

## What About Headship? 1 Corinthians 7 and Ephesians 5

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In Christ, there is no male-female division (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 11:11 ‘Woman is not separate from man, nor is man separate from woman in the Lord.’).

It is simply not natural in close friendships for one friend always to have the final authority in decision making.

NIV, RSV, NRSV, and ESV, which conceal how Paul defined “head” in verse 23 and incorrectly split the sentence including Ephesians 5:21–24 into two separate paragraphs. Acts 5:8–10 shows that Sapphira was dead wrong to agree with her husband Ananias.

### **Mutual submission is the explicit context of Ephesians 5:21–33.**

Origen (Heine, *Origen and Jerome*, 231-32), Jerome (PL 26: 654), and Chrysostom (Homily XIX on Ephesians, NPNF1, 13:142) teach that the wife’s submission is one facet of mutual submission.

Mutual submission is mutual “voluntary yielding in love” (BDAG 1042).

The earliest Greek manuscripts,  $\mathfrak{P}46$  and Codex Vaticanus B, show **no verb “submit” in v. 22.**

Its omission is confirmed by Clement of Alexandria (Stromata 4.8.64), Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Jerome’s commentary and assertion that in Greek manuscripts verse 22 never repeats the verb “submit” from verse 21.

Virtually all editions of the Greek NT have no verb submit here: NA28, NA27, UBS5, UBS4, Nestle, Westcott and Hort, Tasker, Souter, Alford, Tischendorf, and Goodrich and Lukaszewski 2003

After “submit” first appears in Codex Sinaiticus ca. AD 350–360, every surviving NT manuscript includes “submit” in 5:22. Since no manuscript after AD 350 removed it, removal can’t reasonably explain why all the earliest manuscripts and citations omit it.

**Paul’s longest and most detailed treatment of marriage is 1 Corinthians 7.** It never implies the husband’s leadership or that husbands and wives should have different roles. It identifies exactly the same rights and responsibilities for wives and husbands regarding twelve different issues about marriage, both natural and spiritual: vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 10–11, 12–13, 14, 15, 16, 28, 32 and 34b, 33–34a, without parallel in the literature of the ancient world!

Richard Hays, “Paul offers a paradigm-shattering vision of marriage as a relationship in which the partners are bonded together in submission to one another.” *First Corinthians*, 131.

Fundamental principle: interpret in harmony with other passages by the same author.

Eph 5:22–23: “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord, for a husband is “head” of *his* wife as also Christ is “head” of the church in the sense that he is savior of the body *through giving himself in love for the body.*

Paul explains this passage as primarily about Christ and the church in verse 32. Reference to marriage begins in verse 22 as an illustration of submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, and Paul refers in almost every verse to Christ and the church.

Markus Barth, *Ephesians* 2:618: 5:23, the first known reference to a husband as “head of his wife’ [so it] must be understood as original with the author of Ephesians.” fresh metaphor

**LSJ and its supplements** lists forty-eight figurative meanings for “head,” but **does not list “leader,” “authority,” or anything related as a meaning for “head.”**

TDNT 3:674: “is not employed for the head of a society. This is first found in the [LXX] sphere”  
The word for “head” conveys “leader” in the Hebrew Scriptures 171 times.

The NASB, a literal English translation, translates 115 of these 171 instances “head.”

**LXX uses *kephalē* (“head”) clearly as a metaphor meaning “leader” only once, Isa 7:9b.**

Other alleged instances are not standard LXX clear metaphors of *kephalē* meaning “leader.”

Isa 7:8a was by Origen in the third century AD, long after Paul, to match the MT Rahlfs 2:574

Isa 7:8–9 *kephalē* twice mean “capital city.” Cities are not leaders, nor do they have authority.

LXX explains 4 references to “head-tail” idioms to mean things other than “leader”: “above and below” (Deut 28:13), “high and low” (Deut 28:43–44), “great and small” (Isa 9:14 replacing the Hebrew, “palm branch and reed”) or “beginning and end” (Isa 19:15).

Isa 9:15 explains “head” in 9:14 to be “the old man and flatterers” and “the tail” to be “the lying prophets.” The “head” is the beginning of those the Lord takes away from Israel.

Isa 9:15 translates the Hebrew “head” with *archē*, here meaning “beginning,” not *kephalē*.

