

to him by his neighbor. He that is pure in the flesh, let him be so, and not boast, knowing that it is Another who bestoweth his continence upon him. Let us consider, brethren, of what matter we were made; who and what manner of beings we were, when we came into the world; from what a sepulchre and what darkness He that molded and created us brought us into His world, having prepared His benefits aforehand ere ever we were born. Seeing therefore that we have all these things from Him, we ought in all things to give thanks to Him, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Clement 37:5-38:1).

5:22-23 If v. 21 lays forward the general statement requiring mutual submission of those within the family, then 5:22-6:9 particularizes this and how it was to be manifest in the homes of Paul’s audience. Vs. 22-33 lay forward the most important and intimate of human relationships, that of husbands and wives toward one another. Parallels can be seen between Ephesians 5:22-33 and other important sections of the Apostolic Scriptures, notably Paul’s concurring letter of Colossians:

EPHESIANS 5:22-33 AND THE HOUSEHOLD CODE ⁵⁸		
ITEM	EPHESIANS	COLOSSIANS AND PARALLELS
to wives	Wives...to your own husbands, as to the Lord (5:22)	Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord (Colossians 3:18) In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands... (1 Peter 3:1) encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children...being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored (Titus 2:4-5)
reason for conduct	the husband is the head of the wife, as Messiah also is the head of the [assembly]...as the [assembly] is subject to	[Messiah is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Messiah (1 Corinthians 11:3)]

⁵⁸ Ibid., 11:447-448.

	Messiah, so also the wives <i>ought to be</i> to their husbands in everything (5:23-24)	...so that the word of God will not be dishonored (Titus 2:5) ...may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior (1 Peter 3:1b-2)
to husbands	Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah also loved the [assembly] and gave Himself up for her (5:25) ...each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself... (5:33)	Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them (Colossians 3:19) You husbands in the same way, live with <i>your wives</i> in an understanding way... (1 Peter 3:7a)
reason for conduct	So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Messiah also <i>does</i> the [assembly], because we are members of His body... (5:28-32; cf. Genesis 2:24)	For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience (Colossians 3:6) ...show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7b)

Most in our Messianic faith community today, when reading through vs. 22-33, believe that these instructions are fairly straightforward and that no explanation of them is really needed. The book is closed on all of this, right? On the contrary, I would submit that the book is about **to finally be opened**. While some of us have kept relatively quiet on our views of husbands and wives within the family (and by extension men *and* women in positions of leadership in ministry), the polygamy fiasco that hit some parts of the independent Messianic

movement in 2008⁵⁹ showed us that a re-consideration for passages like Ephesians 5:21-33 is urgently needed. The relationship that a husband and wife have in marriage is to be modeled after the relationship Yeshua has to the *ekklēsia*, and it affects how people within local congregations and assemblies work together and relate to one another. Most of today's Messianic movement, *which rightly abhors a practice like polygamy*, still holds to a "men first, women second" mentality. I do not think that I am alone in my view that a closer reading of vs. 22-33 within the framework of the First Century Mediterranean would be a good thing, as we consider how family life naturally affects congregational life.

It would not be a wise thing for us to automatically read one's common marriage experience in the Twenty-First Century West into a First Century text, especially as Paul is primarily writing to couples married in a Greco-Roman context. What Paul says in Ephesians had to be crafted very carefully, lest outsiders think that his Jewish Savior⁶⁰ was out to completely undermine basic structures that held society together, causing anarchy. This is not Paul's intention at all, although "many Romans were troubled by the spread of 'religions from the East'...which they thought would undermine traditional Roman family values" (*IVPBBC*),⁶¹ which meant that Judaism's advocating of more personal freedom within the family was a definite threat. Even more of a threat was the First Century Messianic movement and its equality for all people!

Within the Greco-Roman culture of the day, women were required to submit to their husbands, specifically by worshipping their husband's gods. Plutarch said, "A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband's friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions" (*Advice to Bride and Groom* 19).⁶² Knowing the purpose of the gospel was to liberate people from sin, and not create havoc in the home, what Paul describes in vs. 22-31 about husbands and wives was not to be radical so as to tear people apart. On the contrary, it was to draw husbands and wives closer together as one in the Lord, committed to one another in His love. Witherington describes some of the purpose that these verses are trying to achieve:

⁵⁹ Consult the author's article "Is Polygamy for Today?" (appearing in *Men and Women in the Body of Messiah: Answering Critical Questions*).

