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### Building bridges between complementarians and egalitarians

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### Calvin's ideas about women

January 31, 2009 by [Wayne Leman](#)

The last post in this comment thread on a preceding post was by Sue. Here it is:

I want to make clear that I did not cite these things to make a “blanket judgement” of Calvin. I first posted some material from him in a positive light. But when Douglass’s work was mentioned I simply cut and pasted from what Douglass had already put on the internet on this topic. I had read and posted about Dentiere on my own blog last year or the year before, in a series on women preaching.

It happened that Douglass presented some negative quotes about Calvin. I do not want it to appear that I have a purely negative view of any of historic writers or theologians (well perhaps a few). I agree that we see many conflicts. I constantly try to cite enough with links for people to read something on their own.

We cannot deny these conflicts, but I absolutely refuse to view patriarchy as a beautiful thing, not that anyone is saying that it is, but I have friends, close friends and relatives who have lived for years in patriarchal or male dominant societies. Some are deeply damaged. One very close friend, was sodomized brutally by a neighbour. The gloss and patina that overlies the condition of women needs to be removed.

We all suffer, men as well as women, we do well to realize that authoritarian societies, the “some submit to others” paradigm, does as much damage to men as it does to women. And thank God for Calvin for his education reforms, for his support for the people, for contributing to Geneva being what it was and is.

I was raised in the ethos of Geneva, from the age of 3, I knew that Geneva was my heritage but that does not mean that I have to accept patriarchy as a good thing.

Comments in that thread can continue here.

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## 241 Responses to “Calvin’s ideas about women”

1. on [January 31, 2009 at 6:38 am](#)  [David McKay](#)

I haven’t had a chance to read the book, but I have read some comments about it. This link

<http://tinyurl.com/bbzyp2>

leads to the Amazon link to The Christian Lover, which has writings of Christians about or to their partner.

Calvin’s comments are from letters written about his wife, Idelette, after her death. They are reputed to be very tender.

2. on [January 31, 2009 at 7:27 am](#)  [Sue](#)


David,

I have heard exactly the same thing. I have heard some of these passages read aloud although I do not own this book.

I am especially impressed with his legacy of personal devotion and education, which women greatly benefitted from.

Nonetheless, it is important to read what the women themselves wrote. That is why I posted so much about Marie Dentiere. I have posted her own thoughts on this topic on my blog

<http://powerscourt.blogspot.com/2009/01/marie-dentiere-defense-of-women.html>

3. on [January 31, 2009 at 2:36 pm](#)  [Don Johnson](#)

Calvin might have changed, let’s hope so.

4. on [January 31, 2009 at 3:22 pm](#)  [Marilyn](#)

Thanks for alerting us to this new book, David!

5. on [January 31, 2009 at 4:37 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

“We all suffer, men as well as women, we do well to realize that authoritarian societies, the “some submit to others” paradigm, does as much damage to men as it does to women”


They are often all expected to fit one box, one set of characteristics and abilities. Not all men are leaders nor have any desire to be. Trying to be what one is not is indeed damaging to anyone as well as those around you.

6. on [January 31, 2009 at 4:56 pm](#)  [Charis](#)

We all suffer, men as well as women, we do well to realize that authoritarian societies, the “some submit to others” paradigm, does as much damage to men as it does to women.

The damage also extends to the ones who are “lords over”. Perhaps they are even more “damaged” than their perceived underlings?

*“Who would you rather be: the one who eats the dinner or the one who serves the dinner? You’d rather eat and be served, right? But I’ve taken my place among you as the one who serves. And you’ve stuck with me through thick and thin. Now I confer on you the royal authority my Father conferred on me”* Jesus in Luke 22:27ff (MSG)

7. on [February 1, 2009 at 12:34 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

You speak of “authoritarian societies, the “some submit to others” paradigm.””

The language you use for describing what “authoritarian societies” are, is, so far as I know, unique to yourself.

All societies which are based on the rule of law legitimize state-administered coercion of those found guilty or as a preventative measure. Restrictions on the freedom of citizens are in place in all democracies, in which the “tyranny” of a majority coerces a minority. “Some” are submitting to “others” all the time.

Perhaps you side with another Genevan, the enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, who famously concluded that “freedom” and personal volition are to be separated according to a higher principle: “Whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be forced to be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing else than that he will be forced to be free.”

Fine, but this is an anti-liberal point of view in terms of political philosophy. In short, you appear closer to Calvin and Rousseau in this sense than most people, including myself, are now.

8. on [February 1, 2009 at 12:54 am](#)  [madame](#)

I only posted the quotes from Calvin to prove John H. wrong...

Calvin may have very well honored women. His view of them as inferiors may have awakened in him a desire to protect them, honoring them as “weaker vessels” even in essence. I don’t know. (I don’t really know much about

Calvin's view of women other than the quotes I posted).

Nevertheless, I believe his belief that women were created as inferiors, and that they bear a stigma, are potentially damaging and shouldn't be accepted. I posted some quotes from John MacArthur, a 20th-21st century respected Bible teacher who exposes similar views as Calvin's with respect to women. His culture is not influencing him, rather, he's very counter-cultural with his views, making them even more dangerous to Christians who would consider counter-cultural to mean necessarily good. It's well known today that women are not less or inferior (although some people still think we are!)

Because he held the view that women are inferior by design doesn't mean he was a misogynist either. Maybe he truly loved women and felt compassion for them and the stigma they bear. I don't know. Maybe he truly cherished his wife, giving her much honor as a weaker vessel. Maybe his view of her as an inferior being inspired more Christlike love than if he had viewed her as an equal.

I didn't point out Calvin's view of women in order to vilify him.

John MacArthur's (and other Complementarian's) points are more worrying. Calvin's can be put down to lack of knowledge and societal influence. MacArthur's, not.



9. on [February 1, 2009 at 2:29 am](#) [Don Johnson](#)

The fear of a "tyranny of the majority" is exactly why the USA is a republic and not a direct democracy. The will of the demos gets filtered many times.



10. on [February 1, 2009 at 2:54 am](#) [Sue](#)

And that is what comes of a hasty note being transformed into a post!!

But you write,

*All societies which are based on the rule of law legitimize state-administered coercion of those found guilty or as a preventative measure. Restrictions on the freedom of citizens are in place in all democracies, in which the "tyranny" of a majority coerces a minority. "Some" are submitting to "others" all the time.*

Not at all. "Some submit to others" is a most bizarre state and only exists where there is an excluded class who submit to no one. This is what "some to others" is intended to mean. That the one to whom one submits is himself free from submitting

It is right to describe a society based on the rule of law as "all submit to all."

So, I say we must live in a society where "all submit to all" and we cannot afford an excluded class of persons. But I am not saying that Calvin proposed such. He does not in general terms.


But, nonetheless, anyone who exhorts wifely obedience and excludes wives from full participation in decision-making in the home, has set a side an exclusion, a little domain in which the wife, "the one", submits to the husband, "the other" without reciprocity. This is with the understanding that although the husband may imagine that he serves the wife, he may at any time invoke "final say" - he does not accord her equality in making decisions for the home.

In fact, if you google "some to others" you will find in the top 10 search results, two references to Wayne Grudem including Sarah Sumner's cogent argument in "Men and Women in the Church" page 146 as to why "some to others" is

not a viable interpretation for Eph. 5:21.

I recommend to you this book if you have not read it.

Generally speaking we do not describe a democracy or a society based on the rule of law, as “some submit to others.”

11. on [February 1, 2009 at 4:58 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

You made my point well. The “some submit to others” paradigm is language you have transferred from an exegetical debate among comps and non-comps into the realm of political discourse (you “authoritarian societies”). Your google search shows as much.

On the other hand, if it true that republics and democracies, which are full of hierarchies, are “all submit to all” in terms of paradigm, then the only question is, transferred back to marriage, what kind of hierarchies are appropriate to it. As I see it, this is a case of not being able to have one’s cake and eat it, too.

You raise the question of the proper sense to attribute to Eph 5:21 again. As well you should. It remains open for discussion. The problem with the interpretation you espouse is recognized by many scholars, regardless of how they come down on the question in the end. Eph 5:21 as you understand it seems to be, as the egal scholar Erich Fuchs once put it, in “contradiction” with 5:22-24.

Thank you for recognizing how important Sarah Sumner’s contributions are to the comp-egal debate. I don’t agree with all her points, neither in the book you cite or her last co-authored with her husband. But I think that her critique of egalism on one side and compism on the other have more weight than either side has been willing to admit.

So far you have avoided engaging her main theses as well. They are challenging to comps and egals alike.

Madame,

If you keep at it, you will find occasion to prove me wrong on other occasions! I try to be careful to bullet-proof my statements before I offer them for consideration. But I do not always succeed. It’s a gift to have as many loyal critics as I have on these threads.

You are right that Calvin occasionally spoke of women as inferior to men. No matter how typical that attitude was and still is, that doesn’t make it right. But Reformation historian Steven Ozment’s well-known statement about Luther, that he was “a leading defender of the dignity of women and the goodness of marriage,” applies no less to Calvin. It is an interesting paradox. Such paradoxes are not uncommon today as well.

12. on [February 1, 2009 at 6:41 am](#)  [Wayne Leman](#)

John wrote:

*Eph 5:21 as you understand it seems to be, as the egal scholar Erich Fuchs once put it, in “contradiction” with 5:22-24.*

This is true, John, if the only truth in the Bible is that which is explicitly stated. And that is one way to interpret the Bible. I know from your past comments that you are open to other ways of discovering truth, including, I suspect, “biblical truth.”

Here is one way to interpret 5:21 as not contradicting 5:22-24: if we view 5:22-24 as the only submission relationships which are explicitly stated. There are others, of course, which are not stated in that particular passage which are stated elsewhere in the biblical canon. And we can easily think of others which are not explicitly stated there.

I, for one, believe that a broader view of Scripture calls for me to submit to my wife as much as she does to me. I think that this is the way that Jesus taught, that we are to serve others rather than being served by them.

I suggest that Paul explicitly stated the submission relationships of 5:22-24 because of his higher priority teaching that within the church we are to submit to one another, we are to serve others. We are not to lord it over one another. Some people \*could\* misinterpret his higher priority teaching on the full ontological equality of all persons, regardless of social role, to mean that we can disregard social norms. But this would lead to social chaos and bring condemnation from others upon our faith which upsets social norms. Now, our faith does upset some social norms, but it doesn't always do so immediately. Slavery was not eliminated in Paul's time nor did he teach that it should be. That time would come later. I don't know if women had the right to vote in Paul's time. For that matter, I don't know how many citizens of the Roman empire had the right to vote for anything.

Today, in many parts of the world, it is appropriate to speak out against the evils of slavery. It is important for the church to take a lead in speaking out when women are treated as second class citizens for anything, voting, wage equality, spousal abuse, etc. The church must speak out against child slavery, exploitation of children for the sex industry, etc. The church must speak out when minorities are oppressed or when there are huge inequities between the haves and the have nots.

Yes, there are social hierarchies within various cultures, including the culture(s) of Paul's time, that need to be recognized and these call for some submission relationships. But that does not mean that we are not to defer to the desires of others not included in Eph. 5:22-24, if that can be done in accordance with godly principles.

I know that some exegetes believe that 5:22-24 delimits the reciprocal submission taught in 5:21. But I suggest that that is too limiting, just to take that much of the Bible literally as the complete description of the submission of 5:21 and not include other parts of the Bible which teach us to submit more widely, including in non-hierarchical relationships.

I think you are right to challenge egal teaching that may "demand" (?) mutual submission too broadly. But I don't think that recognizing a weakness in an egal of mutual submission necessarily calls for adopting another view that is too limiting.

As Sarah Sumner say, both egals and comps need to submit to biblical teaching. We should be careful about not demanding mutual submission in all situations as well as not limiting submission only to the relationships of Eph. 5:22-24.

I think I'm preaching to the choir, but I like to clarify your thinking to others esp. since some egals here think from your posts that you are a closet comp. I think, rather, that you want each of us to recognize that we may not be being as charitable toward those with whom disagree as we ought. And we often overstate a case, perhaps based on personal experience or one view of a certain passage of the Bible. I think you're really an egalitarian, as you have stated, but that you want egals to treat comps fairly, and recognize that comps can have marriages which are truly loving, and that egal marriages can be very unloving. That's what I think. But I wouldn't want to put words in your mouth! 😊

13. on [February 1, 2009 at 7:00 am](#)  [Sue](#)

*The problem with the interpretation you espouse is recognized by many scholars,*

I espouse the same interpretation on Eph. 5:21 as Sumner - she writes "the phrase itself connotes the idea of mutuality" (However, I lack her generous attitude to those who interpret submit in Eph. 5:22 differently ) I note that

you are of the same opinion as me on this one, since you wrote,

*Something is awry here. The verb in question does not even occur in 5:22. It is gapped from 5:21. Surely it has to mean one and the same thing in 5:21 and (elliptically) in 5:22.*


I am not sure of what problem you are talking about. Certainly traditional exegesis created a paragraph break between the verses. This does not surprise me. But you seem to think this is not possible so you do not share traditional exegesis. My opinion rests on this. I know what the tradition is, and I let it rest there. No point in troubling myself further. I wouldn't accept slavery and I won't accept the subordinate state of women as a God-given model for life. I am continually surprised that you seem to recommend it to me.

*On the other hand, if it true that republics and democracies, which are full of hierarchies, are "all submit to all" in terms of paradigm, then the only question is, transferred back to marriage, what kind of hierarchies are appropriate to it.*

When marriage is viewed as an authority and submission relationship, it is a hierarchy - in the singular - with one person at the top of the hierarchy all the time, the same person. Marriage is like a monarchy.

14. on [February 1, 2009 at 7:05 am](#)  [Sue](#)

I meant in that view marriage is like a monarchy.

15. on [February 1, 2009 at 7:14 am](#)  [Wayne Leman](#)

Sue wrote:

*I wouldn't accept slavery and I won't accept the subordinate state of women as a God-given model for life. I am continually surprised that you seem to recommend it to me.*

Sue, why don't you give a concise description of what you understand as constituting "the subordinate state of women," then ask John if that is actually what he is recommending for you.

I suspect there is a disconnect of some kind here and I'd like to see it bridged. In spite of the many words exchanged between you and John, I'm not sure that you two are actually on the same page when writing sometimes on this blog. I'd like to find out more clearly how close John's beliefs about women are closer to yours than you may realize.

For instance, some topics that could be addressed when questioning John about a subordinate state of women could include whether he personally (not the comps whose loving marriages he defends on this blog) believes it is appropriate or not for wives to voice their opinions to their husbands, for women to have equal pay with men for the same work, whether or not John personally believes that only the husband can have the last say in any decision, whether it is permissible for a wife to have more education than her husband, whether John believes it is permissible for his own wife to preach to congregations, etc.

16. on [February 1, 2009 at 7:34 am](#)  [Sue](#)

Wayne,

While John may not be recommending subordination, he certainly believes that hierarchy is necessary in marriage.

I will take back and apologize for suggesting that John is recommending subordination to me personally. I remain agnostic on other issues.



17. on [February 1, 2009 at 1:31 pm](#) [Don Johnson](#)

I do not believe that thinking one part of the Bible contradicts another is viable for a believer that accepts inspiration. It is even less possible that an author would contradict himself and even less that he would do so immediately. It is a sign of NOT understanding when one thinks that MIGHT be happening, it indicates a puzzle to solve, not a contradiction to accept.



18. on [February 1, 2009 at 3:27 pm](#) [John Hobbins](#)

Wayne,

Thanks for summarizing a number of points we agree on, and which I myself have often emphasized on these threads.

I am an egal looking for common ground and the possibility of dialogue with complementarian brothers and sisters. My focus puts me at odds with the focus of a number of other egals who comment on these threads.



19. on [February 1, 2009 at 5:15 pm](#) [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

I will back off from replying to your accusations. You already know that I consider them baseless.


Traditional exegetes and many contemporary exegetes of all persuasions regard “submit” as used in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 and parallel passages as signifying in context a qualified endorsement of existing relations of super-ordination and subordination. The consensus is wide and deep and includes complementarians on one side, arch-feminists on the other, and the great majority of moderate exegetes in the middle. Differences of opinion about the meaning of “submit” in Eph 5:21 do not change that.

On other occasions, I have pointed out analyses of the relevant passages by prominent egal scholars such Andrew Lincoln, Carolyn Osiek, Bonnie Thurston, John Eliot, and Richard Hays. They all conclude that Paul and Peter seek not to overturn but to redeem patriarchal structures from within. You neither engage their conclusions nor address their arguments. Should you choose at some point to engage their arguments, it might be possible to identify common ground.

It is sometimes thought that in terms of exegesis, comps sit in one corner and egals in another. Not true. There is wide agreement among a large number of egals and comps about what the plain sense of the relevant texts is. The real differences, it seems to me, are on the level of application.

Insofar as an interpreter fails to respect the historical sense of a given text, for whatever ideological reason, the result is ultimately counter-productive. Other people will note the distortion, and draw the conclusion that the ideology being defended is also a distortion.



20. on [February 1, 2009 at 9:25 pm](#)  [Wayne Leman](#)

John wrote:

*It is sometimes thought that in terms of exegesis, comps sit in one corner and egals in another. Not true. There is wide agreement among a large number of egals and comps about what the plain sense of the relevant texts is. The real differences, it seems to me, are on the level of application.*

John, this may be true about some of the passages, but I don't think it is true about Eph. 5:21. I have been following these issues for many years and it was not until fairly recently that I had ever read someone suggest that *allelois* of 5:21 means anything other than how it has been glossed in the standard lexicons, i.e. "to one another". I had read no limitation upon that to a meaning of "some to some others", as claimed that 5:22-24 limits its meaning.

I suggest that traditional, historical exegesis of 5:21 takes the plain sense of *allelois* as meaning "to one another," and sees that as yet another instance of the dozen or so one-anothers of the Bible: forgive one another, love one another, etc. I suggest that that traditional plain text reading is the reason why so many English Bible versions have the division break \*after\* 5:21, since it makes less sense to limit the plain text interpretation of "one another" as some claim is done by 5:22-24. Of course, the problem with dividing up the passage between 5:21 and 5:22 is that that division does not follow Greek syntax. There is no syntactic break between 5:21 and 5:22. The Greek sentence just flows on.

One need not believe in mutual submission within marriage, if one believes that the overall witness of Scripture does not support it. But such a belief has syntactic evidence against it from the sentence structure of 5:21ff. Just as comps claim that egals have to give unique meanings to the plain text of Scriptures that they use to support their views, egals claim that comps do the same.

Personally, I'd rather live with the difficulties of Scripture rather than trying to explain them away under some theological or ideological umbrella. I'm willing to live with a command to submit to one another as well as a specific command to wives to submit to their husbands. I have given my suggestion as to how we might reconcile that tension, but it is only a suggestion. I'd still prefer to take what I consider the plain text view of each of the passages, regardless of what it might impact my personal views. I grew up being taught comp theology. But I have moved away from that teaching precisely because I have paid more attention to plain text interpretation, for instance, of *allelois* in Eph. 5:21.

I suggest that historical interpretations of Eph. 5 have included a majority of exegetes who have supported the idea that wives have a subordinate role to their husbands. But I also suggest that, historically, exegetes have not limited *allelois* of 5:21 to mean "some to some" and limited to the roles addressed in 5:22-24. Somehow traditional exegesis lived with that tension.

21. on [February 1, 2009 at 10:19 pm](#)  [Sue](#)

I have restricted myself to a discussion of Eph. 5:21 up until now since the matter of "some to others" had not been dealt with. If we now agree that no traditional exegetes proposed this, then we have achieved common ground for this one verse that grammatically and in the most basic sense it refers to mutual submission.

Do we have agreement on this?

Regarding verses 22 and following, my suggestion has been that traditional exegesis differentiated the meaning of submit in verse 21 and verse 22. You suggested that this could not be done.

We have reached a new impasse. Once again, I do not see any logical way to line up your approach with traditional

exegetis.

Perhaps you are now going to propose that “submit” in verse 21 and “submit” in verse 22 have been interpreted differently in traditional exegesis. Then we would have reached common ground.

Do you think that “submit” in verse 21 and the implied “submit” in verse 22 have been interpreted in the same manner in traditional exegesis or in a different manner?

22. on [February 1, 2009 at 11:40 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Wayne,

Your conclusion is:

“historically, exegetes have not limited allelois of 5:21 to mean “some to some” and limited to the roles addressed in 5:22-24. Somehow traditional exegesis lived with that tension.”

I agree with your conclusion. In previous comments I attempted to explain why traditional exegesis, based on Ephesians 5:21 and 5:22-6:9, supported the principle of mutual submission on the one hand and traditional hierarchical arrangements in marriage, family, and domestic slavery on the other.

In traditional exegesis, 5:21 was normally read as the conclusion of what precedes rather than the introduction to what follows. When that is done, a “some to some” interpretation - allelois is used in this sense, not just in the “all to all” sense - is illogical.

Even so, though someone like Chrysostom might advocate on this basis that masters treat their slaves as friends, with that he did not mean to suggest that masters free their slaves or give up their responsibilities as masters. Traditional exegetes reached the same conclusions with respect to marriage and parenting.

Quite recently, it has become clear that Eph 5:21 is better understood as the introduction to what follows. Structurally, that would mean it is analogous to 1 Peter 2:13: “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.”

In fact, once the reading of the early papyrus 46 is accepted in Ephesians 5:22 [in which the verb “submit” is understood in 5:22 and carried over from 5:21 rather than repeated], the fact that 5:21 serves as the introduction to 5:22-6:9 is no longer in doubt.

A contextual reading of allelois in a more modest sense, rather than universal submission of “all to all,” is then a viable interpretation - the natural reading, so far as I can see.

Otherwise, we would have expected Paul to say very clearly, if he meant to say it, that husbands should submit to wives just as wives should submit to husbands; that parents should submit to children just as children should submit to parents; that masters should submit to slaves just as slaves should submit to masters.

But he doesn’t specify as he would have needed to do, either in Ephesians or in the parallel Colossians, if that was his sense. 1 Peter doesn’t either, and confirms this analysis.

The conclusion is difficult to avoid that whatever sense “allelois” Paul intends it to have in 5:21, it did not involve overturning the existing hierarchical arrangements of the domestic household of his day.

If that is the case, the next question is application in our day and place.

We live a pluralistic world. Many people continue to choose, by mutual consent, to understand their marriage in such a way that the husband is head of the household. It is also the case that Christian young people raised by egal parents

but with insufficient structure often look to soft complementarian models for an alternative. Part of the appeal of soft complementarianism is that soft comps have produced so many excellent practical resources. But another part is simply that a clearer definition of areas of responsibility is something many young men and women long for.

Other people choose to think of their marriage as an arrangement in which neither husband nor wife has “final say” in major decisions as a matter of principle. Who will be the tie-breaker in cases of conflict is left up in the air on principle (I have often pointed out that in loving traditional and complementarian marriages, it is in fact “up in the air” as well).

My marriage is structured on the “neither-nor” model, which makes my marriage egal. However, I emphasize the need for structure (domain-based hierarchies) in marriage and the family. I’m convinced that marriages of whatever framework need a balance of mutuality and hierarchy.

If the plain sense reading of Ephesians 5:21-6:9 accords with what I have suggested above, how does an evangelical egal like me justify the choice to be egal?

Based on the conviction that as culture changes, to a large extent Christians may change with it. The dynamic is fully in evidence within the New Testament, with lots of fireworks, spats, splits, and so on in the midst of the change: just read the book of Acts! It is fully in evidence in the history of the church ever since.

Even as culture changes, we continue to believe that God speaks to us through his Word.

Even though, depending on our culture, we may or may not consider it appropriate to greet one another (allelouis again!) with a holy kiss, we all agree that we are called to greet each other warmly.

Even though, depending on our culture, we may or may not consider it appropriate to fast one day or two days a week (the norm among Jews and Christians in ancient times; the reason why Jesus taught “When [not if] you fast . . .”), we all agree on the importance of self-restraint and that it is a gift to be simple, a gift to be free.

Even though, depending on our culture, we may or may not consider it appropriate to think of marriage as an arrangement in which the husband is head of the household, we all agree on the importance of love and respect in both directions as the fundamental principles of any healthy marriage.

23. on [February 2, 2009 at 12:01 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

You say:

“my suggestion has been that traditional exegesis differentiated the meaning of submit in verse 21 and verse 22. You suggested that this could not be done.”

