7–8, 10): “And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, ‘That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the sons of Ammon, and be our head (A: eis kephalēn; B: eis arkhonta) over all the inhabitants of Gilead.’ So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, ‘If you take me back home to fight against the sons of Ammon, and the Lord delivers them to me, I shall indeed be your head (A: eis kephalēn; B: eis arkhonta).’...Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander (A: eis kephalēn eis hēgoumenon; B: eis kephalēn kai eis arkhēgon) over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord in Mizpah.” The same variation appears here again. The last example (v. 11/10) is interesting in that the phrase “head and commander” is slightly different. Literally, A reads “as head as commander” while B reads “as head and as leader.” The additional phrases eis hēgoumenon and kai eis arkhēgon clarify the overall meaning of this text.

3) 3 Kingdoms (1 Kgs) 8:1: the LXX text reads: “Twenty years later, when Solomon finished building the house of the Lord and his own house, King Solomon assembled all the elders of Israel in Zion, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the city of David, which is Zion.” Note that the word head (kephalē) does not even occur. However, the RSV reads in part, “Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes....” The phrase “heads (kephalas) of the tribes” is relegated to the apparatus in Rahlfs’s text and attributed to Origen’s edition of the LXX.

4) Isa 7:8–9: “But the head (kephalē) of Syria is Damascus [and the head of Damascus is Rezin]; nevertheless, in sixty-five years the kingdom of Ephraim will cease being a people. Also the head (kephalē) of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head (kephalē) of Samaria is Remaliah’s son.” In this passage, the word “head” occurs four times in English, but the Greek word kephalē occurs only three times in Rahlfs’s edition. The section in square brackets is not printed in the LXX text, but is in the apparatus with unnamed manuscripts either deleting or including the phrase.

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Greek translations of passages are characterized by a head-tail metaphor (hence the phrase “top-bottom”). One must necessarily borrow from those of higher economic status (which may of course include one’s ruler). Furthermore, the head-tail metaphor is juxtaposed to statements regarding “top-bottom” or “higher-lower.” The entire chapter of Deut 28 speaks of the blessings or curses which God will send upon Israel depending on their obedience or disobedience. The chapter opens with the statement: “…if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God to be careful to do all His commandments I command you today, then the Lord your God will set you high over all the nations of the earth” (vs. 1, OSB). The point of the chapter revolves around the blessings of material prosperity and the curses of material deprivation. Prominence is surely a valid issue here. If Israel obeys, they will be a prominent nation in the world; if they disobey, they will be humiliated. While leadership in world affairs often follows economic and social prosperity (but is not necessary), nowhere in

the text of Deut 28 does it expressly say that Israel will “rule” other nations; rather, material prosperity is reiterated in many ways. Authority is not a necessary entailment of the use of kephalē in this passage.

2) Isa 9:14–16: “So the Lord cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day—the elder and honored man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail; for those who lead this people lead them astray, and those who are led by them are swallowed up” (RSV).

The LXX version (vv. 13–14) of this passage is interesting: “So the Lord took away head (kephalē) and tail from Israel, great and small, in one day. The elder and those who admire persons, this is the head (arkhē). The prophet who teaches lawlessness, this is the tail” (OSB). In this particular passage, the word kephalē is used only once, yet the notion of authority is clearly stated by the use of the Greek word arkhē. Furthermore, it is clear that Isaiah identifies both “head” and “tail” with those in authority, the “head” being the elders and the “tail” being the lying prophets. “Authority” is thus derived from the context and the additional use of the word arkhē, and not merely from the word kephalē itself.

This leaves four LXX passages which are textually firm (no variant readings) and wherein the connotation of authority is reasonably understood:48

1) 2 Kings (2 Sam) 22:44: “You will deliver me from the quarrels of the people; you have kept me at the head (eis kephalēn) of the nations. A people I have not known served me.”

2) Ps 17:44 (18:43): “Deliver me from the contradictions of the people; you will establish me as the head (eis kephalēn) of the Gentiles; a people I never knew served me…”

3) Jer 38:7 (31:7): “For thus says the Lord to Jacob: Rejoice and exult in the Head (epi kephalēn) of the nations. Make a proclamation and praise Him. Say, ‘The Lord saved His people, the remnant of Israel.”

4) Lam 1:5: “Her oppressors have become the master (eis kephalēn), and her enemies prosper; For the Lord humbled her because of the greatness of her ungodliness.”

Thus, the value of the LXX has been overrated as evidence for kephalē connoting “leader” or “authority.” The relatively few uses of kephalē as a metaphor for leader can best be explained as due to Hebrew influence. Furthermore, the connotation of “source” for kephalē in the LXX does not exist. It is simply inappropriate to the context of each passage mentioned here.

8. Philo

Philo reiterates many of Plato’s ideas regarding the soul, and many of Philo’s statements regarding the soul are very similar, if not identical, to statements made by Plato in the Timaeus and elsewhere. For example, he refers to the “dominant” or “sovereign mind,” ho hēgemōn nous (On Dreams 1.30, 44); and to the mind as being “holy” and as a “fragment of the Deity” (On Dreams 1.34); and he further says that “the Mind, the sovereign element of the soul ... evidently occupies a position in men precisely answering to that which the great Ruler occupies in all the world” (On the Creation 69; compare Who is the Heir 233: “In fact I regard the soul as being in man what the heaven is in the universe”). There are many other similar statements throughout Philo’s writings. In assessing Philo’s use of kephalē, one
must remember that Philo was a Neo-Platonist. One must question whether Philo is using κεφαλή literally or as a personal metaphor for “leader” or “ruler,” and whether his usage of κεφαλή has more to do with his Platonic notion of divine reason as the dominant or controlling part of the soul. Philo’s philosophical underpinnings can be clearly seen in two κεφαλή passages (On Dreams 2.207 and Moses 2.82). In both of these passages, κεφαλή denotes the literal head and is not a personal metaphor for “ruler, leader.”

Much has been made of Philo’s use of κεφαλή in Moses 2.30 which allegedly denoted authority. In this passage, Philo extols the achievements of king Ptolemy II Philadelphos (ca. 308–246 BC). Here, Philadelphos is certainly a leader, but not in terms of being the ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty, for the entire dynasty had nearly died out before Philo was born; rather Philadelphos is the leader in terms of being the best, the most prominent, the most influential of the Ptolemaic kings. This is entirely clear in the overall context of Moses 2.29–30. Note that κεφαλή is used but once despite the translation.

Ptolemy, surnamed Philadelphus, was the third in succession to Alexander, the conqueror of Egypt. In all the qualities which make a good ruler, he excelled not only his contemporaries, but all who have arisen in the past; and even till to-day, after so many generations, his praises are sung for the many evidences and monuments of his greatness of mind which he left behind him in different cities and countries, so that, even now, acts of more than ordinary munificence or buildings on a specially great scale are proverbially called Philadelphian after him. To put it shortly, as the house of the Ptolemies was highly distinguished, compared with other dynasties, so was Philadelphus among the Ptolemies. The creditable achievements of this one man almost outnumbered those of all the others put together, and, as the head (κεφαλή) takes the highest place in the living body, so he may be said to head the kings.

Those who claim that the notions of “ruler” or “authority over” work in this context must explain how it is possible for one dead king to rule or exercise authority over other dead kings. There is in fact no notion of authority here; rather, this passage illustrates very well the notions of prominence or preeminence as described above.

On Mating with the Preliminary Studies 61 is another disputed passage about which both sides of this debate are confused:

And of all members of the clan here described Esau is the progenitor (genarkhēs), the head (κεφαλή) as it were of the whole creature—Esau whose name we sometimes interpret as “an oak,” sometimes as “a thing made up.”

Payne claims that κεφαλή in this passage denotes “source of life” but Grudem rejects this interpretation and maintains that “ruler, authority over” is relevant. Payne’s claim that Esau is the source of life of his clan is surely incorrect. The deceased Esau is not really the source of anything. Esau is merely the founder or progenitor of his clan, as Philo clearly states. Κεφαλή here probably has the sense of “starting-point,” referring to the fact that Esau is the beginning or founder of the Edomites, rather than “source of life.” Esau will always be the founder of his clan.

On the other hand, Grudem’s claim that κεφαλή here means “ruler” is based on a misunderstanding of the Greek word genarkhēs (“progenitor”). Grudem claims that genarkhēs can also mean “ruler of created beings,” and he cites LSJ for support. He then translates the sentence: “And Esau is the ruler of all the clan here described . . .” thereby equating “ruler” with κεφαλή. In equating κεφαλή with genarkhēs as “ruler of created beings,” Grudem has committed the same logical and semantic fallacy that Kroeger did in translating κεφαλή as “source” due to the presence of arkhē in that passage (see section 2 above).

