

**[This material is Appendix Three from *What's With Paul & Women? Unlocking the Cultural Background to 1 Timothy 2*, 2010, pages 107-134.]**

## **“IN THE LORD, HOWEVER...” (1 Cor.11:11) Sorting Out Crucial Gender Issues**

A review article of *What's the Difference? Manhood & Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*, John Piper, Crossway Books, 2001, 91pp.

By Jon Zens, December, 2009

While we were on a ministry trip going as far south as Oklahoma City, a good friend gave me *What's the Difference?* and asked me to comment on it. After reading it, I felt that the content begged for more than a cursory response. What follows, then, is my attempt to biblically reflect upon some of many issues raised in this book.

In this little book, John Piper distills his understanding of gender “differences as God wills them to be according to the Bible” (p.14). He is not interested in getting bogged down in numerous technicalities which are dealt with in other larger sources he lists. However, as he boils things down to what he sees as important essentials, some serious flaws are revealed.

This book contains some solid wisdom, but several of the author's key assumptions and conclusions about the Bible and gender appear not to give full weight to all that the Scripture sets before us. By exposing some critical fallacies in Piper's approach, it will become clear that much more thought needs to be given concerning manhood and womanhood than is provided in his book.

***What About 1 Corinthians 7:1-5?***

It is interesting that in Piper's major publication, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (1991), there are separate articles devoted to Eph.5:21-33, 1 Cor.11:3-16, Col.3:18-19, 1 Pet.3:1-7, etc., but 1 Cor.7:1-5 is suspiciously absent. Likewise, in *What's the Difference?* there are two lists of verses provided that deal with marriage, but once again 1 Cor.7:1-5 is not included (pp.21,66).

This omission is unfortunate for the following reasons. First, 1 Cor.7:1-5 is the *only* place in the NT where the word "authority" (Greek, *exousia*) is used with reference to marriage. But it is not the authority of the husband over the wife, or vice versa, that is in view, but rather a *mutual authority* over each other's body. 1 Cor.7:4 states that the wife has authority over her husband's body. One would think that this would be a hard pill to swallow for those who see "authority" as resting only in the husband's headship.

Secondly, Paul states that a couple cannot separate from one another physically unless there is *mutual consent* (Greek, *symphonou*). Both parties must agree to the separation or it shouldn't happen. There is in this text, then, nothing supporting the contention that the husband's "authority" should override his wife's differing viewpoint.

John Piper suggests that "mature masculinity accepts the burden of the final say in disagreements between husband and wife, but does not presume to use it in every instance" (p.32). But 1 Cor.7:5 challenges Piper's assumed maxim. If the wife disagrees with a physical separation, the husband should not overrule his wife with the "final choice" (p.33). Biblically, such separation can occur only if both husband and wife are in "symphony" (unity) about such an action.

Now if *mutual consent* applies in an important issue like physical separation from one another for a period of time, wouldn't it seem proper that coming to one-mindedness would be the broad decision-making model in a healthy marriage? Piper feels that "in a good marriage decision-making is focused on the husband, but is not unilateral" (p.32). In light of 1 Cor.7:1-5 I suggest that decision-making should focus on *finding the Lord's mind together*. Over the years the good ideas, solutions to problems and answers to dilemmas will flow from both husband and wife as they seek the Lord as a couple for "symphony."

1 Cor.7:5 throws a wrench into the works for those who would conclude that the husband has the “final say” under presumed authority commonly known as “male headship.” Paul teaches that unless the couple can agree on a course of action, it should not be executed. I suggest that this revelation invites us to re-examine what the husband’s headship really entails (cf. Gordon D. Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1-7 Revisited,” *Paul & the Corinthians: Studies On A Community in Conflict*, Trevor J. Burke/J. Keith Elliott, eds., Brill, 2003, pp.197-213).

