



In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul wrote: *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.* This is our fourth message in Ephesians five on the topic of marriage and even though I have read the passage each time, so that we are grounded in THE WORD and not merely my words, I want to read it again.

²¹ *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* ²⁴ *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* ²⁶ *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ²⁷ *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* ²⁸ *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹ *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,* ³⁰ *because we are members of his body.* ³¹ *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* ³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*³³ *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

This past Tuesday the Call Committee had two more skype interviews with potential candidates for the Pastor of Discipleship and Worship. One of the interviewees wanted to know how our church is perceived in the community. One member of the committee told the guy that Rich wants our church to be known as the church whose husbands love their wives. Would you guess that a man or a woman said that? I love the fact that a married woman said it but it would have been even better if a husband had said it. This vision should resonate with wives as they would

be on the beneficiaries, but my hope is that it also resonates with the husbands; that this would be a highly desirable goal to work toward.

As I said, this is our third week on the topic of marriage and we've got several more to go yet. This passage is deeper and more wonderful than I ever imagined and I want to handle it as carefully and completely as possible. However, I recognize that not everyone in our church body is married and therefore you may be bored or inclined to check out. Let me say a couple things about this.

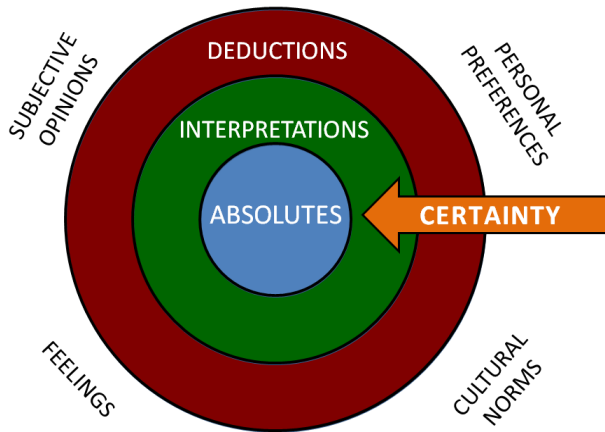
First, if you are not married but expect to be one day, then this actually does apply to you. If that day is many years from now, you may forget most of what I say in these messages but perhaps some nuggets of truth will stick with you.

Second, a lot of what I am talking about transcends marriage. Last week I spent most of my time talking about power and authority and the potential abuses. How do wives obey the command to submit to their husbands? As I said last week, before we answer that question we needed to have confidence that this is exactly what the Scripture is teaching. And I think we did that. However, married or not, all of us are under authority of some kind, probably in many areas. If you are a child living in your parents home, then you are under their authority and you need to figure out how commands to obey them apply to you. We will get to the specific parent child section in chapter six eventually but much of what I am saying about husbands and wives applies directly to parents and children. It also applies to the employer/employee relationship. It applies to living under the authority of the government. The Bible commands us to submit to all of these various levels of authority and the last time I checked, there were no perfect husbands, perfect parents or perfect governments.

Third, we can learn a ton about unity and how to interpret the Bible. For example, I received an excellent question about two weeks ago. This person was concerned why I was presenting the Complementarian position as the only position that is Biblically acceptable, especially considering that this topic is not essential to our faith. In other words, since it is a debatable subject and not core to our salvation, why was I making such a big deal about it and not being fair to the opposing viewpoint.

First of all, I have to say that I love questions like this one. I tell you often to be good Bereans and search the Scriptures for yourself. Don't take my word for it but instead, be convinced in your own mind. Cults, false teachers and those who are heavy handed in their leadership either do not invite feedback or else squash questions when they arise. As a church, we want to be the polar opposite of this. We want to be an open book and it starts with holding the teachers accountable based on the perfect standard of God's word. So I genuinely get very excited when I get good, hard questions ,especially when they are asked with such kindness, as this one was.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLE OF CERTAINTY