3 Kingdoms (1Ki) 8:1 “head” = “tops” was added by Origen (d. ca. 254). Rahlfs LXX 1:646.

In four more passages, the standard LXX translation has *eis kephalēn*. The only English equivalent for *eis kephalēn* that fits these contexts naturally is “as head”: Judg 11:11; 2 Kingdoms (= 2Sa) 22:44; Ps 17:44 = 18:44 in Hebrew = 18:43 in English; Lam 1:5.

3 variant reading, “as head” (*eis kephalēn*) meaning “as leader” are not in the older MSS B &, only Codex Alexandrinus. All three occur in a single ten verse span, Judg 10:18; 11:8, 9.

Nigel Turner cites *eis* meaning “as like normal Greek *hōs*,” *Syntax*, ed. J. H. Moulton (1963) 247 Dana+Mantey, *Manual Grammar* (1957) 103 “as, expressing equivalence,” cf. BDAG 290 4.d.

Greek readers likely understood *eis kephalēn* as a simile, “as head”, not a metaphor “is head”  
LXX’s almost complete absence of “head” as a metaphor for “leader” shows its translators, like Greek dictionaries, **did not recognize *kephalē* as a natural metaphor for “leader.”**

In spite of the LXX tendency to translate Hebrew words with the closest Greek equivalent and to “extend their range of meaning in an un-Greek way after the Hebrew” Walters 143 *kephalē* meaning “leader” was un-Greek that even when it was the closest equivalent to the Hebrew, LXX translators almost never used *kephalē* as a metaphor for “leader”.

### **Objective Criteria for Determining what “Head” means in Ephesians 5:23**

**1** Gold standard: Did the author define the meaning of this word in this context? “apposition”

**2** Does the literary context explain what the word means or conflict with proposed meanings?

**3** How does the author use this word elsewhere, especially in similar contexts?

1 Col 1:18: “he is the *kephalē* of the body, the church, who is the *archē*” origin/source NEB/TEV

Paul uses apposition twice here, first to define “the body” as “the church,” and second, to

define “the head” as “the source” by identifying “he is the head” with “who is the source.”

Verses 20–22 twice explain that Christ became the source of the church by “making peace by the blood of his cross ... in his body of flesh by his death.”

Christ [is]	head	of the	church
he	savior	of the	body"

<i>ho Christos</i>	<i>kephalē</i>	<i>tēs</i>	<i>ekklēsias</i>
<i>autos</i>	<i>sōtēr</i>	<i>tou</i>	<i>sōmatos</i>

1. A. T. Robertson's *Grammar* (1934), 399 identifies this as "**emphatic apposition**" since the grammatical construction of each of the four parts of the parallel expressions matches exactly:

nominative singular subject (Christ = he)

predicate nominative singular noun describing the subject ("savior" explains "head")

genitive singular article ("of the" = "of the")

genitive singular noun identifying what Christ saves ("the church" = "the body")."

Christ as savior "loved the church and gave himself up for...nourishes and cherishes" her.

**Christ as "head" is the church's savior, its source of love and nourishment.**

Husbands "love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her".

Husbands are not told to have authority over their wives, but "to submit to one another"

by loving his wife, giving himself for her, nourishing her, and cherishing her, vv 25–33

2. Eph 4:15–16 head means "source": Christ is the "head ... from whom ... the body grows"

This prepares readers to understand "head" as "source" in ch. 5.

The context of mutual submission 5:21 is incompatible with interpreting "head" as "authority over" in which only the wife must submit to her husband, not vice versa.

3. "Source" makes good sense in 9 of Paul's 11 metaphorical uses of *kephalē*, including Col 2:19, "the head, from whom the whole body ... grows" and all five uses in 1 Cor 11:3–5.

**All 3 principles show "head" in Eph 5:23 means "savior," "source of love and nourishment."**

Is Christ the model only for husbands? No. Eph 5:2 commands the whole church, including wives, "walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us." Eph

4:13 expresses the goal that we all attain "to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Does Paul command only the husband to love his wife, not the reverse? No. Titus 2:4

Does Ephesians 5 teach that as Christ has authority over the church, a husband should have authority over his wife? Chrysostom vehemently denies that husbands have authority like Christ, stating "And who will endure this?" *Hom. in ep. 1 ad Cor.* 26.3 in NPNF1, 12:150.

1 Tim 5:14 call wives to "rule their homes," literally "be house despots" (*oikodespotein*)

Paul affirms the equal standing and mutual submission of wife and husband.