

**A BIBLICAL VISION OF
THE SEXES: HARMONIOUS
ASYMMETRY**
Doug Ponder

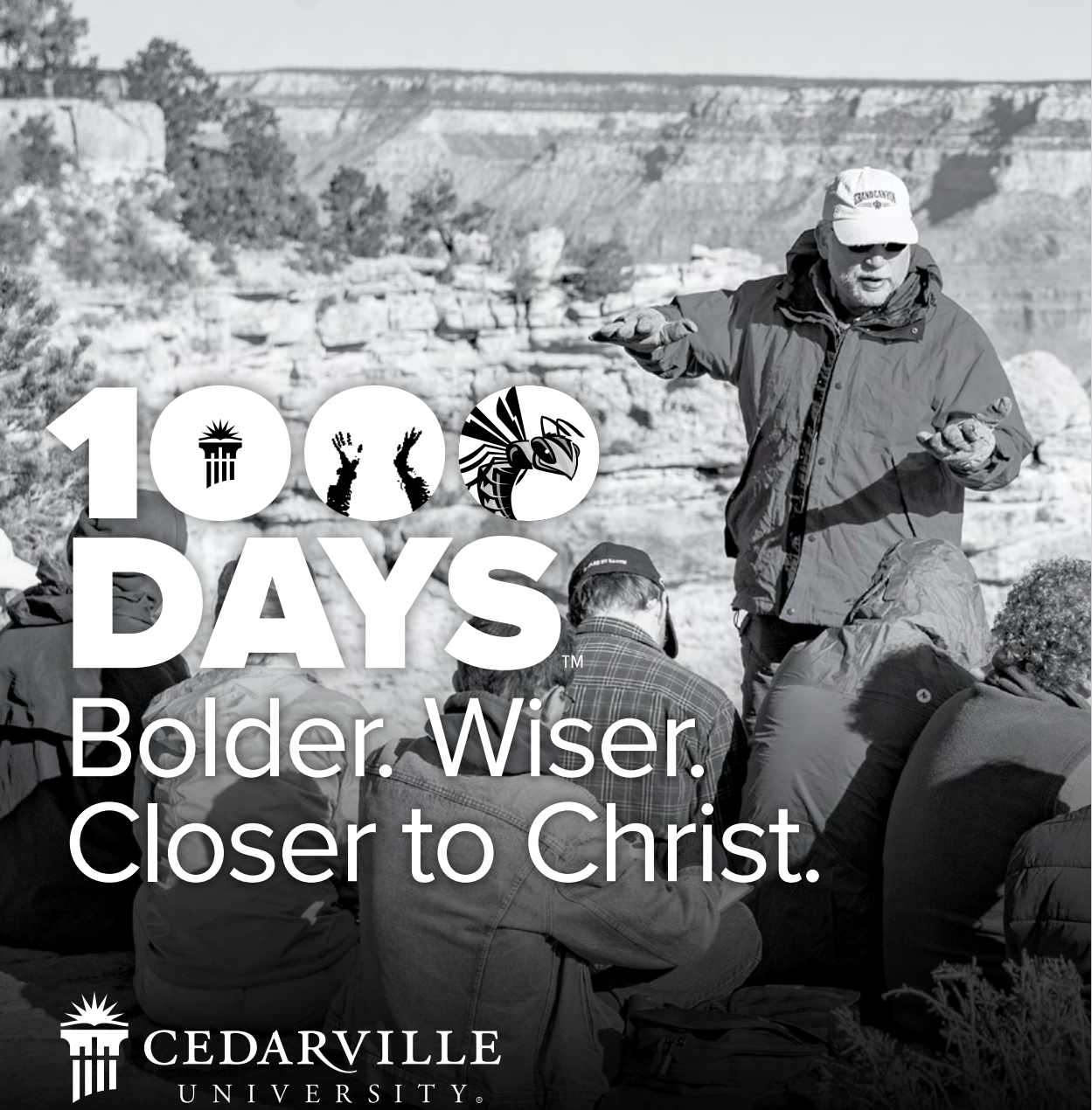
**FEMINISM'S PATRIARCHS:
AN IDEOLOGICAL RESPONSE
TO THE FAILURES OF MEN**
Emma Waters

**ADVOCATES, NOT MERELY
ADHERENTS: LAY-OF-THE LAND
OBSERVATIONS AND CHALLENGES
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Editorial: Some Things Never Change

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (535–475 BC) famously quipped, “There is nothing permanent except change.” From one angle, we can understand what he meant by this oxymoron. As time-bound creatures, all we experience is change. And to be familiar with human history is to know each passing era is marked by slower or more rapid change. But the Christian knows a higher Truth rooted in greater Wisdom: There is nothing permanent except God, who does not change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). Those who supplant God with change make Progress their god. And “progress” is a cruel taskmaster.

2024 is shaping up to be a year of seismic change. Under the guise of “progress,” humanity is regressing in rebellion. Caught in the fray, the church continues to be buffeted by the world on every side, challenged particularly in her understand-

ing of anthropology and authority. What does it mean to be male and female in the image of God? What does it mean to be creatures *coram Deo*, before God, who is our Maker? And have the right answers to these questions really changed with the changing times?

Will our generation stand on God’s unchanging Word against the tide and resist change just for the sake of it? Or will we be duped by the god of “progress”?

As Christians prepared on Good Friday to celebrate Easter this year — an event believers around the world have marked every year for 2,000 years — the President of the United States issued a proclamation declaring March 31st, Resurrection Sunday, to be “Trans Visibility Day.” The contrast could not be any more stark: A fallible, sinful man issued a word about a fake



holiday celebrating a fake identity (everyone knows a man cannot become a woman and vice versa) from one of the most powerful seats in the world. Meanwhile, Christians celebrated the true Word made flesh, obedient and sinless, crucified, buried, and raised from the dead to rescue us from our fraud and rebellion, and who is right now sitting at the right hand of God in heaven.

Of course, we should not be surprised when the world acts worldly. But what about those who bear the name of Christ? At their General Conference earlier this year, the United Methodists voted overwhelmingly to capitulate to the LGBT revolution, lifting a ban on the ordination

of homosexual clergy. The sinful rebellion did not stop there. The platform instructed delegates to introduce themselves with their preferred pronouns and not to use “exclusively masculine” language for God — a practice that stands against Jesus and the Bible’s clear witness otherwise. God is the only one, apparently, whose pronouns the UMC will not respect.¹ Thankfully, that denomination saw an exodus of more than a million, mostly African members in one day in response to this unbiblical development.²

Later on this year, the PCUSA will consider at their denominational meeting a proposal that is not only a complete surrender to the LGBT revolution, but itself a militant ad-

¹ See Colin J. Smothers, “Priestesses and goddesses in the church?” *WORLD* (May 20, 2024), <https://wng.org/opinions/priestesses-and-goddesses-in-the-church-1716076519>.

² Mark Tooley, “One Million United Methodists Exit in One Day,” *Juicy Ecumenism* (May 29, 2024), <https://juicyecumenism.com/2024/05/29/one-million-united-methodists-exit-in-one-day>.

vance against any dissenters. If passed, any clergy who does not affirm gay marriage or any identity that currently marches under the rainbow flag would be defrocked and kicked out of the denomination.³ All in the name of non-discrimination, of course — no theological conservatives allowed.

Closer to home, *Christianity Today* (*CT*) devoted an entire cover story in April to the issue of women in pastoral ministry — a position brand new in the world within the last century — with the majority of the articles in *CT* promoting egalitarianism within evangelicalism. One cannot help but wonder what Carl F.H. Henry, the founder of this once-great evangelical flagship magazine, would think of *CT* promoting a position he once referred to as a “great embarrassment.” As Albert Mohler recalls, Henry confronted Mohler for his sympathy toward egalitarianism, telling him he would one day regret this position as a “great embarrassment.”⁴ This confrontation was decisive for Mohler, and he went on to become one of complementarianism’s greatest apologists, leading Southern Seminary to reject “change” for change’s sake and recover its conservative, complementarian heritage. Henry founded *CT* to influence evangelicalism in a biblical direction, much like he influenced Mohler. Today, *CT* promotes change toward the position of egalitarianism, thereby influencing evangelicalism in an unbiblical direction.

In this issue of *Eikon*, Denny Burk, Tom Schreiner, and Brad Green counter *CT*’s egalitarian arguments. We also hosted a forum in

this issue of complementarian leaders who assess the state of complementarian theology in their respective evangelical denominations. In addition, you will find an excellent article on the patriarchs of feminism from Emma Waters, an article exploring the troubling Marxist roots of feminist theory from Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, a barn-burner of an article on designed male-female difference from Doug Ponder, a thoughtful essay on emotionalism and female feelings from Shane Morris, and much more. In short, you are in for a real treat.

All around, the foundations of society continue to crumble. Change is inevitable. Men and women are rebelling against their Maker as they ignore God’s design, women acting like men and men acting like women instead of embracing their God-given station — equal yet different. In this issue, we aim to push back against the change and erosion, standing against the worldly waves that seek to capsize God’s church. Anchored by the Word, we will trim our sails to the Spirit of God and not the spirit of this world, all to the glory of God our Father, all along the way using “exclusively masculine” language for God. Some things never change.

As James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” ✕

Colin J. Smothers
Eikon Executive Editor

³See Colin J. Smothers, “An absurd — and inevitable — requirement” *WORLD* (April 12, 2024), <https://wng.org/opinions/absurd-and-inevitable-requirement-1712871298>.

⁴Trevin Wax, “Al Mohler on Why He Changed His Mind on Women Pastors,” *The Gospel Coalition* (September 28, 2010), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/al-mohler-on-why-he-changed-his-mind-on-women-pastors/>.

JONATHAN E. SWAN

The Ancient Paths

Salters’ Hall Redux: Southern Baptists and the Law Amendment



The church faces new challenges in every generation.¹ In the eighteenth century, for example, the English-speaking church faced intense theological attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity. Today, doctrinal challenges revolve mainly around the ethics of human sexuality. Where Enlightenment rationalism and liberal toleration seized the eighteenth-century imagination, postmodern relativism and self-expressionism reign supreme today.

SALTERS' HALL FALLOUT

During the seventeenth century, various forms of anti-Trinitarianism became endemic in England, such that Socinianism, Arianism, and other forms of Unitarianism remained constant temptations for the church well into the eighteenth century. The results were disastrous. Among the Dissenting² denominations, Presbyterians and General Baptists were the hardest hit by these waves of heterodoxy. The Church of England also struggled to maintain Trinitarian orthodoxy within its ranks. By contrast, however, Particular Baptists and Independents largely stood their ground, although even the most conservative congregations saw some fall away.

During the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a key factor of ecclesial decline was not merely a denial of the Trinity, but an aversion to confessionalism. Emblematic of this aversion was a se-

ries of meetings at Salters' Hall in London in 1719, where Dissenting pastors were called on to give advice to Presbyterians in Exeter who had become suspicious that some of their pastors no longer adhered to the doctrine of the Trinity.³

While the initial cause of the meeting pertained to the doctrine of the Trinity, the point of controversy at Salters' Hall ultimately came down to the issue of subscription — what we now refer to as confessionalism. The Subscribers, as they became known, contended that in order to uphold the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, pastors should be held accountable by subscribing to a statement of faith. The Non-Subscribers, however, insisted that Scripture should be the only test of orthodoxy, and that it was, moreover, unscriptural to hold fellow believers to man-made doctrinal statements.

When the question came to a vote at Salters' Hall, the Non-Subscribers carried a 57-53 majority over the Subscribers. The outcome of this vote led to a split within the assembly, with each party sending its own letter of advice to the Presbyterians in Exeter. While both sides officially affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity, they did not come to terms on *how* to maintain Trinitarian orthodoxy. Non-Subscribers insisted on liberty of conscience and argued against subscription. The Subscribers, however, were suspicious

that the Non-Subscribers might be hiding less-than-Trinitarian convictions. At best, they believed them to be misguided in believing that they could maintain orthodoxy devoid of confessionalism.

While it may be the case that nearly all of the Non-Subscribers at Salters' Hall were actually Trinitarian in their convictions, the Subscribers rightly understood the necessity of confessionalism for upholding orthodoxy.⁴ Subsequent history provides clear evidence for their conviction, since the lax enforcement of the Thirty-Nine Articles within the Church of England and the outright rejection of confessionalism among the Presbyterians and General Baptists gave cover to anti-Trinitarians within these denominations.⁵

The connection between confessionalism and orthodoxy is especially apparent in the history of the General Baptists. In response to the anti-Trinitarian views of Matthew Caffyn, one of their pastors, the General Baptists chose to resolve doctrinal tensions within their community by the use of Scripture words only — in other words, without a confession. This anti-confessional stance among the General Baptists was maintained at Salters' Hall, when only one of the fifteen General Baptists voted for subscription. By contrast, only two of sixteen Particular Baptists voted in favor of non-subscription.

The subsequent history of the Dissenting

denominations after Salters' Hall, particularly the two Baptist denominations, justified the Subscribers' concerns. As the eighteenth century wore on, most of the General Baptists fell into Unitarianism. Their objection to confessionalism made both doctrinal clarity and accountability impossible, which resulted — predictably — in heresy being tolerated. Baptist historian Raymond Brown recounts: "In several instances, resistance to subscription became the prelude to heterodoxy. People who refused to sign the articles came eventually to deny them and those General Baptists who were theologically uncertain ultimately became committed Unitarians."⁶ The account of nineteenth-century historian Joseph Ivimey is of particular importance, since he wrote about the reality of his day. He painted an even more bleak image of the General Baptists in the fallout of Salters' Hall:

It is worthy of observation, as it respects the non-subscribers among the Baptists, that the churches to which they belonged, have become extinct; or, if there are any vestiges of them remaining, those who compose them are found marshalled under the banner of Socinus. The truth of the gospel has not continued with them; and these remarks are applicable to all the Presbyterian churches. It is pleasant also to remark, that most of the Particular Baptist ministers in London were so

¹ I am grateful to Clint Bass, Michael A.G. Haykin, and Tom Nettles, whose feedback improved this essay.

² The Dissenters (also called Nonconformists) were Protestants in England and Wales who did not conform to the Church of England and thus separated to form their own congregations.

³ The following account of the Salters' Hall controversy is dependent on the following sources: Anon., *An Account of the Late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers at Salter's-Hall*, 3rd ed. (London, 1719). Anon., *An Authentick Account of Several Things Done and Agreed Upon by the Dissenting Ministers Lately Assembled at Salters-Hall* (London, 1719). Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 1, *From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (1978; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 374–376. Jesse F. Owens, "The Salters' Hall Controversy: Heresy, Subscription, or Both?" in *In Essence One, in Persons Three: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Particular Baptist life and thought, 1640s–1840s*, eds. Michael A.G. Haykin with Roy M. Paul (West Lorne, Ontario: H&E Academic, 2022), 45–68.

⁴ Jesse Owens has recently argued that nearly all the General Baptists at Salters' Hall were orthodox Trinitarians, but merely opposed subscription. Jesse F. Owens, "The Salters' Hall Controversy: Heresy, Subscription, or Both?" in *In Essence One, in Persons Three: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Particular Baptist life and thought, 1640s–1840s*, eds. Michael A.G. Haykin with Roy M. Paul (West Lorne, Ontario: H&E Academic, 2022), 45–68.

⁵ See Clint C. Bass, *The Caffynite Controversy*, Centre for Baptist Studies in Oxford Publications 19 (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2020), 124–131.

⁶ Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, A History of the English Baptists, vol. 2 (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 22–23. This assessment is consistent with Owens' more recent treatment of Salters' Hall: "No matter how well-intentioned the Nonsubscribers at Salters' Hall were, if they hoped to maintain any sort of theological orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, their categorical opposition to subscription proved unwise." Owens, "The Salters' Hall Controversy," 68.

zealous for the doctrine of the Trinity, and the proper divinity of the Lord Jesus, as to subscribe with their hands what they believed in their hearts; thus contributing to stem the torrent which threatened to deluge the whole of the Dissenting churches.⁷

To summarize: the Baptist churches that rejected confessionalism eventually lost the gospel; but the churches that embraced confessionalism preserved the gospel.

CONFESSING THE TRUTH TO PRESERVE THE TRUTH

The contrast between the Particular and General Baptists on the matter of confessionalism has much to teach Southern Baptists today. As Dissenting pastors met at Salters' Hall in 1719 to debate how best to respond to concerns raised about heterodox anti-Trinitarianism, Southern Baptists will meet in Indianapolis to determine how best to respond to the presence of female pastors within its Convention. In both cases, the matter boils down to the issue of confessionalism.

At last year's annual meeting, the SBC strongly indicated its convictions about female pastors. It did so by clarifying and strengthening its definition of the pasto-

ral office in the *Baptist Faith & Message* (BFM) and by disfellowshipping churches with female pastors — including the well-known and influential Saddleback Church. Yet, not all are agreed on how to handle the issue moving forward.

Some within the SBC believe that female pastors should be included among its membership — even though this practice clearly contradicts article six of the BFM.⁸ Some proponents of this view appear to be advocating for a “Baptist” form of confessionalism that ultimately amounts to confessional *minimalism*. An article from earlier this year appears to make the case that holding churches within the SBC accountable to the BFM amounts to a dangerous form of “creedalism” that would wrongly force its doctrine upon churches.⁹ This article seems to communicate that while confessions serve some important functions, they should not be used to set strict doctrinal boundaries as markers of fellowship. In other words, adherence to the words of the BFM should not be a requirement for cooperation.¹⁰ The problem with this construal is that Baptists have long used confessions for such a purpose. Furthermore, the Preamble to the BFM itself states that Baptist confessions have served “as instruments of doctrinal accountability.”¹¹

⁷ Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:166.

⁸ Denny Burk makes a compelling case that confessionalism within the SBC requires non-contradiction to the BFM. Burk uses the term “subscription” to refer to the formal adoption of the BFM by a church as its official doctrinal statement. This is different from the way this essay has been using “subscription” with reference to Salters' Hall and Baptists of that era. In that latter case, subscription refers to agreement or consent to a set of doctrinal articles. Denny Burk, “Non-Contradiction (not Subscription) Is the SBC's Confessional Standard,” *DennyBurk.com*, June 21, 2022, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://www.dennyburk.com/non-contradiction-not-subscription-is-the-sbcs-confessional-standard/>.

⁹ Malcolm B. Yarnell III and Steven A. McKinion, “FIRST PERSON: For Baptist confessionalism,” *Baptist Press*, January 2024, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-for-baptist-confessionalism/>.

¹⁰ This statement should not be understood to mean that each church in fellowship with the SBC must formally adopt the BFM 2000 as its confessional statement. A church does not have to adopt the BFM as its official doctrinal statement to adhere to the words of the BFM. So long as the church's doctrine is consistent, and not in contradiction to the teaching of the BFM, it should be understood to confessionally align.

¹¹ “Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee to the Southern Baptist Convention” *The Baptist Faith and Message*, June 14, 2000, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://bfm.sbc.net/preamble/>.