So back to the question, and you'll see why I am addressing it here. As I said, it will teach us about unity and how to interpret the Bible. Some of you will see this coming but this question calls for the Concentric Circle of Certainty, the handy dandy tool I pull out on occasions such as these. I use this to talk about how to maintain the highest level of unity within the highest level of doctrinal purity. In the center are Absolutes defined as being true for all people at all times in all places and you're willing to die for these beliefs but never kill or harm for them. For example,

most, but not all things in our Statement of Faith are in the center circle of Absolutes. One belief in our Statement of Faith that I would not put in the center is premillennialism. I simply do not have enough doctrinal certainty to be willing to lay down my life for that belief. But I would put the deity of Christ and the necessity of belief in Christ alone for salvation firmly in the center.

This circle creates unity because it allows us to stand shoulder to shoulder together with the most amount of people. But the key to the whole thing is determining the size of the center circle of absolutes. For example, if the only thing in the center circle is a belief in a god of some kind, the number of absolute truths is reduced to one vague belief. By this standard, we would be unified with almost everyone in the world. Although this would achieve maximum unity, our faith would be utterly worthless.

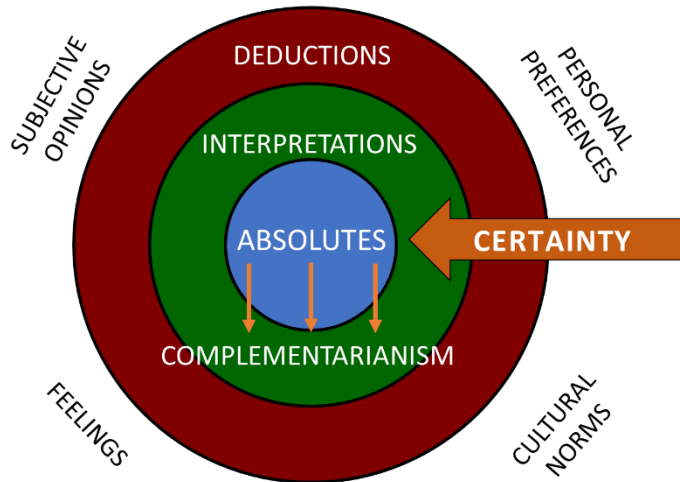
On the other hand, if you put too many things in the center circle, such as which Bible translation is the right one, you destroy unity and you are left with only a tiny group of people with whom you can enjoy Christian fellowship. So it all comes down to which doctrines belong in the center circle.

Throughout history and up until today, we have two major errors. One, we have had a disagreement about what belongs in the center circle and two, there have been those willing to harm or even kill for their beliefs. There are several factors which enter into that all important decision about what belongs in the center circle, but I think my definition of absolutes speeds up the decision making process considerably. If you can answer "yes" to the question, "Would I be willing to die for this belief?," then you have an absolute belief. If you cannot answer "yes," then that particular belief belongs in one of the outer circles.

With that as a backdrop, let's get back to the question that someone asked me. They wanted to know why I am presenting the Complementarian position as the only Biblically acceptable position. As I said, it's a really great question and fundamentally, this person is referring to this circle of certainty. What they are asking is why I seem to be elevating Complementarianism into the center circle.

So here's a softball question for you. If you hold to Complementarianism, would you be willing to die for that belief? My answer to that question would be a firm "no." I'm not going to take a bullet or have my head chopped off if a wife does not submit to her husband in the way that I think this passage says she should. Both sides agree that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church, so that is not in dispute. I'm not going to surrender my life for this belief.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLE OF CERTAINTY



However--and this is a huge however--as I have already shared, the implications and applications for this belief have many fingers that stretch into the inner circle. So I'm not going to give my life for this belief by itself, but I would give my life for the beliefs that underpin this belief. This is why I have spent so much time on the topic.

So how do we know what belongs in the inner circle of absolutes? Here are three standards by which to assist in the decision making process. In other words, these will show how the foundations of Complementarianism belong in the

center circle. And you can use these four principles with other beliefs to see where they should be put.

