

Who's in Charge of the Family?

by Sheryll Prinz-McMillan

Headship—The Scriptures witness that the Christian Church has only one head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:23; Col. 1:18). In His church, leaders do not lord it over others, but rather serve others and empower them for the exercise of their spiritual gifts (Matt. 20:25-28; John 13:12-17; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

A church member came into my office for counseling. She sat down and moved right to the point: Her husband hit her. Not too often, she assured me, only when he was upset or when she had done something "wrong." My first concern was to check for her safety, so I asked if an emergency shelter was needed. But she wouldn't even consider the possibility of leaving him, for she believed a Christian wife should always submit to her husband "as God intended." She noted how the Bible placed the husband over her as the "head" of the household, and said it was her duty to find a way to work within the situation. She recited the verses for me: "Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:22-24, NIV). Then she suggested that as a pastor I might be able to help them establish the proper family order. Maybe I could teach

her how to give him more confidence to lead the family.

I was surprised and concerned. The couple's beliefs were leading to violence. The entire family was at risk for a theology that I believe is suspect. God established love and mutual support as the primary values in marriage, and no hierarchy should supersede it, especially one that produces violence. Passages such as Malachi 2:14-16 clearly point out that God sees violence as evil. I became concerned about this "headship theology" and where it leads. I began to question: What does the Bible really teach about being a family? And I began to study. What follows are some discoveries encountered in looking for a biblical understanding of relationships.

Hierarchies and Headship

It has been estimated that at least a million Christian women are victims of spouse abuse in the United States alone, and conservative estimates suggest that one out of every three or four women are beaten by men in some way. Many recent scholars have suggested that there is a direct link between abuse and a belief in a divinely established hierarchy of authority, commonly known as "headship theology." For instance, in the book *Abuse and Religion*, authors Pagelow and Johnson point out that patriarchy, the social order in which male control is elevated, provides a structure where men can do as they want to "their" women. In this model, subordinating women allows men to gain control and power, establishing a pattern in society that becomes institutionalized. Eventually, even religion adopts the model, because such relationships seem "natural, morally just and sacred."¹

These researchers see a direct correlation between the patriarchal family system and spouse abuse, and suggest that authority is the problem. When a hierarchical model, one that establishes a "rank," or priority of one over the other, is set up, power comes from the top down. In this model there must always be a "subordinate" or obedient person. In patriarchy, the model of power moves from man to woman to child, with each step down losing power. The man has the power to punish any woman or child who resists his attempt to control. This pattern of inequality may initiate a chain reaction

that runs throughout the family.

Since "headship" is often shorthand for hierarchy and control, and this type of hierarchy is directly linked to abuse, it is imperative for Christians to establish a biblical view of the relationship between women and men. Clearly any model that endorses abuse is questionable for any who take Jesus seriously, for He said: "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, KJV), and "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28, KJV).

Headship, as a catchphrase for relational hierarchy, not only has the potential for abuse, but also for idolatry as well. A current premarital counseling book teaches a wife-to-be to elevate the husband even above God. This author believes that the man is established by God as the interpreter of God's directives in a woman's life. The book recommends that when a woman feels God is leading her in a direction opposite of her husband's, she should take her husband's position over what she believes God has shown her. A quote from this book exemplifies the idolatry such "headship" theology establishes: "The Scriptures say a woman must ignore her feelings about the will of God and do what her husband says. She is to obey her husband as if he were God himself. She can be as certain of God's will when her husband speaks as if God had spoken audibly from heaven."² If "head" is a rank of authority within the family that sets up the potential for abuse and idolatry, then it becomes urgent to distinguish whether this model is biblical. Let us now examine some passages that are critical to understanding God's intent.

1 Corinthians 11

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1-3).³

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is generally seen as the verses from which "headship theology" originates. In this passage, Paul argues

that women should wear head coverings—an argument that is interesting in itself. Verses two and three present the greatest challenge. In order to interpret these texts, one must begin with the context and an understanding of the historical background. The passage itself must be taken seriously, but it is most important to understand as well as possible what was originally intended by the text. Exegesis requires looking at whom it addressed, and how the people who first heard the words understood their meaning. This must be done in order to discover the meaning of these words today. For this passage, the most important issue is Paul's use of the Greek word translated *head*.

Paul's major argument involves the issue of hairstyle, as "head coverings" is generally interpreted today. In these verses, the argument is based on his use of *head*. Translated from the Greek, this word can carry a variety of meanings. Often it is treated as an idiom, just as is the English word *head*. The confusion results from the idiom, or phrases meaning something different from what they literally say, being different in Greek and English. For example, in English the word head means literally the round part of your body located on top of your shoulders. But we often use the term to refer to "the head of state" or the "head of the company." We seldom think twice about the idiom; it is just part of our language. Yet we are clear when we refer to the "head of state" that we do not mean a person's physical skull. Not all languages contain the same idioms, and many theologians believe that *head* held a different meaning in Greek than it does in English today. Idioms often cause confusion for translators and for adults learning a new language. Such phrases as "kicked the bucket," or "time stood still" may be entirely misunderstood by one unfamiliar with English idioms. Similarly, there is the potential for misunderstanding Paul's idiomatic use of *head* for today's English speaker. In Paul's day, the word *kephale*, translated as *head*, often held a number of metaphorical meanings in addition to the literal meaning.