### ***“I Speak Concerning Christ & the Ekklesia” (Eph.5:32)***

What burdens me as I listen to the contemporary rhetoric surrounding the issue of marriage and the roles of husbands and wives is that the *typological* nature of marriage is minimized or omitted. This arises because most believe that marriage is fundamentally an institution or creation ordinance started in the Garden of Eden. Yet it seems quite clear that earthly marriage is a *type* – a picture of Christ and his bride, the *ekklesia* (Eph.5:31-32). So to talk about marriage as isolated from the typology of Jesus and his church is to miss a Christ-centered perspective. Marriage is given real meaning and significance only when it is vitally connected to its purpose as an earthly picture of Christ and his people. We must not sever what God has joined together. Consider these beautiful parallels:

\*\* Before the fall into sin, “Adam” as the first human being was looked upon by the Lord as “male and female.” Gen.5:2 makes the astounding, but crystal clear observation that “When God created Adam he made this one in the image of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Adam when they were created.” Adam looked like one person, but he was actually a plurality -- he had a woman within his body. “He named *them* [plural] Adam [singular].”

The Lord Jesus is called “the last Adam” (1 Cor.15:45). He looked like one person, but he, too, had a bride in his side. He came to purchase the *ekklesia* of God with his own blood (Acts 20:28). The unity between Christ and his people is so deep that to touch his flock is to touch the Savior himself – “why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4).

\*\* Adam was put to sleep in order that his wife might be created. "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept." Adam was completely passive in the creation of his wife.

Likewise, Christ was put to sleep in order that his wife might be created. She could not become his bride without being saved from her sins. Her redemption required that Christ be put to the sleep of death as her substitute. Christ's death was a part of his passive obedience to God. He took upon himself the death His bride deserved.

\*\* Adam's side was opened, and his wife was made from that which was removed. "And [God] took one of [Adam's] ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the part which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman."

Likewise, Christ underwent an opening of his side and from what came forth redeemed his wife. "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out." The church of God was redeemed with this blood, and birthed through this water.

Interestingly, Eve is pulled from the "side" of Adam. The Hebrew for "side" is *tsela* and the Greek is *pleura*. When Jesus died it was his "side" (*pleura*) that was pierced with a spear, and from that redemptive act the church is, as it were, pulled forth as a new Eve (cf. John 19:34; 20:20,25,27).

\*\* Adam was married to his wife: "and [God] brought her to the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman [Hebrew, Ish-shah], because she was taken out of Man [Hebrew, Ish].' Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Likewise, Christ is married to his wife. As Eve was united to Adam in the most intimate of physical relationships, so is the church united to Christ in the most intimate of spiritual relationships. Adam and Eve were united into "one flesh." Christ and his church are united into "one body." She is therefore called "the church which is His body" (1 Cor.12). And as God designed the union of husband and wife to last a lifetime, so the union of Christ and his church will last forever.

Nothing will ever separate the bride from the love of the heavenly Bridegroom.

\*\* We discover another parallel in this: as a man leaves his father and mother in marriage on earth so he can cleave to his wife, so Christ left his Father in heaven to come to earth, redeem his people through his death, burial and resurrection, and so cleave to his Bride forever.

From a biblical perspective, specifically in God's promise in Genesis 3:15, *it can be said that the whole unfolding of human history is ultimately about the coming of Jesus the heavenly Groom who secured the forgiveness of sins and the fellowship of his Bride* -- folks from every people group on earth, a people so great in number that no one can count them. We are given, by the apostle John in the Book of Revelation, these glorious descriptions of the end of history:

For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear . . . .I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband . . . .Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb . . . . The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" And let the person who hears say, "Come." Those who are thirsty, let them come; and those who are willing, let them take the free gift of the water of life (Cf., Donald Joy, *Bonding: Relationships in the Image of God*, Evangel Publishing House, 1999, pp.19-29; Daniel Parks, "Christ Typified in the First Marriage, Gen.2:18,21-24," [www.sovereigngraceofgod.com/parks.htm](http://www.sovereigngraceofgod.com/parks.htm)).