1. Exegetical Certainty
2. Theological Importance
3. Historical agreement in the church

Let's take these one at a time.

1. Exegetical Certainty

I won't review all of the reasons why I think this is the correct position which I have covered the past three weeks. You can go back and read those yourself. I'll say it again, all that matters to me is that we deal with Scripture fairly and rightly. I don't care about being right, I only care about what is right. Let me say that again so it's clear. I don't care about being right, I only care about what is right. In other words, my goal is not to defend the traditional position simply for the sake of tradition.

But what I have seen by examining the very best arguments for the Egalitarian position, in my opinion, do serious harm to God's word. Time and again, words are redefined, context is overlooked and fundamental truths from Genesis onward are misunderstood. In addition to everything I have already shared, here is a prime example of how Egalitarians argue their case.

“I used to hate talking about submission too. I hated how that word was used—along with proof texts from Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and 1 Peter 3—to put Christian women “in their place,” as subordinates to their husbands. But that was before I studied the context of the epistles to the early Church, before I learned about the Greco-Roman Household Codes and Peter and Paul’s radical Christian remix that often passes unnoticed by modern readers.”¹

Another leading Egalitarian has said nearly the same thing.

“Peter and Paul worked within imperfect systems because any outright challenge to the law of the land would bring persecution down upon the Church in great number. In fact, the Apostles “advocated this system, not because God had revealed it as the divine will for Christian homes, but because it was the only stable and respectable system anyone knew about” at the time.”²

So what they are saying is that even if the Scriptures are clear that state that wives are to be in submission to their own husbands, this was never God’s original intent. Instead, they believe that the Biblical writers were prisoners of their first century culture. The only reason they used this language of submission was due to the fact they could not escape the cultural pressures bearing down on them. God most assuredly never wanted this to be the case, but he allowed it 2000 years ago.

In terms of fairly representing Egalitarianism, I really have tried to present as much evidence as I can. The problem is that in every case, they want to continually change the meaning of words, ignore context and import ideas into the passage that you would never find unless you were trying really hard to do so. In terms of exegetical certainty, the traditional model is overwhelmingly convincing. But this still does not prove that it should be in the inner circle of absolutes, so we’ll move onto the second principle.

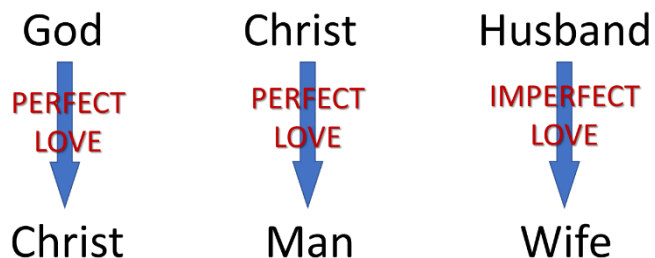
2. Theological Importance

A. The traditional view is founded in the functional submission of the Son to the Father. I have covered this in depth already, but it bears repeating here. This is not first century cultural pressure. The foundation is the eternal Godhead.

1 Corinthians 11:3

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.

B. The traditional view is based in the creation story and the foundation of the marriage relationship. In Ephesians 5:31, Paul quoted from Genesis 2:24. “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and*



mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24 as well when he taught about the foundations of marriage. This belief is not held prison by a sinful Roman culture. It is based in the creation story in the garden.

C. The Traditional model is based in the church's submission to Christ.
Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

D. The traditional view is founded in the integrity and proclamation of the gospel. This passage is about the gospel. Paul wrote, *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* Nearly half of the verses are describing Christ's love and sacrifice for the church. The marriage relationship--and specifically the submission of wives to husbands and love of husbands for their wives, flows directly out of the pure gospel message.

Here are the four sets of relationships in this passage.

Relationship 1—Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.

Relationship 2—Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Relationship 3—Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

Relationship 4—Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

As I have said, if husbands are supposed to submit to their wives, then it also means that parents are supposed to submit to their children, that masters are supposed to submit to their slaves and that Christ is supposed to submit to the church.