On the contrary, I noted that traditional exegesis and BAG(D), insofar as they do not base themselves on the reading of P46, make precisely that differentiation. Even so, the examples of traditional exegesis you have cited, Chrysostom and Calvin, precisely because they engage in holistic exegesis, an approach you have so far opted out of, nevertheless interpret “submit” in two distinct senses in 5:21 and 5:22-6:9 in such a way that “mutual submission” becomes the underlying melody of structures of super-ordination and sub-ordination within existing human institutions of their day (marriage, parenting, domestic servitude).

However, as an exegete, I regard the differentiation of meanings you suggest is characteristic of traditional exegesis, with “submit” meaning one thing in 5:21 and something rather different in 5:22ff., to be untenable, for reasons of text (P46), structure, and cultural-historical considerations.

I stand by my conclusions.

24. on [February 2, 2009 at 3:38 am](#)  [Sue](#)

John,

In the previous thread you wrote,

*Those key differences do not include the one you wish to identify by reading Ephesians 5:21, not in light of the ensuing context and others like it in the New Testament and beyond, but in light of a text in 1 Clement.*

and

*Something is awry here. The verb in question does not even occur in 5:22. It is gapped from 5:21. Surely it has to mean one and the same thing in 5:21 and (elliptically) in 5:22.*

You gave the impression that you believed that Eph. 5:21 could not be understood as it is in Clement, as mutuality, AND you said that it has to mean one and the same thing in 21 as in 22.

(I realize that this relates to P46, but the fact is that P46 was discovered in the 1930's. I don't know about you but I was roundly questioned on P46 in my NT oral exam in Bible school in Switzerland 30 years ago. I think the influence from this manuscript is quite clear in the NRSV and possibly in the RSV. It is not news.)

Therefore I wrote,

“my suggestion has been that traditional exegesis differentiated the meaning of submit in verse 21 and verse 22. You suggested that this could not be done.”

This corresponds to what you wrote in the last thread. But now you write,

*On the contrary, I noted that traditional exegesis and BAG(D), insofar as they do not base themselves on the reading of P46, make precisely that differentiation.*

The fact is this. I pointed out to you that BAG had made this differentiation.

You wrote,

*Quite recently, it has become clear that Eph 5:21 is better understood as the introduction to what follows. Structurally, that would mean it is analogous to 1 Peter 2:13: “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.”*

P46 has been around for 80 years and in the NA Greek text for at least 30 years. Can you cite anyone other than Grudem who comes to this conclusion?

*In fact, once the reading of the early papyrus 46 is accepted in Ephesians 5:22 [in which the verb "submit" is understood in 5:22 and carried over from 5:21 rather than repeated], the fact that 5:21 serves as the introduction to 5:22-6:9 is no longer in doubt.*

Yes, I think it does serve as the introduction to what follows. That is why the NRSV paragraphs it the way they do.

*A contextual reading of allelois in a more modest sense, rather than universal submission of “all to all,” is then a viable interpretation - the natural reading, so far as I can see.*

No one other than Grudem and his cohorts have suggested this. Sumners specifically denies it.

Can you cite anyone else who has come to this conclusion? Can you find even one Greek speaker or commentator who thinks allelois does not speak to mutuality?

I have to disagree with your final conclusion. IMO No Greek speaker, no commentator ever denied that Eph. 5:21 spoke to mutuality, and so an extra “submit” was supplied in the manuscript.

I cannot agree that yours is a possible reading for a native speaker of Greek.

25. on [February 2, 2009 at 3:46 am](#)  [Sue](#)

John,

The RSV was in fact a response to the papyri which include P46. You cannot claim that P46 is waiting to influence the exegetical community. TDNT and BDAG editors are well aware of P46. However, they do not come to the same conclusions that you do. This is for the simple reason that it is impossible to interpret allelois as “being subject to the authorities.”

I agree that context is important, but you simply cannot overrule the basic grammar of a language.

26. on [February 2, 2009 at 5:25 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

The basic grammar of the Greek language allows for a variety of usages of the reciprocal pronoun, including a usage that may be termed “some to some.” A look at specific examples proves this in a matter of minutes. Which usage is in view in a particular passage will depend on its suitability to context.

I cannot agree with your approach to language. It is not flexible enough. The word “mutual” in English, or its equivalent in German, is also subject to a range of usages. You continue to assume that it must be taken in an egalitarian sense.

Finally, you continue to ignore the big picture. Sooner or later you are going to have to deal with the consensus among scholars about the historical sense of Ephesians 5:22-6:9 and the other household codes. As I pointed out from the start, that consensus, if right, makes your arguments ineffective once 5:21 is taken to introduce the following.

Have you looked at the German monographs yet I referred to earlier? I am not going to do your work for you. Here is TDNT’s double conclusion (I quote):

“the imperative in Eph. 5:21: “Submit to one another” in the fear of Christ, and then the broader command in 1 Pt. 2:13: “Submit to every ordinance of man,” [] stands expressly at the head of admonitions ordering the relations between men generally.”


According to the same article in TDNT, with the verb “submit” in the relevant passages:

“the primary point is recognition of the existing relation of super-ordination.”

The standard lexica agree. Whether or not, the reciprocal pronoun in Eph 5:21 is used expansively or modestly is beside the point. Nor will that debate ever be decided by citing one scholar against another. The question remains open. This is the very kind of question that scholars are wont to leave open on principle.

It's time you dealt with the larger unit. Since you now agree that context matters, you cannot restrict yourself any longer to 5:21 as you did on the earlier thread.

If "submit" in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 and the other relevant passage means what TDNT and the standard lexica says it means (see above), how are you going to interpret 5:21 in harmony with that?

27. on [February 2, 2009 at 5:42 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

P46, of course, has already influenced the exegetical community. It is a primary reason why the traditional interpretation of Eph 5:21, in which 5:21 was understood apart from 5:22-6:9, is unusual today.

28. on [February 2, 2009 at 7:41 am](#)  [Sue](#)

*The basic grammar of the Greek language allows for a variety of usages of the reciprocal pronoun, including a usage that may be termed "some to some." A look at specific examples proves this in a matter of minutes. Which usage is in view in a particular passage will depend on its suitability to context.*

"Anyone to anyone" is also possible but "some to others" is a direct contradiction to this passage,

1My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? James 2

*I cannot agree with your approach to language. It is not flexible enough. The word "mutual" in English, or its equivalent in German, is also subject to a range of usages. You continue to assume that it must be taken in an egalitarian sense.*

I only say that the relations are mutual and not "some to other." I have not said that they are strictly egalitarian, you have assumed that. I mentioned Clement, Chrysostom and Calvin, none of them are gender egalitarians. You claim they are incorrect. that is your choice.

*Sooner or later you are going to have to deal with the consensus among scholars about the historical sense of Ephesians 5:22-6:9 and the other household codes.*

There are two basic choices, either lump the subordination of women with slavery as unacceptable or lump women with children, which I regard as unacceptable.

*As I pointed out from the start, that consensus, if right, makes your arguments ineffective once 5:21 is taken to introduce the following.*

Why has no other exegete dealt with this? - except Grudem, of course - and now you.

*"the imperative in Eph. 5:21: "Submit to one another" in the fear of Christ, and then the broader command in 1 Pt. 2:13: "Submit to every ordinance of man," [] stands expressly at the head of admonitions ordering the relations between men generally."*

Oh, and Kittel.

*It's time you dealt with the larger unit. Since you now agree that context matters, you cannot restrict yourself any longer to 5:21 as you did on the earlier thread.*

*If "submit" in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 and the other relevant passage means what TDNT and the standard lexica says it means (see above), how are you going to interpret 5:21 in harmony with that?*

I choose to lump the subordination of women along with slavery as something that we ought not to practice.

*P46, of course, has already influenced the exegetical community. It is a primary reason why the traditional interpretation of Eph 5:21, in which 5:21 was understood apart from 5:22-6:9, is unusual today.*

*Can you cite anyone other than Kittel and Grudem to support the notion that Eph. 5:21 meant "some to others" although I note that even Kittel mentioned mutuality, but of course, that did not apply well to the *Enloesung*.*

29. on [February 2, 2009 at 7:42 am](#)  [Sue](#)

The last paragraph is mine. Perhaps we should revisit what Sarah Sumner has to say on this. She maintains that Eph. 5:21 must be taken as mutuality. You have recommended her work. At what point do you disagree with her?

30. on [February 2, 2009 at 1:06 pm](#)  [DB](#)

I think the cultural differences are significant and the expectations on a marriage have also changed.

Note: None of this negates the need for the Christian to use the Bible as authority.

Also, the injunction for husbands to love their wives was much more jaw-dropping at the time Paul wrote the Epistles. Seriously, marriages were political or something of convenience, The expectation of love and emotional intimacy simply did not exist the way it did today. Women were chattel in those times and you can bet she would submit to her husband (she would be forced to anyway,) but with the hope that she would be loved and respected and given deference as the weaker vessel, that was revolutionary in Greek or Roman civilization.

I think a lot of that continued into Calvin's time. I cringe at what some of the Church Fathers wrote, but I try to cut them a little bit of slack since we are all bound to our culture to one extent or another.

31. on [February 2, 2009 at 5:36 pm](#)  [Sue](#)


*I try to cut them a little bit of slack*

I too cut them a little slack.


32. on [February 2, 2009 at 6:01 pm](#)  [Don Johnson](#)

If John wants to read Eph 5 as endorsing a male hierarchy, he is free to do so and also try to convince others by quoting others who believe it endorses a male hierarchy.

I do not see it as endorsing a male hierarchy, I see it as discussing the cultural assumptions and NOT endorsing them.

33. on [February 2, 2009 at 9:39 pm](#)  [Debbie Kaufman](#)

DB: There were men and women who married for love. The story of Isaac and Rebekah, The Song of Solomon. So I can't believe that loving their wives was something new to them. I believe culture dictated to them.

34. on [February 2, 2009 at 9:40 pm](#)  [Debbie Kaufman](#)

Well, their selfishness dictated to them.

35. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:43 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

You say,

““Anyone to anyone” is also possible but “some to others” is a direct contradiction to this passage.”

On the contrary, “some to others” is suitable in light of what follows. You admit as much when you add, with respect to what follows:

“There are two basic choices, either lump the subordination of women with slavery as unacceptable or lump women with children, which I regard as unacceptable.”

This amounts to saying that you reject the teaching of Ephesians 5:22-6:9. Since you do not qualify your statement, I can only assume you believe that Paul demeans women in this passage, either by lumping them with slaves, or lumping them with children.

Is that what you mean?

I see things very differently. Paul does not demean women or slaves in this passage. He works within shared cultural givens of his day, and supports them and transforms them at the same time.

In the process, Paul defends the dignity of women and the goodness of marriage.

Based on your comments on this thread, I imagine you would never say that of someone who is not an egal after your own heart. At least you would never say that of Paul or Calvin.

But I differ with you there.

I am pleased to see that you find Sarah Sumner's point of view of value on one exegetical detail. Surely you realize, nonetheless, that your global approach to the passage under discussion has nothing in common with hers. You continue to avoid all discussion of her fundamental conclusions on this passage.


Your last comment leads me to the conclusion that Ephesians 5:21 as you understand it is acceptable in your eyes, but 5:22-6:9 must be rejected by right-thinking people. If I have misunderstood, please correct me.



Don,

You mischaracterize my position. As do many other exegetes, egal and non-egal, I have pointed out that Paul's approach to the setup of the Greco-Roman household was one of \*qualified\* acceptance.

You have argued that Paul's acceptance is a matter of appearances, whereas under the surface he rejected the setup. I find this line of argument unconvincing. I cannot find this line of argument in any of the many commentaries I have on this passage.

36. on [February 3, 2009 at 8:02 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

A word about Kittel. TDNT is a multi-author work. Kittel did not write the relevant entries to this discussion.

Gerhard Delling is the author of the entry on upotasso. Heinrich Schlier, the entry on kephale. Their conclusions are consistent with one another, and represent a consensus view, which is why they list monographs in their bibliographies without taking issue with them.

At some point, if you wish to take issue, not with Kittel, but with Delling and Schlier, you will need to take a look at what else they have written on the subject. Schlier's commentary on Ephesians is famous. I read it in Italian translation while in seminary.

I do not always agree with what I find in TDNT. But the conclusions it reports cannot be dismissed without engaging the arguments on which they are based.

37. on [February 3, 2009 at 5:13 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)


*On the contrary, "some to others" is suitable in light of what follows.*

John, I would say it is suitable *within a context of applying to all*. In other words, in the Ephesians passage, it does not merely apply to wives, children, and slaves, as Grudem contends, but also to husbands, fathers, and masters.

38. on [February 3, 2009 at 5:37 pm](#)  [TL](#)

"Paul does not demean women or slaves in this passage. He works within shared cultural givens of his day, and supports them and transforms them at the same time."

With a qualification on 'supports', I would agree (as I believe would Sue and Don). The qualification is that if one is seeking to transform something then he does not support it as is. Paul was not supporting the household codes, he was transforming them. In order to transform something you must stand in it's form and work from the inside out, until you have changed it's form in such a slow process that you keep the people in it from running away.

39. on [February 3, 2009 at 5:39 pm](#)  [Don Johnson](#)

John,

When I respond to you, I am really informing all the other readers that they can choose to reject what you teach if they wish.

I understand that you will not accept what I teach, you want to teach hierarchy in Eph 5 and I do not. That is the difference. I cannot stop you from seeing hierarchy there, but you cannot stop me from not seeing it there. And I invite others to NOT see hierarchy there as being endorsed.

40. on [February 3, 2009 at 6:32 pm](#)  [Sue](#)

*I do not always agree with what I find in TDNT. But the conclusions it reports cannot be dismissed without engaging the arguments on which they are based.*

I have engaged them. I have reviewed every occurrence in the LXX, and all the occurrences in Philo, and all others in Grudem's study. I do not see any other person called the kephale of his people, as leader, except Jephthah. I think the commentaries are lax in not admitting this.

41. on [February 3, 2009 at 6:37 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Bonnie,

We differ on a basic level about the particular emphases of this passage.

Like many other exegetes of all persuasions, I see Paul's advice to wives, children, and slaves to be the examples he gives of submission in practice, whereas his follow-up advice to husbands, parents, and slaveowners are presented as the only acceptable Christian responses thereto.

Paul's advice to husbands is very stringent: to love one's wife as Christ loves the church, to cherish her as one cherishes and cares for one's own body. Abuse is thereby ruled out of court from the get go.

Whereas I think it is clear that obedience is a form of submission (Peter uses the obedience of Sarai to her husband as an example of what submission means in practice) - with neither submission nor obedience to another human being absolute in a Christian framework (it is subject to overrides on a variety of grounds) - I don't see how love and care of a husband for his wife are forms of submission; how not provoking to anger is a form of submission of parents to children (it is a form of love); or how not threatening employees is a form of submission of employers to employees (it is common decency).

When I preach on a passage like this one, I illustrate it with examples of right living from scripture. I know how many Protestants like to make a distinction between examples of right living in Scripture and express commands. The tendency has been to allow express commands to drown out the witness of examples of right living.

I consider this tendency to be utterly misguided.

The Catholic emphasis on examples is healthier and easier for most people to grasp than abstract language, which is too easily twisted in sinful directions.

That's why, in the "love-obey" framework, the asymmetry of the vows did not and does not normally lead to obedience on one side only. That's because the models or examples are Joseph and Mary, both of whom are thought of as having "submissive and obedient hearts," first to God, then to each other, and finally, to their fellow man. The

examples of those hearts are right there in the gospel. Submission and obedience to God alone is, on this understanding, unqualified. Submission and obedience to others beyond God is goal-oriented toward submission and obedience to God.

If you ask me, that changes everything.

To make a long story short, I find it unhealthy to take any one passage of scripture and make it be the be-all and end-all on a given topic. When I teach on Ephesians 5, I do my best to stick to the emphases of the passage, and not replace them with my own. At the same time, I round out the emphases of Ephesians 5 with emphases derived from other biblical passages.

In that way, I integrate and make room for an emphasis on mutual submission and mutual obedience when teaching on this subject. I even point out how mutual obedience can and did lead to sin and the abuse of another (Hagar) in the case of Abram and Sarai. I do not want to portray mutual submission as by definition good. It is subject to abuse. It is good only if it is qualified, as Paul indeed qualifies it, “out of reverence for Christ.” Without that qualification, mutual submission also becomes an excuse for sin.

I know full well that “submission” is an unusable term for some, “obedience” for others, “hierarchy” and “authority” terms to be avoided. My approach is different. I use them all because I think they are all, properly understood, aspects of healthy multi-faceted relationships among people.

42. on [February 3, 2009 at 6:55 pm](#)  [Don Johnson](#)

Obedience is not a form of submission in the sense that submission implies obedience, but obedience is a possible example of the working out of submission in SOME specific cases. Submission and obedience are distinct but related things.

43. on [February 3, 2009 at 6:55 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Don,

I realize that your goal is to remove “authority” from the equation completely. “Hierarchy” is another word you have no use for, except in a negative sense.

For this reason, you have called NRSV and NLT’s translation of 1 Peter 3:1 (“you wives must accept the authority of your husbands”) examples of false teaching. I disagree and argue rather that what we need to do is recover a healthy understanding of authority.


That you benefit from hierarchical arrangements every day, in which spheres of responsibility are not shared but parceled out such that you follow the lead of someone else within that arrangement, seems to strike you as ultimately in contradiction to the gospel.

Or maybe not. I have yet to see you speak in favor of domain-based authority, though I also do not remember you challenging my claim that such authority is of the essence of human society.

44. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:01 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

“Like many other exegetes of all persuasions, I see Paul’s advice to wives, children, and slaves to be the examples he gives of submission in practice, whereas his follow-up advice to husbands, parents, and slaveowners are presented as the only acceptable Christian responses thereto.”


Where do you see the husbands, parents and slaveowners as being admonished in how they respond to the submission of others. The way I view it is that they are the primary persons being admonished and the wives, children, and slaves are being admonished regarding their responses. This is the way that Paul uses the household codes as a loose form to be transformed and to address those who have abused it for their own advantage.

45. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:03 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Don,

Can you give an example of a case in which someone submits to someone’s direction but disobeys the contents of that direction at the same time?

In the moment in which someone defies another’s direction in the sense of setting aside that direction, both non-submission and disobedience occur. You have cited examples from the book of Daniel before, but the examples you give are, in ordinary English usage, examples of both non-submission and disobedience.

46. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:14 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

“Don,

*I realize that your goal is to remove “authority” from the equation completely. “*

Authority has not been proved to have been part of the equation. It must be assumed or inferred from the use of ‘head of’.

*“That you benefit from hierarchical arrangements every day, in which spheres of responsibility are not shared but parceled out such that you follow the lead of someone else within that arrangement, seems to strike you as ultimately in contradiction to the gospel.”*

In the world, we absolutely must have various sorts of hierarchies. And absolutely, we benefit from them. In marriage, especially Christian marriages of the redeemed, the goal is to be a one flesh union of two becoming as one. In history, some or a minority of women have benefitted from authoritative marriages based on hierarchies. In history throughout the world, most women have not benefitted or not been able to attain a true oneness in marriage through a male authority based relationship. Shared authority and shared decision making has a much better chance of encouraging and supporting a true oneness in marriage.

47. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:14 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Hi Believer3,

Follow the structure in the household codes. Perhaps the structure is clearer in a short example like Colossians 3:18-4:1.

First wives are instructed to submit to their husbands, as is “fitting” or “seemly” for those who belong to the Lord. In that context and with that instruction as a premise, the next instruction follows: “Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.”

Paul is perfectly aware that the submission of wives to their husbands might be used as an excuse by the husbands to take advantage of their advantage.

So he adds, “love your wives and never treat them harshly.”

If the order of Col 3:18-19 were reversed, its logic would be torn apart. 3:19 corresponds to 3:18, in non-reversible order.



48. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:18 pm](#) *Don Johnson*

I am not anti-authority, I am against specious claims of authority. I am not anti-hierarchy, I am against specious claims of hierarchy. Those that would be free are always consider suspect that those that would wish them to be less free. When Christ has set one free, one is free indeed.

I accept that there is a authority hierarchy between parents and children and between employers and employees and between government and citizens/subjects. There is also a limited authority hierarchy between church leaders and church members.

What I do not accept is that there is a requirement for an authority hierarchy in marriage. Someone may choose that, but it is not a requirement to do so.



49. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:29 pm](#) *John Hobbins*

Believer3,

As many exegetes of all ideological persuasions have argued, “authority” and a hierarchical relationship of husband and wife is implied by Paul in Ephesians 5:22-24 and other passages.

As egal scholar Judith Gundry-Volf puts it with reference to 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul gives “instructions which presume a hierarchical relationship of man and woman.”

Gundry-Volf also emphasizes that Paul “undergird[s] their new social equality in Christ without denying their difference.”

I can give many other examples of egal scholars who argue along these lines if you wish. You don’t have to be a comp to understand the relevant texts in this way. Not by any means. But I imagine you agree.



50. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:33 pm](#) *Don Johnson*

Paul is speaking in a culture that presumes hierarchy and so he speaks into the members of culturally-assumed hierarchy. This is a far cry from endorsing that hierarchy in the case of a marriage, as obey is NEVER commanded of a wife.



51. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:37 pm](#) *Don Johnson*

When Daniel went into the Lion's Den or the 3 friends went into the fire, they were submitting to the authority of the King. They did not resist the consequences, but trusted in God.

This is the principle that Gandhi and MLK used, they disobeyed, but submitted to the consequences, revealing the hypocrisy of the leaders. Submissive disobedience is actually quite powerful in the right context.

I expect most everyone will be able to see what I am discussing.



52. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:41 pm](#) *John Hobbins*

Don,

You say:

“What I do not accept is that there is a requirement for an authority hierarchy in marriage. Someone may choose that, but it is not a requirement to do so.”

I agree one hundred per cent. It's a choice, not a requirement. We can and should be able to recognize pros and cons to the choices we make in this area as in any other area.

Since the idea of marriage without a “authority hierarchy” as you call it was not a live choice in Paul's day, he works with the option he had, not the one he wished he had.

Actually, I'm not convinced Paul wished for another option. Instead, he was convinced that the form of this world is passing away, that the time is short, that we have more important things to do than be married, for example, for the sake of mutual satisfaction. But he also allowed that mutual satisfaction can and should occur within marriage.

It's hard to keep up with Paul. He is a complex thinker.



53. on [February 3, 2009 at 7:49 pm](#) *Don Johnson*

But an equal marriage WAS a live choice in Paul's day. That is because he had gone thru an equality revelation like Peter had and saw clearly. Paul goes out of his way in 1 Cor 7 to make all kinds of equality pairings.




54. on [February 3, 2009 at 9:04 pm](#) *Bonnie*

Hi John,

you asked Don, *Can you give an example of a case in which someone submits to someone's direction but disobeys the contents of that direction at the same time?*

Why must the question be framed in terms of submitting to *direction*?

55. on [February 3, 2009 at 9:34 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Hi Bonnie,

I've framed the question in two or three different ways already on these threads. The substance doesn't change so far as I can see. But if you can come up with a convincing example with a wording of your choice, I'd like to hear it.


Perhaps you wish to say, as Don just did, that one can disobey but submit to the consequences.

Is that what we want to teach?

Not as an absolute rule. In cases of chronic abuse, I have helped people "disobey," "not submit," and "not submit to the consequences," all at the same time.

That has sometimes meant getting someone safe passage to a shelter. If I have to, I will lie through my teeth for the sake of life and limb in that situation.

If I am wrong to teach and act in this way, you are welcome to explain why.

56. on [February 3, 2009 at 10:36 pm](#)  [Don Johnson](#)

My point is simply that obedience/disobedience and submission/nonsubmission are not the same and do not need to be thought of as the same, altho they SOMETIMES overlap.

Someone might obey but not be submissive about obeying.

Someone might obey and be submissive.

Someone might disobey and be submissive.

Someone might disobey and be unsubmitive.

All are possible as each has a different meaning.

Paul wrote that in the context of 1st century a slave was to obey his master and a kid their parents as a way of practicing submission to them.


57. on [February 3, 2009 at 11:49 pm](#)  [Tamar](#)

*That has sometimes meant getting someone safe passage to a shelter. If I have to, I will lie through my teeth for the sake of life and limb in that situation.*

What you need to do is empower women to look after themselves instead of thinking that a woman needs a man to look after her. A woman needs the police and she needs her own sense of self. We are not children or pets or anything else.

58. on [February 3, 2009 at 11:52 pm](#)  [Tamar](#)

I think Susan Hunt has spoken well on this. This is the role of other women. Women need other women to take authority in these situations, to act on their behalf. Even police always send a male-female team. A man can only help if he treats a woman as another human being. If he lacks that category it only reinforces her plight.

