

WHAT WINGER PRESENTLY GETS WRONG:

MALE HEADSHIP: IS IT REALLY BIBLICAL?

[17 January 2023]

When the apostle Paul says the husband is the head of the wife, does ‘head’ mean ‘authority over’, or something else?

This article responds to Mike Winger’s video ‘Women in Ministry Part 8: Male Headship: Is it REALLY Biblical?’¹

If you’re in a hurry, go to www.bit.ly/3DzHxUM for a quick summary.

You can see our online or pdf articles on other videos by Mike at www.terranwilliams.com/articles/. Or use these links:

- *Part 2 (Genesis)* — www.bit.ly/40lo9oh
- *Part 3 (OT Women)* — www.bit.ly/3jAjCNX
- *Part 4 (NT Women) part A* — www.bit.ly/3JDVRiB
- *Part 4 (NT Women) part B* — www.bit.ly/3X08GXx
- *Part 8 (Meaning of Head)* — www.bit.ly/3RwliET
- *Part 9 (Wives submit)* — www.bit.ly/3l8CmVv
- *Part 10 (1 Cor 11, Head Covering)* — www.bit.ly/3Y2Zp2l

Still to come: Part 5 (Female Apostles), Part 11 (1 Cor 14, Silencing Women), Part 12 (1 Tim 2).

Please do not misunderstand our title ‘What Winger Presently Gets Wrong’ as implying any personal criticism of Mike. On the contrary, by including his name in the title, we are acknowledging the prominence of the ministry to which the Lord has called him. His Bible teaching is often of good quality and of much benefit to many people. He is a valued brother in Christ. But on this topic of Women in Ministry we are convinced that he has made mistakes and has misread Scripture.

Of course, Mike tries hard to think clearly and teach biblically. But if you think that Mike consistently succeeds in that aim, this article will give you reasons to reconsider, as will our two-part article responding to his video about Women Leaders in the New Testament, at www.bit.ly/3YPVNRr

Who are we, and why are we responding to Mike Winger?

Andrew Bartlett is based in the UK. He is the author of [Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts](#) (2019). He has been studying Scripture for nearly 60 years. In his day job as an international arbitrator and judge, he specializes in dispassionate analysis of texts, evidence and arguments. He has a degree in theology and has served in lay leadership in several churches.

¹ The video can be found on Mike’s own site biblethinker.org and on YouTube.

Terran Williams is a South African pastor-teacher, with a ministry of planting and nurturing churches. He is the author of **How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy** (2022) and a number of other books.

‘Complementarianism’ subordinates women under men’s authority in the church and in the home. When Andrew and Terran wrote their books, Andrew was a member of a complementarian church and Terran had just completed his long tenure as a leading pastor of a complementarian church. They each engaged with the leading scholarly complementarian works and independently concluded that God’s word does not subordinate women under men.

Mike Winger started releasing his video teachings on ‘Women in Ministry’ soon after Terran’s book was published. Because Mike’s lengthy videos have been watched by many thousands of people, he has emerged as one of the world’s most influential complementarian teachers. On reviewing Mike’s videos, Andrew and Terran found that there were substantial errors in Mike’s research, reasoning, and handling of Scripture.

Since the ordinary believer is more likely to get their information about Scripture from free online resources than from scholarly books, Andrew and Terran decided to team up and write some freely available responses to Mike’s teaching. Terran credits Andrew with doing the lion’s share of the work.

We love Mike’s heart. He repeatedly indicates his readiness to change his mind if solid reasons are put to him. He says: ‘If you’re a scholar who’s really studied in this area and you want to give me pushback, I really would like to read it now. If I’m wrong, I want to know it. Love to see that pushback.’ [Part 8 video, 0hr6mins] We commend Mike for his openness, and we thank him for his invitation. We are hopeful that his engaging with our feedback will result in a good conversation in which we all make progress in our understanding of God’s word.

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What's it all about?

The word 'headship' is not in the Bible. When people talk about 'male headship', they may mean a number of different things.

So far in his series, Mike Winger has talked about it mainly in the context of marriage.² What Mike means is that *God has appointed the husband to be the leader in the marriage, having one-way authority over his wife.*³ So, on this interpretation, when the Bible says that the husband is the '*head of*' his wife, this metaphor means that he has '*authority over*' his wife.

There is one reasonably definite instance where the Bible says that the husband is 'head' of his wife; it is in Ephesians 5:23.⁴

There is a possible second instance in 1 Corinthians 11:3, where Paul says that the man is 'head' of woman, or, less likely, the husband is 'head' of a wife. Mike's notes for his Part 10

² Later on, he takes it further. In the notes of his Part 10 video, he says that male headship 'isn't just reserved for marriage'.

³ We use the term 'one-way' authority to distinguish Mike's view from the mutualist view that husbands and wives have the same authority. By 'one-way', we mean that, according to Mike, the husband has authority over the wife, but the wife does not have authority over the husband. We are not referring to 'absolute' authority or 'domineering' authority, or micro-management. Mike does not teach that the husband has absolute or domineering authority or should micro-manage his wife.

⁴ We judge this to be definite, but 100% certainty is not available. For 'husband' and 'wife', New Testament Greek uses the ordinary words for 'man' and 'woman'; the particular meaning has to be inferred from the context. Some commentators consider that in Ephesians 5:23 Paul is referring to 'a man', rather than specifically a husband (compare 1 Corinthians 11:3).

video state that he is ‘still on the fence’ as regards whether in 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul is referring to man and woman or to husband and wife.

So, on Mike’s own assessment, there is just one definite instance where a husband is called ‘head’ of his wife.

Nonetheless, according to Mike’s notes for his Part 8 video:

‘Paul calls a husband the “head” of his wife numerous times.’

Mike is billed as the BibleThinker. But this quotation shows how hard it is for Mike to stick close to the Bible when he thinks about this topic. The phrase ‘numerous times’ is an effusive exaggeration, expressing his energetic enthusiasm for male authority. It is a flag that cautions his audience to look out for possible inaccuracies and misperceptions in his teaching.

Mike’s Part 8 video discusses four topics that relate to the idea of male headship:

- (1) how the head was understood in ancient Greek medicine,
- (2) how the apostle Paul uses ‘head’ (Greek: *kephalē*) as a metaphor,
- (3) how the metaphorical meaning in the Bible has been understood in church history, and
- (4) what Greek lexicons say about it.

Mike believes that his view of male headship is firmly established by Scripture. But he says in his video:

‘Anyone with pushback – now’s the time to present it, but it’d better be good because I put a lot of work into it. I like to see serious pushback. And if I’m wrong, ... if I can see I’m wrong, I’ll happily come out and recant and change and clip pieces out of a video and make a video telling everybody. That’d be fun.’ (1hr36mins)

This article is some of the pushback that Mike has so firmly invited. In our view, Mike’s teaching in this video is distorted by significant errors and omissions. When examined without a prior commitment to male authority, his four topics do not show that Paul’s ‘head’ metaphors in Ephesians 5:23 or 1 Corinthians 11:3 are about male authority over women.

First, to set the scene and prepare the ground, we need to highlight an important question and offer some reminders on how to read metaphors.

Why doesn’t the Bible instruct husbands to exercise authority over their wives?

Let’s get clear what Mike is actually meaning to teach.

In the introduction to his Part 8 video, he emphasizes that the ‘authority structure’ in marriage ‘really matters’, because it ‘radically affects most people’ (0hr1min).

In his Lesson Overview, Mike says:

‘I’m going ... to see what the Bible really says about husbands being the head of their wives. This is super important, because ... it impacts every single marriage in the body of Christ! I can’t overstate the practical impact of getting this topic wrong, ...’

Mike must intend that the husband should actually exercise his authority in daily life, otherwise there wouldn’t be much purpose in teaching that the husband has authority over his wife. And he says he regards this topic as ‘super important’.

So, it seems pretty clear that Mike means to teach that *husbands ought to exercise authority over their wives*, including in regular decision-making. He wants most people’s lives to be radically affected by this. As he sees it, this is so very important that he ‘can’t overstate the practical impact of getting this topic wrong’.

On that point, Mike is not an outlier. In 1987 John Piper wrote the first draft of the Danvers Statement (often regarded as the complementarian creed). Piper believes that Statement to be ‘prophetic’. He recently wrote that it ‘confronts men who are unwilling to lead their wives’.⁵

Likewise, Wayne Grudem writes about his own marriage:

‘... in every decision, whether large or small, and whether we have reached agreement or not, the responsibility to make the decision still rests with me. (I am speaking here of the decisions that involve the both of us, not the individual decisions we each make about our personal spheres of responsibility.) I do not agree with those who say that male headship only makes a difference once in ten years or so when a husband and wife can’t reach agreement. I think that male headship makes a difference in every decision that the couple makes every day of their married life.’⁶

There are many complementarian books and articles which contain instructions for husbands exercising authority over their wives, telling them how to do it. The authors take other instructions from Scripture (such as that husbands should love their wives, or that husbands should honor their wives) and they transfer them over to the exercise of authority, so that the husband should exercise authority over his wife in a loving way, or should exercise authority over her in a way that honors her.

Now, here’s what leads to our important question: If this is a biblical outlook, that husbands’ exercise of authority over their wives is ‘super important’, and ‘really matters’, because it ‘radically affects most people’, then we should expect to find in the Bible some teaching which says that *husbands ought to do it*.

There are many passages in Scripture about conduct in marriage. Mike refers to some of them in his Part 8 and Part 9 videos. But this ‘super important’ teaching, that *husbands ought to*

⁵ ‘The Current State of Complementarity’, 16 November 2022, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-current-state-of-complementarity>.

⁶ *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: an analysis of 118 disputed questions* (2004, 2005), 42.

exercise authority over their wives, is not stated in the passages that Mike refers to. Nor is it stated anywhere else in the Bible.⁷

And we're not talking here only about the absence of an *instruction*. There isn't even explicit *guidance*, or *advice*, or a *suggestion*, that husbands ought to exercise authority over their wives.

If Mike's view is right, how can that be?

If God has truly appointed the husband to exercise one-way authority over the wife, that would presumably be for a reason: so that the husband should lead her by giving instructions and guidance and take decisions for both of them. And yet the Bible never says that the husband *should do this*, even though there are multiple passages about conduct in marriage.

Even the narratives in markedly patriarchal Old Testament settings do not support the idea that the husband must always be the one to give directions. For example, the Shunammite woman takes the initiative to host the prophet Elisha:

'And she said to her husband, "Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way. Let us make a small room on the roof with walls and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there.'" (2 Kings 4:9-10, ESV).⁸

And Mike acknowledges in his Part 9 video that in 1 Samuel 25 Abigail was commended for disregarding the decision of her foolish husband in order to save her household from the wrath of David and his men (Part 9: 0hr45mins).⁹

On Mike's view, the exercising of the husband's authority is super important. Supposedly, if people get it wrong, the practical impact cannot be overstated. Yet from Genesis to Revelation no Bible author ever judges it worth saying.

⁷ Historically, some commentators misinterpreted Genesis 3:16 as such an instruction. But it is not an instruction at all. Grudem agrees that it is not an instruction, for it states results of the curse. He says: '*we are never to try to increase or perpetuate the results of the curse*. We should never try to promote Genesis 3:16 as something good!' (emphasis original). *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: an analysis of 118 disputed questions*, 40.

⁸ We often refer to or quote the ESV in this article. We do this simply because it was produced by complementarians and is a favorite among complementarians. Our use of it does not imply endorsement of it as a version or preference over other English versions. For a thorough analysis of the complementarian ideology of the ESV, see Samuel L. Perry, 'The Bible as a Product of Cultural Power: The Case of Gender Ideology in the English Standard Version', *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 2020, 81:1, 68-92. Available at www.bit.ly/3Xbvuoq.