⁶⁰ Keep in mind here that although "Savior" or *sōtēr* (σωτήρ) is surely a Divine title used in reference to the LORD God (Deuteronomy 32:15; Isaiah 12:2; 45:15, 21; 60:16; 63:8; Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 3:18; Psalm 24:5; 27:1; 62:2), it was also a term used to refer to Caesar. This would have caused the Philippians, among others, to really think through where their loyalties lied when Paul told them, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah" (Philippians 3:20). To them, this communicated that the emperor was *not* "Savior."

For a further discussion consult A.B. Luter, "Savior," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp 867-868, and the author's commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁶¹ Keener, *IVPBBC*, 551.

⁶² Plutarch: *Advice to Bride and Groom*, Loeb Classical Library edition (1928). Accessible online at <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Coniugalia_praecepta*.html>.

“The code does not reflect a defensive or apologetic quality, as though the church were trying to either blend in with the existing cultural standards or to defend its distinctiveness. Rather the code is a bold and positive attempt to modify the existing structure.”⁶³

In the view of *IVPBBC*, while Paul does borrow from some traditional Roman family structures, he does modify things. In the quotations offered from Aristotle’s *Politics* (1.1253b; 1.1259a), the philosopher addresses master and slave, husband and wife, parents and children. But Paul addresses husband and wife (5:21-33), children and parents (6:1-4), and slave and master (6:5-9). If there is anything that Paul directly contradicts from the Greco-Roman *Haustafel*, it is that “unlike most ancient writers, Paul undermines the basic premise of these codes: the absolute authority of the male...” (*IVPBBC*).⁶⁴ Paul teaches that husbands are actually expected to serve their wives, treating them as they would their own bodies (v. 28). Paul is, in a very careful way, being subversive in that he wants the family unit to not be a place where the man is a total autocrat.

Mutual submission within the family, especially between a husband and wife, was something foreign to Greco-Roman values, *and even some of the Jewish values*, of the First Century. In 5:21-6:9 we see Paul directly confronting some of the ancient household codes of the Mediterranean, and what they mean in light of the gospel. Ephesians 5:22-33, in particular, present us with some difficult questions, as we look at these verses in a Twenty-First Century world where women have a great deal more opportunities than they did in ancient times. Marshall is absolutely right to remind us, “Of all the ethical statements in the NT this is the one that is probably least acceptable to Christians in the third millennium AD!”⁶⁵ This is why we must try our best to read it from the perspective of the original audience *first*. Marshall continues, “It is more to the point...that the context is one of mutual submission, which does not absolve either husbands or wives from being submissive to each other.”⁶⁶

5:22 V. 22 begins the particularization of the general statement made in v. 21: “Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (NASU). Here, you must note that the NASU has provided “*be subject*” in *italics*, whereas the Greek simply has *gunaikēs tois idiois andrasin hōs tō Kuriō* (γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ), or “wives to your husbands as to the Lord.” Many believe that the verb “*be subject*” is supplied by context, being dependent on v. 21—but is it, really?

Paul states that a wife is to act toward her husband the same way as she would act toward the Lord. This certainly does involve submission, but this submission is not one way. Traditional interpreters like Harold W. Hoehner do rightly say, “the second partner is also to show submissiveness by his care and concern for the first partner,”⁶⁷ as the husband has responsibility as well. The omission, however, of the verb “submit” from the early textual

⁶³ Witherington, 321.

⁶⁴ Keener, *IVPBBC*, 551.

⁶⁵ Marshall, in *ECB*, 1391.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Hoehner, in *BKCNT*, 640.

witnesses of Ephesians 5:22, does indicate, though that a wife’s subjection is not something in Paul’s mind—as opposed to the mind of a later copyist.⁶⁸

Greek and Roman men would have had a very difficult time thinking of their wives as their equals, something that can be substantiated from literature extant from the times. Such views ran completely contrary to the creation of man and woman by God in the Garden of Eden:

CREATION OF MAN AND WOMAN BY GOD	CREATION OF WOMAN IN HELLENISM
<p>So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them...And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken” ...Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “Humankind” when they were created (Genesis 1:27; 2:22-23; 5:2, NRSV)</p>	<p>[Prometheus giving fire to man] stung high-thundering Zeus deep to the spirit, and angered him in his heart....At once he made an affliction for mankind to set against the fire. The renowned Ambidexter moulded from earth the likeness of a modest maiden, by Kronos’ son’s design....When he had made the pretty bane to set against a blessing...Both immortal gods and mortal men were seized with wonder then they saw that precipitous trap, more than mankind can manage. For from her is descended the female sex, a great affliction to mortals as they dwell with their husbands...as a bane for mortal men has high-thundering Zeus created women, conspirators in causing difficulty (Hesiod <i>Theogony</i>)⁶⁹</p> <p>Our women...must strip for exercise, then—their excellence will be all the clothes they need. They must play their part in war and in all other duties of a Guardian, which will be their sole occupation....that our men and women Guardians should be forbidden by law to live together in separate households, and all the women should be common to all the men; similarly, children should be held in common, and no parent should</p>

⁶⁸ Cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, pp 608-609.

⁶⁹ Hesiod: *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M.L. West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp 20-21.

	<p>know its child, or child its parent (Plato <i>Republic</i> 456e, 457d)⁷⁰</p> <p>[H]alf the human race—the female sex, the half which in any case is inclined to be secretive and crafty, because of its weakness (Plato <i>Laws</i> 780e)⁷¹</p> <p>The men of the first generation who lived cowardly or immoral lives were, it is reasonable to suppose, reborn in the second generation as women....That is how women and the female sex generally came into being (Plato <i>Timaeus</i> 91a-d)⁷²</p> <p>It is possible, as we have said, to observe first in animate beings the presence of a ruling authority, both of the sort exercised by a master over slaves and of the sort exercised by a statesman over fellow citizens...The same principle is true of the relation of man to other animals. Tame animals have a better nature than wild, and it is better for all such animals that they should be ruled by man because they then get the benefit of preservation. Again, the relation of male to female is naturally that of the superior to the inferior, of the ruling to the ruled. This general principle must similarly hold good of all human beings generally (Aristotle <i>Politics</i> 1.1254b)⁷³</p> <p>For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male....The first departure indeed is that the offspring should become female instead of male; this, however, is a natural necessity...And the monstrosity, though not necessary in regard of a final cause and an end, yet is necessary accidentally....For females are weaker and colder in nature, and we must look upon</p>
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⁷⁰ Plato: *Republic*, pp 167, 168.

⁷¹ Plato: *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (London: Penguin Books, 1970), pp 217-218.

⁷² Plato: *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1977), pp 122, 123.

⁷³ Aristotle, *Politics*, 16.

	the female character as being a sort of natural deficiency (Aristotle <i>On the Generation of Animals</i> 767b, 737a, 775a) ⁷⁴
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This chart has reproduced just a small sampling of some of the many possible views present regarding the creation of women in Hellenistic religion and philosophy, referencing a few of the most influential. Suffice it to say, it is very easy to see how the creation of women as a curse upon men **contrasts significantly** with the creation of Eve as Adam’s “helper” (Genesis 2:18) for which he was extremely joyous and thankful. Greek and Roman husbands of the First Century would widely have had an extremely difficult time thinking of their wives as being any kind of equal—especially if Zeus had originally created women to be a curse to men! With these kinds of sentiments floating around the Hellenized world about females, we should not be surprised in the least to see that homosexuality was also rampant.⁷⁵

Many men in today’s Judaism, Christianity, and the Messianic movement—while perhaps not coming from a Hellenized background as the majority of Paul’s original audience in Ephesians—do likewise have difficulty seeing women as their equals in the Lord. One factor that did not help the First Century Believers was how “Age differences contributed to this disparity: husbands were normally older than their wives, often by over a decade in Greek culture” (*IVPBB*).⁷⁶ Men who were in their thirties typically married women in their early teens, who in turn had not been given sufficient schooling. This is not generally a problem in today’s Western world, where spouses are often only a few years apart or even the same age, and both genders receive the same basic education. Still, even while wives will be encouraged to submit to their husbands, the responsibility of the husbands to submit to their wives is often not emphasized enough in various religious circles today. I have seldom seen it happen in the Messianic community.