Far from using confessions in an altogether different way from other Protestant denominations, Baptists (both General and Particular) advocated alongside Presbyterians and Independents for subscription at Salters' Hall. The claim that Baptists are "not creedal," meaning they do not use confessions as tests of orthodoxy or as a doctrinal basis of unity, is historically unfounded.

It should go without saying that the SBC cannot impose the BFM on any church since denominational cooperation is *voluntary*. Churches choose to enter into fellowship with the Convention. This voluntary polity preserves freedom of conscience and demonstrates genuine doctrinal unity — if all parties enter that fellowship with a good faith commitment to the teachings of the BFM.¹³ Furthermore, the SBC does not even require churches within the Convention to formally adopt the BFM as its official statement of faith.¹⁴

Like the General Baptists in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it is certainly the case that some Baptists throughout history have rejected confessionalism (sometimes negatively referred to as "creedalism" in reference to the use of confessions as a means of doctrinal accountability). But they often did so at their own peril. One will be hard pressed to find historical examples where biblical-faithful confessionalism *hindered* the

progress of the gospel. But you can very easily find examples to the contrary. The anti-confessionalism displayed at Salters' Hall provides a sobering reminder about the cost of rejecting confessionalism. In time, such a rejection inevitably leads to the rejection of gospel truth — or indicates that those truths have already been compromised.

THE NEED FOR CONFSSIONAL CLARITY IN THE SBC

If the Law Amendment is ratified at the upcoming annual meeting, Southern Baptists will have taken a clear stand, not only for complementarianism, but confessionalism. They will have decisively determined that the BFM represents their doctrinal standard of unity and cooperation. And that is exactly what is needed at this time.

Historically, creeds and confessions have

arisen out of controversy, when the presence of heterodox teaching prompts the church to define and then declare what is true, biblical doctrine. These confessions provide a "pattern of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13) with which to communicate true, biblical doctrine, and with which to reject false doctrine. While the SBC has a confession in place, the Law Amendment would utilize the SBC's Constitution to not only strengthen Southern Baptist commitment to its complementarian convictions, but to clarify its confessional identity.

At a time when many churches within the SBC operate in contradiction to the BFM by ordaining females to the pastorate (lead, co-pastor, associate, or otherwise), confessional clarity is necessary.¹⁵ One could go so far as to say that in moments like these, it is the spiritual *duty* of Southern Baptists not to just *say* what they believe, but to be *doers* of what they believe (James 1:22). Our shared commitment to Scripture demands no less.

When the clear teachings of Scripture and our shared confession are contradicted, it is not sufficient to cite personal commitment to the teachings in question. If Southern Baptists are to maintain the biblical traditions that were delivered to them (1 Cor. 11:2), they must confess and practice them. The history of Salters' Hall and the General Baptists teaches us that when churches stop confessing those truths together, at some point down the road, they are no longer kept. At the time when they most needed confessional clarity, they opted for a confessional laxity that led to their demise.

While complementarianism is not as foundational as the doctrine of the Trinity, it is nonetheless an important issue that we must not downplay. How many denominations must we see slide downward from egalitarianism into LGBT-apostasy before we realize its significance? Regrettably, Wayne Grudem and John Piper have been proven right again and again when they wrote, "the

¹² Furthermore, General Baptists had previously used a doctrinal statement, *A Brief Confession* (1660), "as a test of fellowship" within their denomination. As Bass has documented: "Obviously, those who signed the confession were expected to believe the doctrines expressed in it." Anti-confessionalism was a later development and a departure from earlier General Baptist practice. See Bass, *The Caffynite Controversy*, 113–124.

¹³ See Colin J. Smothers, "Not a Freelance Club: Identity, Association, and Confessionalism in the SBC," *Christ Over All*, March 20, 2024, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://christoverall.com/article/concise/not-a-freelance-club-identity-association-and-confessionalism-in-the-sbc/>

¹⁴ See footnote 8.

¹⁵ Kevin McClure, "How Many Female Pastors are in the SBC?" *American Reformer*, June 10, 2023, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://americanreformer.org/2023/06/how-many-female-pastors-are-in-the-sbc/>.

feminist minimization of sexual role differentiation contributes to the confusion of sexual identity that, especially in second and third generations, gives rise to more homosexuality in society.”¹⁶ The decision by the United Methodists last month to lift its ban against LGBT-ordination is but the most recent manifestation of this decades-old observation.¹⁷

There certainly are churches that have inadvertently mislabeled some female staff members as pastors. But just as the anti-confessionalism among orthodox General Baptists opened the door to anti-Trinitarianism, such a practice within the SBC will eventually prove corrosive to later generations by obfuscating the biblical qualifications for pastors/elders/overseers.

Rather than compromising on its commitment to complementarianism and confessionalism, the SBC should rather provide instruction for correcting what may in some cases be honest mistakes. Mislabeled a staff member is a simple fix, if it in fact involves an inadvertent mislabeling. Churches that truly desire to maintain confessional unity with the Convention would be happy to correct their mistake and use it as an opportunity to teach the biblical doctrines of church leadership and male-female complementarity.

But there are also certainly churches where such a designation is not inadvertent, but intentional — which is the issue

the Law Amendment seeks to address with crystalline clarity. Will Southern Baptists be united under a common confession or will they not? Will the BFM reflect Southern Baptist practice or will it not? A positive answer to these questions describes Baptist confessionalism, the latter some form of pragmatic doctrinal minimalism.

THE ANCIENT PATHS OF CONFESSIONALISM

Similar to the decision faced by Dissenting pastors at Salters’ Hall, Southern Baptists have an opportunity to strengthen their commitment to sound doctrine through a commitment to confessionalism. They should be reminded that when we look back at Baptist history, those churches that rejected confessionalism often drifted away from the faith and lost their gospel witness. By no longer following the pattern of sound words, they conformed to the pattern of the world (Rom. 12:2). If Southern Baptists wish to learn from their past, they will follow the ancient paths of confessionalism and ratify the Law Amendment. ✕

*Jonathan E. Swan is
Executive Editor of Eikon*

¹⁶ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions: An Overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 64.

¹⁷ Christina Grube, “United Methodists Repeal Ban on Gay Clergy, Pass Other LGBTQ Policies,” *World*, May 1, 2024, accessed May 15, 2024. https://wng.org/sift/methodists-repeal-ban-on-gay-clergy-enact-other-lgbtq-policies-1714578183?mkt_tok=NzEwLVFSUi0yM-DkAAAGS2HpM3Muijn_Vi_K8ixW0bVAEOP6X1HI5AOJt5YN4zBnMOl3JjarGHqt2CjawD12YcxRt_Is44lpMyg6y5VZHnyhAA9Jxp-wQLtb0tG3DYGgN.



A Response to Christianity Today | DENNY BURK THOMAS SCHREINER BRADLEY G. GREEN

Do Egalitarians Need Safe Spaces?



The April 2024 issue of *Christianity Today* (CT) includes three cover stories addressing ongoing differences between complementarians and egalitarians. Titled “Division of Labor,” the cover asks whether egalitarians and complementarians are really as opposed to one another as people suppose. Inside the magazine, the editors introduce the three authors — Gordan Hugenberg, Dani Treweek, and Gaby Viesca — as “ministry leaders” who “offer better ways forward for all schools of thought on women’s roles in the church and the home” (3).

In an editorial, executive editor Joy Allmond says that their coverage offers a “third way” between egalitarianism and complementarianism — a kind of truce between the two sides (7).¹ Allmond says that the magazine’s approach to egalitarianism and complementarianism is in keeping with the vision of CT’s founder Billy Graham, who “envisioned a convening point for Christians who don’t belong in progressive settings or fundamentalist contexts but who long to link arms with other sojourners somewhere in between” (7).

The editors are aiming high with this issue, but sadly the effort is long on good intentions but short on execution. Even though the aim is to be above the fray, the authors of the cover stories are primarily egalitarian, and their egalitarianism is presumed at almost every turn. Even the lone complementarian contributor — Dani Treweek — is so dissatisfied with the state of complementarianism that she wonders aloud whether she will call herself a complementarian anymore (48).² Treweek’s reticence about her own view is in stark contrast to the two egalitarian articles, one of which makes a biblical case against there being any restrictions on women in ministry (Hugenberg)³ and another which is a kind of “how-to guide” on transforming a complementarian church into an egalitarian one (Viesca).⁴ The result is not above the fray but a lopsided presentation in favor of the egalitarian view.

That is why the editors of *Eikon* thought it would be useful for us to offer some feedback to the two egalitarian cover stories, as well as to one additional piece that claims Mary Magdalene was “The First Apostle.”⁵

THREE EGALITARIAN PITFALLS

My aim in this essay is to engage critically with Gaby Viesca’s contribution, which appears under the title, “Beyond Damage

Control: Churches moving toward egalitarianism should make women the priority, not public relations.” Her thesis is very simple. She wishes to warn egalitarian pastors about three pitfalls to avoid when steering a church from complementarianism to egalitarianism (51). Even people with the best of egalitarian intentions can botch the job, and Viesca wants to help egalitarian pastors not to lose their way in the face of complementarian opposition.

The first pitfall is assuming that issuing a new statement on women will lead to egalitarian outcomes in the actual ministry of the church. On the contrary, complementarianism is a system that must be deconstructed from the inside out. There must be intentional, direct action against “traditions,” “assumptions,” “value systems,” and “structures” that would prevent women from assuming leadership in a church (51-52). All of these “invisible barriers” need to be eliminated (51). For example, churches will need to consider what “maternity leave” might look like for a female senior pastor (52).

The second pitfall in “formerly complementarian churches” is assuming that the job is done after one woman is allowed to preach (52). On the contrary, churches need to adopt a “full-fledged vision for female preachers in our churches” (52). One woman preaching every now and then will not do. Indeed, churches need

² Danielle Treweek, “Will ‘Complementarianism’ Survive? Cancellation, Co-Option, and Cannibalization of the Movement Threatens Its Future,” *Christianity Today* 68, no. 3 (April 2024): 48–50.

³ Gordon P. Hugenberg, “Joint Heirs: Complementarians and Egalitarians Are Not as Divided as Some Think,” *Christianity Today* 68, no. 3 (April 2024): 44–47. The web version of this article appears under the title “Complementarian at Home, Egalitarian at Church? Paul Would Approve” at www.ChristianityToday.com.

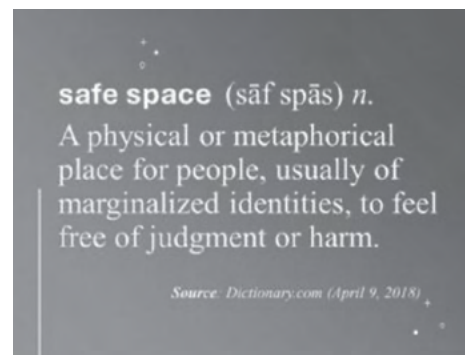
⁴ Gaby Viesca, “Beyond Damage Control: Churches Moving toward Egalitarianism Should Make Women the Priority, Not Public Relations,” *Christianity Today* 68, no. 3 (April 2024): 51–52. The web version of this article appears under the title “Egalitarianism Is More Than a PR Statement” at www.ChristianityToday.com.

⁵ Jennifer Powell McNutt and Amy Beverage Peeler, “The First Apostle: Jesus Welcomed the Witness of Mary Magdalene. So Should We,” *Christianity Today* 68, no. 3 (April 2024): 55–59. The web version of this article appears under the title “The First Apostle’s Unlikely Witness” at www.ChristianityToday.com.

¹ Joy Allmond, “In This Issue: Editor’s Note,” *Christianity Today* 68, no. 3 (April 2024): 7.

to staff-up with women from a variety of perspectives, ethnic backgrounds, and life experiences.

The third pitfall consists of the failure to recognize the “emotional toll” that these transitions have on women. Discussing what a woman can or cannot do in ministry is a “fully embodied” experience for women and can inflict emotional trauma (52). In debates about women in ministry, the “playing field is not level” (52). Unseen power dynamics put women at a disadvantage. Male church leaders may not realize that the arguments can be one-sided. Therefore, the church should provide “safe spaces” for both men and women to “voice their spiritual and emotional needs and struggles” (52).



AUTHORITARIAN IMPLEMENTATION

Viesca argues that these three pitfalls undermine churches in the process of transitioning from complementarianism to egalitarianism. And yet, Viesca fails to consider the biggest problem with transitioning a church to egalitarianism — the fact that egalitarianism falls short of what the Bible actually teaches. Of course, the question of what the Bible teaches on these things is the most contested issue between Egalitarians and Complementarians. And yet Viesca does not spend even

one sentence making a biblical argument for her position. It’s as if egalitarianism is so self-evidently true that eventually everyone will surely come around.

Perhaps most troubling is her opening anecdote in which a pastor announces to his complementarian church a transition to egalitarianism. The pastor knows that the congregation is “not of one mind” on the issue (51). Nevertheless, Viesca gives the impression that it is better for a pastor to plow forward over the objections of complementarians than to get bogged down in persuading the consciences of the people. One need not be a congregationalist to see the problems with this kind of top-down, authoritarian overthrow of a church’s complementarian doctrine.

SYSTEMIC COMPLEMENTARIANISM?

Viesca’s argument relies heavily on a problematic social justice framework. She speaks of complementarianism as if it were some sort of systemic injustice to be overturned. She contends that even if a church formally endorses an egalitarian position, complementarian “systems” and “structures” may still remain at every level of a church’s ministry and prevent women from ascending to leadership. Those systems and structures come in the form of “traditions,” “invisible barriers,” “unspoken rules,” and “value systems” — all of which must be dismantled before women can assume leadership. Indeed, churches must ensure that a woman’s responsibility to care for her own children is no barrier to leadership.

Viesca never addresses the fact that the “traditions” and “value systems” she de-

“Again, she does not make a substantive case for the egalitarian position but rather assumes it to be true, while warning leaders against focusing too much on persuasion through Scripture.”

sires to dismantle often reflect the biblical convictions of church members. Theology drives practice and culture, yet Viesca recommends downplaying theology in favor of pragmatic transformation. Again, she does not make a substantive case for the egalitarian position but rather assumes it to be true, while warning leaders against focusing too much on persuasion through Scripture. Rather, she argues that church leaders should focus their efforts on creating specific pathways for women to assume leadership (52). She speaks of *representation* as a key value for appointing leadership in the church (52), even though this is not one of the values the Bible gives us (see 1 Tim 3:1ff). In this way, her recommendations reflect the grammar of social justice ideology but not scriptural qualifications for church leadership.

CONCLUSION

Near the end of her essay, Viesca says that the “chief question” is whether or not churches are willing to create pathways for women to assume leadership in the church. But in reality, the big question is

whether egalitarianism is true in the first place. Viesca never compels readers that it is, for she never even considers a substantive case for her view. Her advice, therefore, sort of floats in the ether with no real grounding in the Bible, theology, or tradition. For that reason, her Scripture-free recommendations are just as likely to result in a church-split or a pastor being fired as they are to achieve an egalitarian revolution. This is no basis upon which to transform a complementarian church into an egalitarian one. On the contrary, it’s a recipe for destroying a church’s faithfulness to Scripture. ✕

Denny Burk is President of CBMW

Understanding the Image of God:

A Response to Mary Conway, "Gender in Creation and Fall"

Gordon Hugenberger rightly reminds us in his essay in *Christianity Today* of the many areas where complementarians and egalitarians agree.¹ In addition, we have all benefited from his excellent scholarship over the years. Still, I would dissent from his claim that 1 Tim. 2:9–15 speaks of the relationship between husbands and wives instead of men and women generally. If we accept Hugenberger's interpretation, the text doesn't prohibit women from serving as pastors or from preaching the word when the church gathers for worship. Still, his reading of the text is quite unconvincing. There are decisive reasons for thinking that Paul speaks of men and women generally, not husbands and wives specifically, in 1 Tim. 2:9–15.

Hugenberger's reading is flawed because the context in 1 Timothy 2 is clearly public worship, not the individual relationship between husbands and wives. When we read 1 Tim-

othy as a whole, the focus in the letter is the public assembly of the church, the right teaching of the word and the refutation of false teachers. Paul often speaks of teaching in the letter, and it invariably refers to what occurs when the church gathers together (1 Tim. 1:3, 10; 4:1, 6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 2, 3). A quick look at the letter verifies that we have a public setting. False teachers are threatening the church (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:3–7), and Timothy is charged to resist their influence (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:18–20), by proclaiming the gospel (1 Tim. 1:12–17; 2:3–7). First Timothy 2:8–15 is followed by a command to appoint overseers and deacons in the church (1 Tim. 3:1–13), and both are offices that relate to public ministry in the church. The Pauline instructions are designed to make the church a bulwark against the false teaching (1 Tim. 3:14–15). Paul immediately returns to the threat of false teaching and the need to resist it (1 Tim. 4). The role of elders is addressed again in 1 Tim. 5:17–25, and the letter ends as Paul emphasizes the importance of resisting false teaching and pursuing what is good and right and true (1 Timothy 6). The idea, then, that Paul addresses husbands and wives in chapter 2 doesn't fit the aim and purpose of the letter. Hugenberger individualizes and privatizes a text that addresses the church which is gathered for worship and instruction.

Hugenberger claims that the terms used for men and women in the New Testament typically refer to husbands and wives, and thus, in his judgment the same is true in 1 Tim. 2:9–15. That sounds like an impressive argument, but when we examine the matter more closely Hugenberger's reading fails. Yes, the words for men and women often refer to husbands and wives, but this is evident from the context in which these words occur. And the fundamental rule for interpreting the Bible is that we must interpret every text in context, and thus appealing to statistics doesn't really prove anything. New Testament writers signal in *context* when husbands and wives are intended. The following examples illustrate the point: "the married woman" (Rom. 7:2); "each man should have his own wife" (1 Cor. 7:2); "to the married" (1 Cor. 7:10); "if any brother has a wife" (1 Cor. 7:12); "her husband" (1 Cor. 7:39); "let them ask their own husbands at home" (1 Cor. 14:35); "I betrothed you to one husband" (2 Cor. 11:2); "more are the children of the desolate one than of the one having a husband" (Gal. 4:27); "wives being subject to their own husbands" (Eph. 5:22); "wives submit yourselves to your

¹ Gordon P. Hugenberger, "Joint Heirs: Complementarians and Egalitarians Are Not as Divided as Some Think," *Christianity Today* 68, no. 3 (April 2024): 44–47. The web version of this article appears under the title "Complementarian at Home, Egalitarian at Church? Paul Would Approve" at www.ChristianityToday.com.

husbands” (Col. 3:18); “husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; cf. 1 Tim. 3:12; 5:9; Titus 1:6); “instruct the young women to be lovers of their husbands . . . being subject to their own husbands” (Titus 2:5); “wives being subject to their own husbands” (1 Pet. 3:1). We can also put it this way. If you replace “wife” and “husband” with “woman” and “man” in the texts cited above, it still clear that wives and husbands are on view by various modifiers (e.g., “their,” “their own,” “one,” etc.). These modifiers are completely lacking in 1 Timothy 2, confirming that husbands and wives aren’t in view.

