

## THE MEANING OF “HEAD”

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Traditionally, the theological interpretation of *headship* meant that man has authority over the woman. This thought stems from 1 Corinthians 11:3, which says in part, “. . . the head of every woman is the man.” These days, we usually hear this Scripture used to maintain that man is the head, the leader, authority, boss. The Good News Bible assumes this idea in translation, “The husband is supreme over the wife.” (I Cor. 11:3 GNB).

Major women’s organizations insist on having a man in an oversight position of each local chapter. Men’s groups that hold “honor your pastor” meetings don’t allow women pastors to attend. Many modern international speakers and men’s groups still allege the confining view that the man is THE priest and head of his home. Where did this all begin?

### WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Of course, the mistreatment of women has been around a long time. Paul had a lot to say about allowing women to minister – most of what he said has been misunderstood. Then, about the 3rd Century AD, the establishment of governmental church hierarchy (priesthood, etc.) totally eliminated women from church priesthood.

Protestantism brought about much reformation. But, surprisingly, the emergence of Protestantism (arising mostly in Europe) didn’t help her plight.

**LUTHER** (1483-1546). Though many had previously protested against the church, Luther successfully broke ranks to begin the Protestant movement. One of the major reasons why his work was more successful than those of the past was the invention of the printing press. This innovation allowed literate people to make some personal value judgments without having a priest interpret for them what they must believe. Luther's Ninety Theses nailed against the door in Wurtzberg was a monumental breakthrough. Centuries of spiritual transformation have occurred from the actions of men like Luther.

Luther indeed changed the world and turned the church toward greater freedoms. But, like we mentioned, Luther didn’t benefit the cause of women – at all.

One major issue of Protestant contention was the worship of Mary. Luther's own work, according to Tillich, was pervaded by “A hidden Mariology insofar as Luther, in effect, substitutes the motherhood of God with the demanding father image.”<sup>1</sup> For him, Eve originally had been created with a purpose -- but now she lost it FOREVER and for all women!!! Because of Eve, now men must control the female by keeping them under male authority. Luther taught that women must necessarily feel shame because of the very fact of their existence.<sup>2</sup> He said:

God has created men with broad chests and shoulders, not broad hips so that men can understand wisdom. But, the place where the filth flows out is small. With women it is the other way around. That's why they have lots of filth and little wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

Luther's theology was almost exclusively masculine, agreeing in many areas with patristic tradition. His teachings transformed men within a whole new socio-economic setting while women's roles remained both ignored and impoverished. Scholar Kierkegaard comments:

“That Luther invented a religion for the adult man states the limitation as well as the true extent of Luther's theological creation. Luther provided new elements for the Western male's identity and created for him new roles.”<sup>4</sup>

Luther enthusiastically called marriage a noble state, and his teaching on married clergy broke ancient practices. He decided that marriage wasn't a sacrament but merely an essential civil matter, like food. He married Katherine Von Bora, who had escaped the cloistered life with eight other nuns. He said when his wife behaved “saucy” that she received a “box on the ear.” He belittled his own wife as she tried to learn saying, “There is no dress that suits a woman as badly as trying to become wise.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, the phrase, “A woman's place is in the home” was actually coined by Luther. Obedience and submission replaced chastity as the woman's prime virtue.

Luther's reformation governed the laws of the home:

First. The woman was to be under obedience to the masculine head of the household.

Second. She was to be constantly employed for his benefit.

Third. Her master and “responsible head” strictly chose her society for her.

Fourth. This masculine family head was regarded as a general father confessor, held as responsible in word and deed.

Fifth. Neither genius nor talent could free women from such control without his consent.<sup>6</sup>

Luther taught the priesthood of the male believer and never equality. According to Luther, there was no other way a woman could help man except to bear children. He said, “If they become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth -- that is why they are there . . . So that you could by God's will of suffering and perhaps dying (go) through these delicious pains.”<sup>7</sup>

His opinionated writings described her as a weak vessel, a nail, a tortoise, burning with lust, stinking, a tool of the devil, etc. It is clear that Luther saw marriage as a just punishment for women. He believed that in the Paradise Garden of Eden, the sexual union had been good and without shame. But, today, he said, because of the Fall, man

could not know any woman without the “dreadful madness of lust.” He linked sex with shame and pleasure and compared it with epilepsy. Luther agreed with the thinking of the day, that a woman's sex drive was much stronger than man's was. He thought that all women shared the qualities of a prostitute to some degree. Still, he maintained that the goodness of marriage could be found through the eyes of faith.<sup>8</sup>

According to Luther, this punishment (of women) was because of the original sin in the garden; and the woman bears it just as unwillingly as she bears those pains and inconveniences which have been placed upon her flesh. The rule remains with the husband, and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command. He rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions, tills the soil, builds, plants, etc. The woman, on the other hand, is like a nail driven in a wall. She sits at home...the wife should stay at home and look after the affairs of the household as one who has been deprived of the ability of administering those affairs that are outside and concern the state...In this way Eve is punished (*Lectures on Genesis*, 3:16).