Once we begin to see marriage as an earthly pointer to the ultimate marriage of the Lamb with his Bride, it puts the issues dealt with in *What's the Difference?* in a completely new light. The emphasis in Genesis 1-2 is not on *differentiated roles* but on a *one-flesh partnership*. The issue is not "Who's in charge?" but "How can we in our relationship enhance our love and service to God?" It's not about the "creation ordinance" of marriage. It's about a passionate relationship – "she is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh!" This is ultimately Christ's proclamation to his *ekklesia*.

Connecting human marriage to Christ and the church also opens the door for understanding the crux issue in sexual sins. People tend to look at sexual sin as a violation of God's will – and it is. *But the most fundamental problem with sexual deviations is that they mar, violate and contradict in various ways the beauty and purity of Jesus' relationship with his Bride, the ekklesia.* Adultery, same-sex relationships, fornication, promiscuity, bestiality, rape, using women/ children/men in the sex industry, female circumcision, etc., are all destructive perversions of “the beginning” when God created them male and female, and of “the fullness of time” when Christ came to gather a Bride from all the nations.

Without sin, Adam and Eve were fully naked and had no shame. “There is now no condemnation to those in Christ” (Rom.8:1). Sexual sins that twist the image of Christ and his Body practice all kinds of nakedness attended with the fullness of shame. They ruin and disfigure the wonder of Christ and his *ekklesia* becoming “one flesh.”

### ***Ephesians 5:21-33***

With this “profound mystery” as a backdrop, we can better understand Paul's words to husbands and wives in Eph.5:22-33. In Eph.5:18 the apostle gives an imperative to be “filled with the Spirit,” and five participles follow showing the fruit of such a life. Verse 21 sets forth the fifth evidence of the Spirit-filled community, “submitting yourselves to one another out of reverence to Christ.” Here we see a *mutual submission* among all the parts of the body. This is the setting for the specific relationships that follow, beginning with husbands and wives.

Verse 22 has no verb. It reads literally, “wives to your own husbands as to the Lord.” Then why do most English translations read, “wives *submit* to your own husbands...”? Because they have correctly inferred that *submission* is implied. In the English language a sentence is not complete without a verb. In the Greek, a sentence may be complete without a verb, but in such cases, the action is assumed to continue from the preceding sentence. The verb in verse 21 is “submit.” The assumed verb in verse 22, therefore, should also be “submit.”

But that's not the whole story. Since verse 22 was written in such a way as to make it deliberately dependent on verse 21 for its action verb, it is also

appropriate to assume a continuation of any previously established qualifiers to that action. In verse 21, the act of submitting is not a one-way street, but *mutual* – “to one another.” If Paul did not intend for that same spirit of mutuality to be assumed in the submission implied in verse 22, he would have supplied a new verb and structured the sentence differently. Even though Paul’s focus in verse 22 is on “wives,” there is no justification for stripping the implied “submit” supplied by the translators of its previously established mutuality. A wife should indeed voluntarily “submit” to her husband. But that does not cancel out her husband’s responsibility to just as willingly submit to his wife. Indeed, husbands and wives should “submit to one another.”

It should be clear, therefore, that Paul’s motivation for instructing believing wives to submit to their husbands was not to establish a hierarchy in the marriage relationship – nor in any other relationship between believers. It is the unique, “one another” quality of life within the body of Christ that is its most essential characteristic. Just as elders (pastors) have no inherent right to lord it over those whom they shepherd (cf. 1 Pet. 5:3), husbands have no inherent right to lord it over their wives. In Christ, earthly marriage is an equal partnership, with both husbands and wives willingly submitting to one another as unto Christ. Paul’s only reason for underscoring the wife’s need for submission to her husband is because her role in marriage, as the following verses so beautifully reveal, is to be an earthly reflection of Christ’s Bride, the church. And in the “oneness” of that relationship, there is neither male nor female, “for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Because of church teachings, personal leanings and cultural practices, words like “submission” and “authority” are laden with potential misunderstandings. Dennis J. Preato reminds us that we need to think things through a little more carefully:

The Greek word, *hupotasso*, is often translated as "submitting to" or "being subject" in Ephesians 5:22. However this Greek word has more than one use and a range of meaning that is quite different from what people today generally think. "*Hupotasso*" actually has two uses: military and non-military. The military has a connotation of being "subject to" or "to obey" as if you are under someone’s command. Most people would probably think of this meaning. However the non-military use means "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden"

(*Thayer's Greek Lexicon* #5293). In ancient papyri the word *hupotasso* commonly meant to "support," "append," or "uphold" (Ann Nyland, "Papyri, Women, & Word Meaning in the New Testament," *Priscilla Papers*, 17:4 (Fall, 2003), p.6) . . . [W]hy would Scripture need to command Christians to be filled with the Spirit in order to be subject to, follow orders, or be under someone's authority? A person does not need to be filled with the Spirit to follow orders, for even nonbelievers demonstrate this fact when they "submit," or obey their superiors ("Empirical Data in Support of Egalitarian Marriages & A Fresh Perspective on Submission & Authority," Presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, April 23, 2004).

The wife's responsibility is mentioned in verses 22-24 and 33. It is often overlooked that Paul directs more attention to the husband's responsibilities, as the seven verses in between are directed toward the men in the households. It is possible that Paul has more to say about the husband's responsibilities toward his wife because of the generally low status of women in the first century – they were often viewed as property.

In Eph.5:22-33, then, we see a beautiful picture of husbands reflecting the Lord's pattern toward their brides – sacrificial nourishing, protecting and caring – and the wives reflecting the pattern of the *ekklesia* toward her Groom – respect and submission.

### ***What About Gifted Wives?***

Piper's view of a wife's submission seems to focus unduly on the husband's life and ministry. Wifely submission, he says, is "a *disposition* to yield to the husband's authority and an *inclination* to follow his leadership . . . the divine calling to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts" (pp.52,66). But with this view how does the husband truly encourage the ministry of his wife's gifts?

*What's the Difference?* seems unable to envision or deal with scenarios where wives have special gifts in the church. For example, Deborah was first a prophetess and then a judge. But she was called a "mother in Israel" and the name of her husband is mentioned. Likewise, Huldah was a prophetess in Israel, and a wife whose husband is also named. It is clear that a wife can be eminently gifted and express her gifts in the covenant community without tainting her marriage. The "ministry" of either husband

or wife should flow out of and be subordinate to a mutually respectful (submissive) marriage relationship.

The woman's options are neither a demand to suppress her gifts for the sake of her calling as a wife, nor to express those gifts to the detriment of her marriage. She can be a good wife and still use her gifts to the fullest extent. The husband's benediction should rest upon the blossoming expression and use of his wife's gifts.

### ***Female Leadership?***

When all is said and done, it seems that Piper's goal is for sisters to be eliminated from any leadership in the church. "The realities of headship and submission in the marriage have their counterparts in the church" (p.66). He sees males at the helm of the "God-given order of leadership by spiritual men" (p.67).

But it is not quite that simple. The New Testament indicates that women did play a part in leadership in the first century. Piper rightly sees in the verb *proistemi* (literally, "to stand in front of") the concept of management and leadership. He sees in this word "leadership for sure" and applies it to males where it is used in 1 Tim.3:5 and 1 Thess.5:12 (p.86). However, his limiting of leadership to men runs into a serious problem in Rom.16:2. Here, Phoebe – who delivered the Roman letter to the believers – is noted by Paul to be a "deacon of the *ekklesia* in Cenchrea" and a form of *proistemi* is used with reference to her. It certainly appears that there was some form of "leadership" attached to her functions in the Body of Christ.

In Rom.16:7 Andronicus and Junia are mentioned as "outstanding among the apostles." Some have argued that the name here is masculine, "Junias." However, the evidence points to the fact that until 1100AD she was considered to be a woman, and then she was transformed by translators into a man (cf. Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, Fortress, 2005, 138pp.; Linda Belleville, "A Re-Examination of Romans 16:7 in Light of Primary Source Materials," *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 51, 2005, pp.231-249).