It is important to understand how the idiom *head* is used in the eleventh chapter of first Corinthians. Recent scholarship suggests that the Greek word, *kephale*, was never used to mean "authority," "superior rank," "leader," "director" or anything similar in Paul's day.⁴ In fact, a survey of the most complete Greek-English lexicon

found more than 25 possible figurative meanings for this word (besides its literal meaning of the physical head of one's body) and not one included any definition that suggested authority or rank.⁵ Entries *do* include such meanings as the physical head of a person or animal, the source or origin of a river, a wig, and the completion or consummation of something. Other researchers surveying lexicons have reached similar conclusions, noting that at least seven major Greek dictionaries do not list "leader" or "authority" as a meaning for *kephale*, especially during the period of Paul's writing. The most widely accepted alternative translation or understanding of this word is *source*.⁶

Source stems from the most common understanding during Paul's time of the metaphorical use of *head*—the source or fountainhead of a river. This use of *kephale* is found in the New Testament and in contemporary Greek sources. It is also consistent with those who translated the Old Testament (written in Hebrew) into the Greek Septuagint, the version of Scripture that Paul and Jesus would have used. The Old Testament Hebrew word for *head* has a similar metaphorical meaning as the English word *head* and is often used to refer to a *chief* of something. When the early translators of the Old Testament encountered *head* in the Old Testament, they translated it a number of different ways. Where it meant a leader or chief, the Septuagint translators chose a specific word meaning *ruler*, *commander*, or *leader*, rather than using *kephale*.⁷ This implies that even early translators of the Old Testament recognized the distinction between use of *kephale* for "head" and words used to suggest a "leader" or "chief." With this distinction in mind, it is important to note that translators chose to use *kephale* rather than a word meaning *ruler* in this passage.

Using *kephale* to mean "source," or more specifically "source of life" is supported in many different places. Other New Testament verses use the word *head* to mean source of life. In Colossians 2:19, Christians are told to hold to the head, from whom the whole body is nourished; and Ephesians 4:15 describes Christ as the source of life for all Christians.⁸ Colossians 1:18 seems to define *head* for us most clearly: "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything." Christ is the source of the church,

the beginning of all life, and the origin of all things. The Bible never refers to humankind, man or woman, as the actual head or source of life, other than as mediators of the life of Christ from one to another. This is where Protestants differ from Catholics; we believe in the priesthood of *all* believers, mediating Christ's forgiveness and life, not just a few select males who can mediate Christ to the church. Paul's contemporaries also used this word for "head" to refer to source of life. Philo, a Jewish writer of the first century, wrote of *kephale* as the source of spiritual life; Greeks writing about Zeus in the material known as the Orphic writings referred to him as the fountain-head or source that brought all things into being; and early Christian church fathers such as Basil and Athanasius wrote of the Father (God) being the source of life for the Son (Christ).⁹

If one utilizes this translation—source of life—in 1 Corinthians 11, the passage itself becomes much clearer. Rather than "head," if "fountainhead," "source of life," or even "source of knowledge" were substituted, the passage would read: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the *life source* of man, and the man is the *life source* of woman, and God is the *life source* of Christ" (verse 3). Each points to the connectedness of all life in God: Adam receiving life from God, Eve receiving the rib from Adam's side, and even Christ receiving life from God through the incarnation. Another paraphrase of this passage might read: "Woman was made from man, therefore man is first in the order of primacy. However, in the Lord, both men and women depend on each other for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman."¹⁰ In Christ all orders of primacy are taken away.

Paul completes this thought in verses 11 and 12 where his image comes full circle: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God." A beautiful picture of interconnectedness is established! A picture, which even in spite of all the cultural baggage of head coverings, angels, and worship customs, still clearly establishes what it means to be a woman and man "in Christ." Neither man nor woman would take precedence, but both would work to bring the knowledge of the Source of life to all. Paul acknowledges the new order in Christ. The order given in verse 2

is reversed in verse 12, where now man comes from woman. It is here that the image of God is seen as central, rather than as an order or rank. In fact, the hierarchical view of God-Christ-man-woman does not appear here at all, rather we see portrayed a chronological view establishing the creation of man, the formation of woman, the birth of Christ, and the reversal of previously established orders in God. A chronology of the church is established, but a chronology does not establish priority. If it did, verse 3 would have both man and woman above Christ, and Genesis would claim that the animals would rule over all of humanity'. This passage speaks of a God who makes order out of chaos, like the Genesis story, not a God who established lines of power.