The Reformation era always projected a feminine image (Mary) as the nature of the church. In contrast, Luther's imagery of the church becomes masculine and fraternal, speaking of the brotherhood of believers. The male realm was said to be religious, public, rational, and theoretical.<sup>9</sup> Luther claimed that the man should arise and take his rightful place while the woman should remain a subjugated and obedient wife who serves only in the private domestic realm.

Though in many places these ideals have modified and lessened, this Christian ideal of masculine supremacy still dominates.

- Have you ever wondered why most wedding vows pronounce them “man and wife,” but not parallel nouns like, “man and woman” or “husband and wife?”

Yes. It was Martin Luther who forcibly challenged the established church's conception of the role of the priest. Martin Luther broke free of the one-priest-confessional idea to the concept of the universal priesthood. Early Protestants decided that every husband was “THE priest of his home.” He was “the man of the house.” Luther claimed that the MAN was the “spiritual head.” In fact, Luther maintained that “Women should keep in their proper place.” He actually coined the phrase, “A woman's place is in the home.”

Perhaps it's time for us to nail a different “protest” on the door of the church.

Of course, every husband is a priest. Every believer is a priest. Ex.19:6 says, “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” also (I Peter 2:9). HOWEVER, JESUS EXPECTS TO BE THE ONLY HIGH PRIEST OF OUR HOME.

- One must ask, did Christ teach His apostles to be priests? Did He teach them Levitical priesthood ritual? Is there a Scripture that says that every home has one priest? Or one head? (No, no, no. See Tim.2:5.) Each Christian has direct access to God and is able to offer his/her own spiritual sacrifices.

- Often, in order to take authority over a situation, men claim “headship.” The early Apostolic Church leaders set a pattern for the current headship teaching that still dominates our present evangelical church. For example, Edmund Becke edited Mathew’s Bible with this note on 1 Peter 3:7 (spelled as the original) , “And yf she be not obedient and healpful unto hym, endeavoureth to beate the feare of God into her heade, that thereby she maye be compelled to learne her dutie, and to do it.”<sup>10</sup>

If it were true that “man is the head (boss or leader) of the wife” spiritually, then a born-again wife with an unsaved husband, or a single woman, or a widow has no “spiritual head.” She somehow has an independent free will to be saved, but after that, she must have a male overseer or boss! If no other mediator except Christ exists, then how can we justify the husband coming between the wife and her Lord? How about the still popular notion, “As your head I refuse to give you permission.”<sup>11</sup> When one person, any person, dominates another—they displace the divine Lordship of Christ. In Christ, there are no racial superiorities, no class superiorities, and no gender superiorities. After all, everyone possesses free will options to choose life or death, blessings or cursing, and freedom or bondage.

One must first notice that the Scripture says the man is the head of the woman, NOT the head of the home. No Scripture says that the husband is the head of the home. It also does not say he is the head of his wife. This erroneous concept of headship rejects women’s personal accountability for her own actions -- because the husband somehow has the right to nullify her decisions.

1 Corinthians 6:17 reminds us, “But he (each person, this word is not gender defined) that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit with the Lord.” As we examine this further, let’s do so assured of the revelation that we (the body corporate) are a kingdom of priests.

*The questioning of the meaning of head, doesn’t side with rebellion and lawlessness. It doesn’t at all imply that homes and churches become places of rivalry, or contention over who’s in charge. God gives churches governmental authority to rule and assist believers to achieve their potential, both through correction and encouragement. Scriptures distinctly differentiate between the essential need for apostolic governmental authority and “headship” within a family unit. Governmental Scriptures concerning ministerial oversight do not concern the word “head” (kephale).*

*Before we go further, let’s make it plain. Truly liberated people (all races, classes, and both genders) are servants of God. They are not cocky, insubordinate, rebellious, or difficult. They are not pushy, haughty, or demanding. Don’t make the same mistakes that soooo many others have made and misuse your freedoms. Use Truth to gain the internal freedom needed to optimize your choices in life.*

The Greek word for “head” (*kephale*) in question here, unlike its English and Hebrew counterparts, does not, and never has communicated the meaning of “chief, supremacy, nor boss.” In our example, the Greek the word *kephale*, which has been translated “head,”

also never meant decision maker, superior rank, nor final authority. We can't assign any of those connotations to the word *kephale*, just because of our current usages. Examination of other concurrent Greek literature confirms the FACT that *kephale* was never understood to mean "leader, boss or scalp."