⁹ Terran adds: I look back to many crossroads in my life when I prayed to God for wisdom, and strained my ear towards heaven for what God might tell me. And many times, I have heard God say to me the very words he once said to Abraham: 'Listen to whatever [your wife] tells you' (Genesis 21:12). For further discussion and biblical examples, see Terran Williams, *How God Sees Women*, chapter 8.

So, we have a question for Mike: *Why does the Bible not instruct husbands to exercise authority over their wives?* How is it that the Bible authors have such a different view from Mike on what is important, and on what is super important? What is the explanation for this?

We can think of two potential explanations to consider.

The first potential explanation is this: *the Bible shows that husbands are in authority over their wives, and this is sufficient, because it logically implies they should exercise that authority. No further instruction is needed.*

But does this explanation work? In the absence of explicit instruction, what would be expected to happen?

Some husbands will be too lazy, too irresponsible, too preoccupied, or too weak to exercise authority over their wives. So they would certainly need to be instructed to do it. According to John Piper, they need to be confronted, and told to do it.

The explanation that no instruction is needed might make sense if the Bible viewed human beings as infallible and sinless. But it doesn't, and they are not. So, that explanation will not do.

Here's the second potential explanation. The reason why Scripture does not instruct husbands to exercise authority over their wives is this: *God's design for marriage is that wives and husbands have equal authority and they should make important decisions by mutual consent.* God has not designed marriage so as to give husbands a one-way authority over their wives. We saw this when we responded to Mike's Part 2 video on Genesis, and we will see it more fully when we respond to Mike's Part 9 video. The only direct guidance we have in the Bible on how a married couple should make decisions is in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul teaches not a husband's direction or tie-breaking but joint decision-making by mutual consent.

On a couple of things here, we do agree with Mike.

First, teaching that a husband should exercise authority over his wife *has great practical impact* on people's lives, especially the lives of women. In our view, however, the impact is negative. See Postscript (1), below.

Second, the Bible nowhere commands husbands to make their wives submit. Mike correctly says this in his next video (Part 9: 0hr53mins). That is a valuable reminder.

But Mike misses the more fundamental point, that the Bible nowhere instructs husbands to exercise authority over their wives.

How to read a metaphor

Everyone agrees that Paul's uses of the word 'head' to refer to a husband or a man in Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 are metaphorical. Similarly, whenever Paul refers to Christ as 'head', this is a metaphor. The question is: what do these metaphors mean?

Because of the importance of this question, there is a need to flag up some reminders about how we read metaphors. These reminders will help us later on.

We start with some terms used for describing metaphors. The *subject* of a metaphor is what it is about. The *vehicle* is the word or phrase that is used metaphorically. The *tenor* of the metaphor is its meaning.

If I say of my friend: ‘John is a pig when he eats’, the *subject* is the manner in which John eats, the *vehicle* is ‘pig’, and the *tenor* is that he eats messily, or perhaps greedily.

We perceive the tenor by making a connection between our mental image of a pig eating and John eating.

When we consider the tenor of ‘head’, as used by Paul, it will be important to keep in mind three particular features of how metaphors work.

First, the assertion which a metaphor makes is only ever *partial*, never total (*Feature 1 – partial assertion*).

No one would imagine I mean that John is a pig in every respect when he eats. He does not take his meals in a barn, or in a muddy field, or in the woods, or put a long snout into the food, or eat on all fours. I do not even mean that he takes food into his mouth and chews with his teeth, despite the similarity that both John and pigs take food into their mouths and chew with their teeth. I mean only that John eats messily or greedily.

Second, the tenor of a metaphor does not depend upon the real facts about the vehicle (*Feature 2 – conventional understanding*). For the pig metaphor, the objective facts about pigs don’t matter. It doesn’t matter that we don’t know whether in reality pigs are greedy or whether in fact they eat only what they need. And if the real truth about pigs is that they are actually very clean and hygienic when they eat, that doesn’t matter either. What matters for the tenor of the metaphor is a conventional understanding that pigs eat messily, or greedily.¹⁰

Over time, some metaphors become ‘dead’ metaphors – in other words, firmly fixed in a conventional meaning, so that we no longer perceive the meaning by using our imagination to make a connection between the vehicle and the subject; instead, we receive the meaning as if the words were literal. In English, this is true of ‘head’ in usages such as Head of Sales or Head Teacher. In those examples, the meaning is fixed, in the sense of ‘chief’ or ‘principal’ or ‘director’.

However, writers and speakers can generally re-use, adapt or invent any metaphor they like, whenever they like, with any tenor that they like – all they have to do is give any needed clues so that their audience can sufficiently understand what they mean. This is the third feature that we will need to keep in mind (*Feature 3 – variability*).

¹⁰ These examples are adapted from the valuable discussion in Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC) 2018, 32.

In discussing our English-language example 'John is a pig when he eats', we have assumed an understanding of how pigs eat that is conventional in contemporary Western culture.

Other languages and cultures, whether now or in past history, might have a different understanding of pigs.

So, when a metaphor is used in Document X in an ancient foreign language in an ancient foreign culture, how do we grasp the author's intended meaning?

There are five potential sources of help, all of which Mike rightly tries to utilize in his video, as we will soon explain.

Help No 1. What clues does the writer of Document X give us in the immediate context?

To determine meaning, context is always king. So, the cardinal rule for interpreting a metaphor is this: if the writer gives an indication of the meaning, whether directly or indirectly, pay attention to it.

Suppose the writer said: 'John is a pig when he eats. He gets so messy.' The direct explanation 'he gets so messy' tells us the tenor of the metaphor: John eats messily. Or suppose the writer said: 'John is a pig when he eats. He's gaining weight week by week.' Then the indirect clue 'he's gaining weight week by week' shows us the tenor of the metaphor: John eats greedily.

If the writer has given enough clues in the immediate context to make the meaning clear, then we don't need any further help, except as a cross-check of our understanding (which could be distorted by the difference between our culture and the ancient culture).

But when we need more help, where do we go?

Help No 2. Does the writer of Document X use the same metaphor, or a similar one, somewhere else in their own writings?

Does the same writer also say somewhere else that Jane and Joseph are pigs when they eat? Do those other uses give us some clues to what was meant by describing John as a pig when he eats?

Help No 3. How was the vehicle viewed in that particular time and culture?

We can go to primary written sources to find out how people thought about the vehicle, understood literally. To do that, we would look at extant writings from around the same time as Document X and in the same culture. Or, if there is not enough to help us there, we may take a look at how the vehicle was viewed in earlier writings or closely related cultures. If we do not have good access to primary sources, then we may consult secondary sources, such as history books. Can we find out what people thought about pigs in the relevant time and culture? We want to know, because Feature 2 is that the tenor depends on conventional understandings of the vehicle, not on the objective facts about it. Do the subjective views about pigs in the writer's culture give us some clues to the tenor of the metaphor?

Help No 4. Are there native speakers whose writings tell us the meaning of the metaphor?

If native speakers of the language, close to Document X in time and culture, themselves read Document X and offered their interpretation of the metaphor, then that would be valuable evidence. Are there native speakers who can tell us what it meant, when Document X said that John was a pig when he ate?

Help No 5. How was the particular metaphor used prior to Document X in the same culture?

Did someone else previously say that someone was a pig when they ate? Or were there representations of such a scene in the visual arts of painting or sculpture? We can go to primary or secondary sources to find out. If the metaphor had been used before, perhaps the writer knew it and is either repeating it in the same sense or adapting it to a related sense.

In principle, those five sources of potential help are what Mike discusses in his Part 8 video:

- When Mike discusses how the head was understood in Greek medicine, that is Help No 3 (conventional understanding of the vehicle).
- When he talks about how the apostle Paul uses 'head' as a metaphor, that is No 2 (use by the same writer elsewhere) and, to a small extent, No 1 (clues in the immediate context).
- When he examines how the metaphorical meaning of 'head' was understood in church history, that is No 4 (native speakers' interpretations).
- When he recounts the so-called 'battle of the lexicons', that is No 5 (prior uses of the metaphor).

Now let's review what Mike says.

Greek medicine: How was the functioning of a person's 'head' viewed in Paul's time and culture?

Part (1) of Mike's video, commencing at 0hr10mins, is titled: 'Medical Claims that "Head" Means "Source"'.

In Ephesians 5, the 'head' metaphor is used in a way that seems to involve implicit comparisons with the human head and body. Since the vehicle of the metaphor is 'head', it is reasonable to consider what functions the human head was conventionally understood to have, at the time when Paul wrote.

Mike's basic claim is that the head was definitely seen as the command center which issued instructions to the body, and egalitarian views which contradict that, or downplay it, are untrue.

According to Mike, egalitarian views are 'a house of cards' (0hr11mins). He says that (for example) the Greek philosopher Plato regarded the head as the seat of control, and other

scholars know this; it is only egalitarian scholars that don't know, because misconceptions float around egalitarian scholars as they quote each other (0hr20mins).

To prove this supposed uniquely-egalitarian misunderstanding, Mike cites Philip Payne as saying that Plato 'moved the command centre to the heart'.

But Mike's citation is inaccurate. The words do come from Payne's book, but they are not Payne's own. They are in British English ('centre', not 'center'). They are clearly shown in Payne's book as a quotation from page 83 of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, revised 3rd edition, 2003.¹¹ The dictionary entry is written by J. T. Vallance, an Australian classical scholar, who taught classics at the University of Cambridge. Mike mis-reads Payne's book.

One may legitimately doubt whether Vallance correctly understood what Plato meant to convey, but this historical and interpretive question is not tied to egalitarian scholarship. Payne is relying on a standard reference work written by a classical scholar, who would presumably defend his viewpoint by reference to Plato's rather intricate reasoning in his extant works.¹²

In fact, irrespective of what Plato believed, the subject of ancient medical views on the function of the head is considerably more complex, and more interesting, than the over-simplified presentation in Mike's video.

Mike's discussion revolves around the binary question: 'was the head or the heart understood to be the command center of the body in Greco-Roman society at the time when Paul wrote his letters?'

But there are two difficulties with that question.

The first difficulty arises from the considerable extent to which there were conflicting views on that question. The extent of disagreement was greater than Mike acknowledges.

Mike argues that according to Hippocrates, Philo, Rufus of Ephesus and Galen the head ruled the body, and that this was the common view in Paul's time.

But Vallance correctly says in the same quotation (as set out in Payne's book) that Aristotle (the great philosopher) and Diocles of Carystus (the great physician) taught that the heart was the command center and seat of intelligence. Aristotle and Diocles were influential voices. (Later in the video, at 0hr30mins, Mike acknowledges that Aristotle did indeed teach that the heart was the seat of intelligence and control.) In addition, according to Clinton Arnold, some Stoics, especially Zeno and Chrysippus (3rd century BC), argued that the heart was the governing part of the body.¹³

¹¹ *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*, 122-123.

¹² For a thoughtful discussion of Plato's outlook, with reference to the relevant parts of his works, see the section on Plato in Cervin, 'On the Significance of Kephale ("Head"): A Study of the Abuse of One Greek Word' (April 30, 2016) <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/significance-kephale-head/>.

¹³ Arnold, 'Jesus Christ: "Head" of the Church', in J. B. Green & M. Turner (Eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (1994), 353.

And, unwittingly, Mike is not giving his audience the full picture when he says that Hippocrates taught that the head ruled over the body.

Hippocrates lived from the 5th century BC into the 4th century BC. Hippocratic medicine did originally teach that the head ruled.

But the later Hippocratic treatise 'On the Heart' (possibly as late as 3rd century BC) states to the contrary. It refers to the left ventricle, a chamber in the heart, and says:

'Man's intelligence, which *rules over* the rest of the soul, is situated in the left ventricle.'¹⁴
(emphasis added)

Aristotle, Diocles, Zeno, Chrysippus, and the Hippocratic treatise 'On the Heart' were all before Paul, and all five taught that the body was ruled by the heart, not by the head.

What about Philo, Rufus of Ephesus and Galen?