Paul's clarification of man being woman's source and woman being man's source, reflects the Creation account where woman and man together are said to be fully created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). In fact, Paul ties his entire argument together with the Creation story by reminding his audience of the Creator's identity: "all things come from God." Paul notes the culturally established gender differences of men and women, but rather than utilizing this to establish a hierarchy of control or value, Paul establishes their equality and mutual dependence. He affirms the fact that all believers should conform to the image of God in Christ in even stronger words in other passages such as 1 Corinthians 15:49; Romans 8:29; and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

In many ways this translation of *kephale* as source has been dubbed the battle of the lexicons. Although the evidence for this translation is extremely convincing, others have pulled out their lexicons to find verses in later writings where it would be appropriate to translate the word *kephale* as "ruler." But the rules for translation suggest that when in doubt, look to the context and other Bible teachings on the same subject. And here, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is clearly arguing for the maintenance of a particular tradition (verse 2) to avoid contention (verse 16) and the alienation of the Jews and Greeks (1 Cor. 10:32). At the same time, he is reiterating his credo: all power comes from Christ; no other is to receive authority over the congregation of believers. Paul continues to work within the cultural tradition *and* newfound Christian freedom to establish a norm of Corinthian behavior. This is similar to what

Paul does in many other texts, such as Galatians 3:28, where he advocates the equality of all in Christ. As a man of his culture Paul may often have been blind to the implications of his own words. Change is difficult. Yet, Paul continues to affirm what he knows to be true; that in Christ there is freedom, and in Christ one is not to rule over the other.

In Corinth, the ideal is the interrelationship of man and woman, working together for the kingdom. But even after Paul reminds them of their priorities, the congregation is squabbling over appropriate hairstyles. Paul reminds them strongly in verse 11 that “neither is woman without man nor man without woman, in the Lord.”¹¹ Neither woman nor man is to take priority, but both should be aware of the fact that they are reflecting Christ to the world. Because of this, they are to maintain a decorum that will not alienate Greeks and Jews. Paul seems to be much less concerned about the relationship between men and women than with the argument over what women do with their hair and how that decision is made. Paul was not addressing our present-day concern of the relationship between men and women; rather, he was addressing a hairstyle concern that made the congregation suspect to outsiders looking in.

The Jews were not used to including women in their worship practices, and the Greeks associated women in church with the ecstatic temple cults that were particularly prevalent in Corinth. Jewish tradition saw it as scandalous and disgraceful for a married woman to show her face or to speak in public. But Jesus did not accept the traditional male excuse of lust being a woman's fault (Matthew 5:28), and allowed women to participate actively as His followers. Now these newly "freed" women could be seen and could speak in Christian worship, and, in addition, take responsibility for their appearance. It is highly likely that many had a difficult time dealing with such changes. Both the Jews and the Greeks would need time to become accustomed to women taking highly regarded positions of authority, praying, and prophesying (chapter 14) in church—something that Paul clearly assumes is the norm. For in this passage, he casually notes what women should do with their *hair* when they speak during worship: “*Whenever a woman prays or prophesies with an unveiled head, she disgraces her head*” (verse 5).¹²

At no time during the passage does Paul suggest that any order or chronology would prohibit women from functioning during worship or act with authority in any other time or place. Nor does he suggest the primacy of man, or authority of man over woman. The only time "authority" is even mentioned is when women are admonished (in verse 10) to have "authority over their own head," or as the NRSV puts it in a clarification note, a woman is to "have freedom of choice regarding her head."¹³ The argument is to be settled by the women themselves, no matter what others say. Although some have tried to see "authority" in verse 10 linked to the man, there is no textual evidence to support this translation. The authority referred to in verse 10 can only be linked to the woman and understood as her possession. Serious scholarship today agrees that the word for authority (*exousia*) cannot imply someone else's authority in this context, but rather the woman's own authority over her own head. The word itself implies a particular kind of authority, one that suggests a sense of ability and capacity to act. It may also suggest freedom and liberty, and might be equated with "power," or "right." Possibly Paul is likening this issue to the previous one of eating food offered to idols: Women have the authority to make decisions about their own heads regarding hairstyle, and like food offered to idols, it is not a sin to act against the religious customs of the time. Paul tells those concerned about food offered to idols that it is no longer a sin. God's power covers the old religious taboos such as eating food that was sacrificed. Paul recommends that the only concern should be if your eating will prevent someone from knowing Christ. Similarly, women are encouraged to make their own decisions, in fact, for the "sake of the angels," witnesses to all that we do here on earth. Old religious taboos should not pre-empt freedom in Christ. Neither are men or women to let such disagreements create a stumbling block for nonbelievers, for the church is not to be argumentative about such practices (verse 16).

However one interprets the "head covering," most theologians and commentators ascribe its necessity to "tradition" and cultural norms of Paul's time.¹⁴ But interestingly, although rules of hairstyle are dismissed for today, many assert that the position of women and men in Corinth during Paul's time should still be normative, without recognizing that these customs were estab-

lished by pagan societies, which even Paul was working toward demystifying. Paul was actually part of an enormous social revolution brought about by Christianity—where there is "no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Although Paul subscribed to such an order, he and Peter often had difficulties themselves with the change it required. Accepting the Gentiles, working with women, and circumcision all became points of radical change that stretched the apostles' own sense of tradition and propriety. It was only with often-repeated calls to the ideal of a household of faith based in Christ, that these changes were dealt with at all, and even then sometimes with great difficulty. An example of this is Peter requiring circumcision, or refusing to eat with the Gentiles even after he had been convinced that simple acceptance was theologically correct. The issue of hairstyles is one more chance for the apostle Paul to proclaim the Christian ideal. He paints an ideal vision of women and men in mutually connected and dependent relationship. At the same time he argues for tradition while still allowing women to make the ultimate decision.