When husbands and wives are intended, the context makes it clear, but there is nothing in the context of 1 Tim. 2:9–15 to indicate that husbands and wives are in view. Paul



could have easily added words like “your wives” or “your husbands” to clarify that wives and husbands are intended, but we find nothing of the kind. The references to men and women in 1 Tim. 2:9–15 are quite general, which is why the majority of commentators agree that men and women are the subject of the admonition, not husbands and wives per se. Yes, the text refers to Adam and Eve, but that doesn’t indicate that their marriage is in view. Paul appeals to Adam and Eve (1 Tim. 2:13–14) to ground his commands in cre-

ation — not to specify that that the command pertains to the relationship of wives to husbands.

Hugenberger makes a similar mistake in appealing to 1 Pet. 3:1–7 as a parallel to 1 Tim. 2:9–15. He rightly notes some parallels between the two texts, but the differences are more important than the similarities. There is no doubt that Peter speaks to husbands and wives in 1 Pet. 3:1–7 as he calls upon wives to submit to their husbands, and husbands to be understanding of their wives. But there is not even a whisper of a husband-wife relationship in 1 Timothy 2. Nowhere does Paul speak of “their husbands” or “their wives” or of how husbands and wives should relate to one another.

Hugenberger also thinks that a church gathering can’t be in view since Paul speaks of proper dress and adornment for women (1 Tim. 2:9–10), and we find a similar admonition in 1 Pet. 3:5–6. But Hugenberger’s claim hardly follows logically. Surely, the dress of women would also be a concern in the public assembly. And then we have to ask: would Paul restrict himself exclusively to the dress of married women? Certainly the adornment of single women would also be important. Actually, Paul must have public gatherings in his mind because he isn’t commanding wives about their adornment within the confines of the home. If Hugenberger were to say that Paul is concerned about the dress of wives in the assembly, then we are faced again with this question. Why would Paul only care about the dress of married women and not the adornment of single women?

To sum up, the reasons Hugenberger gives to defend the idea that husbands and wives are the subject of the commands in 1 Timothy 2 fail to convince. The judgment of most commentators is correct. Paul’s admonitions in 1 Tim. 2:9–15 refer to men and women in general and should not be restricted to husbands and wives. ✕

Thomas Schreiner is an Associate Dean for the School of Theology and the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Professor of Biblical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Should We Consider Mary the First Apostle?



One of the glorious and beautiful truths of — and legacies of — biblical Christianity is Christianity’s effect in history of ameliorating the various sufferings seen in the world. as Tom Holland has recounted in his one-volume church history, *Dominion*, Holland was somewhat surprised at how Christianity changed the world into which it arrived. Christianity led to the amelioration of much of the suffering and brutality of the ancient world. A beautiful and serendipitous discovery indeed by Holland. And Christians should rejoice at how Christianity—from its earliest moments — encouraged (indeed *commanded* Christians to treat woman with love, especially as seen in the husband-wife relationship, where husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and *gave himself* for her (Ephesians 5:25). So, we should not be surprised to see in the pages of the New Testament women right there alongside men in numerous passages.

McNutt’s and Peeler’s *Christianity Today* essay, “The First Apostle,” was intriguing to read.¹ When I was asked to write a response to the essay, I was happy to do so. The more I have read the essay in writing a response, I have had to work at the best *way* to respond. I should say, Jennifer Powell McNutt is a friend, while I don’t *believe* I know Amy Beverage Peeler. The difficulty of writing a response is for two related reasons: (1) I think there are actually two essays (or theses) here; (2) I think there is something of an equivocation or ambiguity in how the word “apostle” is being used. The “Mary” being considered here is Mary Magdalene, and not Mary the mother of Jesus, or any of the other myriad “Marys” in the New Testament.

Here is what I take to be the essays/theses to be:

- Mary Magdalene is a blessed woman, had the honor of being close to Jesus and to being one of the first persons to see the risen Jesus, was told by Jesus to share the news of his resurrection/ascending, and was able share the good news of the resurrection of Jesus.
- Mary Magdalene should be considered the “first apostle.”

Few (no?) Christians would quibble about the thesis “a.” If one reads the four gospels, Mary Magdalene appears at a number of places — including at the death of Jesus, as well as coming to the tomb and being told by Jesus to go share that he has risen (or “is ascending” — Jn. 20:17) (Matt. 28:5-10; Mk. 16:1, 6; Lk. 23:55-56, 24:4-10; Jn. 19:25; 20:1-18).

But many persons would wonder if it is necessary, or wise, or accurate to affirm thesis “b”: that Mary Magdalene should be considered the “first apostle.”

These two oscillating theses I think can be seen in relation to the second main issue of concern I have: something of an equivocation or ambiguity about the term “apostle.” What is an apostle? In the New Testament, the criteria for being an apostle appear to be two-fold:

- Those who had known Jesus in his earthly ministry as well as seen the resurrected Jesus (Mark

¹Jennifer Powell McNutt and Amy Beverage Peeler, “The First Apostle’s Unlikely Witness,” *Christianity Today*, March 18, 2024, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2024/april/mary-magdalene-first-apostle-mcnutt-peeler.html>.

14:28; 16:7; Matt. 26:32; 28:16; Luke 24:36-53; John 20:19-29; 21:1-4; cf. Acts 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:5).

- Those had been called or appointed or chosen, who would be given authority, and who were sent for a special purpose.
- Called/appointed/chosen: Matt. 10:1; Mk. 3:14; Lk. 6:13; Lk. 9:1; Acts 1:2.
- Given authority: Matt. 10:1; Mk. 3:14; 1 Thess. 2:6 (apostleship seems to denote authority to make “demands”; cf. 1 Cor. 9:3-14).
- Sent for a special purpose: Matt. 10:5; Mark 3:14; Lk. 9:2 (cf. Acts 1:7).

Additionally, the New Testament explicitly designates the twelve disciples as “apostles” (Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:13-16). The twelve apostles are explicitly said to be chosen (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2) or appointed (Mark 3:14). The New Testament can speak of “the twelve” some thirty-four times, with thirty of those occurrences being the twelve disciples or apostles. The other occurrences of “the twelve” speak of the patriarchs (Acts 7:8), tribes (Mt. 19:28; James 1:1; Revelation 21:12), or gates (Revelation 21:21). Matthew 19:28 also speaks of “twelve thrones.”

Paul, of course, is also an apostle (Acts 14:14; 1 Cor. 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1). Paul is an apostle “untimely born” (1 Cor. 15:8, ESV), for his call did in fact come from Jesus, but Paul’s witness to the resurrected Jesus (*like* other apostles) came from the *risen* and *exalted* Jesus (*unlike* the other apostles) (Acts 9:3-6; cf. Acts 22:10 and 26:16-17).

The circle of apostles may have centered in, indeed seems to have certainly centered in, the twelve and Paul. But there is no

reason to limit apostles to the twelve and Paul. James the brother of Jesus is called an apostle (Gal. 1:19; cf. 1 Cor. 9:5). In Romans 16:7 Andronicus and Junia are either a *part* of the apostles or are well-known to the apostles. Silvanus (1 Thess. 1:1) may have been an apostle (1 Thess. 2:6). Paul’s apparent distinction between “the twelve” (1 Cor. 15:5) and “all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:7) may also point to a broader group of apostles. Finally, Jesus Christ himself in Hebrews 3:1 is called “the apostle and high priest of our confession.”

In short, when McNutt and Peeler suggest that Mary Magdalene is the “first apostle,” this requires an equivocation on the word “apostle.” There is a kind of linguistic elision going on here, it seems to me. If being an “apostle” entails the kind of criteria outline above, then Mary Magdalene is certainly not an “apostle,” for she does not meet the criteria above. However, if being an “apostle” simply means being a witness, even a witness whom Jesus “sent” in some way (Matt. 28:5-10; Mk. 16:1, 6; Lk. 23:55-56, 24:4-10; Jn. 19:25; 20:1-18), then Mary Magdalene would be an apostle. But in this more attenuated sense of “apostle,” the logic of McNutt and Peeler’s essay is that — ultimately — every Christian is (or can be) an apostle. And I was not surprised when McNutt and Peeler reach this conclusion by the end of the essay (speaking of Mary Magdalene):

She is a redeemed sinner whom the Spirit of God empowered to follow Jesus and whom Jesus himself commissioned to tell the good news of his return to life on Easter morning.

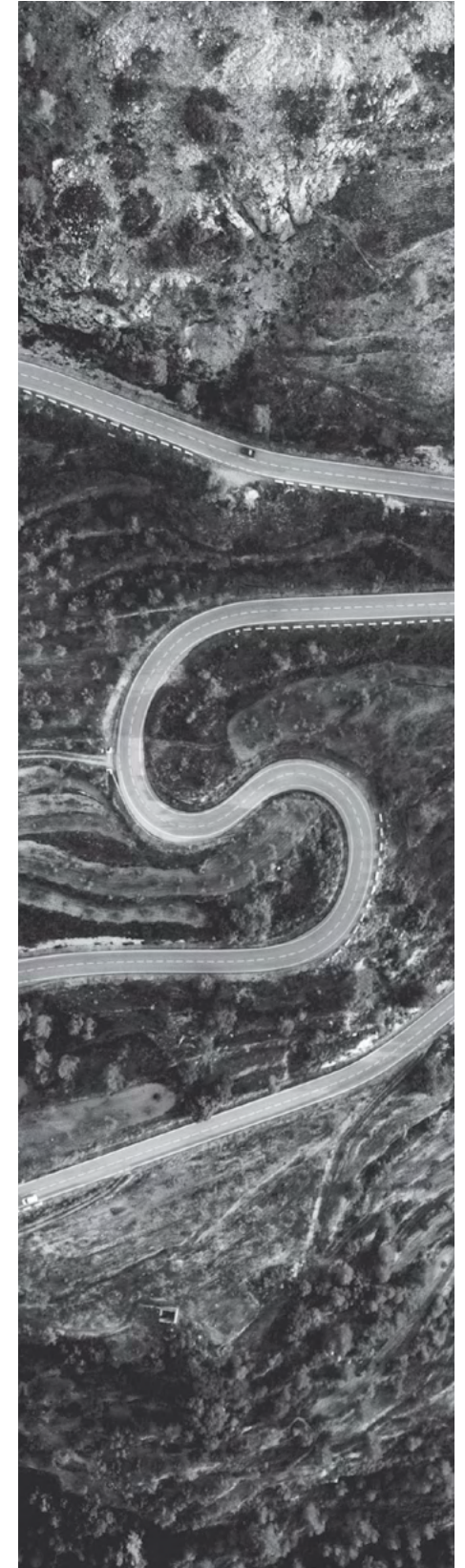
The final words of the essay follow from the logic of the essay:

As we encounter her image, let us use it as a mirror to see ourselves and what we, by God’s gracious power, can become: apostles, sent to tell the good news of the Resurrection.

Again, if “apostle” simply means one who is “sent” to share the gospel, then of course every Christian is an “apostle.” But if “apostle” is interpreted against the whole matrix of the New Testament, then every Christian is most certainly *not* an apostle.

Perhaps it is fitting to end by turning to the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul. Paul believes in the importance of the apostles and the prophets. Indeed, in Ephesians 2:19-20 Paul can write that the “household of God” itself is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” Christians are indeed being “built together” (Eph. 2:22), but Christians like you and I are *not* the foundation itself. Paul asks a question in 1 Corinthians 12:29. He poses a straightforward (albeit rhetorical) question: “Are all apostles?” The obvious and expected answer is obvious: no. We are all witnesses, ambassadors, followers of the Lord Jesus. But we are not all “apostles.” When the logic of our argument places us in opposition to the Apostle to the Gentiles, we should think twice about how we got into such a position. ✕

Bradley G. Green is Professor of Theological Studies at Union University (Jackson, TN) and Professor of Philosophy and Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, KY).



A Biblical Vision of the Sexes: Harmonious Asymmetry

Complementarians believe that men and women are “equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood.”¹ Or, as John Piper and Wayne Grudem put it, complementarians believe the Scriptures assert the reality of “both equality and beneficial differences between men and women.”² Similarly, Denny Burk has written that the “Danvers [Statement] envisions an equality between male and female that cannot be reduced to undifferentiated sameness.”³ Each of these statements highlights an indispensable element of complementarianism, namely, the affirmation of both the equality and

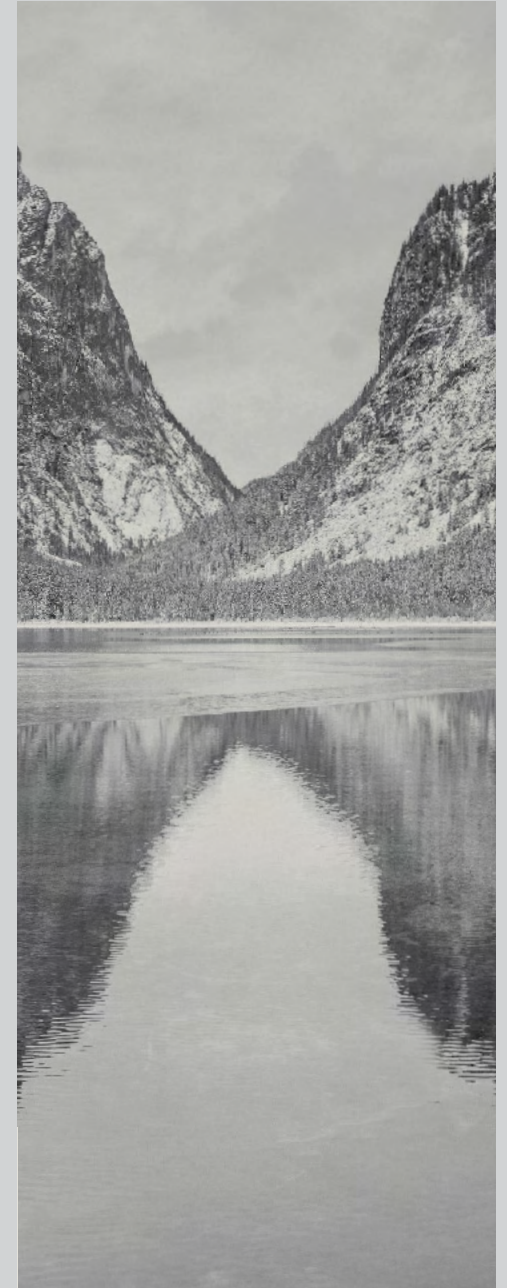
asymmetry of the sexes.

Yet affirmation is not the same as emphasis. And while the Scriptures certainly teach both truths, sexual equality is generally *assumed* by the biblical authors, while sexual asymmetry is often *emphasized*. Furthermore, there are significant theological reasons for the scriptural focus on sexual asymmetry, which means there are deleterious consequences for getting the matter wrong — not only by way of denial, as egalitarians do, but also by way of de-emphasis, as many complementarians

increasingly are doing.⁴ In view of all this, my goal in this article is to connect the fact of mankind’s sexual asymmetry to the meaning that the biblical authors ascribe to the same. More specifically, I aim to demonstrate that the asymmetry of the sexes is not only a biblical teaching but also a biblical emphasis that should be embraced in accordance with its significance.⁵

In the following essay, I first highlight where the asymmetry of the sexes — which is a fact of nature — is clearly taught in Scripture. Second, I show that the biblical authors employ this asymmetry in the service of their theological agenda(s). Finally, I sketch some of the places where a failure to embrace and uphold mankind’s sexual asymmetry adversely affects Christian life and doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). In other words, my argument can be summarized in three parts:

1. Sexual asymmetry is a fact of nature and a clear teaching in Scripture.
2. The Biblical authors assign significance to mankind’s sexual asymmetry.
3. Thus, the failure to embrace sexual asymmetry is harmful to life and doctrine.



⁴ See Bryan Laughlin and Doug Ponder, “Complementarians and the Rise of Second-Wave Evangelical Feminism,” *Sola Ecclesia*, February 26, 2024, <https://solaecclesia.org/articles/complementarians-and-the-rise-of-second-wave-evangelical-feminism/>.

⁵ Against the objection that all of the Bible’s teaching is significant, consider two points. First, while Matthew 15:21 and Mark 10:45 are equally scriptural (thus equally true), they are not equally significant. For is it not as important to know that “Jesus withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon” (Matt 15:21) as it is to know that the Son of man came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Second, the Bible explicitly endorses a hierarchy of significance in various places. For example, Paul speaks of the gospel as being of “first importance” (1 Cor 15:3), and Christ speaks of “the weightier matters of the law” in his rebuke of the Pharisees for straining gnats and swallowing camels (Matt 23:23–24). There are, then, two errors we must avoid: the first sees all truths as equally significant, when they are not; the second error regards one truth (e.g., the gospel) as being of mono-significance, while acting as if no other truths matter.

THE FACT OF SEXUAL ASYMMETRY

Augustine of Hippo once wrote, “I think everyone, educated and uneducated, can tell the difference between the masculine and feminine genders.”⁶ Less prestigiously, but no less accurately, the 1990 film *Kindergarten Cop* features a scene where a young boy gives Arnold Schwarzenegger a lesson in basic sexual anatomy after a fidgety girl asks to use the restroom. The children erupt with laughter. I recall that the film’s viewers laughed, too — not because of some arrested development in them, but because of the real humor in a child explaining the obvious to an adult.

Unfortunately, what was obvious to previous generations is no longer so today. Instead, the modern moment is a tragic fulfillment of G. K. Chesterton’s century-old warning about a world stripped of self-evident truths by the acids of secular modernity.⁷ In that same place Chesterton observes, “So far from it being self-evident to the modern [person] that men are created equal, it is not self-evident that men are created, or even that men are men.”⁸

Circumstances like these are precisely why George Orwell said, “We have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent

“Let us return, therefore, to what was once humorously self-evident”

men.”⁹ Let us return, therefore, to what was once humorously self-evident, to what everyone, educated and uneducated, could plainly see and easily understand: men and women are different. To be sure, men and women are not different beings, as if one were more human than the other. Yet men and women are different expressions of humanity, complementary modes of human existence who exhibit significant differences in various areas.

Most obviously, men and women are different biologically. Human life could not continue to exist without differences in reproductive anatomy, and those who deny the binary nature of human sexuality are tugging at a thread with the potential to unravel the God-given foundation of

the family and society, which is organized around the family.¹⁰ Beyond mere anatomy, studies of the human body also show that the average man has about 90% more upper-body strength and about 65% greater lower-body strength than the average woman.¹¹ In terms of distribution, this places the average man in the 99.9th percentile of women (i.e., the average man is stronger than all but one-in-a-thousand women).¹²

Male and female brains are different, too. From the thickness of the cortex to ratios of gray and white matter, from the interconnectedness of the brain’s hemispheres to the size of cerebral parts that mediate emotions, cognition, aggression, and nurturing behavior, male and female brains differ significantly.¹³ And given the role that the brain plays in human behavior, these differences are more than biological (highlighting another dimension of human sexual asymmetry). Women tend to be more generous and altruistic than men, exhibiting comparatively greater

prosocial behavior.¹⁴ Similarly, research has shown that mothers and fathers differ in how they raise their young: mothers tend to emphasize safety, while fathers tend to encourage beneficial risks.¹⁵

Importantly, these differences are not byproducts of environmental conditioning. As scientist Doreen Kimura explains, the differences in male and female brains present “so early in life that from the start the environment is acting on differently wired brains in boys and girls.”¹⁶ That is why similar expressions of sexual differentiation are found across vast stretches of time and geographical distance, further challenging any notion that male-female differences are the result of social customs or norms.¹⁷

To sum up this little survey of sexual asymmetry, we can say that sexual asymmetry is “hardwired” into every man and woman, forming a significant facet of their identities.¹⁸ Indeed, every cell in

¹⁰ See Craig Carter, “The New Gender Gnostics,” *Eikon* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 28–38.

