

## A Meta-Study of the Debate over the Meaning of “Head” (Kephālē) in Paul’s Writings

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Since the middle of the twentieth century there has been an ongoing, sometimes acrimonious debate over the meaning of “head” (Greek, kephalē) in Paul’s letters, especially 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23. The literature is extensive. The debate continues, but few have taken the time to read all the significant discussions or have access to the actual articles, much less the resources to critique such. This article is an attempt to review the most significant scholarly literature that has emerged in the debate and to summarize each without critique. The focus is narrow and should not be taken as a meta-study of the whole debate on male and female relations in the church, home, and world.

Since no evaluation can be completely free of prejudice or bias, I will state my current position. I hold a critical and qualified acceptance of the evangelical egalitarian viewpoint. I offer the following review as the fairest attempt that I can give of the history and current state of the issue. In conclusion, I offer my own application of the results to 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23. Only the most significant contributions (in my estimation) from all sides can be included. I offer my apologies to any who were overlooked.

### The history of the debate

#### Stephen Bedale (1954)

We begin with an early seminal article by Stephen Bedale.<sup>1</sup> Amazingly brief for the firestorm it sparked (4 pages), the points Bedale raised continue to be played out in the current debate. Bedale argued that since the normal Greek metaphorical meaning of kephalē would not be understood as ‘ruler’ or ‘chief,’ Paul must have been influenced by the Greek version of the Old Testament (Lxx) where kephalē was used sometimes to translate the Hebrew rōsh (when it meant ‘ruler’ or ‘chief’).

However, rōsh could have a second figurative meaning as well in other contexts, ‘first’ or ‘beginni...

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