So, in 1 Corinthians 11, biblical "headship" does not exist. Relationship roles are not established with a theology of authority or hierarchy, but with a partnership with God. The context clearly portrays men and women being asked to mutually support one another in Christ, to avoid contention, allowing women ultimately to make their own decisions. A picture that Paul emphasizes by reminding the Corinthians that neither takes priority, that as one came from the other in Creation, now the other is true in natural birth—neither fact takes pre-eminence, rather "all things come from God."

1 Corinthians 14

Paul continues in chapters 12 and 13 to describe what it means to live together in Christian community. First Corinthians 13, the famous "love" chapter, summarizes Paul's view of living in the body of Christ, and chapter 12 notes how all gifts come together for the mutual support and love of the body as a whole. In chapter 14, Paul begins to address worship, which he sees as also having the

potential for divisiveness. He begins the chapter (verse 1), reminding the Corinthians that they are to "pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts." By verse 26 his point is clear, "all things [are to] be done for building up," for God does not desire gifts to be used simply to lord over another, or to show off, but rather God is a God of order (verse 33) and gives all gifts "so that all may learn and all be encouraged" (verse 31). Here Paul is particularly concerned about the speaking in tongues, and that this gift is used for the benefit of the body as a whole.

By the last half of verse 33 the issue of woman's role is again addressed. Paul writes:

As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (verses 33-36).

Paul has already indicated that women could pray or prophesy in the church (chapter 11:5), so it is unlikely that he would change his mind within three chapters! It appears that he has other issues in mind. As with chapter 11, looking at context and culture may help in understanding this passage. Remember, Paul is discussing the issue of orderly worship and the uplifting of the body of Christ through the proper use of spiritual gifts, not male-female relationships. The preceding discussion involves speaking in tongues, a gift that apparently tended to get out of hand at times. Women were somehow disrupting the church service in Corinth with this gift (cf. chapter 14:25, 26, 30), and Paul was reminding the Corinthians of the need for order in worship.

There is a direct connection between the Greek word for "speak" (*laleo*) and the term used for speaking in tongues: they are both derived from the same root, further linking the discussion of tongues and the verses regarding orderly worship. This link may suggest that Paul was concerned that a particular type of speech, prevalent particularly among the women, would add further chaos to the already disorderly worship service. Paul most likely was

worried about this "babbling," being afraid that it would encourage confusion between the newly formed Christian group and the mystery religions prevalent in Corinth, where both men and women participated in *lalein*, or babbling.

This view is supported by the fact that women found cultic liberation in the worship of Dionysus, a prominent goddess in Corinth. Here, women called Maenads featured prominently and practiced a frenzied shouting and ecstatic raving, behavior that most upper-class Roman men found offensive. In addition, many mystery religions included initiation rites that were similar to those introduced in Christianity, including baptism, a sacrificial meal, and the participation of women and slaves. It would be no wonder if outsiders confused Christianity with the pagan cults, since they had some superficial resemblances. In fact, it was most likely this identity crisis being addressed in 1 Corinthians as a whole, and particularly with regard to worship in chapter 14. Roman law outlawed participation in any cult that encouraged "inappropriate" behavior, and it only took one member of the offending religion to bring retribution to the entire community. Paul called the Christian community to worship, to avoid getting sidetracked in behavior that could jeopardize the whole Christian church, particularly behavior that was not beneficial anyway.

Women who actively participated in a public worship service that included chaotic speech would have seemed scandalous to good Jewish and Roman citizens. Women speaking at all was probably difficult for the men of the congregation to bear, let alone being likened to the out-of-control mystery religions. In Roman society, it was actually illegal for a woman to participate in the mystery religions. Further, it was deemed highly inappropriate for her to speak in public. For women at that time, being quiet in public was linked to social propriety.

In Corinth, women were not only speaking in public, but "babbling," bringing shame on their husbands and risk to the Christian community. The babbling, linked to speaking in tongues, was most likely accentuated by the fact that women had not participated in worship services before their acceptance into Christianity, other than those coming out of the cults where women were accepted. In other communities, the Jews may have given stability

to the new congregations, but in this situation the Jewish women had no experience with worship participation. They were not even allowed to study the Torah, let alone participate with questions during the worship service. Paul recommends that *all* be "silent" if it creates confusion (1 Cor. 14:30), but for the women, he recommends that they ask their husbands (who *were* allowed to study the Torah) questions at home (verse 35), indicating that questioning during the service was part of the problem. This suggests that worship, not the women's relationship to the men, is being addressed. If the women had been interrupting the period when Scripture exposition was done, then even greater affront would have been caused to the more conservative Jewish men, who would have placed a high value on silence or "appropriate" questions during this period.

Paul tells the women to be "submissive" or "subordinate," "as the law says," indicating a reference to the Roman law. There was no Jewish or scriptural law demanding women's silence, but the *Romans* could have interpreted this activity as illegal. Actions that linked the early church to outlawed sects could have threatened the status of the entire Christian community. The apostle's words seem to imply a submissive attitude for all (not just the women) during worship service, in order to maintain political acceptability. In fact, in the New Testament, *submission* is linked to whom one should submit, but there is no such reference here. Rather, the only referent to submission is in verse 31, where the "spirits of prophets are subject [submissive] to the prophets." Verse 34 may be implying that just as the gift of prophecy should be for the service of the prophets, women's voices should serve the congregation as a whole, thus asking for the women's submissive behavior for the sake of order. In colloquial terms, Paul was telling the Corinthians to "be quiet and worship, or you will all get into trouble!"