¹¹ W. D. Lassek and S. J. C. Gaulin, “Costs and Benefits of Fat-Free Muscle Mass in Men: Relationship to Mating Success, Dietary Requirements, and Native Immunity,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 30, no. 5 (2009): 322.

¹² Lassek and Gaulin, “Costs and Benefits,” 322.

¹³ For these and other differences between men and female brains, see J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2012), 38–39. The point here is not that any one of these sexual traits is better than the other. (If anything, I would argue that God’s design for the family suggests both are essential.) Rather, the point is that these differences are observable and measurable because they are real facets of God’s design.

¹⁴ See Alexander Soutchek et al. “The Dopaminergic Reward System Underpins Gender Differences in Social Preferences,” *Nature Human Behaviour* 1 (October 2017): 819–27.

¹⁵ See Brad Wilcox, “The Distinct, Positive Impact of a Good Dad: How Fathers Contribute to Their Kids’ Lives,” *The Atlantic*, June 14, 2013. See also Anthony Esolen, “The Boy Genius: Finding Him Again Through the Patriarchal Group,” *Touchstone Magazine*, March/April 2019, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=32-02-029-f>.

¹⁶ See Doreen Kimura, “Sex Differences in the Brain,” *Scientific American*, 267, no. 3 (1992): 119–25. Intriguingly, as early as 350 BC Aristotle had postulated that differences in men and women began in the earliest stages of embryonic development. See *Aristotle’s History of Animals: In Ten Books*, trans. Richard Crosswell (London: George Bell & Sons, 1887), especially Book VII.

¹⁷ For example, Steve Stewart-Williams, drawing on the anthropological research of Laura Betzig, writes, “In all the ancient civilizations of the world — including those of the Aztecs, the Babylonians, the Chinese, the Egyptians, the Incas, the peoples of the Indian subcontinent, and the Zulus — powerful men accumulated large harems of nubile young women. Equivalently powerful women, such as Cleopatra, did not accumulate large harems of nubile young men. They could have, but they didn’t.” Steve Stewart-Williams, *The Ape That Understood the Universe: How the Mind and Culture Evolve*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2019), 82. See also Laura Betzig, *Despotism and Differential Reproduction: A Darwinian View of History* (Piscataway, NJ: Aldine, 1986).

¹⁸ It hardly needs to be said that not every man and woman exhibits every characteristically male or female trait or tendency at all times or to the same degree. One must account for individual decisions (cf. Pss. 73:4; 109:24; 1 Cor. 9:27), as well as the corruptions of a fallen world, including biological and psychological distortions (Lev. 21:18; 22:25; Rom. 8:2). Even so, sexually differentiated tendencies and traits are scripturally affirmed (1 John 2:14b; 1 Pet. 3:7) and statistically significant. Indeed, the scientific literature supporting sexual differentiation is vast and widely accessible. See, for example, R. Croson and U. Gneezy, “Gender Differences in Preferences,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 47 (2009): 448–74; and D. G. Rand et al., “Social Heuristics and Social Roles: Intuition Favors Altruism for Women but Not for Men,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 145 (2016): 389–96.

⁶ Augustine, Sermon 46, “On the Shepherds,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, vol. 1: Sermons on the Old Testament, 20–50, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1990), 287.

⁷ Chesterton writes, “We shall soon be in a world in which a man may be howled down for saying that two and two make four, in which furious party cries will be raised against anybody who says that cows have horns, in which people will persecute the heresy of calling a triangle a three-sided figure, and hang a man for maddening a mob with the news that grass is green.” See G. K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News*, August 14, 1926, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 34 (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991), 34:144–45.

⁸ Chesterton, *Collected Works*, 34:144. Emphasis mine. In the original context, Chesterton means men in the sense of human beings, not men in the sense of males. It would seem Chesterton’s powers of prescience could not quite envision a world so bad off as ours, where the madness of the crowds has progressed to such a state that many can no longer say what a man or woman is. Furthermore, there is an important sense in which it is the dogmatic insistence that all persons are equal (in the sense of being interchangeable) that has directly contributed to the loss of our ability to distinguish men and women from one another. For if the sexes can be distinguished, then a crack is left open for the notion that either may excel in ways that highlight antecedent design which, in turn, entails suitability for different roles.

⁹ George Orwell, review of Russell’s *Power: A New Social Analysis*, *Adelphi*, January 1939, para. 1, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.lehman.edu/faculty/rcarey/BRSQ/06mayorwell.htm>.

the human body is sexually typed.¹⁹ It did not have to be this way, of course. No one forced God's hand to make squamous epithelial cells have male or female markers. It would seem, then, the Lord wanted every part — even the smallest parts — of our bodies to reflect one of the first facts the Scriptures give about our human nature: “Male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27).

In other words, sexual asymmetry is real. It is a fact of nature. Yet nature alone cannot explain what these differences mean; it can only show us that these differences exist to such an extent that they require an explanation. For that we must turn to the Scriptures. There we see from the beginning that the biblical authors are not only aware of male-female differences but take pains to emphasize their asymmetry. For example, consider the differences on display in the way Moses describes the creation of the first man and woman:

1. The man was “formed” (יָצַר) (Gen. 2:7), whereas the woman was “made” or “built” (בָּנָה, Gen. 2:22).

2. The man's substance is taken from the ground (Gen. 2:7; 3:19), whereas the woman is taken from the man (Gen. 2:22).
3. The man is created outside the Garden (Gen. 2:7), whereas the woman is created within the Garden (Gen. 2:22–23).
4. The man explicitly receives the priestly commission to “work” and “keep” the Garden (Gen. 2:15; 3:19), whereas the woman is not alive when this commission is given.
5. The man directly receives the Lord's prohibition not to eat from the tree of life (Gen. 2:16–17), whereas the woman was not alive when that word was spoken
6. The woman is introduced as the man's “helper” (עֵזֶר) (Gen. 2:18), whereas the man is not called her “helper” in return.²⁰



¹⁹ Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Understanding the Biology of Sex and Gender Differences, *Exploring the Biological Contributions to Human Health: Does Sex Matter?* eds. Theresa M. Wizeman and Mary-Lou Pardue (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001), 4.

7. The man names the woman, twice (Gen. 2:23; 3:20), just as he had named the animals before her (Gen. 2:19), whereas the woman does not name the man.
8. The man's name (אָדָם) corresponds to the ground (אֲדָמָה), recalling his origin (Gen. 2:7) and sphere of vocation (Gen. 2:15; 3:19, 23), whereas the woman's first name (חַוְוָה) forms a wordplay with her origin from man (אִישׁ, Gen. 2:23), even as her second name highlights her vocational sphere as “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).
9. In marriage the man is said to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife (Gen. 2:24), whereas the woman is not symmetrically said to do the same.
10. When the woman ate from the tree of knowledge, nothing immediately happened (Gen. 3:6), but when the man ate from the tree, “the eyes of both were opened” (Gen. 3:7). This shows that their relationship is not perfectly symmetrical (cf. Lev. 4:3).
11. Though Eve ate first, the Lord addresses Adam first (Gen. 3:9) and holds him responsible for the fall (Gen. 3:17; cf. Rom. 5:12).²¹ This shows that the man and woman had asymmetrical roles and/or responsibilities.²²

12. Only the man is exiled from the Garden,²³ whereas the woman is not explicitly mentioned in that judgment. Thus, even though the woman is included in God's judgment on the man (1 Cor. 15:22), it is significant that the Lord is able to deal with both by exiling the man alone.

I suspect some might argue that these details of mankind's sexual asymmetry are not particularly significant, but Moses has not left that option open to us. For one thing, his words in Genesis 2:24 explicitly cast Adam and Eve not just as the first man and woman, but as the model man and woman for all who follow after them. Each of us is a son of Adam or daughter of Eve. Moreover, the paradigmatic nature of the man and woman in Genesis 1–3 fits the character of these chapters, which also establish far-reaching types and patterns of various kinds: the Sabbath (Gen. 2:1–4; Exod. 20:8–11), the institution of marriage (Gen. 2:24; Exod. 20:14; Lev. 20:11–20; cf. Matt. 19:3–5), the temple-like nature of Eden (Gen. 3:8; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:14; cf. Gen. 2:15; Num. 3:7–8), the sovereignty of the Lord (Gen. 2:16–17; Exod. 20:3–5, 7, 10, 13–17), the deadly consequences of siding with Satan in rebellion (Gen. 3:23–24; Deut. 28:15–24), and the Lord's gracious intervention to deal with his people's sin (Gen. 3:21; Gen. 4:4; 22:8; Exod. 12; Lev. 16).

²⁰ Debates about the meaning of עֵזֶר obscured the fact that, regardless of its precise meaning in this context, the use of the term is asymmetrical. As Paul later says, “Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Cor. 11:9).

²¹ The Hebrew words used in the Lord's judgment employ second masculine singular endings, indicating without a doubt that the Lord held Adam — not Eve — ultimately responsible.

²² There is a fascinating parallel to this asymmetrical relationship in Leviticus 4, where the Lord makes a distinction between the sins of the people and the sins of the anointed priest, whose sin brings guilt on the people (4:3) in a manner that is dissimilar to the sins of the people relative to the priest.

²³ The relevant texts read: “The Lord God sent *him* out from the garden” (Gen. 3:23) and “He drove out the *man*” (Gen. 3:24).

Therefore, in view of the many enduring biblical-theological types and patterns established in Genesis 1–3, there can be little doubt that the details of the creation of humanity are also meant to serve as a paradigm for understanding God’s design for men and women.²⁴ Indeed, the burden of proof rests on anyone who wishes to maintain that the male and female elements of the creation narrative are somehow excluded from having the same paradigmatic character of the narrative of which they form an integral part.

THE MEANING OF SEXUAL ASYMMETRY

It is one thing to show that men and women are different and that the biblical authors emphasize these differences. It is quite another thing to explain why these differences exist. Happily, the Lord has not left us to figure this out for ourselves. Moses’ account of the creation of man and woman focuses not on their equality but on their beneficial asymmetry. That is to say, the creation account highlights the asymmetry of the sexes as a central facet of the goodness of God’s design (Gen. 1:31). We see this most clearly in the situation that gives rise to woman’s existence, which is marked by a direct word from the Lord: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18).

Commenting on Genesis 2:18, Alastair

Roberts notes, “What makes the woman unique is her capacity for complementing labour [sic] in profound union with the man. The animals are also helpers, but only the woman is a suitable counterpart for the adam [i.e., man] in his vocation and spouse with whom he can become one flesh. The differences between men and women are precisely features that make them fitting for each other.”²⁵ In other words, God made men and women both different from and different for each other.²⁶ This is why, even in texts where the equality of the sexes is undeniably taught (e.g., Gen. 1:26–28; 1 Pet. 3:7b), the kind of equality in view is not one that eviscerates distinctions between the sexes but one that finds its fullest significance in their beneficial asymmetry (cf. Gen. 2:18; 1 Pet. 3:7a).²⁷

Subsequent biblical authors recognize Moses’ paradigm for the sexes and repeat, develop, and apply it across the biblical canon. For example, the pattern of male headship and male initiative in Genesis 2:24 — where a family is formed by the man’s leaving and cleaving — is reinforced throughout the Scriptures, which routinely describe marriage in terms of men “taking” a wife but never in terms of a woman “taking” a husband.²⁸ Correspondingly, just as wives are “taken” by husbands, so also daughters — but never sons — are “given” by fathers in

marriage (hence the traditional wedding custom of a father “giving away” the bride).²⁹

Sexual intercourse is also described in asymmetrical ways. For example, while both men and women may “know” each other sexually,³⁰ in every instance of a named subject, it is always the husband knowing his wife (Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; 1 Sam. 1:19; Matt. 1:25) and never the other way around. Similarly, the Hebrew word translated “went in to” (בָּוֹא) is not always sexual (cf. Gen. 23:2; Exod. 10:3; Num. 8:22), but when used as an idiom for sex, it is always the man who “goes in to” the woman (cf. Gen. 16:4; 29:23, 30; 30:4; 38:2, 9, 18; Judg. 16:1; Ruth 4:13; 2 Sam. 12:24; 2 Sam. 16:22; 1 Chr. 2:21, 24; 7:23; Ezek. 23:44). In this regard, the biblical language appears to be an intentional reflection of the anatomical realities involved in sexual intercourse.³¹

There are also asymmetries in scriptural commands directed toward men and women. For example, there is an enforced asymmetry in male and female adornment

(Deut. 22:5; 1 Cor. 11:2–16), including metaphorical adornment.³² The biblical authors also show sophistication in their directives, explicitly warning men against lust (Matt. 5:28; cf. Exod. 20:17) and wrathful aggression (1 Tim. 2:8; cf. 1 Pet. 3:7), while explicitly warning women against nagging (Prov. 19:13; 21:9; 27:15) and showy attention-seeking displays (1 Tim. 2:9–10; cf. 1 Pet. 3:3–4). Asymmetrical commands like these abound in the Scriptures, and they are further illuminated by biblical narratives as well.³³

In view of all this, we see one reason the biblical authors frequently issue asymmetrical commands is that they are applying the beneficial asymmetry of the sexes in God’s design. They did not need knowledge of testosterone or the Y-chromosome to observe that men and women exhibit differing traits and tendencies, including tendencies to sin differently. Nor were they forced to guess why sexual differentiation exists, for Moses had already established its beneficial purposes in Genesis 1–3. In other words, the biblical authors issue asymmetrical

²⁴ That is, for male and female in general, as opposed to only the man (Adam) and the woman (Eve) in the creation narrative itself.
²⁵ Alastair Roberts, “The Music of Male and Female,” *Primer* 3 (October 2016): 13, emphasis mine.
²⁶ The language of “different from and different for” is my adaptation of Alastair Roberts, who prefers to speak only of “difference for” instead of “difference from.” I have elected to retain both in order to emphasize the fact of our difference before explaining the benefits of those differences. See Alastair Roberts, “The Music of Male and Female,” 13.
²⁷ It may sound odd to speak of a “kind” of equality, but such precision has become a necessity in the late modern world, where, increasingly, it is thought that equality denotes *sameness* or *interchangeability*. C. S. Lewis famously identified this problem in his response to Lady Nunburnholme regarding the ordination of women to the Anglican priesthood. See Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 256–62.
²⁸ For some of the many examples of men taking wives (but not wives taking husbands), see Gen. 19:14; 24:3; 24:37–40; 24:51; 28:1–2, 9; 31:48–50; Exod. 20:1, 22; Lev. 20:13–14; Deut. 22:30; Judg. 14:3; 15:6; 1 Sam. 25:50; 2 Sam. 12:9; 12:10; 1 Kgs. 4:15; 2 Kgs. 4:1; Jer. 16:2; Hos. 1:2; Ezra 2:61; Neh. 6:18; Matt. 1:20; Mark 12:19; Luke 20:28.

²⁹ See Gen. 34:8–9, 16, 21; Josh. 15:16; Judg. 21:1, 7, 18; 1 Sam. 17:25; 18:17, 19, 27, 44; 2 Kgs. 14:9; Jer. 29:6; Ezra 9:12. Also note that the authority to “give” a daughter in marriage is implicit in the laws regulating vows in Number 30:1–16, where a husband is held accountable for the vow(s) of his wife, while a father is held accountable for the vow(s) of his (unmarried) daughter. The Scriptures also speak of a “dowry” (מְהוּבָה) for daughters given in marriage (Gen. 34:12; Exod. 22:16–17; 1 Sam. 18:25), yet there is no dowry for sons.
³⁰ For examples of men “knowing” women in a sexual sense of the term, see Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16; 38:26; Judg. 19:25; 1 Kgs. 1:4; 1 Sam. 1:19; Matt. 1:25. For instances of women “knowing” men in a sexual sense of the term, see Gen. 19:8; Num. 31:17–18, 35; Judg. 11:39; 21:11–12.
³¹ The same goes for the language of “conception” (Heb. הָרָה / Gk. ἐν γαστρί ἔχεν). Though people today may loosely speak of couples conceiving (or struggling to conceive) a child, the biblical authors follow Moses’ lead in using the term exclusively in reference to mothers conceiving (Gen. 4:1, 17; 16:4–5; 21:2; 25:21; 29:32–34; 30:5, 7, 17, 19, 23; 38:3–4, 18; Exod. 2:2; 1 Sam. 1:20; 2:21; 11:5; 2 Kgs. 4:17; 1 Chr. 4:17; 7:23; Job 3:3; Songs 3:4; Isa. 8:3; Hos. 1:3, 6, 8; 2:5; Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:31; 21:23; 1 Thess. 5:3; Rev. 12:2). The only time a man is said to “conceive” anything is the metaphorical use of the term, such as the conception of some wicked scheme (e.g., Ps. 7:14).
³² For example, when Paul speaks to the appropriate conduct of men and women in the household of God, he mentions the kind of clothing or apparel “that women should adorn themselves with” (1 Tim. 2:9). Yet it is notable that Paul gives no apparel-related command to men in that context (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8). Instead, he gives commands regarding male behavior that he does not give to women. Similarly, when speaking of the “good works” (1 Tim. 2:9) that display “good faith” and “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:10), Paul gives asymmetrical instructions to each sex. Even when there is parity in the case of reciprocal commands (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:2–5, 8–9), we find that there is still sexual asymmetry centrally featured in the broader context (1 Cor. 7:1, 10–11; 25–28, 39–40).
³³ A somewhat amusing case is found in Judges 14 and 16. There we see men (Samson and the men of Timnah, then Samson and the men of Gaza) and women (Samson’s first wife and Delilah) respectively display the characteristically masculine behaviors of lust (Judg. 14:1–2; 16:1), violence (Judg. 14:15b; 16:2), and wrath (Judg. 14:19b), as well as characteristically feminine behaviors, like nagging, emotional manipulation (Judg. 14:16–17; 16:15–16), and seduction (Judg. 14:15a; 16:5).



commands from God to reinforce the asymmetrical design of God. In this way God's commands are shown to fit God's creation,³⁴ pointing back to the way things ought to be and pointing forward to the way things will be when Christ renews all things (Matt. 19:28; Titus 3:5; Rev. 21:5).

Yet there is a second significance the biblical authors assign to sexual asymmetry, which goes beyond its import for our life and godliness, namely, marriage as a metaphor for salvation. Following Moses' use of covenantal terms to describe the first marriage in Scripture,³⁵ the prophets repeatedly describe the Lord's covenant with Israel as a marriage (e.g., Isa. 54:5; 62:5; Jer. 31:31–32; Hos. 2:2–3, 13, 16, 19).