Philo's life overlapped with Paul's. Philo recorded that both views were held in his own day, and there is abundant evidence in his writings that he did not firmly commit himself to one view rather than the other.¹⁵ Mike appears to be unaware of this.

Later in this article, we will show that Philo used metaphors where 'head' meant 'source'.

Rufus of Ephesus was later than Paul (not even born when Paul died), so we need to be careful about drawing firm conclusions about what ordinary people in Paul's time in Ephesus or Corinth thought about brain functions, based on what Rufus wrote.

Galen is later still: he was born in the second century AD and died in the third. Mike cites an article about Galen by a medical writer, F. R. Freeman, who says:

'*Unlike some of his predecessors*, Galen concluded that the brain controlled cognition and willed action.'
(emphasis added)

This quotation confirms that there were differing views on the seat of control prior to Galen's time. Paul lived long before Galen's time.

¹⁴ Cited by Plinio Prioreschi, *A History of Medicine*, Vol. 2: *Greek Medicine* (2nd edn, 1996), 274. Like Mike, Andrew Bartlett missed this: see *Men and Women in Christ*, 67, as also did Arnold in 'Jesus Christ: "Head" of the Church', 353.

¹⁵ In *On Dreams* 1.32 he wrote: 'And where in the body has the mind (*nous*) made its lair? Has it had a dwelling assigned to it? Some have regarded the head (*kephalē*), our body's citadel, as its hallowed shrine, since it is about the head that the senses have their station, and it seems natural to them that they should be posted there, like bodyguards to some mighty monarch. Others contend pertinaciously for their conviction that the heart (*kardia*) is the shrine in which it is carried.' F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, trans., *Philo*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 311, 313. Richard Cervin adds this comment: 'Philo apparently remained somewhat uncommitted in his own view, for on at least three occasions he refers to the "ruling principle" or "mind" as residing in either heart or brain (*The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 136, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 90, and *On the Posterity and Exile of Cain* 137), and in his *Allegorical Interpretation* (I.62) he makes the uncommitted statement that the ruling part of the soul is located in the body.' See 'On the Significance of *Kephalē* ("Head"): A Study of the Abuse of One Greek Word' (April 30, 2016) <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/significance-kephale-head/>.

Mike suggests that Galen's view was held by ordinary people in Paul's time, based on his reading of Clinton Arnold's article 'Jesus Christ: "Head" of the Church'. But Arnold's article provides scant support for that suggestion (for details, see our footnote).¹⁶

The uncertainty persisted long after Paul. In about the late second century AD, it was recognized by the Skeptic philosopher Sextus Empiricus, when he wrote:

'For we see certain fluids belonging to each of the regions in which the doctrinaire thinkers believe that the commanding-faculty is located—be it the brain, the heart, or whatever part of the animal one may care to put it in.'¹⁷

The second difficulty with the binary question is a much larger one. Even if we could know with confidence what Paul's audience thought about whether the head ruled the body, that is not the only question that we need to consider. We are engaging in this inquiry because we are interested in what people might have thought about, when 'head' was used as a metaphor. But the head was understood to have more than one function.

Irrespective of whether the command center was in the head or the heart, Hippocratic medicine held that *the head provided life and nourishment to the body*. Of course, this happened visibly and was obvious to everyone, irrespective of medical knowledge, because food and water enter via the head, so the head nourishes us and gives us life. But in Hippocratic medicine, this function was also understood to operate invisibly by some kind of internal flow, since it was believed that the veins nourished the body from the head.¹⁸

There was also a well-known theory that the brain was the origin of sperm. Sperm was believed to be a drop of brain, which passed through the body before being ejaculated by the male organ. This function of the brain had been taught even before Hippocrates, by Alcmaeon (early fifth century BC). While it is true to say that consensus on this point was lacking, according to a

¹⁶ Arnold, 354, cites Galen: 'To most people the head seems to have been formed on account of the encephalon and for that reason to contain all the senses, like the servants and guards of a great king.' But as far as one can tell, in this citation Galen is speaking of people in his own day, well over a century after Paul. Arnold does not cite any evidence from Galen about what 'most people' believed in Paul's time. Arnold, 355, also states: 'Rufus's opinion is important because he taught anatomy and physiology at the end of the first century C.E.'²⁸ Such opinion was surely well known in Asia Minor, which was famous in antiquity for its advanced medical science and excellent medical schools (Pergamum, Smyrna, Ephesus, Miletus, Tralles, Laodicea, and elsewhere).²⁹ Mike cites this and relies on it, but it is quite unclear how it is supposed to support Mike's suggestion. Rufus's opinion could not have been well known before Rufus promulgated it, around the end of the first century, long after Paul was dead. And Arnold's brief reference to medical schools refers to 'antiquity' (meaning centuries earlier), as seems clear from Arnold's footnote 29, which says: 'Ilberg, *Rufus von Ephesos*, 1, notes: "Die Anfänge griechischer Heilwissenschaft liegen im Osten, auf der kleinasiatischen Küste und in ihrer Nähe, wie die Anfänge wahrer Wissenschaft überhaupt."' Our translation: 'The beginnings of Greek medical science lie in the east, on the coast of Asia Minor and in its vicinity, as do, in general, the beginnings of true science.'

¹⁷ For the source reference, see footnote 39 of Cervin's article 'On the Significance of Kephalē ("Head"): A Study of the Abuse of One Greek Word'.

¹⁸ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 288, and as stated by Arnold in 'Jesus Christ: "Head" of the Church', 352, referring to *Nat. Hom.* 19.11. This treatise says that, from the head, the veins reach to every part of the body and give nourishment and provide what the body needs.

reputable medical historian it is not until the end of the first century AD – after Paul’s time – that we find in Rufus of Ephesus the first clear statement that sperm originates in the testes.¹⁹

Mike says, if he is wrong, it is a kindness to him and to everyone else to say so (0hr30mins).

What should we conclude?

In kindness, we offer the following conclusions:

The overall picture regarding medical knowledge is not as presented by Mike in his video. *At least* three functions of the head, as understood by first-century readers, are possibly relevant to understanding a ‘head’ metaphor:

- Probably most of Paul’s readers thought that the head was the source of nourishment that made the body live and grow.
- Some of Paul’s readers – perhaps many – may have thought of the head as the source of sperm and thus as the source of human beings.
- Perhaps many of Paul’s readers may have thought that the head ruled the body, though some or many may have thought (in line with Aristotle, Diocles, the Stoics, and revised Hippocratic views) that the body was ruled by the heart.

Greek medicine does not show that Paul’s ‘head’ metaphors in Ephesians 5:23 or 1 Corinthians 11:3 are about male authority over women. These three functions of the head, as contemporaneously understood, can do no more than suggest possibilities for us to consider when we turn to the text of Paul’s letters and try to understand the tenor of his ‘head’ metaphors.

And these three by no means exhaust the possibilities.

For example, everyone knows that if a person’s head and body are separated, the person dies. So, another possible metaphorical use could convey the idea that the life of the whole body depends on maintaining organic unity with the head.

And it is important to keep in mind that the tenor of a ‘head’ metaphor does not need to call up a medical understanding of the head at all. A ‘head’ metaphor may be making a point which depends not on medical knowledge but simply on the idea of physical position at the top,

¹⁹ Plinio Prioreschi, *Greek Medicine*, 280-281. Other views on sperm can be found at <https://margmowczko.com/troy-martin-hair-testicle-1-cor-11-15/>. Since Prioreschi (1930-2014) may be unfamiliar to readers, here is a brief description: ‘an accomplished scholar – i.e., physician, scientist, linguist (of classical and several modern languages), pharmacologist, medical historian, and ethicist, as well as thinker, ... Prioreschi completed his MD (1954) at the University of Pavia, Italy, and his PhD (1961) in experimental medicine at the University of Montreal. From 1967 to 2002, Prioreschi was a professor of pharmacology and medicine at Creighton University. He was also an accomplished medical scientist, medical scholar, as well as a formidable figure in pharmacology and medical history and ethics. The complete series of his authoritative series, *A History of Medicine*, to which he devoted more than 20 years of his life, includes: ... Volume II: Greek Medicine ...’ Miguel A. Faria, ‘A fascinating look at primitive and ancient medicine by medical historian and classical scholar Plinio Prioreschi, MD, PhD’ *Surg Neurol Int* 25-May-2015; 6:87. Available from: <https://surgicalneurologyint.com/surgicalint-articles/a-fascinating-look-at-primitive-and-ancient-medicine-by-medical-historian-and-classical-scholar-plinio-prioreschi-md-phd/>

which could indicate prominence. And if the metaphor includes a body, the head, by reason of its prominence, could represent the body.

How Paul uses ‘head’ as a metaphor

Part (2) of Mike’s video is titled: ‘Bible Context Claims That “Head” Doesn’t Imply “Authority”’. His purpose is to review claims made in egalitarian scholarship about how Paul uses ‘head’ as a metaphor.

Mike’s radical misreading of Pierce and Kay

Mike commences with quotations from egalitarian scholars Ronald Pierce and Elizabeth Kay, which he subjects to forceful criticisms.

But his criticisms are misconceived, for he slips up by misreading what they write.

The quotations are taken from a paragraph consisting of four sentences. Mike quotes and criticizes the second, third and fourth sentences. Here is the full paragraph, starting with the first sentence:

‘Second, though Paul does not explicitly mention authority in Ephesians 5, he instructs the wife to “submit herself” to her husband (who was construed culturally as the head of the Roman household) as part of the apostle’s principle of “submitting to one another” in the church (Eph 5:21-22, 24).^[24] Though *kephalē* (“head”) in the head-body metaphor may connote “authority over” or “source of provision” in the larger contexts of both Ephesians (Eph 1:20-23; 4:15-16) and Colossians (Col 1:18-32; 2:9-15, 18-19),**[COMMA]** Paul only reinforces the idea of “source of provision” for husbands to wives.^[25] Moreover, he calls husbands to love their wives sacrificially as Christ did for the church (Eph 5:25-30)—again, standing *kephalē* on its head. As “head” of his wife, the husband is commanded to love her—not to exercise leadership or authority over her—however benevolent that might be.’²⁰

MISTAKE 1:

Mike reads out the second sentence (0hr33mins). It is immediately clear from his intonation that he is misunderstanding it. He has overlooked the first sentence of the paragraph, which refers to Ephesians 5; and he reads the second sentence as if the comma in the sentence were in a different place, like this:

‘Though *kephalē* (“head”) in the head-body metaphor may connote “authority over” or “source of provision”,**[COMMA]** in the larger contexts of both Ephesians and Colossians Paul only reinforces the idea of “source of provision” for husbands to wives.’

²⁰ Discovering Biblical Equality (3rd edn), 115. For completeness: Their footnote 24 explains about the *paterfamilias* as the head of the Roman household. Their footnote 25 is a reference to the book chapter by Clinton Arnold which Mike himself frequently relies on in his video: ‘Jesus Christ: “Head” of the Church’.

That misreading makes a drastic change in the meaning.

The meaning of what Pierce and Kay write is:

In the larger contexts of both Ephesians and Colossians [for which five references are given in Ephesians 1 and 4 and Colossians 1 and 2], *kephalē* may connote ‘authority over’ or ‘source of provision’; but in Ephesians 5 Paul only reinforces the idea of ‘source of provision’ for husbands to wives.

Mike’s mis-reading transforms this into:

Kephalē may connote ‘authority over’ or ‘source of provision’; but in the five references in Ephesians 1 and 4 and Colossians 1 and 2 Paul only reinforces the idea of ‘source of provision’ for husbands to wives.

So, Pierce’s and Kay’s key proposition is that *in Ephesians 5 Paul reinforces only the idea of source of provision in the husband-wife relationship*. But Mike mistakenly transfers that key proposition away from Ephesians 5 and allocates it to the five passages in Ephesians 1 and 4 and Colossians 1 and 2.