5:23 A wife is to submit to her husband the same as she would submit to the Lord, as an act of obedience to the Lord—but the principle of mutuality is that the husband too is required to submit (v. 21). In the husband’s submission to his wife, Paul says, “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Messiah also is the head of the [assembly], He Himself *being* the Savior of the body.” As the two are submitted to each other, the husband is to recognize himself as the “head” of his wife. But what does the husband being the “head” of his wife mean, specifically? Does it mean that he gets to treat his wife in whatever way he wants? Does he truly get to be an autocrat?

In the Hellenistic world, the husband being the “head” of his wife did largely mean that he got to be an autocrat. In desiring that women be utilitarian tools of the state, Plato said “if we are going to use men and women for the same purposes, we must teach them the same

⁷⁴ Aristotle: *On the Generation of Animals*, trans. Arthur Platt (Adelaide, South Australia: University of Adelaide Library, 2005). Accessible online at <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/generation/>>.

⁷⁵ For a further discussion with more documentation on Greco-Roman views of women, consult Cunningham and Hamilton, pp 71-83.

⁷⁶ Keener, *IVPBB*, 551.

things” (*Republic* 451e).⁷⁷ This reveals that in the Greek world, giving men and women equal opportunities was not something looked upon favorably. But it was Plato’s student Aristotle who specifically taught, “the relation of male to female is naturally that of the superior to the inferior, of the ruling to the ruled. This general principle must similarly hold good of all human beings generally” (*Politics* 1.1254b).⁷⁸ The question that has dogged many interpreters of v. 23, especially in the past twenty to thirty years, is whether or not the Christian Church (and by extension us as the Messianic movement) has adopted a view of the husband being “head” more consistent with Scripture, *or* more consistent with Hellenism.

There are two different views regarding “head” present in today’s evangelical Christian theology:

1. The traditional or **complementarian** view, which sees “head” as meaning the husband’s authority over the wife.
2. The **egalitarian** view (simply derived from the French *égal*, meaning “equal”), which sees “head” as relating to the man being the “source” or “origin” of the woman.

Complementarianism

Most of us in our religious experience have been exposed to the **complementarian** view of “head” in Ephesians 5:23. This is a view which holds that males and females are essentially equal in terms of their spiritual standing before God (cf. Galatians 3:28), but that there are specific roles only designated for males. Since Paul is writing in terms of an ancient society where a top-down, male-dominated family structure was the norm, it would seem fairly obvious that the man, who was created first, should take the lead. The more powerful male family members were responsible for the well being of weaker family members, namely the women. Within this framework, the submission of the wife to her husband comes because she is ordered under her husband. Complementarians consider that support of their view of “head” as meaning “authority” or “first,” comes from 1:22 where Yeshua is seen as “head over all things.”

The available lexical definitions of *kephalē* (κεφαλή) do allow it “to denote superior rank” (*BDAG*).⁷⁹ From this point of view, when Paul says “the man is the head of a woman” (1 Corinthians 11:3), and in this epistle that Yeshua is the Head of the assembly (4:15; cf. Colossians 1:18), the husband is first in the family with the wife coming second. Some suggest that Tanach typology of Israel being the wife of God is at work in v. 23 (Isaiah 54:4; 62:4; Ezekiel 16:7; Hosea 2:16). As the husband is the head of the wife, the traditional perspective, as summarized by Hoehner, would be “It means that she recognizes her husband is the head of the home and responds to him accordingly without usurping his authority to herself.”⁸⁰ So in this schema, it is the husband who would be the “head of the household.”

⁷⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 161.

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, 16.

⁷⁹ *BDAG*, 542.

⁸⁰ Hoehner, in *BKCNT*, pp 640-641.

Too much can be made of complementarians who argue that wives must submit to their husbands as though the husband is a complete superior, and women have little value. The basis of a wife's submission to her husband is obedience to the Lord and is motivated by love. O'Brien, supporting a complementarian view, is right to remind us, "Subordination smacks of exploitation and oppression that are deeply resented. But authority is not synonymous with tyranny, and the submission to which the apostle refers does not imply inferiority."⁸¹ Indeed, the vast majority of complementarians in today's Christianity encourage extreme respect and honor to be shown to women. A. Skevington Wood concurs, "He is not implying that women are inferior to men or that all women should be subject to men. The subjection, moreover, is voluntary, not forced."⁸² The issue at hand in v. 23 is the relation of husbands and wives in marriage. O'Brien is quite specific to state,

