

HEAD and HEADSHIP: Men, Women and Marriage

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Many men view themselves as superior to women, and some base their ideas on misunderstood scriptural references. This concept is often known as "headship" even though that term does not appear in the Bible. In this article we will examine "headship" and establish God's true instructions for marriage.

In English "Head" has three meanings:

- 1) a person's literal head connected to the rest of the body
- 2) one in authority, one in charge, as in, "He is HEAD of the company."
- 3) a beginning point, as "head" of a river

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary talks of this last meaning, "The word head is often used of inanimate objects such as rivers to designate a **beginning point** or top part of the object <Gen. 2:10; Ps. 24:9>."

The Greek *kephale*- Strong's 2776, is used of the literal head of the body and also as the "source of life" just as we used the term "head of the river", meaning the **source** of the river. In Greek mythology Athena sprang fully grown from the head of Zeus, therefore "head" became connected with the idea of "source of life" and became a common meaning.

If the Greeks wanted to express the idea of authority or ruling over someone there were many other words that they used, but the exact word used for one's literal head, *kephale*, was thought of as "source of life" and not as authority. So in this way, the Greek word for head does not always carry the exact same meaning that our English word does. Many early writers understood this point.

Ancient writer Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria, writes of Adam:

"Therefore of our race he became first **head, which is source**, and was of the earth and earthy. Since Christ was named the second Adam, he has been placed as **head, which is source**, of those who through him have been formed anew....Therefore he himself our **source, which is head**, has appeared as a human being."

Other writers of the first few centuries are also quoted in Catherine Clark Kroeger's paper "The Classical Concept of *Head* as 'Source'" which can be found in the book *Equal to Serve* by Gretchen Gaebelien Hull, p 267-283. Dr. Clark holds a Master's degree in Greek and a Ph.D. in classical studies.

Head as Source of Life

In Col 1:18 below, Paul talks of Christ being like the literal head and the church like the literal body. The two are connected and function as one! Notice the ideas of "beginning" "firstborn from the dead" and "preeminence" which are all concepts linked with the **source of life**. We receive life from Christ who was the first to be resurrected to eternal life.

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

This next verse also expresses the idea of being joined:

Col 2:19 ... the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. (NKJ)

Again, the idea is of closeness and interdependence as a flesh and blood head is to a body that is growing.

Women first or Men first?

This next scriptural passage is a very misunderstood one. Some of the beliefs of the false teachers of the day included the idea that Eve was created first, not Adam (see 1Tim. 2:13) and therefore man originated from woman. Also it was said that man originated from woman because every man was born of a woman and therefore a man's source of life was a woman. In the next scripture Paul is countering this false concept using "head" in the Greek meaning of "life source".

1 Cor 11:3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. (KJV)

Christ gave life to the man (Adam) and then woman (Eve) was created from man and the head--life source--of Christ is God the Father. Paul is not listing a chain of command here, **he is countering a pagan teaching**. He is showing the **source of life** of each one: man, woman and Christ.

Paul is not in a discussion about men having authority over women, but whether men came from women. In the next verse he shifts from "life source" to literal "heads" and whether one's head should be covered or uncovered while praying. Finally he decides a woman's hair is her covering.

1 Cor 11:4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. (NKJ)

In translating this next verse to the Ephesians, the translators added "things" when it is not in the Greek. Again, Christ is like a head and we are like a body.

Eph 1:22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all {things} to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all. (NAS)

Lastly, let's look at Ephesians 5:21-33, an important passage regarding the relationship between husband and wife. The marriages of Ephesus were especially troubled because the cult of Artemis looked back to Amazon warrior women who subjugated men. Verse 21 is to all church members and the lines that follow are to married couples within the church:

Eph 5:21-33
21 and **be subject to one another** in the fear of Christ.

Here **all** church members are told to be "subject to one another". Both males and females are to be "subject to one another". We are not to be in contention with other church members--male or female, but to willingly cooperate. There is no injunction for all the women to be "subject" to all the men as some believe. Next Paul moves this same willing cooperation into the sphere of marriage:

22 Wives, {be subject} to your own husbands, as (Greek: *hoos*) to the Lord.

Does "As" the Lord Mean Equal to the Lord?

The "be subject" is not in the Greek; that thought is carried from the verse before telling how all members are to act toward each other. The "as," is translated from the Greek *hoos*, and could be translated "**after** the Lord" because this exact same word is translated "after" in Acts 16:10, "And **after** (*hoos*)..."

A Christian woman is subject first to the Lord and **after that**, subject to her husband. It does **not** mean that a husband's influence and wishes have **equal authority** with Christ's commands, for that would be blasphemy! No man is equal with Jesus Christ.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself {being} the Savior of the **body**.

Paul presents the idea of being connected-- as a married couple you are **one being** just as a head is connected to a body as Paul makes clear in verse 31.

24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives {ought to be} to their husbands in everything.

There is definitely the idea of a husband's leadership here, but godly leadership-- NOT supreme authority and crushing domination--loving as Christ's own love. Back in Eph. 5:21 at the start of this passage we were told that every church member is to "be subject to one another", so we know that being "subject to " does not give permission for oppressive behavior.

25 Husbands, **love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church** and gave Himself up for her;

26 that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

28 So husbands ought also to **love their own wives as their own bodies**. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

Clearly, Paul's instruction to husbands is kind love and the idea of being **one body**, not to dominate harshly, bark orders, and view wives as lesser mortals.

29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also {does} the church,

30 because we are members of His body.

31 For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become **one flesh**.

32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

33 Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and {let} the wife {see to it} that she respect her husband. (NAS)

Supreme Commanders

Some take this passage and make husbands into Supreme Commanders who stand on their wives to make themselves look taller. Does Christ treat the church that way? Remember that no man should elevate himself to the level of Christ and think he comes between his wife and Christ! A woman is always responsible directly to Jesus Christ **first** and to any human being second.

Notice in the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 that God held the woman equally responsible for the lies they told. If the man was the "Supreme Commander" of the home and the woman MUST obey the husband, even when what he commands is evil-- if all this were true, then Sapphira would have gone free. God would have said, "Sapphira has no responsibility in this matter. She had to do what her husband said." Instead Sapphira had responsibility before God because He expected her to obey His Commandment not to bear false witness. Instead she obeyed her husband Ananias, and died because of her choice to put her husband's words **as** if they were **equal** to the words of Christ!

Conclusion

A husband's instructions are never to be put "as" or **equal** to the Lord's instructions. They are to be followed "after" the Lord. Like a woman respects God she is to respect her godly husband in a similar way-- but not equal to God! If a woman puts her husband equal to God she makes her husband her God! No man, even a very good man, can be given equal status with God or Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "And the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh." Mark 10:8. A husband and wife are one union, one flesh, and one body. A wife should cooperate with a godly husband's leadership and "be subject" to him **after the Lord**. A woman is not to be subject to all men, just to her own husband. She must never obey her husband when he would lead her to disobey God. Husbands are to love their wives with a Christ-like love-- a sacrificing love-- and wives are to respect their husbands and return that same high standard of love.