MISTAKE 2:

Mike says that Pierce and Kay are wrongly insisting that ‘head’ can only mean *either* ‘authority over’ *or* ‘source of provision’, but not both. Yet Paul may mean both at the same time.

But this is another mistake by Mike. Pierce and Kay do not say that this is necessarily an either/or situation. Their point is, rather, that in Ephesians 5, for the husband-wife relationship, Paul reinforces only one of those two ideas, namely, source of provision.

MISTAKE 3:

Mike then runs through four of the five passages in Ephesians 1 and 4 and Colossians 1 and 2. He introduces his run-through with these words:

‘This is more like in my normal wheelhouse, what I really love to do, verse by verse study, someone says something about the Bible and you open it up, and you read it in context, and you’re like ‘that’s right’ or ‘nah, that’s wrong ... – anybody can do this, you don’t need no degrees, you just need to pay attention and use the Bible’ (0hr34mins).

Then for the next 11 minutes (0hr35mins to 46 mins) he digs himself into a deeper and deeper hole. It is grieving to watch. But we remind ourselves that we all slip up from time to time, as James 3:2 says (‘we all stumble in many ways’). We have all made errors that with hindsight make us cringe, mistakes where we can’t explain afterwards how we came to make them.²¹ If you find that we have made some errors of our own in this response, please write and tell us,

²¹ Andrew, in the Preface to his book *Men and Women in Christ*, recounts how he was reminded of James 3:2 – ‘when I diligently checked which days an art exhibition was open and then, in true Homer Simpson style, booked non-refundable train tickets for the only day when it was closed.’

so that we can make any needed corrections. You can email us at terranwill -at- gmail.com.²²
Please put these words in the subject-line: Winger Part 8.

Mike says that in some of the listed passages in Ephesians and Colossians, Paul does not restrict himself only to the idea of ‘source of provision’, as if that were something *different from* what Pierce and Kay wrote. But that is exactly as Pierce and Kay said.

MISTAKE 4:

Mike’s next mistake is that he omits to consider Colossians 2:18-19, whether in his video or in his notes. We will see below that there is no idea of authority in the *kephalē* metaphor in that passage, where the head is the source of nourishment and growth.

MISTAKE 5:

Mike goes on to say, incorrectly, that Pierce and Kay *ignore* Ephesians 5:22-23 (0hr38mins).

He adds, without awareness of the irony: ‘for those who can’t think these things through carefully like this, this series is not for you’ (0hr39mins).

MISTAKES 6 and 7:

To try to add weight to his misconceived criticism, he offers two imagined reasons why Pierce and Kay (supposedly) ‘ignore’ Ephesians 5:22-23.

His first imaginary reason is that they seem to dismiss it as irrelevant because it doesn’t expressly use the word ‘body’ in relation to wives (0hr40mins).

His second imaginary reason is that they ignore it because maybe they don’t like the implications of it (0hr41mins).

But they don’t ignore it, and neither of those imagined reasons has a basis in the quotation that Mike is criticizing.

MISTAKE 8:

When he gets to the end of his review of their Bible references, he re-reads what Pierce and Kay wrote, still with the incorrect meaning in his mind. He comments:

‘How did they say this? Paul only reinforces the idea of “source of provision” for husbands to wives? Really? Not in my Bible!’

Then, in the most painfully ironic words of all, Mike says that ‘this’ (meaning serious errors by egalitarian scholars) is what he sees ‘over and over again’. He says it is not an anomaly; it happens all the time and it is very unfortunate. (0hr43mins)

In all kindness, we are bound to say that Mike’s words seem apt to describe some parts of his own Women in Ministry Series. Every video that we have so far responded to has contained multiple errors.

²² You’ll need to replace “-at- ” with “@”.

We have real sympathy for Mike's position, because egalitarian scholarship does contain errors (as does complementarian scholarship). But Mike seems to have got caught in a whirlpool of mis-reading egalitarian scholars because he *expects* their work to be incorrect, which in turn leads him to mis-read further, which drags him down yet deeper into error.

MISTAKE 9:

In a further criticism, Mike says that disagreement and confusion over women in ministry is caused by scholarly works that focus more on saying that complementarian views are evil and immoral than they do on actually providing careful, researched, and accurate representations of either Greek or history or scriptural context (0hr43mins).

This criticism is made in the context of Mike's discussion of the excerpt from Pierce's and Kay's chapter in *Discovering Biblical Equality*. We have read the whole of their chapter. There is nothing in it which says that complementarian views are evil and immoral, or which could be interpreted in that sense. (Perhaps he has some other book in mind?)

MISTAKE 10:

Mike goes on to consider the last two sentences of the quoted paragraph from Pierce and Kay. For ease of reference, we repeat them:

'Moreover, he calls husbands to love their wives sacrificially as Christ did for the church (Eph 5:25-30)—again, standing *kephalē* on its head. As "head" of his wife, the husband is commanded to love her—not to exercise leadership or authority over her—however benevolent that might be.'

Mike then claims that egalitarians regard it as inherently unloving and immoral for the husband to have authority over his wife (0hr45mins).

But there is no evidence of that viewpoint being expressed by Pierce and Kay. Their quoted words are to the contrary: they do not deny that benevolent authority is possible. This is another imaginary criticism of what they write.

MISTAKE 11:

Mike then says that their view is a false dichotomy, because loving people is compatible with exercising leadership or authority over them. He gives the example of Jesus, who did both.

But this is another imaginary criticism. Pierce and Kay do not assert that loving people is incompatible with exercising leadership or authority over them.

MISTAKE 12:

It is perfectly true that loving people *can be* consistent with exercising authority over them. But that is not the relevant question here. The relevant question is whether in Ephesians 5 Paul instructs the husband both *to exercise authority over* his wife, and *to love* his wife, or whether he only instructs the latter.

Anyone who reads Ephesians 5 can see that Paul *does* instruct the husband *to love* his wife and that Paul *does not* instruct the husband *to exercise authority over* his wife. This is the point that Pierce and Kay make with all clarity in the quoted paragraph: the husband is commanded to love her, he is not commanded to exercise leadership or authority over her.

But Mike misses this fundamentally important point which they make. That is a particularly disappointing mistake.

MISTAKE 13:

Mike mischaracterizes the egalitarian argument as: ‘he’s told to love her; therefore, *it’s implied* he’s not to exercise authority over her’ (0hr45mins).

That mischaracterization does not reflect the argument that is advanced by Pierce and Kay in the excerpt which Mike is criticizing. Their argument does not depend on some supposed *implication*. It depends on Paul’s *express words* in Ephesians 5.

The point is a simple one, but it bears repeating and emphasizing:

- **Anyone who reads Ephesians 5 can see that Paul *does* instruct the husband *to love* his wife and that Paul *does not* instruct the husband *to exercise authority over* his wife.**

Mike misses this point.

MISTAKE 14:

Mike goes on to rely on Ephesians 5:22-24 as if those verses were an instruction to husbands (0hr46mins).

But they are not. They are explicitly an instruction to wives. They do not lay any obligation on husbands. The obligation on husbands is stated in 5:25-33a. *Mike’s view that husbands ought to exercise authority over their wives is wholly lacking in explicit biblical support.*

Mike considers Ephesians 5 in more detail in his Part 9 video ‘Have We Misunderstood “Wives Submit”?’ When we come to consider what he says there, we will engage with exactly what Paul writes. That will include attending to Paul’s own explanation of his ‘head’ metaphor in Ephesians 5 (which Mike mistakenly disregards). In the meantime, we observe that Mike’s critique of Pierce and Kay is not good scholarship. In fairness to them, he would do well to issue a correction of the many mistakes he has made, including his misrepresentations of their teaching and reasoning.

Introducing a closer look at ‘head’ in Colossians and Ephesians

Before going on to Ephesians 5 (in our response to Mike’s Part 9 video) and 1 Corinthians 11 (in our response to Mike’s Part 10 video), we should look a little more closely at Paul’s five other uses of ‘head’ metaphors, to get a clearer picture.

If our question is “Does ‘head’ clearly mean ‘authority’?”, we will arrive at the following answers:

Colossians 1:18 – no, though there is arguably an association with the idea of authority.

Colossians 2:10 – no, though again there is arguably an association with the idea of authority.

Colossians 2:18-19 – no, definitely not.

Ephesians 1:22-23 – ‘head’ carries an idea of authority but there is not a simple one-to-one correspondence between ‘head’ and ‘authority’.

Ephesians 4:15-16 – no, definitely not.

This is an unpromising start for a fixed equation of a ‘head’ metaphor with ‘authority over’. It shows that there is no such fixed equation in Paul’s usage.

It should not be thought strange that our answers show such variability. Paul is under no obligation to use metaphors in an invariable way. To show the practical reality of this feature of Paul’s writing, which Mike appears not to fully take on board, we will first lay out a less controversial example: how Paul uses a ‘temple’ metaphor.

Comparison: Paul’s ‘temple’ metaphor

In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul writes:

‘Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.’ (ESV)

The subject of the metaphor is the group of believers in Corinth. The vehicle is ‘God’s temple’. We know that in the Old Testament, and persisting into Paul’s time, the Jerusalem temple was conventionally understood as God’s special dwelling place. So, the tenor of the metaphor is that God dwells in the group of believers. And this is confirmed by the explanation ‘God’s Spirit dwells in you’.

Paul uses this metaphor again in a substantially similar way in 2 Corinthians 6:16.

But in Ephesians 2:21-22, he changes the subject. He extends it so as to encompass not only a particular group of believers but also Jews and Gentiles generally, who come to Christ, all being joined together into one ‘temple’ where God dwells.

But then we may compare what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20:

‘Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.’ (ESV)

The vehicle is the same as before – ‘temple’. But here, both the subject and the tenor have changed. The subject is now each believer’s physical body. The tenor is no longer that God

dwells in his people, who collectively constitute a kind of temple. The tenor is now that God's Spirit dwells within each individual's physical body.

This illustrates Paul's freedom to re-use, adapt or invent a metaphor. Even using the same vehicle ('temple') in the same letter (1 Corinthians), he can change the subject and the tenor.

Similarly, when he uses the vehicle 'head' in a letter, we need to be alive to the possibility that *the subject and the tenor may vary, even in the same letter*.

In the three uses in Colossians, the only subject of Paul's 'head' metaphor is Christ, but it is used in differing ways. Twice, it is explicitly a head-and-body metaphor, the 'body' being the church. Once, it is only a 'head' metaphor.

(1) Colossians 1:18 (head-and-body):

'And he [*Christ*] is the head (*kephalē*) of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.' (ESV)

Mike says that the *kephalē* metaphor in verse 18 'clearly, clearly' connotes authority (0hr42mins). But he does not consider the context or Paul's precise train of thought.

Paul's central emphasis in verses 15 to 17 is on Christ as the agent of creation and in verses 18 to 23 on Christ as the agent of redemption (which Paul understands also as new creation). This suggests the idea of 'source of life'. In other words, he is the source of creation, and he is now also the source of the church's life, the one who brings the church into being through his redemptive work. His resurrection from the dead is the start of the new creation, and he imparts this new-creation life to his body, the church.

Since this is the central emphasis, it makes sense to understand Paul's two further statements that Christ is 'the beginning (*archē*)' and 'the firstborn from the dead' as parallel to his first statement that Christ is 'head of the body', meaning 'source of life' rather than 'authority'. For 'the beginning' has to do with origination, and 'firstborn from the dead' has to do with being the first one to attain resurrection life. None of these three statements clearly expresses authority.

Paul then uses these three statements ('head of the body', 'beginning', 'firstborn from the dead') to support his claim about Christ's preeminence in everything.

In the ESV, the word 'preeminent' translates the Greek participle *prōteuōn*. The core semantic idea of this verb is 'to be first'. It is on the same track as 'beginning' and 'firstborn'. Christ has the first place in everything.