No one would deny that some form of leadership is contained in the word "co-workers." Paul designated men like Timothy and Aquila and women

like Priscilla and others as “co-workers” – these were people whose labor was associated with evangelism, church-planting and church care.

It is interesting to note that the idea of “household-leader” is used both of men and women. *Oikodespotes* (literally, house-despot) is used of married women in 1 Tim.5:14. It should be noted, then, that in the first century a married woman was also called “master-of-the-house.”

### ***Where Do Women “Prophecy”?***

On the Day of Pentecost it was proclaimed by Peter, citing the prophet Joel, that both men and women would “prophecy” in the Messianic age. Paul made it clear in 1 Cor.14 that “prophecy” should be central in the body gathering, where there would be participation by all (1 Cor.14:23-24,26). In 1 Cor.11:1-5 Paul has no issue with sisters and brothers “praying and prophesying.”

But Piper’s view dictates that women not speak publicly in any way that might snuggle up to “teaching.” Thus, his notion of what it means for a woman to “prophecy” is non-public and very limited in scope. “The fact that a Christian wife and church member, according to Acts 2:17, may ‘prophecy’ implies, at least, that she may often have ideas and insights that a wise and humble husband and pastor will listen to and adopt” (p.84).

It will not do to have a double standard. If Piper’s definition of prophecy applies to a woman then it must mean the same for a man. To say that a man can prophecy publicly but women non-publicly is unacceptable. Acts 2 and 1 Cor.11 indicate that they do it together. “Non-public” prophecy is an oxymoron. Prophecy as portrayed in the New Testament is exercised publicly in the assembly.

The issue of female prophesying highlights a most serious flaw in Piper’s viewpoint. He defines men’s and women’s roles in such a way that he cannot let the full weight of Scripture speak. To suggest that female prophecy is summed up in a sister speaking valuable things *privately* to her husband or pastor is ludicrous and agenda-driven. Philip had four virgin daughters (with no husbands) who prophesied. And we are asked to believe that their ministry consisted solely in privately sharing some thoughts with “a pastor”! I don’t think so.

## ***Revelation 2:20 – A Prophetess “Teaches”***

In Christ’s words to the Thyatira *ekklesia* we find that a female prophetess was “teaching” very bad things. Christ gave her some space to repent – not of the fact that she taught, but that her teachings were errant. Just as the fact that there were false teachers in the *ekklesias* shows that there were good teachers, so the fact that there was an evil female prophetess is indicative of the reality that there were women who prophesied soundly.

The seven letters of Christ to the *ekklesias* give glimpses into the life of the early assemblies. It would appear that female prophetesses functioned – for both good and ill – as was the case also with male prophets/teachers.

## ***Connecting the Wrong Dots***

Piper presents one line of reasoning that is severely flawed and consequently quite misleading. He links certain concepts and assumes that the way he puts the pieces together is accurate. But is he correct in doing this?

The realities of headship and submission in marriage have their counterparts in the church. Thus Paul speaks of authority and submission in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. We will try to show that “authority” refers to the divine calling of spiritual, gifted men to take primary responsibility as elders for Christlike servant-leadership and teaching in the church . . . . So when Paul puts those two things together and says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority,” one very natural implication is, “I do not permit a woman to assume the office of elder in the church.” So the authority Paul has in mind in 1 Timothy 2:12 at least includes the authority of elders (pp.66,90).

