

How Paul Used One Word to Affirm Heterosexual Marriage, Raise the Status of Women

The Greek word translated “head” in Ephesians 5:23 is *kephale*. By using this one word, Paul undermined the basis of homosexuality in the ancient world and lifted the woman to an equal status with her husband.

Recent studies have shown that the ancient meaning of *kephale* was “source” rather than the traditional “authority.” For example, in a landmark study that was published in the Feb. 20, 1981, issue of *Christianity Today*, Dr. Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen examined and compared how the translators of the Greek Septuagint had translated *rosh*, the Hebrew word for “head,” into Greek. Their findings demolished the traditional understanding of the word as meaning “authority over.”

They discovered that when *rosh* was used literally to refer to someone’s physical head, the Septuagint translators used *kephale*. When *rosh* was used figuratively to refer to the “source” or origin of something, again they would use *kephale*. They discovered, however, that when *rosh* was used figuratively to refer to a person of authority, the Septuagint translators avoided *kephale* and used *archon* (ruler) or a similar word.

In his magnanimous commentary on 1 Corinthians, noted evangelical scholar, Dr. Gordon D. Fee, sums up the research of the Mickelsens and others, saying,

Paul’s understanding of the metaphor, therefore, and certainly the only one the Corinthians would have grasped, is “head” as “source,” especially “source of life” (Hyatt, *Who’s the Boss?*, 30).

Kephale was the appropriate word for Paul to use in addressing

the issue of marriage in a pagan world where homosexuality was rampant and based on the essential inferiority of women. His point was to show that the woman has her source in the man and is made of the same substance as he.

This was important for the Greeks believed that the gods had created woman as a form of punishment for man. She had originated from a different source and was inferior to man in substance and intellect. One pagan writer said,

“Some women were made from the sow ... others from the high-stepping mare or the unstable waves of the sea” (Hyatt, *Who’s the Boss?*, 32).

Additional evidence for the low value placed on womanhood surfaced in a debate conducted slightly later than the New Testament. In it, the judge decided in favor of homosexuality because of the alleged moral inferiority of women. He said,

“Therefore, let the obligation to marry be universal, but let the love of boys be reserved only for the wise, because perfect virtue flourishes least of all among women” (Hyatt, *Who’s the Boss?*, 32).

Plato (ca. 427–347 B.C.) was of the same mindset and taught that the truly noble soul is masculine and would seek out another male as the object of its love—because they are alike and of the same substance (Hyatt, *Who’s the Boss?*, 32).

In speaking of the husband as the *kephale* (source) of the wife, Paul is undermining this pagan view of womanhood. He is also alluding to the creation narrative in Genesis where, instead of creating a separate creature from the ground to make the woman, God took a side from the person He had already created from the dust and formed the side into the woman.

Commenting on this Genesis account of the creation of the woman, the Jewish commentary on the Torah, *The Chumash*, says,

“Unlike man’s, the woman’s body was not taken from the earth. God built one side of the man into woman—so that the single human being became two, thereby demonstrating irrefutably the equality of man and woman” (Hyatt, *Who’s the Boss?*, 31).

If Paul’s purpose in Ephesians 5:23 had been to establish authority, he could easily have done so by choosing words at his disposal, such as *archon* (ruler), *despotes* (master) or *kurios* (lord). In speaking of the husband as the *kephale* (source) of the wife, Paul is undermining the pagan idea that she originated from a different and inferior source.

By using *kephale*, Paul proclaimed that she was, in fact, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, as Adam had declared of Eve in Genesis 2:23. By using *kephale*, Paul undermined the ancient argument for homosexuality and declared that woman is, indeed, a fit partner for the man.

This article is derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt’s latest book entitled, Who’s the Boss? and available from Amazon in both paperback and Kindle, and also from his website at . If you would like to contact him to schedule him to speak on this or other issues, contact him at dreddiehyatt@.