Preeminence is not necessarily the same as authority. A preeminent tennis player is not thereby in authority over other players. A preeminent New Testament scholar is not thereby in authority over other scholars. Even a preeminent general is not thereby in authority over his soldiers (the general's authority is from being appointed as general, not from being preeminent).

Mike does not explain why he considers that this reference to preeminence should necessarily be read as a reference to authority, nor why such an idea should be read back into the ‘head’ metaphor.²³

However, some commentators make a link to Psalm 89:27, where David (foreshadowing the Messiah) will be appointed as the firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. So, it is possible that Paul intends an association with authority here.

But that would not have the consequence that ‘head’ means ‘authority over’. A connotation (associated idea) is not a denotation (direct meaning).

Even allowing for the possible allusion to Psalm 89, we remain of the view that, read in context, Christ is the ‘head’ of the body because he is the source of the church’s life. However, we acknowledge the possible association with authority.

(2) Colossians 2:9-10 (head):

‘For in him [*Christ*] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.’ (ESV)

Christ is the *kephalē* ‘of’ (not explicitly ‘over’, as some translations say) all rule and authority. This is one of only two passages that speak of Christ being the *kephalē* of something other than the church.²⁴

Paul does not offer any parallel phrases here, to make clear what he means by his *kephalē* metaphor. We infer that he probably considers them unnecessary because he means it in the same sense that he has already used in 1:18. If so, Christ is the creator-source of all the rulers and authorities who were disarmed at the Cross (see 1:16 and 2:15).

Paul is concerned about false doctrines in Colossae, as we see from 2:4, 8, 16-23, which seem to include the worship of angelic powers (2:18). The Colossians should not live in fear of the angelic powers, or worship them, or seek fullness from them, for Christ has disarmed them and, as verse 10 teaches, it is in Christ that fullness is found.

Mike does not discuss Colossians 2:10 in his video, but his notes say: “Obvious”.

Since Christ is the source of all rule and authority, and bearing in mind the possible association with authority in 1:18, it would be reasonable to argue that *kephalē* is here *associated with* the idea of authority. But that is not the same thing as saying that *kephalē means* ‘authority over’.

²³ The Greek verb *prōteuō* is not otherwise used in the New Testament. Mike refers to one possible meaning in BDAG ‘to hold the highest rank in a group’, and one in LSJ, where *hoi prōteuontes* is given as the ‘chief men in a city’. He appears to think that citing those two meanings clearly establishes his interpretation (0hr42mins). But other meanings in BDAG include ‘be first’ and ‘have first place’ and LSJ offers ‘to be the first’ or ‘hold first place’. Mike provides no specific reasoning either for adopting a meaning involving authority for *prōteuōn* in the particular context of Colossians 1:18, or for applying such a meaning to the ‘head’ metaphor.

²⁴ The other one is 1 Corinthians 11:3. We will see below that some ancient Greek interpreters understood ‘head’ as ‘source’, at least in 1 Corinthians 11:3.

(3) Colossians 2:19 (head-and-body):

‘... [*false teachers are*] not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God’ (ESV)

This is the instance which Pierce and Kay included but which Mike omitted to consider. Here, the tenor of the metaphor is clear. Christ is the source of the ongoing life and growth which God supplies for the whole body of the church. The false teachers are not sustained by Christ, because they have lost their connection to the head. Here, the tenor of the metaphor does not include anything about authority.

This third use of *kephalē* in Colossians as source of life and growth fits comfortably with our ‘creator-source’ reading of Colossians 1:18 and 2:10.

(4) Ephesians 1:19-23 (head-and-body):

‘[19] ... the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. [22] And he put all things under (*hupo*) his feet and gave him as head over (*hyper*) all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.’ (ESV)

In verse 22, Christ is head over all things, to the church which is his body.

It would be easy here to assume a one-to-one correspondence between ‘head’ and ‘authority’. But a close look will show that a more nuanced conclusion is required.

In this passage, Paul’s use of language is complex. To get a clear understanding, we need to start with Paul’s spatial metaphor.

Paul commenced the whole passage with the remarkable statement that God ‘has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’ (1:3).

Verses 20 and 21 tell us that Christ is seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places, far above (*hyperanō*) all rule and authority and power and dominion. So, in verse 22 all things are under (*hupo*) his feet.

If that is where Christ, the head, is seated, then it is also where his body is; and all things are under his body.

Paul says this again, in different words, in 2:6 – *in* Christ Jesus (that is, as his body, in union with him), believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

In Paul’s spatial metaphor, the ‘all things’, which are under Christ’s authority, do not include the church which is his body. Because it is his body, it is above those things, which are under his feet.

Accordingly, in regard to the relationship between Christ and his church, the tenor of the head and body metaphor in 1:22-23 refers to the union of Christ and his church, so that the church shares Christ's own high position, seated with him.²⁵ Paul is not using this metaphor to make a point about Christ's authority over his church. Of course, we know from elsewhere that Christ is lord of the church, but here Paul is emphasizing through the head-and-body metaphor that Christ is in such close union with his body, the church, that the church shares his position over all things.

Mike says in his notes: 'this passage is dripping in authority.' It is indeed. We agree that Christ, who is head over all things, is in authority over all things. But Mike does not consider the context or trace Paul's train of thought. So, he misses the difference that Paul brings out between Christ's relationship to 'all things' and Christ's relationship to 'the church'.²⁶

In this instance, therefore, 'head' carries a clear idea of authority, but it would be an inaccurate over-simplification to say that there is a one-to-one correspondence between 'head' and 'authority'.

We would not be faithful to Paul's metaphor if we were to imagine Christ as a bodiless head dangling over the powers. The word 'head' is introduced by Paul in his spatial metaphor not primarily for the purpose of making a point about authority but in order to explain how his body, the church, is also on the throne, because of its *close union* with Christ.

Can you imagine the impact of this sketch on those who first hear this letter read out? They may gasp: they are on the throne, too! The dark powers that may have tyrannized them are beneath them. By virtue of their being joined to Christ like a body to a head, all his resurrection power and all the authority he has over the cosmos, especially its spiritual forces, are theirs, too. This is a great foundation for Paul's teaching on spiritual warfare, later in the letter (chapter 6).

(5) Ephesians 4:15-16 (head-and-body):

'... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.' (ESV)

Mike says:

'This is a great verse for the egalitarian position because it's clearly about nutrition and we're being joined as relational. And we're getting supplied from Christ to minister to one

²⁵ This identity of Christ and his church is a New Testament theme which fulfils the vision of the triumph of the Son of Man in Daniel 7, where the Son of Man is given full kingly authority in God's presence (7:13-14) and the interpretation is that this sovereignty is given to God's holy people (7:18, 27). Paul again expresses a similar concept of believers reigning with Christ in Colossians 3:1-4.

²⁶ Andrew acknowledges that he did not make this clear himself in *Men and Women in Christ*, 50. Terran, however, did notice it - admittedly just before printing - in *How God Sees Women*, Appendix 3.

another as well. It's a beautiful idea. This head-body metaphor is a beautiful, beautiful thing. So, I would say that, yeah, this passage – I would agree with that it focuses on provision. It does not mention anything about authority.' (0hr38mins)

We fully agree. And it is worth noticing that the metaphor combines the ideas of 'source of ongoing life and growth' and 'union', for it is only as the parts are all joined to the head that they are able to receive the provision for their sustenance and growth which comes from the head.

We may recall here that the tenor of a metaphor depends upon a conventional understanding of the vehicle. As we saw above, according to Hippocratic medicine, one of the functions of the head was that it nourished the body through the veins by some kind of internal flow. As a background idea, this fits Paul's metaphor without discomfort. The head keeps the body alive and makes it grow.

But Mike qualifies what he has just said. He adds:

'But, to not overreach, we should say it doesn't exclude the possibility of authority with headship, either. It just talks about one thing and doesn't talk about another. And unless you have that either/or fallacy where, if provision is mentioned, it means 'not authority', unless you have that fallacy in your mind, then this just becomes a verse that doesn't actually do a whole lot for our discussion.'

We are unsure what Mike means by this.

If he means that the absence of an idea of authority *here in these verses* does not rule out that there may be an idea of authority in a head-body metaphor *somewhere else*, then we agree with him, since metaphors may vary.

But if he thinks that the absence of the idea of authority from these verses is consistent with authority being implied here, then we must disagree. It is not legitimate to add extra ideas into a metaphor on the basis that those ideas can be found in a different use of a similar metaphor. There is nothing in Ephesians 4 which suggests that the idea of authority is implied in the head-body metaphor used in verses 15-16.

This usage in Ephesians 4 fits comfortably with our interpretation of Ephesians 1:22.

In summary, in the five uses of 'head' metaphors in Colossians 1-2 and Ephesians 1 and 4, there is a significant degree of variation. Sometimes there is a clear idea of authority, either directly or by association. Sometimes there is not. We have seen a particular emphasis on Christ's organic union with his church and on how, as head, he is the body's source of life and nourishment for growth.

Thus, a survey of the five uses does not show that Paul's 'head' metaphors in Ephesians 5:23 or 1 Corinthians 11:3 must necessarily be about male authority over women.

When we get to Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11, the tenor of Paul's metaphors might or might not include ideas of source of life, or source of provision through organic union, and

might or might not include ideas of authority. It will depend on what Paul says in those passages.

Church history: can native speakers help us?

Mike calls part (3) of his video the 'Church History Argument'.

In this part, Mike considers only one church father, Chrysostom. Chrysostom understood certain uses of 'head' by Paul to imply authority.²⁷

Here is Mike's summary from his Lesson Overview:

'Surprisingly, some Egalitarians will actually share a quote from Chrysostom to show that one of the church fathers understood perfectly well that this term "head" didn't mean to imply authority. Catherine Kroeger, founder of CBE promotes this view, and many echo her.'

Mike spends the whole of this part of his video criticizing a passage in an article by Kroeger where she refers to Chrysostom. The criticism sounds strong until one looks at Kroeger's article to see what she is actually saying and the audience for whom it was prepared. We explain in Postscript (2), below, why we believe Mike's criticism to be unjustified.

The real question of interest here is: can native Greek speakers, in the centuries following Paul, help us to understand Paul's 'head' metaphors? How did they understand Paul's meaning?

Chrysostom provides us with one example. Whatever else he got from what Paul wrote, we agree with Mike that he certainly derived the idea of 'authority' in some instances.²⁸

How did others interpret Paul's 'head' metaphors?

Some other Greek interpreters understood 'head' as 'source' in Paul's writings, at least in some instances. These include:

- Eusebius (died 339) (*Eccl. Theol.* 1.11.2–3, alluding to Ephesians 1:22 and 1 Corinthians 11:3),
- Theodore of Mopsuestia (died 428) (*Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 11:3),
- Cyril of Alexandria (died 444) (*de recta fide ad Arcadium et Marinam* 1.1.5.5(2).63, alluding to 1 Corinthians 11:3; *de recta fide ad Pulcheriam et Eudociam* 5(2).131D,

²⁷ In the introductory part of his notes, Mike also includes a reference to Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitudes*, 7.3. This is an apparently fictional work from the 2nd century AD. The intended meaning of Hermas's 'head' metaphor in its context is a matter of debate. But in any event, this is not an exposition of Paul's use of a head metaphor. So, Mike rightly does not include it in part (3) of his video. The text in Greek and English can be seen at <http://www.katapi.org.uk/ApostolicFathers/Shepherd3.html#s7>.

²⁸ However, what Chrysostom writes on this topic is a bit of a tangle. In his Homily 26 on 1 Corinthians, he tries to maintain a husband's superior authority as 'head' over his wife while at the same denying (in opposition to heretics) that the Father as 'head' is superior to the Son. Chrysostom's homilies are available online at www.ccel.org and at www.newadvent.org.

alluding to 1 Corinthians 11:3 and discussing a little more widely ‘head’ meaning ‘source’),

- Cosmas Indicopleustes (6th century) (*Topographia Christiana* 5.209).²⁹

The first of the two citations from Cyril states:

‘Christ is the head of every man: for man was made through him. ... “But the head of a woman is the man”, for she was taken out of his flesh. ... And similarly, “the head of Christ is God”, for he is from him according to nature ...’ (translation by Wayne Grudem)³⁰

In Grudem’s translation, it is plain that ‘head’ means ‘source’.

