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## Does Κεφαλή Mean “Source” Or “Authority Over” In Greek Literature? A Rebuttal

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In this paper I shall discuss the meaning of one of the Greek words which is at the center of the debate over women’s roles in the Church: κεφαλή “head.” This paper is a rebuttal of Wayne Grudem’s article on the meaning of κεφαλή. Grudem’s article has obviously had some influence because it is often appealed to by traditionalists in support of an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 that men have authority over women.

### Introduction

In his article “Does kephalē- (‘head’) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,”<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem claims to have analyzed 2,336 occurrences of the word in Greek literature in order to determine whether κεφαλή can mean “source” or “authority over.” His findings are directly relevant for our understanding of Paul’s use of this word in the New Testament. Grudem concludes that (1) κεφαλή *never* means “source,” and (2) “authority over” is a “common and readily understood” meaning of the word, and that the latter meaning “best suits the New Testament” (p. 80).

Is Grudem correct in his assessment of the meaning of κεφαλή? My answer is “no.” Grudem’s article includes some questionable assumptions. I will expose Grudem’s assumptions, and I will further demonstrate that many of the 49 passages which Grudem cites as evidence for “authority over” do not mean what Grudem claims they mean, and that Grudem has misrepresented the evidence. The first part of this paper will contain a summary and critique of Grudem’s assumptions and methodology. In Part Two I will discuss Grudem’s treatment of the argument for the meaning of “source.” in Part Three I will discuss each of Grudem’s examples at length, and I will demonstrate that most of the examples Grudem cites do not

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support his claim. All translations of original texts are my own unless otherwise specified.

### I. Methodology

There are several problems in the methodology of Grudem’s argument. First, he invokes evidence from various lexica. Grudem seems to take a rather disparaging view of Liddell-Scott-Jones’s *Greek-English Lexicon* 2 (henceforth LSJ). He says: “Liddell-Scott is the tool one would use when studying Plato or...

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