

"What is your View on Women in Ministry?"

plus commentaries on 1 Cor. 14:33; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; & Ephesians 5

Those of you who've really studied this issue know that the majority of it comes down to two or three primary proof texts in scripture (1 Cor.14; 1 Tim.2; and Eph.5). But before we explore these verses together, allow me to recap the historical context of women during the time in which Paul's letters were written.

Most scholars agree that Christ was *not* leading a women's liberation movement; however, when you consider how degraded women were during the times of Christ, the role he allowed women to play in his movement was definitely a significant step forward when you consider how terribly women were treated in those days.

In fact, here's what a few famous thinkers said about women. And the reason I share them is because, they create a powerful backdrop for the Bible texts we're about to explore.

Socrates, the "great Greek Thinker", said: *"to be a woman is a divine punishment since a woman is half-man, half-animal."* Wow, now that's a flattering assessment, isn't it Ladies!? In fact, most Athenian men saw women exclusively as objects of pleasure. The "Great" Aristotle taught that *"the courage of a man was shown in commanding a woman."* And, in an ironic sort of way, there's still a bit of truth to that (I tried it early on in my marriage and lost all my courage!)

The great Pericles taught that *"women should be so far retired from men's business that 'her name would never be mentioned among men."* And remember, this was commonly taught to men of those times. So the fact that the Bible even lists women as Christ followers was somewhat scandalous in certain parts of Greek culture. After all, in most places, women were forbidden to do anything with men. It was a totally segregated state. And in many parts of the Middle East, it still is.

In fact, the ideal Greek woman was quiet and un-educated. Education was often thought of as a liability when it came to finding a female spouse. So, when Jesus allowed women disciples to travel with Him (and learn from him), this was a rather stunning gesture.

In his Book Women in the Ministry of Jesus Ben Witherington wrote:

"We know women were allowed to hear the word of God in the synagogue but they were never disciples of a rabbi unless their husband or master was a rabbi willing to teach them. Though a woman might be taught certain negative precepts of the Law out of necessity, this did not mean they would be taught rabbinic explanations of Torah. For a Jewish woman to leave home and travel with a rabbi was not only unheard of, it was scandalous. Even more scandalous was the fact that women, both respectable and not, were among Jesus' traveling companions" (p. 117).

So, in the cultural context, Christianity seemed to be a clear elevation of women. However, despite these advances, there were definitely limitations on women in scripture.

For example, in Luke chapter six when Jesus selected the 12 Apostles, not one was a woman. And this probably wasn't accidental. In fact in Acts 1:21 (when they were replacing Judas), they specifically limited the position to a man. And throughout most of the Bible, spiritual leadership gravitated towards men.

But, here's the Million Dollar Question: "Why did God gravitate towards men as leaders?" Did God do this because He "designed men" from the beginning to be leaders? Or, was God just working through the cultural realities of those times? I.e., Did God choose to lead through men because the culture at that time was male dominated, was Jesus simply choosing his battles in order to win a greater war: the war for our souls?

Of course, before we throw out the "Christ Working-through-culture" approach, remember that God "adapted his rules" to the realities of the culture before (even when it wasn't

his original intention).

For example, the Bible teaches that God didn't like divorce; yet, he allowed it due to "hardened hearts." Or, as another example: God didn't want Israel to have a king in the Old Testament; yet, he relented and gave them Saul. Therefore, the questions remain: Did God *eternally design* women to be "equal in value" yet "subservient in role"? Or, was God simply working through the existing culture? (I.e., 12 men to reach a male dominated culture?)

Now, these two approaches are important because they form the two main positions on women in ministry. (And here's a little "theological lingo" for you). The *Complementarian* Position states that men and women are "equal in value; yet different in role." I.e., Women are valuable but, were never meant to teach doctrine or be spiritual leaders. The *Egalitarian* Position states that men and women are different in gender, but similar in their roles before God. So with this in mind, let's look at one of the two main texts at the base of this debate, 1 Corinthians 14:33.

