

Head First
1 Corinthians 11:3

¹ Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. . . . ³ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman,¹ and God is the head of Christ.



- a. What is Paul's ultimate desire (11:1)? – **imitation of Christ; Christlikeness in all things.**
- b. What does Paul see as necessary toward that desire?
 - “understanding” (11:3) – this is deeper than “head knowledge”; it involves perception and the will (*eido* – be aware, behold, consider, perceive, see, be sure of)
- c. How many relationships are in view in 11:3? **Three**
- d. Which of the three relationships in 11:3 do we tend to be most preoccupied with? **The middle one – the man and woman;** maybe I can also ask, in that middle relationship, what do we as men tend to be preoccupied with? **How our wives should respond to us**
- e. What is the common word used in each of them? **Head**
(Note: who is assigning this terminology? Paul, by the Spirit of God – It isn't of our devising)
- f. What is common about the arrangement / order within each relationship? **The H(h)ead is mentioned first; the one who has a head is second**
 - Two perfect Heads (one Divine, and one both human and Divine) and one imperfect head
 - One with a Head who is perfect, and two are imperfect (man and woman)
 - The middle relationship is the only completely human relationship
- g. Is there anything that surprises you about the three relationships included?³ **that Christ has a Head**
- h. Why do you think Paul put the three relationships in this order? Why do you think he put the one in the middle? **Actually the order might initially seem out of place to us. If we were making the list, how would we likely arrange the list? 3, 1, 2**

¹ Because of Ephesians 5:23, I understand this passage to be referring specifically to the husband / wife relationship. For **the husband is the head of the wife**, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

² The three relationships here are not ALL the relationships; for example, we will see later a fourth one – Christ is the Head of *all things*, and a fifth – Christ as Head of the *church*.

³ Third relationship in the verse may be surprising for at least two reasons – Christ is perfect, and Christ also is a Head.



Observations to suggest an answer why Paul listed these relationships this way:

- A. The relationships begin and end with Christ – He is mentioned first and last, **both as a Head, and One who has a Head** (remember the context of 11:1)
- B. The significance of the word “head”
 1. By the design of our human bodies, and the role of the head (position, function)
 2. By looking at “Head” in relationship #1 (Christ and man) – what is implied by this terminology?
 3. By looking at other passages where “head” is used?
 - a. Ephesians 1:21-23
 - *Head of all things* (1:22) – Christ’s **Position** (structure, authority) and Christ’s **Function** (active responsibility) – He is Head over all things, to the advantage or benefit of the church
 - Personal, Presiding, Providing
 - b. Ephesians 5:23ff
 - *Head of the church* – He is Head over the church – position and function (personally, sacrificially, sanctifyingly, nourishingly, lovingly)
 - *The Savior of the body* (Ephesians 5:23)
 4. By looking at relationship #3 (God and Christ)

God as Father, directing the Son, sending the Son, giving His Son, etc. yet all the while maintaining a loving relationship with the Son from before the foundation of the world, and doing all that His does to honor Son.

5. By considering submission
In the final relationship, the Head and the One with a Head are both perfect and co-equal, yet One still has to yield voluntarily to the other; to arrange Himself relationally under the other in the unfolding of the whole drama of redemption.

How do we see Him do that? condescending, humbling Himself, not grasping for equality, self-denial, sacrifice, learning obedience in all things (Philippians 2).

What is implied or explicitly stated as the appropriate response to Christ as Head in all of the above relationships?

- Ephesians 1 (all things) – yields to His headship
- Ephesians 5 (the church) – submission - willing, voluntary submission – Christlike (and church-like!)

What are the implications of these observations for the man who has a Head?

What are the implications of these observations for the woman who has a head?

C. The placement of the man / woman relationship in the middle

1. Both the man and woman are positioned within the verse to be nearest to the relationship to which they are to look to Christ for their example. Both to learn either to be a Head or how to be one who has a head (cf. 11:1). The ultimate goal is Christlikeness in our specific roles.



2. Husbands and wives tend to be most influenced in their marriage relationship by the other spouse (this is not necessarily bad! – it is important to be alert and sensitive to each other).
3. But there are other relationships that should have an even more profound influence. Both parties in the husband / wife relationship should look first to Christ in other relationships to guide them in theirs.⁴

What questions does this teaching raise? What are the implications?