Ephesians 5

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.. .. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:1, 21).

The ideal is once again established, as the writer of Ephesians goes on to tell the Christian community that they are to renounce pagan ways and to live a new life in the kingdom of Christ. Supporting one another in Christ is the way the kingdom is established. But Paul was a man of his own time, and utilized familiar forms to help the people understand ways to live together, forms commonly known as the "household codes" that are found in verses 21 through 33.

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The household codes were Roman laws often posted in cities. These laws defined the ways in which families should live together to be considered good citizens. Such codes usually included the role of husband, wife, child, and slave, noting for each their proper relationship to the state. Household codes had predictable elements, which Paul himself generally used. But the passage in Ephesians begins differently: even though the standardized laws are coming next in the letter, Paul let the Christians know that things were to be different. Rather than establishing the hierarchy of submission (one-way: husband-wife-child-slave), Paul tells the Ephesians that they are to be "subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." This command for mutual submission (two-way), suggests a different type of relationship that is centered in Christ. In this type of relationship, neither is supreme and both work for the common good. For propriety and acceptability Paul leaves the hierarchy intact, but he subtly undermines it in such a way that Christians through the ages have been reminded to free slaves, to allow women into leadership, and to protect children.

Again, *head* is used (verse 23), but just as in 1 Corinthians 11, both husband and wife are pointed to the true "source of life"—Christ (verse 25). Paul could have reminded the congregation that Christ is Lord and Ruler, but instead he told the Ephesians that Christ is the source of life. In this way, he emphasized servanthood and life as the primary qualities of a Christian household.

The fact that this phrase is within the form of a traditional household code is significant. The Christians in Asia Minor were already in jeopardy, as discussed in 1 Corinthians, and were often confused with pagan cults. Paul wanted to lessen the tension between the Christian community and the Roman government,

especially since the conversion of wives and slaves provoked political tensions. The household was seen as the key to managing the entire state, and if women and slaves did not stay "in their place," the Romans felt chaos would ensue. Wives were taught to enjoy their husband's wisdom and gods. Those who did not, violated their household duties and the laws of the state. Moving out of the established pattern for families was seen as tantamount to treason, and such changes were reason enough to ban a religion and kill its adherents. The watch cry of Rome was: "Preserve the present order and do not desire change, knowing that revolutions inevitably destroy states and lay waste the homes of people."¹⁵ Laws were established to maintain the family order, and household codes were introduced to familiarize the people with these laws. Paul most likely adopted these codes to suppress Roman cultural objections to the gospel, and to avert further persecution and confusion with pagan cults, while simultaneously adding a new twist.

Paul did not adopt the codes verbatim. They were close enough to be recognized, but included crucial differences, such as the refrain for mutual submission. Another major change occurs in verse 25, where husbands are commanded to love their wives. The husband was generally instructed to "rule" or "govern" his wife, rather than to love and respect. In Paul's rendition of the code, husbands are only commanded to love—they are not encouraged to rule, to procure their wife's submission, or even her respect. They are to care for their wives as they do their own bodies, or as Christ does for the church; but above all, they are to remember that in Christ they are "one flesh," a mystery of mutuality that can only occur in Him. Submission, as Paul establishes it, occurs only when one has the power of surrender. Wives can "submit," or *choose* to join their husbands, as their husbands *choose* to love, rather than rule them. Paul, while still maintaining the semblance of order and familial propriety for the Romans, encourages freedom and mutuality within the Christian household. Husbands are invited to submit (Eph. 5:21) and love their wives, as wives are invited to freely and fully join their husbands in marriage, not attempting to withdraw from the relationship as they commit themselves to Christ.

Note that although the author of Ephesians gives similar commands to wives, children, and slaves, he never summons wives

to "obedience," as he does the other two groups. Paul gives in to the current social order, struggling between the ideal and his traditional upbringing, as he does in Romans 7 where he struggles between the ideal and what he is used to. This tension is clearly seen as Paul encourages a "correct look" in marriage and slavery. Paul's own cultural upbringing does not establish the pattern for today. Rather, it must be found by looking at the whole of Paul's writing and the whole of the biblical story. The application of any one passage could lead to a gross misinterpretation of the gospel ideal.

It seems that Paul dealt with the political situation of his day in a way that was most conducive to the spread of the gospel. He avoided persecution where possible, while at the same time preaching a message that subverted social norms, creating a tension both for himself and the churches that had to interpret the messages. Even as we struggle with such issues in our culture, Paul worked to find new ways to live the gospel in his. Though he occasionally glimpsed the ideal that Jesus established during His time on earth, he nonetheless fell into old patterns of coping during times of crisis. He allowed the household codes to stand, but in the midst of them he called for a radical new kind of relationship—one where love and mutual submission ruled and "Christ is the head of all."

1 Timothy 2

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty (1 Tim 2 :11-15).