Further, Grudem has simply misunderstood LSJ, according to which genarkhēs has two senses: “1. founder or head of a family or race; 2. ruler of created beings.” In the first sense, Philo uses the word to refer to humans as the founders or progenitors of their races (Who is the Heir 279, of Abraham; On Dreams 1.167, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Preliminary Studies 133, of Moses or Levi). So also in Ps.-Lycophron’s (second century BC) Alexandria 1307 of Dardanus, the ancestor of the Dardani, a Greek tribe. It should be noted that all such uses of genarkhēs involve a known ancestor who is obviously dead. Philo also uses the word in reference to the 70 Elders (Moses 1.189), and once apparently to mean “ethnarch” (ethnarchēs), a magisterial title (Flaccus 74). In the second sense, the word invariably refers to a god (of Zeus in Callimachus Fragment 36 and in Babrius 142.3; of Kronos in Orphic Hymn 13.8; of God in the Corpus Hermeticum 13.21).

Thus, based on these citations, most of which are in LSJ, it is most reasonable to conclude that genarkhēs means “progenitor” as the founder or ancestor of a tribe or people when applied to humans such as Esau who are already known to be such. This is no doubt the sense intended by Philo in Preliminary Studies 61, and it is correctly translated in the Loeb edition. Esau is not a “ruler of created beings” because he is clearly not a god. Rather than indicating that Esau is the ruler of his clan (which he cannot be because he is dead), the metaphorical use of κεφαλή denotes that Esau is the head, i.e. the beginning, the foremost member of his clan, just as the head is the foremost member of an animal’s body. There is no connotation of “source,” “rule,” or “authority over” here, but rather one of “starting-point.”

9. Plutarch

There are several passages in Plutarch containing κεφαλή which have been alleged to mean “ruler” or “authority over.” These passages have been dealt with in more detail elsewhere, so I will not belabor the issues here except in summary. It must be borne in mind that Plutarch was also a Platonist and this fact has a bearing in the interpretation of his use of κεφαλή. The first four examples are taken from his Parallel Lives.

1) In Agis 2.3, κεφαλή is used literally with reference to a snake and is not a metaphor: “Ye cannot have the same man as your ruler and your slave. Since in this case also one certainly can apply the fable of the serpent whose tail rebelled against its head (κεφαλή) and demanded the right to lead in turn instead of always following . . .”
2) In Pelopidas 2.1, kephalē is clearly used by Plutarch as one part of a body analogy with reference to the military: “For if, as Iphicrates analyzed the matter, the light-armed troops are like the hands, the cavalry like the feet, the line of men-at-arms itself like chest and breastplate, and the general like the head (kephalē), then he, in taking undue risks and being over bold, would seem to neglect not himself, but all . . .”66 Of course, generals have authority over their troops. Plutarch is here using a metaphor, and the connotation of authority is clearly present in the overall context of the passage. Note, however, that the word kephalē is not used of the general independently as a metaphor.

3) In Galba 4.3, we see the closest parallel to the NT in that the word kephalē is used in conjunction with the word “body” (sōma) as a compound metaphor: “But after Vindex had openly declared war, he wrote to Galba inviting him to assume the imperial power, and thus to serve what was a vigorous body in need of a head (kephalē), meaning the Gallic provinces, which already had a hundred thousand men under arms . . .” Here the connotation of authority is readily derivable from the military context.

4) Cicero 14.6: “‘What dreadful thing, pray,’ said [Cataline], ‘am I doing, if, when there are two bodies (sōmata), one lean and wasted, but with a head (kephalē), and the other headless (akephalos), but strong and large, I myself become a head (kephalē) for this?’” Cataline (L. Sergius Catalina, a 1st century BC Roman statesman) made this statement to the Roman senate in an attempt to stir up a rebellion. Although the connotation of authority may be present here due to the context, there are two problems about this passage. First of all, Plutarch expressly states that Cataline spoke in a “riddle” (14.7), which may imply that the use of kephalē here was an unusual Greek idiom. Secondly, this “riddle” may have been influenced by Latin because the word caput (head) often is used as a metaphor for leader. The Latin source for this “riddle” is Cicero’s speech Pro Murena 25.51. Hence, Plutarch may have been translating this passage from Latin rather literally. Any fair assessment of this passage must take these factors into consideration.

5) This final example is from the Moralia (692D–E), “Table Talk” 6.7.1: “The ancients even went so far as to call the wine ‘lees,’ just as we affectionately call a person ‘soul’ or ‘head’ (kephalē) from his ruling part.”66 Here the word kephalē is again used literally, not as a metaphor. Those who claim that “authority” is relevant here forget that the word kephalē was a common form of address in Greek. Just as we say, “Hey, man,” in addressing someone, so an ancient Greek would say ὁ kephalē (literally, “O head”).67 Furthermore, Plutarch’s use of kephalē as the “ruling part” is surely derived from his Platonism. Remember that for Plato, the ruling part is not the head as such, but the soul which is merely located in the head.

These Plutarchian passages are of dubious value as proof that kephalē is an independent Greek metaphor for “ruler” or “authority over.”


It is clear that evangelicals disagree regarding the understanding of the kephalē metaphor in Paul. Grudem and others maintain that “authority” or “ruler” is Paul’s point; others such as the Mickelsens, Payne, and Bilezikian maintain that “source” or “provider” is the point. Now it is true that Christ is our leader and ruler and that he does have authority over the Church, and it is also true that he is the source and provider of our salvation, our lives, our very being in as much as he is the agent of creation—all this is readily derived from Christology.

The debate really revolves around the issue of the kephalē metaphor: to what extent are these subsidiary issues (authority, source, provider, prominence, etc.) bound to the meaning of kephalē? It is my belief that those who have previously written about the meaning of kephalē in the NT have made too much of what I consider to be a rather simple head-body metaphor by reading into one part of that metaphor meanings that are at best only implications that can be derived from the immediate context of a given passage. All living creatures have heads, and the head is typically the uppermost part of the body. Decapitated bodies are dead bodies. It would be senseless for Paul to speak of the Church as the headless body of Christ.

With the explanation of prominence that I gave above in mind (see section 3 above), let us now examine the NT passages where someone (usually Christ) is called kephalē. Although there are many difficulties in some of the following passages, it is not my intent to provide a detailed exegesis of each one, but rather to explain how the notions of “source,” “authority,” or “prominence” may be relevant.

The first point that should be noted is that in five of the seven passages (Eph 1:22f., 4:15f., 5:22; Col 1:18, 2:19), the word sōma (body) is present. The Church is the body and Christ is the head of that body. In these passages, Paul’s use of the words kephalē and sōma go together to form a composite metaphor (compare Plutarch’s Pelopidas 2.1 and Galba 4.3 above). Only in 1 Cor 11:3 and Col 2:10 does Paul use kephalē apart from sōma as an independent metaphor.68

1) Eph 1:20–23: “…which [God] accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule (arkhē) and authority (exousia) and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head (kephalē) over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

While I will not deny that authority is a relevant issue in this passage, the question is whether authority is the primary connotation here, just derived from the word kephalē itself. It is certainly wrong to dismiss the notions of prominence and preeminence in this passage inasmuch as God the Father has set Christ at His right hand “far above” all rule, etc. Just as the head is above the physical body, so Christ is above everything in creation. Christ is also preeminent in the sense of being supreme. I fail to see how either of these notions could be denied in this passage, and I likewise fail to see why authority must be considered the primary connotation. We also see here the notion of topness quite clearly. This passage very nicely fits the semantic scenario I described above (see section 3 above). On the other hand, the connotation of source does not fit the context at all. It makes no sense to say that Christ is the “source over” (hyper) all things in the Church.
2) Eph 4:15–16: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head (kephalē), into Christ, from whom the whole body (sōma), joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.”

In this passage, I think that both the Mickelsens’ connotation of “source” and Bilezikian’s of “provider” may be applicable, but I do not believe that those notions can be derived from the semantic range of the word kephalē itself. The connotation of “source” may be implied in the prepositional phrase “from whom” (ἐκ hο.findOne) and the overall tenor of the passage may speak of Christ as the provider of the body’s growth. Interestingly, although I disagree, Grudem admits that the sense “source of life” is possible for kephalē in Philo’s Preliminary Studies 61.78 If this connotation can be admitted in Philo, why can it not be admitted elsewhere, or here, if it is appropriate to the context? This is not to deny Christ’s authority. I just do not think that the connotation of authority is necessarily explicit in the metaphor in this passage.