In a somewhat similar vein, Cosmas writes:

‘For just as Adam is head [*kephalē*] of all people in this world, because he is their cause [*aitios*] and father, in this way also is the Lord Christ according to the flesh head [*kephalē*] of the church and the father of the age to come.’³¹

The learned ninth-century lexicographer Photius is of particular interest here. He was twice Patriarch of Constantinople (858-867 and 877-886) and was the author of commentaries and theological treatises. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 11:3, he gives two interpretive options. His first option is that ‘head’ means ‘source’ (that is, source of life) – his exact terms are *gennētēs* (procreator/begetter) and *proboleus* (progenitor/originator). His second option is ‘authority’.³²

After examining only one church father (Chrysostom), Mike states:

‘Church history totally supports headship implying authority’ (1hr34mins).

That is not a correct statement. Mike has not presented a balanced picture of how Paul’s metaphors were understood by native Greek speakers in the centuries following the New Testament. In fact, they were divided over how ‘head’ should be understood. ‘Head’ as a metaphor for ‘source’ is not something invented by modern egalitarian scholars to justify their views.

Church history does not prove that Paul’s ‘head’ metaphors in Ephesians 5:23 or 1 Corinthians 11:3 are about male authority over women.

In our response to Mike’s Part 9 video, we will show that Paul’s teaching on the full equality of authority and mutuality of husband and wife remained understood for some time after the

²⁹ Grudem interprets some of these references differently or argues that there is some ambiguity. See further *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts*, 155 (in chapter 8, under ‘Objections to a sources interpretation’).

³⁰ *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 569.

³¹ We are indebted to Philip Payne for the list of references and for the Cosmas text. We are unsure which specific scriptures Cosmas had in mind; the phrase ‘head of the church’ suggests texts in either Colossians or Ephesians.

³² A translation of Photius’s text can be found in Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 580. Grudem offers comments, but misreads the text, seemingly not appreciating that Photius is offering two interpretive options.

New Testament period, before traditional patriarchalism largely recaptured the Christian imagination. That could not be guessed at from Mike's 'Church History Argument'.

Lexicons, and how 'head' metaphors were used before Paul

Discussing Greek medicine above, we said we would come back to Philo.

Philo of Alexandria was not a physician. He was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher. He wrote in Greek. He was born perhaps two or three decades before Paul.

There are clear examples in Philo's writings of a 'head' metaphor used with the tenor 'source of provision' or 'source of life'. We lay out the primary sources, in translation, in Postscript (3), below. One of them is strikingly similar to Paul's usage in Ephesians 4:15-16.

Part (4) of Mike's video is called: 'The Battle of the Lexicons; does kephale mean authority?' He says this is the biggest of his four topics. He spends the longest on it.

Lexicons are useful secondary sources because they collect usages and meanings from a variety of primary sources and show the results of their research.

Where the meaning of a metaphor used by Paul is controversial, and we are looking for help, we can consult lexicons to find out how the metaphor was used prior to Paul, since that may perhaps give us some clues to what Paul may mean by it.

Disappointingly, Mike loses sight of the nature of this inquiry, with the result that most of his long discussion is flawed and misses the central point.

Mike slips into thinking that the most relevant question is: 'what do lexicons think that Paul meant by 'head' when used as a metaphor in 1 Corinthians and in Ephesians?'

But that question is not the reason for consulting lexicons. We are not here consulting lexicons as substitutes for commentaries on Ephesians or on 1 Corinthians. As we should expect, most New Testament lexicons reflect the traditional majority interpretation of Paul's metaphors. The traditional majority interpretation fits in with the patriarchal culture in which Christianity spread and with the fact that the word for 'head' was commonly used in Latin (*caput*) – and, later, in German (*Kopf*) and in English (*head*) – to denote a position of leadership and authority. Latin, German and English are the three languages in which most theological discourse with which we are familiar has taken place. Seeing the traditional majority interpretation repeated in New Testament lexicons does not take us any further forward in our inquiry into whether that interpretation is correct or incorrect.

What we should be doing here is seeing whether we can equip ourselves for examining Paul's metaphors afresh, by looking into *prior uses* of 'head' metaphors, which Paul or his readers might possibly have been aware of. If we find that there were regular prior uses of 'head' as a

metaphor in certain particular ways, we can then go on to consider whether any of those particular uses helps us to understand Paul's uses in his letters (*Help No 5*).

This idea of examining prior uses is well understood by egalitarian scholars such as Lynn Cohick.

Mike starts this part of the discussion by citing Cohick:³³

'The Greek term used for head is *kephalē*, which typically refers to the physical head resting on the neck. In Hebrew, Latin, and English, *head* can be used metaphorically to indicate "leader." It is difficult to make the case that it refers to "leader" in Greek, for we have almost no evidence of this.^[29] Lexicons in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries suggested "source" as a possible metaphorical meaning, but not "leader."^[30]

Cohick's footnote 30 states:

'The 1843 edition of the Liddell and Scott lexicon included over twenty-five entries under *kephalē*, including the metaphorical meaning "source", but no entry referring to "leader" or "authority over." The ninth edition, published in 1996, likewise does not include "leader" or "authority over" as possible meanings for *kephalē*. Additionally, ancient lexicons do not define *kephalē* as authority or leader; see Cervin, "Does *kephalē* Mean 'Source'?", 85-112.

Mike cites many New Testament lexicons, which repeat the traditional majority view *on what Paul meant in his letters*, and on that basis mistakenly asserts that Lynn Cohick's summary of what lexicons show is 'really problematic' (1hr14mins). But Mike has lost sight of the fact that Cohick's citation of lexicons here, as secondary sources, is concerned primarily with what they say about usage *prior to Paul*.

He complains that not only Cohick, but also Cervin in the article cited in Cohick's footnote 30, are 'throwing out' all the most relevant lexicons. By this, he means that they do not consider what the New Testament lexicons say. He thinks this is 'misleading' (1hr16-17mins).

But usage in the New Testament, that is, in Ephesians and 1 Corinthians, does not tell us what the usages were prior to Paul. The New Testament lexicons are not focused on the question of prior use. So, they are not useful for this part of the discussion. They tell us how some interpreters have understood Paul's own usage, which we already knew, but the correctness of that interpretation is the very thing under discussion.

Wayne Grudem responded to Cervin in an article published in 1990. Mike commends Grudem's articles. He says the 1990 article is 'fantastic' (1hr20mins). As regards the metaphorical meaning 'source' for 'head', Grudem's ultimate message is that it 'simply does not exist' in Greek literature.³⁴

Mike often laments what he considers to be counterfactual claims made by egalitarian scholars. We agree that, like all scholars, they sometimes make errors. But in this instance, it is

³³ From *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 3rd edn, 199-200.

³⁴ The quotation 'simply does not exist' is from Grudem's 2002 article.

the claim by Grudem that is counterfactual. This becomes clear if one looks at what Philo wrote: see Postscript (3), where we briefly discuss Grudem's articles.

Even though Mike recommends Grudem's articles, it seems to us that he understands Grudem's conclusions may not be entirely correct. At one point Mike says he is not arguing that 'head' cannot mean 'source'. On the contrary, Mike thinks 'it can mean source and authority' (0hr34mins). And we saw above that, when Mike briefly considers what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:15-16, he candidly acknowledges that in Paul's express words there is only the idea of 'source of provision', without mention of authority (0hr38mins). As we have indicated, that particular example from Paul is very similar to one of the examples from Philo.

Mike concludes his lexical argument by saying that nearly every English version of the Bible agrees on rendering *kephalē* as 'head', with only the 2017 edition of the much-criticized TPT using the word 'source'. But that is a meaningless point. There is no doubt that *kephalē* in Greek translates literally as 'head' in English. The translators' primary task is to reproduce the metaphor, not to interpret it.

It would be possible to survey the lexical discussion in much greater detail than we have done here or in Postscript (3) below. But it is unlikely that to do so would serve a useful purpose, because of the limitations of considering prior uses of a metaphor. If scholars find prior uses of a 'head' metaphor with the tenor 'source' and/or with the tenor 'authority over', it does not follow that Paul necessarily used one or both of those meanings. Study of prior uses can do no more than provide possibilities for us to consider when we look at Paul's own actual uses.

Usage of 'head' metaphors in Greek writings prior to Paul does not show that Paul's 'head' metaphors in Ephesians 5:23 or 1 Corinthians 11:3 are about male authority over women.

Conclusions, and a question for Mike

The question in the title of Mike's Part 8 video is: Male Headship: Is it REALLY Biblical? From considering the topics in this video, our response is that Mike has not shown that male headship, in the way he understands it, is biblical.

We quote here Mike's conclusions from his notes, and compare them with what we have found:

'1- Common medical thought in NT times supports "head" as implying authority'

This is misleading, because it is an over-simplification. The factual picture is much more complex, offering multiple possibilities.

'2- Paul's metaphorical and contextual use of "head" in relation to both Jesus and husbands implies authority'

Not so. Paul's metaphors are not uniform. In the five examples from Colossians 1-2 and Ephesians 1 and 4, authority is associated with Paul's 'head' metaphor in some instances and

not in others. No conclusion can be drawn about Paul's uses of 'head' for the husband in Ephesians 5:23 and for the man in 1 Corinthians 11:3, which have yet to be examined in detail (see the Part 9 and 10 videos and our responses).

'3- Church history totally supports headship implying authority'

Not so. Even our very brief review of what Greek church fathers wrote shows a division of opinion.

'4- Lexical study of "kephale" strongly supports the authority implication'

Not so. Mike's analysis loses sight of the purpose of consulting lexicons in this context, which is to review metaphorical uses of 'head' prior to Paul. The meaning 'source' for a 'head' metaphor definitely exists in Greek prior to Paul. See Postscript (3) below. But anyway, this is a side issue, since Paul's usages in 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 are new.

'5- Common E [egalitarian] claims are really problematic'

The main reason why Mike takes this view is that he misreads and misunderstands what egalitarian scholars have written.

We have found that Mike's teaching in each of the four parts of his video is distorted by major errors and omissions. The four topics do not demonstrate that Paul's 'head' metaphors in Ephesians 5:23 or 1 Corinthians 11:3 are about male authority over women.

Our question for Mike

We suggest that, if complementarian teachers wish to insist that husbands ought to exercise authority over their wives, they should point to a biblical command which says that husbands ought to do so.

But they cannot. And this teaching has practical impacts: see Postscript (1), below.

When we have responded to Mike's Part 9 video, we hope a more biblical way forward will be clear. With joy and awe, we will be able to contemplate Paul's vision of mutual submission and mutual support, in which important marital decisions are made jointly, and where Christ-following men are not called to exercise authority over their wives but to sacrifice themselves for them in caring, self-giving love. What should be expected is that men empowered by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) will be willing to lay down their lives for their wives and serve them sacrificially, as Christ did for the church, in accordance with Ephesians 5:25-33a.

For now, our pressing question for Mike is this:

- ***Since there is no instruction in the Bible which says that husbands ought to exercise leadership authority over their wives, why do you teach that husbands ought to exercise leadership authority over their wives and that this is very important?***

Postscript (1): Practical impact on marriages today

We have heard complaints from teachers of complementarian marriage seminars that Christian husbands all too frequently abdicate their (supposed) responsibility to be the leaders over their wives and to exercise authority over them, both in spiritual matters and more generally.

While doubtless some men are lazy, we have also noticed that quite frequently the marriages of couples in complementarian churches appear more egalitarian, and happily so, than the teaching in those churches would require.

