

Are Husbands Heads or Tails?: A Review of The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood (Part 2)

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In *The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood: How God's Word Consistently Affirms Gender Equality*, Philip Payne demonstrates that egalitarianism is driven by a social agenda, not the Bible. The historical novelty of egalitarian doctrine should alone give us pause, to be sure. But when the movement's leading scholars are more flexible with the words of Scripture than a game of Twister, it becomes clear which commitment is the cart and which is the horse.

[In the first part of this review](#), we saw how Payne equivocated with the meaning of biblical equality. In this post, we will see how Payne plays fast and loose with the biblical text to make it sound like a female elder, a female pastor, and even a female apostle.

This review will address another category of egalitarian mishandling of Scripture to keep us moored to God's Word as our first and overriding commitment. In effect, this is a cautionary tale about the dangers of ditching *Sola Scriptura*. Payne, in particular, departs from the path of plain Scripture reading by supplying his own spurious translations.

By the nature of this part of the review, some of the explanations will get technical. Payne's book dives into the microscopic details of translation work, so we will deal with

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his arguments in kind. However, my hope is that in reading this review, you will take away two things:

1. Scholars have no inherent authority, or any authority by virtue of their degrees. God's Word has all the authority, so you don't have to be intimidated by a Ph.D. waving around technical terminology.
2. It is easy for any of us to be driven by a theological agenda rather than letting the text of Scripture drive our conclusions. "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" ([1 Cor 10:12](#)^L). Letting God's Word speak means being willing to allow it to correct us, not us to correct it.

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Translation Innovations

In addition to his equivocation on equality, Payne uses his own questionable translations of key texts to circumvent the clear meaning of Scripture. Appealing to a novel translation is a common tactic for those departing from historic readings of the Bible, particularly when they can appeal to their own scholarly scruples to do so. Payne attempts to subvert key texts in the New Testament dealing with the roles of men and women by making the words say what they don't mean.

For example, Payne asserts his own translation in the debate over the meaning of *kephale* (usually translated "head") in [1 Corinthians 11:3](#). The verse in the ESV reads, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." Payne writes of this passage, "'Head' clearly means 'source' with no hint of authority..." (p. 53). Here, he engages complementarian scholar Wayne Grudem head-on (pun intended) as [Grudem has spilled some ink over this particular Greek word](#). Grudem argues that "*kephale*" can and does mean "one with authority over."

So, which is it? Does *kephale* mean "source" or "authority"? Payne's arguments for why it must mean "source without authority" fall afoul of several issues:

- Begging the question by assuming his conclusion in his premise, like "the only reference in this chapter to authority is an affirmation of the woman's authority over her head in verse 10" (p. 52).
- Misrepresenting complementarian exegesis, as in his assertion that a translation of "authority" requires adherence to "eternal subordination of the Son to the Father" (p. 52), which it does not. Paul specifically says that God is the head of "Christ," the incarnate Son, not the eternal Son. While Grudem has

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argued for the eternal subordination of the Son, it is not a necessary conclusion in order to read *kephale* as “authority” in this passage.

- Appealing to Greek lexicons that support his position while ignoring or discrediting several others (like BDAG, Liddell, DBL Greek, PLGNT) that contend for the meaning “leader” or “authority” (p. 53-57).
- Providing misleading data about the Septuagint’s (Greek Old Testament) use of *kephale*. Payne states, “Of the 180 [uses of the Hebrew word *rosh* to mean “leader” in the LXX], the best-attested text of the LXX **only once** translates *rosh* as *kephale* that readers would have to identify as a metaphor for leader” (p. 54). A quick glance at these 180 passages in a well-attested version of the LXX (Swete), however, reveals several passages that use *kephale* as a translation of *rosh* meaning “leader” or “person with authority” ([Deut 28:13](#), [Judges 11:8-11](#), [2 Sam 22:44](#), [2 Kings 2:3](#), [Ps 18:44](#), [Ps 110:6](#), [Is 7:8-9](#), [Jer 31:7](#), [Lam 1:5](#)). Burying it in an endnote, Payne acknowledges some of these passages but quips that because they do not use “head” as a *metaphor* (“is head”) but as a *simile* (“as head”) they are “less jarring” (p. 76). However “jarring” the chosen literary device may be is irrelevant to the question of the term’s translation implying authority instead of source. It seems like Payne intentionally hides critical data to the understanding of this term to forefront a technically true but misleading statement about the Greek Old Testament use of the word *kephale*.
- Failing to acknowledge all the New Testament passages that use *kephale*, some of which necessarily imply authority. For example, Payne never mentions [Ephesians 1:22](#) “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.” The Scripture index of Payne’s book only lists [Ephesians 1:22](#) in a bibliographic entry dealing with BDAG, a lexicon which supports the meaning of “leader” or “authority over.” That same endnote is Payne’s only mention of [Colossians 2:10](#), “and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”