3) Eph 5:21–24: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head (kephalē) of the wife as Christ is the head (kephalē) of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.”

The notion of authority is clearly implied in this context by the presence of the verb hypotassō (“to submit”—not hypotassō, “to subjugate”), even though the connotation of authority is not always present in the meaning of this verb. As with all Greek words, hypotassō (sub-omai) has a range of meanings, some of which have nothing to do with authority (e.g. “to place under,” cf. 1 Cor 15:27 and Eph 1:22, “to append,” etc.).71

Despite the punctuation of various Greek editions and English translations, it is not in fact clear whether v. 21 stands at the end of a paragraph or at the beginning of a paragraph, nor is it even clear that there is a paragraph break at this point. Verse 21 contains an admonition to mutual submission, and this applies to husbands by implication. True, Paul does not expressly tell husbands to submit to their wives; but neither does he expressly tell wives to love their husbands (cf. v. 25). Are we then justified in concluding that wives need not love their husbands? Certainly not! Submission is a relevant issue in Eph 5, but it is not simply a matter of wives submitting to husbands. BDAG cites this passage along with a few others as examples “of submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love” (848). The details of the implications of submission in the NT are a matter for further discussion and interpretation, and lie outside the scope of this paper. In this passage, the notion of authority is not derived from the word kephalē, but rather than from the overall context.

4) Col 1:17–18: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head (kephalē) of the body (sōma), the Church; he is the beginning (arkhē), the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent (prōteuōn).”

This passage speaks of Christ as being the “firstborn” of the dead, and as having the “first-place” in everything. Preeminence (prōteuōn) is obviously relevant here and is so translated by Tyndale in the KJV and in the NKJV. Again, we have the head-body metaphor. Christ will occupy the most exalted place, which is the topmost place, just as the head occupies the topmost or prominent place with respect to the body. Of course Christ necessarily possesses authority, but I reiterate that the point of this discussion is whether the word kephalē denotes authority in and of itself, or whether authority is derivable primarily from the context. I claim that the latter is true.

5) Col 2:18–19: “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head (kephalē), from whom the whole body (sōma), nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.”

This passage has a number of similarities to Eph 4:15–16, and I think that the notion of source or source of life may be an implication derivable solely from the context. Authority may or may not be applicable here. In the overall context of Col 2, Paul is warning his readers against going off the doctrinal deep end and of becoming “puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind” rather than “holding fast to the head.” It seems reasonable to me to interpret this passage in terms of a head-body metaphor. The body, the Church, is sustained by the head, Christ, and one risks one’s life in abandoning the head. The implication is that the Christian will not survive apart from Christ just as members of our human bodies will not survive if they are cut off from our bodies.

The final two NT passages contain kephalē as an independent metaphor, not joined with the body (sōma).

6) 1 Cor 11:3–5: “But I want you to understand that the head (kephalē) of every man is Christ, the head (kephalē) of a woman is her husband, and the head (kephalē) of Christ is God. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered (κατὰ kephalēs ekhōn) dishonors his head (kephalē), but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head (kephalē) unveiled dishonors her head (kephalē)—it is the same as if her head were shaven.”

Only in v. 3 is kephalē used (thrice) as a metaphor. In vv. 4 and 5, it is used literally (although some expositors press a metaphorical meaning?72). Despite the numerous exegetical problems with this passage, I think that both connotations of authority and prominence may be relevant here. Both the Greco-Roman culture and the Jewish culture of the first century were indisputably male-dominant. Males had decided advantages over females in nearly every respect, legally, socially, politically, etc. If Paul’s words here are taken as a reflection of such a cultural attitude, the idea of prominence does not seem to me to be wholly irrelevant, nor does authority. Males were prominent with regard to females and exercised authority over them; in the same way, Christ is prominent with regard to humans. I doubt that a first century mind would have had as much difficulty understanding this comparison as we do today.

What about “source” here? At first blush, “source” may look possible, but as Hurley has explained, it runs into trouble because of St. Paul’s parallelism. If kephalē means “source” here, then God becomes the source of Christ and this implication has
serious repercussions for Christology. I seriously doubt that "source" is a viable option in this passage.

7) Col 2:9–10: “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head (kephalē) of all rule (arkhē) and authority (exousia).” This passage has some similarities to Eph 1:20–23. The notion of authority may be present, but so are prominence and preeminence. Again, the question is which notion, if any, is primary? It is unlikely that "source" is applicable in this context because that would make Christ the source of “every ruler and authority” and that does not make much sense in this context.

In most of the NT passages, authority is implied within the overall context, as are prominence or preeminence. In two passages (Eph 4:15–16 and Col 2:18–19), “source” may be possible due to the context and depending on how the passages are interpreted. However, neither “authority” nor “source” is the primary meaning of the kephalē metaphor throughout Paul’s writings.

Conclusion

What then does kephalē mean? The answer is easy: the literal head. What then of the connotations and metaphorical extensions of kephalē? How does one explain them (references to tops of mountains, trees, waves; sources or mouths of rivers; and so forth)? The most comprehensive explanation, as Chadwick has also pointed out, is that kephalē, as the topmost part of the body, was extended to refer to the tops of things (hence, “top” or “summit” of mountains, etc.), or the ends of things (hence, “source” or “mouth” of rivers). This is in full accord with my explanation in section 3 above, which I arrived at independently of Chadwick.

In pre-biblical Greek (archaic, classical, early Hellenistic), the word kephalē is hardly used as a personal metaphor at all, and does not mean “source” or “ruler” or “authority over.” Furthermore, any claim that these are “common” meanings or implications for kephalē during these periods is empirically wrong. Also, the argument that kephalē later took on its connotation of authority from the noun kephalainion (“sum, total, chief”) is false.

The use of kephalē as a personal metaphor first occurs in the LXX, and that usage is most likely due to Hebraic influence because (1) it is used thus relatively infrequently (about 11 of about 180 occurrences = 6%) and (2) the existence of several variants (kephalē or archēn) in some manuscripts testify that there was uncertainty about the metaphor in Greek at some point. In Hellenistic, non-biblical Greek, kephalē is sometimes used with literal reference, but as a simile. Any possible connotations of prominence or authority are derived only from a given context, although topness is the only implication which is relevant across the board. The notion of source is inapplicable. Claims that “source” or “ruler” are valid meanings of kephalē are often based upon mistranslations or misappropriations of other Greek words present in a given context (e.g., archē “beginning” not “source” or genarkhēs “progenitor” not “ruler”).

It has been suggested that St. Paul was thinking in Hebrew or Aramaic while writing in Greek and that he intended kephalē to denote either “source” or “authority over.” Given the excellent quality of Paul’s Koine Greek and the apparent ease with which he functioned in Greek-Roman culture, I seriously doubt that he found it necessary to think in Hebrew while composing Greek, and I also doubt whether native Greeks of the period would have clearly understood the kephalē metaphor in these senses. Any claim that they would have done so is as yet far from vindicated. I close with his warning to Timothy: “Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers” (2 Tim 2:14).

Notes

1. This article appeared in a special edition CBE journal, titled “Missing Voices” and edited by Hilary Ritchie, in the fall of 2014. The 2014 version, which used a Greek font instead of transliteration and contained significantly more Greek text in the endnotes, is available at www.CBEInternational.org. The 2014 article was, in turn, an expansion and revision of the author’s 1991 article, “Peri tou kephalē: A Rejoinder to Wayne Grudem,” also distributed by CBE.


5. In the various articles that I have consulted while researching this topic, I have seen too many occurrences of erroneous citations and references to ancient authors. At times, the word kephalē is not even used in Greek although the word “head” may have appeared in some English translation; at other times the original context is irrelevant to the topic at hand; and sometimes the reference is simply wrong, making it difficult, if not impossible, to verify the citation.


7. Of course, ruler has other denotations such as “measuring stick,” but these are irrelevant to this discussion.
It took less than a century for this change to come about. Many young
authors so cited.

kephalē is cited.

17. See Chadwick, Lexicographica Graeca, 183, wherein this passage is
cited.

18. D. Grene, trans., The History: Herodotus (Chicago: University
(Oxford: University Press, 1927). Also published in LCL.