59. on [February 4, 2009 at 12:06 am](#)  Sue

*It's a choice, not a requirement*

If the subordination of women is taught in church it is no longer a choice. Once moral value is placed on it, it ceases to be a choice. I cannot believe that anyone who thinks of women as humans would say that this is a choice.

60. on [February 4, 2009 at 12:17 am](#)  Don Johnson

Kephale as ruler is a possible choice to make that is not totally bogus. Whether it is the right choice to make is another question.

61. on [February 4, 2009 at 12:27 am](#)  believer3

“Perhaps you wish to say, as Don just did, that one can disobey but submit to the consequences.

Is that what we want to teach?”

Isn't that what Paul did? He disobeyed the government and preached Christ. And then he humbly submitted to the consequences of his actions.

62. on [February 4, 2009 at 12:37 am](#)  Bonnie

Whoa, John. What I'm asking is, why frame it in so specific and narrow a way when the passage itself does not do so. It instructs wives to submit to their husbands, not to their husband's direction.

63. on [February 4, 2009 at 1:17 am](#)  Sue

*Kephale as ruler is a possible choice to make that is not totally bogus.*

As per Jephthah? That just doesn't make sense.

64. on [February 4, 2009 at 2:16 am](#)  TL

Sue,

Knowing Don, my guess is that he means that it is possible to use a means of logic by which one could arrive at the



concept of kephale as ruler in some instances. But Don would also qualify that by saying that doing so, does not guarantee it is the correct or best choice.

Don, can correct me if I'm wrong 😊

65. on [February 4, 2009 at 2:34 am](#)  Sue

Thanks. If one differentiates between metaphoric meaning and lexical meaning then I think one can say that the lexical evidence for kephale meaning “ruler” is slight and not representative of Greek literature as a whole. It is poorly supported. The church fathers never felt that the meaning “ruler” could be assumed and to a person denied that the Son was less in authority than the father.


Metaphorically, everything is up for grabs. Fire can mean life or death, warmth or drought, and water the same, it also can mean life or death. So, the metaphorical meaning could be debated, but should never be used to place a woman in bondage. Even if it appears that she chose it, once she is married the game is up, unless she divorces. There is no opt out clause for those suborned to obedience.

66. on [February 4, 2009 at 3:09 am](#)  believer3

I agree on all counts Sue.

The metaphorical grabs is a curious one for Eph. 5. The head-body metaphor is not used in the OT to my recollection, only the “head and tail” which does show subordination. To me it is quite obvious that head/body is a metaphor showing interdependence and oneness. But the most prolific comp authors do not address it. They still insist on ignoring the ‘body of’ part of the metaphor and treating the ‘head of’ as if that were the totality of the metaphor. At least I haven’t read anything showing they recognize it.

Marilyn, John, or David. May I ask if you know of a comp author that approaches the Eph. 5 passages as a ‘head of and body of’ linking. I’d would be interested in what they might say about it.

67. on [February 4, 2009 at 3:12 am](#)  Don Johnson

Sue,

Yes, you have shown that the evidence is slight for kephale as ruler, I agree and thank you for this work.

And TL got my drift.

68. on [February 4, 2009 at 4:12 am](#)  Sue

*only the “head and tail” which does show subordination.*

It is an idiom.

69. on [February 4, 2009 at 5:08 am](#)  believer3

Sue,  
It's an idiom for leader-follower, correct?

70. on [February 4, 2009 at 5:31 am](#)  Sue

I agree that metaphorically it is possible it could be ruler. But that is why it was so debated. What did it mean? In what sense was God the head of Christ. This was of first importance for the early fathers.

71. on [February 4, 2009 at 5:33 am](#)  Sue

What I am trying to say is that this was a debatable option, but I don't see the early church fathers going for it. It does not have to mean ruler, nor is it even likely that Paul is trying to say that God is the ruler of Christ, man of woman and Christ of man. Is God not the ruler of man and woman alike? There must be some other meaning.

72. on [February 4, 2009 at 2:43 pm](#)  Marilyn

believer3,

The most extensive treatment of the head/body couplet I've seen is found in non-egal, non-comp Sarah Sumner's *Men and Women in the Church*. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, everybody - comp or egal - should read that book. Sumner argues that head is a metaphor and that metaphors should be read expansively.

I don't know of a comp author who has written primarily on the head/body couplet in Ephesians 5. Regardless of whether you agree with Sumner that metaphors should be read expansively, the other two couplets in Ephesians 5 have to be very relevant to understanding the head/body metaphor because they are the context that Paul provides. I.e., Ephesians 5 tells us that the head is to love the body and sacrifice for the body, whereas the body is to respect the head and submit to the head.

And, comp authors have written extensively on the Love/Respect couplet (i.e., Emerson Eggerichs' *Love and Respect*) and the sacrifice/submit couplet (i.e., Bryan Chapell's *Each for the Other*). So, we have quite a bit of comp writing on what it means for the head to love the body and what it means for the head to sacrifice for the body. Since these - along with the body's respect for the head and the body's submission to the head - are Paul's emphases, they seem to me to be the place to begin for a deep, expansive understanding of the metaphor.

Anybody else have resources to offer?

73. on [February 4, 2009 at 3:26 pm](#)  Marilyn

John,

I'm very appreciative of your taking the time to summarize how you preach Ephesians 5.

You've repeatedly encouraged us to think of gender passages in light of the whole counsel of Scripture. But, it wasn't until your 2/3 6:37 comment to Bonnie, that I was able to internalize the importance of this. A heavy weight was lifted.....my obsession over I Corinthians 11:3 (which I earlier described as an emotional "flashpoint" verse for me) is due to the fact that I was taught the verse as an isolated passage and internalized it as such. Your post reminded me that I need to situate it in the whole of Scripture. That's very freeing. Thank you for taking the time to draft that long comment! (Still not sure exactly what I Corinthians 11:3 means, but am much less stressed about it.)

74. on [February 4, 2009 at 3:27 pm](#)  [Marilyn](#)

Bonnie,

When you have time, would you consider writing more about how your ontological view of head plays out in real life? Whenever I hear the word "ontological," my eyes glaze over.

An earlier discussion on our list didn't help, either. Do you remember a fellow who briefly joined our conversation a while ago, who made ontological arguments? I couldn't follow what he was saying and several times asked him to rephrase. He responded that he couldn't rephrase and that to understand his position required many years of study. I responded that even an Oxford Don like C.S. Lewis strove for the "simplicity that lies beyond complexity". He replied that Lewis got many things right, but his position on "simplicity" wasn't one of them. That conversation only served to increase the "I don't get this" brain freeze that occurs whenever I hear the word "ontological"!

I know you don't believe in hierarchy in marriage. But, I also don't think you reduce headship to figurehead stuff, either (e.g., husband sits at the "head" of the table, wife takes husband's last name when the couple marries, etc.). I don't have a good idea of what your middle ground looks like and need some real-life examples to aid my understanding

75. on [February 4, 2009 at 5:04 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

I remain unconvinced by your line of argument about kephale. So far you have avoided discussion of the other relevant metaphorical usages of kephale in the Septuagint (see TDNT). With respect to passages like 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:22-23, the fact that so many egal scholars accept that hierarchy is in view, and that the metaphorical use of kephale plays a part in Paul's argument in qualified support of a social hierarchy, is a fact you have yet to engage with.


Nor have you dealt with the arguments of egal scholars like Thurston, Gundry-Volf and Hays in this sense. The egal bibliography that goes in the opposite direction that you take is very long. Osiek is an easy target. She has not written extensively on kephale, or devoted a paper or a lengthy discussion to it. At some point you will have to deal with egal scholarship that has.

The exegetical debate on upotasso, kephale, allelois, and authentein is not a comp vs. egal debate. Nor should it be a debate about lexical and metaphorical meanings. It is a debate about meaning at the discourse level, not at the word level. The best traditional and modern exegesis focuses on the word level only insofar as it illumines the meaning of larger units. It is not possible to figure out the meaning of a passage by examining attested lexical and metaphorical meanings of its individual words in the dictionaries and choosing among the meanings the one we find acceptable apart from context.

Sure, on the basis of a reader-response theory of interpretation, in which the choices of the reader are privileged rather

than the choices of the author, it is possible to argue in that way. But I am traditionalist on this score, and proud of it.

When I read Paul and Peter, it is their voices I strive to hear, not my “voice-over.” I strive to overhear one side of a conversation that took place in a time and place very different from my own. I then take what I hear and relate it to what else I have heard in reading scripture, and in terms of my understanding of the whole counsel of God attested therein.

76. on [February 4, 2009 at 5:05 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Don and Believer3,

This is how I see it. All this \*choosing\* because the evidence points in one direction, but does not \*require\* interpretation in that sense, is the opposite of objective exegesis. It is clear that the passages would be guilty in your eyes if they meant what many other egals and scholars of other persuasions say they mean. To avoid that conclusion, like excellent defense lawyers, you try to get the passages off the hook on insufficient evidence.


This is a courtroom strategem. It has no place in the field of exegesis. It is akin to the “devil and you” line of argument which I also hear repeated on these threads. This a famously weak approach to winning an argument, but has rhetorical force for the already convinced. It goes like this in this context: since Grudem (the devil) and you agree on this, what you are arguing for is prejudicially wrong. Once again, this kind of argument has no place in the field of exegesis.

77. on [February 4, 2009 at 5:06 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Believer3,

You ask me for information about comp teaching, but I am not the best person to ask about that. I can provide references and quotes from egal scholars on the topic at hand, in particular, Andrew Lincoln (I’ve quoted his exegesis at length before; I can again). Note also:

Gundry-Volf, J. M., “Gender and Creation in 1 Cor 11:2–16: A Study in Paul’s Theological Method,” in J. Adna, S. J. Hafemann, and O. Hofius (eds.), *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche. Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 151–71

78. on [February 4, 2009 at 5:15 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

I’ve quoted once already from Thiselton. I hesitate a little to quote more because his language is difficult. But here goes. Note that both scholars he interacts it in this passage are \*egal\* scholars. Indeed, Dale Martin is a flaming egal.

“[Dale] Martin argues that “when it comes to the male-female hierarchy, Paul abruptly renounces any status-questioning stance.... This ... has to do with physiology. The ‘stuff’ of female nature is differently constituted from that of male nature.”

This is less than convincing, however, in the light of [Judith] Gundry-Volf’s more careful arguments about the dialectic between creation, culture, or society and eschatology. Paul insists on gender distinctiveness. That goes for the men (vv. 4, 7 with Murphy-O’Connor) no less than for the women (vv. 5, 6, 7b).

However, if love takes priority over freedom, any competitiveness about “authority” becomes obsolete in the new

order, even if a reciprocity of relationship allows different inputs to the relation of mutuality; rather, the entailments of protection of, and respect for, “the other” hold greater prominence than issues of “authority” within the wholeness of Paul’s dialectic.

Here lexicography, theories of metaphor, exegesis, and the continuity of 8:1–14:14 cohere well together. Neither “headship,” nor “order,” nor “equality” alone conveys the complexity and wholeness of Paul’s theology. Again, multiple meaning holds the key.”

Thiselton, Anthony C.: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians : A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : W.B. Eerdmans, 2000, S. 821

The statement “a reciprocity of relationship allows different inputs to the relation of mutuality” is a philosopher’s way of saying that functional inequality and mutuality are compatible.

There is no doubt in my mind that functional inequality and mutuality were compatible for the New Testament authors. In fact, within traditional, com, and egal marriage frameworks, functional inequality and mutuality are compatible.

79. on [February 4, 2009 at 8:23 pm](#)  [David McKay](#)

Ah, Marilyn. “Ontological” is one of my pet hates. Occasionally I see it used in a sentence where it was actually needed. Usually the sentence makes perfect sense without it.

My other current pet hate is “missional”. Love the concept, but hate the word.

80. on [February 4, 2009 at 8:49 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

David, I hope you will allow that I have used the word “ontology” and its forms in these threads to make a distinction between that which *is*, in terms of absolute reality or that which is created by God, and that which might be imposed, or something acted. For example, I read “head” in Eph. 5, Eph. 1, Colossians 1, and I Cor. 11, as, even if metaphorically, something that God, Christ, and man *are*, not something that they should act as, or *should* be. You cannot *try* to be or act as something that you already *are*; if you are that thing already, then there’s no trying involved. The exhortation in Eph. 5 is for husbands to love as Christ loved, not to be heads. The words about a husband being head are directed to wives, not husbands.

Perhaps I have used the wrong term, or used the term “ontology” improperly; I am not a professional philosopher. But I don’t know how else to express the distinction I wish to make. 😊

81. on [February 4, 2009 at 8:53 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Marilyn, thanks for your question. I have already answered it in pieces, in various places on these threads, but don’t expect that you would’ve seen them; there’s a lot of writing here! When I get a chance I will try to compile those ideas and write them out succinctly 😊



82. on [February 4, 2009 at 9:04 pm](#) [David McKay](#)

Hi Bonnie. I'm not singling you out. And I'm not saying you are using the word improperly. But I find myself often hating the current buzz word.

In the 70s we had "ongoing" and "situation" as in "It's an ongoing situation situation."

In Australia, we have politicians seeing how many times they can say "working families" in one sentence. [Interestingly, my wife and I are not a working family, according to its usage, because we don't have children currently living with us.]

Hans Frei turned me off "ontological" for life. I had to read his little book three times to convince myself that I had read it.



83. on [February 4, 2009 at 11:09 pm](#) [bonnie3](#)

LOL thanks, David. I hear what you're saying. I'm not much into buzzwords either, except when I find one that suits a purpose for which I can find no other word 😊



84. on [February 4, 2009 at 11:29 pm](#) [Sue](#)

*But, I also don't think you reduce headship to figurehead stuff, either*

I have often asked how compism (headship) relates to being single and few have acknowledged this comment. Would it be considered irrelevant - or just that we have limited opportunities in ministry but otherwise function as men do. I don't see it this way, but what do others think?

I personally think that the single mother does all the things a father would do, and the mother would do, but she feels just as feminine as any other woman. I see it as doing everything a man might have to do, but being restricted in church. Are there any other differences?

Don't get me wrong, I am very respectful of my administrator and other men who I interact with in healthy ways, as I would be to women in these positions.



85. on [February 5, 2009 at 12:02 am](#) [believer3](#)

Sue,

*"It does not have to mean ruler, nor is it even likely that Paul is trying to say that God is the ruler of Christ, man of woman and Christ of man. Is God not the ruler of man and woman alike? There must be some other meaning."*

Yes, I've pondered that for a few years. LOL

I do not understand why people want to say that 1 Cor. 11:3 is speaking of an hierarchy at all, especially one of authority/leadership. The first alarm is that it is out of order. And Paul is too precise on his chiasm's elsewhere to list something out of order. His scholarship is too meticulous. And then parts are missing. Where is the Holy Spirit. It's not mentioned, yet God and Christ are listed. One would think that slaves and children would also be listed. It just

does not properly represent an hierarchy. In addition, we have the problem of the appearance of God being an authority/leader/ruler over Christ (if this were an actually valid hierarchy), which goes against all traditional understandings of the Trinity. Add to that leaving the HS out, it would hint of the HS either also being over Christ (it was the HS that rested on Christ in the baptism) or else the HS not being a viable part of the Trinity. So, is that confusing enough? 😊

86. on [February 5, 2009 at 12:16 am](#)  [believer3](#)

Marilyn,

”The most extensive treatment of the head/body couplet I’ve seen is found in non-egal, non-comp Sarah Sumner’s *Men and Women in the Church*. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, everybody - comp or egal - should read that book. Sumner argues that head is a metaphor and that metaphors should be read expansively.”

If by reading expansively, she means ‘holding loosely’, it’s a good point. However, if the entire section is read, one can easily see that Paul continues to tie the pieces together, IOW he continues to define the metaphor in the rest of the section (5:21-33).

As for other authors, I’ve been speaking about and teaching the head of/body of metaphor for so long I don’t recall offhand who specifically has written about it.

My problems with the love/respect and sacrifice/submit is that usually comps teach them as “men only sacrifice and love” and “women only respect and submit”. Whereas my understanding of the whole of chapter 5 is that everyone is to do those things and his pointing them out in the household code format is to point to where they lack in order to transform what is lacking.

87. on [February 5, 2009 at 2:27 am](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Hi Marilyn,

I’ve been trying to think of how to answer your question. I’ll start with an edited excerpt from a post at my blog which will hopefully help (it is primarily theological, but a good place to start):

Based upon Ephesians 1, 2, 4 (:15), and 5; Colossians 1; John 1; and I Corinthians 11, I’ve come to believe that “head” has to do with source in terms of God (the original Source, the I AM), Christ, and the order of creation. Submission to this head has to do with loyalty and dedication to that which was and is the source, in terms of origin and sustenance. This goes beyond mere deference in service, yet does not go so far as to accept analogies of rule and judgment between the members of the Godhead, the Godhead and the church, and husband and wife.

If a husband’s being head carries some authority over his wife, it is not an authority that he *owns* or *exercises*, but rather one of God’s that she serves and defers to in the form of submitting to her husband as her head (source of her “stuff”). Not head of the marriage, or the household, but of her. She submits to him because woman was made from man: the manner of the creation of woman is given as the explanation for man’s being head. Likewise, Christ is begotten of the Father, and the church (and man) were made through Christ, and Christ is the firstborn of the dead. One might say that the “begetter” naturally has rights to rule the begotten. Yes, except that man did not make woman from himself, God did. Christ did not create; God did, through Christ. Christ made the church as the firstborn of the dead (redeemer) but again, as an agent of God’s. Yet he enjoys great rulership, to which we all, women and men, are also *raised* (Eph. 2:6). Therefore, I can only think that the redemptive purpose of a husband as head of his wife is to raise

her up, rather than rule over her. This is how husband and wife become one, in marriage and in Christ, in the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



88. on [February 5, 2009 at 5:59 am](#) [molleth](#)

Bonnie,

That is so interesting. You have done a great job of making a lot of different passages (including comp fav's and egal fav's) synthesize into a beautiful comprehensive picture. Wow.



89. on [February 5, 2009 at 1:11 pm](#) [DB](#)

I don't get the whole woman came out of man thing to justify subordination.

I'm trying to think of which passage of scripture it is, but somewhere (and if some better Biblical scholar knows, do enlighten me,) that man came from woman and woman from man; that we are \*interdependent\* not that one is better than the other.

A quick sidenote: from a biological perspective; you get everything but half of your chromosomes from your \*mother\*. so eve came from Adam's flesh, but everyone else (those of us who have earthly dads and moms,) came from our mothers like the Bible says. (seriously, all of your cytoplasm, organelles, yadda-yadda come from mom. Your mitochondria has its own DNA and it's strictly from your mom. This is why geneticists can trace us all back to a common female ancestor that they have estimated at 40,000 years ago 😊 Sorry for the rabbit trail, but I'm a hopeless nerd.



90. on [February 5, 2009 at 2:42 pm](#) [EricW](#)

*She submits to him because woman was made from man: the manner of the creation of woman is given as the explanation for man's being head.*

But no wife living today has her husband as her "source" in the sense of having been made from him. And as I wrote in an earlier post, "priority/prominence" is apparently a better-argued meaning for kephalê than "source." Also, they become "one flesh" in the same passage that says that woman came out of man, so they are no longer two, but one; and in Genesis 1 "them," not just "him," is given dominion, with no indication that there is a difference between the male and the female.

DB: The passage you're wanting is 1 Corinthians 11:8-12. That passage is fraught with difficulties. For one, as I asked in another post, on what basis does Paul use relational/spiritual kephalai to point out or teach things about physical kephalai and hair? Is he just playing with words? What did his culture view a person's physical head and hair as being and doing? Then you have the "because of the angels" passage. Then you have him saying that "in the Lord" there is mutual dependence - i.e., one isn't "over" the other. I.e., if one is a "source," then so is the other, at least in the Lord - which has implications for church leadership. Then you have his "does not nature teach" comment, whose meaning depends on what one means by phusis. (Any guesses?) Then he seems to say that a woman's long hair has been given to her for a covering - which raises the question of why does she need to cover her head if she has long hair, since she's already praying with a "covered" head? And finally, he concludes the passage somewhat ambiguously - i.e., is he telling them they are to do this because all the churches do this, or is he simply saying that this is the common practice?



I think conclusions and doctrines drawn from 1 Corinthians 11 should be considered tentative at best, and they certainly shouldn't be based on just part or parts of the passage or things Paul says here without fully understanding all that he is saying and meaning in verses 3-16, since he considers them all to be part of the same point or argument he is making to encourage them to hold firmly to the traditions he delivered to them.

Or so I think.

91. on [February 5, 2009 at 4:42 pm](#)  [TL](#)

*"I don't get the whole woman came out of man thing to justify subordination."*

I don't either DB. My sense is that what comes before is to protect and sustain what comes after. Then what comes after cherishes what facilitated their life. IMO that is the proper order. It is the order of creation. If one reads Genesis chapt. one carefully, you can see it clearly. Light gives life to the water. Water and light gives life to the earth. Light, water, the earth and plants gives life to the land creatures, and so on. And man who gains sustenance, protection, and joy from all that came before him is to cherish, support and guard all creation.

Within humanity, the male came first with his strengths to sustain what came after, woman. Woman cherishes man, guards him and supports him. We have missed that element in the use of ezer. Ezer is a help that guards, a particular kind of protection and a particular kind of strength. And she does this as his equal, kenegdo. This has different ramifications because humanity, being made in God's image is superior to all that was created before. But man and woman are equally made in God's image.

I see this scenario in the metaphor of Ephe. 5. The husband has a certain pre-eminence as the one who nurtures (sustains life) and cares for his woman. This is 'head of'. The wife as the one being nurtured, 'body of', in turn supports, honors, cherishes and as his ezer, guards her man. This is in effect a certain arranging of her life to get under him and lift him up. If both do their parts as equals, then the result will be a unique oneness that will be mutually satisfying.

Metaphors though must be held loosely. We cannot use them to limit. If we try to limit the Ephe. metaphor we take the risk of breaking the oneness, demanding instead of encouraging.

92. on [February 5, 2009 at 4:44 pm](#)  Marilyn

Hi Bonnie,


Thanks so much for your thoughtful reply and your beautiful words. With the (arguably important) exception of your equating head with source, your views sound to me to be very similar to those expressed by Sarah Sumner.

You are careful to make distinctions between your views and those of soft comps, but I have to admit that I still don't have a very good understanding of what the distinctions you draw mean for daily living.

Examples of where I don't get what you mean for how daily life is lived would be your distinction between being head of the marriage versus head of the wife, as well as your distinction between "authority over" versus ownership/exercise of authority. What does it mean for a husband to have authority over his wife, but not to exercise authority over his wife? In particular, how is submission a meaningful concept if the husband to whom a wife is submitting, isn't exercising authority either explicitly or by implication (in the sense that spouses often know each other's preferences without those preferences being stated)?

I see you as being concerned about a lack of sufficient emphasis in soft comp teaching on God being the granter of all authority and the husband needing to always have that in the forefront of his mind as he exercises the authority God has given him. I like the way Gary Thomas addresses this issue. He states that he always tries to keep in mind that his wife is God's daughter and to ask himself how God wants him to treat His daughter.

But, perhaps your concern is deeper (and I'm still too dense to see it)?

93. on [February 5, 2009 at 4:49 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

You say:

"I have often asked how compism (headship) relates to being single and few have acknowledged this comment."

That's an excellent point. Paul and Catholic Christianity thereafter developed ways in which single women (it begins with widows) might relate to other single women for the common good (koinonia) of the Christian community and the world. "Orders" developed; and indeed, they were and are orders, with vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. All of this against the background of a traditional understanding of marriage in which law and self-understanding made for marriages that were often more one-sidedly hierarchical than is the case among comps today.

Protestant Christianity was less creative in this sense. However, women's circles and women's missionary societies often put very gifted single women both in the service of and with huge responsibilities over married men and women.

It is a paradox that these societies and circles are dying out in contemporary egal culture.

Egal churches in particular can't seem to keep them going. Comp churches may be doing somewhat better.

94. on [February 5, 2009 at 5:00 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

John,

Those are not the only ways that Christian single women were involved. Lydia, a single woman, had the first home church in her home. She was also a business woman, a seller of purple (dye or dyed cloths??).

There were also the female co-workers that followed Paul around and did some of his work. We see this in the many female co-workers that went with Phoebe to deliver the epistle to the church in Rome.

95. on [February 5, 2009 at 6:29 pm](#)  [bonnie3](#)

Thanks, molleth 😊

EricW,

I agree with you on I Cor. 11. I see far too many people concluding "definitives" based on some pretty indefinite material, imo.