This passage presents a number of hurdles for understanding the role of women and authority, so it is important to begin with what is clear. First, Paul is not recommending silence for all women or in all teaching. In this passage, Paul tells only the "woman," singular, to keep silent, possibly indicating a particularly problem-

atic woman in the crowd. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 11 has Paul clearly noting women as teaching, praying, and prophesying, and in 1 Corinthians 12 he gives no gender rule concerning the use of any spiritual gift. In fact, Paul notes that "all" have gifts, presupposing that women would receive the gift of teaching and preaching which automatically assumes some authority.

Paul often greets his "fellow workers," including Priscilla Mary, and Phoebe (Rom. 16); and in Romans 16:7, he notes a prominent apostle. Junta (others translate this name as Julia) a woman who apparently is a relative of Paul's and has served as a leader in the churches with Andronicus. Paul even allowed women to function with the higher-ranked and more authoritative ministry of prophecy (Acts 21:9 and 1 Corinthians 11:5). Clearly Paul was not noting a common practice of prohibiting women from speaking or teaching. If so, Timothy would have already been aware of such a prohibition after working with Paul, and Paul could have simply reminded him of the custom or practice that had already been established. Instead, Paul gives instruction regarding prayer, and within that context presents an argument that appears out of harmony with his previous actions.

Even as Paul suggests "silence" for the woman, he uses a word that does not imply complete quietness. Instead, Paul chooses a word that can be translated "settled down," "undisturbed," or "not unruly"—possibly implying a situation similar to that as found in 1 Corinthians 14. Actually, Paul exhorts the whole church to this kind of quiet lifestyle, using the same word, and in the same context in 1 Timothy 2:2, indicating that these words refer more to attitude than to gender.

The concern for the community's domestic life is the reference point for these verses. Earlier in the chapter, Paul notes how concerned he is about those teaching celibacy as the only way to be in relationship (1 Timothy 4:3). He devotes almost all of chapters four and five to outlining "false asceticism" and the propriety of marriage. Chapter two also addresses family life, as Paul reminds the believers of the need for order and dignity, of the need for men to pray with "holy hands" and "without anger or argument" (chapter 2:8). The very connection of the phrasing "hands" and "anger" suggests that hands had been utilized for things other than

prayer, such as abuse and fighting.¹⁶ He informs them that in God's household, power is not gained by strength or force, but through prayer in community. This is again reinforced as he lists the qualifications of bishops in chapter three (verses 2-6).

If the background of chapter 2 in 1 Timothy is taken into context, the passages regarding the woman appear to teach mutuality and a respect for marriage, rather than the "submission" of women. The word translated "to teach" could have a number of meanings, including the formulating of doctrine, being "bossy," and the preaching of a false teaching such as celibacy (chapters 5:13, 15; 3:11). All these interpretations fit the context: people advocating celibacy, an argumentative and abusive worship service, men abusing their power, and the woman abusing her power by the way she looked and spoke. The translation of the word for "authority" supports this as well. This word is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, but other ancient Greek literature suggests that the word implies "to domineer" or "to usurp authority" and at times is associated with sexual manipulation and even murder.¹⁷

Connected with this idea is a type of woman who publicly taught: the *hetairai*. These were a group of women who were "free." They were not married, did not have children, and were well educated and considered high-class entertainers and prostitutes.¹⁸ Wives were limited to their quarters, going out only occasionally and if properly attended, and certainly did not speak in public. The *hetairai*, on the other hand, were free to speak and move about publicly, attributing much of their freedom to their disavowal of marriage. Moreover, these women were often connected to wealthy men as "teachers," engaging the men in philosophical and political discourse, often using their "freedom" and sexual manipulation to get financial support.

The concern expressed in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 then takes on special significance. Taking "authority" over a man, when linked to issues of marriage, celibacy, and sexuality could connect the women in the Ephesus church both philosophically and publicly to the *hetairai*. *Teaching* in these verses could be connected with loose sexual behavior that seeks to manipulate. It could also be taken as a prohibition against women imitating the pagan female teachers who made it evident that they were available after class for

a second occupation.¹⁹ Paul strongly points out that whenever power is abused, it is wrong. Whether that abuse of power is physical force, as with the men (chapter 2:8) or using sexuality, dress, or wealth in a way that manipulates, as with the women of Ephesus (1 Tim. 2:9-12). No one is to use power to manipulate another in the household of faith.

In verse 15, Paul again addresses the heresy of celibacy by arguing that women can be saved "even if"²⁰ they have children. Paul suggests that they can be "whole" (another translation of salvation), free women in Christ, without having to manipulate others. There is no need to abuse new-found freedoms. All should relate in "faith and love and holiness with modesty" (chapter 2:15).