19. See Chadwick, Lexicographica Graeca, 181, wherein this passage is
cited.


21. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, A Greek-English Lexicon,
Supplement, ed. by P. G. W. Glare, was published in 1996.


Based on Semantic Domains, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible
Societies, 1989), 1739.


26. See also Chadwick’s discussion of kephalē in Lexicographica
Graeca, 177–83. Chadwick’s discussion supports my contention regarding
“prominence,” but nowhere does he acknowledge either the notions of
“source” or “authority over” as valid extensions of the word kephalē. My
explanation here (© 1991, see notes 1 and 4 above) is independent of
Chadwick’s (1996).

erroneously identifies the word in question as the adjective kephalatios;
however, LSI’s treatment of the noun kephalē is listed as a sub-entry
under the heading of kephalēs.

28. Following are the citations in LSI, 945; Eupolis, Fragment 93, 5th
century BC; Menander, Perikeiromene 173, ca. 342–292 BC; Lucian of
Samosata, Harmonides 3, ca. 120–200 AD; Gallus 24, Philoepeneus 6,
Piscator 14; Appian, Bella Civilia 5:50 and 5:43, ca. 100–160 AD; Julianus
Imperator, Orations 3:125d, 351–369 AD. The Greek texts and English
translations for all these authors except Eupolis are available in the Loeb
Classical Library series.

University Press, 1914–26), 3:9. For a discussion of and comment on
the Greek text of Eupolos’s fragment, see J. M. Edmonds. The Fragments

30. From the Loeb edition; see also F. H. Sandbach, ed. Menander:

31. The Greek text can be found in J. Burnet, ed., Plutonius Opera, 5 vols.
(Oxford: University Press, 1900–07). The English edition I have quoted in
this article is by J. M. Cooper, ed., Plato: Complete Works (Indianapolis:
Hackett, 1997). Other English translations of Plato’s works can be found
in the Penguin Classics Series, LCL, and elsewhere.

32. There is a passage in Herodotus’ Histories (7.448) containing
kephalē which is also alleged to mean “authority over,” but the use of
kephalē there is literal, not metaphorical. See Cervin, “Rebuttal,” 94–95.

33. The traditional method of citing Plato is to use section numbers
along with the letters a–e which denote the subsection. All Greek texts of
Plato as well as any decent English translation include these numbers in
the margins.

34. Cooper, Plato: Complete Works, 1248. The word kephalē is used
only once by Plato in this passage, as noted above.

539, n. 60.

36. De Motu Animalium ("Movement of Animals") 10.703a; De Partibus Animalium ("Parts of Animals") III.10.672b. see Jonathan

37. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, trans., Philo, vol. 5 (Cambridge:
Harvard University Press, 1934), 311, 313.

Cherniss, trans., Plutarchus Moralia. vol. XIII, Pt. I (Cambridge:

39. Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, 1.124–28, quoted in A.
A. Long and D. N. Sedley, The Hellenistic Philosophers, 2 vols. (Cambridge:


42. Grudem, “Response,” 452 (emphasis mine).

43. Grudem claimed that kephalē occurred twice in an English passage
in Herodotus where the word was used only once in Greek. So also, in Isa
9:13–14 (LXX); see Cervin, “Rebuttal,” 94, 98.

44. J. A. L. Lee, A Lexical Study of the Septuagint Version of the
Pentateuch (Chico: Scholars, 1981). Lee’s see LXX’s chs. 1 and 2 for an
excellent overview of the quality of LXX Greek. For additional critiques of
the nature of LXX Greek, see S. Jellicoe, The Septuagint and Modern Study,
ch. 10 (Oxford: University Press, 1968), 2:450. The Greek text is located in
2:458–69.

103.

46. So also Bilezikian, Beyond Sex Roles, 239.

47. The OT translations which follow are from the Orthodox Study Bible
(Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), which is based largely on
Rahlfs’ Greek edition of the LXX text. The letters A and B denote the
Greek manuscripts Alexandrinus and Vaticanus respectively.


103.

50. Translations are taken from the Orthodox Study Bible; references are
to that text and references in parentheses are to the Hebrew
Masoretic Text.

51. The only readily available Greek text of Philo is in LCL: F. H.
Colson and G. H. Whitaker, trans.. Philo, 12 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard
52. See Grudem, “Head,” 73; Cervin, “Rebuttal,” 99–100; and Grudem, “Response,” 441.
54. See also Cervin, “Rebuttal,” 99ff.
57. See Chadwick, Lexicographica Graeca, 183, for the sense of “starting-point” for kephalē.
59. LSJ, 342, but see the Revised Supplement, 75, for corrections and revisions.
60. The text is in LCL.
61. Callimachus was a Greek poet (ca. 305–240 BC). The text can be found in R. Pfeiffer, Callimachus, 2 vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1949), 1:23–24 (no. 229). Babrius (first to second centuries AD) was a Roman poet who put some of Aesop’s fables into Greek verse; the text is in LCL. The text and translation of the Orphic Hymns are found in A. N. Athanassakis, The Orphic Hymns (Chico: Scholars, 1977), 22–23. The Corpus Hermeticum is a treatise of religious and philosophical doctrine dating from about the second century AD. The text, translation, and notes are in W. Scott, Hermetica, 4 vols. (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), 1:254. The only citation listed in LSJ that I have been unable to check is the inscription IG 5 (1).497, which LSJ state refers to Heracles, a demigod.
64. Agis 2.3.
65. Pelopidas 2.1.
66. Table Talk 6.7.1 (Moralia 692d–e).
67. LSJ, 945; see also Chadwick, Lexicographica Graeca, 179ff.
68. The following translations are taken from the RSV, Second Catholic Edition.
69. LSJ, 499, definition III; see also BDAG, 296, definition 3, for this and related senses.
71. See LSJ, 1897 and BDAG, 1042, for examples and references.

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New Creation and Inheritance: Inclusion and Full Participation in Paul’s Letters to the Galatians and Romans

Caroline Schleier Cutler

A common theme in biblical narrative and prophetic literature is that God aligns with those whom Walter Brueggemann calls the "dispossessed," that is, those denied land, denied power, denied place or voice in history. The dispossessed can also be defined as those who do not receive an inheritance, or who do not receive an inheritance unless someone else acts on their behalf. Thus, in an ironic twist, God ensures that it is the dispossessed who become the heirs, the meek who inherit the earth (cf. Matt 5:5).

In Paul’s epistles to the Galatians and Romans, the themes of adoption and inheritance are prominent, particularly in Gal 3:23–4:7 and Rom 8:14–25. In Rom 4:13, the true descendants of Abraham are promised that they "would inherit the world." This denotes an inheritance that is substantial—even cosmic—in its proportions. It is an inheritance closely tied to the concept of "new creation" (Gal 6:15), which is central to Paul's thinking.

In examining these inheritance texts in Galatians and Romans it is necessary to address two questions: Who inherits? and What kind of inheritance do they receive? Some have suggested that these passages—especially Gal 3:28—are to be interpreted solely in terms of salvation. However, the Galatian and Roman letters present ample evidence that inheritance goes beyond soteriology (the work of Christ) to encompass social and ecclesiological issues as well. Indeed, it has the potential to impact every area of the Christian life and even the whole of creation. The context of Galatians is crucial for this interpretation of Gal 3:28 and its surrounding discussion of inheritance. The context of Paul's account of the Antioch incident in Gal 2:11–14 sets the stage for how Gal 3:28 is to be understood and, moreover, how to apply it in the twenty-first century.

By framing Gal 3:28 as a discussion of inheritance Paul shows that all are included, whether male or female, and regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. The contexts of the two texts demonstrate two important features of inheritance: its inclusive nature and its participatory nature. These texts pave the way for women as well as men to be included as full participants who work together in Christ for the kingdom of God.

**Paul’s Paradoxical Language**

Since my argument is that the inheritance texts in Galatians and Romans promote the full inclusion and participation of all, whether male or female, it is necessary to briefly address the issue of the non-inclusive language used by Paul, such as huios ("son") and huiosthesia ("adoption as sons"). There is a paradox here—one that Paul seems to put forward intentionally. The very fact that he is using exclusive terminology and then describing inclusivity, the removal of barriers to inheritance in Gal 3:28, makes the inclusive statement all the more impactful. As Sandra Polaski notes, "The grammar may be gender-exclusive, but the image it invites us to imagine reaches beyond generic sameness to a celebration of diverse mutuality." Paul thus uses the exclusive terminology of the sonship metaphor to show how women and slaves are also given the privileged status of sons and heirs.