1. Where does an imperfect head go for lessons? (two primary options in 11:3 – God and Christ) – to be an imitator of God and an imitator of Christ, specifically in their roles as Heads.⁵
2. Where does an imperfect one who has a head learn how to follow that head? (two primary options in 11:3 - Christ and husband)⁶
3. Is there a limit to “headship” – how far does headship reach?

We must apply the question to each relationship, beginning at #1, then #3, then #2 – Scripturally headship covers “all things” even in marriage (cf. Ephesians 5:24), though “in all things” would not include sin (i.e., obey God rather than men, Acts 5:29)

4. How does one submit to an imperfect head (that middle relationship’s unique challenge)? Submitting to an imperfect human head, even a disobedient one (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-3:6 anticipates this question)

⁴ As Paul so often does, he places Theological, Christological, and anthropological truths into the foundation of his applications.

⁵ Peter suggests a third tutor for a husband – the submissive wife (1 Peter 3:1ff).

⁶ Paul mentions two other tutors for a wife – the submissive church (Ephesians 5:23) and older women (Titus 2:4).

5. How does the head in that middle relationship respond if the wife does not submit? **He responds obediently to his own head even if a wife is responding incorrectly (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:7 anticipates this question)**

- 1) Do we agree with what the Bible is teaching here: that the husband has a Head, who is to be his Head in all things; that the wife has a head, who is to be her head in all things?
- 2) Do we agree that Christ is the primary example for each? – either how to be a head, or how to be one who submits to a head?

Concluding Applications (for men, not the women):

1. NOT to start by considering all the ways our wives can improve on their Christlike responses! To start by confessing our own lack of Christlikeness in my headship of her. (remembering it is a position, but it is also a function)
2. Realize we are astoundingly blessed
 - A. To have Christ as our Head – we are connected to Him personally, blessed in Him savingly, and equipped by Him sufficiently
 - B. To have a wife (or at least the possibility of one)
 - C. To be entrusted with headship in that relationship – a privileged responsibility entrusted to us by the Lord
3. In our choices as heads, we can choose to look at our *Head* First!

We have Christ as our example in initiating love, choosing sacrificially, remembering the long-term goal, enduring in faithfulness, looking to the joy set before Him, etc.

If a new event or issue surfaces in the coming days, let's test our typical or present responses by the Scripture passages we've seen today – what would imitate Christ as a Head? How can I respond in word and attitude as He did, or as He said, particularly when I'm not happy with what another may be doing?

Ephesians 4:17, 32; 5:1-2; 25, 29

- To forgive as forgiven by Christ
- To love when unlovely
- To understand her in her struggles with God and her femininity

Our doing well is less about our being rightly related to our wives, but more about our being rightly related to our Head and submitting to Him. (1 Corinthians 11:3). In yielding to Him, we most flourish, bearing fruit that will bless those we lead.

4. In our choices as heads, we have opportunity to go first – to lead in looking to Christ – *Head First!*

“Leaders get out in front and stay out in front by raising the standards by which they judge themselves – and by which they are willing to be judged” (Fred Smith, *Learning to Lead*).

We all have reasons why we may fail to lead:

1. We may not understand the necessity, so we minimize our role.
2. We may not understand the urgency, so we choose a lazy, rather than intentional approach.
3. We may be fearful due to our sense of inadequacy, so we substitute a lesser goal.
4. We may be personally discouraged (particularly over past failures and present weakness, or possibly over disappointment in another arena (i.e., work), so we set aside our commission.

The structure of 1 Corinthians 11:3 is intended to be instructive, to be part of what holds us in the place appointed to us by our Head and to guide us in our functioning.

- The structure embodies a commission from my Head, reflects my mission from my Head, and suggests accountability to Him for it.
 - My passive disobedience does not alter the structure or its intention
 - My overt failures do not alter the structure or its intention
 - The structure remains as a teaching tool
- This is more about my responding rightly to my Head than about my focus on the imperfections of the one for whom I am head
 - More about my submitting to my Head than about my satisfying those for whom I am Head
 - This is more about accepting the leadership appointed to me by my Head. I can never take a day off from my position.
 - Instead of living self-indulgently (Ephesians 4:17), how can I be the self-denying example Christ is to me? (cf. Ephesians 5:2)
 - Instead of pursuing my role lazily, how can I be the proactive nourishing and cherishing leader Christ is to me? (Ephesians 5:29)
 - Instead of harboring bitterness, anger, resentment toward my wife (Colossians 3:19; Ephesians 4:31), how can I display the kind, tenderhearted, forgiving spirit Christ displayed / displays to me?