Here it is significant that the Lord is always typed as Israel's husband and never as Israel's wife.³⁶ One reason is male headship (1 Cor. 15:22), patterned after

the fatherhood of God, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph. 3:15). In addition to this, there is also the pattern of male initiative Moses establishes in Genesis 2:24, where a son leaves father and mother to cleave to his wife and form a one-flesh union. The whole book of Proverbs appears to be structured on this pattern, opening with a son who is poised to leave his father and mother in the hopes of cleaving to a wife (Prov. 1:8ff). He soon encounters a choice between two women: the forbidden adulteress (Prov. 2:16) and the woman whose worth is "more precious than jewels" (Prov. 3:15), and who is "a tree of life [!] to those who lay hold of her" (Prov. 3:18). By the end of the book, the son has chosen well. He has left his father and mother without forsaking their teaching (Prov. 31:1), and he has found his "excellent wife" (Prov. 31:10a), whose worth is "more precious than jewels" (Prov. 31:10b).

Is this not the same pattern followed by our Lord himself, who left his heavenly Father (John 1:14, 18) and his earthly mother (John 19:25–27) to cleave to his bride? The Apostle Paul thought so.³⁷ He cites Genesis 2:24 in his discussion of marriage in Ephesians 5:22–33, weaving together commands rooted in the asymmetry of the sexes³⁸ with a typology of salvation rooted in the same (Eph. 5:31–32). In other words, the asymmetry of the sexes is central to Paul's argument. For if man and woman are equal in any sense that renders them interchangeable — in their being, their roles, or even their behavior — then the asymmetrical commands are arbitrary and the typological symbolism of Christ's work for the church is destroyed.

THE IMPORT OF SEXUAL ASYMMETRY

I began by noting that sexual asymmetry is a fact of nature and a clear teaching in Scripture. I have also shown that the biblical authors emphasize mankind's sexual asymmetry for both practical and typological purposes. Missing the biblical emphasis on sexual asymmetry therefore negatively affects Christian life and doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16).

In the first place, the failure to align with

the biblical emphasis on the asymmetry of the sexes hinders (if not totally removes) the ability to appreciate the blessing of God's design (Gen. 2:18). Thus, instead of celebrating what makes men and women different for the good of all, individual men and women, as well as any confused cultures they inhabit, tend to exalt one set of sexual traits and tendencies to the neglect or disparagement of the other. The sexes begin to conceive of their differences not in terms of mutual benefit but in terms of competition — a battle of the sexes.

That battle is what lies behind statements like, "A woman can do anything a man can do," or, "Anything a man can do, a woman can do better." This sentiment now dominates popular works of fiction, which increasingly feel like little more than vehicles for promoting egalitarian wish-dreams on the silver screen.³⁹ The downstream consequences of this way of thinking are far more insidious than silly stories. The fantasy of sexual interchangeability compels societies to permit (or even require) women to serve in the frontlines of war, not only in contradiction to the pattern found in the Scriptures,⁴⁰ but also without due concern for the brutalities invariably committed against captured female soldiers.

³⁴ For more on the consonance between God's creation and God's commands, see Joe Rigney, "Indicatives, Imperatives, and Applications: Reflections on Natural, Biblical, and Cultural Complementarianism," *Eikon* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 32ff.

³⁵ To describe the first marriage in Genesis 2:24, Moses employs two Hebrew words (*'āzab* and *dābaq*) that elsewhere refer to covenant making (Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20) and covenant fidelity (Gen. 28:13–15; Deut. 29:25; Neh. 9:32). Their use together in Genesis 2:24 clues us in to the fact that Adam and Eve's marriage was, in fact, a covenant — as later biblical authors explicitly acknowledge (Mal. 2:14–15).

³⁶ This is intriguing, given that the Lord sometimes refers to himself with maternal imagery (Num. 11:12; Isa. 49:15; Ps. 22:8). Furthermore, Israel is frequently called God's "son" (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; Jer. 3:19; Hos. 11:1). These realities introduce the hypothetical potential for the Lord to call himself the "bride" of Israel (his son), yet no biblical author who employs marriage as a type ever does so. Instead, every biblical author who employs the marriage covenant as a type always describes the Lord as the "husband" with Israel in the role of his "wife." For a discussion of why the occasional matronly metaphors are properly distinguished from the non-metaphorical (yet still analogical) language of God as "Father" (and other masculine terms), see Kyle D. Claunch, "On the Improper Use of Proper Speech: A Response to Ronald W. Pierce and Erin M. Heim, 'Biblical Images of God as Mother and Spiritual Formation,'" *Eikon* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2023): 69–77.

³⁷ Paul was not wrong, of course. Moreover, he is not the only biblical author to draw such a connection. In one particularly striking parallel, the speaker in Isaiah 61 says the Lord "clothed me with the garments of salvation . . . as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isa. 61:10). Not only does this verse highlight differing dress for the bridegroom and the bride, but the verb used for "decking himself like a priest" (כִּהֵן) is the same used with reference to the ministry of priests and the priestly office (Exod. 28:1–4, 41; 29:1, 44; 35:19; 40:13–15; Lev. 7:35; 16:32; Num. 3:3, 4; Deut. 10:6; 1 Chr. 6:10; 24:2; Ezek. 44:14; Hos. 4:6). This connects the man (i.e., the bridegroom) with the priestly office, while not doing the same for the woman. Instead, she is set forth as the bride, "adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2; cf. Jer. 2:32). In this way, Isaiah 61:10 not only looks back to the priestly bridegroom of Genesis 2, but also looks forward (with typological anticipation) to the ultimate Bridegroom (Matt. 9:15) who would deck himself as a Priest for the sake of his bride (Heb. 7:28). He is none other than the One who read from this chapter (Isaiah 61) at the start of his ministry and said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

³⁸ Specifically, husbands are called to "love" their wives (Eph. 5:25, 28), while wives are called to "submit to" (Eph. 5:23) and "respect" (5:33) their husbands. This is why egalitarian attempts to read this passage through the lens of Ephesians 5:21, with its corporate call to mutual submission, fall utterly flat.

³⁹ For a critique of the folly inherent to this approach, see Alastair Roberts, "Why We Should Jettison the 'Strong Female Character,'" *Mere Orthodoxy* (blog), April 18, 2016, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/why-we-should-jettison-the-strong-female-character>.

⁴⁰ For some of the biblical teaching on men in the military, see Num. 1:2–3; Deut. 3:18–30; Josh. 1:15–15; 2 Sam. 24:9; 2 Chr. 25:5; 1 Pet. 3:7; cf. Nah. 3:13.

Another consequence of the failure to appreciate the goodness of God's design is seen when women are incentivized to act more like men, which robs the world of their feminine strengths and quite often multiplies masculine weaknesses. This is what Catholic neurologist and sociologist Karl Stern calls "the flight from woman."⁴¹ Commenting on that societal "flight" from feminine strengths, Alice von Hildebrand and Peter Kreeft write,

It is the modern feminists who are the real male chauvinists, lusting for reproductive freedom (sexual irresponsibility) like playboys and demanding empowerment, that is, envying and imitating not only males, but male fools, judging inner worth by outer performance, sacrificing being for doing, finding their identity in their worldly careers, not in their inner essence, in their physical and spiritual wombs and motherhoods. . . . It is a strange and sad phenomenon. Genuinely hurt women often become radical feminists, hating their own femininity and hating ordinary women who love and enjoy their ordinary femininity. How often have you heard radical feminists praise midwestern housewives?⁴²

Similarly, Colin Smothers points out that once a society has severed the connection between form (the asymmetrical traits and tendencies of God's design) and function (the corresponding "rules and roles" in God's Word), nothing remains to stop from men and women from being

interchangeable in all areas. As Smothers observes, "If a woman can do anything a man can do in the home, why the need for a man in the home at all? Would not two women suffice? Would not two men?"⁴³ In other words, if men and women are not (formally) different, they are (functionally) interchangeable in all respects; and if they are interchangeable, then there is no difference between a son and a daughter, a brother and a sister, a husband and a wife, a father and a mother. This absurdity has the potential to destroy societies.

It also has the potential to destroy churches. The essence of the egalitarian argument is that ministerial positions (e.g., the office of elder/pastor/overseer) are a matter of spiritual gifting, with no sexual restrictions of any kind. Such an approach to the pastorate overlooks the nature of the office, which is connected to the reason why God calls only (qualified) men to the pastorate. As Alastair Roberts notes, "The great priestly leaders of the people of God were marked out by their preparedness to employ sacred violence without pity in the service of God's holiness."⁴⁴ For example, the Levites were set apart for priestly service immediately after slaying 3,000 of their own brothers following the golden calf incident (Exod. 32:27–29). Similarly, Phineas the priest ended the unholy union of a couple with the tip of his spear (Num. 25:7–8). Samuel, the priestly prophet (1 Sam. 2:12–18), "hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord" (1 Sam. 15:33) after Saul spared his life in disobedience to God's

command (1 Sam. 15:9).

Even in the gospel age of the New Testament we find that such patterns continued. As Alastair Roberts notes:

Paul, Peter, James, and John all seem to have been men characterized by a sort of avenging zeal, zeal which was broken and harnessed for God's service. Peter, the one who cut off the High Priest's servant's ear, later became the one proclaiming the divine death sentence on Ananias and Sapphira. Paul was the former persecutor of the Church, who called for the ecclesiastical death sentence of excommunication to be applied without pity or pause in the case of continued sexual immorality (note the allusion to the OT death penalty in 1 Corinthians 5:13).⁴⁵

It would seem that these tendencies and traits are purposeful features of God's design, not only of men but also of the ecclesial offices restricted to men. In other words, there is congruence between male and female constitutions and their respective callings in God's economy. The more nurturing sex is the one who uniquely is capable of conceiving, bearing, and sustaining children. Similarly, the more aggressive sex (1 Tim. 2:18) has been gifted with the strengths necessary to fulfill the priestly character of the pastoral office with the firmness and resoluteness it

requires (Titus 1:9; Acts 4:13).⁴⁶

To ignore the congruence between the asymmetry of the sexes and the particular callings the Lord has given to each is therefore not simply a matter of violating God's will, as if it were an arbitrary imposition, but is a matter of violating God's design. The former would be bad enough; the latter is disastrous, for it goes against both the revealed Word of God and the divine wisdom of God's reasons behind the "rules." In this way, the household of God comes to be filled with leaders who lack the sexually asymmetrical traits and tendencies given by the Lord for the good of his people.

This dynamic explains why denominations that have embraced egalitarianism almost invariably slide into other anthropological errors, like the affirmation of homosexuality.⁴⁷ Such a course is more than a consequence of (poor) hermeneutics. It is also a consequence of misplaced feminine strengths. As Calvin Robinson explains:

Generally speaking, men tend to be more theologically rigid, whereas women tend to be more theologically flexible. That is because men do not have the emotional intelligence of women. We are more black and white, meaning we tend to be logic-based when it comes to problem solving. Women tend to be more inclusive. They are more empathetic and tend to

⁴¹ Karl Stern, *Flight from Woman* (1965; repr., New York: Paragon House, 1985).

⁴² Alice von Hildebrand and Peter, *Women and the Priesthood*, cited in "Sexual Symbolism," *Peter Kreeft* (blog), accessed April 8, 2024, <https://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/sexual-symbolism.htm>, emphasis added.

⁴³ Colin Smothers, "The Fallacy of Interchangeability," *Eikon* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 12.

⁴⁴ Alastair Roberts, "Some Lengthy Thoughts on Women in Leadership," *Alastair's Adversaria* (blog), December 8, 2011, <https://alastairadversaria.com/2011/12/08/some-lengthy-thoughts-on-women-leadership/>.

⁴⁵ Roberts, "Some Lengthy Thoughts on Women in Leadership."

⁴⁶ To be sure, there are times when pastors must be also "gentle" among their people, as Paul was when he compared himself to a nursing mother taking care of her children (1 Thess. 2:17). Yet it is telling that Paul did *not* say, "We were gentle among you, like a good father taking care of his own children." In other words, some connection between gentleness and motherhood made the maternal metaphor more fitting.

⁴⁷ As Colin Smothers notes, barely a decade after its founding the first "evangelical feminist" organization, the Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC), embraced homosexuality using the same hermeneutic that justified their egalitarianism. This led to the formation of Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) in 1987. Colin Smothers, "Is the Slippery Slope Actually Slippery? Egalitarianism and the Open-and-Affirming Position," *9Marks Journal*, November 23, 2019, <https://www.9marks.org/article/is-the-slippery-slope-actually-slippery-egalitarianism-and-the-open-and-affirming-position/>.

be more emotion-based when solving problems. You can see how that might be a problem when a group is claiming to be an oppressed minority, and the thing preventing them from attending Church is the cruel doctrines and the regressive scriptures we follow. Which empath wouldn't want to compromise in order to make a so-called oppressed minority feel included?⁴⁸

In other words, the feminine proclivity for pity and inclusiveness, which is good and necessary within the home, is ripe for demonic abuse within the leadership of the church, where doctrine is not a matter of compassion but of truth.

Finally, as I noted above, Paul sees in our sexual asymmetry something vitally connected to the symbolism of the gospel. To be sure, sexual asymmetry is not the gospel. Yet given the prominence of marriage as a metaphor for our salvation (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31–32; Rev. 21:2; 22:17), it is appropriate to say that any view of the sexes that diminishes or denies the asymmetry of God's design confuses or obscures something of the gospel's meaning.

David Murray helps us see the connection when he asks, "Why did our Redeemer go to such lengths to provide us with such a varied and diverse world? Partly the reason was that He had an eye to using these things, animals, materials, and so on to teach sinners the way of salvation. He was preparing visual aids for future use."⁴⁹ Murray goes on to explain

that this means "[God] created sheep so He could teach sinners about how He is the Good Shepherd. He created birds to help His redeemed people live less anxious lives. . . . He created lilies and roses so He could compare Himself with them. He created water to explain how He refreshes and revives the thirsty."⁵⁰ And with a little help from William and Barbara Mouser, I would also add that "When God created man and woman, what God had in mind was Christ and His Church."⁵¹

CONCLUSION: MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM

Debates about the nature of the sexes, their relation to each other, and the ways in which members of either sex should inhabit the world are all part of the frontlines of ministry in virtually every local church in the West. This calls for careful thinking about the total witness of the Scriptures to the nature of the sexes in God's design. But also, given the significance of the sexes and the destructive consequences of contravening God's design, our cultural moment calls for the kind of courage that "cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20), including what we have seen and heard about the asymmetry of the sexes. For "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27), and "Behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). ✕

Doug Ponder is the Dean of Faculty and Professor of Biblical Studies at Grimké Seminary. He is also a teaching elder at Remnant Church in Richmond, VA. He has contributed to several works as an author, editor, and researcher.

⁴⁸ See Calvin Robinson, "Cancelled from Mere Anglicanism," *Fr Calvin Robinson* (blog), January 20, 2024, <https://www.calvinrobinson.com/p/cancelled-from-mere-anglicanism>.

⁴⁹ David Murray, *Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 47.

⁵⁰ Murray, *Jesus on Every Page*, 47.

⁵¹ William E. Mouser and Barbara K. Mouser, *The Story of Sex in Scripture* (Waxahachie, TX: International Council for Gender Studies, 2006), 71.

NEIL SHENVI AND PAT SAWYER

Feminism as a Critical Social Theory: Implications for Christians



I. INTRODUCTION

With cultural conversations increasingly centered on the radical proposals of critical race theory and queer theory, discussions of gender and feminism seem almost obsolete. However, a deeper analysis reveals that contemporary feminism is a critical social theory which shares the same basic framework as its more extreme ideological cousins.

In this article, we provide a very brief historical overview of feminism, an explanation of how it falls under the umbrella of critical theory, a discussion of the overlap between contemporary feminism and evangelical egalitarianism, and a biblical response to both feminism and anti-feminist “red-pill” movements.¹

II. THE HISTORY OF FEMINISM

Many feminists and historians analyze modern feminism in terms of three waves: the first began with the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the second arrived in the 1960s around the time of the Equal Rights Amendment, and the third began in the 1990s.² We recognize that wave distinctions in feminism can be overstated and too neatly defined; nevertheless the prevalence of their usage compels us to employ them and give some brief explanation.

First-wave feminism centered on issues like women’s voting rights, property rights, the abolition of slavery, and the

temperance movement. It culminated in the ratification of the 19th amendment to the US Constitution in 1920, which granted universal female suffrage. Leaders within first-wave feminism included Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in the United States and Emmeline Parkhurst in the United Kingdom.

Second-wave feminism was motivated by concerns around female economic, educational, and social empowerment. French Philosopher Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Betty Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique* were both seminal texts of the second wave. Figures like Gloria Steinem galvanized and popularized the movement. Its legislative centerpiece was the Equal Rights Amendment, which was passed by Congress in 1971 but did not secure sufficient state support to amend the US Constitution.

Third-wave feminism, which began in the 1990s, embraced the critiques of womanist (black feminist) activists like bell hooks³ and Audre Lorde, who argued that second-wave feminism had centered the concerns of middle-class white women. Highly relevant to third-wave feminism was the concept of “intersectionality,” a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.⁴ Intersectionality argues that our identities are complex and that race, class, and gender interact to produce unique forms of oppression.

Conventional wisdom among most conser-

vative evangelicals today is that first-wave feminism was unequivocally good and foundationally Christian, while second- and third-wave feminism were more secular and problematic. The actual history, however, is more complicated (and uncomfortable). For example, in 1895, first-wave pioneer Elizabeth Cady Stanton published *The Woman’s Bible*, which, on its very first page, made statements like “instead of three male personages [within the Godhead], as generally represented, a Heavenly Father, Mother, and Son would seem more rational;” and “The first step in the elevation of woman to her true position [is] the recognition by the rising generation of an ideal Heavenly Mother, to whom their prayers should be addressed, as well as to a Father.”⁵ Other prominent first-wave feminists embraced free love, female superiority, and various heterodox doctrinal positions.

We raise this issue not to poison the well against feminism, but to emphasize that Christians should be careful to distinguish between their support for particular goals within a movement and their support for the ideology or theology of said movement, a crucial point that we will return to later.

III. CRITICAL THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY FEMINISM

The critical tradition began with Karl Marx and expanded through the work of prominent intellectuals like Antonio Gramsci, Max Horkheimer, Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, and Kimberlé Crenshaw.⁶ Critical theory today is a broad

category that encompasses many different critical social theories: critical race theory, critical pedagogy, postcolonial theory, queer theory, etc. At its root, contemporary critical theory can be described in terms of four central ideas: the social binary, hegemonic power, lived experience, and social justice.⁷

The social binary divides society into oppressed groups and oppressor groups along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, physical ability, and other identity markers. Oppressor groups are identified by their hegemonic power, that is, their ability to impose their values and norms on culture in a way that makes them seem “natural” and “objective.” These values then justify the dominance of the ruling class (men, whites, heterosexuals, Christians, the able-bodied, etc.). However, through their lived experience of injustice, oppressed people (people of color, women, LGBTQ people, non-Christians, the disabled, etc.) can recognize these hegemonic norms as arbitrary and oppressive and can work for social justice, the dismantling of systems and structures (e.g. white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, Christian hegemony, ableism, etc.) which perpetuate the social binary.