In the context, the Corinthians were a church filled with disorder. There was a lot of fighting. Numerous people were fighting for the opportunity to speak. Visitors are starting to leave. So Paul starts laying everyone flat with rebukes from a pastoral heart. And finally he gets to the Corinthian women:

14:33 "As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. ³⁵If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

Now the main question that scholars ask of this text is this: Is this a universal command, or, was this advice for a specific situation? Complementarian Approach would say: The text says, "As in ALL the congregations of the saints." After all, a complementarian would argue: "*It doesn't say 'SOME of the congregations.'*" But the Egalitarian approach would refute: "This verse isn't universal." Paul may say: "it's disgraceful for a woman to speak"... But we have to weigh this with the fact that, two chapters earlier, he's telling women how to prophesy in church (how to publically declare the oracles of God); so, he's obviously *not* saying that women universally can't speak!" After all, if Paul can happily work with female prophetesses in the book of Acts, then surely Paul could not intend what Complementarians interpret him to be saying.

In other words, an Egalitarian would argue that when Paul writes 'as in ALL the congregations,' he really means, 'When women are acting crazy like you...like I would do in any congregation, I'd make you shut-up!'" Or, he's referring to a regional problem such as: 'As in ALL the congregations of the saints [in Corinth]...' Or, [where women are likely to act offensively.]

So you can see 2 different approaches: Complementarians approach texts like these with the assumption that verses like these are the evidence of a universal design of God that he thought up before we were created. On the other hand, Egalitarians approach texts like these with the assumption that "it's just specific advice for a specific situation."

And frankly, this is the problem in just about every proof text on this issue: Most of the texts are enculturated enough that it's tough to discern whether we're reading a "Universally Transcendent Command" vs. "Specific Advice." For the most part, our interpretations seem to reveal our preconceived biases more so than they reveal Paul's perlocutionary intent. So, to be intellectually honest, allow me show you just how tricky this can be.

Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Tim. 5:23 "²³Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." Was this meant to be a universal command... or was this advice for a specific situation? And, how do you know? Then, 1 Timothy

2:12 (the other classic passage on women) "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." Once again, was this meant to be a universal command... or was this advice for a specific situation?

I mean, how do we know with certainty if Paul is trying to say: "Timothy, *in your situation*, I do not permit..." After all, remember the implications of this interpretation are huge. We're talking about benching 68% of the body of Christ from preaching publically! This would have a *massive effect* on the spread of the Gospel. So we better be sure!

As another example from the Corinthian context: 1 Cor. 11:5 teaches that any women who prays or prophesies should have her head covered. And vs. 15 says that women should have long hair... it's a disgrace for women to have short hair. It also says that long-hair on guys is a disgrace...(so when I first was hired as a pastor... I had a pony-tail that went all the way down to my belt (I was a real hippy at the time). As you'd imagine I got a lot of letters from angry church members over my hair :)

But before I digress too far: Is this verse for today? Or, was Paul just addressing a specific cultural issue? i.e., Was this a universal command for hair styling that existed in the mind of God before creation? Or, was this advice for a specific situation? Some Egalitarians charge Complementarians of being selective about their literal interpretations. After all, if you're going to advocate that "silencing women is a universal command," then, three chapters earlier, you better advocate that women having long hair is equally true and universal in God's mind.

Again, many Christian leaders believe, based on 1 Cor. 14:34, that women can't speak in church. And they argue that this command is a relevant "universal command" for today; yet, the entire rest of the chapter is all about using unknown tongues and prophecy – which is something that many Complementarians suddenly ignore!?

Whenever, I point this out, many Complementarians defensively fabricate weird theories like, "Yea, but Peter, that stuff was just for first century Christians... it's not for us today." Oh, but suddenly, two verses later these same people say, "*Oh, but the women stuff, now that's relevant for today!*"

Of course, my point here is not to say: "Everyone's interpretation is silly but mine isn't." Rather, I'm simply trying to point out how complex these passages can be.