To yank the word “authority” out of 1 Tim. 2:11-12 and connect it to “the authority of elders” is unwarranted and fallacious. The Greek word Piper links with “authority” in 1 Tim. 2 is the infinitive *authentein*, and it is only used here in the New Testament. The Timothy text has to do with restraining a woman from teaching for the purpose of having her way with a man. The translation, “to usurp authority over a man” is not accurate. Linda Belleville observes:

If Paul had wanted to speak of an ordinary exercise of authority, he could have picked any number of words. Within the semantic domain of “exercise authority,” biblical lexicographers J.P. Louw and Eugene Nida have twelve entries, and of “rule” [and] “govern” forty-seven entries. Yet Paul picked none of these. Why not? The obvious reason is that *authenthein* carried a nuance (other than “rule” or “have authority”) that was particularly suited to the Ephesian situation . . . . [Louw and Nida] put *authenteo* into the semantic domain “to control, restrain, domineer” and define the verb as “to control in a domineering manner”: “I do not allow a woman . . . to dominate a man” (1 Tim. 2:12) . . . . [They] also note that [*authenthein*] is expressed idiomatically as “to shout orders at” . . . or “to bark at” . . . . So there is no first century warrant for translating *authenthein* as “to exercise authority” and for understanding Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 to be speaking of the carrying out of one’s official [teaching] duties. Rather the sense is the Koine [common Greek] “to dominate; to get one’s way” (“Teaching & Usurping Authority: 1 Tim. 2:11-15,” *Discovering Biblical Equality*, Ronald Pierce & Rebecca Groothuis, eds., IVP, 2005, pp.211,216).

### ***Gender “Problems” Created by a Teaching***

We’ve all seen examples of how errant teaching can impact people. If a person has been brought up to believe that a certain race is inferior, then he/she will feel very awkward being in table fellowship with such people. So it would seem that Piper’s teaching about manhood and womanhood creates unnecessary problems and tensions. Here are some aspects of the outworking of his views:

To the degree that a woman’s influence over man is personal and directive it will generally offend a man’s good, God-given sense of responsibility and leadership, and thus controvert God’s created order. A woman may design the traffic pattern of a city’s streets and thus exert a kind of influence over all male drivers. But this influence will be non-personal and therefore not necessarily an offense against God’s order . . . . All acts of influence lie on the continuum between personal and impersonal . . . . Some influence is very directive, some is non-directive. For example, a drill sergeant would epitomize directive influence. It would be hard to see how a woman could be a

drill sergeant over men without violating their sense of masculinity and her sense of femininity . . . . The God-given sense of responsibility for leadership in a mature man will not generally allow him to flourish long under personal directive leadership of a female superior. J.I. Packer suggested that “a situation in which a female boss has a male secretary” puts strain on the humanity of both. I think this would be true in other situations as well. Some of the more obvious ones would be . . . . in professional baseball if a woman is made the umpire to call balls and strikes and frequently to settle heated disputes among men (pp.62-63).

If mutual respect for males and females in God’s image is emphasized, then a man having a female boss is not inherently a problem. The problems that can certainly arise in such contexts would result from personal baggage carried by one or both of the parties, not because there is something unnatural about having a female leader.

Perhaps many women would feel uncomfortable being in military positions where they would command men, or being a baseball umpire. The point is that such positions are not limited to men by any divine law. Some women would be qualified and very capable in these situations, and perhaps a female umpire might be a calming influence in the midst of heated disputes! Every now and then in history there was a Joan of Arc!

Men and women from Israel came out to Deborah’s palm tree for counsel from God’s word and no one’s humanity was strained. King Josiah and his men sought interpretation and directives from Huldah and had no awkward moments because they were receiving counsel from a woman.

I submit that the views of *What’s the Difference?* put unnecessary pressure on women, causing them to walk on eggshells, constantly second-guessing themselves. “Are my actions around men too personal? Are they non-personal enough? Am I being too directive? Am I non-directive enough?” Women who are always wondering if they are stepping over into some “male” territory tend to just give up and retreat into the shadows. The components of Piper’s grid seem to engender bondage for sisters, not freedom.