Scholars recognize that contemporary feminism is a critical social theory because it applies these specific ideas to the subject of sex and gender.

First, feminism has always understood women as a collectively subordinated group in need of liberation. Feminist scholar Deborah Cameron writes that despite

¹The “red pill” movement is constituted by largely online communities committed to the idea that men, not women, are systematically oppressed and marginalized by society.

²For histories of feminism see Rory Cooke Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, (Berkeley: Seal, 2016) or Julia Heimer Dadds, “Feminisms, Embodying the Critical” in Levinson et al., *Beyond Critique* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2011), 171–91.

³Born Gloria Jean Watkins, bell hooks changed her name to honor her maternal great-grandmother and adopted a lowercase spelling.

⁴For treatments of intersectionality, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham: Duke, 2019) or Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

⁵Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible – Part 1* (New York: European Publishing, 1895), 14.

⁶For discussions of critical social theory, see Levinson et al., *Beyond Critique* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2011) or Ben Agger, *Critical Social Theories* (New York: Oxford, 2013) or Craig J. Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995).

⁷For a Christian analysis of contemporary critical theory, see Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, *Critical Dilemma* (Eugene: Harvest House, 2023).

the historical and geographical diversity of feminist movements, they all share two minimal feminist ideas: “1. That women occupy a subordinate position in society” and “2. That the subordination of women . . . can and should be changed through political action.”⁸

Second, feminism in all its iterations has believed that female emancipation doesn’t merely require legal equality, but also necessitates a change in social norms and commonly accepted views of gender. This emphasis grew in importance during feminism’s second wave but, as we saw in the Stanton quote above, was present even in first-wave feminism.

Third, consciousness-raising and the importance of “embodied knowledges” became increasingly central during second-wave feminism. Influenced by New Left thought, feminists turned to Marxist theories of “false consciousness” to explain the resistance they encountered not just from men, but from many women as well. They argued that men who rejected feminism were trying to protect their patriarchal power and privilege, while women who rejected feminism were suffering from internalized misogyny.

Finally, the importance of intersectionality to contemporary feminism cannot be overstated. In fact, according to feminist scholar Kathy Davis, “intersectionality” — the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination — has been heralded as one of the most

important contributions to feminist scholarship.⁹ Intersectionality does not merely suggest but requires that feminists work for the liberation of all marginalized groups, whether people of color, or the poor, or the disabled, or the LGBTQ community. This insistence is part and parcel to feminist theory. As bell hooks asserts, “eradicating the cultural basis of group oppression would mean that race and class oppression would be recognized as feminist issues with as much relevance as sexism.”¹⁰ Such solidarity is especially noticeable in feminist support for the demands of transgender women (i.e., biological men who identify as women) even when they conflict with women’s interests (e.g., sex-segregated prisons or locker rooms or sports).

IV. CRITICAL THEORY AND EGALITARIANISM

The relationship between contemporary feminism and egalitarianism (the belief that there are no God-ordained gender roles in either the church or the family) is complex. While non-evangelical egalitarians are more likely to explicitly claim the label of “feminist,” evangelical egalitarians often resist it.

In recent years, however, evangelical egalitarians have increasingly adopted a feminist ideological framework regardless of their attitude towards the label.

One case in point is Beth Allison Barr’s *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, which includes numerous statements that show



strong affinity with critical ideas.¹¹ For instance, she repeatedly appeals to the idea that sexism is one of many interlocking systems of oppression. She writes “patriarchy walks with structural racism and systemic oppression” (33), that “patriarchy is part of an interwoven system of oppression that includes racism” (34), that “[p]atriarchy and racism are ‘interlocking systems of oppression’” (208), and that misogyny “especially hurts those already marginalized by economics, education, race, and even religion” (212). Note that “patriarchy” here means “complementarianism” because Barr explicitly equates the two: “Complementarianism is patriarchy” (13).

Barr is also skeptical of hermeneutical practices and doctrines — including in-

errancy — that are used to defend complementarianism. She positively quotes theologian Clarice Martin, who urges her readers to embrace a “liberated hermeneutic” over a “hierarchicalist hermeneutic” (34). Barr writes that “[Inerrancy teachings] buttressed male authority by diminishing female authority — transforming a literal reading of Paul’s verses about women into immutable truth” (189), that “Inerrancy introduced the ultimate justification for patriarchy — abandoning a plain and literal interpretation of Pauline texts about women would hurl Christians off the cliff of biblical orthodoxy” (190), and that “[i]nerrancy wasn’t important by itself in the late twentieth century; it became important because it provided a way to push women out of the pulpit” (191).

⁸ Deborah Cameron, *Feminism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2019), 8.

⁹ Kathy Davis, “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful,” *Feminist Theory*, 2008, vol 9, issue 1, 67.

¹⁰ See bell hooks, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, 239–40.

¹¹ Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021).

Finally, Barr concludes her book by stating plainly that: “Complementarianism is patriarchy, and patriarchy is about power. Neither have ever been about Jesus” (218).

Kristin Kobes Du Mez’s *Jesus and John Wayne* is another popular book that offers an intersectional analysis of gender.¹² For example, she argues that “For conservative white evangelicals, the ‘good news’ of the Christian gospel has become inextricably linked to a staunch commitment to patriarchal authority, gender difference, and Christian nationalism, and all of these are intertwined with white racial identity” (6-7), that evangelicals in the 1970s promoted “family values” that were “intertwined with ideas about sex, power, race, and nation,” and that the “reassertion of white patriarchy was central to the new ‘family values’ politics” (12). In the Vietnam era, “[f]amily value politics . . . involved the enforcement of women’s sexual and social subordination in the domestic realm and the promotion of American militarism on the national stage” (88).

Like Barr, Du Mez believes that “the battle over inerrancy [in the Southern Baptist

Convention] was in part a proxy fight over gender . . . [Conservatives] insisted on a ‘populist hermeneutic,’ a method privileging ‘the simplest, most direct interpretations of scripture.’ For conservatives, this wasn’t just the right method, it was also the masculine one” (108). She continues, “Inerrancy mattered because of its connection to cultural and political issues. It was in their efforts to bolster patriarchal authority that Southern Baptists united with evangelicals across the nation Patriarchy was at the heart of this new sense of themselves” (109).

Inerrancy is only one of many doctrines Du Mez believes was shaped by patriarchal beliefs. She also names “complementarianism, the prohibition of homosexuality, the existence of hell, and substitutionary atonement” as “watershed issues” promoted by those who shared a “common commitment to patriarchal power” (204).

The connection between Du Mez’s analysis of power and critical theory is solidified by her own statements on social media. Commenting on criticism of her

book, Du Mez remarked that she hadn’t “been at all surprised by the pushback” because she had “academic training analyzing power & cultural systems.”¹³ When asked by a reader how “the average person can analyze power and cultural systems so that we aren’t held captive by them?”¹⁴ she replied: “for me it wasn’t one source but years spent reading social & cultural histories, histories of gender, Foucault, Gramsci, Adorno, Habermas.”¹⁵ All four figures listed are prominent critical social theorists.

A final example comes from Julianny Nieves’ chapter “When We Were Not Women” in the 2021 anthology *Discovering Biblical Equality*.¹⁶ In her essay, Nieves outlines a vision of feminism saturated by critical social theory. In her opening paragraph, she states that evangelical discussions of gender “are characterized by being White centered and male dom-

inated, and often reflective of a privileged socioeconomic class” (597). She adds in a footnote, “Whiteness is a sociological construct [that] preaches in word and deed the presumed (god)-given superiority of Euro-American aesthetics, theologies, cultures, and ways of life and thinking, locating everything and everyone in a spectrum that grants degrees of privilege based on their proximity to the baptized idol of the White man I call for a decentering of Whiteness . . . to move away from ideas and practices that prioritize Euro-American cultures and their concerns, while moving toward a truly catholic approach, which is multisectorial, multiethnic, multiracial, multilingual, and inevitably intersectional (i.e., considers the intersections between socioeconomic class, gender, race/ethnicity, etc.)” (598).

In her criticism of John Piper’s discussion of female beauty, Nieves writes, “In a racialized and gendered society such as the United States, some bodies are given power on the basis of sex and race, while others are destitute of it. Those who are given the power are then the ones who establish social arrangements through their words (e.g. law, denominational policies, theological discourses, etc.), locating bodies in specific spheres” (607).

In her critique of George Knight’s discussion of the nature of “respect” and a “gentle and quiet spirit,” she writes, “Who determines the parameters of what is respectful and what is not? Moreover, who gets to define what ‘a gentle and quiet spirit’ is? How is it defined? How is it to be embodied? Who sets the rules of proper feminine demeanor? In this case, it is obvious who is defining these aspects of womanhood: White males in the Reformed Baptist tra-

¹² Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

¹³ Kristin Du Mez (@kkdumez), Twitter, Dec 31, 2021, 12:02pm, <https://twitter.com/kkdumez/>

¹⁴ Ryan Ashton (@ryanlshnton), Twitter, Dec. 31, 2021, 12:39pm, <https://twitter.com/ryanlshnton/status/1476971307388616705.status/1476962014761267215>.

¹⁵ Kristin Du Mez (@kkdumez), Twitter, Dec 31, 2021, 12:53pm, <https://twitter.com/kkdumez/status/1476974873377443844>.

¹⁶ Julianny González Nieves, “When We Were Not Women” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, Ronald W. Pierce and Cynthia Long Westfall, eds., 3rd edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2021).



dition who assume a maximalist version of complementarianism” (610).

Throughout her essay, Nieves issues strident calls for “an intersectional approach.” She writes: “Unless there is an intersectional approach to decenter Whiteness and maleness from the theological discourse on womanhood and femininity, the conversations will continue to perpetuate the logic of true womanhood as Anglo and middle class” (618); and “[t]he lens of gender is not enough to construct a true egalitarian position. Intersectionality is required” (619).

These examples show that many, though not all, evangelical egalitarians are committed to the ideas of a critical-theory-infused feminism. Of course, some egalitarians still defend their views using grammatical-historical exegesis, but a growing sympathy for other approaches to theology seems undeniable. In the next section, we explain why such a commitment is a problem and how evangelical complementarians should respond.

V. RESPONDING BIBLICALLY

The critical social theory that undergirds contemporary feminism must be rejected by Christians for several reasons.

First, while women in many countries legitimately constitute an oppressed group that is consistently subjected to cruel and unjust treatment, this is not the case in most of the Western world. Affirming the proposition that “women in America are oppressed” requires us to redefine “oppression” not in terms of concrete unjust

treatment, but in terms of more shadowy and contested social norms. The most relevant examples are male eldership within the church and male headship within marriage. Historically, feminists have seen such rules as a few of the many ways women are oppressed by “the Patriarchy.” To reach this conclusion prior to any analysis of what the Bible says on this subject is to shut the door to biblical correction.

Second, critical theory’s cynicism towards truth claims is radically corrosive. Assertions that complementarian Christians are merely trying to preserve their male power and privilege (if they are men) or that they suffer from internalized misogyny (if they are women) are a non-starter for anyone engaged in serious theological discussion. If we are permitted to dismiss doctrine as a mere power play or as the product of nebulous socio-political forces, then every doctrine, no matter how fundamental, will be open to deconstruction.¹⁷

Likewise, interpretations should be categorized ultimately as “true” or “false,” not as “patriarchal” or “feminist” or “white” or “black” or “Western” or “indigenous.” While feminist standpoint epistemology would take an interpreter’s lived experience or social location as the guarantor of their inherent authority, evangelicals should instead evaluate interpretations rather than interpreters. Does a particular interpretation accurately capture Scripture’s intended meaning? If so, then it is true regardless of the interpreter’s identity. If not, then it is false, regardless of the interpreter’s identity.

Lastly, anyone who adopts an intersectional framework will become rapidly unteth-

ered from biblical orthodoxy regarding sexuality and gender identity. Even a commitment to evangelism or the exclusivity of Christ may eventually come to be seen as an imperialistic construct that oppresses adherents of indigenous religions. The slow (or rapid) progression from complementarian to egalitarian to feminist to LGBTQ-affirming is not a slippery slope; rather, it is the logical outworking of feminism’s philosophical commitments.¹⁸

For these reasons, Christians must wholeheartedly reject contemporary critical

“gendercide.” Sex abuse, domestic violence, and human trafficking are also horrific injustices that disproportionately impact women. Complementarians should absolutely refuse to think of these evils as “feminist issues.” As we mentioned at the start of this article, it is crucial for Christians to be able to separate their support for particular goals within a movement and their support for the ideology or theology of that movement.

Second, the proliferation of feminist theory in our culture means that comple-

“...it is crucial for Christians to be able to separate their support for particular goals within a movement and their support for the ideology or theology of that movement.”

theory and any feminist theorizing that is undergirded by it. Four other responses are worth mentioning.

First, we should recognize legitimate concerns of both secular feminists and egalitarians wherever they occur. There are indeed grievous systemic injustices done to women, especially in the developing world. Sex-selection abortion, which has killed upwards of 100 million baby girls over the last few decades, is the most obvious example of a large-scale systemic injustice that could be legitimately termed

mentarians should guard against latent feminism seeping into professedly complementarian marriages and organizations. For example, a husband must not abdicate his responsibilities as father, particularly in the area of engaging and disciplining his children, and should instead embrace his God-given role as head of his wife (Eph. 5:23) and discipler of his children (Eph. 6:4). Neither should a husband adopt a warped sense of “servant leadership” that causes him to wholly defer to his wife, making her the *de facto* leader in all major family decisions. Wives should

¹⁷ See Alisa Childers and Tim Barnett, *The Deconstruction of Christianity* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2024).

¹⁸ See Colin J. Smothers, “Is the Slippery Slope Actually Slippery? Egalitarianism and the Open-and-Affirming Position,” *9Marks Journal* (December 2019).

not be passive-aggressive, gossip about or ridicule their husbands, or weaponize sex, withholding it to get their way. The church should not embrace a flawed view of sin that sees men as more inherently corrupt than women. Christian marriages should not approach the subject of submission solely in terms of “mutual submission” while failing to honor and demonstrate the wife’s unique submission to her husband. Ultimately, we must understand that “complementarian in name only” is not complementarian and is therefore in opposition to God’s design for the family.

Obviously, husbands can equally fall into sin in their marriages, controlling their wives, manipulating them, or even physically abusing them. In the context of a discussion about feminism, however, we want Christians to reject a framework which would treat men’s sins with utter contempt while treating women’s sins with indulgence or even acceptance.

Third, complementarians should likewise guard against reactionary movements to our “right,” in the form of “men’s rights activists,” “pickup artists,” and self-proclaimed misogynists like Andrew Tate. As the assumptions of critical theory and feminism have seeped into our culture, a growing number of disaffected young men have turned to online influencers peddling porn, misogyny, and twisted ideas about sex and gender under the guise of masculinity. Ironically, the manosphere often promotes a mirror image version of feminism, where men are the aggrieved, subjugated class that is therefore justified in their contempt for women. Complementarians should reject this view as unbiblical and wicked.

Finally, while complementarians should

continue to appeal to the biblical witness regarding male eldership and headship, we should also promote the power of joyful marriages and families. Many young people are terrified of marriage and children. They have grown up amidst divorce, hook-up culture, and the disintegration of the family. Therefore, a community of Christian men who joyfully love and sacrifice for their wives as Christ loves and sacrificed for the church, and Christian women who joyfully submit to and adore their husbands as unto the Lord, will be a powerful witness to the goodness and wisdom of God and his word. ✕

Dr. Neil Shenvi has an AB in chemistry from Princeton University and a PhD in theoretical chemistry from UC Berkeley. He is the author of two books, Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity (Crossway, 2022) and Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology (Harvest House, 2023), and is widely recognized for his writing on critical theory. He can be reached on Twitter at @NeilShenvi or through his website www.shenviapogetics.com.

Dr. Pat Sawyer has a BA in psychology from UNC-Chapel Hill, an MA in communication studies from UNC-Greensboro, and a PhD in educational studies and cultural studies from UNC-Greensboro and is published in the academy and in various popular outlets. His PhD is in the critical tradition and analyzes social justice pedagogy in higher education. He is the co-author of two books: Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology (Harvest House, 2023) and Disney and Apologetics: Exploring the Moral Power and Theological Significance of Disney Stories (High Bridge Books, 2023). Pat is on the editorial board of the peer-reviewed education journal, Philosophy, Theory, and Foundations in Education. He is married and has three children and can be reached on Twitter (X) @RealPatSawyer



Feminism's Patriarchs:

An Ideological Response to the Failures of Men



“Few philosophers respected Fourier’s work, critiquing his lack of education and jumbled prose, yet ironically, his legacy lives on as the patriarch of feminism.”

The history of feminism began where it is most likely to end: with a man.

In 1837, French philosopher and ill-reputed utopian socialist Charles Fourier coined the term “feminist” to describe his belief in the equality of men and women.¹ This may seem unremarkable, especially today, but taken in the larger context of his political philosophy, the foundational errors of the feminist movement emerge. Fourier believed that the institution of marriage was inherently oppressive to women — vowing to never marry himself — instead, encouraging men and women to explore their array of sexual desires, including those for the same sex. He spent most of his time, however, articulating a

proto-communist vision of society where all laborers, men and women, were organized into productive labor units and goods were shared in common.

Few philosophers respected Fourier’s work, critiquing his lack of education and jumbled prose, yet ironically, his legacy lives on as the patriarch of feminism. Fyodor Dostoevsky, for example, criticized Fourier multiple times throughout his novel *Demons*:

Dedicating my energies to the study of social organization which is in the future to replace the present condition of things, I’ve come to the conviction that all makers of social

¹ Old Times, “The Founder of a Feminist Tradition Charles Fourier: Charles Fourier Contribution To Early Socialist Thought” *Medium*, May 13, 2021, accessed May 16, 2024, <https://oldtimes381.medium.com/the-founder-of-a-feminist-tradition-charles-fourier-ff4fb90a993b>.

systems from ancient times up to the present year, have been dreamers, tellers of fairy-tales, fools who contradicted themselves, who understood nothing of natural science and the strange animal called man. Plato, Rousseau, Fourier, columns of aluminum, are only fit for sparrows and not for human society.²

Fourier's ideas, such as a loose sexual morality, a tendency toward socialism, and the devaluation of the traditional family, continue to influence the political and social themes articulated by the feminist movement today.

FEMINISM'S PATRIARCHS

It is easy to identify many of the prominent feminist women throughout history — Mary Wollstonecraft, Betty Friedan, and Judith Butler — yet it is men, beginning with Charles Fourier, who have directed many of feminism's key developments. Indeed, what is often called “feminism” cannot be separated from ideologically driven men who saw an opportunity to *take advantage of* or to *cultivate* detached and vulnerable women ripe for redirection toward their own social and political goals.