So, when people make this issue out to be super black and white, it really irritates me because it isn't.

So, allow me to humbly suggest an interpretation that, to me, makes more sense in light of the Corinthian context. In Chapter 14, he starts with rebuking the tongue-talkers. Apparently, they were speaking in their unknown tongues and in Vs. 23, it was clearly freaking *visitors out*. So, Paul basically says, under these circumstances: "*Be silent!*"

Then, Paul takes on the prophets. They weren't prophesying in turn, nor were they carefully weighing what each other were saying so, once again, he restricts them. Thus, can you see a pattern emerging here in First Corinthians? He's saying: "You tongue talkers, under these circumstances, *be silent!* You prophets, under these circumstances, *be silent.*" And finally Paul gets to the ladies and says, "Under these circumstances, be silent!"

You see, none of Paul's previous restrictions were "universal designs of God creating subservience before the creation of the world." Yet this is exactly how Complementarians are asking us to read this.

For the most part, Complementarian hermeneutics ignore the entire context of 1 Corinthians. And I'm just getting started.

For example, if a person is going to argue that 1 Cor. 14:33 forbids women from being in

ministry, then, that same person better be willing to do exactly what the verse says and make sure that women remain *entirely silent* in the church at all times. After all, the verse demands "silence" – which means, no singing; no greeting; no announcements. Yet, do many Complementarians argue this? Of course not. It's ridiculous. And strangely, many of them defend their position using the exact same "cultural argument" that I did.

Lastly, if you're going to argue that women were universally designed to be subservient to men, you better be willing to fight this battle *outside of the church* in the secular workplace as well. After all, it seems a bit awkward to have a female boss when you believe they are "out of God's will" by playing that role.

That's why the leading systematic theologian on Complementarianism started taking bold stands when Wayne Grudem wrote "83 things that women should not do in churches." In his 800+ page treatise, he concluded that, "*Women should not be greeters... Should not give announcements... edit the church newsletter...or sing a solo on Sunday morning...They should not teach the Bible to a Junior High Sunday School class... [and] they should not pray publically*" to quote a few.

One of the troublesome things about this debate is that no one thinks of the practical implications of this issue. For the most part, the debate about women in ministry generally occurs between "ivory tower evangelicals" who are rather detached from what is going on in the earth.

Studies show that over 68% of the body of Christ is women. So, the implications of this doctrine are rather dramatic. If we bench women from the public preaching of scripture, it's much like trying to win the super-bowl with both arms tied behind our backs.

As for me: I believe that the teaching of scripture is the single greatest thing we can do to help transform lives. It's hard to agree with this value when we're benching almost three-quarters of Christ's body from teaching. And if you agree with me about the power of God's Word, then you know that when scripture is preached, divorce is decreased. Marriages are strengthened. Promiscuity is curbed and thus AIDS orphaning is stemmed. Because of the preaching of scripture, drug dealers, mob bosses, sex traffickers, and rapists repent. So, when we reduce the public preaching of scripture by 68%, that means we directly increase rape, genocide and torture on the earth. A lack of women preachers can be measured in blood and tears. And I realize that sounds mellowdramatic; but, it's nonetheless true.

Obviously, I do not agree with Complementarianism. Of course, I *also* do not wholeheartedly sign off on Egalitarianism either. Of course, I never force anyone in my church to agree with me. And I've never felt the need to separate myself from churches that preach this. After all, with the sad state of the American church being what it is, we need all hands on deck.

But, at the end of the day, I need to make a practical decision on this in order to run my church. And it suffices to say that I believe that women can be perfectly great leaders in the body of Christ. Some of the most brilliant Bible teachers ever met are women. Heck. Just listen to my wife. She clearly commands the scriptures far better than most men.