"The apostle is not urging every woman to submit to every man, but wives to their husbands. The use of the middle voice of this verb (cf. Col. 3:18) emphasizes the voluntary character of the submission."⁸³

It is also too much to say that the traditional perspective argues that a total and blinded obedience of wives to husbands is somehow taught *or demanded* by Paul (and likewise as though Paul would also argue blind obedience to civil government in Romans 13). This is not true at all, and not only of interpreters from the past century. Nineteenth Century commentator Adam Clarke emphasized that a wife must submit to her husband in "every lawful thing; for it is not intimated that they should obey their husbands in any thing criminal, or in any thing detrimental to the interests of their souls."⁸⁴ If a husband is engaged in illegal activities, or activities that clearly violate God's will and Law, then a wife is surely expected to resist.

Traditionalists hold to men and women being spiritual equals in the Lord, but advocate that a man's position as leader is necessary for familial cohesion. F. Foulkes comments, "in the family, for its order and its unity, there must be leadership, and the leadership is that of the husband and father."⁸⁵ But he goes on to describe how a married woman with equal rights in society may "make herself a career as well as her husband," and how "the New Testament...[says] she may do so, provided that it does not mean the sacrifice of the divine pattern for home life."⁸⁶ Most complementarians today do not oppose women in the workplace, and would solely argue that the issue of male "headship" only concerns the husband as benevolent leader of his family. Christian complementarians rightly argue against any kind of harsh or dictatorial leadership on behalf of the husband toward his wife and family.⁸⁷

⁸¹ O'Brien, 412.

⁸² Wood, in *EXP*, 11:75.

⁸³ O'Brien, 411.

⁸⁴ *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*. [E-Sword 8.0.8](#). MS Windows 9x. Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation, 2008.

⁸⁵ Foulkes, 155.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 156-157.

⁸⁷ One of the best complementarian perspectives that I have seen is expressed by Craig Blomberg in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, pp 123-184.

Egalitarianism

A second, and widely growing position in today's evangelicalism, is that of **egalitarianism**. Egalitarians view Galatians 3:28 as meaning that Yeshua the Messiah has brought total equality to the genders, and that roles previously allowed for men in the Tanach can now be opened up for women.⁸⁸ The lexical definition of *kephalē* (κεφαλή) as “source” like that “of a river” (*LS*),⁸⁹ meaning the headwaters of a river, is something that egalitarians strongly appeal to.⁹⁰ When Paul says, “Messiah is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Messiah” (1 Corinthians 11:3), “head” as meaning “source” or “origin” is what is intended, as from the Godhead (*ho Theos, ὁ θεός*) came forth the Messiah, the Messiah is the Creator of the world including the man/Adam, and from the side of the man/Adam came Eve. Philip B. Payne asks how if *kephalē*/head here is to mean “authority,” “Why would Paul say that Christ is the authority of every male human being? Is there any sense in which Christ would be the authority over men but not over women? If so, that would undermine the very universal lordship of Christ.”⁹¹

In Ephesians 5:23, viewing *kephalē*/head as “source,” when Paul says that the husband is the “head” of his wife, it is to be a reminder of what Adam said of Eve: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). Egalitarians strongly argue that “head” meaning any kind of “authority” in v. 23 is something that interpreters have read into the text, not being supported by an ideal of male-female equality in the Lord with mutual submission as the directive (v. 21). It is something more influenced by how in much of modern English, the term “head” is associated with leadership, not something always seen in Biblical Greek.

(The idea that most egalitarians are somehow “feminists,” because they advocate that men and women be given equal treatment in the Body of Messiah, is quite dumbfounded. Not withstanding a modern feminist movement that advocates abortion rights and worship of a mother goddess, historically the feminist movement has had many things that both Jews and Christians have supported. This would include things like: opposition to physical abuse and rape, wife beating, sexual harassment and exploitation, bride burning in countries like India, harsh physical labor in rural Africa, abortions of female children because they are female, and infirm female children being allowed to die because they are female. **These are things that all complementarians oppose.**)⁹²

⁸⁸ Keep in mind that the Tanach Scriptures are themselves rather revolutionary when it comes to the role of women, especially when the Torah's law codes are compared to those of the Ancient Near East.

Consult the author's article “Answering the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianics Encounter in the Torah” for more details, as well as the relevant sections of *TorahScope, Volume I* by Mark Huey (2010 paperback edition).