An experience Carolyn S. Briggs had in a Midwest church captures the frustration and awkwardness many women feel in churches:

We were Elder ruled. The Elders were the shepherds of the church and held all authority. Women could not be Elders. We were not allowed to teach men the Word of God, although we had Bible studies where we taught one another . . . Finally, on Saturday morning we woke up early and met with a small group of stalwarts who wanted to study theology from the seminary textbooks Phil had supplied . . . . “So, Carolyn,” Phil was saying. “Tell us about dispensational theology.” “We can divide the history of God and man into seven dispensations and determine God’s method of relating to man through each of those dispensations,” I said quickly, shyly and surprised that he had called on me. I was one of only two women present. This study was really supposed to be for the men, the only ones who could teach, according to God’s Word. No one said women couldn’t come, but no one especially invited them, either. “What does that mean?” Phil asked. “That sounds like God changes. We know from the Scriptures that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” I was silent for a moment as I waited for someone else to chime in. I bit my lip and looked down. Phil laughed . . . . “You’d get eaten up in seminary, you know that? Stand firm, all of you. ‘Study to show yourselves approved, a workman of God, unashamed.’ Or in your case, a workperson,” he said, winking at me. It was subtle enough. I had been put in my place, but lovingly . . . . I smiled at Phil and made a helpless face so he would laugh again. I didn’t speak again the rest of the morning. Phil didn’t call on me, and I didn’t have the nerve to answer any more questions, even if I did know all of the answers (*This Dark World: A Memoir of Salvation Found & Lost*, Bloomsbury, 2002, pp.128-129,166,167,168).

Also, Piper teaches the notion that all men have some sense of “leadership” over all women. I do not think such a notion can be sustained by God’s word. In terms of Biblical usage, “head” is a term used *exclusively* within marital bonds. As an example of a true masculinity that leads, provides for and protects women in general, Piper presents a scenario where a man and a woman are walking down a street and are confronted by a man with a lead pipe. “Mature masculinity,” he says, “senses a natural, God-given responsibility to step forward and put himself between the assailant and the woman . . . . His inner sense is one of responsibility to protect because he is a man and she is a woman” (p.41). But wouldn’t he feel the same exact sense if this event happened and he was walking with another man? Isn’t

our sense to protect any human being rooted in the fact that both male and female are bearers of God's image? Didn't Jesus step out to protect His Bride who is both male and female?

### ***What Is "Headship"?***

This is not the place to continue the debate over the meaning of "head" (Greek, *kephale*). However, it does need to be noted that there is more to the story than just the simplistic assertion that *kephale* means to have authority over, attached to "the idea of leadership" (p.86). There is considerable evidence that this was not the primary meaning of *kephale* in the first century (cf. "Kephale Meanings," <http://exegetist-theberean.blogspot.com/2007/05/kephale-meanings.html>; Laurie Fasullo, "What About the Word *Kephale* ("Head") in the New Testament?" <http://searchingtogether.org/kephale.htm>).

The early church fathers were overall very negative toward women. Yet, as Dennis J. Preato notes, people like Cyril of Alexandria and John Chrysostom did not see *kephale* in 1 Cor.11 as referring to "authority over," but as "source":

**Cyril**, Bishop of Alexandria (A.D. 376-444) commenting on 1 Cor. 11:3 defines the head metaphor as "source": *Thus we say that the kephaleo of every man is Christ, because he was excellently made through him. And the kephaleo of woman is man, because she was taken from his flesh. Likewise the kephaleo of Christ is God, because he is from him according to nature* (Manfred T. Brauch, F.F. Bruce, Peter H. Davids and Peter Kaiser, Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, "Head of the Woman Is Man? [1 Cor.11:3]," electronic edition).