Even more, all throughout the Bible, we read of women prophets, even women military leaders (see Judges 4). I mean, how can a woman be a "prophet-judge" leading 10,000 men into battle yet suddenly can't even teach a 7th grade boy's Bible study. To me, that's just ridiculously bad Bible scholarship. And I've yet to read a Complementarian who adequately addresses any of these passages without requiring mental gymnastics.

Of course, I have not engaged passages like 1 Tim.2:11 or Eph. 5 here as I don't want to lose everyone in the details. (Of course, if you're curious, at the end of this essay, I DO take a little

time to walk through them.)

In the meantime, Ladies, don't desecrate God's Word by leaving it on the shelf for men to teach – just because someone tells you "you're not qualified." It's foolish to leave your wounded neighbor in a ditch when God has given you the Scriptures that can save them.

Thus, I put a new spin on Paul's classic charge to Timothy: *"Do not let anyone look down on you because you are a women. But set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."*

For further commentary other classic "Women in Ministry" texts, see the commentaries below:

Commentary on *1 Timothy 2:11-15*

"¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

The million dollar question about this passage is this: Is Paul's command regarding women specifically aimed at women under *specific circumstances*? Or is Paul making a *universal declaration* about women at all times and under all circumstances? People who have humility about God's Word are forced to admit that we cannot know the answer for sure.

Clearly, Paul didn't want women under this circumstance to be in positions of authority over men. But why must we believe this is a universal design for all women for all time?

In opposition to this grand assumption, many, who think that scriptures advocate women in ministry, take a different approach to this scripture such as:

"I [Paul] do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man [in the type of situation that you, Timothy, find yourself in]. In other words, there is no reason why we must interpret this verse as a "universal command" forbidding all teaching involvement of women under all circumstances. In fact, under close inspection, there is nothing in this verse's context that would forbid this interpretation.

After forbidding these women from teaching Paul adds his reason:

"¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve."(vs. 13)

First of all, Paul's reason for limiting the role of these particular ladies is rather obscure. He seems to be implying that birth order affects authority. Unfortunately, Paul does not elaborate much on his rationale. Thus, commentaries have made hundreds of guesses.

When you study this passage in various commentaries, you'll find an incredible diversity of ideas. In fact, many scholars list this as one of the most complicated passages in the New Testament – thus, many hermeneutics text books highlight it as one of the classic exegetical dilemmas.

Certainly, we can assume that such a statement about Adam and Even made sense to Paul's original hearers. Or else he wouldn't have said it. But for the rest of us, we are left with making conjectures.

Some people say that this means: "God intrinsically designed men to rule over women" - as if this Genesis reference is indicative of some universal design. But such an interpretation

carries the huge assumption that Paul is creating some grandiose statement about God's universal role for women. But, why must we assume this? What if Paul were simply saying: "Ladies, God created man first, and because of this, you should honor your husbands by playing this particular role right now."

For example, I have two young daughters named Lijah and True. Both being less than five years old, they sometimes fight over toys. So, imagine if they were fighting and I told my three year old, "True, listen up. I gave your older sister that toy first. So would you please honor her by letting her play with it. Would you please play with this other toy instead?"

Now, in making this statement, it would be incorrect to interpret me as saying: "All younger sisters should universally submit to their elder siblings at all times and in all places." Why? Because my request was not a universal code of conduct. Thus, many scholars have posed the question: what if Paul's request was intended to be interpreted the same as mine?

After reading dozens of scholars, not one of them has any exegesis that necessitates this statement to be a universal code of conduct.

Ultimately, the humble exegete will admit that this is a tough passage and that we have no way of verifying with certainty what Paul really means. So, our interpretations of this obscure passage really just reveal our large assumptions.

For example, if we believe that under all circumstances women should never teach because God eternally determined this as a part of his intrinsic design, then we would probably see this "Adam and Eve" reference as evidence of God's "universal design for women".