But even with this foundational clarity, there are evangelicals who argue against this point.

There's a book with the sketchy title of *As Christ Submits to the Church*. Here's a summary of the book. "A gospel-shaped view of marriage and women's ministries is shaped by the pattern of Jesus' life, which is voluntary surrender to the other, and not shaped by authority and power."³

Did Jesus voluntarily surrender? Indeed, he did but his ability to surrender was based upon his ultimate authority and power. Christ is the head of the church. Jesus' sacrificial love only had any impact, any effect at all because he was the head of the church. Jesus is the Creator, the Ruler, the Preeminent One. Jesus does not and never will submit to the church. But this is where your theology leads you when you believe at all costs that wives should never submit to their husbands.

Let me give you one last principle for how to determine the placement of doctrines.

3. Historical agreement in the church

I keep referring to the Complementarian position as the traditional model for good reason. It is the view held by the church for the first 1900 years of its existence. There simply was no other view.

In 2014, the EFCA did a denomination wide doctrinal survey.⁴ They received 1074 responses which represents a response rate of 56%, so this is a very reliable sampling of pastors in the EFCA. For the sake of perspective, I'll include other doctrines.

- Premillennialism: is very or somewhat important to 76% of respondents
- Tribulation: 52% are pre, 4% are mid, 28% are post, with 16% being “other”
- Creation matters: 60% affirm literal six-day creation
- Complementarianism: 92% affirmed it was very or somewhat important. Only 6% affirm the egalitarian view.
- Eternal Security: 94% affirm that “those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit” cannot lose their salvation.

Therefore, belief in the Complementarian view is on par with belief in eternal security. Such is the level of certainty among EFCA pastors. Denominational unity itself does not guarantee truth. There are some denominations where 100% of the pastors are Egalitarian. However, I believe that we are standing firmly upon 1900 years of church history

Do you see what I mean now about this doctrine being in the inner circle? The doctrine itself is not in the inner circle but all of the foundations that hold up the doctrine are in the dead center of absolute truths. I’m not going to give my life for this doctrine. I’m just not. But I will give my life for the supremacy of Christ, for the eternal Godhead, for creation of Adam and Eve and the foundation of marriage.

Therefore, how does this impact our unity with those who differ from us? If two people disagree on the supremacy of Christ and the nature of the deity, we would not be in fellowship. Those doctrines are far too important not to be in unity. But if two people disagree about male headship in marriage, that in itself should not divide them. So do you see my dilemma as I preach this passage? I believe with every fiber of my being that male headship is the proper Biblical model and it’s the best model. If it works as it is supposed to work, it is the superior model. But if you don’t share this belief, I’m not going to yell at you. I will never shame you. Our relationship should not change. But I will not hesitate to persuade you and do all I can to convince you that is right and this is best.

But enough from me. Let’s hear from a Christian wife who is trying to live this stuff out.

“I KNOW deep down the beauty of submission, but to be totally honest, it TERRIFIES me. I'm absolutely terrified to let go of control and let someone else lead me while also trusting that they won't harm me. It's always in the back of my mind that I could be hurt again at any moment, even though I know there's truth in God's promises.”⁵

Men, a wife like this needs a gentle hand of love. She wants to obey God’s word, but it terrifies her. We’ve all had this experience of wanting to obey God but finding it so hard to do so. So we wrestle. But I’m telling you, it’s a good fight. It’s worth it. And for a wife like this or for any wife, husbands you never say, “You must submit to me.” That’s not your domain, it’s hers. Your job is to love her as Christ loved the church.

Rich Maurer
March 5, 2018

¹ <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/mutuality-household-codes>

² <https://biblicalgenderroles.com/2015/01/28/the-biblical-and-logical-fallacies-of-sarah-beeseys-christian-feminism/>

³ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2011/11/01/as-christ-submits-to-the-church/>

⁴ https://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2014/05/efca_doctrinal_survey_and_summary_4.pdf

⁵ <http://www.sagetheblog.com/2015/05/obstacles-to-submission.html>