Paul utilizes the Creation account to make a point, rather than establish a pattern for all times. Just as Eve was not present for God's original teaching and was less educated than Adam, so the woman of Ephesus is less educated, and thus needs to be wary of heresy that could deceive the community. Paul would have been aware of the Creation account of Genesis 1, where humankind is created at the same time (chapter 1:26-28), yet he chose to recount only part of the story, most likely intentionally. This recounting probably was intended to fight the gnostic heresy, rather than to establish any pattern of relationship between men and women. Gnostic cosmologies often credited female activity with the creation of the universe, dismissing the need for any male. "Gnostic lore pictured Eve as instructor of Adam and mediator of the knowledge, or gnosis brought by the serpent."²¹ This theology greatly appealed to women who had little power or position in their own society, but as the writer of 1 Timothy reminded the reader, in the Christian community, the serpent was not to be believed. Sin was destructive, and both Adam and Eve had been *completely* deceived. Knowledge does not elevate one's status in the world. Neither woman nor man is to hold power over the other, through knowledge, the ability to give birth, nor the ability to refrain from marriage or childbearing. If this type of destructive teaching were taking place, it is no wonder that Paul was concerned about the woman who was teaching it!

The new Christian church often had problems with unqualified teachers, both male and female (see James 3:1, which suggests

that "not many" should teach), and Paul repeatedly reminds the churches that to live as the body of Christ required supporting not abusing one another. His argument might sound like this today:

Lead decent lives, respecting your leaders. Men, do not act abusively, lording power over any other, rather lift your hands only in prayer. Women, do not let the world confuse you with those who abuse their sexuality, by dressing and teaching in ways that manipulate men. Do not have power or authority over any through methods of teaching that are unethical. You do not even need to give up family to be whole women. All are to relinquish power "over " others and submit to the power of God. Never use power over another, never abuse the other physically or emotionally—most of all, abide in love and patience.

Conclusions

All these passages have required the same type of interpretation as other scriptural teachings: each understood according to context, history, and a consistency with other biblical truths. In reviewing these Pauline passages, it becomes clear that there is no such thing as biblical "headship." All the passages used to support this idea are not talking about relationships between women and men, but rather how to deal with worship, outsiders, problem people, and heresy. Both 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 support a model of interconnectedness, with women clearly involved in decision-making and worship. Ephesians 5 introduces ways of living in mutual submission, through love and the centrality of Christ. Similarly, 1 Timothy was written to remind the congregation to avoid heresy that undermined the value of family and worship and that Christian freedom does not require celibacy. Most importantly these passages show that Christian submission requires giving up of power over others and submitting to the power of God. These texts, taken with cultural sensitivity and in conjunction with other Bible passages, set forth a model of relationship that is radically different from the hierarchy of "headship theology."

A general overview of the biblical model for relationships

should include a look at the life of Jesus and Paul, and the Creation account itself. Jesus included women where they were traditionally not wanted: as disciples (Luke 8:1-3), as students (Luke 10:38-39) and as the first witness and evangelist proclaiming the Resurrection (Luke 24). He was concerned that women be treated with respect both in marriage and out. Jesus' teachings on divorce gave more power to women than they had ever had as spouses, usurping the traditional male's authority over his wife. Jesus lessened the distinction between the married and unmarried, proclaiming that His followers gave up such family distinctions when they became His disciples (Matt. 12:46-50). This did not lessen relational obligations, but rather changed them—now Christians were responsible to care for a much larger family, but were not bound by tradition.

Jesus charges the disciples with feeding the poor, dispensing healing, and serving their new "family." He did not tolerate squabbles regarding positions of authority, but reminded the disciples that the first would be last. None was to take the "first" or "head" position but God—to do otherwise would be blasphemy. When James and John came to Jesus asking for places of authority He said to them, "You do not know what you are asking.. among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them.... But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:35-45). For the followers of Jesus, the reign of God is the place where service rather than domination, is found. In God's eyes, only those who reach out a hand of healing are counted—there is no special rank for Jews, males, or the rich and powerful.

Similarly, Paul utilized women's gifts of preaching, teaching, prophesying, and leadership. His teachings pushed the boundaries of society's rules for male authority and female submission to a place where distinctions became blurred and all were simply servants of Christ." Nowhere does Paul call for a more radical commitment to a new household of faith than in Galatians 3:28-29 where all are equal in Christ: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female— for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ,

then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise " Positions that have traditionally brought "authority" function differently in the "headship" of Christ, the source of all life and power The "curse" of division that sin brought is remedied.

Regarding "headship," Paul was clear: Christ is the head of the church. Anyone claiming otherwise was elevating himself to a place that belonged to God alone. Some believed in various teachers rather than Christ. Others followed teachings that elevated males or Jews, supplanting Jesus as head of the church. Repeatedly Paul reminds these believers that none but Christ was to be "head " none but Jesus to be worshipped. Instead, the household of faith allows all to be priests, servants, friends, and family

It's ironic that many looking for God's ideal in male-female relationships actually turn to the "curse" of Genesis 3 for a model In all other instances, the curse is something that we have tried to reverse. Interestingly, within the actual discourse of Genesis 3 only the serpent and the ground is actually "cursed." Both Eve and Adam are told what *will* happen, not what *should* happen! The predictions for Adam are seldom held up as an example to be followed. It is not suggested that men sweat or pull weeds because that is their lot under Genesis 3!

Genesis actually describes two Creation accounts, one in chapter one, describing a God of order and planning, the other in chapter two, which clarifies the connectedness of all things In the opening account of chapter one, the sun comes first, then the water, then the plants, then humankind, which is literally a "groundling" or "dust person" created in the image of God Neither female nor male takes priority.