You said,

me: *She submits to him because woman was made from man: the manner of the creation of woman is given as the explanation for man's being head.*

You: *But no wife living today has her husband as her "source" in the sense of having been made from him. And as I wrote in an earlier post, "priority/prominence" is apparently a better-argued meaning for kephalê than "source." Also, they become "one flesh" in the same passage that says that woman came out of man, so they are no longer two, but one; and in Genesis 1 "them," not just "him," is given dominion, with no indication that there is a difference between the male and the female.*

Yet there *is* difference between male and female; it is the two, similar yet different, become one that makes the marital unity. I agree that both man and woman are given dominion equally. Whenever Paul speaks of the difference between man and woman, he refers, not to sexual differences, but to who was made for whom, who was made from whom, who is head of whom, who was deceived (won't go there now 😊), image and glory, and that sort of thing – always referring to the creation account (Gen. 1 and 2).

In I Cor. 11:12, Paul shows the interdependence of being, in both creation and perpetuation of male and female, when he says, "For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God."

Paul bases pretty much everything he says about male-female relations upon this creation/origination: woman originates from man, yet man is also birthed from woman, and all originates from God.

(And I could riff on this and say that, if there is to be any hint of the fatherly in a husband's relation to his wife, then there is a corresponding hint of the motherly in a wife's relation to her husband. 😊)

96. on [February 5, 2009 at 6:35 pm](#)  [Sue](#)

*That's an excellent point. Paul and Catholic Christianity thereafter developed ways in which single women (it begins with widows) might relate to other single women for the common good (koinonia) of the Christian community and the world. "Orders" developed; and indeed, they were and are orders, with vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. All of this against the background of a traditional understanding of marriage in which law and self-understanding made for marriages that were often more one-sidedly hierarchical than is the case among comps today.*

First, I was thinking of the single mother, who is no more capable of taking a vow of poverty than any family man is.

But, I am also interested in the demise of the single orders, and how negative this was for single women. Eventually those women who were able went on missions. My province benefitted greatly from women lay ministers until the men shut them down.

*Protestant Christianity was less creative in this sense. However, women's circles and women's missionary societies often put very gifted single women both in the service of and with huge responsibilities over married men and women.*

*It is a paradox that these societies and circles are dying out in contemporary egal culture.*

Actually, it was in the last generation, in the early comp culture that separate women's mission organizations suffered the most by being absorbed by men's organizations and losing female leadership.


In egal culture, the women went from being leaders in a separate organization to sharing leadership with men. This has its pros and cons for sure.

But many mission societies that were run by women were combined with men's organizations in comp culture, and women were just absorbed into the lower levels.

I believe that in many traditional settings through segregated organizations women had opportunities, but in present comp culture there is no such thing in a general sense, only in very limited domains.

I am fairly familiar with the history of many mission organizations. Do you remember Helen Montgomery, BTW. You can google her along with baptist or bible translation, and see how she fared. She was on my blog. Check out my last post.

(Its too bad that of all the women I have written about, only de Beauvoir, written for a language discussion, ever attracted any attention. Silly thing that.)

97. on [February 5, 2009 at 7:29 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Believer3,

Thank you for pointing out other New Testament precedents. Because of statements in the Pastoral Epistles, it has been difficult to give those precedents a segue.

However, wherever the church has shown a willingness to accept gift-based authority and not depend on office-based authority alone, it has allowed women to be missionaries (apostles), preachers, healers, you name it.

To this day in the Catholic Church, a woman cannot be a presbyter (priest) or bishop. But a woman who has clearly been given extraordinary spiritual gifts of teaching can nevertheless teach priests, bishops, cardinals, the pope himself. Chiara Lubich was one such woman. She taught the men and women of her church and beyond very well.

98. on [February 5, 2009 at 8:10 pm](#)  [Tamar](#)

*To this day in the Catholic Church, a woman cannot be a presbyter (priest) or bishop. But a woman who has clearly been given extraordinary spiritual gifts of teaching can nevertheless teach priests, bishops, cardinals, the pope himself. Chiara Lubich was one such woman. She taught the men and women of her church and beyond very well.*

And this is one reason that I have not criticized these denominations specifically, although this claim - is still posted about me on the internet to this day. I would appreciate it very much if inaccurate information that has been posted about me, attributed to my real name, would be removed from the public domain. This is one reason why I use a moniker now.

99. on [February 5, 2009 at 10:30 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

You say,

“Actually, it was in the last generation, in the early comp culture that separate women’s mission organizations suffered the most by being absorbed by men’s organizations and losing female leadership.”

Not in the denomination I currently serve (United Methodist) nor in the denomination that ordained me (Waldensian). Both were in the forefront of early feminism and went straight from a traditional ethos to an egalitarian ethos. The influence and importance of the women’s organizations were strongest in the traditional phase, with some overlap into

the egalitarian phase.

The UMW (United Methodist Women) was once the largest women's organization in the world. No one ever shut them down, or could. I'm talking about very strong women (Hillary Rodham Clinton comes out of this matrix.)

The organization has withered on its own vine. Sociologists have an explanation. They say that organizations like these thrive in the "pushback" mode. UMW became establishment, part of the system. It slowly lost momentum as a result.

The best and most creative missionary work in the world today is no longer funded and initiated by women's organizations. It once was. In the denominations I am most familiar with through the ongoing work of Church Women United (the ecumenical umbrella organization in which the successor organizations of the women's missionary societies find a home), complementarianism had nothing to do with their decline.

Perhaps you can be more specific about the denominational contexts in which "comp culture" in which "men shut down" the societies. In the denominations I know best, the societies continue, a shadow of their former selves.

100. on [February 5, 2009 at 10:54 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Tamar,

I don't know how you can

- (1) argue in favor of "functional equality" (your words),
- (2) condemn those who don't,
- (3) equate those who do not follow you in your condemnation with complicity in the enslaving of women,

but also,

- (4) exclude from your criticism organizations that do not practice functional equality.

I am happy to serve in a church that has women and men among its bishops and presbyters. I am blessed by the ministry of many of them, women and men.

But I notice that something was lost as well as gained following the immense cultural changes in whose wake the ordination of women came to be accepted in my church culture.

No wonder the issues continue to be debated. No wonder feminism is on the wane even as its impact on the way we all live, for good and for bad, has become irreversible.

101. on [February 6, 2009 at 2:41 am](#)  [Sue](#)

Here is one story I am very familiar with. The mission still exists but after men joined I am not aware that there ever was another woman leader.

"History of Interserve USA

Interserve USA has a double heritage — that of a British mission founded in 1852 in London, and an American mission founded in 1860 in New York City. Both missions worked in Asia and their ministries ran parallel with similar goals until 1976 when they merged.

How Did It All Begin?

The life of a nineteenth century Indian woman, especially if she was from a high-caste Hindu or Muslim family, was hard. Young girls were married off in childhood and then became the property of their husbands. They were confined to the women's quarters of their husband's family, called zenanas. They received neither education nor adequate medical care, since all physicians were men and thus unable to enter the zenanas. The most egregious example of oppression of women was the custom of suttee, or widow burning. A Hindu woman was held somehow responsible for her husband's death and by immolating herself on his funeral pyre she could hope to cleanse herself of this sin.

In 1851 in Calcutta, India, a high caste Hindu woman named Mohesuri was publicly baptized. She and her cousins found a Bible, read it, and Mohesuri came to believe in Jesus Christ as her Savior.

Mrs. Mackenzie, wife of an English merchant working in India, heard about the conversion and wrote to a friend in England, Mary Jane Kinnaird, who was married to a member of Parliament. Sharing Mrs. Mackenzie's compassion for women in India, on March 1, 1852 Lady Kinnaird founded the London Board for the Calcutta Normal School and insisted that it be interdenominational. She wrote, "If we can give the women of India the power to read, and the Book to read, God will bless His Word."

#### Meanwhile Across the Pond

In New York City Sarah Doremus, the wife of a prominent businessman, heard a missionary from China speak about the need for women to reach women in the East. In 1861, over the resistance of many male mission leaders in America, Sarah Doremus founded the first foreign mission society in America established and run by women, the Woman's Union Missionary Society (WUMS). They had only women Board members and only women missionaries. The mission was interdenominational — unheard of then. In 1862 Miss Harriet Britain was sent to India.

#### Expansion

In 1880 the Zenana Mission in England added medical work to its ministry and became Zenana Bible & Medical Mission (ZBMM). In a day when women doctors were a rarity both the UK and US seemed to have no problems finding dedicated Christian women physicians. Many of these women went into medicine in order to be missionaries. In 1883 WUMS began medical work in China and cooperated with other churches and mission groups.

#### A New Century, New Challenges

In 1936 ZBMM in London was having severe financial difficulties and another world war seemed imminent. The Board voted on whether or not to be absorbed by their Anglican counterpart, Church of England Zenana Missionary Society. By one vote the decision was made to remain independent and interdenominational.

The 1950s brought many changes to the fellowship. In 1951 work in China ended for WUMS, but the door to Nepal opened. WUMS became a member of the United Mission of Nepal - ZBMM was already a member. In 1952, one hundred years after its founding, ZBMM admitted men. Under the leadership of Jack Dain and Alan Norrish, men joined as missionaries and team leaders. Auxiliary committees were formed in other countries and these committees soon became full sending Councils. Direction of the mission now came from all the Councils - each Council with one vote. Instead of a British mission, ZBMM became an international mission. The fellowship also began divesting themselves of institutions and property, turning them over to Christian nationals. In 1957 the organization became the Bible & Medical Missionary Fellowship (BMMF).

In 1964 the U.S. Council of BMMF was formed under the guidance of the already formed Canadian Council. Canada guided the U.S. Council administrative policies until 1974 when Dr. Jay W. MacMoran was appointed as Acting Director. Charter Board members included Dr. C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General.

#### A Time of Expansion

In 1970 WUMS changed its name to United Fellowship for Christian Service (UFCS) and men joined their Council. Serious discussions began concerning merger with BMMF. In 1974 Alan Norrish, a BMMF missionary, completed his assignment in Afghanistan and came to the U.S. to begin the merger process. In 1976 UFCS moved to Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, and both missions became known as BMMF International. In that year the fellowship became fully independent of the Canadian Council. In 1986 Dr. Ralph Eckardt became the first American native U.S. Director and,

soon after, the name was changed to International Service Fellowship, known as Interserve. In January 2004 Rev. Douglas Van Bronkhorst became our Executive Director.”

102. on [February 6, 2009 at 2:47 am](#)  Sue

*But I notice that something was lost as well as gained following the immense cultural changes in whose wake the ordination of women came to be accepted in my church culture.*

How can you attach causal links to this kind of thing?

*No wonder the issues continue to be debated. No wonder feminism is on the wane even as its impact on the way we all live, for good and for bad, has become irreversible.*

And women aren't about to give anything back or undo any of it. I don't see women turning in their voter registration cards.

It feels as if blame is attached to the gains in human rights that women have experienced. Should I feel guilty for wanting the rights that men have. I bear all the same responsibilities as men. Why should I have to do that without having the rights men have?

103. on [February 6, 2009 at 2:55 pm](#)  Bonnie

Hi Marilyn,

I'll respond directly to your questions:

*Examples of where I don't get what you mean for how daily life is lived would be your distinction between being head of the marriage versus head of the wife,*

If my husband is my head in terms of the metaphor of creation origin, then I think of myself in relation to him in this archetypal sense – as Eve to his Adam. He's not head of the marriage because he's not its origin (tho the “flesh” of its origin, but God instituted marriage), nor is he in charge of it any more than I am. He is in charge of doing his part and I'm in charge of doing mine. I must submit to him (and not to anyone else) in order to achieve unity and he must sacrificially love me in order to achieve same. I think of it in terms of commitment, I guess.

*as well as your distinction between “authority over” versus ownership/exercise of authority.*

I don't think my husband has authority over me that he exercises or owns *himself*. He doesn't boss me or direct me or lead me any more than I do him (!) Or maybe he does, or maybe I do, but no one is keeping score; he directs when appropriate and I do likewise.

*What does it mean for a husband to have authority over his wife, but not to exercise authority over his wife?*

The way I see it is that the authority he has is the authority that his being head has over me, which is God's authority to command me to submit to him as my head and as the person to whom I am united in marriage, in order to achieve that unity in its fullest sense.

*In particular, how is submission a meaningful concept if the husband to whom a wife is submitting, isn't exercising authority either explicitly or by implication (in the sense that spouses often know each other's preferences without those preferences being stated)?*

In I Peter 3:1-2, the disobedient (to the Word) husband certainly wouldn't be exercising proper explicit authority (direction), at all times, to which a wife would be obliged to acquiesce. As to submission to preferences, this should certainly be considered as a matter of courtesy, but a higher moral consideration may trump preference (of either husband or wife) at times.

*I see you as being concerned about a lack of sufficient emphasis in soft comp teaching on God being the granter of all authority and the husband needing to always have that in the forefront of his mind as he exercises the authority God has given him.*

The authority that it seems to me that God has given a husband to exercise is to sacrificially love his wife. The authority that God has given a wife to exercise is to lovingly submit to her husband in the unity of the Holy Spirit. She must not be rebellious. She owes him the highest honor and loyalty, more than any other person in her life, under the law (not the Law, but the law). This may well call for disobeying him, or leading him spiritually, or whatever else she may need to do for the well-being of all involved.

Thanks for asking about these things, Marilyn; I know my answers aren't thorough but they are a basis and a start, and I hope they help!

104. on [February 6, 2009 at 3:00 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Hi John,

You said to Tamar,

*But I notice that something was lost as well as gained following the immense cultural changes in whose wake the ordination of women came to be accepted in my church culture.*

This is very interesting. What do you think it is that was lost?


105. on [February 6, 2009 at 3:09 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Sue,

*You said, It feels as if blame is attached to the gains in human rights that women have experienced. Should I feel guilty for wanting the rights that men have. I bear all the same responsibilities as men. Why should I have to do that without having the rights men have?*

I think that blame *has* been attached, by some, to the human-rights gains that women have experienced. And it probably has a lot do with association with so-called "reproductive rights." Which is unfortunate, because I think most of us here, as well as other Christian equalists (or whatever we are rightly called!), do not at all consider it a basic human right.

But no, of course none of us (women) should feel guilty for wanting the rights of basic personhood and citizenship that men have.

106. on [February 6, 2009 at 3:40 pm](#)  [Marilyn](#)




Thanks so much, Bonnie. I'm still having a brain freeze with this. It may literally be because I'm an accountant. When I read Christian writing on gender (from an egal or comp perspective), my reaction is often "ok, those are very beautiful words, but how does it play out on the ground?"

I'm not seeing how you're defining his sacrifice in a way that is going to result in his behaving differently than she does, as a result of her submission. I see gender-nuanced language in your descriptions, but I don't see how your descriptions map into gender-nuanced behavior or gender-nuanced differences in how the couple relate to each other. Sorry, I know that this is me being dense. You get it, and you write with clarity and grace. So, the problem is at my end. If there is a stalemate, for example, she submits and he sacrifices. How does that differ from the egal mutual submission model? Is there a special honor accorded to the head? If so, how does that differ from Gary Thomas' and Emerson Eggerichs' soft comp notions of a special respect being shown to the husband?

Will understand if you don't have time! Again, your explanations are clear and specific. I'm just not able to connect the dots and figure out the implied application.

P.S. One point of agreement for all of us on this list (I think) is that irrespective of whether the language is sacrifice, submit or lead, there are always to be qualifications - first and foremost, we are to glorify God in all we do.

107. on [February 6, 2009 at 4:28 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Hi Bonnie,

In my view, through feminism God has blessed both women and men. At the moment, I'm reading the fabulous feminist utopia by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*. For me, her utopia is not about solutions (not her strong point, or that of radical feminism in general), but about asking important questions.

But feminism has been a mixed blessing, as is usually the case insofar as movements impact the body politic.

You have already given an example of a downside of (much, not all) modern feminism: a distorted view of reproductive rights. It once was worse. In my family, which has a long feminist pedigree, eugenics was also once championed. One of my ancestors, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., famously said: "Three generations of imbeciles are enough." I'm sure he meant well, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

A specific downside of feminism in egal churches like the one I serve, the United Methodist Church, is that the switch from a traditional to an egalitarian ethos exacerbated the gender imbalance further in the direction of a feminization of the church. In the traditional ethos, mothers already tended to be the chief spiritual point of reference in their families. Women already tended to be the movers and shakers in many different ways in the life of the church.

Those trends have now been accentuated, though I will note that my wife Paola, who pastors her own church, succeeds better than most male pastors in raising up male leadership in the congregation. I wish I could say that this is a general trend.


What sociologists call "the feminization of the church [or synagogue]" has reached acute proportions in some egal settings. But of course this is part of larger phenomenon that continues to impact all churches.

Few feminists seem to care that an unintended consequence of the push for an egalitarian society has been the creation of new gender imbalances.


Few feminists seem to be self-aware enough to realize that they sometimes fall into a reverse female chauvinism in which a point of view is dismissed for the simple reason that a male champions it.

Few feminists seem to care that a growing post-feminist phenomenon is the idolization of what Ariel Levy calls

“female chauvinist pigs.” It is useless to pretend that this trend is not impacting young women in a negative way, beginning now, I notice, in 7th and 8th grade.


108. on [February 6, 2009 at 4:43 pm](#)  [Don Johnson](#)

Everything I have read about a so-called “feminization of the church” has been incredibly bogus.

109. on [February 6, 2009 at 5:16 pm](#)  [Marilyn](#)

Don,

Do you see the statistics as bogus (i.e., you don't think there is a disproportionate decline in church attendance by men) or are you saying the explanation is bogus? If the latter, what do you think explains declining male participation?

110. on [February 6, 2009 at 5:23 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)


Don,

Are you familiar with Fishman's research on the feminization of the Reformed synagogue? “One unintended consequence of women's activism within the Reform movement has been the feminization of the Reform synagogue setting” he said in a recent interview.

Go here for a summary :

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/939259.html>


The situation revealed by the research in question is not very different in an egal church like the one I serve, the United Methodist Church.

111. on [February 6, 2009 at 5:30 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

I also recommend Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977).

A fascinating study of an earlier period: Barbara Welter, “The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860,” in *Clio's Consciousness Raised* (1973).

This is just the tip of the iceberg.

112. on [February 6, 2009 at 5:42 pm](#)  [Don Johnson](#)

I see the premise as misguided and wrong. If one sees the gender ratio as a problem, then a solution would be to restrict female entry, which is crazy. Every soul that is a believer is a GOOD thing and worrying about gender ratios is worrying about the wrong thing. We want more believers in the Kingdom, not simply more males.

The Kingdom tends to have more members among the “less than” in society, as they see their need clearer. The “more than” can mask their need more and think they do not need God.



113. on [February 6, 2009 at 6:03 pm](#) [molleth](#)

One can ask why the men are leaving. But the answers usually given, at least to me, often seem to betray a misogynistic bent. It's all the women's fault, \*not\* the fault of the (manly) male leaders who are there, not the fault of the way the church is structured, or it's program style, or it's doctrinal stance, or it's teaching, not the fault of the men who've left, not the fault of ANYTHING other than the *women*.

All those things seem very sacred, unquestionable bastions—all fingers of blame point to the women.

The denom's I know of personally have all been male-ruled and women have always occupied a lesser role in everything, so then hearing from their pulpits about this insidious “feminizing (the obvious implication being that “femininity” is a dangerous evil that oozes into masculinity and ruins it) makes me have to work hard not to roll my eyes.

It is such a painful experience. Yet again, the message in “the feminization of the church” sermons comes across loud and clear—it's the same core message I heard all growing up: In God's economy, women are second-class citizens.

I'm not stupid. It was pretty easy to get that there is something wrong with us, something lesser. And the “woe, feminization” folks help spread that same message. The men are leaving because the women are too vocal, or the women decorated the fellowship hall? Wow. There is something dangerous about us. There is something about us that harms men, that makes them have to run away for protection, that ruins them...

And just like Adam said of Eve, here we are as a Church, doing it all again, loudly claiming that, “the woman made me do it.”

If the folks worried about feminization would carefully look at ALL factors, investigate and research thoroughly, I'd be a lot more inclined to listen to their observations. But the fact that they zeroed in on blaming the women first, women in the denom's I've know who were never anything but secondary features as it was, is really frustrating—and the fact that people in my neck of the woods listen and believe it is even more difficult for me to deal with.



114. on [February 6, 2009 at 6:13 pm](#) [John Hobbins](#)

“Every soul that is a believer is a GOOD thing and worrying about gender ratios is worrying about the wrong thing.”


I don't follow. That would mean the attempt to address gender imbalances from the feminist side is also wrong.

I'm in favor of addressing gender imbalances. There is a new rule in place that the Trustees committee (responsible for the physical plant and upkeep of the grounds) in local United Methodist churches must include at least two women. The impact of this rule has been positive. Men (generally speaking) are blind to some things. No use pretending the contrary.

But the greater gender imbalance is now in the other direction. It is or at least should be a worry, just as it should cause some soul-searching if your congregation is all-white.

To suggest otherwise is tantamount to claiming that we shouldn't care if the prophecy of Joel Peter quoted on the first Christian Pentecost is being fulfilled in our midst or not.

Is it really a healthy thing when people, comps or egals, are indifferent on these things? I don't think God is indifferent about them.

115. on [February 6, 2009 at 6:28 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Molly,

I hope we can find some common ground in which, faced with a phenomenon like the feminization of the church, it's not about pretending that it is not an unintended consequence of feminist (and pseudo-feminist) trends, nor about blaming women, but about recognizing and addressing the problem.

The situation is of course far more mixed in strong complementarian churches of the kind you are familiar with.

I notice however that churches like the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox churches, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and a number of Reformed churches, have found ways of creating wider spaces for women in leadership within the church, but have not found ways, generally speaking, of overcoming the feminization of the rank and file.

The problem is even more marked in some cultures, and has deep roots that have found fertile soil all over again in "egalitarian" culture. In Italy, it is not that unusual for Mass to be attended by women at a 10 to 1 ratio. Talk about imbalance! Furthermore, the mother is too often the children's only point of reference from a religious point of view.

116. on [February 6, 2009 at 7:00 pm](#)  [EricW](#)

*I notice however that churches like the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox churches, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and a number of Reformed churches, have found ways of creating wider spaces for women in leadership within the church, but have not found ways, generally speaking, of overcoming the feminization of the rank and file.*

I'm not sure about that. Frederica Mathewes-Green has written about why Orthodoxy seems to be a "man's" religion:

<http://www.frederica.com/facing-east-excerpt-1>

...Something about Orthodoxy has immense appeal to men, and it's something that their wives—especially those used to worshipping in the softer evangelical style—are generally slower to get. The appeal of joining this vast, ancient, rock-solid communion must be something like the appeal of joining the marines. It's going to demand a hell of a lot out of you, and it's not going to cater to your individual whims, but when it's through with you you're going to be more than you ever knew you could be. It's going to demand, not death on the battlefield, but death to self in a million painful ways, and God is going to be sovereign. It's a guy thing. You wouldn't understand.

When I asked members of our little mission, "Why did you become a member?", two women (both enthusiastic converts now) used the same words: "My husband dragged me here kicking and screaming." Several others echoed that it had been their husband's idea—he'd been swept off his feet and had brought them along willy-nilly. Another woman told how she left Inquirer's Class each week vowing never to go again, only to have her husband wheedle her into giving it one more try; this lasted right up to the day of her chrismation. I can imagine how her husband looked, because that's how my Gary looked: blissful, cautious, eager, and with a certain cat-who-ate-the-canary, you'll-find-out smile....

A continent away someone I've met only by mail is writing me a letter. She's a multi-generation evangelical, descended from missionaries and professors at Christian colleges. Now her husband has begun looking into Orthodoxy and shows the signs, so familiar to me, of beginning that plummeting dive. Her words, too, are familiar:

"This is a church whose disciplines and life, I feel, appeal initially more to men. To me it all seems so...hard. In my spiritual walk up to this point my heart has led my head. I might go to church mad and unrepentant, but with a worship chorus in a lilting tune, or a heartfelt spontaneous prayer, my heart would begin to soften. I'd come out ready to live the obedient life.

"Orthodoxy makes sense in my head, but I yearn for something to grab my gut and help me over the hump labeled 'self.' All the 'soft' music, etc., that used to draw me is missing and I'm left in this massive struggle with my will. Does that make sense? Doesn't a spoonful of sugar help the medicine go down, and all that?

"And how do women eventually come to terms with this somewhat austere church?"...

As I look over my shoulder, I can see this friend not far behind me on the road, on the cloverleaf of conversion, and it's by now a familiar sight. Her husband is driving, and she's in the passenger seat.