Therefore, the conception of "head" in Eph. 5:23 and I Cor. 11:3 must be studied as it was understood by the Greeks. If Paul had meant to talk about the head, skull area of the body, boss, or leader then several other Greek words do translate into English, but none of them are *kephale*. There are words that do mean topmost bodily member (Eph. 1:22-23) interdependent with the body (I Cor. 12:21; Eph. 5:23-30) and the part usually born first (Col. 1:15-18).<sup>12</sup>

- *Of the Greek words meaning the head of the body, none are kephale.*
- *Paul's native tongue was Greek. In the seven passages where he used the word kephale, he addressed Greek speaking converts from other Greek religions. If Paul had wanted to say leader or ruler, he would have used the word "archon" as he did in Romans 13:3. He knew how to use the word "exousia" to express authority as he did in Rom.13:1-2.<sup>13</sup> He could have used prostatus to describe an overseer or ruler as he did in 1 Tim.3:4. But, as a brilliant scholar, Paul deliberately chose to use "kephale" for the issues in which he was speaking about derivation, origin, and source.*
- *Kephale is never intended to mean "authority, boss, or the one in charge" in the New Testament.*

*Kephale* was a commonly used buzzword meaning source. The meaning was clear because Greeks looked for the origin of things. Many times, the source of something was said to be from the head of something – hence the confusing terminology using headship.

- For example, Aristotle thought that the human head was the source (*kephale*) of human sperm. He taught that semen went from the head through the spinal cord to the genitals. That's why the Romans often referred to intercourse as "diminishing one's head." The Greek goddess Athena was said to have come out of the head of her father, Zeus (her source, *kephale*). Pythagoras agreed sperm came from the brain, and consequently his followers refused to eat meat that came from near the head.<sup>15</sup>
- Plato thought that the head was a receptacle for the soul, a seed itself, while the mortal part resided in the chest. To him the head not only produced the sperm but life to the whole body. Plato also used *kephale* to mean the beginning of a story. Adam was hailed as the head (*kephale*) of all people because of being the original father (source).

Both the Romans and the Greeks understood that *kephale* meant source.

Because of the opposition to women in governmental ministry, I spent almost thirteen years studying this topic and traveling to all the historical places to research this topic. One day, I photographed this famous large old sculpture fountain in Rome that depicted the four river Gods (see picture displayed). Here, the god of the river Nile stands holding a cloth over his eyes— this imagery is used because they didn't know the source of the Nile—the place of origin that generated the whole river. Even the gods wanted to know where rivers came from! Many ancient explorers searched for the beginnings of Roman rivers – and when they found the source, they would place a shrine or statue of the head of a bearded man or bull.

Paul also used *kephale* (head, source) to compare Christ as the head (derivation, source) of the church (I Cor. 11:3). He was before all things, and Colossians 2:18 tells us that He made all things consist by holding them together. He's the *head* (inception, origin) of the body, and the church sprang from Christ's side (Jesus is the source of the church). The Head of every believer is Christ, the source of living water that flows out. He's the only foundation and the only head (source) of our life. Both the woman and the man must acknowledge Christ as their Head. Likewise, marriage partners must learn to live without strife and contention, equally draw life from *their* Head. The husband should love his wife, wash her with the Word of God, nurture her, and help her find her true identity with him under Jesus.

Paul's Scripture that says, "The head of woman is the man" (\*\*\*) probably addressed the fable that Eve saved the world. (The worship of the mother goddess was universal in the area of Asia Minor where Paul addressed these scriptures. Paul undoubtedly wrote this to remind these former Mother Goddess worshipers that Eve was not a goddess that created humanity. Eve came from Adam, not vice-versa.) It cannot mean the boss of every (any) woman is every (any) man – that would require different words. It meant that the head (source) of woman (Eve) was man (Adam). Don't get the story backwards.

Some major denominations still interpret this verse to mean that a married woman must be totally under the "covering" headship of her husband; they say single women must be under a male authority of her church. Some (any) male must be "over" every woman.

This viewpoint suggests the argument that somehow a woman is a step more than a man away from God! It also maintains that a married woman is necessarily subservient (under) to her mate, even though Scriptures declare that Jesus put all believers, male and female, in a superior state.

Women are not created just to be menially subordinate to men. We're all supposed to be bondservants of the Lord, voluntarily chained as Paul was on his way to Rome. We are to serve one another – with no private agenda to chase, no personal ambition to "lord over."

**THE "HEAD" IS CHRIST:**

Frequently, these so-called headship Scriptures are used as the foundational proof for a “Divine chain of command.” Except, there’s no such thing as a Divine chain of command. The Father isn’t ranked first, with Jesus coming in a big second, followed next by the man; and then, the woman tagging along as the last in line. This Scripture never implies that the *Father* is the head (boss) of the Son, but rather it means that God is the *head* (source) of the Son. The “head” of Christ is God. Jesus came forth as the issue from God -- which subsists as three Persons in One.<sup>17</sup> The union and oneness of the Trinity must remain intact as we define this word *head*.