⁸⁹ *LS*, 430.

⁹⁰ There is actually some lexical debate over what *kephalē* (κεφαλή) should be defined as. *BDAG*, 542 states that *kephalē* is “not source.” William David Spencer addresses this, remarking, “Readers should note, it is one thing to emphasize a definition of ‘head’ within the category of authority, but quite another to specify that the word *cannot* as well mean ‘source’ in the New Testament” (“Editor's Reflections” *Priscilla Papers* Issue 24:2, Spring 2010).

⁹¹ Payne, 130.

⁹² For a more detailed description, consult Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, pp 5-10.

Does Paul's usage of "head" automatically equal "authority"? What does the Greek term *kephalē* (κεφαλή) really mean? There has actually been a considerable amount of ink spilled defending the view that *kephalē* should be viewed as "source" in some key Pauline texts describing gender roles,⁹³ and strong rebuttals issued holding to the position that *kephalē* means "source."⁹⁴ While it is easy to think that the debate over what *kephalē* means has been limited to the scholastic arena,⁹⁵ it is steadily making its way into materials more common to be accessed by the normal layperson. The publication *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, for example, describes how "Besides its literal, physical meaning ('head of man or beast'), *kephalē* had numerous metaphorical meanings, including that of 'source.' It is this meaning that seems most suited to the texts (1 Cor 11:3 and Eph 5:23) in which the relationship of husband and wife (or man and woman) is addressed."⁹⁶

In terms of the ongoing discussion over what *kephalē* really means throughout the Apostolic Scriptures, most especially in texts like Ephesians 5:23, Aida Besançon Spencer summarizes some important points to consider:

"For us 'Who is head here?' means 'Who is the boss?' Yet many excellent studies have been done in recent years to prove that 'head' (kephale) when used in Greek never stood for the decision maker. Such studies are reinforced by looking at the Bible. 'Head' or kephale can refer to a literal head (Matt. 8:20), to hair only (Acts 18:18), to the whole person (a synecdoche, a part representing the whole, as in Ex. 16:16), the top or foundation (Gen. 8:5; Matt 21:42), the source (Col. 2:19), life (Isa. 43:4; Acts 18:6), the first-born (Col. 1:18), and a blessing (Deut. 28:13, 44). What meaning does Paul have in mind in Ephesians 5:23? Whatever meaning Paul has in mind would in some way be analogous to Christ's relationship to the church."⁹⁷

Spencer goes on to conclude that if it were Paul's intention to use "head" as meaning decision-maker or authority figure, "he would have used arche or 'ruler' (as in Luke 12:11), or

⁹³ "1 Corinthians 11:2-3: Head/Source Relationships," in Payne, pp 117-139; specifically his fifteen reasons on why *kephalē* does not exclusively mean "authority."

⁹⁴ Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of *Kephalē* ('Head'): A Response to Recent Studies," in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), pp 425-468.

⁹⁵ Cf. C.C. Kroeger, "Head," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp 375-377; J.K. McVay, "Head, Christ as," in *Ibid.*, pp 377-378.

⁹⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 641.

A more recent example I found of this is seen in *God's Game Plan: The Athlete's Bible 2007*, a study Bible published by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). While this publication employed the HCSB, with translation principles that protest the usage of inclusive language in English Bible versions, its comments on Ephesians 5:23 concur closer with an egalitarian view:

"The word 'head' when used today has the sense of 'ruler' or 'authority.' However, in Greek when 'head' is used in a metaphorical sense as it is here, it also means 'origin' as in the 'source (head) of a river.' Woman has her origins in man (Gen. 2:18-23) just as the church has its origins in Christ" (Nashville: Serendipity House Publishers, 2007, p 1149).

⁹⁷ Aida Besançon Spencer, "From Poet to Judge: What Does Ephesians 5 Teach About Male-Female Roles?" *Priscilla Papers* Issue 4:3, Summer 1990.