**John Chrysostom**, Bishop of Constantinople (A.D. 347-407) commenting on 1 Cor.11:3 said the head metaphor does not mean that one has authority over another, or one is under subjection to another. Dr. Joe E. Trull, editor of *Christian Ethics Today*, quotes Chrysostom: *"If you think 'head' means 'chief' or 'boss,' you skew the godhead!"* (Joe E. Trull, "Is the Head of the House at Home?" [[http://www.christianethicstoday.com/Issue/009/Is%20the%20Head%20of%20the%20House%20at%20Home%20\(Ephesians%205\\_21-6\\_9\)%20By%20Joe%20E.%20Trull\\_009\\_3\\_.htm](http://www.christianethicstoday.com/Issue/009/Is%20the%20Head%20of%20the%20House%20at%20Home%20(Ephesians%205_21-6_9)%20By%20Joe%20E.%20Trull_009_3_.htm)], accessed 23 October, 2003) ["Empirical Data in Support of Egalitarian Marriages & A

Fresh Perspective on Submission & Authority,” Presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, April 23, 2004].

When we were having a Sunday gathering south of Oklahoma City (November, 2009), I presented some thoughts on marriage. In the discussion one of the couples who has been married 25 years brought out some excellent points as they talked about their relationship. The husband said that, to him, being “head” had nothing to do with “authority” over his wife, but had to do with his functioning – to use a military term – as a “*point man*.” This term means “to assume the first and most exposed position in a combat military formation, that is, the lead soldier/unit advancing through hostile or unsecured territory. The soldier/unit on point is frequently the first to take hostile fire. The inherent risks of taking point create a need for constant and extreme operational readiness . . . . The point man walks several meters out in front of everyone else and is likely to be the first one to encounter enemy soldiers. It is a hazardous position that requires alertness and ability to deal with unexpected attacks” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/take\_point). Another brief definition, “Point Man: lead soldier in a unit cutting a path through dense vegetation if needed and constantly exposed to the danger of tripping booby traps or being the first in contact with the enemy” (vietvet.org/glossary.htm).

The words of Paul in Eph.5 to the husbands were not about ruling over another person, but about following Christ in sacrificial actions toward their brides. All illustrations have their limitations, but “point man” does seem to capture some important images about the functions of a husband (cf. I. Howard Marshall, “Mutual Love & Submission in Marriage, Col.3:18-19 & Eph.5:21-33,” *Discovering Biblical Equality*, Pierce & Groothuis, eds. (IVP, 2005), pp.186-204).

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

My assessment is that *What's the Difference?* promotes its own agenda by magnifying the alleged “role” differences between men and women, and does not give proper priority to and focus on husbands and wives becoming “one” in marriage.

While John Piper claims to have “made every effort to bring the thinking of this book into accord with what the Bible teaches” (p.14), I do not think that he succeeded, and I believe he also effectively muted much of the Biblical

testimony about women. He affirms that “God does not intend for women to be squelched or cramped or frustrated” (p.53), yet his views seem to contribute to these very tragic ends.

It would seem that in Piper’s best of worlds men would accomplish the bulk of what needs to be done (pp.60-64). What are women supposed to think when they read statements like, “it is simply impossible that from time to time a woman not be put in a position of influencing or guiding men . . . . The closer they get to the personal side, the more inappropriate it becomes for women to exert directive influence” (pp.60,62)?

Felicity Dale, who was a medical doctor in England, noted that the church is *hemiplegic* – the female half of the body of Christ is paralyzed. What a tragedy! As Donald Joy observes, “We are always impoverished when a single sex group meets, discusses, and make decisions, since only one part of the full-spectrum personhood seems to be present. So where urgent decisions are being made, we surely want both sexes speaking and voting” (*Bonding*, p.25).

Piper holds that the sisters cannot publicly prophesy (but apparently the men can). All they can do is prophesy by speaking privately to their husbands or to “a pastor.” One gets the impression that gifted women like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Esther, Anna, Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, and many others are left with no meaningful function in Piper’s conception of *ekklesia*.

The template for gender that *What’s the Difference?* lays down does not seem to be in line with the truth as it is in Jesus. The conclusion for Paul is this: “In the Lord, however, the wife is not independent of the husband, nor is the husband independent of the wife. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman” (1 Cor.11:11). For Paul the functions of husband and wife were to be viewed from the perspective of *interdependence and respect*, not *hierarchy*.