These are the tactics of an illusionist, not a biblical scholar. Payne spends three pages debating one lexicon entry, so he isn’t pressed for space or ignorant of the minute details. These appear to be intentional moves to obfuscate data that doesn’t support his argument, rather than an open, honest dealing with all that the biblical witness presents. These arguments against *kephale* as “authority” become the basis for Payne’s reversal of [Ephesians 5:23](#) as well (p. 115). That Payne covers up so much critical translation information suggests that he is driven by a theological agenda rather than the biblical text itself.

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Payne goes on from there to provide his own translation of [1 Corinthians 11:4](#), “Every man who prays or prophesies having long hair like a woman’s hanging down from his head disgraces his head.” Just check any other translation of this passage ([here are 32 of them](#)) and you won’t find another referring to the covering as hair. Payne’s argument is essentially that long hair was “effeminate” for men of Paul’s day, so men shouldn’t “[present] himself as a woman” (p. 66). In contrast, women with long hair, according to Payne, needed to “exercise control over her head by putting her hair up on her head in order to avoid symbolizing undisciplined sexuality” (p. 68). So, Payne uses a unique translation of this text in order to make it about keeping a modest top bun rather than God’s designed roles for men and women in the church.

With [1 Corinthians 14:34-35](#) (“the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission...”), Payne spends an entire chapter trying to prove why he doesn’t believe it is part of the inspired text (p. 79-101). He writes, “Crucial evidence shows that the best explanation of the different locations of these verses is that they were not part of Paul’s original letter but were added later” (p. 83). His argument is largely based on scribal notations in a 4th-century codex named Vaticanus. And still, [every major Bible translation](#) includes these verses. Apparently, no translation committees were as concerned about Vaticanus’ distigme-obelos-marked additions as Payne is. Again, this suggests that Payne begins with an egalitarian conclusion and then, when faced with a contradiction in the text, searches for scraps of an argument to justify his conclusion.

And speaking of translation committees, Payne voluntarily shares about his unsuccessful attempt to convert the ESV to egalitarianism in [1 Timothy 2:12](#). The hotly contested verse reads in the ESV, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” Payne’s contention is that the word translated as “exercise authority,” *authentein*, necessarily means “to assume authority that one does not rightly have” (p. 144). For Payne, this translation confirms his argument that Paul only intended to prohibit “women to assume authority to teach if they do not have that authority” (p. 145), not all female exercise of authority over men in the church. The ESV committee chairman did not see the merits of Payne’s translation, so the ESV remains unchanged. However, Payne also submitted the same request to the NIV translation committee, which did take his advice and changed the reading from “have authority” in the 1984 edition to “assume authority” in their 2011 update. Apparently, the NIV translators [denied being influenced by Payne’s work at the time](#), but Payne says in his book that they were (p. 144-45). The 2011 NIV update [came under fire](#) for several such alterations that suggested theological preference over translation fidelity.

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Finally, Payne appeals to a loaded translation to underscore his argument that the woman Junia listed in [Romans 16:7](#) is one of the apostles. The ESV reads, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.” Payne again uses the NIV translation which calls Andronicus and Junia “outstanding among the apostles.” You can see the difference. While in this case, there are a few other translations that agree with the NIV (NASB, ASV, ERV), most translations opt for some rendering that makes it clear that “epismoï en tois apostolois” refers to the pair’s personal reputation held by the apostles, not their public reputation as exceptional apostles. And the NIV translation does not itself demand an interpretation that sees Junia as one of the apostles, because “among the apostles” could still refer to a personal reputation with a group. Junia is highly regarded *by* the apostles, not *as* an apostle. Payne exploits the ambiguity of the NIV’s preposition choice to forward his agenda.

This sample of Payne’s translation gymnastics demonstrates how subtle and sophisticated eisegesis can look. In his effort to debunk complementarianism, Payne imposes his worldview on the text and even, at points, cuts out parts of the Bible that don’t fit. May Payne’s mishandling of Scripture sound a warning call to us, that we not follow the same path, attempting to bend God’s Word to our will. But may this also be an encouragement to us, that the Bible is still its own best defense. The truth of God is plain as day in black and white for those who have ears to hear. May God give his church the humility to listen, to trust, and to obey.



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