‘judge’ or ‘mind’ (used in Philo as the dominant aspect of humans, e.g., Allegory II.5-8).⁹⁸ One of the available definitions of *archē* (ἀρχή) is clearly, “**an authority figure who initiates activity or process, ruler, authority**” (BDAG).⁹⁹ Lincoln indicates something that we as Messianics should pay close attention to: “In its LXX usage, where it translated the Hebrew שׂרָר, *rōš*, κεφαλή, also took on at times the further connotations of that Hebrew term and had the force of determinative source or origin.”¹⁰⁰ Payne also asserts, “The LXX translators...almost always chose not to use κεφαλή, when שׂרָר means ‘leader,’” further claiming “This is compelling evidence that the vast majority of LXX translators did not regard kefalh, as appropriate to convey the metaphorical meaning ‘leader.’”¹⁰¹ Egalitarians would argue that “source” language is what is used in 4:15-16 where Paul describes Yeshua as “head” of the body, also seen in Colossians 2:19 where Yeshua is the source of life for the *ekklēsia*, “the head, from whom the entire body [originates], being supplied and held together.” In Payne’s estimation for Ephesians 5:23, “The best solution is probably to translate kefalh, as ‘source’ and add a note, ‘literally, “head.””¹⁰²

If “source” language for “head” is what is being used in v. 23, then it only serves to reinforce the fact that husbands are to love their wives the same as their own bodies (v. 28). The analogy made would be that Eve originated from Adam, and so the husband needs to think of the wife as personally originating from himself.¹⁰³ In the view of Witherington, “It is of course quite true that Paul does not appear here in the guise of the modern feminist. He still speaks of the headship of the man in the family. But that headship has been transformed by the model of Christ.”¹⁰⁴ The husband is not supposed to be the only decision maker in the family, but instead be an equal partner along with his wife in the marriage experience. Any subordination of the wife within marriage is something that came as a direct result of the Fall (Genesis 3:16), and should now be a status reversed by the work of Yeshua (Galatians 3:28).

The issue of viewing “head” as “source” for egalitarians in v. 23 is that there is a mutual submission (vs. 21, 30) which is to be seen in the Body of Messiah, which is a distinct manifestation of Believers’ being filled by the Holy Spirit (v. 18) and being changed by God’s love. Husbands are to treat their wives the same as they would themselves, as opposed to husbands being absolute autocrats—something that was surely affluent in Greco-Roman

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ BDAG, 138.

¹⁰⁰ Lincoln, pp 368-369.

¹⁰¹ Payne, pp 120, 121.

¹⁰² Ibid., 137.

¹⁰³ Lest anyone think that the creation of Adam first somehow denotes a Divine preference for males, we cannot forget how the Genesis creation account directly countered the competing Mesopotamian mythology. In *Atrahasis*, human beings were given birth by a mother goddess to be the slaves of the gods.

Cf. Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp 14-15ff.

In the Biblical creation account, contrary to this, humanity is made to commune with God in a garden planted by Him (Genesis 3:8). Females must join with males in order to conceive a child, similar to how the womb-goddess must give birth. But from the Biblical point of view, God portrayed as male cannot give birth, as man and woman are made by the Lord *ex nihilo* or out of nothing (Hebrews 11:3).

¹⁰⁴ Witherington, 323.

society. Egalitarians remind us that while Paul's words about submission are also given in a context where slaves are to submit to their masters (6:5-9), masters were required to submit to slaves if they were Believers (as Paul implies in Philemon). As is further stated, "we are [all] members of His body" (v. 30), which for the marriage relationship means "each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband" (v. 33).

The value of a good wife to a good husband is not an exclusive concept to Paul. Proverbs 31:10-11 declares, "An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain." This section of the Tanach actually depicts a husband and wife partnership in business, with the two working together for the mutual benefit of their household (Proverbs 31:12-27). While there may be a great deal of discussion of the male as "head of the household," egalitarians point out that such language **is not seen in the Apostolic Scriptures**—and they would be correct.¹⁰⁵ This phraseology is instead **derived directly from Hellenistic philosophy**; it was Aristotle who said "the head of the household rules over both wife and children" (*Politics* 1.1259a).¹⁰⁶ A more literal rendering of *kai gar gunaikos archei kai teknon* (καὶ γὰρ γυναικὸς ἄρχει καὶ τέκνων)¹⁰⁷ might instead be, "rules over wife and children,"¹⁰⁸ but the point taken is that the verb *archō* (ἄρχω) appears here, related to the noun *archē* (ἀρχή)—and not *kephalē*/head as used in Ephesians 5:23.

