

Wenstrom Bible Ministries
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Colossians: Colossians 1:18a-Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Ruler Over the Church

Lesson # 23

Colossians 1:18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (NASB95)

“**Also**” is the conjunction *kai* (καί), which indicates that in addition to being the sovereign ruler over all of creation and every creation, Jesus Christ is also the sovereign ruler over the church.

In other words, in addition to being the cosmological ruler, Jesus Christ is also the soteriological ruler.

“**He**” is the intensive personal pronoun *autos* (αὐτός), which is emphasizing that Jesus Christ is the sovereign ruler of the church which is His body.

“**Is**” is the verb *eimi* (εἰμί), which means “to exist a particular state or condition,” which is identified by the expression ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας, “**head of the body, the church.**”

This indicates that the Son, Jesus Christ exists in the state or condition of being the head of the body which is the church.

The present tense of the verb *eimi* is a gnomic present, which is used for a general timeless fact or spiritual axiom, or an eternal spiritual truth which indicates that Jesus Christ “as an eternal spiritual truth” exists in the state or condition of being the head of the body which is the church.

The present tense is also a customary present tense or stative present used to signal an ongoing state indicating that the Son exists in the ongoing state of being the head of the body which is the church.

“**Head of the body**” is composed of the following: (1) noun *kephalē* (κεφαλή), “**the head**” (2) noun *sōma* (σῶμα), “**of the body.**”

The noun *sōma* is used in a figurative sense to describe the church as being like the human body in that it has diversity among its members and refers to church age believers who are joined together as a corporate unit with the implication of each member having a distinctive function within this unit.

The articular construction of the noun *sōma* is monadic emphasizing the uniqueness of church age believers in that they are identified with Jesus Christ in His crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and session at the right hand of the Father.

The noun *sōma* is in the genitive case and functions as a genitive of subordination meaning that *sōma* specifies that which is subordinated to or under the dominion of the head noun *kephalē*.

Thus, this would indicate that Jesus Christ is the head “over” the body which is the church.

The articular construction of this word *sōma* is functioning as a possessive pronoun indicating that the body belongs to Jesus Christ or is Jesus Christ’s possession.

The noun *kephalē* is employed in a metaphorical or figurative sense and means “head” expressing the fact that Jesus Christ is the sovereign ruler over the church.

This word *kephalē* is functioning as a predicate nominative indicating that it is making an assertion about Jesus Christ, namely that He is the ruler or head over the body, which is the church.

The articular construction of this word is monadic meaning that there is only one head of the body, the church and that is Jesus Christ.

So the article expresses the idea that Jesus Christ is in a class by Himself and is the one and only ruler of the church.

“**The church**” is the noun *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), which refers to the totality of Christian congregations or Christian assemblies throughout the Roman Empire and those Christians who were dead and now in heaven.

The articular construction of the noun *ekklēsia* is functioning as a possessive pronoun indicating that the church is Jesus Christ's possession.

The article is monadic indicating that the church is a unique congregation because it is in union with the unique theanthropic person of creation, Jesus Christ.

The noun *ekklēsia* is in the genitive case and is functioning as a genitive of simple apposition meaning that it stands in apposition to the genitive form of the noun *sōma* and is clarifying for the reader or specifying for the reader what group of people Paul is referring to when he uses the noun *sōma*.

Colossians 1:18 Furthermore, He Himself, as an eternal spiritual truth exists in the state of being the head over His body, namely His church. (Author's translation)

In Colossians 1:15-17, the apostle Paul identified for these faithful Christians in Colossae a four-fold relationship of Jesus Christ in relation to creation: (1) He preexisted creation (verse 15). (2) He created all things (verse 16). (3) All things in creation exists for Him (verse 16). (4) He holds all things together (verse 17).

Now, beginning in Colossians 1:18, Paul discusses Jesus Christ's relationship with the church.

Paul makes two assertions about Jesus Christ in relation to the church.