**In Christ**

In Gal 3:23–4:7, the phrase en Christo Iesou ("in Christ Jesus") is central, occurring in 3:26 where it relates to how we are sons ("children" in NRSV) of God, and in 3:28 where it defines our oneness as believers. It also occurs earlier in 3:14, where it is the means by which the Gentiles receive "the blessing of Abraham." The phrase "in Christ Jesus" does not occur in Rom 8:14–25. However, it does occur in Rom 8:1–2 and 8:39, thus framing the chapter with references to the reality that in Christ we are no longer under condemnation (8:1), and to the reality of God's love for us in Christ Jesus (8:39). These passages work together to show that being in Christ is requisite for the members of his church. In fact, according to Beverly Roberts Gaventa, it is "the first and most important thing to be said about us," as seen in Gal 3:28.

It means that there are no more barriers between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free persons, and males and females. It means there is now a radical inclusiveness which is possible because the faith community "is no longer defined by physical fatherhood." Significantly, in both Galatians and Romans, being in Christ also impacts our everyday lives because the truth that we are in Christ is lived out in us.

**All-Inclusiveness**

Several indicators confirm that the message of Gal 3–4 applies to all. One is the word pantes ("all") which occurs in Gal 3:26 and 3:28. What is emphasized in 3:26 is that Gentiles have already become sons of God. The clear link between Gal 3:26 and 3:28 shows that every believer, female and male, is a child of God. Moreover, because sons are heirs, the all-inclusiveness also applies to inheritance (Gal 4:7, Rom 8:17). However, God's generous redemptive activity moves even beyond the adoption of believers as sons who inherit to expansively encompass all of God's creation (Rom 8:22–23).

Although land is the typical OT concept of inheritance, it can also effectively represent God's inheritance in the NT. Brueggemann notes, "Land is for sharing with all the heirs of the covenant, even those who have no power to claim it. Something about land makes one forget them, makes one insensitive to them." The dispossessed are prevented from receiving a full inheritance and need the Father whose "good pleasure" (Luke 12:32) it is graciously to give us the kingdom inheritance. Through the process of adoption, slaves become sons of the Father and are then identified as heirs (Gal 4:7, Rom 8:15–17).

Gentiles and Jews alike have a claim to this promised inheritance, for they are deemed "Abraham's offspring" (Gal 3:29). The inclusive nature of inheritance is brought out by the fact that all—male and female—have the same "legal status of son" in God's presence and that this status includes inheritance.
Notably, Gal 3:28 is framed by the language of heirs and inheritance (3:18, 29, 41, 7). Moreover, Rom 8:17 proclaims that we, as God’s children, are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”

The matter of what the inheritance looks like is also central to this discussion. N. T. Wright observes that, in Rom 8, the land inheritance has become the entire redeemed cosmos—the new creation.16 Daniel Kirk aptly designates this as a “new creation inheritance.”17 The basis for this understanding of inheritance as the whole creation is in Rom 4:13: “For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith” (RSV). Abraham’s true descendants are to inherit the world.18 This is, indeed, a generous, expansive inheritance.

**Jews and Gentiles**

The issue of Jewish and Gentile relations within the church is central in both Galatians and Romans. It is particularly significant because Paul considers his calling and mission to be to the Gentiles.19 The primary concern for him is for Gentiles to be included in God’s people.20

A major problem to be confronted in the Galatian church is that the Jews were treating the Gentiles “as second-class citizens in the church.”21 The context for this treatment, according to F. F. Bruce, is the historical “cleavage between Jew and Gentile.”22 Wayne Meeks points out another critical issue for Paul—that both Gentiles and Jews without Christ are viewed by Paul as being enslaved and are therefore both outsiders.23

The solution for Paul is reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile followers of Christ.24 This reconciliation is brought about by a God who “shows no partiality” between Jews and Gentiles (Rom 2:11).25 Both Jews and Gentiles can now be the sons of God26 who is the Father of both.27 This all can happen through the adoption of both Jews and Gentiles as children of God. Marianne Meye Thompson observes that this adoption is “now expressed in the language of family and inheritance, and testifies to God’s faithfulness to the Jews, the children of Abraham, and God’s mercy to the Gentiles, also the children of Abraham.”28 Thus, through the love and mercy of God, Gentiles and Jews can have true unity and the promise of God’s inheritance.

**The Antioch Incident and Table Fellowship**

Related to the Jew/Gentile issue, whether members of divergent groups can come together at a common meal is crucial for a study of inclusive inheritance in Galatians and Romans. This question is well demonstrated in the Antioch incident Paul recounts to the Galatians. Paul’s description of this event helps clarify the nature of the inheritance he later addresses in Gal 3:26–4:7. Two essential characteristics of the inheritance are its inclusiveness and its breadth; it relates not only to salvation—as some would claim—but impacts who we are and what we do, including what happens in the church of Christ. It is this dynamic renewing nature of the inheritance that indicates that it is a new creation inheritance.

In Gal 2:11–14, Paul tells of a conflict with Cephas (Peter) at Antioch because Peter has ceased eating with Gentiles. This clearly is of great consequence to Paul. Scholars are nearly unanimous in declaring that this passage is central to the message of Galatians and had social and ecclesiological implications for those who embraced the good news of Jesus Christ.29 The actions of Peter and those who followed in his footsteps resulted in the excluded Gentiles being viewed as “at best second-class citizens in the new community.”30 For Paul, this was a crucial issue tied to the good news of Jesus Christ.

The heart of the matter was that Jews and Gentiles were once again being separated into two groups.31 The gospel was therefore at risk and Paul was concerned—even furious—enough to confront Peter publically (Gal 2:14).32 This was clearly not only a spiritual issue but one that impacted church life. It applies to the Jew/Gentile pair but also has unmistakable relevance for the other two pairs of Gal 3:28 (slave/free, male/female). Daniel Boyarin astutely poses the following question: “If Paul took ‘no Jew or Greek’ as seriously as all of Galatians attests that he clearly did, how could he possibly—unless he is a hypocrite or incoherent—\not have taken ‘no male and female’ with equal seriousness?”33

Unified table fellowship was essential to Paul. By his response to Peter in Gal 2:11–14, he showed that “he knew of the meal’s power to work for the integration of differences.”34 Hal Taussig describes the concept of table fellowship in early church congregations as a “social experiment” where they used a common cultural phenomenon to bring about a re-visioning of community in terms of gender, ethnicity, status and religion.35 This practice gave access to a common table for many who would not usually have shared a meal.36 For Paul, Christian unity was unavoidably linked to who was willing to eat together.37 In turn, the context of the table fellowship discussion in Gal 2 has an impact on how Gal 3:28 is interpreted. “Paul clearly intended 3:28 to prohibit excluding Gentiles as a group from any privilege or position in the church,” and they were to be treated as equals and welcomed to the table.38 If this is the case for Gentiles, we can conclude that this would also apply to the other groups addressed in Gal 3:28, including male and female.

**Circumcision or Baptism?**

Another matter connected with the Jew/Gentile issue is whether circumcision or baptism is the preferred entrance ritual into the Christian community. The Galatian and Roman epistles illustrate that Paul overwhelmingly favors baptism over circumcision for several reasons.

Circumcision physically marks off people into distinctive groups, whereas with baptism such markers no longer play a part.39 Circumcision therefore takes believers backwards because they are unnecessarily trying to fulfill the law;40 The rite of circumcision also excludes and overlooks women,41 whereas baptism is inclusive and makes way for “full participation” of both women and Gentiles in the faith community.42

However, Paul’s most convincing line of reasoning against circumcision as an entrance rite to Christian community is almost certainly the new creation argument in Gal 6:15: “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” (RSV). This concept is foundational to Paul’s letter to the Galatians.43 In the new creation, women and men have equal access and space is made for them to participate together.
Maternal Imagery and the Obsolescence of Patrilineal Genealogy

There is a noticeable movement in Galatians and Romans away from a system of genealogy that is dependent on male biology to one that is God-centred. Paul uses imagery of matrilineal descent and adoption to emphasize this God-centeredness.

Traditionally, to be a descendent of Abraham meant male descent passed on from father to son. Both Gal 3:23–4:56 and Rom 8:14–25 have background material in which Abraham is identified as the progenitor of the line to which all believers belong. However, in neither case is this lineage shown to be determined physically. There is a redefinition of the phrase in Gal 3:16 and Rom 4:13, Abraam . . . to spermati autou (“Abraham’s seed”), which is in the person of Christ, giving rise to a “strictly christo-centric spermatology.” Male genealogy is truly on its way out in terms of the faith community. Both Jews and Gentiles have their genealogy reconfigured away from male descent. Christ has brought about the obsolescence of patrilineal lineage.