117. on [February 6, 2009 at 7:10 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Eric,

My experiences with EO churches suggest to me a feminization of the rank and file with ancient roots, with a "second-wave" feminization of another kind at the same level and in intermediate leadership roles in a middle-class, upper middle class environment. I'm thinking of a large and prosperous charismatic Orthodox congregation in Milwaukee. But I haven't been there for a long time, so things have probably changed again.

In other ways, it is absolutely true that EOC is a "man's world." But we are talking about two sides of the same coin. At least, that is the way I see it.

118. on [February 6, 2009 at 7:34 pm](#)  [kathy](#)

Maybe the last are entering first? Kingdom come any one?

119. on [February 6, 2009 at 7:39 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Kathy,

I'm convinced that you are right in some specific instances.

In general, however, the trends are not healthy. Even non-Christian sociologists say as much.

120. on [February 6, 2009 at 7:45 pm](#)  [EricW](#)

A “charismatic Orthodox congregation”? You’re kidding me? As far as I knew, the only charismatic Orthodox activity of any note in this country was/is connected with Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, as “charismatic” activities are generally frowned upon by Orthodox priests and/or there is no place for informal charismatic ministry and worship - e.g., messages in tongues, prophecy, etc. - by the faithful during the Liturgy or the other services.

Interestingly, my “godfather,” who joined the EOC a year before I did, but then left it a few months before I did, wrote a dissertation of sorts on the quenching of the Spirit and the prophetic gifts by the early church. He had originally set out to show the opposite - i.e., to debunk the Pentecostal/charismatic claim that Constantine and the “organized church,” etc., were in a large way responsible for the diminishing of the charismata - but he found the data was in fact supporting that claim. That, and a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit, led him to conclude that he could no longer be or remain Orthodox. But that’s a 300-page story....

121. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:03 pm](#)  *believer3*

”A specific downside of feminism in egal churches like the one I serve, the United Methodist Church, is that the switch from a traditional to an egalitarian ethos exacerbated the gender imbalance further in the direction of a feminization of the church.”

John, you take a great risk by attempting to equate Christians who believe in Biblical equality with modern feminism. This frees those who wish, to claim that all the ills of modern feminism are born by Christian egalitarians and also leaves a door to claim that modern feminism is our initiator, none of which is true (and I doubt it is true for you). Egals have been very gracious to acknowledge that patriarchalism is not the same as complementarianism, as well we have differentiated between hard comps and soft comps. Please do not insert a reason to comps to not give us the same consideration. Christians who believe in Biblical equality are not associated with modern feminism even though there are some good accomplishments amongst feminists. Although there are those who consider themselves Christian feminists (I’m not one), they still distance themselves from most of the imbalances that modern feminism holds.

Also, understanding that the Bible is misread in instances of the disagreements between egals and patriarchalists (egals and comps have much in common) has nothing to do with feminist thinking. So, I am asking you to please not seek to bring in feminist charges.

Poodles I believe was the one who came up with the ideas of the church being feminized by having women more involved in leadership and ministry. I read some of his stuff and really other than the catchy phrase, there is no merit to it. There are still more males in ministry than women and likely always will be.

122. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:09 pm](#)  *believer3*

“One can ask why the men are leaving. But the answers usually given, at least to me, often seem to betray a misogynistic bent. It’s all the women’s fault, \*not\* the fault of the (manly) male leaders who are there, not the fault of the way the church is structured, or it’s program style, or it’s doctrinal stance, or it’s teaching, not the fault of the men who’ve left, not the fault of ANYTHING other than the women.”

Exactly Molly. I once did a small survey of my own. The obvious conclusion to me was that more and more Christians are tired of the same old, same old. The churches that are growing do one of two things. They either are growing because they’ve become a social church and are shallow in Bible knowledge. Or they are growing because they have opened doors for more involvement, more casual services, more spontaneous yielding to the HS and are deeper in Bible knowledge and activities.

The percentage of men to women has little to do with much of anything. That just leads to counting ethnicities and other differences.

123. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:17 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

*“He had originally set out to show the opposite - i.e., to debunk the Pentecostal/charismatic claim that Constantine and the “organized church,” etc., were in a large way responsible for the diminishing of the charismata - but he found the data was in fact supporting that claim.”*

Interesting story, Eric. I’ve felt for most of my 39 years with Christ that the churches “boringness” 😊 is due to the quenching of the HS gifts and ministries.

The average church is pretty boring to me these days. Before our new pastor (whom I am immensely pleased with) our Sunday church services were awesome because of the way we rearranged them. Many times we moved the chairs around in different patterns. We talked. We talked before the sermon. We talked after the sermon. WONderful. We did so many different ways of doing “sermons” one never knew what to expect. One Sunday one of the elders brought his pottery wheel and demonstrated making a pot while preaching on Christ/God as our potter. He then encouraged people to share what inspired them about it all. I used to delight in getting up and going to church.

Now we are more traditional and it’s back to duty. However, we are looking for other avenues to bring in creativity. So, there is hope. 😊

124. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:20 pm](#)  [madame](#)

Bonnie, you said:

*The way I see it is that the authority he has is the authority that his being head has over me, **which is God’s authority to command me to submit to him as my head and as the person to whom I am united in marriage, in order to achieve that unity in its fullest sense.***

I’m not sure I’ve understood this right. Do you believe a husband has the authority to command his wife to submit to him?

125. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:23 pm](#)  [Charis](#)

How about we just have all female churches and all male churches?

The temple in Jesus’ day had a “court of women”

Don’t conservative synagogues still separate male and female? And muslims do so.

Personally, I think I would enjoy going to an all female church. 😊 (I sort of do that already, since I don’t attend an “institution”, just to a couple ladies Bible studies)

126. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:30 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

Charis,

It would be good for women to have an all women's church. We need to learn to feel good about being women. As Molleth reminded me indirectly, it is tiring and frustrating to hear men try to blame the ills of everything on women's participation.



127. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:33 pm](#) *EricW*

The church that Molly and we were part of for a number of years started out very informal and had an "anyone and everyone do anything" attitude and approach. Our meetings were like family gatherings. We had fun, awesome worship (and sometimes strange worship, when the on-premises drug-rehab residents or the occasional off-the-street visitor shared their sometimes-odd thoughts), and we loved getting together. While technically the gifts of the Spirit were never quenched, the shepherding/controlling nature of the leader eventually led to a diminishing of the free-for-all (in a good way) nature of our meetings. Several of us on more than one occasion expressed a desire to return to the good old days of Jesus-People casualness, but it seemed to fall on (purposefully?) deaf ears, sad to say.

What could and should have been and become a life-changing message and ministry ended up losing its life and becoming a cult, which some of us were fortunate to escape, but others only did so at great cost to their families and marriages.



128. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:34 pm](#) *Marilyn*

Umm...errhh.....here comes a comp comment about those pesky gender differences. The following is an excerpt from an Amazon review of Murrow's "Why Men Hate Church." The author of the review is a female pastor of discipleship:

"The piece that was most helpful to me was Murrow's discussion of the pictures or metaphors that we use in our churches for describing the Christian life. One metaphor describes Christianity as an intimate relationship with a wonderful man. The other metaphor describes Christianity as a movement to save the world against impossible odds. Both are valid expressions of our faith- a passionate relationship with Jesus Christ and an aggressive expansion of God's Kingdom. Here is the problem: the first metaphor (the relationship stuff) is the one we tend to emphasize in our churches ("Jesus wants to have an intimate, passionate, love relationship with you") and it sounds like the theme of a chick flick. We have replaced "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" and "Onward Christian Soldiers" with love songs "draw me close to you" and "your love is extravagant." This resonates with women but not men. We need to move a little back towards the idea that Christianity is about a war raging for souls. I want to make sure that the spiritual growth strategies at my church are as magnetic and empowering to men as Jesus himself was."



129. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:36 pm](#) *kathy*

So many are so concerned about 'feminization of the church'. \*rolls eyes\* (in humor). Who cares? I'm so tired of all the fleshly concerns that I could die from boredom. Sorry if I sound offensive, but I'm entirely honest here. I'm outte!



130. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:38 pm](#) *kathy*



‘It would be good for women to have an all women’s church. We need to learn to feel good about being women. As Molleth reminded me indirectly, it is tiring and frustrating to hear men try to blame the ills of everything on women’s participation.’

It’s boring too. lol! 😊

131. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:39 pm](#)  believer3


Interesting story again ERic. 😊

Ours was not really a free for all, nor could anyone do anything. Our elders and pastors were very involved. They just had specific places where there was freedom to involve the congregation. And then the elders at different times became really creative in giving the Sunday sermons. I’d say it was a controlled freedom. But such a thing is indeed difficult to keep the balance. There can be too much freedom so that there is no structure, or too much structure so there is no room for the Spirit. The Spirit can be quenched either way. 😊

132. on [February 6, 2009 at 8:44 pm](#)  believer3

*“The piece that was most helpful to me was Murrow’s discussion of the pictures or metaphors that we use in our churches for describing the Christian life”*

It’s a good point. We need both. God is complicated.

133. on [February 6, 2009 at 9:06 pm](#)  chaidrinkingfool


I don’t know what’s happening in the churches: why more women attend church than men do, if that’s what’s going on. I know that I have had the “feminization”\* (and I do hate that term—let’s not use that as shorthand for the problem, let’s go ahead and articulate that not enough men are attending and active in church communities) of the church thrown at me as a reason that perhaps women should be limited in church.

That is a problem. Where women are excluding men, that should be addressed. Where men are assuming they aren’t needed because women have been given permission to use their gifts, that should be addressed.

Assumptions and sinfulness are probably part of the problem. Also background and prior church teachings can play a part. People should \*communicate\* with each other. Forgive me if that solution sounds too feminine, but I don’t know of any other way to learn about the needs of other people.

Funny thing is that whenever I read about the images of God that are preferred by women, and the ones that are preferred by men, I almost always prefer the latter. I don’t know what the answer is to this problem: I suspect there is more than one.

\*Since “feminine” is used in some circles as though the word =female, and is close to the oft-demonized “feminist”, it’s difficult for some of us to not understand the term as simply throwing the blame back on the woman. Or the “uppity women” at least. With the implied solution, if I’m not reading too far into it, being to put women back in their place.

134. on [February 6, 2009 at 9:07 pm](#)  [chaidrinkingfool](#)

But yes, believer3, you make a good point: We need to include both those images of God AND MORE.

Our words will always fall short of describing who God is, and we needn't make an idol of one image or another...

135. on [February 6, 2009 at 9:18 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

*"People should \*communicate\* with each other. Forgive me if that solution sounds too feminine, but I don't know of any other way to learn about the needs of other people."*

😊 That is not feminine, it is human. Communication of more than emotional and physical needs (animals can do that) is part of being human and created in the image of God. Remember God SPOKE the world into existence and Christ is the Word of God.

136. on [February 6, 2009 at 9:26 pm](#)  [kathy](#)

chaidrinkingfool, I like your 9:06 comment. I'm interested, I'm interested! Thanks!

137. on [February 6, 2009 at 11:14 pm](#)  [David McKay](#)

Most churches I've attended have had more women than men. Some people say that church-going is a girlie thing to do, which gets back to my Bussy Theology thing. I don't feel I'm being "a big girl" [which used to be my oldest son's favourite put down of his mates] by participating, but then I do other things that some people think are girlie, such as reading and talking.

Some men are happy to assist a church by doing building maintenance, running barbecues, etc but will not sit down in a church service.


We can get some men to attend a meeting at our local famous car racing track [Mount Panorama] which features the driver of the Jesus car, who would not dream of coming to a church meeting, even though it is held in a public school, rather than a church building.

138. on [February 6, 2009 at 11:16 pm](#)  [David McKay](#)

I was interested that someone said that the Egalitarian movement did not arise from the modern Feminist movement. It would seem that Feminism has paved the way for Egalitarianism.

If you say that it did not, where has Egalitarianism come from?

Both seem to be Twentieth Century phenomena.

139. on [February 6, 2009 at 11:18 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Believer3,

You misunderstand my point and I assume that is my fault so I will try again.

I was not equating anything with anything. My first point is this: feminism has impacted everyone and everyone's subculture, for good and for bad, in reversible and also in (thank goodness) irreversible ways.

Complementarians, singly and as a subculture, have also benefited from feminism, first-wave, second-wave, what have you. Perhaps most are not men and women enough to admit it. I also see this tendency among some evangelical egals.

The facts are otherwise. The historian in my bones tells me: we are all feminists now.

Okay, not quite all, but I'm hoping I make myself clear.

It is probably true that feminism in a good sense has positively impacted egal churches like the one I serve more than it has complementarian churches. But it is also probably true that feminism in terms of its excesses and imbalances has negatively impacted egal churches like the one I serve more than it has complementarian churches.

If you disagree, I would like to know why.

You say:

"Although there are those who consider themselves Christian feminists (I'm not one), they still distance themselves from most of the imbalances that modern feminism holds."

I have several friends who are Christian feminists. Some of them are far more cognizant and up-front about the negative (and just the positive) impact feminism has had than egalitarians who say they are not feminist.

It's almost as if some Christian egals think they can exorcise the problems which come with modern feminism by not self-identifying with it. But it is not that easy. More than verbal distancing is necessary. Far more.

In any case, I disagree heartily with Kathy that these are fleshly concerns. The culture which we breathe contains many things we can receive from God's hand with gratitude, but it also contains the dust of death.

My question to fellow-egals is: given that modern feminism brings with it a number of imbalances, what is being done to identify and correct these imbalances? How explicit are we willing to be in challenging those imbalances?

I'm not convinced that CBMW as a movement identifies, corrects, and challenges these imbalances successfully.

But I don't see how that gets CBE as a movement or other Christian egals off the hook.

It doesn't get comps who don't align with CBMW off the hook either.

You would think we might be able to agree that we are all in this together, that we must guard against imbalances that emanate from both directions: complementarian excesses and egalitarian excesses.

Charis,

Your remarks reminded me of a title of a short story by Flannery O'Connor (a great Christian writer who looked evil square in the eye and, confident of God's grace, refused to blink): "A Good Man is Hard to Find."

But don't get too excited. She also knew that a good woman is hard to find. Have you ever read her short story entitled, "Revelation"? Her portrait of Mrs. Turpin is tender and tough at the same time. So much salvation in that one

short story.

140. on [February 6, 2009 at 11:27 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

On a lighter note, I am thankful that believer3 mentioned throwing a pot on a wheel as part of worship. I've had someone do that in every church I've served, but have not yet done it where I pastor now.

Time to arrange for that. You can guess what passage in Jeremiah I preach to on that occasion.

141. on [February 6, 2009 at 11:59 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Marilyn, don't be so hard on yourself 😊 Just because I "get" my own understanding doesn't mean everyone else must! (And you're not the first person who hasn't "gotten" something I've said!!)

*I'm not seeing how you're defining his sacrifice in a way that is going to result in his behaving differently than she does, as a result of her submission.*

Well, I guess I don't see that he needs to behave differently in any way that is not endemic to his simply being a man. Or, put another way, perhaps women and men walking in the spirit and loving one another a la I Cor. 13 will result in behavior both similar (since both are human) yet also somewhat different according to their innate differences.

Of course, this does not address gender behavior such as clothing worn (or head coverings 😊) or things like that. That's a whole 'nother can of worms 😊. I'm mainly thinking of spousal behavior toward one another.

*If there is a stalemate, for example, she submits and he sacrifices. How does that differ from the egal mutual submission model?*

Maybe it doesn't...I'm not sure.

*Is there a special honor accorded to the head?*

Yes...he is probably the one who would represent the whole family, if he is whole and well. He would be the default "go-to" person for the family unless someone else was designated. Those are practical examples. There are metaphorical ones for the wife, along the lines of being Eve to his Adam (harder to put into words 😊).

142. on [February 7, 2009 at 12:22 am](#)  [Bonnie](#)

John, thanks for your response. You said,

*Few feminists seem to care that an unintended consequence of the push for an egalitarian society has been the creation of new gender imbalances.*

Can you give examples?

Regarding the feminization of the church, that's another phenom that I've tried to research and discuss in a series at my blog which, like most of the series I attempt, I never finished. The research got too involved. Anyway, part of the problem I found is that, first off, there are different ideas of just what "feminized" means.

As far as female chauvinist pigs goes, I think they've always existed, it's just that the notion has become popular with some, as you note. As has female "trash" (just look at the Bratz dolls...even Barbie has gotten racy!)

Certainly there has been backlash against backlash, and, to me, the whole "anti-feminization" movement is just more backlash, which causes me to wonder, sheesh, when will it end?!



143. on [February 7, 2009 at 12:39 am](#) [Bonnie](#)

Hi madame,

*Do you believe a husband has the authority to command his wife to submit to him?*

No! Sorry, I reworded that sentence a few times but it's still not good...what I was trying to say was, the authority that a husband has as head is God's, not his. I don't see his authority as *head* as one handed down, or delegated, in a military-type chain of command, as some do. Except, I suppose, in certain instances. But not as a general rule for a marriage...absolutely not! The authority he's handed, so to speak, is the authority to love, and to be responsible.



144. on [February 7, 2009 at 12:48 am](#) [TL](#)

"I was interested that someone said that the Egalitarian movement did not arise from the modern Feminist movement. It would seem that Feminism has paved the way for Egalitarianism.

If you say that it did not, where has Egalitarianism come from?"

You say that the feminist movement paved the way for egalitarianism? Which feminist movement? The modern feminist movement had nothing to do with it. If you are speaking for the Suffragettes who fought for the right for women to NOT have abortions, to be able to keep their children in case of divorce, to vote in elections, to divorce, to have equal pay for equal work, and probably quite a bit more, yes you are probably right. I've a book written in the mid later 1800's and it speaks about women petitioning for the right to vote in church meetings and have their issues heard. The Suffragettes were primarily Christian women and they suffered brutally for their audacity to speak up for women.

That would be what paved the way for the Christian's who believe in Biblical equality, what we call Christian egals. And there were women here and there throughout Christian history that have stood up for women's right to serve God when and how God calls them to.

145. on [February 7, 2009 at 12:53 am](#)  [TL](#)

Good thoughts Bonnie.

*The authority he's handed, so to speak, is the authority to love, and to be responsible.*

I would refine it a bit, since every Christian has the authority to love sacrificially and be responsible for fellow Christians. We are to carry each other's loads. I would say that a husband has the responsibility to use his personal strengths as a man to nurture, provide for and protect his wife.

All Christians are to use their gifts to benefit others. It is a godly principle.

146. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:01 am](#)  [believer3](#)

*"Some men are happy to assist a church by doing building maintenance, running barbecues, etc but will not sit down in a church service."*

Yes, I know of few of these. There are women who will come to Bible Studies and get together but not Sunday morning church. I think it reads into the "church is boring" theory.

147. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:29 am](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Refining well taken, TL, thanks 😊

148. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:33 am](#)  [madame](#)

*Certainly there has been backlash against backlash, and, to me, the whole "anti-feminization" movement is just more backlash, which causes me to wonder, sheesh, when will it end?!*

I think it's just the old pendulum swinging back and forth.

Bonnie, thanks for clearing that one for me...

*I don't see his authority as head as one handed down, or delegated, in a military-type chain of command, as some do. **Except, I suppose, in certain instances.** But not as a general rule for a marriage...absolutely not! The authority he's handed, so to speak, is the authority to love, and to be responsible.*

Could you give some examples of instances when a husband could rightfully use "chain of command" style authority?

I struggle with the concept of authority to love and be responsible. I'd usually speak of responsibility to love rather than authority, same as responsibility/duty to submit and respect.

Sometimes the theory (as Marilyn very well said) sounds very nice - or very harsh in some cases!- but one wonders how that's supposed to look in practice. The talk of husband authority on behalf of his wife and servant leadership is hard to understand. Authority is power to enforce one's will or rule, or a delegated rule. Servant leadership is an oxymoron (I think that's the word!). A servant does the will of the one he serves. A leader usually commands. Except,

of course, the type of leadership Jesus displayed, but the leadership implied in Complementarian teaching leans heavily towards the worldly understanding of the term.



149. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:36 am](#) [Don Johnson](#)

David asked “If you say that it did not, where has Egalitarianism come from?”

It comes from God as revealed in the Bible by way of Jesus, Peter and Paul, for the most part. As they were egals, I am following their lead.

I agree that this might seem preposterous to some and implausible to others.



150. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:37 am](#) [John Hobbins](#)

Bonnie,

You asked me to give examples of the few feminists who seem to care about the unintended consequences of feminism.

I was hoping you could provide examples!

I’ve read things by Mary Stewart van Leeuwen in this sense (she happens to be a friend and an evangelical feminist), but I don’t know where at the moment. She’s very busy but who knows, she might even be willing to post on evangelical feminism for compgal. If there was enough interest on this, I could ask her.

No one on these threads self-identifies as an evangelical feminist. I don’t either, but I am convinced that evangelical feminists have their own unique insights to offer in this debate.



151. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:43 am](#) [John Hobbins](#)

Madame,

You say,

“the leadership implied in Complementarian teaching leans heavily towards the worldly understanding of the term.”

I didn’t notice this in Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas or Love and Respect by Emerson Eggerichs. These are the comp authors I know best.

L & R is, BTW, on the way to becoming one of the best the best-selling Christian marriage advice books of all time.



152. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:49 am](#) [Bonnie](#)

Another thought, on feminism/changing culture/feminization: It may very well be that, as women have been “discovering themselves,” so to speak, and culture has been changing, in ways both good and bad (mostly good, I would say — some of the bad is merely growing pains, and life is messy to begin with) to accommodate this, many

men who were accustomed to defining themselves along cultural or traditional lines have lost their bearings. Thus many are grabbing at just about anything that comes down the pike. Here is where I really do think that the church is failing — it's offering false information, or none at all!

Admittedly the issue is complex. But I also think that, in our culture, a sense of duty has been lost. This ties in with what John said on another thread about marriage. People go their separate ways, in search of what pleases them, rather than sticking by one another.

Are men really that uncomfortable in church? And if they are, is it because it's "feminized," or because church threatens their false sense of masculinity (or they are insecure about their masculinity), or because they're less likely to be devoted to sticking with a boring church? If they don't like it, why don't they speak up and change it? And if the women react in a huff, so what? I guess I just don't understand all the complaining. (She says, as she complains about the complainers!)

I just think that men are being left off the hook when they shouldn't be. And is the whole question due to thinking that the responsibility to put people in the pews is solely up to churches? Is the responsibility solely the church's? I wonder.

153. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:53 am](#)  [Bonnie](#)

LOL John, I meant examples of gender imbalances, not feminists who seem to care...! Never mind, in reading one of your later comments I think I got a better idea of what you were saying.

154. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:56 am](#)  [believer3](#)

*"It comes from God as revealed in the Bible by way of Jesus, Peter and Paul, for the most part. As they were egals, I am following their lead.*

*I agree that this might seem preposterous to some and implausible to others."*

That is how I came by it. When I came to the Lord and started searching, I didn't even know about 'feminism'. Guess that can happen living on an island. We used to get whatever we got, later than the mainland. 😊

155. on [February 7, 2009 at 1:58 am](#)  [Marilyn](#)

For two reasons, I would appreciate hearing more about/from Mary Stewart van Leeuwen. First, as I understand it, she acknowledges gender differences and has written with some specificity about what gender means. It would be informative to compare her evangelical feminist perspective on gender to that of the comp model(s) and identify the differences.

Second, I would appreciate hearing the second step of the two-step exegesis. I.e., how do you go from the commonly accepted interpretation of the text to egal application, without a redemptive hermeneutic? From recent discussions, I think I now have a decent understanding of CBE's position - current application is egal because the original text is considered to be egal. And, I have a good understanding of the first of the two steps in the evangelical feminist exegesis. Still hoping to have a chance to learn about the second step in the near future.....





156. on [February 7, 2009 at 2:06 am](#) [molleth](#)

*No one on these threads self-identifies as an evangelical feminist.*

I don't know about anyone else, but I have no problem identifying myself as a Christian feminist. (I find myself in full agreement with first-wave feminism, but second-wave feminism and I don't see eye to eye on some things).

When feminism is defined as simply wanting women to be treated with just as much dignity as men are, which is (I think) the actual definition of feminism, then I am a feminist and happy to use the word. In fact, I wish more Christians would use the word and rescue it from the "f-word" it's become in the evangelical-hood. 😊



157. on [February 7, 2009 at 2:42 am](#) [Sue](#)

Thanks Molly. I am glad to see you stand up for this. The definition of feminism is so fluid that many steer away from it now. But if it means that women should have the same basic human rights as men, absolutely! Its crap living without them.

On the feminization of the church .....

It appears to me that someone in this thread is trying to suggest that the feminization of the church in the early 1800's was caused by feminism. What am I missing?