Scholars have found it helpful to delineate between First-Wave (1848–1920), Second-Wave (1960–1970), and Third-Wave (1992–present) feminism when studying the evolution in beliefs and issues in the so-called march for women's equality. Few scholars, however, have focused on the men who shaped each wave of feminine reaction and response to the prevailing cultural, fa-

miliar, and religious mores. Since man acts upon history and woman adorns his handiwork, the Christian student ought to look for men in the pages of the feminist history, both as a catalyst of reaction, and also as the germination for their destructive ideas. From the men promoting free-love during first-wave feminism, the moguls concerned with depopulation in the second-wave, and the transgender influencers in third-wave feminism, each required the buy-in of women to succeed.

This exploration into the depths of feminist lore does not strip woman of agency or blame man for the actions of woman. Quite the opposite. Woman is as free an agent as man and has a salvific role in the redemptive work in creation (cf. 1 Tim. 2:15). Furthermore, man cannot be effective in the political arena without her support. In the same way that woman completes man's work in creation (Gen. 2:18), she is a force of destruction when turned toward the wrong ends (Prov. 14:1). For precisely these reasons, men have twisted the natural role and work of women under the guise of female empowerment, to gain the support of women for their own immoral or foolish efforts.

Over time, a movement that claimed to strive for equality between men and women unmasked itself as a movement that sought to make women like men, and even deny the reality of meaningful biological differences altogether. While this is obvious in second-wave and third-wave feminism, these beliefs were present from the beginning of first-wave feminism, too.



THE MEN OF FIRST-WAVE FEMINISM (1848–1920)

The personal lives of the first-wave feminists — men and women alike — show us the natural outcome of their ideas.

Scholars often credit Mary Wollstonecraft, author of the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, as the first feminist thinker.³ Other prominent first-wave feminists include Lucretia Coffin Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton of Seneca Falls and “The Declaration of Sentiments.” At the level of abstract theory, these thinkers posited an egalitarian vision of the relationship between the sexes in the public sphere — the right to vote, own property, and be ordained pastors — and in the private sphere, decrying the total authority fathers and husbands had over their wives and their

children. In practice, however, they tended to promote a vision of men and women as independent of and from each other, free to pursue their own interests.

In her book, *The End of Woman*,⁴ Carrie Gress explores the untold stories of first-wave feminism.⁵ She challenges the long-held assumption that first-wave feminism was net-positive for women, while second-wave feminism veered off course with the inclusion of abortion and hormonal contraception. Most importantly, Gress reveals the men behind the First Wave and their role in shaping its women.

The men of first-wave feminism — including Edward Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, and Percy Shelley — each took advantage of vulnerable women, thus shaping these early feminists' thoughts

² Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated by Constance Garnett, *The Possessed*, (New York: MacMillan), 376.

³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Johnson, 1792).

⁴ Carrie Gress, *The End of Woman: How Smashing the Patriarchy Has Destroyed Us* (Washington: Regnery, 2023).

⁵ S.A. McCarthy, *The Washington Stand*, August 8, 2023, accessed May 21, 2024, 'Family Is on The Chopping Block': A Conversation with Dr. Carrie Gress on Feminism (washingtonstand.com).

about marriage, childbearing, and the desire for a revolutionary change in the class and sex structure of society.

Mary Wollstonecraft's view of marriage, for example, was greatly influenced by her father, Edward, and his nightly abuse of her mother. Despite Mary's attempts to mediate between her parents, her mother seemed resigned to the situation and did little to rectify it. Mary left home as soon as she could, and eventually had children with two men whom she never married. Mary's second partner, William Godwin, shared her disdain for marriage as a bondage for men and women alike.

Mary's personal life is a tragic tale. Her first lover abandoned her not long after she gave birth to their first child; she attempted suicide multiple times; and not long after meeting William Godwin, she began bearing his children, too. Unfortunately, Mary died ten days after the birth of their second daughter from complications. Godwin later married a neighbor to help raise both their children. Undoubtedly, these experiences greatly influenced Mary Wollstonecraft's own books about the role of men and women in society, which formed the philosophical foundation of first-wave feminism.

Despite Godwin's outspoken support for non-monogamous commitments, he was displeased when his own daughter followed in his footsteps. Mary Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft's final child, met and fell in love with the infamous poet and playboy Percy Shelley when she was only fourteen years old. Despite Percy's own marriage and child with another woman, Mary and

Percy ran away together two years later, prompting the suicide of his wife.

Percy's radical views about a free and open expression of love without the limitations of marriage harken back to Charles Fourier's vision of a feminist society. Percy considered himself, and other like poets, "the unacknowledged legislators of the world."⁶

Percy cast his vision of a feminist future in his infamous novel, later called *The Revolt of Islam*, about the ideal woman.⁷ Percy names this woman Cythna, and he depicts her as truly independent, sexless, and unattached from marriage, procreation, religion, and cultural expectations. Cynthia was "free" to live as she pleased with no consequences for her sexual or moral forays.

Of course, the reality is far grimmer. As Mary Shelley's own life testifies, women and children suffer while men like Percy Shelley benefit from this liberated lifestyle. During their brief marriage, Percy had many affairs with other women, gaining an unwelcome reputation everywhere they went. Mary herself gave birth to four children and had one miscarriage with Percy, although only one child survived until adulthood. This hardship has led many scholars to read *Frankenstein* as a story about the limitations of technology to overcome the harsh realities of sex, childbearing, and the need for unconditional love.

By 1848, it was clear to many women that neither the current legal situation, nor the promise of a liberated lifestyle from revolutionaries such as Percy Shelley, were sufficient to gain women the rights they

desired. Such women prematurely concluded that men, either due to their failure to lead or their guidance into marital open borders, could not be trusted to offer a solution. It is with this backdrop that Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote the *Declaration of Sentiments* for the Seneca Falls Convention, the first feminist gathering and declaration of independence from men.⁸ In the same style as her contemporary Shelley, Stanton frames the relationship between men and women as "a long train of abuses and usurpations . . . under absolute despotism" and calls women to "throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security."⁹

The abuses that Stanton lists include:

- The requirement that women obey laws they had no say in passing [the right to vote],
- That marriage, in the eyes of the law, makes women civilly dead,

- Divorce laws, including the grounds for divorce, are dictated solely by the interests of men and seek to deter women by awarding full custody of the children to fathers,
- Barring women from educational and professional pursuits and distinctions, regardless of the quality of their mind, and
- Men who place themselves in the position of God, dictating to women the sphere they must inhabit [motherhood and childbearing].¹⁰

Clearly, many of the abuses listed here were a source of great heartache for women. The right to pursue higher education, professional interests, and play an active role in politics is one that many women, myself included, have benefited from greatly.

But in some cases, the liberated laws we have today have swung so far in the op-

⁸ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Report of the Women's Rights Convention*, (Rochester: John Dick, 1848) 4-10. https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss41210.mss41210-005_00343_00370/?sp=25&st=image&r=-0.097,-0.019,1.4,0.937,0.

⁹ Stanton, *Report*, 7.

¹⁰ Stanton, *Report*, 8-9.



⁶ Percy Shelly, *The Defence of Poetry* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1891).

⁷ Percy Shelly, *The Revolt of Islam*, (London: C & J Ollier, 1818).

posite direction that they harm men: no-fault divorce has enabled 70% of all divorces¹¹ to be initiated by women — 90% for women with a bachelor’s degree or higher¹² — and changes in family law mean that, with few exceptions, women receive *de facto* custody of their children. Many of the other concerns noted, however, seem more directed at nature itself. For example, laws permitting abortion or hormonal contraception aim to liberate women from the duties of motherhood and childbearing. Still, these artificial attempts to change nature fail to do so, and only further harm both men, women, and unborn children.

Stanton’s assumption, that women are necessarily oppressed by men, led to a false conclusion that the best alternative was for women to free themselves from men altogether. In their attempt to free themselves from men, these women also alienated themselves from the gifts and duties of womanhood. Such unattached and vulnerable women soon found themselves further manipulated by the men of second-wave feminism, who like Fourier and Shelley, used feminism to gain the support for women for their own revolutionary ends.

THE MEN OF SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM (1960-1970S)

It is not until the technological advancements of second-wave feminism that Percy Shelley’s Cythna — a sexless creature with no maternal or familial duties

— could become a reality. Second-wave feminism, which is synonymous with the sexual revolution, created a culture and policies that encouraged contraception, abortion, hook-up culture, and no-fault divorce. Proponents include *Ms. Magazine*’s Gloria Steinem, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Betty Friedan of the *Feminine Mystique*, and Angela Davis of the Black Panthers.

As in first-wave feminism, many of the defining issues of second-wave feminism are the result of top-down efforts by well-funded men, such as John D. Rockefeller III, Hugh Hefner, and the advocacy group originally named the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), which was formed by three men. This time, their goals went beyond attempts to abolish marriage and focused on their efforts to depopulate the United States and normalize sexual promiscuity.

In 1970, Richard Nixon’s administration established the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future. Concern about overpopulation spurred on by Paul R. Ehrlich’s erroneous book *The Population Bomb*, animated conversations about how to reduce the birth rate. Chairman John D. Rockefeller III (1970-1972) was particularly concerned with this problem, and after a two-year review period, he offered a list of startling recommendations to solve the problem.¹³ Nixon, to his credit, rejected these recommendations, but they still made their way into public policy.

Rockefeller III’s recommendations included the passage of an Equal Rights Amendment, abortion-on-demand for all, hormonal contraception access for all, the removal of home economics courses or sex-specific education in high school, and a messaging emphasis that encouraged women to delay marriage and motherhood in favor of higher education and a full-time career. Rockefeller III recognized that to make his recommendations salient, he would need to gain the buy-in of women. Feminism provided the best conduit to do this.

Women’s rights and other feminist causes became unwitting tools to achieve Rockefeller’s depopulation goals. As Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman elected to Congress and influential feminist, argued in her remarks to the Republican Task Force on Earth Resources and Population,

The U. S. population growth rate has equaled and exceeded two of many underdeveloped countries. We are now adding about 3,000,000 people each year. . . . We urgently need to examine our attitudes and policies toward family planning and abortion or we shall be crowded off the earth.¹⁴

Similarly, Hugh Hefner, the founder of the pornographic magazine *Playboy* (1953) and the owner of the Playboy Mansion, benefited from the feminist movement’s liberalization of sexuality. Hefner considered himself a liberator of women and a feminist throughout his life, promoting his work to women under this banner. It is not

difficult to imagine how grafting his pornographic and promiscuous lifestyle onto feminism benefited his own career, at the expense of women. In many ways, Hefner is a less talented, but equally corrupt, version of Percy Shelley. His ideas, through the promise of a riveting lifestyle and artistic depictions of pornography, sought to capture the imagination, and participation, of women for his own benefit.

It should come as no surprise, then, that a small group of men were behind the inclusion of abortion as a core feminist issue. In 1969, an all-male formation committee launched the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Law (NARAL). (The pre-formation planning committee included Lawrence Lader of New York, Garrett Hardin of California, and Dr. Lonny Myers of Chicago.) Feminists were originally divided over the issue of abortion, but once NARAL gained the support of Betty Friedan, who helped run the National Organization for Women (NOW), there was no going back.

Of course, children are the ones who pay the ultimate price. In Percy Shelley’s life, many of his own children died from the lack of proper care that they, and their mothers, received, given Percy’s demands for travel and back-to-back births. Similarly, Hefner’s sexual revolution benefited from abortion’s “get out of jail” free card at the cost of many unborn lives.

The sexual revolution and the introduction of reproductive technologies into second-wave feminism further alienated women, and by extension men, from their

¹¹ “Women More Likely Than Men to Initiate Divorces, But Not Non-Marital Breakups,” American Sociological Association, August 22, 2015, Women More Likely Than Men to Initiate Divorces, But Not Non-Marital Breakups | American Sociological Association (asanet.org).

¹² Renata Ellera Gomes, “Highly Educated Women Are More Likely To Ask for Divorce and Other Myths That Need To Die” Sexography, January 18, 2024, <https://medium.com/sexography/highly-educated-women-are-more-likely-to-ask-for-divorce-and-other-myths-that-need-to-die-dfce2b53c9cc>.

¹³ “Population and the American Future,” The Center for Research on Population and Security, accessed May 20, 2024, Rockefeller Commission on Population and the American Future - Intro and Chapter 1 (population-security.org).

¹⁴ Shirley Chisholm, “Statement: On Abortion, Shirley Chisholm, December 3, 1969,” accessed May 20, 2024. STATEMENT: On Abortion, Shirley Chisholm, December 3, 1969 | Black Agenda Report.

own bodies. As the unified bond of marriage, sex, and procreation was torn apart by an emphasis on pleasure apart from sexuality, a far more pervasive social trend took root: the emphasis on gender — an internal sense of self — over biological sex. Feminism, which has downplayed the reality of biological sex since its inception, now enters a collision course with itself as biological sex comes into conflict with radical gender ideologies.

THE MEN OF THIRD-WAVE FEMINISM (1992–PRESENT)

“The confusion surrounding what constitutes third-wave feminism is in some respects its defining feature.”¹⁵ Despite the incoherence of this statement — a house divided against itself cannot stand — feminist scholar Elizabeth Evans highlights feminisms’ collision course with itself that third-wave feminism reveals.

For many feminists, such as J.K. Rowling, feminism is inherently at odds with the transgender movement. A growing number of “TERFs,” or “Transgender Exclusionary Radical Feminists,” aim to protect “true” feminism — equality for women — from gender theorists such as Judith Butler, whose feminism — equality for all genders — tends to harm women and children. Despite the unlikely alliance that has emerged between many TERFs and social conservatives in defending the importance of biological sex, the transgender movement is not a deviation from feminism *per se*. Indeed, it is the fruit of a consistent philosophical movement from

“As the unified bond of marriage, sex, and procreation was torn apart ... a far more pervasive social trend took root: the emphasis on gender — an internal sense of self — over biological sex.”

Charles Fourier, Percy Shelley, and Hugh Hefner to Dylan Mulvaney. The devaluation of biological sex for higher ideals has taken on flesh as the transgender movement prioritizes gender — an internal sense of self — over biological sex.

The men of third-wave feminism are easier to spot than ever before. In this upside-down world, they are reasserting their dominance by masquerading as women with legal or social support.

Obvious examples include “Caitlin” Jenner, “Lia” Thomas, Dylan Mulvaney, and “Rachel” Levine. The cultural deference that many liberal and feminist women pay to these men led my colleague Delano Squires to joke that “the country’s most powerful women finally found a group of men they can submit to.”¹⁶

As the social hierarchy shifted, many of the men who now identify as women saw a chance for advancement under the confused banner of feminism. Bruce Jenner, for example, was a star decathlete in the 1970s, but had become a mid-level celebrity with a drunk driving death on his record. After his so-called transition to a woman, he became an overnight cultural icon and received *Glamour’s* 2015 Woman of the Year Award. Similarly, Dylan Mulvaney was a C-list Hollywood actor with some minor sitcoms to his name before he transformed himself into an online sensation and influencer with his “Days of Girlhood” TikTok videos.

Within athletics, William Thomas ranked in the 400’s among male collegiate swimmers. With little hope of reaching the top tier among male athletes, Thomas began to identify as Lia and compete in the women’s category. Overnight, he began setting time records and tied for first place with Riley Gaines in the NCAA’s 200-yard freestyle championship in 2022.

Similarly, Adam Levine’s transition to Rachel enabled him to hold distinctions as both a “transgender” person and as a woman. For example, as the National Women’s History Museum explains, Levine’s confirmation as the 17th Assistant Secretary for Health in 2021 gave him the distinction of the “highest-ranking openly transgender government official in U.S. history.”¹⁷ Later the same year, Levine “was sworn in as a four-star admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps . . . [and is the] highest-ranking member and its first-ever female four-star admiral.”¹⁸ These honors,

which distinguish him above other men and women, make a mockery of the achievements of women. Moreover, as with each previous wave, women pay the price for this fraudulent replacement of womanhood.

Each of these men inhabited the loathed “straight, white, and male” category. But they found a place of distinction, and cultural dominance, in the transgender movement. Men of third-wave feminism are much like Percy Shelley or Hugh Hefner. Such men, behind each wave of feminism, manipulated women for their own benefit by teaching women to ignore their natural inclination toward marriage, sex, and procreation.

THE JAEI GENERATION

The dangers of evil men and foolish women, who find themselves reduced to sexless animals in their attempt to gain power and domination over the other, leave us with a lasting question: How *should* the wise woman respond? In many instances, women faced legitimate wrongs, failures, or a loss of meaning that drove them to act. Unfortunately, many of their “solutions,” divided from virtuous guidance and structure, only made the problem worse.

There are three recurring ways women respond to spiritual, economic, and moral separation from godly men:

- They make the most of a hard situation, but tend to passively accept their circumstances;
- They replace men and act in their place;

¹⁵ Elizabeth Evans, *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 25.

¹⁶ Delano Squires, “America’s most powerful women have finally found men they can submit to,” *Blaze Media*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.theblaze.com/fearless/squires-america-s-most-powerful-women-finally-found-men-they-can-submit-to>.

¹⁷ Mariana Brandman, “Rachel Levine.” National Women’s History Museum. 2022. www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/rachel-levine.

¹⁸ Brandman, www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/rachel-levine.

- They seek to work in and through the natural hierarchy of the family or political structure of the nation to hold men accountable.

So, how should women respond when men prey upon women or abdicate their role as moral and spiritual leaders? Thankfully, the answer is within our grasp. The ultimate battle is not between the sexes, but against the seed of the serpent. We need a “Jael Generation” of women who act with righteous cunning, foresight, and hospitality, who can offer wise counsel to those around them. As many of the wise women of Scripture teach us by their example, this accountability begins with their husbands or fathers and extends outwards into society, even reaching the high priest or king. Such wise women never pick up the sword to fight, nor do they seek to replace the men in authority, and yet they often are credited with the victory.

So, how did these wise women of the Bible act in response to the failures of men or their nation?

RIGHTEOUS CUNNING

In Genesis 3, the serpent deceived Eve, and the whole creation fell under the curse of sin. In the very passage where God judges’ creation, he declares the *protoevangelium* to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

In this promise, the first Gospel proclamation, God empowers subsequent women to destroy the head(s) of the serpent(s) that threaten God’s redemptive work in the world. Rather than mimicking men, wise women in the Bible fight for and

through their offspring with the very tool that once caused the downfall of humanity: righteous cunning.

In the stories of the Woman of Thebez and Jael, they used millstones and tent pegs (traditionally feminine and household objects) to deliver carefully aimed, deadly blows to the heads of adversaries. Tamar and Rahab employed righteous cunning to fulfill the promises of God when those in authority over them failed to act faithfully. Similarly, the Egyptian midwives deceived Pharaoh and refused to kill newborn Hebrew boys. In each instance, God does not condemn this use of righteous cunning. He blesses each of these women with families of their own, including some in the lineage of Jesus Christ.