The Father isn’t the “boss” or leader of the Son; the Son isn’t the boss of the Holy Spirit. They all equally, individually, and altogether constitute GOD. Together they all compromise the monotheistic God in the plurality of three eternal substances as One. The Father, though always referred to as the First Person of the Trinity, isn’t “the boss” of the Son who’s absolute deity, nor the Spirit who’s also divine. The distinction between them does not imply any inferiority. Jointly, they have always existed, are co-equal, and are co-eternal. All the Godhead shows forth the same attributes and operates within the same function. They are altogether sovereign, absolute, perfect, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, immutable, and can’t lie.

The Scripture says that the head (source) of Christ is God, (the totality of the Triune God). From eternity, Christ has always been Christ. Jesus, the God-Man, became the issue sent forth out of God to accomplish our covenant redemption. GOD is the SOURCE of Christ. Bible theologians call this eternal uniting of humanity and Deity the “Hypostatic Union.”

In a Bethlehem manger-inn, Jesus took human form and has not left it. His body transformed after death and then resurrected. That Jesus, the God that that fully lives with us, is the part of God that died for us. As the express image and the fullness of the Godhead, He was very God. But, in spite of being co-equal, Jesus humbly served, saying only what the Father said. Though He was an Omnipotent being, He humbled Himself and waited to be exalted. Jesus didn’t think it robbery to be equal with God, yet He only spoke what was from the Father. He didn’t regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped – He already was God (Phil. 2:6). Now He sits on a throne at the right hand of the Father. Furthermore, He raised (past tense) us up *together* (men and women) and made us sit *together* in Him (Eph. 2:9). There, Jesus eternally intercedes for us. He’s not fifty percent man and fifty percent God, but one-hundred percent God and one-hundred percent human.

This eternal God-in-the-flesh met me personally. He that is in me has the Spirit without measure! He dwells fully in us. Imagine! The fullness of the Godhead dwells in you and me. He finished His work so that we could inherit our full privilege--today! Not later in the sweet by-and-by. Now!

Ephesians 3:19 says that to know the love of God toward us (His corporate-enthroned bride) passes (exceeds) knowledge. Paul projects a new vision of the body of Christ, envisioning the personhood and interdependence of men and women existing and ruling

together in and through Christ--a breakthrough that expanded in the first century church and that soon went askew.

Jesus is our model of equality. There is no striving for what is ours. When we know our position, we can fully walk toward our destiny and freely inherit our Kingdom promises.

The debate is over. There is nothing to prove. We walk in total respect, love, and victory. Today we are charged to bring God's creative intention back to completion. The Lord has chosen you and me to break the mold of past mistakes and walk together as a manifestation His fullness.

My friend, Jesus prayed that we be one . . . united in purpose IN HIM.

For further elaboration and extensive study, please see this author's book from which this article was excerpted, *From Enmity to Equality*.

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1. Ruether, Rosemary R. *Women-Church, Theology and Practice*, (Harper and Row, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Genesis #:9.

3. D. Martin Luther's Werke "*Tischreden, Weimar*," 1912-21" p. 25.

4. Ruether, Rosemary R. *ibid*, pg. 31.

5. Wiesner, Merry "*Feminist Theology*," pg. 129.

6. Gage, Matilda, *ibid*, Microfiche, pg. 146.

7. D. Martin Luther Werke *Tischreden, Weimar, 1912-21* p. 25.

8. Douglass, Jane Dempsey *Women and the Continental Reformation*, (Simon and Schuster, New York) p. 298.

9. Luther allowed for bigamy in difficult marital cases. German prince Phillip of Hesse had a bigamous marriage, contrary to imperial law, and had Luther's blessings.

10. "Mutuality The National Newsletter of Christians for Biblical Equality" June 1994 St. Paul, MN 55107-9998 p.1, date of quote - 1549.

11. The Reformed Journal, Malcolm, Kari Torjesen, "*Shaky Foundations*,"

12. Evans, Mary J. *ibid*, p. 67.

13. Mickelsen, Berkeley and Alvera, "The Head of the Epistles," *Christianity Today*

14. Bilezikian, *ibid*, pg 249.

15. Kroeger, Catherine Clark, *The Classical Concept of Head as 'Source,'* Appendix III, the plenary address of 1986 to the Evangelical Theological Society.

16. Kroeger, *The Classical*. . . etc., *ibid*.

17. Walvoord, Cambell, Zuck, *Chafer Systematic Theology - Abridged Vol. 1*, Victor Books p. 149.
18. Again, this refutes the Gnostic notion that Adam came from the gnosis of Eve. The Scriptures concerning *head* (seat of life) of every woman being the man does not mean that the boss or leader of every woman is every man. It means that woman was derived from man. The head of the *family* isn't the man, but rather, Jesus is to be the head of the family.