158. on [February 7, 2009 at 2:47 am](#) [John Hobbins](#)

Hey, Molly. Stand by that word. Lots of very fine people, first wave and second wave, have self-identified and do self-identify as feminists. Furthermore, pro-life feminists (like Sarah Palin) have a special contribution to make.



159. on [February 7, 2009 at 2:48 am](#) [Marilyn](#)

I can't speak for evangelical feminists. But, I have read a fair amount by a pro-life Catholic feminist, Mary Ann Glendon. Glendon is a professor at Harvard Law School, the U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, and the President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. She generally affirms the Vatican's 2004 critique of secular feminism, *On the Collaboration of Men and Women*. (The document was prepared in advance of the 2005 UN Conference on the status of women.)

The document's key concerns about secular feminism include:

1. A blurring of distinctions between men and women
2. The regarding of women as adversaries of men
3. A related tendency to see gender as culturally constructed, resulting in a polymorphous sexuality

In response to these concerns, the documents endorses:

1. The idea that profound differences between men and women are rooted in creation and imply a relationship that is complementary rather than competitive
2. Labor policies that do not force women to choose between a career and motherhood

3. The cultivation of feminine values such as “listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise and waiting,” but in a way that is devoid of “a passivity inspired by an outdated conception of femininity.”

Glendon’s caveat about the document was that it addresses concerns about a 1970s style feminism that she feels has faded away in much of the U.S.

160. on [February 7, 2009 at 3:04 am](#)  [believer3](#)

*“On the feminization of the church .....*

*It appears to me that someone in this thread is trying to suggest that the feminization of the church in the early 1800’s was caused by feminism. What am I missing?”*

Wasn’t me. 😊 Did you misunderstand something I said?

I don’t consider the Suffragettes Movement to have feminized the church. I just get a chuckle over the whole concept of the church being feminized. I don’t consider women standing up for what they believe to be Biblically right for women, a question of feminizing the church.

161. on [February 7, 2009 at 3:38 am](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Madame, I guess I’m thinking of representative-type things, like when there’s a death in a man’s family and he gets power of attorney to make decisions that may also affect his family, if things aren’t spelled out in a will. That might be a bad example. A situation when there would need to be an “on behalf of”-type decision made. Sorry I can’t come up with better right now! I’m definitely not thinking of military-type barking orders, though.

I agree with your comments. Although, I’d say authority has broader meaning — it can be understood in terms of authorization (a type of permission, or charge laid to someone), as well as expertise; for example, I have authority to teach music by way of my natural ability, training, and experience in it.

Thanks for your questions; I really appreciate them. (They’re probably helping me more than my answers are helping you!)

162. on [February 7, 2009 at 3:43 am](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Marilyn,

*1. The idea that profound differences between men and women are rooted in creation and imply a relationship that is complementary rather than competitive*

This pretty much captures my view of male-female relationship. The complementarity is built-in; it needn’t be contrived in any way.

163. on [February 7, 2009 at 4:13 am](#)  [Sue](#)

*The document's key concerns about secular feminism include:*

- 1. A blurring of distinctions between men and women*
- 2. The regarding of women as adversaries of men*
- 3. A related tendency to see gender as culturally constructed, resulting in a polymorphous sexuality*

#1 The Catholic church has self-interest at stake here.

#2 Women should be allowed to stand up for themselves. No doubt the suffragettes were regarded as the adversaries of men. So what?

#3 And how many actual features of gender have we identified on this blog so far, other than childbearing. None that I am aware of.

I fail to see any validity in these statements.

164. on [February 7, 2009 at 4:16 am](#)  Sue

*I guess I'm thinking of representative-type things, like when there's a death in a man's family and he gets power of attorney to make decisions that may also affect his family, if things aren't spelled out in a will. That might be a bad example. A situation when there would need to be an "on behalf of"-type decision made.*

This is highly circumstantial. There are many families where women are more suited to these roles. They have been more involved or they are older or they are financially more responsible.

Gender would be the very last qualification for power of attorney in my view. One might say "all other things being equal" but they never are.

165. on [February 7, 2009 at 4:21 am](#)  Sue

*I don't consider the Suffragettes Movement to have feminized the church.*

I don't either. There were complaints about the feminization of the church in the early 1800's. But someone connected female leadership and the feminization of the church.

*My question to fellow-egals is: given that modern feminism brings with it a number of imbalances, what is being done to identify and correct these imbalances? How explicit are we willing to be in challenging those imbalances*

What imbalances? We know that women outnumbered men in church long before feminism. We know that women outnumbered men in teaching young children long before feminism. So, what imbalances are we talking about? We need to identify them first.

166. on [February 7, 2009 at 5:16 am](#)  kathy

'What imbalances? We know that women outnumbered men in church long before feminism. We know that women outnumbered men in teaching young children long before feminism. So, what imbalances are we talking about? We need to identify them first.'

Really. Continue on please...

Does it ever END.....

167. on [February 7, 2009 at 6:01 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Evangelical feminists, not just Catholic feminists, have decried the assumptions of more radical versions of feminism. Here is an example from a 1997 document signed by prominent evangelical feminists:

“We Will Expose the Assumptions at the Foundation of the Radical Feminists’ Philosophy. We are especially concerned about the effects on women of contemporary cultural trends. We decry the erroneous thinking about human nature, sin, and utopian expectations of society that have produced a pervasive sense of emptiness. The notion of women’s autonomy—including absolute control over our own bodies—leaves us with an unrealistic sense of human power and an exaggerated sense of independence from the consequences of our attitudes and actions. The denial of the transcendent God who orders the universe and directs our lives leaves us with societal chaos and the absence of any objective standard of meaning. Most especially, it is the authority of the one true God, in whose image male and female are made, that insures the dignity and equality of women and men.”

Here are three examples of ways in which these evangelical feminists challenge the assumptions of other feminists, Christian and secular:

“The movement to “re-imagine” two thousand years of Christian faith. We repudiate the assumption that Christian faith and teachings were first “imagined” by men and now should be “re-imagined” by women.”

“The movement to reject any objective ultimate authority and elevate human experience as the only source of meaning”

“The promotion of easy-to-get divorces, abortion on demand, and lesbianism as acceptable lifestyle choices. We repudiate tolerance for sinful behavior patterns that stem from making misguided assumptions that pleasure produces human fulfillment and that such fulfillment is the main object of life.”

These paragraphs are taken from A Christian Women’s Declaration,” issued on September 16, 1997 by the Ecumenical Coalition of Women and Society, a project of the Washington-based Institute on Religion and Democracy.


The declaration carves out a middle ground in which the assumptions of radical feminism are challenged but not one inch is given up of the net positive gains for women that have taken place recently and before - as the drafters of the declaration understand them - in the history of the church and in society.

Like Catholic feminism, the declaration also affirms the complementarity of the sexes.

A number of other disturbing trends are identified in this declaration:

“The elevation of individual rights over personal responsibility.  
The focus on the autonomous individual to the neglect of institutions of civil society, especially family.  
Excessive state power and other utopian attempts, whether of the left or right, to engineer perfect societies.  
The “therapeutic” view that sees the sole purpose of human life as pleasure and self-actualization.”

I don’t agree with all of the emphases in this declaration, but it is a courageous example of egalitarian evangelical women making no bones about their profound differences with more radical feminists, Christian and non-Christian.

168. on [February 7, 2009 at 7:26 am](#)  [molleth](#)

Marilyn, That was really interesting. One thing, slightly off topic that I can't help but go, "AUGH!" about... (pardon my frothing at the mouth)...

3. *The cultivation of feminine values such as "listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise and waiting," but in a way that is devoid of "a passivity inspired by an outdated conception of femininity."*

This, I don't get. I have never gotten it. It makes no sense to me.

I do not understand how these (good!) things are feminine but not masculine. And I especially do not get how the Bible could be used to affirm such a statement.

**Listening**—is this not a characteristic that the prophet Isaiah praised in the coming Messiah?

**Humilty**—did Jesus say it was a feminine attribute when He praised the humble in the Sermon on the Mount? Didn't Jesus say He was humble? Wasn't Moses praised as the most humble man on the face of the earth?

**Faithfulness**—isn't Abraham the father of faith? Didn't he exhibit faithfulness, even when never actually getting to build a house in the land of promise? Was he being feminine in so doing?

**Praise**—I don't understand how praising someone is a feminine virtue. Isn't the Bible full of men praising each other and praising God? Was it only women that praised Jesus when He rode in on the donkey? Was Jesus being feminine when He openly praised His Father?

**Waiting**— Doesn't Hebrews 11 catalog those who waited in faith, believing in what was unseen, a long list of men and women who are held up as examples for us all...?

I really struggle, and I mean *really* struggle, when godly attributes are partitioned off to one gender or the other. There is no Biblical justification for it. None.

169. on [February 7, 2009 at 7:36 am](#)  [Tamar](#)

I still don't see why feminism is blamed for too many women in church, or too few men teaching little kids.

This just doesn't connect to anything at all. There were more women than men in church 200 years ago. What has feminism got to do with this.

*"The movement to "re-imagine" two thousand years of Christian faith. We repudiate the assumption that Christian faith and teachings were first "imagined" by men and now should be "re-imagined" by women."*

*"The promotion of easy-to-get divorces, abortion on demand, and lesbianism as acceptable lifestyle choices. We repudiate tolerance for sinful behavior patterns that stem from making misguided assumptions that pleasure produces human fulfillment and that such fulfillment is the main object of life."*

Oh well. Now I recognize this. This is what I was supposed to repudiate some time ago on your blog. Because of course we know that no one ever got an abortion before feminism gave them the idea.

But I do promote easy to get divorces! I am counting my pennies these days. More money for the kids and less money to the lawyers, I say.

And, of course, it is feminism which is to blame for putting pleasure before responsibility. No man ever thought that one up on his own. Men would never do this.

I am surprised that a group of women could be guilted into that kind of chest beating!

170. on [February 7, 2009 at 7:38 am](#)  Tamar

*(pardon my frothing at the mouth)...*

Thanks I appreciate the company.

171. on [February 7, 2009 at 7:46 am](#)  Tamar

*I am surprised that a group of women could be guilted into that kind of chest beating*

Oops. That was a slip. I meant to say that I was surprised that women would beat themselves up like this. They take on far more guilt than they should in my view. Naturally they have been turned off by certain facets of modern life, but this is unnecessary. And they don't speak on my behalf.

I believe in the sanctity of life and in joint reproductive rights to the extent that I did not ever separate a child from the father, nor did I even file for divorce myself.

But I think I have extremely conservative views on these things and I don't expect anyone else here to take what I did as an example.

172. on [February 7, 2009 at 10:07 am](#)  [madame](#)

Bonnie,

*I'd say authority has broader meaning — it can be understood in terms of authorization (a type of permission, or charge laid to someone), as well as expertise; for example, I have authority to teach music by way of my natural ability, training, and experience in it.*

I agree with you. Thanks for explaining what you mean by authority on behalf, although I think both partners can exercise this authority. For example, the fact that I'm an US citizen means that I, in a sense, "authorise" my family to move to the US, and my husband should be given a work permit. All because he is married to me. (At least that's the way things were a few years ago)

I think the lines between husband and wife and their responsibilities are rather blurry, not etched in stone as some would like them to be.

*Thanks for your questions; I really appreciate them. (They're probably helping me more than my answers are helping you!)*

Your answers are helpful too 😊

173. on [February 7, 2009 at 10:33 am](#)  [madame](#)

John,

I said

*“the leadership implied in Complementarian teaching leans heavily towards the worldly understanding of the term.”*

To which you responded:

*I didn't notice this in Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas or Love and Respect by Emerson Eggerichs. These are the comp authors I know best.*

I haven't read Love and Respect, so I can't comment on this one.

Sacred Marriage is hardly your typical Complementarian marriage book. Gary Thomas spends little (if any, can't really remember any more!) time on gender roles and how they should play out in marriage. The purpose of the book is not to tell us how to live out our marriages, but rather to inspire us to allow God to use marriage to shape us. I think the book should be mandatory, both for Complementarians and Egalitarians. Just my opinion, of course....

Most Comp. literature (mainly online, lots from CBMW) defines leadership in the way the world understands it. The husband is the boss, he has the last word, he has more authority, and so on... They may not say this directly, but it's definitely implied.

I believe husbands are called to exercise a different type of leadership, more in line with Jesus' "servant leadership". Jesus set aside his comfort, his rights, his power, and used his authority to lay down his life for us. He lead by example, by sacrifice, by taking the first step in the way we should go.

Both leaderships are valid. The first type of leadership can be exercised benevolently, in the best interest of those under one's authority, but it's the type of leadership I believe is given to parents, not husbands.

I'm trying to think this through and type it out while my 17 month old daughter contends for the keyboard....

174. on [February 7, 2009 at 12:27 pm](#)  [Marilyn](#)

Molly,

Sorry for the detour that was painful reading for you! There had been a call for evangelical feminist critiques of secular feminism. None was forthcoming, and I thought that a critique of secular feminism that a highly regarded Catholic feminist supported would contribute to our conversation.

Don't know if this helps, but it's important to keep in mind that what we're talking about is a matter of emphasis. I don't think the Catholic church is saying men shouldn't be humble, faithful, etc. Similarly, Emerson Eggerichs isn't saying that women don't want respect. Again, it's a matter of emphasis.

What Glendon, the Catholic Church, and complementarians are saying, however, is that gender is more than a social/cultural construct (although, of course, there will always be social cultural influences and we need to think about what those mean for us, as Christians). Biology is not destiny, but it is not irrelevant either. Physiological differences in men and women have a significant impact on who we are and the way we see the world. I didn't used to believe this until I became a mother.

It's my personal opinion that the inability to at all articulate what those differences are is why CBE materials are so unpopular. At a fundamental gut level, I don't think the average person buys the "it's all symmetric" argument that I

hear on this list.

Nor is it enough to say, “we believe in complementarity,” without being able to provide a vision of what that complementarity looks like. It takes a theory to beat a theory. Critiques of an interpretation of Scripture allow those who affirm the interpretation to refine and strengthen their positions. But, a critique of an interpretation does not provide an alternative to the interpretation.

P.S. Here’s another intriguing quote from the Vatican’s document: “Every outlook which presents itself as a conflict between the sexes is only an illusion and a danger; it would end in segregation and competition between men and women, and would promote a solipsism nourished by a false conception of freedom.”

I think that’s a really neat Christian critique of secular feminist theory, which is all about theories of power (i.e., competition between men and women).

175. on [February 7, 2009 at 12:39 pm](#)  [Marilyn](#)

Madame,

You’re right that Sacred Marriage and Love and Respect are only two of hundreds of marriage books available on the U.S. market. But, it is Sacred Marriage and Love and Respect that are the best sellers. So, they’re representative of the strain of complementarianism that is capturing the hearts and minds of husbands and wives in the U.S.

However, there are two other soft comp books that are selling as well as Love and Respect, and I have been remiss not to mention these. They are Shaunti Feldhahn’s For Women Only and For Men Only. The two books can be thought of as practical applications of the material in Love and Respect. I.e., with survey data and real-life examples, Shaunti answers the question “What does it mean to apply the soft complementarian model in the current cultural context?”

I love Shaunti’s style! If my daughter were to ask me for soft comp role models who do a great job of balancing the public and private spheres, all the while presenting a beautiful vision of Christianity to the world, it is Sarah Eggerichs, Shaunti Feldhahn, and Dr. Leslie Parrott I would encourage her to look to.

176. on [February 7, 2009 at 2:36 pm](#)  [Charis](#)

Hated Shaunti Feldham(sp?)

A husband wants his wife to look skinny and voluptuous because of his “altruism”??? Couldn’t possibly be related to his filling his mind with porn... sheesh...

(and I weigh only 10 lb more than when he married me and I have birthed 8 children and been pregnant 11 time and work very hard to keep myself fit. Don’t give the crap about his desire for a “trophy wife” being because he LOOOOOOOOOVES me, PULEEEEEEEEEASE)

177. on [February 7, 2009 at 3:52 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

Charis,

I don’t read Christian marriage books generally, so I’m not familiar with Shaunti Feldham. But I think that sometimes



comp women writers feel they must give at least token acknowledgement to what men want. That is how I would attribute the quote about wives looking skinny.

I also think it is unhealthy for women to be told they must remain skinny to please their husbands. Most men round out as they mature. Much of it has to do with genetic lines. Certain races tend to remain thinner and most races round out in age. Some of it has to do with culture and the type of food they eat, as well as life style. But a voyeuristic view of women is indeed likely the result of the American over emphasis on porn in movies, advertising, magazines, etc. Our view is tainted. Christians should be teaching their men better.

However, there are countries worse.... Asia, Muslem countries, etc.

178. on [February 7, 2009 at 4:31 pm](#)  Marilyn

Charis,

I'm so sorry that you've experienced so much pain around this issue. I'll take a stab at continuing the conversation, but am prepared to pull back if because of your past experiences, the entire topic is just too painful for you.


The material you refer to is in chapter 8 in Shaunti's book. So many women bring painful experiences to this material that Shaunti opens by writing, "Before you read any further, pray first! I'm not kidding. We're going to navigate some tricky waters here, and to get the most out of this, you'll need to be open...while being protected from hurt. Pray that the Lord will shepherd your process of reading and absorbing the material." Shaunti then goes on to provide the message. The message is not that it is your appearance that matters to your husband. Rather, it is that you are honoring your husband by making an effort for him. Charis, she is saying and describing nothing more than you wrote about yourself.

Shaunti's message is also very anti-pornography. In fact, chapter 6 is a shout-out against pornography. In that chapter, Shaunti tells a moving story of how she and her then-boyfriend (now husband) used to stroll the streets of NYC together. Seemingly out of nowhere, Shaunti would see her future husband suddenly turn his head away from a street scene in front of them. He later explained to her that he was turning to avoid burning into his brain, a sexual image. She refers to these visual images as comprising a "mental rolodex" and explains how she wants to honor her husband for doing all that he can to avoid adding new images to his mental rolodex. Once in his mental rolodex, he can't stop an image from coming into his head. But, he can stop himself from dwelling on the image. (This is analogous to the quote about how it's not sin when a bird with a sinful thought flies into your head, but it is sin to let the bird build a nest. I've heard that attributed to Martin Luther, but am not sure if that's the correct attribution.)

In addition, Shaunti presents herself in a manner that is inconsistent with your takeaway on her message. She is not encouraging an overly sexualized style. I hate to degenerate to talking about a woman's clothes, but it's relevant to the point I'm making. Shaunti's style is neither overly-feminized nor overly-sexualized in the ways that some evangelical comp women advocate. When she speaks, you'll typically see her in a silk blouse with a modest neckline, worn under a tailored blazer. Her message is one of modesty and is far cry from a trendiness that screams "look at me" or an immodesty that screams "bet you can't take your eyes off of me." She dresses and comports herself in a way that doesn't distract from the content of her message. That's how Christian women should comport themselves, right?

A friend of mine who attends another church in my town was recently handed by her senior pastor, the extremely difficult task of communicating to the women on the worship team, that their immodest dress (e.g, cleavage, tight skirts, short skirts, etc.) had become a distraction that was impeding worship. My friend agreed with her pastor that the problem needed to be addressed, but knew that she was entering emotionally charged territory. I recommended Shaunti's materials. My friend played audio excerpts of Shaunti reading from Chapters 6 and 8 of her book. The hostility my friend saw in the room vanished as the women listened to Shaunti's gentle presentation. They "got it," and their behavior changed.

Hope this helps put the material in perspective.

179. on [February 7, 2009 at 5:04 pm](#)  [Tamar](#)

I have to say that Eggerichs' book is so entirely disrespectful of single mothers, and women in general who are protectors and providers, who are analytical and initiative, that I don't know what to think. Is there a message here that all single mothers should leave this list? Do we as Christian women have absolutely nothing in common. I am getting this clear message.

Other than one comment about vows of poverty and chastity, single women are considered non-existent.

What characteristics are virtues for men, and are wrong for women and vice versa? I have not read even one virtue suggested here yet, where everyone says, oh yeah, that is masculine, or that is feminine.

Although I believe that men and women are deeply shaped by their body and I don't think men and women are "the same," I have yet to read anything in these so called feminist critiques, that make sense to anyone.

180. on [February 7, 2009 at 6:57 pm](#)  [Charis](#)

I need to clarify that I heard her talking about her book on Focus on the Family. I wanted to throw the radio across the room and I definitely didn't buy the book or read it. She surveyed 1000 men to get her advice for women. What did 1000 men in a survey say they WANT. OK, wives, there's your assignment!

I LIVED that way, I did everything my husband WANTED for 22 years. Based on painful experience, I know that what a man WANTS is not necessarily the same thing as what a man NEEDS. If a generation of young christian women are buying these books and getting on that hamster wheel, I fear the high divorce rate among professing Christians will continue unabated as carnal men's immature flesh is overindulged by wives who mean well but are being sold a shiny looking fruit which leads to death.

181. on [February 7, 2009 at 7:29 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

molleth,

*I do not understand how these (good!) things are feminine but not masculine. And I especially do not get how the Bible could be used to affirm such a statement.*

They're not, and it can't! 😊


And add me to the list of Christian feminists (my "coming out" statement is [here](#))

182. on [February 7, 2009 at 7:29 pm](#)  [molleth](#)

I have similar feelings, Charis. She's sweet, she's nice, and she truly means well. I appreciate that about her. I've even sat in an audience and listened to her speak. I feel that she's very genuine and is seeking to give God glory.

But her underlying message (that I hear, anyway) is still the same one that kills me: you were made for serving/servicing him, what he says is right (trust the male voice over your own voice), it's your responsibility to do what pleases him and it's also your responsibility to keep him from sinning.

If I hadn't had the experiences I've had, perhaps I wouldn't be so bothered by those underlying messages. Perhaps I wouldn't even hear them. But because of my experiences, her words set off warning bells all up and down my brain.

183. on [February 7, 2009 at 7:34 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Sue and madame,

*This is highly circumstantial...*

*I think the lines between husband and wife and their responsibilities are rather blurry...*

I'm not in disagreement. I was thinking, in the POA example, of it having been given to the husband of a "typical" nuclear family, such as my own. Of course there will be exceptions depending on circumstance. It is not a hard-and-fast thing. I was just trying to give an example to madame of when headship as an actual acted figure-head-or-more-type thing might actually come into play. But maybe there aren't any?

184. on [February 7, 2009 at 8:03 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

John and Marilyn,

I think that there *are* voices which have been articulating the differences between evangelical and secular feminism. I have been since I began blogging, though not under that specific heading, and I'm just an obscure little blogger. There are many others, but none who would be considered "prominent." And why? In large part, because no one is promoting them.

I was asked to speak at a blogging conference a couple years ago on the topic of biblical womanhood, which I did, and then never heard from the conference folks again. Perhaps I did not say what they wanted me to say. David Kotter of CBMW was in attendance. Later, when I wrote to him with comments on one of his posts at Gender Blog, he did not respond. I am fairly certain he had already written me off as "one of them." It is very, very difficult to speak against complementarian doctrine or even articulate a "middle ground" (which I did in my talk) without automatically being put in the overly-egal, or unbiblical egal camp (and vice-versa, apparently!)

I also was one of the few conference speakers not asked to make a contribution to their book, *New Media Frontier*. When I wrote to one of the editors to inquire as to why there were no women authors, I was told that the prominent authors they'd invited had declined, though he agreed it was a problem and would "see what he could do." (many of the other authors were decidedly not "prominent.") Well, I should've known...Crossway Books is the publisher. They're as comp as it gets. \*sigh\*

What I'm trying to say is, it is very hard to find language that is "unloaded" enough that it does not cause most to automatically and superficially categorize a person into a particular camp. And promotion apparently requires that a person toe a certain line.

Marilyn, you said,

*Nor is it enough to say, "we believe in complementarity," without being able to provide a vision of what that*

*complementarity looks like.*

Forgive me, but I can't help but wonder whether it is truly necessary to provide such a vision, other than the models of godly women and instruction in godliness given to all in Scripture.

It's my belief that there is no prescription for the "true" woman, the biblical woman, the beautiful-godly-spiritual woman — the Christ-honoring woman — other than that she live by the gospel and walk in the spirit. Period. If she does that, I believe *she will know what to do*, without anyone having to spell it out for her. At least, that's how I approach it. (I would say that a woman can have confidence in God and His Spirit that He will guide her in the way she needs to go!)

addendum: I should qualify that by saying that this doesn't mean we will *always* know what to do about everything; certainly we may need advice or counsel on particular issues. But in general, I think that God has created us male and female, and we live this out in either a redeemed or a corrupted way.