We believe that a major reason why Christian husbands so frequently do not live up to their church's teaching is that this is a burden that the Lord has not placed on them and which most men are not equipped to carry; and both they and their wives feel this to be confirmed in their day-to-day experience.

The discomfort of putting complementarianism into practice can be particularly acute for men whose personality is more gentle than the average man, whereas men who are naturally more assertive are over-commended:

'Some men are natural leaders. According to complementarian theology, a man who leads well is doing God's will. But if a man doesn't lead well, he's giving in to his sinful, fallen nature. So if you're a guy and you find it natural and comfortable to be the leader at home, it's easy to think you're a better Christian than that guy over there who just doesn't like being the leader and isn't very good at it. But is this really spirituality—or just personality?'³⁵

Correspondingly, women whose personality is more assertive than the average woman are condemned by complementarianism as bad wives, while women who are naturally more shy are over-commended. We have noticed that women who are privileged to stay at home while their husbands work, or women who are naturally compliant, often have no problem with the one-sided emphasis on women's supporting role.

Ancient patriarchal assumptions were self-confirming: women who were focused on children and utterly dependent on their husbands financially, naturally submitted to their husbands, who, all the while, were growing in their society-engaging confidence. Still today in the church, some stay-at-home moms easily take to the same assumption. To them, one-sided wifely submission feels right. They are also lauded as examples of godly womanhood (which they may well be, in the particular context of the life to which *they* have been called). But women whose calling is to be leaders in the workplace remain unaffirmed, and are seen, in their home setting, as a difficult problem which their husbands must somehow manage.

Probably the most influential popular Christian book on marriage from a complementarian viewpoint is *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needs*.³⁶ The author states:

³⁵ Kristen Rosser, 'The Consequences of Complementarianism for Men' (January 26, 2016) <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/consequences-complementarianism-men/>.

³⁶ By Dr Emerson Eggerichs, 2004.

‘... to set up a marriage with two equals at the head is to set it up for failure. That is one of the big reasons that people are divorcing right and left today.’ (221)

But where is the evidence for that claim?

A recent study of 21,000 married and divorced church-going Christian women in North America came to the opposite conclusion. It suggests that there are real dangers in putting complementarianism into practice in one’s marriage.

In *The Great Sex Rescue: The Lies You’ve Been Taught and How to Recover What God Intended* (2021), Sheila Gregoire publishes the conclusions of the study:

‘What happens to couples when one spouse makes the decisions ... even if they talk their decisions over with their spouse first and seek their input? They are 7.4 times *more* likely to be divorced than couples who share decision-making power.’ (emphasis original)

Of the thousands surveyed, about 40% believed that the husband should have decision-making power in the marriage, and over 60% believed that one of the best ways a wife can love her husband is by submitting to his leadership – and yet:

‘... only 17.3% of couples actually act out men having the final say. In contrast, 78.9% of marriages function without a tiebreaker ... In these marriages, couples either make decisions together or forgo making a decision if they don’t agree.’³⁷

The study brings to the surface two quandaries.

First, among complementarians there is a mismatch of beliefs and behavior. The majority of Christians who believe that the husband is the decision-maker or tiebreaker do not put it into practice. From personal observation, it appears to us that many Christians intuitively know that a marriage where there is equality of authority is better, even if theoretically and theologically they acknowledge higher male authority.

Second, and related to this:

‘... many Christian couples believe husbands have decision-making authority. *This belief did not cause harm to the couple until it was put into practice.*’ (emphasis added)

The study concludes:

‘... when women don’t feel heard, and instead feel as if their opinions are not as important as their husbands’, their marriages are twenty-six times more likely to end in divorce. ... the risk of divorce skyrockets in marriages in which the husband is the one who ultimately makes the decisions, even if he consults his wife on them. When we set up marriages where a husband has decision-making power, we create marriages in which his opinions, by definition, matter more than hers. And when women feel their opinions are not given the same weight as their husbands’, ... marriages crumble.’

³⁷ The remaining respondents, not included in the 78.9%, were in marriages in which the wife made the final decisions.

Conversely, the study suggests that there are great benefits from mutuality in marriage:

‘When couples share power (make decisions together), wives are four times ... more likely to rate themselves among the happiest 20% of marriages than among the least happy 20% and are 67% more likely to frequently orgasm during sex.’

These statistics suggest that the couples that fare best are those that decide to work things out together, and when they disagree, to give the matter the time and care it needs to come to an agreement.

We would be interested to see an independent expert review of the quality of the sampling in the study and of the statistical significance of the findings. In the meantime, we note with some comfort that one of Gregoire’s co-authors (Johanna Sawatsky) is a statistician, and with even more comfort that the results appear fully in harmony with Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 7, which we will discuss in our response to Mike’s Part 9 video.

Postscript (2): Kroeger and Chrysostom

John Chrysostom was a native Greek speaker. And not an ordinary one. He was one of the foremost orators of his generation, and became Archbishop of Constantinople. He preached many sermons which were written down, from which we can still benefit. He died in 407.

Catherine Clark Kroeger was an egalitarian New Testament scholar. She died in 2011.

Here is Mike’s criticism of what Kroeger says about Chrysostom:

- According to Mike’s Overview, Kroeger’s article (wrongly) promotes the view that Chrysostom understood that ‘head’ did not imply authority.
- In the video Mike states that her article seems to imply that Chrysostom was weighing in against the idea that *kephalē* means authority (0hr56mins).

So, we need to examine the details of Mike’s criticism to see whether it is justified.

Mike does not provide any context for the criticized passage in her article, but we will do so.

Before the passage which Mike criticizes, Kroeger has spent over 2,000 words discussing, in four sections, ancient ideas of the head as (1) ‘the source of a river, spring or fountain’, as (2) ‘source of generation’, as (3) ‘source or beginning’, and as (4) ‘producing growth’.

In the next section of her article, she turns to ancient medical ideas about the relationship of head and body. In this context, the quotation of which Mike complains begins in this way:

‘The commonly held anatomical view of antiquity, that the head was the source of the body’s existence, led the foremost exegete of the early church to further metaphorical uses. From the head, John Chrysostom said, the senses “have their source and fount”.’

Kroeger then sets out some sentences in which Chrysostom develops this idea of the senses having their source in the head:

‘In the head are the eyes both of the body, and of the soul. ... All the senses have thence their origin and source. Thence are sent forth the organs of speech, the power of seeing and of smelling, and all touch.’

After some further citations from Chrysostom, she concludes the section with:

‘How often today we fail to recognize the implications of a sensitive dynamic of head and body!

According to Mike’s Overview, she is promoting the view that Chrysostom understood ‘head’ did *not* imply authority. But the criticized passage does not address that topic. It does not say anything about whether Chrysostom understood that ‘head’ did or did not imply authority.

As further explained in his video, Mike’s complaint is that she seems to imply that Chrysostom was weighing in *against* the idea that *kephalē* means authority.

However, we do not understand how he gets that implication from the passage which he quotes and criticizes.

Certainly, Kroeger leaves out some sentences in which Chrysostom shows that he regards Paul’s ‘head’ metaphor as conveying an idea of authority. But that is because Kroeger is not discussing that topic in the criticized passage. She is discussing the idea of source and showing that even Chrysostom (who is well known for his insistence on male authority) picks up the idea of source and makes further use of it.

We can understand that, if someone knew little or nothing of Chrysostom, they might imagine the quotation to be misleading, simply because it does not draw attention to Chrysostom’s views on male authority, including that he thought of the ‘head’ in terms of authority. But we see from footnote 1 to Kroeger’s article that it originated from a plenary address which she gave to the Evangelical Theological Society. It seems to us that Kroeger would likely have expected her audience at ETS to be generally well aware of Chrysostom’s views.³⁸ To an informed listener, the point of interest in the quoted passage is that *even Chrysostom* picks up the idea of ‘head’ as source and makes use of it.

We conclude that Mike’s criticism of the passage in Kroeger’s article is not justified.

Postscript (3): Grudem’s articles

There are three articles by Wayne Grudem that play a part in the lexical discussion.

Grudem’s original **1985** article was ‘Does Κεφαλή [*kephalē*] Mean “Source” Or “Authority Over” in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples’.³⁹ Cervin responded in 1989.⁴⁰

³⁸ Full members of the ETS must have earned a Th.M. degree, its equivalent, or a higher degree in biblical studies, theological studies, or a related discipline.

³⁹ *Trinity Journal* 6 NS (1985), 38-59.

⁴⁰ ‘Does *kephalē* Mean “Source” of “Authority Over” in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal’, *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989): 10.

In **1990**, Grudem replied to Cervin, with ‘The Meaning of Kephale (“Head”): A Response to Recent Studies’.⁴¹

Grudem followed this up with a further article in 2001, which he expanded in **2002**: ‘The meaning of Κεφαλή [*kephalē*]: An evaluation of new evidence, real and alleged’.⁴²

A full discussion of the merits and demerits of these articles would take many pages. We will confine ourselves to the following:

- (1) Mike is incorrect to say that Lynn Cohick uses ‘statistical trickery’ when she refers to Grudem’s first article.
- (2) Examples from Philo, and multiple lexicons, show that Grudem downplays the evidence of *kephalē* as a metaphor for source of something.
- (3) Grudem’s claim that *kephalē* was an established metaphor for ‘authority over’ is overstated.

(1) Statistical trickery?

In Mike’s discussion of how ‘head’ metaphors were used before Paul, he criticizes something written about Grudem’s 1985 article by Lynn Cohick.⁴³ In the cited passage, Cohick’s footnote 29 includes this statement:

‘He [Grudem] examined over two thousand examples of the term *kephalē* in the ancient world and concluded that 2.1 percent of the time, it should be translated with the sense of “leader” or “having authority over,” including in the biblical text’s examples.’

Mike calls this ‘statistical trickery’ by Cohick, because the total, of which 2.1 percent is a proportion, includes literal uses (0hr51mins).

That is an injudicious and unjustified description.

Cohick’s statement correctly reproduces one of Grudem’s conclusions. The 2.1 percent statistic is provided by Grudem himself in his article.

It is sufficiently clear to the kind of reader who examines footnotes that this statistic, cited by Cohick, gives Grudem’s claimed proportion in relation to all the uses of the term *kephalē* that he surveyed. Moreover, Cohick is merely describing what Grudem concluded; she is not suggesting that his statistic is meaningful.

Indeed, the statistic means little. The 100%, of which this is a proportion, is Grudem’s selection of materials extending to the 4th century AD. There is no way that Paul’s metaphorical use of *kephalē* could have been influenced by those who wrote after he did.

⁴¹ Grudem, ‘The Meaning of Kephale (“Head”): A Response to Recent Studies’ (TrinJ 11 NS [1990] 3-17), reprinted as an appendix in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 1991, 2006, 2021. The link in Mike’s notes goes to the 2001/2002 article by Grudem.

⁴² In *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (2002), 145-202. Reprinted as an Appendix to *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (2004, 2005).

⁴³ From *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 3rd edn, 199-200.

The same is true of the further statistic which Mike quotes from among the many in Grudem's article, that 16.2 percent of metaphorical uses mean 'person of superior authority or rank, or "ruler", "ruling part"' (0hr51mins). This is 16.2 percent of examples of metaphorical uses *to the 4th century AD*.

Besides, both the 2.1 percent figure and the 16.2 percent figure are unsatisfactory because they depend upon (a) interpreting Paul as meaning 'authority over' (which is the very thing which we are supposed to be inquiring into) and upon (b) Grudem's own interpretations of passages in other writers as referring to authority even though other scholars interpret them differently.

Mike would do well to withdraw the unjustified description 'statistical trickery'.

(2) Grudem's downplaying of 'head' as a metaphor for source

Grudem's downplaying of 'head' as a metaphor for source in Greek literature is contrary to the evidence.

We begin with lexicons.