The first is that He is the head over the church or the sovereign authority over the church.

The second is that He is preeminent in relation to the church because He is the beginning of the new creation or new humanity as demonstrated by the fact that He is the first person raised from the dead to receive a resurrection body.

So when we compare Paul's statements in Colossians 1:15-17 with his statements here in Colossians 1:18, we can see that in addition to being the cosmological ruler, Jesus Christ is also the soteriological ruler.

The head metaphor to signify the rulership of Jesus Christ over the church is employed by Paul in several places in his writings (Eph. 4:15; 5:23; Col. 2:19).

The body metaphor is employed often by Paul in his writings to describe the church's intimate and eternal union with Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 6:15; 10:17; 12:12-13, 27; Eph. 1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30; Col. 1:18a; 1:24; 2:19; 3:15).

The head and body metaphor is one of eight metaphors used in the New Testament to describe the relationship between the church and the Lord Jesus Christ: (1) The last Adam and the New Creation (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 5:17a). (2) The Head and the Body (Col. 1:18a). (3) The Great Shepherd and the Sheep (Heb. 13:20). (4) The True Vine and the Branches (John 15:5a). (5) The Chief Cornerstone and the Stones in the building (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:5-6). (6) The Great High Priest and members of the Royal Priesthood (Heb. 4:14a; 1 Pet. 2:9a). (7) The Groom and the Bride. (Our wedding occurs at the Second Advent) (Rev. 19:7). (8) The King of Kings and the Royal Family of God (Rev. 19:14-16).

The first assertion in Colossians 1:18 teaches that Jesus Christ is the sovereign ruler over the church.

The term "sovereignty" connotes a situation in which a person, from his innate dignity, exercises supreme power, with no areas of his province outside his jurisdiction.

As applied to Jesus Christ in relation to the church, the term "sovereignty" indicates His complete power over the church, so that He exercises His will absolutely, without any necessary conditioning by a finite will or wills.

The Scriptures teach that the church age believer is elected to the privilege of experiencing an eternal relationship and fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:3-4).

The apostle Paul in Romans 8:29 teaches the Christians in Rome that they were foreknown by the Father and were predestined by Him to be conformed to the image of His Son so that His Son would be the firstborn among many brethren.

In Romans 8:30, the apostle Paul teaches the Christians in Rome that they have been predestinated, called, justified and glorified by God the Father.

Ephesians 1:5 teaches that the church age believer was predestined by the Father in eternity past for the purpose of adoption as sons.

Romans 8:15 teaches that the church age believer has been adopted “Roman style” into the royal family of God.

During the dispensation of the church age when a sinner exercises faith alone in Christ alone, the omnipotence of God the Holy Spirit places that person in an eternal union with Christ.

This identifies the believer positionally with Christ in His crucifixion, death, resurrection and session.

The Scriptures teach that the church age believer is crucified, died, buried, raised and seated with Christ which took place at the moment of conversion, when the Holy Spirit placed them in union with Christ.

The baptism of the Spirit identified the church age believer with Christ’s crucifixion (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20), His death (Romans 6:2, 7-8; Colossians 2:20; 3:3), His burial (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12), His resurrection (Romans 6:5; Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:10-11; Colossians 2:12; 3:1) and His session (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1).

The Scriptures teach that at the moment of conversion, each and every church age believer has been given a spiritual gift for the purpose of serving other members of the body of Christ (1 Peter 4:10; Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7).

In the book of Philippians, the apostle Paul teaches the Philippian church that they and all church age believers are citizens of heaven (Phil. 1:27; 3:20).

The dispensation of the church age ends with the “rapture” of the church, which is a technical theological term for the resurrection of the church, which is imminent, and will be invisible to the world, and will terminate the church age dispensation (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; Phil. 3:20-21).

At the Bema Seat, each and every church age believer will have to give an account of their four-fold stewardship of time, talent, treasure and truth to the Lord Jesus Christ in order to determine if they merit rewards or not (Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 John 2:28).