With this shift in focus away from male descent, Paul uses several images which incorporate the idea of matrilineal genealogy. One reason for this is that, in first-century culture, power over the family line is held by the father and the concept of matrilineal descent would be seen as a subversive reversal. In Gal 4:21–31, in the context of his allegorical comparison of Hagar and Sarah, Paul contrasts “non-biological motherhood as children of ‘promise’” with what he describes as a biological parentage—being “born according to the flesh”—equated to enslavement (Gal 4:23 NRSV; cf. 4:25, 29–31). Of primary importance in Paul’s writings is the fact that “Jesus’ story is a narrative of matrilineal descent.” It is not the anatomy of the male that determines human destiny, but rather our adoption in Christ—the true Seed—by the Father.

In overturning the old model of genealogy, the apostle Paul’s argument is always focused on the good news in Christ. This good news allows for and, indeed, calls for an overturning of patriarchy and the narrow definition of male descent. Concerning this, Brigitte Kahl observes the following: “In his rereading of the Genesis story in Galatians 3–4 Paul develops a concept of fatherhood and motherhood that could be a nightmare to anyone interested in ‘orderly’ patriarchal categories and cultural practices.” Since inheritance is so closely tied to genealogy, the shift is therefore from an inheritance that is narrow and rigid to one that is wide and inclusive.

There are other examples of mother imagery in Romans and Galatians. Mother and birth terms stand out as dominant in Gal 4:25, including a maternal metaphor that Paul uses of himself. In Gal 4:19, the apostle addresses the Galatians as “my little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (NRSV). This metaphor identifies Paul with women and would therefore have been a humbling image for him to use of himself. It is therefore quite an unexpected and noteworthy occurrence.

In Rom 8:22, Paul—once again notably—uses a maternal metaphor in the midst of his inheritance and adoption discussion, when he announces that “the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.” The surrounding context in Rom 8:18–25 highlights the hope of new creation in a meaningful way showing the birth pains to be worthwhile and productive.

Gaventa proposes that Paul uses the maternal metaphor, as he does other metaphors, to persuade his readers to consider things in a new way so that they will change their minds about something. He is fostering an intimate relationship with his audience. I suggest that he also has another objective in Galatians and Romans: by using gender-inclusive metaphors, Paul is emphasizing the inclusivity of the good news of adoption, inheritance and new creation for all, regardless of whether they are male or female.

Gender Inclusiveness and the Far-Reaching Impact of Galatians 3:28

The words of Gal 3:28—“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (NRSV)—are considered a powerful statement of equality and “border-transgressing unity” for all, including women. Klyne Snodgrass calls this text “the most socially explosive statement in the New Testament.” These assessments are not overly extravagant; Paul’s declaration has the potential to revolutionize Christian life.

It is essential to emphasize that Paul framed this verse in the language of inheritance. A question then to be asked is: What does Gal 3:28 tell us about what an heir is and what an heir inherits? Paul is using this passage to widen the scope of who is considered an heir—Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. Additionally, from the context of the Antioch incident in Gal 2, it is evident that the inheritance cannot be limited to something that is only soteriological and has no relevance for practical and ecclesiological matters.

Typical of the perspective that Gal 3:28 has only to do with salvation is S. Lewis Johnson Jr. who maintains that this text exclusively concerns a person’s “spiritual status in Christ.” While no one would deny that Gal 3:28 has a spiritual meaning, to limit it to this aspect raises serious concerns. Several contextual reasons make it impossible to interpret Gal 3:28 purely soteriologically with no social implications.

One key point is that women and slaves in Israel were already considered part of the covenant community, so Paul would have been declaring nothing new if he was only talking about coming to faith. Similarly, there were no expectations that being male or free was a requirement to be a follower of Christ, but there were problems with the Jew/Gentile question. In fact, because of his calling to the Gentiles, Paul was especially focused on the issue of ethnicity, although he certainly took the other pairs seriously.

Clearly, Gal 3:28 has not eradicated distinctions. For example, hierarchical human structures continue despite what Paul has announced. However, while these distinctions still exist, the words of Gal 3:28 level out “values and structural norms imposed on these distinctions.” Johnson, perceiving the existence of role distinctions within the church, asks whether “distinction of roles of believers within that equality necessarily violates that equality.” In response, Philip Payne comments, “If such distinctions of roles are based on the gifts and callings of individual believers, they would not violate that equality.” However, exclusion based on whether one is female or male would certainly harm that equality.

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Lyn van Rooyen
Director, Christian AIDS Bureau for South Africa
Clearly, the truth of Gal 3:28 impacts not only spiritual status, but also social status and relationships. This is certainly the case in Paul’s response to Peter at Antioch over table fellowship. This incident indicates that his goal for the churches of Christ is “complete social integration.” With the reconfiguring of relationships, patriarchal modes of encounter must also be challenged, and “no structures of dominance can be tolerated” any longer. This also means there were consequences, not only for women, but for men who adopted Paul’s new paradigm. If they were free men, they would likely have to give up honor in order to foster equality with others—something remarkable for that time.

Paul, in describing new creation to the Corinthians, declares that “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:17 NRSV, emphasis added). It is worthwhile noting that, as in Gal 3:28, he also uses “in Christ” (en Christo) language here. It is also significant that he uses the word “everything” twice, highlighting the reality that new creation impacts all of life. Therefore, by restricting the scope of Gal 3:28 to only the spiritual, Johnson offers a woefully limited inheritance which does not fit with the concept of the full, new creation inheritance that Paul depicts in his writings.

**Full Participation in Church Life**

Proper application of Gal 3:28 would allow for women to participate fully in the life of the church. Any limitations would detract from the verse’s ideal intention for the church. There are parallels for Gal 3:28 at Col 3:11 and 1 Cor 12:13. In both of these, practical matters of church life are addressed. The male/female pair only occurs in Gal 3:28, which is noteworthy because it could have been left out but was not. All indications are that this text was intended to have significant ecclesiological consequences for women—that is, in terms of who the people of God are and how they interact with each other in the practical life of the church. This would make sense, for Paul was speaking to and about women, as members of the Galatian congregations, about baptism—the rite of entry into the faith community. His concern would be how this faith community lived out their faith.

The practicality of this Pauline saying is also unmistakable when we consider it in the context of the promises to Abraham (Gal 3:14, 29) which Johnson considers merely spiritual. Payne rightly points out that all of the blessings to Abraham—and through him to the covenant community—in Gen 12:2–3 are of a social and practical nature rather than only spiritual. Further evidence of the functional nature of Gal 3:28 is seen in the rabbinical prayer—a precursor of which was thought to be behind the formulation of Gal 3:28—in which male Jews give thanks for not being born a Gentile, slave, or woman. What is interesting is that members of these three groups did not participate in study of Torah; thus the prayer emphasized how they were excluded from the opportunity of studying Torah. If this prayer was being renounced by Paul, those who had formerly been excluded from such activities would now be included.

In his assertion that “role distinctions” are not eliminated in Gal 3:28, Johnson indicates that there are restrictions to what women can do in the church, including prohibitions on certain types of authoritative ministry and preaching. In restricting ministry and leadership in any way, one risks flouting the Pauline teaching on the proper practice of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12–14. For Payne, recalling the context of the Galatian epistle and the narrative of the Antioch incident gives further rationale for encouraging women to use whatever leadership and ministry gifts they might have: “Galatians 2:11–14 shows how strongly Paul would have reacted if anyone had used ‘role distinctions’ to exclude Gentiles or slaves from leadership roles in the church.”

Those who promote limitations on women’s ministry would thereby also restrict the preaching of the gospel. In response to this, Susie Stanley justifiably wonders if we can “separate the good news of the gospel from the fact that the ‘freedom found in Christ’ includes the freedom for all believers, men and women, to share that good news?” It is inconceivable that Paul would want to restrict the preaching of his beloved gospel in any way (cf. Phil 1:15–18).

Paul himself fully embraced not only Gentiles but slaves and women in all areas of church life and ministry. He was able to apply the truth of Gal 3:28, that there was no longer male and female, in his own life and ministry. All of this evidence points to the full inclusion of women in the church. Women, as well as men, are welcomed not only as members of the faith community but as participants wholly dedicated to the good news of Christ and working together for God’s kingdom.