Mike correctly notes that egalitarian scholars rely on the fact that the LSJ lexicon gives the meaning 'source' and does not give the meaning 'leader' or 'authority over'. He rightly acknowledges that LSJ is a very respected resource.

Mike then claims that egalitarians use the LSJ lexicon as their evidence 'because it's the only one they've got ... that's going to help them out' (1hr22mins).

But that claim is not correct.

Philip Payne has kindly supplied us with the following list of fourteen further lexicons which give the sense of source, in addition to LSJ:

- the twelfth century Johannes Zonaras Lexicon (1),
- the sixteenth century lexicons by (2) Petrina, (3) Estienne, and (4) Budé, Tusanus, Gesner and Junius, and
- later lexicons by (5) Passow, (6) Pape, (7) Schenkl, (8) Woodhouse, (9) Bailly, (10) Bölting, (11) Rost, (12) Feyerabend, (13) Montanari, and (14) Banks.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Johannes Zonaras, *Lexicon* (ed. Johann August Henrich Tittmann; Leipzig: S. Siegf. Lebr. Crusii, 1808); Henri Petrina, *Dictionarium Graecolatinum* (Basel: Henri C. Petrina, 1568), "origio" = source or origin; Henri Estienne, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (8 vols.; Geneva: Henr. Stephani Oliva, 1572; reprinted Paris: Ambrosius Firmin Didot, 1829), 4:1499, "Fontes" = fountain-head, source, origin, cause; Guillaume Budé, Jacobus Tusanus, Konrad Gesner, and Hadrianus Junius, *Dictionarium Graecolatinum* (Basel: Henri C. Petrina, 1577); Franz Passow, *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache* (1819–1824); Wilhelm Pape, *Griechisch-Deutsches Handwörterbuch* (3rd ed.; 3 vols.; Braunschweig: Friedrich Vieweg und Sohn, 1880), 1:1428, "ποταμοῦ, die Quellen, Her 4, 91"; Carlo Schenkl, *Vocabolario Greco-Italiano* (Vienna: Loescher, 1892), 467, "κεφαλή ποταμοῦ. la sorgente" = "source, spring"; S. C. Woodhouse, *English-Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1932), 390, "source, origin ... ἀρχή ... in prose and verse"; A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire Grec Français Rédigé avec le concours de. E. Egger: Édition revue*

We turn next to examples of ‘head’ metaphors used by Philo.

In his video, Mike reads out a quotation from a book chapter by Clinton Arnold, where Arnold gives examples of Philo describing the head: ‘the master limb of the members’, ‘the first, highest and principal part’, ‘the chief’, ‘the head like the citadel of a king, has as its occupant the sovereign mind’ (0hr29mins).⁴⁵ Those citations make us aware of the possibility that, when Philo uses ‘head’ as the vehicle for a metaphor, he may intend the tenor to be ‘chief’ or ‘master’ or something of that kind.

But that is not what we find in the following examples.

Here is Philo in *On Rewards and Punishments* (125), commenting on Deuteronomy 28:13:

‘[T]he virtuous one, whether single man or people, will be the head [*kephalē*] of the human race and all the others like the limbs of a body which draw their life from the forces in the head.’

The cardinal rule for understanding a metaphor is to pay attention to any explanation that the author provides. Philo is quite explicit here with his explanation. In this metaphor, the person described as ‘head’ is depicted as the source of life for the people described as limbs.

But Grudem mistakenly lists this excerpt as an example of *kephalē* meaning ‘authority over/ruler’, where a person in authority is metaphorically called the head of others under his authority.⁴⁶

Grudem’s classification clashes with what Philo himself tells us. Philo’s own explanation makes plain the tenor, that the person described as ‘head’ is the source of life for the people described as limbs. That fits precisely with the conventional idea that the head was the source of nourishment that made the body live and grow. The tenor of the metaphor conveys only the idea of source of life and does not convey a meaning that has to do with authority.⁴⁷

par L. Séchan et. P. Chantraine (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1950), 1085, “la source d’un fleuve”; Rudolf Bölding, *Dicionário Grego-Português* (Rio De Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1941); Valentin Christian Friedrich Rost, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhök & Ruprecht, 1818; Braunschweig: G. Westermann, 1888); Karl Feyerabend, *Greek-English Dictionary* (New York: Saphrograph, 1971), 220, “source”; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (eds. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1120, “beginning, origin Orph. Fr. 21a ... of a river pl. sources Hdt. 4.91.2, of muscles Gal. 4.565 d”; Robert Banks, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1:682, “source.” Seven of these lexicons are listed in Payne’s book *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 123.

⁴⁵ ‘Jesus Christ: “Head” of the Church’, 356.

⁴⁶ *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 546.

⁴⁷ Arnold in ‘Jesus Christ: “Head” of the Church’, 357, says that the ‘notion of leadership’ is present, but offers no explanation of why he says that is so. Grudem provides a lengthy defense of his classification of this metaphor, which can be seen conveniently in the 2021 printing of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 528-529. Grudem’s own translation of the excerpt is nearly the same as the one cited above (he uses ‘parts’ for ‘limbs’ and ends with the phrase ‘animated by the powers in and above the head’). In essence, Grudem fails to come to terms with Philo’s own explanation. Grudem says that the idea of ‘source’ does not fit the context, because no one would think that the head of an animal was the source of the entire animal, and because no one would think that a virtuous man exalted to leadership in the human race was the

Readers may note the conspicuous similarity to Ephesians 4:15-16, where Paul depicts Christ as the head which is joined to the body and makes the body grow (the body being the community of believers, the church).

And here is Philo in *Preliminary Studies* (61):

‘[O]f all the members of the clan here described Esau is the progenitor [*genarchēs*], the head [*kephalē*] as it were of the whole creature.’

Again, the tenor of the ‘head’ metaphor is source, in the sense of progenitor. Philo himself provides for us the equation of ‘head’ with ‘progenitor’.

The metaphorical use of ‘head’ as meaning ‘progenitor’ may echo the ancient belief that sperm originated in the brain. This made the head the source of a person’s descendants. Again, the tenor of the metaphor conveys only an idea of source of life and does not convey a meaning that has to do with authority.⁴⁸

Even if Grudem were correct that the person described as ‘head’ in either of these examples happened to be also in a position of authority, that would not change the tenor of the metaphor. A metaphor only ever makes a partial assertion (Feature 1); where the author provides an explanation of the tenor, it is not legitimate to add incidental characteristics to the meaning.

The message of Grudem’s articles is mistaken. The meaning ‘source’ for a ‘head’ metaphor *does* exist in Greek literature, and in the two examples from Philo the idea of authority is not included in the tenor of the metaphor.

In his video, Mike refers to Wayne Grudem’s criticisms of LSJ and to Grudem’s interaction with Peter G.W. Glare (1hr26-30mins).

In 1997 Grudem sent his 1990 article to Glare, who had been editor of the Liddell and Scott Supplement from 1981 to 1996 (and previously editor of the Oxford Latin Dictionary from 1955 to 1981).

The letter of response from Peter Glare said:

source of the human race. But Philo’s explanation is not that the head is the source of the entire animal. Nor is it that the virtuous man is the source of the human race. Philo’s explanation gives the sense in which he means that the head is the source of life for the limbs, namely, the limbs draw their life from and are animated from the head. In this passage, Philo is referring to Deuteronomy 28:13, which uses the expression ‘the head and not the tail’ to indicate God’s promise that he will make Israel more prominent than other nations, if Israel obeys him. Philo applies this idea to a virtuous person becoming prominent and being a source of spiritual life to those who are connected with him. There is no allusion to exercise of authority by the person who is portrayed as ‘head’.

⁴⁸ Grudem accepts the translation as correct but argues unconvincingly that there is ambiguity here, and that the meaning of *genarches* as used here might possibly be ‘ruler of created beings’: *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 579. The latter meaning indicates a god. Grudem does not offer an explanation either of how Philo supposedly regards Esau as a god or of how Esau supposedly rules his descendants from his grave. The clan of descendants is here allegorical, representing certain vices, but an allegory needs to make sense.

‘... the supposed sense “source” of course does not exist and it was at least unwise of Liddell and Scott to mention the word.’

It appears to us that Glare was misled by mistakes in Grudem’s 1990 article.

We do not know what Glare would say about the examples from Philo or about the 14 further lexicons which, like LSJ, give the metaphorical meaning ‘source’.

Moreover, we note that Grudem in his 2002 article conceded:

‘... it must ... be recognized that it is an elementary fact of life that we receive our nourishment through our mouths, and thus in a sense through our heads, and this idea was plain to the ancient world as well; therefore, the idea that a metaphor would occur in which “head” meant “source” is not impossible.’

(3) Was ‘authority over’ an established metaphorical meaning of *kephalē*?

The basic point here is that the use of *kephalē* as a metaphor meaning ‘authority over’ was sufficiently unusual prior to Paul that LSJ did not even notice it.

Under this heading, the most significant difference of view between Grudem on one side and some egalitarian scholars on the other side concerns the impact of the evidence from the Septuagint (a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek), where there is a small number of examples of *kephalē* in this sense.

In Hebrew, *ro’sh* (‘head’) was an established metaphor for ‘chief’ or ‘leader’. It is used in that sense in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) about 170-180 times. So, egalitarian scholars argue, if it were true that *kephalē* was established in Greek in the same metaphorical sense, there would be many more (well over 100) examples in the Septuagint of *kephalē* used in this way.

Readers interested to see Grudem’s reasons for disagreeing with this egalitarian argument can see them in full in his 1990 article.⁴⁹

We do not find his reasons convincing.

Most fundamentally, he doesn’t seem to appreciate the force of the point made by egalitarian scholars. He regards it as unsurprising that most examples of *ro’sh* (‘head’), used as a metaphor for ‘chief’ or ‘leader’, were translated by a different word that literally means leader rather than by *kephalē*. But the Septuagint translation is noted for its general approach of one-to-one equivalence where possible, even to the extent of frequently stretching the Greek language beyond conventional bounds to keep the words literally close to the Hebrew. If the translators had regarded *kephalē* as an established metaphor for authoritative leader like *ro’sh*, they would have used it many, many times, in order to reproduce the same metaphor in Greek as in the original Hebrew.

⁴⁹ Conveniently accessible in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 2021 reprint, at 539-543.

Moreover, Grudem increases the number of Septuagint examples by including passages where, as far as we can understand, there is no meaning of authority.⁵⁰

Of course, Paul was familiar with Hebrew and with the Septuagint, and may well have been aware of the small number of instances where metaphorical *ro'sh* was translated by metaphorical *kephalē*. Our point is only that *such a metaphor was not as well established in Greek, prior to Paul writing his letters, as Grudem claims.*

However, it is not necessary to justify this view in more detail, for at the end of the day none of this really matters.

If our view on the metaphorical use of *kephalē* in Greek prior to Paul is incorrect, it makes no difference. That is because of what we have called Feature 3 (variability). Paul was free to make up metaphors as he wished when he wrote his letters. He may or may not have been influenced by prior metaphorical uses of *kephalē* that he was aware of. If he made his meaning clear, he could use a metaphor of '*kephalē*' however he wished, irrespective of what the Septuagint translators or any other writers had previously done or not done.

Moreover, it is worth remembering that there is no example of anyone before Paul using *kephalē* in a head-and-body metaphor to represent husband and wife, which is what Paul does in Ephesians 5. And Paul's usage in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is also novel (three 'heads' in one verse, and no designation of 'bodies').

To decide what Paul means, it is essential to look closely at what he writes in Ephesians 5 and in 1 Corinthians 11, which we will do in our responses to Mike's Part 9 and Part 10 videos.

<https://terranwilliams.com/what-winger-presently-gets-wrong-male-headship-is-it-really-biblical/>

⁵⁰ In addition, as we understand it, some of the examples given by Grudem are variant translations which are believed to have been introduced after Paul's time. But we have not ourselves investigated that aspect.