

**Which definition of kephale is correct?
Examining the Controversy of Women and Head Coverings: Part 1**

1. Study 1 Corinthians 11:2 in light of 11:3-16. How is it related?

1 Corinthians 11:2 serves as a complimentary introduction before Paul's criticism of specific Corinthian church practices regarding women (11:3-16), the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40).

2. Study 1 Corinthians 11:3. What is the meaning of "head"?

There has been considerable debate about what Paul meant by the Greek term "kephalē". The traditional view has held "head" as designating "authority over". Non-traditional views believe that "head" refers to "source" as exemplified by the expression "head of a river", which Paul used to indicate that women are made of the same substance as men. Which view is correct?

The textual evidence indicates substantially that "authority" is the best definition for Paul's Greek term "kephalē".

All the major lexicons that specialize in the New Testament period give the meaning "authority"; none give the meaning "source".

Commentators who ascribe to the meaning of "source" can only base their interpretation on two examples of "kephalē" in ancient literature, and these two ancient manuscripts were written more than four hundred years before the time of the New Testament.

One of the texts, *Herodotus 4.91*, shows that "kephalē" refers to the "end points" of a river, which includes both the beginning and end of a river. The evidence is not persuasive for the meaning "source".

The other text, *Orphic Fragments 21a*, does not provide enough context for one to conclusively define "kephalē" as "source."

Because most recent studies of every use of "kephalē" in extant literature demonstrate that it was never used to indicate "source" until 500 AD, the forthcoming *Lidell-Scott* will change their entry.

The Septuagint, which the apostle Paul used as an important source for the Old Testament and his theology, never once alludes to the meaning of "source".

Within the context of his Epistles on the subject of men and women, the apostle Paul's never used "kephalē" to mean "source"; he used it to refer to "authority".

Ephesians 5:23 is a prime example of this. When verse 23 is read within context of the verses preceding and following it, "kephalē" is undeniably meant as "authority".

Ephesians 1:22 is another example where "head" refers to "authority" and not "source". This differentiation is seen as the preceding verses provide the context to this understanding in affirming the supremacy of Christ over everything and over all time.

In a similar fashion as Ephesians 1:22, Colossians 2:10 uses the term "head" in the context of "authority". In this example Paul is describing Jesus' sovereignty over demonic power. Jesus has authority over them; He definitely is not the source of them!

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Thus in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul is saying that Christ is the authority over man, man is the authority over woman, and God is the authority over Christ.

3. Study 1 Corinthians 11:3 further. Non-traditional views believe that God did not originally create man to have authority over woman. They insist that male authority was the result of the Fall and cultural influences. What is the apostle Paul saying when he refers to the relationship between God and Jesus Christ?

In establishing the headship and authority of God, Paul may be mistakenly understood to infer that there is a hierarchy within the Triune God and a subordination of Jesus Christ. However, Paul is making a reference to the function and role of each personality within the Triune God; he is not saying that there is a hierarchy in the nature and essence of each personality. While Jesus Christ willingly submits Himself to the authority of God the Father, God is one Divine Being who has three distinguishable personal distinctions that serve each other in selfless love and working dependently and cooperatively together.

The Father sent the Son whose purpose was to reveal the Father. The Son sent the Spirit whose purpose was to reveal the Son.

Each personality of the Triune God created the world.

Each personality of the Triune God created man.

The power of God, ministered through the Holy Spirit, resulted in the birth of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ was baptized, the Spirit descended on Him and God the Father attested to His Son.

Each personality of the Triune God was involved with the death of Jesus Christ.

Each personality of the Triune God was involved with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Each personality of the Triune God is brought together in providing for man's eternal salvation. God the Father provided the means for salvation, Jesus Christ the Son willingly paid the price of salvation, and the Holy Spirit set us apart in the process of salvation.

Both Jesus and God the Father dwell within Believers through the person of the Holy Spirit.

The name of each distinct personality of the Triune God is invoked at baptism; but note that they are declared in one name.

For more information, see "The Trinity... equal or hierarchal?"

The sequence of Paul's argument is worth noting. Paul says: 1) Christ is the head of every man, 2) man is the head of a woman, and 3) God is the head of Christ.

The relationship of God and Christ, placed after the relationship of man and woman, provides a context to the headship (authority) of man. Man's authority is functional and not a sign of superiority; woman's submission is functional and not a sign of inferiority. If it were otherwise, Paul would have listed the sequence as God over Christ, Christ over man, and man over woman.

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The relationship between male and female is patterned after the ontological equality yet functional differences that exist among the persons of our Triune God as these verses exemplify:

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (John 10:25-30)

"You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. (John 14:28)

Paul's statement clearly shows that male authority was not the result of the Fall or of cultural influences; male authority was part of God's created order, and women were not created to be inferior. Like the Triune God, different in function but of equal worth, men and women were created for different roles but of equal worth.

References:

1. Piper, J, Grudem, W, eds, Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books (1991), p.127-130.