However, if we believe that Paul was simply addressing a feisty community of difficult women who were dishonoring their husbands, then we'd probably be more inclined to see this Genesis reference as just another way of saying: "*Women, by creating Adam first God gave your husbands a position of respect. So honor them!*" But it wouldn't be construed as a universal role.

In essence, Paul could have used this "respect argument" for almost anything. For example, he could have said: "In these circumstances Timothy, I do not permit women to have their crying babies in church. And listen, God honored men by creating Adam first, so please, tell the women to show some honor to the guys by obeying this and staying in unity with the guys. It would be equivalent to saying, "Guys, Christ honored the ladies by first revealing himself resurrected to Mary Madalene. So, show some respect to your wives by listening to what they have to say." But let's continue with this passage.

"¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

In Genesis 2:18, God created Eve as a "suitable helper" because "it is not good for man to be alone". The Hebrew word for "suitable" literally means a "corresponding" helper.

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* writes: "*God intended husband and wife to be a spiritual, functional unity, walking in integrity, serving God, and keeping His commandments together.*" I.e., alone they are "not good"; but, together, there is a safety. Indeed, Ecclesiastes says "*Two are better than one*". There is more safety and accountability when we live life in unity with others. Yet, because Eve did not put herself into the spiritual unity (that exists when two become one), Paul is saying that Eve was deceived.

Of course, Paul is not absolving Adam of his responsibility either. In other places, Paul places the blame squarely on Adam (Ro. 5:12-21). However, it does seem that Paul is implying that, "*IF there had been a unity between the two, there would not have been any 'deception of Eve.'*"

Once again, this does not necessarily mean that women are inferior in intellect or discernment. Rather, we could simply take this to mean that God created humans to discern things only when we are in unity with other people (unlike the women that were under Timothy's charge). And this interpretation may help us make sense of Paul's final statement in verse 15.

"15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

Once again, the interpretations for this verse are all over the map. However, *context* is critical for interpreting epistles. And this particular context is all about being in unity, as Adam and Eve should have been.

Childbearing is likely a reference to sex, the symbol of being in unity (a.k.a., "One Flesh"). Thus, if these wives would get in unity with their spouses (by means of faith, love, holiness, and propriety), then they will be protected from foolishness.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary adds four more possible interpretations: (a) preserved (physically) through the difficult and dangerous process of childbirth [resulting from humble submission]; (b) preserved (from insignificance) by means of her role in the family; (c) saved through the ultimate childbirth of Jesus Christ the Savior (an indirect reference to Gen. 3:15); and (d) kept from the corruption of society by being at home raising children." (Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

Thus, here is the verse with *my added comments* to create clarity:

1 Tim 2:11-15 "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man [*in the type of situation that you, Timothy, find yourself in*]; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve [*which is a place of honor. I.e., She was added to him, which placed responsibility on her to stay united with him*]. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. [*i.e., Eve didn't do her part to stay in unity*]. 15 But women will be saved [*and protected from foolishness*] through childbearing [*an enduring symbol of total unity and fellowship with their spouse*]*—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."*

As a contrast, I show the verse with *Complementarian assumptions* instead of my own:

1 Tim 2:11-15 "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man [*in any circumstances anywhere*]; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve [*which means that God created Adam with ultimate responsibility and privilege. This is an intrinsic sign of male authority over women.*] 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. [*i.e., Women have an intrinsic propensity for deception when they don't remain under authority.*] 15 But women will be saved [*and protected from foolishness*] through childbearing [*a symbol of unity with their spouse as well as a proper role in the home*]*—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."*

Commentary on *Ephesians 5:22-33*

Eph. 5:22-33 says "²² Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you **also** must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

First off, there's a lot of weird theology on marriage that comes from this passage. Many churches talk a lot about the husband being the "Head"... and that's the key word.

But what does this really mean... to be "the Head of the Household?" After all, I've heard people justify some of the craziest behavior, based upon these verses.