**New Creation and Ethics in Galatians 3:28**

In both Galatians and Romans, Paul reveals how God is doing a new thing in providing adoption and inheritance to those in Christ. It is therefore not surprising that we find evidence of new creation in Gal 3:28. This is indicated by the phrase arsena kai therē ("male and female") which is also used in the Septuagint of Gen 1:27 and pertains to the first creation in Genesis and the new creation in Gal 3:28. Payne describes how this new creation looks in terms of Gal 3:28:

Central to this new creation is the new "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16) that gives no privileged status to Jews over Gentiles, to free persons over slaves, or to men over women. They are all one in Christ Jesus, redeemed from sin and the law by Christ and welcomed into the family of God. All now live in Christ, freed from control by the principles of the world and heirs of God's promises to Abraham. No one is a second-class citizen or excluded by ethnic-religious background, economic status, or gender from any position or privilege in the church.

New creation therefore has an impact on our ethical conduct—how we interact with and treat each other in community.

Love is the basis for right conduct in the Pauline writings. In Gal 5:13–14, we are called to love each other by becoming like "slaves to one another"—in essence, we are asked to take on one of the marginalized positions in Gal 3:28. The ethics of this love has no place for ethnic, status, or gender discrimination in the church. Rather, ungodly patriarchy is transformed "into patterns of active mutuality and solidarity.” If we hold true to Paul’s inspirational words in Gal 3:28, our ethics will assuredly be transformed.
Inheritance and the New Creation Vision

Concerning Gal 3:28, Mary Ann Tolbert says, “the open incorporation of believers of all races, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds into full and equal partnership in the traditional contract of God to Abraham and the Jewish people was an act of outrageous inclusivity.”101 It is a pity if this outrageousness is not taken to its full potential by those who are in Christ.

Galatians 3:28 is contained within Paul’s exploration of adoption and inheritance. Therefore, when one limits the scope of Paul’s pronouncement of inheritance, it says something about what inheritance is. It is an insult to the loving Father who adopts us and gives us inheritance to make it into something less than the vast and immeasurably good thing it is. Instead, let us fully implement Paul’s vision of unity and equal fellowship in Christ.102

The vital message of new creation is heard throughout the Galatian epistle—within the phrase 骖 in Gal 3:28 as well as the proclamation in Gal 6:15 that “a new creation is everything!”103 Fee suggests that an inclusive embrace of Gentiles is “deeply embedded” in the creation context of Gal 6:15 and in the message of Galatians.104 This is certainly also true of Paul’s letter to the Romans.105

In the new creation, male and female become sisters and brothers,106 a family, a community, a “new humanity.”107 And in this new kind of family, there is no place for a perspective that allows men to have sole authority over women.108 What does have an important place in the new creation is an eschatological table fellowship which prophetically brings the not yet into the already. Fee gives us a vivid picture: “In the gathered community only ‘new creation’ practices are welcome: thus husbands and wives, masters and slaves, Jew and Gentile all feast together in anticipation of the great final eschatological banquet.”109

And in the new creation community there is also inheritance. It is, as Kirk portrays it, “the resurrection glory of the new creation inheritance.”110 This inheritance will of course have its consummation in the future renewal of all things. However, it undoubtedly also invades every aspect of Christian life and community in the here and now.

Conclusion

The promise is given to us as Abraham’s descendants that we “would inherit the world” (Rom 4:13). If the word “only” needs to be used to describe this inheritance—that it only applies to our salvation—then it is, indeed, a small world that we inherit. In complete contrast, the letters of Paul show our inheritance to be vast and infinite, invading every area of our lives and the life of the church of Christ. It is a world where “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of us are one in Christ Jesus.” It is a “new creation inheritance”111 that is meant for all. Anything less shrinks the world we inherit for both women and men and is thus an insult to the Giver of this good gift.

As stewards of God’s good gift of inheritance we are called to move forward, to work together as women and men in Christ toward the full implementation of Paul’s spectacular vision in Gal 3:28.112 Jim Reiher tells us that, looking back, we can see a historical movement—from Paul’s early efforts to bring about liberation for the Gentiles, to the massive endeavour leading to the nineteenth-century abolition of slavery. Now, in our time, we hear the call to work toward the liberation of women from the bonds keeping them subject to men including, sadly, in the church.113 Such a trajectory will lead to the undermining and subversion of patriarchal systems in our world and in our churches that oppress and subjugate the marginalized.114 This is the true work of God’s justice. What can we do other than to heed this call?

Notes

2. Sandra Hack Polaski, A Feminist Introduction to Paul (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 71. She goes on to observe the following: “If, as has often been argued, the lower strata of society comprised the bulk of Paul’s congregations, then for males and females alike the promise of ‘adoption as sons’ would sound as a word of hope, beyond the reality of their present physical circumstances. Freedom, responsibility, investment with an inheritance—all these can only be promised to believers through gender-exclusive metaphor of sonship…. In Christ God offers all persons—Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female—the privileged status that can only be described as ‘sons of God’” (71–72).
7. Richard N. Longenecker, Galatians (WBC; Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 159; Polaski, A Feminist Introduction, 82.
8. James D. G. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1993), 202. In Rom 8:14, the word is ἀγαπητος (“as many as”) translated as “all who” in the NRSV.
11. Brueggemann, The Land, 66; cf. J. R. Daniel Kirk, Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 156, on the use of land to depict inheritance in Romans. Land is a helpful way of understanding inheritance in Paul’s writings because of its this-worldly nature and the expectation of “living faithfully in history” (Brueggemann, The Land, 178).


22. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 188.


24. Gaventa identifies this as a central purpose of Romans ("Romans," 315). Fee observes that, in Galatians, "through the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit ... the ground has been leveled" between Jewish and Gentile believers ("Male and Female," 174).


34. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 74.

35. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 174; cf. 71 and 146. In the context of Rom 14–15, which also deals with food and meal issues in relation to Jewish and Gentile differences, Kathy Ehrensperger finds a "concrete testing ground of what otherwise would be a purely theoretical faith." Such a faith "is either practical or it is nothing at all." Ehrensperger, "New Perspectives on Paul: New Perspectives on Romans in Feminist Theology?" in *Gender, Tradition and Romans: Shared Ground, Uncertain Borders* (ed. Christina Grenholm and Daniel Patte; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 238.


37. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 179.


40. Fee, *Galatians*, 140.


45. The background material on Abraham for Gal 3:23–47 is given earlier in Gal 3.

46. The background material on Abraham for Rom 8:14–25 is given in Rom 4.


52. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God’s Family* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 108. This is true even if Gal 4:4 is not referring to the virgin birth, as noted by Morris, *Galatians*, 235; Osiek, "Galatians," 334–35. Paul, in any case, is clear throughout the rest of Galatians and Romans that human male biology is simply not necessary in the descent of Christ.

53. Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption*, 110. Stevenson-Moessner shows how adoption is contrasted with the OT concept of the male seed (103).


56. Osiek, "Galatians," 336. "Perhaps a man willing to use such an image is not as alienated from women’s experience as Paul is often made out to be."

57. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Our Mother St. Paul: Toward the Recovery of a Neglected Theme," in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickestaff; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 96. Gaventa observes here that, "when Paul presents himself as a mother, he voluntarily hands over the authority of a patriarch in favor of a role that will bring him shame, the shame of a female-identified male. Still, maternal imagery becomes effective precisely because it plays on hierarchical expectations." Gaventa (90) notes that, other than when he calls God Father, Paul uses motherhood imagery more frequently than father imagery.