185. on [February 7, 2009 at 8:15 pm](#) [molleth](#)

*Nor is it enough to say, "we believe in complementarity," without being able to provide a vision of what that complementarity looks like.*

I feel this same "problem" exists with walking in the Spirit. We know we are supposed to do it, but it's so much easier to fall back on a nicely coded system. This was the problem Paul had with the church in Galatia.

Walking in the Spirit is not something safe feeling, it does not have step-by-step instructions, and it does not always look the same for each person (though it will always produce the same fruit). Wanting an instruction manual or a step-by-step formula for walking in the Spirit, or claiming that there must be one in order for it to be a valid way of life, is not good (as Galatia so painfully showed us).

I believe that egalitarian marriage can be primarily defined by a husband and wife walking in the Spirit and relating to one another on that basis. So how does one give point-by-point steps for how to walk in the Spirit, a deeply personal experience, without reducing it to law? When we focus on "how does it look," instead of "what fruits does it bear," we may be focusing on the less important piece of the puzzle. Discovering what fruits it bears may answer, for each individual relationship, how it may and may not look.

It seems to me that the church has always balanced precariously on this tension, on the one side, the danger of letting carnal flesh have it's way, and on the other side, the danger of trying to codify the Spirit, something that the Bible tells us is not possible, despite our many attempts.



186. on [February 7, 2009 at 9:03 pm](#) [Sue](#)

Bonnie,

I remember when you were on the conference advertising. I always wondered how that turned out.

John had already started asking me to blog about gender in some specific way, which it was clear I never fulfilled.

Thinking back to two years ago, John asked me if I would blog on gender on my own blog and I did. But evidently never the right way. I never said what I was supposed to say.

Now in retrospect, John, what was it that you were hoping I might blog about. Surely not the resubordination of

woman. In fact, even now I have never noticed that you have identified how you think men and women are different.

Can I ask both John and Marilyn to articulate what gender means to them. Do you think there are gender differences. Also please think of whether this relates in any way at all to being single.

I strongly believe there are gender differences, but I don't think it impacts in any way at all in matters of authority and submission, which should be shared appropriately according to responsibilities and abilities, not gender.



187. on [February 7, 2009 at 9:44 pm](#) [molleth](#)

(Coming back quickly to say, what I meant to emphasize in my above comment, Marilyn, but now see that I didn't do so well, is that perhaps you are coming from the side that is wanting to help people from falling into carnal/fleshly /selfish error, and maybe I am coming from a side that is wanting to help people from falling into a law-based-Spirit-quenching error. In other words, I often wonder if we're on the same side, just battling against two different enemies).



188. on [February 7, 2009 at 10:44 pm](#) [John Hobbins](#)

Sometimes it is about battling different enemies. As a pastor, divorce is by far the most common enemy I see children and parents facing around me. Abuse in the clinical sense is rare by comparison.

It is also about finding help adequate to the specific challenges we face. Most of the families around me have run-of-the-mill problems in need of run-of-the-mill solutions.

Regardless of framework, it may very well be that Lundy Bancroft's book helps victims of an abusive husband get inside their husband's head. Hopefully that knowledge can be part of a healing process, though I think healing may be another process altogether. On these threads, both recovering comps and an egal have testified to this.

But, as Kate Johnson and others have noted, run-of-the-mill books by authors like Eggerichs, the Parrotts, Thomas, and so on will be useless or worse for that same demographic.

Still, for the specific challenges most people face, the run-of-the-mill books will be the most helpful.

Bonnie,

You say,

"I think that there are voices which have been articulating the differences between evangelical and secular feminism."

Exactly. Evangelical feminist Mary Stewart van Leeuwen was one of the signers (and authors, I believe) of the "Women's Declaration" I quoted above. I think the Declaration articulates some of the differences with clarity, and leaves others to one side.

One publisher that is interested in the articulation of a middle ground and is interested in respectful dialogue between complementarians and egals is InterVarsity Press. That is why they published Sarah Sumner's two books and that is why they are about to publish a dialogue book.

There are also egals like Stuart and Jill Briscoe who were and are soft enough and flexible enough in their approach to have a ministry across a wide cross-section of the evangelical world, soft comp to soft egal.

Hardliners on either side of the spectrum will identify the truth with their carefully worked out positions, no matter how idiosyncratic. Hard comps and hard egals alike emphasize differences, and sometimes go so far as to denigrate their opponents. They quote each other for fund-raising purposes. It seems to work!

Almost everyone I know is in the middle somewhere, either soft egal, soft comp, or just plain soft. This is not necessarily a bad thing!

189. on [February 7, 2009 at 11:32 pm](#)  [Charis](#)

I haven't read Parrotts, but I found "Sacred Influence" by Thomas to be encouraging women toward personal spiritual growth in a very edifying/constructive way.

Here's some clips (for example)

*God, not your marital status, defines your life.*

Is that true of you? The more it is, the more success you will have in moving your man, because weak women usually forfeit their influence.

Look at this from a very practical perspective: do you care much about what a person for whom you have little respect thinks of you? Probably not. So then, how is such a person going to influence you? When their opinion doesn't matter; they may communicate clearly, honestly, and practically- but you're still not going to listen to them. In the same way, if your husband doesn't respect you, if you have sinfully put his acceptance of you over your identity as a daughter of God, then how will you ever influence him for the better? (Pg 21)

...if you will do almost anything to gain his acceptance- then you've just given to a man what rightfully belongs to God alone.

And that means you've turned marriage into idol worship.

When you do that, both you and your husband lose....

In addition, how will you ever find the courage to confront someone whose acceptance so determines your sense of well being that you believe you can't exist without him? How will you ever take the risk to say what needs to be said if you think your future depends on your husband's favor toward you? (Pg. 27)

If you truly want to love, motivate, and influence your husband, your first step must be to connect- and to stay connected- with God. Find your refuge, security, comfort, strength, and hope in him. (Pg 2 😊)

It's not your pain that motivates him but his pain. You have to be willing to create an environment... in which your spouse will be motivated by his pain. This is a courageous and healthy movement toward your spouse and toward preserving and strengthening your marriage, and is an act of commitment, not rebellion (pg. 31)

Once you fully understand your status before God, you need never again live at the mercy of a man's approval. (Pg. 33)

190. on [February 7, 2009 at 11:55 pm](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Sue,

I will back off from responding to your comments in which you misrepresent me from my point of view. I have been patient before in responding to you point-by-point. I will be patient now by letting your “apparently”s go unanswered. Let the reader understand.


We are supposed to focus on issues here.

In that case, too, I plan to respond to questions from you selectively from now on. I hope you won't take offense. I'm convinced that our own particular differences and agreements are well-known by now.

Furthermore, our very different approaches to tackling significant disagreements are well-known.

As I see it, to use your own words, you see your responsibility in this debate to be “spark and tinder.” Normally (not always), you take a polemical approach.

I see my responsibility to be aware of and articulate the limitations of my own framework - I can do so precisely because I think it is strong overall - to build bridges, and seek unity. I am convinced that egalitarians can learn from complementarian emphases, just as I am convinced that complementarians can learn from egalitarian emphases.

191. on [February 8, 2009 at 12:01 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Charis,

I thank both you and Marilyn again for your recommendation of Gary Thomas's Sacred Marriage.

For readers of these threads who are relatively new, I would point out that Marilyn and I authored a joint discussion of some of Sacred Marriage's chief emphases a few months back on this blog. [Click here](#) for the first of four posts in that series.

192. on [February 8, 2009 at 12:02 am](#)  Tamar

*In addition, how will you ever find the courage to confront someone whose acceptance so determines your sense of well being that you believe you can't exist without him? How will you ever take the risk to say what needs to be said if you think your future depends on your husband's favor toward you? (Pg. 27)*

I so believed everything in this preceding quote that I lived by it and depended on it for many years. I believed that if I was strong enough, and not dependent emotionally on him then he would change. He would respect me and see that I could live without him and then he would change.

I did change but this did not have the predicted effect. The “weak woman” paradigm is not useful for solving marriage problems except in one way, that a woman who is no longer “weak” is more able to seek divorce.

Unfortunately no Christian book on marriage will say that sometimes you just need to get a divorce, so there has to be another solution. The “weak woman” theory rears its ugly head over and over again. If a wife would only live a more godly and grounded life, her husband would not do this.

I can say that in my case it did not work. My husband recognized that I was no longer “dependent” on him after the first few years. I remained connected and loyal, goodness knows why, but none of this had any effect.

Stepping out of the codependency framework makes absolutely no difference except that it enables a woman to seek divorce, as she should. It does not cause the other party to reform, in and of itself.

193. on [February 8, 2009 at 12:24 am](#)  Marilyn

Writing quickly .....lots of comments to respond to.

Sue, I wonder if perhaps you are personalizing counsel that is directed at someone who is not in your shoes? I don't think that a statement that husbands view themselves as providers is meant to imply that a single woman should not provide for her children. You draw that conclusion, but I don't think it is intended or implied.

To those who've commented on the plethora of advice to wives on meeting their husbands needs, it's worth pointing out that Shaunti Feldhahn also has a book directed at husbands that is all about meeting a wife's needs. The counsel differs, but the treatment is symmetric. Both are held responsible. The underlying assumption is that gender differences lead to vertigo. We can't always trust our instincts because our instinctive response is to provide what we want – not what our spouse wants. We need, instead, to be willing to fly by the instruments.

Charis, I'm with you – the question of whether we're blind to sinful cultural influences is always relevant. Has Shaunti Feldhahn done that? It's worth mentioning that her approach was not restricted to open-ended questions like “what would you like from your wife?” Instead, she conducted a survey. Her survey questions were developed after conferring with a variety of folks, including statisticians (to get the survey methodology correct), theologians, and ministers. So, her point of reference in developing the survey questions was the input of theologians and ministers. On the other hand, nothing but the Bible is inerrant. All models, theories, and insights are just one fallible person's interpretation of what the Bible says. Is there anything about her approach that suggests to me that I should dismiss her results out of hand? No! But, it's always appropriate to examine advice with a critical eye.

Bonnie, I hope that you have an opportunity to meet Sarah Sumner some day. I spoke with her briefly in the Fall of 2007, at a conference at Stuart and Jill Briscoe's church. (I went to the conference specifically to hear her speak.) I asked her if it was lonely working outside of either of the two dominant paradigms. She said that it was, and that is consistent with your experience at the Christian blogging conference. It's less lonely within a paradigm, but the danger,



of course, is seeing the Other as the problem. You do a beautiful job of spanning the boundaries of the two paradigms. Your discourse is a model for all of us here.

Molleth, agreed! Same side, but coming at things from two different perspectives.

A comment that comes up repeatedly – giving voice to gender differences forces people into boxes. I guess that I disagree. The culture is so messed up when it comes to gender that Christians need to be able to articulate a redemptive vision.

Charis, for what it's worth, I see the counsel in Sacred Influence as fundamentally indistinguishable from the counsel in Love and Respect. Both tell a wife that she is to neither enable her husband's bad behavior nor be silent about it. She is to communicate her concerns. Both also counsel her that she is to be respectful.

No time to check in for a while....will enjoy returning to the conversation later in the week.


194. on [February 8, 2009 at 12:33 am](#)  [Charis](#)

Hi Marilyn,

Perhaps you misread the quote? Thomas is saying that a wife who is disrespect**ED** will not be heard (rather than a wife who is disrespect**FUL** as Eggerich lectures. In my husband's case, respecting myself enough to have a mind, opinions, and acknowledged needs of my own was seen as disrespect**FUL** and Thomas gives permission to do so, while I do not perceive Eggerich as doing so, I see Eggerich as putting an overwhelming burden on the wife of having to "act respectful")

195. on [February 8, 2009 at 12:42 am](#)  [Charis](#)

Bonnie, I ditto Marilyn's comments. I really appreciate your insight, graciousness, and "middle ground" position. Don't get discouraged by the seeming lack of prominence, keep thinking and writing.

196. on [February 8, 2009 at 12:54 am](#)  [Wayne Leman](#)

Marilyn wrote:

*We can't always trust our instincts because our instinctive response is to provide what we want – not what our spouse wants. We need, instead, to be willing to fly by the instruments.*

Oh, wow! That is excellent. It's got something about true unselfish love in action, not simply going by feelings, and something about true dependence, not simply flying by one's own effort. In other words, it sounds spiritual (biblical) to me 😊

197. on [February 8, 2009 at 1:01 am](#)  [Charis](#)

Bonnie,

I was reminded of your thoughts when hubby and I read a [daily devotional for Feb 6 \(link\)](#). The meditation seemed

akin to your thinking about “authority”. Kinlaw refers to how Christ will destroy “all dominion, authority, and power” (1 Cor 15:24) and speaks movingly of the Fatherhood of God and “how intimate God wants to be with us” and “the family - is an eternal concept”, etc...

198. on [February 8, 2009 at 2:21 am](#)  Marilyn

Hi Charis,

I couldn't resist checking in one more time before leaving.

I absolutely agree. Both men and women need both love and respect. The differences are a matter of relative emphasis along a continuum.

Charis, I think you mischaracterize L&R when you write: “In my husband's case, respecting myself enough to have a mind, opinions, and acknowledged needs of my own was seen as disrespectFUL and Thomas gives permission to do so, while I do not perceive Eggerich as doing so”

I hear Emerson as saying just the opposite. The book is about each spouse meeting the needs of the other, not about a wife acting as a doormat. I can't find the quote right now, but it boils down to “Confront your husband about your sin. Express whatever is on your heart. There isn't anything that you can't say to your husband. It isn't a matter of what you say. It's a matter of how you say it.” I'll try to find a reference to that portion of the L&R book when I get back.

I think we have different takes on Sacred Influence. Not surprising, I guess, in that Gary Thomas is a deep, nuanced writer.

I had in mind the following direct quotes from pp. 148-149 of Sacred Influence:

“Far too often women expect to argue with a man just as they would argue with a woman. Furthermore, they assume the way they handle conflict is the best way, or even the only appropriate way. In *For Women Only*, Shaunti Feldhan asks a provocative question:

‘If you are in a conflict with the man in your life, do you think that it is legitimate to break down and cry? Most of us would probably answer yes. Let me ask another question: In the same conflict, do you think it is legitimate for your man to get really angry? Many of us have a problem with that – we think he's not controlling himself or that he's behaving improperly.’

The question needs to be asked: why do women tend to respond with hurt, and men tend to respond with anger? It all has to do with the male need for respect. Shaunti goes on to quote Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, who explains, ‘In a relationship conflict, crying is often a woman's response to feeling unloved, and anger is often a man's response to feeling disrespected...’”

Gary Thomas goes on to say: “Men get most frustrated – and angriest – when they feel disrespected. If your conversation takes on a demeaning tone, you have as much chance of resolving something as you would baking a cake by throwing the ingredients down the garbage disposal. You can't control your husband's anger – but you can provoke it by being disrespectful. That doesn't excuse any inappropriate actions on his part, but if you truly want to be part of the solution, then learn how to disagree with your husband without showing a lack of respect...”

FWIW, I'm not seeing a fundamental difference between the messages that these two authors give to wives.

199. on [February 8, 2009 at 2:26 am](#)  Marilyn

Hi Wayne,

Um...time for a confession because giving credit where credit is due is very important to me. My words about vertigo/fly by the instruments were my paraphrase of an illustration Emerson Eggerichs uses. I didn't cite him in the original comment because I was worried folks would tune me out if I did.

But, you're right, I think the concept is very biblical. It's as relevant to reaching across the comp/egal divide as it is to reaching across the gender divide. Thanks so much for sharing that this really resonated with you.

Now, I really do need to go!

200. on [February 8, 2009 at 2:55 am](#)  molleth

Hmm. I have to say, after reading the Bancroft book, the shockwaves of which are still sort of clanging against the walls of my soul, I \*get\* in a whole new way why books like Eggerich's were poison to me and blessing to Marilyn.

Reading about the mind of an abusive man, via Bancroft, especially actually getting down to \*why\* he does what he does, HOW he thinks and why it results in all sorts of different abuses, makes it clear: there is NO program, no book, no paradigm that will help him or make a marriage like that work.

If he is one of the rare and few that have the courage to do the hard work of changing, then maybe someday a book like Eggerich's wouldn't be poison for a woman married to him. Maybe. But until then, anything a typical marriage book says, no matter what paradigm it comes from, will be used by him to keep him in power and his wife in confusion/fear/exhaustion/tension.

In that sense, I agree with Sue. Perhaps the Christian world needs to embrace divorce at times, realizing that there are legitimate times where a woman NEEDS to be told that she needs to GET OUT, that no book is going to fix things, that marriage counseling will NOT help.

Bancroft, along with many other authors I've read, shares that marriage counseling often makes things worse, because these guys are such good players...they look so good in public, and so the counseling tends to be the type given to a typical marriage with a few problems...leaving the wife feeling yet more confused ("Maybe it is 50/50 or all my fault, like he says it is...") or the wife is given exercises in how to "trust her husband," or to have sex regularly so that will help them bond, etc, or practice communication skills, all things that have nothing to do with their real problem, which is deep foundational things in \*him.\*

If marriage counseling makes things worse, then I would think most marriage books, geared for normal non-abusive couples, would also make things worse.

When the man is an abuser, it doesn't matter what the wife does or doesn't do, thinks or doesn't think, in the sense that it won't change him. Might make him worse, actually, if she starts getting healthier. That was the case for me, in that the more I realized that I was actually worth something, that I was a full human being, the worse it got (via frenzied attempts to keep me back down and a generalized seething hatred that I wasn't staying there anymore).

So, not surprisingly, Eggerich's words were used like fists on me—so many times I was mocked for the audacity of wanting to be respected because only men want that (my faith and my gender both being called into question in so doing).

Okay, so now I realize that Eggerich wasn't saying that. I realize also, though, that no matter how slowly or carefully my husband would have read Eggerich's \*actual\* words, NOTHING would have helped. The real problems were on a much deeper level.

That said, I think I'll probably always react to Eggerich like a person who accidentally touches a hot stove. I can't see me ever being able to read his book without it hurting deeply. I can't see me ever handing his book out to anybody (same with Shanti, etc). It's not his fault as much as it is just the association that his book title brings to my mind. It's just the way that information was used. (I can barely hear about modesty, either. When you've had \*modest\* clothes that you dared to "look sexy" in thrown away in a huff by your husband, you might hate the word modesty too).

But I can concede, in a way different than I ever have been able to before, that his book may very well be helpful in cases where husbands are not abusive, and maybe the same is true with Shanti Feldman. I don't know for sure, but I'm willing to bet it's a distinct possibility.

Warmly,  
Molly

PS. Too bad Mrs. Marilyn's going to be gone for a whole week before she sees this shocking comment. 😊 \*grins big\*

201. on [February 8, 2009 at 3:22 am](#)  Marilyn

Last minute need to check the weather report before leaving. ....both forecasted temperatures outside and current temperatures on the blog.

I hear you, Molly. Please, please keep in mind that Emerson is very explicit that L&R is directed to what he refers to as "good-willed spouses." And, just a final thought - when you say you could never recommend Eggerichs or Feldhahn because of your experiences, are you not viewing the "average" family through the lens of domestic abuse?

202. on [February 8, 2009 at 3:22 am](#)  Sue


Molly,

As you know I share your reaction. I can only say that all this stuff about respect seems to be pandering to male entitlement.

*The question needs to be asked: why do women tend to respond with hurt, and men tend to respond with anger? It all has to do with the male need for respect. Shaunti goes on to quote Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, who explains, 'In a relationship conflict, crying is often a woman's response to feeling unloved, and anger is often a man's response to feeling disrespected...'*

Women cry more than they explode because as the physically weaker of the two, being violent could get them into trouble. Men are angry because they can get away with it. They have greater expectations of getting their own way, and greater aggrievement when they don't get it because of the way they are raised. This is relative. Women could be like this too, if they are raised this way.

Just seeing these words makes me glad to be off the rollercoaster. It seems to me that a book should be able to give advice that was healthy and safe for everyone.

203. on [February 8, 2009 at 3:24 am](#)  [John Hobbins](#)

Any followup to Molly's \*grinning\* comment is bound to be a let down, but I would suggest that Gary Thomas's Sacred Marriage is another piece in the puzzle.


That is,

(1) besides those marriages in which a spouse is a determined and utterly resourceful abuser (yes, there are wives who are off the charts in this sense as well),

(2) besides those marriages that can and do benefit deeply from resources like those provided by Thomas (Sacred Influence), Eggerichs (Love & Respect), and the new book by Sarah and Jim Sumner;

(3) there are other marriages in which many joys are shared, but which will be remembered by those who were party to them most of all insofar as marriage was "the merciless revealer, the great white searchlight turned on the darkest places of human nature" (Katherine Anne Porter, quoted by Gary Thomas, Sacred Marriage, p. 27).

Marriage really is difficult in many cases, without being impossible. I continue to think that a marriage whose focus is not inward (mutuality) but outward (in service of God and neighbor) has stronger legs to stand on.

204. on [February 8, 2009 at 4:09 am](#)  [Charis](#)

I'm glad you found some things you liked in there, Marilyn. I do think he speaks life. I skipped the chapter(s) in the middle of the book on submission (deliberately, for similar reasons Molly mentioned), and re: the quote, he loses me there, I never cried in front of my husband for 17 years, (since the adultery in year 8), Not safe to cry in front of him. If he provoked tears in a teenage daughter he would lean his head back and laugh a belly laugh and mock them. I could not handle that. I wouldn't cry in front of him.... and I was very conflict avoidant, a peacekeeper in a very unhealthy way. Some books I've read make me feel like I'm not a very "normal" woman in those respects.... (((((shrug))))))

The Bancroft book Molly mentioned and Thomas' book are both available for a limited preview on googlebooks if anyone is interested in a peek.

205. on [February 8, 2009 at 5:50 am](#)  [molleth](#)

PS. One more thought. I have had email communication with both Eggerich and Sumner (both of which happened through friends setting it up without my knowledge).

It was very very kind of both authors to take the time to email me. I appreciated that. But their differing treatment was truly a lesson in opposites.

For example, when Sumner heard my marital particulars (which, heh, included me admitting that I'd read her recently published marriage book and didn't find it helpful), she immediately said that her marriage book would not apply to me, period. (Among other things, she recommended her leadership book, as it would help me grow in the strengths of leadership that I once had)...

This was very different from Eggerich. It felt to me tha, Eggerich spoke authoritatively that his book would work if I would work it. This is the same tired message abused women get in the church world: it's all your fault, work harder, do more. But the other aspect of what he did was equally painful—it felt to me that his attitude was that my


experience didn't matter, because his way was right. I.e, he had the answer and I had no voice worth listening to unless I got with his program.

I had no expectations of anything with either author—I realize that they're not getting paid to be my personal counselors, etc, and had no dreams of them solving all my problems. Yet with Eggerich, I felt completely disrespected, small and insignificant. If I had to use one word to describe it, it would be "dismissive." Whereas with Sumner, I felt a strong warm hug. (Btw, Sumner also later sent me two follow-up emails full of genuine encouragement and prayers!).

Bottom line, Sumner seems less apt to put men and women in boxes, and offers more fluidity so that those who don't fit the stereotypes still feel human—both in her books and when she heard my own particular story. I'm not sure I could say that about Eggerich.

That said, I wouldn't judge a person's soul on the basis of a few emails. Yeesh. I know that most of us don't have the time nor inclination to talk with people we don't even know, etc. And who knows, Eggerich's could have meant something altogether different than what his email communicated to me. Seriously. But my impressions of the book were decidedly not strengthened from my experience of communicating with him.

PSS. I still hold to my earlier comment, though, which agreed that his book may not be harmful to those in healthy relationships, and could provide helpful tools to boot (I'd read it again if I wanted to be double-dog sure of what I'm saying but, heh, I can't do it, so I'll just wager a guess). This is growth, for me, because I would say I began my tenure on Complegal with the view that his book was plain evil. So, see, Marilyn, growth happens. 😊

206. on [February 8, 2009 at 1:34 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Gol, thanks, you guys, I really appreciate the encouragement.

John, thanks for the reminder about IV Press. I should keep them in mind. I do think that they are associated with the egal side by comps, however.

Yes, I should read more of Sumner and the Briscoes, and would love to communicate with them one day.

207. on [February 8, 2009 at 1:57 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Agh, can't resist another comment before getting ready for church!:

On books, materials, et al: I think that if you take bits of certain authors or read them through a certain lens, it is possible to benefit from what they say. Others, there is more wheat but still a good deal of chaff—the chaff being the attitude under the "specifics" being taught. I tend to read a book looking for overall truth, or spiritual honesty. If I don't see this pervading the material, even if it may have a questionable detail or two (nothing is perfect, as neither is my own writing!), then I honestly do not trust it. I do think there is a lot of material that subtly reinforces unhealthy patterns of relating.