For example, there are a lot of really controlling husbands who say, "Well, the Bible says, I'M the head of this household, which means... It's none of your business to ask me about our finances!" I've honestly heard this dozens of times over the years.

I like to tell my wife: "the Greek word for head literally means... I get to have the t.v. remote... which comes from another Greek word that literally means: "No diaper Changing!"

If I actually said that to my wife, she'd say: "Well, you better learn the Greek word for Sofa cuz that's where you're sleepin!"

On the Other Hand, I've heard many Christian wives refer to this verse in order to abdicate their responsibility in their marriage. For example, I once heard a woman say, "Well, HE is the Head... which means: He's supposed to both initiate AND satisfy every spiritual and romantic need I feel!" (Truth be told, the one woman who said this was so high maintenance, I thought: "If Jesus himself was your husband he would've quit!"

In academic hermeneutics, there's a term called: "Eisogesis" which is the error of "reading into scripture" things that don't actually exist.

For example, a classic illustration of Eisogesis is the idea of Adam and Eve eating an apple. Of course, the Bible doesn't specify a fruit. Or, as another example, we hear of "Jonah and the Whale - when it actually says it was a "big fish."

Now, these are silly examples because they don't really affect theology! But, Ephesians 5 has been used to justify all sorts of weird and controlling behaviors. So, it begs the question: "What does the Greek word, "Head" really mean?"

People ask me all the time: Does your knowledge of Greek and Hebrew help you read the Bible? For the most part, no. (And don't tell that to my Bible professors!) Yet, there are a few rare moments where it helps! And this is one of those passages.

For example, the Greek word translated "Head" in this passage is the Greek word "Kephale." Of course, the problem with the English word "head" is that it adds connotations to the Greek word that don't actually exist in the Greek.

For example, if there was a Greek word for "Tree" and we translated it, "Evergreen" we're adding to the word in translation. Yes, an "evergreen" is a tree. But it may not be the tree that the apostle Paul had in mind. And the same thing is true for Kephale. There's actually no sense of "control" or hierarchy in it.

For example, If Paul wanted to say that Husbands "Have authority Over" Wives used the greek word, "arche." And why? Because "arche" means "head" in a controlling and authoritative sense. It's interesting that Paul *didn't* use this word.

Also, if Paul intended this verse to be about "husbands controlling their wives," there are far better words he would have likely used, such as the Greek word, "Oiko'-despot'ays," which directly means "ruler of the house." But instead, Paul used a far less "authoritarian" word in Kephale. Why?

Keep in mind, Kephale can be used to refer to a "physical head" as in, "You chopped off my head." But metaphorically, it means, "pre-immanent point," such as, "the headwaters of the Mississippi." Or, it could also refer to the tip/head of a spear.

Thus a "spear-head" is a Kephale. It's not "*in charge of*" the rest of the spear. But it certainly affects the shaft.

So, it's like a "point-person"... Like Adrian Peterson of the MN Vikings is the Kephale! He's not the *owner* of the Vikings. He's not the Coach (i.e., an authority). But he's "pre-eminent." He's the spark... (or He's the curse) – the Kephale. But, this doesn't necessitate "control."

Thus the kephale was used to describe the part of the army that was "first into battle – the first to sacrifice." And this makes a lot more sense in the context of what Paul was saying: Husbands should be like Christ: be the first to sacrifice. Be an initiator of righteousness.

And keep in Mind: when this was written, women were viewed like African American slaves in the 1700's. Frankly, they were treated like dogs. They were considered material possessions. As I've mentioned in other essays, Socrates once said: "To be a woman is a divine punishment since a woman is half-man, half-animal." Wow, that's just a flattering assessment!

Women were generally uneducated. In fact, an educated woman was even considered a liability in some circles. You couldn't marry-off an educated women very easily. Thus, it compounded the stereotype that women were poor dumb decision makers.

But here's my point today: If you understand the cultural context that Paul is speaking to, one could even argue that Paul is actually *elevating the value of women* in this passage.