Plutarch later taught, "So is it with women also; if they subordinate themselves to their husbands, they are commended, but if they want to have control, they cut a sorrier figure than the subjects of their control. And control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman, [but] not as the owner has control over a piece of property" (*Advice to Bride and Groom* 142e).¹⁰⁹

Considering these ancient sentiments, egalitarians often argue that the premise for male "headship" equaling "authority" is something that first affected First Century B.C.E.-C.E. Judaism, having adopted some Hellenistic cultural norms in treating women, going off the Biblical mark. These are Hellenistic views of women that likewise made their way into the emerging Christian Church of the Second Century. Craig S. Keener notes how "Some marriages may have been nearly equal, with husbands and wives working in the market together; but

¹⁰⁵ In Torah passages such as Numbers 25:15 where *rosh 'ummot beit-av* (רֹאשׁ אֲמוֹת בֵּית־אָב), "the tribal head of an ancestral house" (NJPS) appears, the LXX notably renders it as *archontos ethnous...oikou patrias estin* (ἀρχοντος ἔθνους...οἴκου πατριᾶς ἐστίν), with the term *kephalē* used in Ephesians 5:23 noticeably absent. Such a "head of the house(hold)" is also not the leader of an individual family, but rather a large nomadic clan within a tribe of Ancient Israel.

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, 33.

¹⁰⁷ The Greek source text for these works has been accessed via the Perseus Collection <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>>.

¹⁰⁸ Aristotle: *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Adelaide, South Australia: University of Adelaide Library, 2007). Accessible online at <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/a8po/>>.

¹⁰⁹ Plutarch: *Advice to Bride and Groom*. Accessible online at <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Coniugalia_praecepta*.html>.

the ideal model propagated in ancient society was that wives should be submissive and obedient, often even slavishly so.”¹¹⁰

Viewing *kephalē*/head as “source” is changing a great deal of contemporary thought in today’s evangelical Christianity. It has helped men have a much higher view of women, and it has helped women see that they need not allow themselves to suffer any kind of “Biblically-based” harassment and/or abuse from men simply because they are female. How Ephesians 5:23 is interpreted in evangelical theology in the future will be a continuing debate, specifically as it regards the ordination of female clergy.¹¹¹ This is a debate that will affect today’s Messianic movement sooner than many currently think, as it is directly related to the already present discord and battling over Jewish and non-Jewish equality and inclusion.

While a great deal of background material must be considered in properly interpreting vs. 22-23, it would be a mistake for us to overlook the important Christology here. Paul has said that “the husband is the head of the wife, as Messiah also is the head of the [assembly],” *ho Christos kephalē tēs ekklēsias* (ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας). The reason He is the “head” of the assembly is because He is “the Savior of the body,” *Sōtēr tou sōmatos* (σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος). Messiah being the Savior of His Body is a concept directly taken from the Tanach, where the LORD God is depicted as the Savior of His people (Deuteronomy 32:15; 1 Samuel 10:19; Psalm 24:5; Isaiah 12:2; 45:15; 62:11; Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 3:18). The usage of Yeshua being head of the Body, here, leads me to conclude that 4:15-16 is what is more in view, as opposed to 1:22. The power and vitality of Yeshua as Divine Savior comes from the head to the rest of His Body—us as Believers. Yeshua is the Source in Heaven of what His people on Earth are supposed to be.

The teaching for husbands here is that being the “source” of their wives, they are to act toward their wives the same way that Yeshua has done for all people—sacrificing themselves if need be.

Excursus: Man as Ruler of the Household—or Husband as Source of the Wife? Which Option Are Messianics to Choose?

Many people in today’s world find Ephesians 5:22-23 to be significant “turn off” words within this epistle, as they often fail to keep them within a larger context of Paul’s thoughts, namely the controlling concept of mutual submission (v. 21), and how Paul confronts some of the societal norms of the First Century Mediterranean. The Apostle Paul wanted a new approach toward submission to manifest itself among the husbands and wives of Asia Minor, where all would be treated with proper

¹¹⁰ Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 166.

¹¹¹ Keener reminds us that women taking a role in Christian ministry, at least, is not something that has only now emerged with the modern feminist movement:

“Women’s ministry...became increasingly accepted in many times of revival, including the Wesleyan revival that changed the course of spiritual life in Britain and the Second Great Awakening in the United States. Pentecostal and Holiness groups were ordaining women long before modern secular feminism and unbiblical arguments for women’s ordination made it a divisive issue in some circles” (*Two Views of Women in Ministry*, 244).