I have looked over the L & R website, and was alarmed by some of the things I read there. Have not read Gary Thomas.

Yet I also think that both of the things mentioned above, by Charis re: Thomas and Sue and Molleth re: the abusive person are true. It seems that the quote of Thomas' that Charis provides is about a wife getting free from needing her husband's approval, and how acting towards him in a way that seeks not to lose this approval doesn't do either any favors (doesn't properly challenge him). This does not address (and perhaps didn't intend to) the marriage in which

either spouse is faulty to the point where a healthy ("normal") sense of pain, compassion, etc. are missing.

*Gary Thomas goes on to say: "Men get most frustrated – and angriest – when they feel disrespected..."*

This is very true of me as well, and I would imagine that there are other women like me. It also hurts me deeply to be disrespected, and I also express hurt via anger, and I know that my husband does as well.

208. on [February 8, 2009 at 5:11 pm](#)  *believer3*

*"It also hurts me deeply to be disrespected, and I also express hurt via anger, and I know that my husband does as well."*


Basic respect as a human being is something that everyone is due. We are all made in God's image. Further respect (a sort of trust) must be earned to some degree.

I suspect that some of the advice in books about respecting husbands is more than respect, perhaps falling short of adulation. Men are human and equally as prone to error as are all humans. As such men and women need loving respectful help from one another to urge us toward the maturity that Christ demonstrated while on earth.

209. on [February 8, 2009 at 5:13 pm](#)  *believer3*

*"Bottom line, Sumner seems less apt to put men and women in boxes, and offers more fluidity so that those who don't fit the stereotypes still feel human—both in her books and when she heard my own particular story."*

Thanks for sharing about your communication with Sumner. That was helpful.

210. on [February 8, 2009 at 6:13 pm](#)  *Don Johnson*

Trying to figure out who needs respect MORE, men or women, seems a futile endeavor.

All people need it.

211. on [February 8, 2009 at 7:43 pm](#)  *Mara*

Sue,

Do you remember on the Grace and Truth blog (Wade Burleson sp?) that an author was posting toward the last of a very long thread dealing with a gender issue?

Was it Eggerich or someone all together different. I ask you because I believe it was you that got involved in dialoging with him. It was one of those really long threads, over 200 posts and most people had dropped out by then. This author confessed to being abused somehow as a boy. He also got frustrated when you didn't see eye to eye with him and felt attacked (if you were the sue that conversed with him.)

I'm asking because if it was Eggerich, I'd like to point something out about what he said there. But I don't want to

bring it up if it wasn't him.

I think I'll go see if I can find that thread again, because it ties in with something I've been thinking as I read the discussion here.

If you know or remember what I'm talking about, let me know.

212. on [February 8, 2009 at 8:04 pm](#)  Sue

Yes,

It was Darby Livingston. I read one of his books in google books and I have been reading his blog A Profound Mystery.

I have mixed thoughts about what he has written, some very bad and some very good. I do think he was aware that his book was very insulting to abused women. I think he is conflicted, as are many men. They simply cannot acknowledge women as fellow human beings. I suffer intensely from the sense that some men reject women as fellow humans.

213. on [February 8, 2009 at 8:23 pm](#)  Mara

Okay, I found it a whole lot quicker than I thought I would and it wasn't Eggerich. It was just Molly's words about her interaction with Eggerich that made me think it might have been him.

This conversation at Grace and Truth also included Molly, Charis (as Gem), and Don even bopped in a minute. There were 350 posts. (Did I miss anybody?)

The post was called "Do Southern Baptists Set Women Up for Abuse?" It was posted December 30, 2008.

I didn't enter into this one. But I remember what I thought as I read Darby Livingston's comment posted on Jan 2, at 11:42 am 2009.

We talk a lot here on comp/egal about the abuse that happens to women in whatever situation they are involved, egal, comp, patriarchy, etc. We talk about the damage and how it affects their thinking.

It frustrates some egals that some comps dismiss egals as a bunch of abused women who can't submit. And it frustrates some comps when they think egals play the abuse card instead of dealing with what the Bible says.

But we don't talk much about the abuse men receive as boys by the hands or mouths of their mothers or other females in their lives and how it affects their thinking.

I'm wondering how many men in pulpits across the country are influenced by past abuse from women. I wonder how many unwittingly preach woman submission through the lens of their own hurt.

You know the saying, hurt people hurt other people.

I simply wonder.

P.S. I do not feel that any of the men who post here regularly have any of these issues. I believe you guys are secure in your identity or you wouldn't be posting here. If there are any wounds from the past, you don't seem afraid to deal with them (perhaps not publically, but you don't seem to be in denial). I'm thinking more along the lines of the drive-bys we get from time to time or those with blogs that tolerate no disagreement. It's the sort of insecurity on those blogs that makes me wonder.



214. on [February 8, 2009 at 8:24 pm](#)  Sue

Here are the only two paragraphs that he [Darby Livingston] wrote about abuse in his book. I think he was embarrassed about this and rightly so. But it perhaps does not reflect his real attitude. Who knows?

“In considering 1 Peter 3, some wives voice concerns about abusive situations. Is a woman supposed to stay in a situation where she is in danger? Most would answer no. However, just being alive in a fallen world implies constant danger. Any sinful person can turn on someone with incredible ferocity. Was Sarah in danger? Was Sarah abused by Abraham? According to some modern, therapeutic definitions, she probably was. But God holds her up as an example of faithfulness and honor.

My point is that as people grow more independent and selfish, they broaden definitions to excuse their decisions. It has generally been acceptable to our social conscience for physically abused women to flee a dangerous relationship. That’s an uncomfortable position to be in. But then, someone decided that living with a selfish husband can be just as uncomfortable as living with a physically abuse husband.”

At this point google books denies access, so I asked Darby if there was another paragraph on abuse in the book and he denied it.

“Uncomfortable?” What shocks me is that a man who endured abuse himself, could write something so lacking in emotion and compassion for a wife who lives a lifetime in violence and subordination. It is as if women are not really human in the same way that men are.

There is nothing really wrong with what he wrote, but it is his only treatment of abuse in the entire book. Men could be abused too, so I am not thinking purely of women here.

215. on [February 8, 2009 at 8:36 pm](#)  Sue

Mara,

My comments are not posted on the same timeline as yours so we cannot interact very usefully sometimes. I have appealed to the moderator many times for the opportunity to engage with others on the same footing.

I simply believe that most people, and especially people who blog, are very damaged and hurt in some way. Clearly I am, and people are able to take that into account.

Others, including the men, who comment here, each have their story. I am not without this awareness and sympathy.

What I want to know is why it is so despicable for a woman to want women to be free from subordination, but it is not despicable for men to want to continue to subordinate women.

It is as if the self-seeking drive that a woman has to be free from violence and coercion and deprivation is somehow worse than the self-seeking drive a man has to suborn the goals and freedom and independence of conscience that a woman has.

216. on [February 8, 2009 at 11:21 pm](#)  Mara

A sense of entitlement is a very hard thing to fight.

Thousands of years and generation after generation of this sort of thinking won't go away gracefully.

Being in the position of believed authority gives a man a sense of security that is hard to let go. Next to impossible for an insecure man.

I was once in a discussion with an advocate of patriarchy (I don't get into those very often and for good reason) and pleaded with him. If a man is insecure and wounded, the answer is for him to get healed and delivered. The answer is not to tell the woman to make herself smaller so that he feels bigger.

I totally get men needing respect. We all do. But how many men have really needed internal healing from deep wounds, have been in denial about it, and instead demanded more respect to puff up his false ego. There's not enough respect in the world to help out this kind of man.

217. on [February 8, 2009 at 11:29 pm](#)  [madame](#)

Mara,

*I totally get men needing respect. We all do. But how many men have really needed internal healing from deep wounds, have been in denial about it, and instead demanded more respect to puff up his false ego. There's not enough respect in the world to help out this kind of man.*

Wow, that is so true! And by giving him the respect he wants, the wife is supporting his denial. Usually they will demand more and more respect while disrespecting everyone around them. Nobody is happy in those households.

218. on [February 8, 2009 at 11:35 pm](#)  Mara

Sue: ““Uncomfortable??” What shocks me is that a man who endured abuse himself, could write something so lacking in emotion and compassion for a wife who lives a lifetime in violence and subordination. It is as if women are not really human in the same way that men are. ‘

I'm pretty sure he doesn't realize the lack of compassion. I'm wondering if he looks upon it as a lesson to himself on how not to be. Therefore his wife benefits from his pain. And those men he teaches to respect women and never raise a hand against them, their wives will benefit from his pain.

When a person sees themselves as the benevolent dictator, the one who sets up the home as a place of safety and justice as he sees fit, they are not concerned so much with the fact that maybe they are not really supposed to be the dictator. They concern themselves with being benevolent and miss the whole point that they are to partner, not dictate.

219. on [February 8, 2009 at 11:41 pm](#)  Mara

Madame,

I may be wrong on this one.

But part of me thinks that where women may be stronger is in the ability to self-examine or being able to see the wounded places in their hearts.

I've heard the saying that when women are depressed, they shop or eat.

When men are depressed they take over other countries.

I don't know how that really stacks up in gender differences. But they do say that most men will not admit depression, and when they feel bad, they don't look inward to find out why, they look outward to see who there is to blame. And it's really easy to blame the person closest to them.

Women do this too, I suppose. But I've heard that men are far more prone to do so.

220. on [February 8, 2009 at 11:43 pm](#)  [TL](#)

Some time ago I realized that prefacing 'dictator' with "benevolent" does not erase the dictatorship, nor does it mean that he/she is always benevolent, only that with his own understanding of benevolence he will attempt to be so. But the fact that he/she is already a dictator speaks negatively of his ability to rightly ascertain benevolence.

:^)

221. on [February 8, 2009 at 11:56 pm](#)  [madame](#)

Mara,

I was just thinking about this, wondering whether I should say it or not, thanks for stating it so well!

*But part of me thinks that where women may be stronger is in the ability to self-examine or being able to see the wounded places in their hearts.*

*most men will not admit depression, and when they feel bad, they don't look inward to find out why, they look outward to see who there is to blame. And it's really easy to blame the person closest to them.*

*Women do this too, I suppose. But I've heard that men are far more prone to do so.*

The married women I know best (my mom, my MIL and myself) are a lot more prone to see fault in ourselves than our husbands are. Now, when I don't just see the fault in myself, but I also acknowledge it to my husband, he is more likely to follow suit and see his fault too. It takes my first step to get him to move. I'm ok with that, as long as he follows suit! (har har, I'm the leader!!!!)

222. on [February 9, 2009 at 12:06 am](#)  [Charis](#)

I recall that discussion, Mara. IIRC it occurred around the same time that it became very clear to me that the pastor providing marriage counseling to my husband and I was operating out of just such "mother wounds". He had testified in a Sunday School about marriage about our "filters" and how his mother had put a knife to his throat and his dad had to pull her off him. He said with tears in his eyes "but that wasn't what hurt most. her words hurt most. she told me she would never love me again" and they sent him away to live with grandparents for a month and their relationship was never the same. What had he done to be thus abused? He had tipped over her china cabinet.

I feel for him, I really do. BUT, he could NOT handle any anger from a woman and he was not my ally in protecting my own children from their **father's** abusiveness. He saw everything through his own "dirty filters". I really think the church is in trouble when we have arrested children at the helm of all the "ministry". There is a reason why the Bible talks about christian **maturity** and qualifications for **elders**.

My own husband backslid badly on the mission field, and then blamed me for years because I was not willing to do

that again. Oddly enough, when we returned shipwrecked, we met with a couple for counseling and they told me “we can’t help you. you are doing everything right”. WHAT was I doing? I was doing just what Eggerich teaches. Hurts me that they could not see that there was gangrene that needed to be addressed and that my “behaving respectfully” was a bandaid. 20 years later, I remain married to an emotionally arrested boy in a man’s body.

223. on [February 9, 2009 at 12:08 am](#)  [madame](#)

I visited the L&R site. I read the stories about the diet book and the marriage book.

I bought a marriage book for my husband and one for me (Stormie Omartian’s books), read mine, tried to get my husband to read his, leaving it on the bedside table, putting it into his laptop case, leaving it casually on the coffee table in the living room... A few weeks later, he was looking for a green book on marriage. I pointed at the book (which was right beside him, on the coffee table) but he said he was looking for a different one. It turns out I inspired him to find one for himself, and he chose “The Christian Family” by Larry Christenson. Yikes....

I ended up throwing the Power of the Praying Husband in the fire in a fit of rage a few months later.

My husband recently bought me a bottle of a very vile laxative after I commented on wanting to do a colon cleanse (I know you all wanted to know about this). He also brought some information on dieting that the pharmacist gave him. I put the laxative bottle in the medicine cabinet, thanked him for thinking about me, and smiled because he got it so wrong yet so right!

It didn’t make me feel unloved. Maybe it’s because I’m past the time when he can hurt me by suggesting solutions for problems.

Is it possible that the book is aimed at newlyweds?

224. on [February 9, 2009 at 12:22 am](#)  [madame](#)

*I really think the church is in trouble when we have arrested children at the helm of all the “ministry”. There is a reason why the Bible talks about christian maturity and qualifications for elders.*

You are SO RIGHT Charis!

225. on [February 9, 2009 at 12:27 am](#)  [Charis](#)

Mara:

I totally get men needing respect. We all do. But how many men have really needed internal healing from deep wounds, have been in denial about it, and instead demanded more respect to puff up his false ego. There’s not enough respect in the world to help out this kind of man.

madame:

Wow, that is so true! And by giving him the respect he wants, the wife is supporting his denial. Usually they will demand more and more respect while disrespecting everyone around them. Nobody is happy in those households.

you ladies have nailed it!

It boils down to the definition of “respect” I think. The Bible teaches us all to “outdo one another in showing honor”

(Romans 12) and we are to “think up on those things which are true right noble pure lovely admirable excellent, and praiseworthy” (Phil 4). BUT that does not mean denying reality, lying to the Holy Spirit (like Sapphira in Acts 5), whitewashing, putting bandaids on gangrene.

My husband would feel disrespected if anyone had a different opinion or if I was sick and couldn't “put out” that night. So unless I disrespected MYSELF, he felt “disrespected”. I got very deep in that pit where I lacked self respect. That is not honoring to the GOD who made me.

226. on [February 9, 2009 at 12:42 am](#)  [EricW](#)

*I really think the church is in trouble when we have arrested children at the helm of all the “ministry”.*

Substitute “country” for “church” and “government” for “ministry.”

227. on [February 9, 2009 at 1:50 am](#)  [molleth](#)

*“My husband would feel disrespected if anyone had a different opinion or if I was sick and couldn't “put out” that night. So unless I disrespected MYSELF, he felt “disrespected”. I got very deep in that pit where I lacked self respect. That is not honoring to the GOD who made me.”*

Exactly.

They only feel respected when we are disrespected. They confuse love and abuse. My husband felt I “proved” that I loved him when I allowed him to violate me (in a myriad of different ways). When I respected myself, he felt disrespected.

These are sick men. Books like Love and Respect are weapons in their hands. The thing is, though, that they don't look sick. They usually look very very good. They can come off like amazing men of God, leaders, wonderful family men. They know how to put on quite a show (and some of it's 100% authentic—they DO have great qualities that are legit). That's how we got married to them in the first place.

228. on [February 9, 2009 at 2:16 am](#)  [Sue](#)

What is really bizarre is that the Christian marriage books that preceded these did not even mention submission of the wife at all.

Walter and Ingrid Trobisch were not of this ilk, nor was Paul Tournier who wrote To Understand Each Other. It was an old fashioned view of women to be sure, but “love and respect” were a bound couplet that you offered another person, not some kind of trade off.


229. on [February 9, 2009 at 2:44 pm](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Charis,

Thanks for the link to the devotional. I love that passage of Ephesians. I agree with the author that it is important to

think of God in terms of Father, and that family as an institution originates with Him, as does marriage (there's that, um, "head" word again 😊). We are His children that He can give us a glorious inheritance, not rule us with an iron hand! The iron hand is against the rebellious and for (protection, provision, etc.) the submissive. He desires to strengthen us with power that we may comprehend the dimensions of His love and be *filled* with Him. All these unfathomably good things that God want to give us in Christ!

It's this fullness that I see as the purpose for the whole "subjection" passage in I Cor. 15. It seems to be a subjection to glory and unity ("all in all"), not to dominating rule. Death is swallowed up in victory!

230. on [February 9, 2009 at 2:58 pm](#)  [bonnie3](#)

*"love and respect" were a bound couplet that you offered another person, not some kind of trade off.*

Wow, Sue...I remember reading both the Trobisches and Tournier years and years ago (at least 1/2 my life ago) and being positively influenced, although honestly can't remember what they said 😊. I wonder if they'd be written off today as being too influenced by the 60s?

*not some kind of trade-off.*


Brilliant.

231. on [February 9, 2009 at 2:59 pm](#)  [Charis](#)

Amen! Preach sister!

This is why I dislike the tendency to want to throw out "wifely submission" because of abuse. SUBMISSION is not a bad thing. SUBMITTING **properly** is a GOOD thing and does not rob us of liberty but brings us into the wide and glorious place GOD has for us. (key word: "properly", submission is a high calling and a sacred trust- we get to be a role model of JESUS CHRIST!)

(Submission is not to be confused with "obedience" which DOES rob the wife of her Christian liberty! BTDT)

232. on [February 9, 2009 at 3:10 pm](#)  [bonnie3](#)

LOL, EricW

233. on [February 9, 2009 at 3:25 pm](#)  [bonnie3](#)

On confusing love with abuse, I wonder if this happens because the abuser was abused him- or herself by a primary caretaker (parent), with whom a child naturally has a love relationship. Or, by a parent who abusively spanked or otherwise punished (abused) him or her, while saying, "I'm doing this because I love you."

I grew up very confused in this area, and, though I've learned a lot since then (the *Boundaries* book helped a lot), the effects linger.

234. on [February 9, 2009 at 3:36 pm](#)  [believer3](#)

Charis wrote:

*“It boils down to the definition of “respect” I think. The Bible teaches us all to “outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12) and we are to “think upon those things which are true right noble pure lovely admirable excellent, and praiseworthy” (Phil 4). BUT that does not mean denying reality, lying to the Holy Spirit (like Sapphira in Acts 5), whitewashing, putting bandaids on gangrene.*

*My husband would feel disrespected if anyone had a different opinion or if I was sick and couldn't “put out” that night. So unless I disrespected MYSELF, he felt “disrespected”. I got very deep in that pit where I lacked self respect. That is not honoring to the GOD who made me.”*

It may be that because men have more personal physical power and also socially they have allowed themselves to hold most of the powers of society, that they have a tendency to hang onto worldly power/authority, because they can. It is not easy to be a servant when the world says you can be an authority, lord and ruler and when the world laughs at “servanthood”.

I sometimes wonder about men debating over being considered an authority to their wives in light of Christ's words to the Thunder Brothers, Zebedee's sons.

“Matt. 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

235. on [February 9, 2009 at 3:43 pm](#)  [Charis](#)

Your comment reminds me of a deeply healing experience, Bonnie. I had been an evangelical Christian for 25 years and I understood that “God loves me” and “God is GOOD” in my head. I had heard that an abusive father affects our view of God but I really thought I had settled that very early in my Christian walk- I KNEW that God was not the same as my father. It was crystal clear there was no comparison.

So, one week my 7 yo son had a very high fever and was hallucinating. I was very scared, and I really thought that God might take him away because we were failing to “get the message” and be good enough parents. Turned out my son was dehydrated. Then my two dogs ran away and were gone for 9 days. I had given them up for dead. My children would keep praying every day. Again, I thought that God was inflicting me to “teach me a lesson”. I would keep asking Him, “what am I missing? what is it you are trying to teach me?” When I was doing a Bible Study (Beth Moore Believing God) and I was on this section about miracles, lo- the first dog comes up to the glass door wagging her tail. It was a miracle!

And God impressed upon me that I had been seeing Him as abusive- “TOE THE LINE OR I’M GONNA GET YOU!!!” He said to me (not in words but quite plainly) “You see? You have misunderstood me! I am not like that! **I am NOT an abusive father!**“

236. on [February 9, 2009 at 5:01 pm](#)  [madame](#)

*And God impressed upon me that I had been seeing Him as abusive- "TOE THE LINE OR I'M GONNA GET YOU!!!" He said to me (not in words but quite plainly) "You see? You have misunderstood me! I am not like that! I am NOT an abusive father!"*

My version of that is

God's sitting up there with his big long stick, waiting for me to disobey so he can give me a whack.


I can fully relate to this:

*So, one week my 7 yo son had a very high fever and was hallucinating. I was very scared, and I really thought that God might take him away because we were failing to "get the message" and be good enough parents.*

I tend to run away from God when I'm afraid I'm not toeing the line. I end up carrying the burden alone.

I know it has a lot to do with how I was parented. My dad still believes children should have a certain fear of their fathers, and he tends to overemphasize God's holiness, wrath, and that loving Him means keeping His commandments. We also heard a lot how even Jesus had to learn to obey.



237. on [February 9, 2009 at 8:01 pm](#)  [Mara](#)

Sue: “What I want to know is why it is so despicable for a woman to want women to be free from subordination, but it is not despicable for men to want to continue to subordinate women.

It is as if the self-seeking drive that a woman has to be free from violence and coercion and deprivation is somehow worse than the self-seeking drive a man has to suborn the goals and freedom and independence of conscience that a woman has.”

When a person’s world view is based on a foundation of hierachy, when order, as defined by gender hierachy, is viewed as handed down by God, questioning this concept is too painful. It is as though questioning the man’s right to rule is questioning God’s right to rule. It overthrows the much needed, much worshiped order of things. Order becomes a god unto itself.

I met a man who believed in Patriarchy who thought that if women didn’t hold up men a rulers in every way, then they were spitting in the face of God because men represented God on this earth as fathers and husbands.

It is a blindness, really. And fear. An insecurity based on false doctrine that cannot be questioned. Questioning it might knock God off His throne and the earth off her axis.

Women trapped in this sort of thinking, who want to hold onto God but who have been wounded by heavy handed gender hierarchy must search for God themselves.

Charis’s example of God showing Himself as NOT an abusive Father is an excellent example.

Me reading Song of Solomon, the Proverbs Woman, the first part of Ezekial 16 and the last part of Hosea 2 and seeing God’s real heart for those He loves helped me.

God’s love is real.

But a controlling environment and male entitlement distorts this love.

Those who haven’t experienced this in their soft comp or even medium comp worlds may have a hard time understanding what the fight is about.

The fight is finding the true nature of God.

He is not always well represented by sinful men (and women) on this earth.

I don’t know if this is the sort of response you are looking for, Sue, or anything that helps you at all. But these are things I wonder as well.

238. on [February 9, 2009 at 8:35 pm](#)  [EricW](#)

Charis / madame:

While it’s certainly not high-level theology, and maybe not even correct theology, a day spent at the Shack (i.e., spent reading the pop-Xian book **The Shack** by William P. Young) might be beneficial in healing authoritarian and disciplinarian views of God. Mama knows best.

239. on [February 9, 2009 at 8:51 pm](#)  [Charis](#)

Thanks Eric,

I did read that book and enjoyed it very much. Sounds to me like the author went through a similar journey of coming

out of agreement with lies about God and getting to know the real character of God. Personally, I loved the garden chapter, such an artistic portrayal of truth!

240. on [February 9, 2009 at 9:12 pm](#)  [madame](#)

Eric,

I was given the book as a late Christmas present from a friend. I haven't started reading it yet.

241. on [February 10, 2009 at 1:53 am](#)  [Bonnie](#)

Charis, I'm glad that God showed you what kind of Father He is, and can't help but think that He does this for everyone who really wants to know, even if the process is slow, as it was for me (perhaps He shows us as we're able to handle it).

I used to worry about every little thing I did, whether it was "okay" or not...what an absolute tyranny. Now, I probably don't worry enough! But this just shows how far He has brought me and I can do nothing but fall at His feet in gratitude.

Here's another random thought on abuse: I am convinced that \*subtle\* abuse is widespread. Perhaps the reason the abusive husband (or wife, but I'll say husband for now) feels he must keep control over everything including his wife is because of how he thinks it reflects upon him — it's all about his sense of performance, perhaps because of abuse or formative experiences or whatever that caused him to feel he must keep up with a certain legalistic standard. The abusive parent does similarly.

It's based on insecurity and feeling of low worth. Enabling it simply perpetuates this and does not call the abuser (mild as the abuse may be) to account. He or she will never be forced to reckon with his/her lack of living properly unless he is not allowed to control others.

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