65. Gal 3:18, 3:29, 4:1, 47.
66. Johnson, “Role Distinctions,” 159; cf. 163, where he states, “All are equal in Christ, the church, and family, but the phrase, ‘in Christ,’ refers to the mystical and universal, the representative and covenantal union of all believers in the Lord.” Johnson’s position is extremely problematic. His dualistic view of Gal 3:28 denies the impact of being “in Christ” in daily life. Another concern with Johnson is his repeated and overconfident assertion that his is the “historic orthodox interpretation of the text” (154; cf. 163, 164). Schüssler Fiorenza is correct in stating that “malestream ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 149.
67. Longenecker, Galatians, 157.
72. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians, 207; Fee, “Male and Female,” 177, n. 11; Payne, Man and Woman, 85, 86; Reiher, “Galatians 3:28,” 276.
73. Fee, “Male and Female,” 177, n. 11.
76. Paul K. Jewett, Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 144.
77. Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 213.
79. See also Rom 10:12, 1 Cor 7:19, 2 Cor 5:16–17, Gal 6:15, Eph 2:13–14.
80. Payne, Man and Woman, 80; cf. Bruce, Epistle to the Galatians, 189.
84. Payne, Man and Woman, 98.
85. Bruce, Epistle to the Galatians, 187. There is also a similar Greek parallel to this prayer.
86. Payne, Man and Woman, 84, 85.
88. “Those excluding women from church leadership either assume that God never gives women certain gifts of the Spirit such as teaching and administration, or they restrict the use of those gifts even though Paul explains that the gifts are for the common good” (Payne, Man and Woman, 99). In addition, we know that women were using their ministry gifts in the early churches (Gasque, “Response,” 190–91). Rom 16 gives a helpful snapshot of such ministering women, with Phoebe the deacon and benefactor (16:1–2), Junia the apostle (16:7), and Prisca (16:3). Mary (16:6), Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis (16:12) who are all described as co-workers in Paul’s mission.
89. Payne, Man and Woman, 97.

James Dunn likewise observes that “it is highly unlikely that he would have allowed gender or social status as such, any more than race, to constitute a barrier against any service of the gospel” (The Epistle to the Galatians, 207).
91. Payne, Man and Woman, 89.
92. Jewett mentions the women of Rom 16 in this regard (Man as Male and Female, 145).
93. The concept of women’s “full participation” in church life and ministry is one that Payne repeatedly emphasizes (Man and Woman, 81, 93, 97; cf. 85, 99).
94. Payne says of the new creation theme in Galatians that it is “always pointing to the new life in Christ lived through the Spirit” (Man and Woman, 92).
95. Payne, Man and Woman, 92–93. Inexplicably, Johnson finds support for the idea of the “distinction between male and female” in the creation account, whereas Gen 1:27 emphasizes that male and female have the same role (“Role Distinctions,” 159–60).
96. Payne, Man and Woman, 104.
98. Gasque, referring also to Gal 5:1, declares the following: “There is a law higher than the law of liberty: it is the law of love” (“Response,” 191).
99. Payne, Man and Woman, 103; cf. Kahl, “No Longer Male,” 47, who highlights Gal 5:6: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (NRSV).
102. Jewett, Man as Male and Female, 147.
104. Fee, “Male and Female,” 177.
105. Fee, “Male and Female,” 177, n. 13. Fee observes that Rom 15 shows that “the eschatological inclusion of the Gentiles with Jews as one people of God [is] its main point.” Longenecker observes that the renewal of God’s people and the entire creation in Christ and the Spirit is a major theme of Romans 5–8 (Introducing Romans, 408); cf. Polaski, A Feminist Introduction, 90.
108. Fee, “Male and Female,” 185. Fee asserts that such a “male-authority viewpoint . . . reject[s] the new creation in favor of the norms of a fallen world.”
111. Kirk, Unlocking Romans, 156.
112. Jewett, Man as Male and Female, 147.
114. Fee, “Male and Female,” 183. “This does not abolish the system, but carried through by Philemon, it dismantles the significance given to it (and in this indirect way, of course, heads toward the dismantling of the system itself!).”

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D'Esta Love is no stranger to writing and editing; as co-editor of the Pepperdine University based ministry journal, Leaven, she has often encouraged the ministry of other women. She is also no stranger to “finding her voice.” In the introduction to Finding Their Voices, Love reflects on the number of years she waited for the opportunity to preach in her own heritage, in a Church of Christ (she was seventy years old). Because opportunities for women to preach in conservative churches remain infrequent, Love has collected these sermons as a way to “document that history as well as preserve their words” (25).

The preservation of that history is important for this particular fellowship of churches. Love recalls one historian, Kathy Pulley of Southwest Missouri State University, who spoke on the history of female preachers in the early Stone-Campbell movement (the movement of which the Churches of Christ are a significant part). While much is known about their lives, none of their sermons were preserved. Love’s compendium is not only a historic record of change in the Churches of Christ, it also preserves the words of the women themselves.

But this significance is not limited to one fellowship of churches. It is also notable because the voices of women are an alternate (and often undervalued) source of biblical interpretation. Another author, Anna Carter Florence, discusses the importance of women hearing and proclaiming “a different and liberating word . . . in the context of their own experience as women.” Love’s collection has merit and application for all who study God’s word and value a variety of voices.

Those whose voices have ever been silenced will keenly appreciate Love’s volume. This was an extremely personal book for me; I was alternately sad and hopeful as I encountered evocative comments such as, “this son who would walk in his footsteps . . . was his daughter” (17), “an older woman . . . struggling with the silence imposed on her for decades” (19), “if you had told me 20 years ago I would be preaching I wouldn’t have believed you” (170), and “asking why I had been given a voice in a silent tradition” (199). The book is not an academic analysis of preaching, and I encourage readers to read the sermons together with their prefaces and biographies in order to connect with the people whose stories they tell.

The sermons are from a variety of contexts. The twenty-nine preachers include two sisters who are college professors (31, 37), a church planter from Texas (57), college or seminary students who preached in class or chapel services (73, 81, 161, 169), and a hospital chaplain (89). Some women found audience outside their own tradition when their own did not invite them to preach (105, 121, 191). Each woman trusted God enough to “witness to the truth of Jesus Christ as they have seen and believed it” (24). Each woman accepts the gravity and integrity of the word of God, and each woman embraces the responsibility of proclaiming that word to her community.

One theme throughout the book is the importance of change. The forward, written by Richard Hughes of Messiah College, affirms that current changes regarding women in ministry are biblical (18). Contributor Charme Robarts suggests that patiently waiting for others to change is important to our witness; like a seed growing in the ground, unseen change and growth may be happening (125). Jo-Anne Fleming, another contributor, reflects on her own congregation’s experience, noting that, after fifteen years of discussing the issue, it was important actually to change their practice by having women “courageously [participate] in the worship service” (130).

A second theme evidenced by these women’s stories is patience waiting and prepared testimony, even before the invitation to share it. Love quotes one woman who wrote “a series of sermons that will go into a quiet folder . . . there is nothing more depressing than pouring one’s heart out in a sermon that may never be preached.” Others believed they “would grow old waiting” (38), or prepared sermons for a graduate course which “forced [her] to grapple with possibilities in gifting and calling” (73). Another waited seventeen years to preach (82). Finally, one contributor wrote “sermons as a spiritual practice” with no intent to preach, stating “I simply did not think it would ever be a possibility” (161). All were “prepared to give an answer . . . for the hope that [they] have,” and to “preach the word . . . in season and out of season . . . with great patience.”

Love’s aim is not only to “encourage women to develop and use their gifts,” but also to empower leaders to open doors to women who are finding their voices (28). While academic resources provide biblical support for women who preach, it may be their stories and sermons which serve as a catalyst for change. One author reminds of the importance to hear all voices which “together create a more complete story and a better sense of the whole of the church.” Ministry leaders and seminary students, both men and women, will benefit from hearing the voices of these women. Love’s legacy is empowering women to tell their stories in a way that connects them to God’s greater story. Let anyone with ears listen!

Notes

2. Love recalls this conversation in Finding Their Voices, 24.
4. Florence, Preaching as Testimony, xix.
5. D’Esta Love, quoting Tiffany Dahlman, Finding Their Voices, 28. As a postscript to that quotation, Tiffany has recently begun pastoring a small house church; she is indeed finding her voice.
6. 1 Pet 3:15 and 2 Tim 4:2, respectively.

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Christians for Biblical Equality

Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) is a nonprofit organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and women of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Scriptures such as Galatians 3:28.

Mission Statement
CBE exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world.

Statement of Faith
- We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons in equal power and glory.
- We believe in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We believe the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We believe that women and men are equally created in God’s image and given equal authority and stewardship of God’s creation.
- We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.
- God’s design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a man and a woman, celibate singleness and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women’s gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world.
- Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

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CBE envisions a future where all believers are freed to exercise their gifts for God’s glory and purposes, with the full support of their Christian communities.

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- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin.
- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from females what God has given them: their dignity, and freedom, their leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.
- Christ’s redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.

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Greg W. Forbes and Scott D. Harower

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Finding Their Voices
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D’esta Love

Finding Their Voices records history in the making and preserves the words spoken by 29 women from pulpits across the U.S. and Canada. It seeks to honor a generation of women who stand at the headwaters of a stream of change, and also recognizes the churches and institutions that welcomed these women and provided space for their voices to be heard.