In the second account, plants need water and a spring appears man needs woman and their relationship is established. The "help meet" of the old King James version is literally the one who completes! No priority or order is established, only a relationship that completes and finishes God's work of humanity. The woman is to help" man, a word that suggests assistance and rescue often associated with the activity of God. This suggests that the woman rescues man by completing the unfinished product of the isolated human. Two are better than one. Community and interdependence make a whole.

So what of couples like the one in the story with which we began? Ideally, they would look to the Bible and see that two can work together to find ways to value one another's gifts, dreams, thoughts, and skills. They would learn that a mutually submissive relationship establishes a truly biblical couple. And 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 would remind all the family of God that each is needed and connected, just as husband and wife were originally intended to be. And, as husband and wife are both needed to be complete, so each member is needed in the body of Christ.

It is tragic when abuse is justified by a model of "headship" that does not exist in the Bible. Furthermore, Ephesians 5 and 1 Timothy 2 both speak clearly against abuse and for the establishment of mutual submission. This is something the entire household of faith must work to create. Only those who actively stand for empowering the weak, the sharing of authority, and using everyone's gifts for the sake of the gospel, are establishing the household of faith.

No one said that living in God's reign was easy! Discipleship requires many changes, including how women and men relate. Just as the move to accept Gentiles required much of the early Jews, and the freedom of slaves was difficult for some to accept a century ago, so it is hard to change gender patterns today. But it is necessary for the Christian who takes God seriously. Although salvation is free, learning to live in God's family may require much of us.

At the General Conference session in Indianapolis a man approached me in a restaurant, asking to join me for a quick bite of dinner before the next session. He wore a delegate tag, and had noted that I also had on a badge linking me to the session. Wanting to share his feelings regarding that day's discussion of women's ordination, he began to speak. He did not know that I was a pastor, nor did he ask. Rather, he quickly launched into a complaint. He felt that "those" women would not only upset the order of the church hierarchy, but also would encourage chaos in families all over the world. Women would no longer know their proper place! In fact, he continued sincerely, there would be trouble in his own household. For if women were officially allowed to hold positions of authority, his wife might attempt to hold more authority within their own home. He admitted to being scared; to wondering how he could

cope with such change, and what it would mean in his life.

I believe he was honest with himself and with me. Fear of change—not theology—was his primary concern. His own position teetered as women's roles changed. Who would he be, if he were no longer the head? What would he do if his wife shared authority? I believe that "headship theology" is often promoted for these fear-based reasons. "Headship" is not just an idea that scholars fight over. It is an idea that has destructive implications for families, church, and society. The time has come for the church to lead society in establishing biblical relationships of mutual support. All true "friendships" are based on mutual affection. A true friend never would claim to be in charge, or try to control the other, but would seek what is best for both. May all who are living in the reign of God do no less!

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1. Mildred Daley Pagelow and Pamela Johnson, "Abuse in the American Family: The Role of Religion" in *Abuse and Religion* by Anne L. Hoi-ton and Judith A. Williamson, eds. (New York: Lexington Books, 1988), pp. 1-12.
2. Brusset, 1986, pp. 60, 61, as quoted in *Abuse and Religion*, p. 6.
3. All texts are from the NRSV unless noted otherwise.
4. Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen, "What Does kephale Mean in the New Testament?" in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, Alvera Mickelsen, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), pp. 97-117.
5. *Ibid.*, a survey of Liddell and Scott's *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).
6. Wayne Grudem, "Does kephale Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,226 Examples," *Trinity Journal* New Series 6 (Spring 1985), pp. 38-59; and S. Beadale, "The Meaning of *kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *JTS* New Series 5 (1954), pp. 211-215, as quoted by Walter L. Liefeld, "Women, Submission, and Ministry in 1 Corinthians," in *Women, Authority, and the Bible*.

7. Mickelsen, p. 102.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
9. Taken from Catherine C. Kroeger, "The Classical Concept of Head as 'Source,'" Appendix 3 in Hull, *Equal to Serve*, pp. 267-276. Hull also includes other examples from classical sources, presenting a convincing argument for the translation of *kephale* as "source of life."
10. Arthur J. Ferch, "Three Pauline Passages on the Role of Women in the Life of the Church," (T.S., Nahroonga: NP, 1985), p. 8.
11. Translation taken from the *Anchor Bible*, "1 Corinthians," translation and notes by William F. Orr and James A. Walther (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 258.
12. *Anchor Bible* translation, emphasis supplied.
13. Quote from the *Anchor Bible*, NRSV phrase from alternative reading in footnote for verse 10.
14. Most translations now read *hairstyle*, because a veil would not have been traditional for Jewish women.
15. Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letter of Paul* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), p. 142.
16. I am indebted to Dr. Madelynn Haldeman for this insight.
17. David Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in *Women, Authority, and the Bible*, p. 205.
18. Julia Neuffer, "First Century Cultural Backgrounds in the Greco-Roman Empire," (T.S.; N.P., 1975), p. 8.
19. John Brunt, "Adventists Against Women's Ordination: A Critical Review," (T.S.; N.P., 1985), p. 10.
20. An appropriate translation of the word generally translated "through."
21. Kroeger, in *Women. Authority, and the Bible*, p. 239.