Certainly, it may not seem flattering to read, "*Wives submit to your husbands*;"but, in the context, Paul is instigating a pretty radical new approach to marriage.

For example, Christ taught in Mark 10 that true leadership is all about servanthood. For example, in Mark 10 we read the story where James and John asked Jesus if they could sit on the left and right hand of Christ when they all got to heaven. And Christ said: You guys are missing the whole concept of leadership. He said: the Gentiles always see leadership as an "authoritative control system." In other words, it's a hierarchy: "Who gets to control others – to literally 'lord over' the others?" But Christ said: Heaven's system isn't about control. (After all, there's only One person who's really in control). Rather, in heaven it's about who sacrifices and serves the most. Thus, if you want to be "great," you've got to let go of control-systems and be a servant leader" Mk 10:44. And in the same way, I believe, Paul was saying the same thing: Husbands, you got to be like Christ! You've got to be like the ultimate servant leader – the kephale.

In some ways, it's actually kind-of ironic that some people interpret this Ephesians passage as advocating the very hierarchical control system that Christ and Paul were subverting. And please understand: This is my deduction of a complicated passage. You don't have to agree.

And there are many men and women who do take a more authoritarian interpretation. And many of them seem to get a long quite fine.

But I find it pretty hard to see this passage as setting up a hierarchy: "Women submit to men" when only a few verses up he says: Men must submit to women too. Eph.5:21 "*Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ!*" That includes everyone! In fact, that's the whole point of this passage which is: "serve one-another."

Over the years, I've read a lot of Complementarian expositions of this passage. And it always seems like they want to stretch this passage to say more than it does.

For example, theologian Wayne Grudem goes into all sorts of details around the word Kephale – as though, winning the argument by "lexicographical exhaustion" somehow trumps the immediate context of what Paul was saying.

Once again, good hermeneutics demands that

(1). The immediate context of a word should be weighed as heavily as its lexicographical context: For example, imagine if I wrote the phrase: "*Dude, that was so sick!*" If you weren't a native speaker of English, you might interpret the slang word "sick" to mean: "*to be afflicted with ill health.*" You could quote a million dictionaries and medical journals that substantiate your claim and still be wrong. But, if you knew that I was a teenage girl, you might interpret "sick" to mean, "amazing." However, if you knew I was a skateboarder, you might interpret "sick" to mean, "physically difficult." If we were on an bumpy airplane, and we just saw someone vomit into a tiny barf-bag with skill, you might interpret "sick" in all three ways!

In other words, we have to know the *perlocutionary intent* of the Apostle Paul. And frankly, this isn't possible for us. We have to bring our assumptions to the text whether we like it or not. And only arrogant people are going to pretend they don't bring filters to this text.

(2). Secondly, the thematic context should also be considered *as important*, if not *more important* than the lexicography. I.e., Even if Kephale had some authoritarian construct to it, it still wouldn't negate the whole context of the passage which is, Eph.5:21 "*Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ.*" In other words, Paul is essentially saying: "*Everyone! Stop being bossy, demanding and entitled. Christ laid down his rights and died for you.*"

"*Submit to one another*" requires that *both parties* defer to one another. Yet, somehow we're supposed to believe that verse 22 trumps the previous? Suddenly, we're supposed to interpret verse 22 as a universal design of God for female subservience before the creation of the world, yet disregard verse 21 as having the same idea behind it? I simply don't see why a person **MUST** interpret this passage to mean that.

Now, if you want to believe such an interpretation, I'll respect your right to obey your own conscience. But please, don't be arrogant enough to say that Paul's perlocutionary intent is obvious when it's not.

Remember: "*[Christ] came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many*" Mk 10:45. The same is true theologically. Christ-likeness can quickly be observed based on how people *apply their theology*. Ladies, if somebody beats you up using this passage, just remind yourself: they missed the whole point of the passage.