FORESIGHT

Faced with the failures of her husband and tribe, who sided against the nation of Israel, Jael embodies the power of daily faithfulness in one’s duties. In Judges 4–5, we meet Jael after her husband Heber the Kenite allied with Jabin, King of the Canaanites, during their war with Israel. One day, as she looked out from her tent, she saw Jabin stumbling toward her. Recognizing the King and the opportunity before her, she called to him from afar and entreated him to rest in her tent. Although he asked for water, she deftly gave him milk and a soft place to rest.

As soon as he fell asleep, she drove a tent peg through his head, swiftly defeating Israel’s enemy. What is so notable about this story is that when Jael drove the tent peg through the evil king’s head, she was not deviating from her normal life. Setting up and taking down tents was a feminine duty; she had likely driven tent pegs into hard patches of

earth hundreds, if not thousands, of times before. Jael was not only engaged in the political affairs of Israel — able to recognize and engage with the king — but that she used foresight and wit to carry out this task in a distinctly feminine manner.

HOSPITALITY

Esther’s story has an aspect of righteous deception as she conceals her true identity from the king. She uses a courageous form of hospitality by approaching the King un-called for — an act punishable by death — and inviting him and Hamon to not one, but two feasts. Here she wins the king’s favor and reveals the evil plan of Hamon to destroy the Jewish people.

Similarly, Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 describes herself as one who prepares a feast — with homemade bread and wine she brewed — to invite the simple and those in need of wisdom to learn from her ways. Here the faithful preparation of a feast reflects the inner self-discipline of these women who can bide their time to not only hold men accountable but do so in the way that is most likely to be successful.

WISE COUNSEL

The Old Testament describes the period of the Judges as one where few men were faithful in their work, such that faithful women were raised up in their place. Deborah, a prophetess of Israel, offered wise counsel to the leaders of Israel throughout this time. When Barak in Judges 4 failed to lead his army against Sisera, Deborah called him out for his disobedience to the Lord.

Similarly, many women throughout the Bible play the role of negotiator or coun-

selor, especially when the men in authority act with foolishness or neglect. The Bible describes Abigail, King David’s eventual wife, the Wise Woman of Tekoa, and the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah as intervening on behalf of their family and city to preserve their life and form an alliance with God’s people when their husbands or city leaders failed to act with wisdom.

Each of these women, in their times, places, and contexts, embody the teachings of Lady Wisdom from Proverbs 8 and throughout the Bible. The archetypal figure of Lady Wisdom instructs the simple, faithfully manages her household, prepares feasts, and calls many to imitate her ways. She was present at the beginning of the world, and in 1 Corinthians 1:24, Paul describes Jesus Christ as the “wisdom of God.” Thus, each woman who embodies the teachings of Lady Wisdom finds her ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the King and Savior of the world.

CONCLUSION

The complicated history of feminism, beset by ideologically driven men who saw an opportunity *to take advantage of* or *to create* unattached and vulnerable women, meets its match in the Jael Generation. Such women may challenge men or institutions when they are wrong, encourage them when they are weak, and provide wise counsel along the way. It is only then that women will find a life-giving alternative to the false promises of feminism and play their part in empowering a generation of men who lead with honor, truth, and care for those entrusted to them. ✕

Emma Waters is a senior research associate in the Richard and Helen DeVos Center for Life, Religion, and Family at The Heritage Foundation.

Feminine Emotionalism and the Evangelical Conscience

G. Shane Morris is a senior writer at the Colson Center and host of the *Upstream* podcast.

A former colleague of mine recently pointed out on Twitter that pornography use repulses godly women and is a huge impediment to marriageability.¹ He was, of course, right about that. But he went on to blame this moral failure among men for the low marriage rate in general, and claimed that he knows “ZERO single women genuinely uninterested in a virtuous, courageous, thoughtful man.” Expanding the discussion beyond the church, he concluded that “the American man’s inability to find a wife is a function of him not living in ways that women respect.”

Is this true? Is the primary obstacle to the formation of godly families in our churches and our nation simply the fact that men are unwilling to live up to the exacting mor-

¹<https://twitter.com/josephbackholm/status/1744778840365220157>.

al standards of women? Is the solution to browbeat those men into doing better — often in mixed, public settings — until they make the cut? And can we really expect women to respond naturally to the moral reformation of men with interest and respect?

Many evangelicals seem to think so. As I’ve noted elsewhere, the typical Bible study feels like an exercise in getting men to instinctively behave, think, and pray more like women.² Evangelical publishers now roll out titles demeaning traditionally masculine traits as toxic, perhaps holdovers of the American west. And we’ve all heard the observation that Mother’s Day sermons tend to be unconditional, velvet-cushioned celebrations of the women in the congregation, while Father’s Day sermons tend to be barbed wire jeremiads about men’s shortcomings and the need for dads to grow a pair and fulfill their responsibilities. Usually, these condemnations of men come *from* men.

The most famous is probably a sermon by former Mars Hill pastor Mark Driscoll, who literally screamed at the guys in his congregation over what he saw as their unwillingness to grow up and fulfill the expectations of their “mothers, sisters, girlfriends, and wives.”³ The language he

² Shane Morris, “Savior or Stoics?: Why Modern Men Look for Spiritual Wisdom Outside the Church,” *The Gospel Coalition*, February 3, 2023; <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/savior-stoics-modern-men/>.

³ Mark Driscoll’s 2009 sermon “Men and Marriage,” available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ja cWAsOK0w & t=3957s & a b _channel=Pearlylove.





used to describe these unnamed men, which he seemed to count among the majority in his flock, was telling: “cowards,” “passive,” “impish,” “worthless,” “little boys,” “making a mess out of everything in their life.” By contrast, the main fault Driscoll found with women in his congregation was that they “enable” such men when they “permit them to continue in folly.”

Looking back on this episode, Aaron Renn notes that “Driscoll doesn’t offer much in the way of building back up in the sermon. It’s mostly tearing down, with simply a call to shape up and man up in response.”⁴

Driscoll’s brusque style may set the fallen pastor apart, but he wasn’t an outlier among evangelicals in treating men as the more sinful sex, or in assuming that women’s natural role is to sanctify males by holding us to their standards. As Nancy Pearcey argues in her book *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, this view of women as the conscience of men is part of a cultural shift that took place following the industrial revolution.

As men began to work more frequently outside the home, Pearcey explains, writers romanticized and moralized domesticity — along with the sex primarily associated with it. Poets, philosophers, and generals began referring to women as “the angel in the house,”⁵ “God’s appointed

agent of morality,”⁶ and “the civilizers of mankind.” “In the nineteenth century,” writes Pearcey, “society began accepting the idea that men are naturally prone to sin and self-centeredness, while at the same time giving women the responsibility to hold them in check.”⁷

In his review of Pearcey’s book in the pages of this journal, Steven Wedgworth notes that the view of women as intrinsically upright eventually made its way into evangelical imaginations through authors like George Gilder, whose 1973 book *Sexual Suicide* asserts that “women’s morality is the ultimate basis for all morality.”⁸ Women, argued Gilder, have an essential duty to pass their natural goodness on to men, who are naturally “poor and neurotic,” “disposed to criminality, drugs, and violence,” “irresponsible about...debts, alcoholic, accident prone, and venereally diseased.” Women, in this view, “transform male lust into love; channel male wanderlust into jobs, homes, and families; . . . change hunters into fathers; divert male will to power into a drive to create.”⁹

Something like my former coworker’s sentiment is evident here: Men are the ones who need to shape up. Women are, by nature, inclined toward higher moral ideals, and if only their sons, husbands, and boyfriends would get their acts

⁴ Aaron Renn, “Newsletter #77: Mark Driscoll’s Gender Teachings,” June 12, 2023: <https://www.aaronrenn.com/p/newsletter-77-mark-driscolls-gender>.

⁵ Nancy Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2023), 108.

⁶ Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, 111.

⁷ Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, 113.

⁸ Steven Wedgworth, “Half the Battle: A Review of Nancy Pearcey’s *The Toxic War on Masculinity*,” *The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, November 21, 2023: <https://cbmw.org/2023/11/21/half-the-battle-a-review-of-nancy-pearceys-the-toxic-war-on-masculinity/>.

⁹ Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, 168.

together and behave as women expect, all would be well.

Years ago, an acquaintance sent me a clever blog from circa 2005 in which the author, who is evidently a teacher or professor, asked students to name the typical sins of men and women.¹⁰ These students apparently had no trouble rapidly listing off internet porn, pride, lust, and anger as common vulnerabilities among men. Yet when asked to name sins typical to women, they struggled. Eventually, the ladies in the room settled on “lack of self-esteem” as the characteristic sin of women.

Presumably, that lack of confidence in their own goodness is what leads women to “enable” wayward men in their sins, as Driscoll put it. Perhaps women should instead assert themselves, doing what’s necessary to force the men in their lives to live up to their innately lofty feminine standards.

Around the same time I encountered that blog, I watched Sherwood Baptist’s film *Fireproof*. In it, a selfish and pornography-addicted husband (Kirk Cameron) is jolted out of his moral stupor when his wife files for divorce and begins dating a coworker. Though this wife’s actions are not portrayed as godly, they are portrayed as *effective*. Cameron’s character smashes his computer and determines to fight for his marriage by pursuing his wife, even if she refuses to forgive him.

Another older “manosphere” blog identified this lionizing of female tough love as a pattern in Christian writing about the sexes, dubbing it “the wakeup call narrative.”¹¹ The author cited examples like a FamilyLife series on marriage¹² in which a pastor’s wife says she refused to be intimate with her husband because she didn’t feel he was right with God.¹³ As this couple tells it, the wife’s “anger,” “bitterness,” “resentment,” and sexual coldness toward her husband served as a wakeup call — literally a message to

him from the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ Another well-known Christian marriage book tells the story of how a wife got her workaholic husband’s attention by throwing what she calls a “godly tantrum” and smashing their wedding china.¹⁵ What unites these examples is the assumption that women’s feelings and reactions — both in marriage and beforehand — serve as a reliable metric of how godly the men in their lives are. Like my well-meaning former coworker, they seem to take for granted that men have bad moral instincts, while women have good moral instincts. We guys, it seems, must fight a stiff gravitational pull toward depravity and dereliction, while women spontaneously know and do what’s right — to such a degree that their *emotions alone* are a barometer of male godliness.

We must not miss how much of this canonizing of female feelings comes from *males*, often in mixed company. Here we step into delicate territory, because I truly believe that much of what we call “white knighting” is well-intentioned, albeit naïve. From the moment we can speak, Christian men are socialized to put women first, to give up our seats for them, to open doors for them, not to belch or pass gas in front of them, and never, ever to hit them. All of this is quite right. But when combined with post-industrial pieties about how women domesticate men, these deferent customs can morph into a pseudo-chivalry that treats every distressed woman as a damsel in need of saving. Naturally, since dragons are in short supply, other men usually furnish the foe to be vanquished.

So far, this can be innocent, however misguided. It even has the feel of something *traditional*, which is why so many Christian men whose moral sensibilities were honed at Promise Keepers rallies still engage in this kind of behavior. *We’re not feminists*, they think. *We’re the opposite! We stand up for women, rather than expecting them to defend themselves.* Again, innocuous, however mistaken. But add in a dash of social anxiety, sexual frustration, or just plain arrogance, and you have a recipe for men whose entire public persona depends on putting other males down in

¹⁰ Keith Drury, “Do Women Sin?” *Drury Writing*, March 11, 2005: <https://www.drurywriting.com/keith/Do.Women.sin.htm>.

¹¹ Dalrock, “The Wake-Up Call,” *The Red Pill*, March 3, 2014: <https://theredarchive.com/blog/Dalrock/the-wake-up-call.7895>.

¹² Ann and Dave Wilson, “The Dance of Intimacy,” *Family Life Today Podcast*, September 14, 2015: <https://www.familylife.com/podcast/familylife-today/the-dance-of-intimacy/>.

¹³ Dalrock, “How to Tell if You are a Godly Man,” *The Red Pill*, February 2, 2016: <https://theredarchive.com/blog/Dalrock/how-to-tell-if-you-are-a-godlyman.7458>.

¹⁴ Ann and Dave Wilson, “Vertical Marriage” Part 1 “Lost Feeling”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_RxiVuct3Q&ab_channel=ParentCompass.

¹⁵ Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York, New York: Dutton, 2011) pp. 175–77.

order to earn points with spectating women. We've all known them, and none of us like them.

Writing about this dynamic in 2016, Alastair Roberts notes that most men are instinctively suspicious of “potential turncoats” in their ranks — of the man who would “willingly betray men and compromise his convictions in order to retain social standing in mixed society.”¹⁶

Roberts continues:

Men cannot trust men whose primary concern is what women think, or who demonstrate little concern for what other men think. Such men will routinely falsify their preferences and betray other men and the male group in order to advance in the favour of women. Men like this cannot be relied upon to show appropriate loyalty to other men, nor to speak the truth when those actions might displease women.¹⁷

That last bit is key. In a culture or church with a robust wariness toward both male and female depravity, turncoat men might remain an annoyance. But in an environment where women are treated as intrinsically superior from a moral and spiritual standpoint, knowing what tickles their ears becomes an extraordinary source of power and influence for unscrupulous men. This is where discussions like Joe Rigney's recent essay on female ordination and empathy become highly relevant.¹⁸ If women are “angels in the home” (or church?) whose job is to morally direct their husbands and sons, (and pastors?) then significant, sub-surface pressure will be exerted on pretty much all institutions to move toward feminine preferences — even if women are not officially in places of power.

What are those feminine preferences? As Pearcey has been pointing out lately, they're increasingly and extremely progressive.¹⁹ Highlighting a 2023 survey by the Universi-

ty of Michigan, she notes that American high school girls are veering leftward in their political instincts, while their male peers are now twice as likely to identify as conservative.²⁰ Sociologists Brad Wilcox and Lyman Stone unpacked this trend last summer in *The Atlantic*, warning that it will further dampen conservative men's hopes for finding a wife in an already historically depressed marriage market.²¹ It turns out that the American man's inability to find a wife may be just as much a function of the American woman's embrace of anti-family political and social beliefs as it is men's failure to live “in ways that women respect.”

It doesn't help that modern women seem to have an instinct to prize feelings *as such* over truth. In a stunning 2022 essay at *Quillette*, a psychologist and behavioral scientist collected published research showing how this instinct has measurably reshaped academia.²² One survey found that a large majority of women (64 percent) thought college students ought to be protected from offensive ideas, while most men (56 percent) did not. Another survey discovered that over 60 percent of male psychology professors believed scholars should be free to pursue controversial research without fearing “institutional punishment,” while roughly the same percentage of female professors said, “it's complicated.”

Apt words to describe a situation in which women are increasingly left-leaning and increasingly impervious to contrary arguments, convinced as many are that emotions are the most reliable guide to reality.

To be clear, American men — particularly Christians — absolutely need to get their acts together. They're in bad

¹⁶ Alastair Roberts, “A Crisis of Discourse—Part 2: A Problem of Gender,” *Alastair's Adversaria*: November 17, 2016: <https://alastairadversaria.com/2016/11/17/a-crisis-of-discourse-part-2-a-problem-of-gender/>.

¹⁷ Roberts, “A Crisis of Discourse—Part 2.”

¹⁸ Joe Rigney, “Empathy, Feminism, and the Church,” *American Reformer*, January 26, 2024: <https://americanreformer.org/2024/01/empathy-feminism-and-the-church/>.

¹⁹ On February 29, 2024, Nancy Pearcey shared a graph on Twitter, remarking: “Young women are becoming more liberal”: <https://twitter.com/NancyRPearcey/status/1763370623508550099>.

²⁰ On March 6, 2024, Nancy Pearcey shared quotes from a *New York Post* article on Twitter entitled, “No Wonder Boys are Turning toward Conservative Beliefs — It's Rebellion against Parents' Woke Ideology!” She quoted, “A 2023 survey of 12th graders by University of Michigan found that, while American girls are headed leftward, their male counterparts are twice as likely to identify as conservative than liberal, as they tack toward a new, edgy kind of anti-woke politics . . . Surely she's noticed that a certain demographic is legitimately falling behind. Some 60% of college students are female, meanwhile boys were seven times more likely to drop out during the pandemic. Brookings Institute senior fellow Richard Reeves tactfully points out in his 2022 book “Of Boys and Men” that men are actually facing some unprecedented challenges — including falling behind in standardized testing and prematurely leaving the workforce in droves. Saying as much isn't reactionary. In fact, men account for seven in ten opioid deaths and four in five suicide deaths. Perhaps hearing out some grievances, rather than waving them away as “reactionary and unformed pseudo-ideologies” would allow parents and sons to actually learn from one another. Respect is a two-way street,” <https://twitter.com/NancyRPearcey/status/1765471409130651684>.

²¹ Lyman Stone and Brad Wilcox, “Now Political Polarization Comes for Marriage Prospects,” *The Atlantic*, June 11, 2023: https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/06/us-marriage-rate-different-political-views/674358/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share.

²² Cory Clark and Bo Winegard, “Sex and the Academy,” *Quillette*, October 8, 2022: <https://quillette.com/2022/10/08/sex-and-the-academy/>.

shape, in ways scholars have written whole books about.²³ But it is at best a misfire, and at worst culpable sabotage against the church, for leaders to bellow at men about their shortcomings while assuming or affirming the innate virtue of female feelings, together with the premium females tend to place on those feelings.

To state the obvious, women are fallen. They sin — often in ways inflected through their emotions that subvert and destroy marriages, families, churches, universities, and (did you think otherwise?) whole societies. And because of that, they need the gospel — not the one that portrays them as angels born to save men, creatures naturally interested only in virtue, creativity, and thoughtfulness, whose main shortcoming is a lack of self-esteem — but the gospel that lays bare their peculiar vulnerabilities and temptations, and points them to the only Man who can save us all. ✕

²³ See Richard Reeves, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do about It* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2022).

On the State of Complementarianism:

A FORUM

HEATH LAMBERT
BART BARBER
TODD PRUITT
ANDREW BALLITCH
FELIX ORJI
GREG STRAND

The State of Complementarianism in the Southern Baptist Convention

Q: What do you believe the Bible teaches about God's design for men and women, particularly in the home and the church? How do you view the relationship between the Bible's teaching on the proper order of the home and the proper order of the church?

A: I believe that God made mankind in two objective genders that are revealed at birth (Genesis 1:27). I further believe that he has invested men with a role in the church and the home that is characterized by loving, sacrificial leadership (1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Ephesians 5:25-30), and that he has invested women with a role in the home and the church that is characterized by a submissive response to this leadership (1 Timothy 2:11-15; Ephesians 5:22-24). If I understand your question correctly, my understanding

between the Bible's teaching on gender and the proper ordering of the home is that it is important and intentional. That is to say that it is not accidental that God calls men to leadership in the home and the church and that he calls women to a submissive role in the home and the church. The Bible's teaching points to an intentionality on the part of God to create in men something that is designed for leadership and to create in women something that is designed to respond to that leadership.

Q: What limits, if any, do you believe the Bible places on women serving in the church?

A: I believe the serving opportunities of women are limited by texts like 1 Timothy 2:11-15. To state this tension explicitly, I would say that texts like that teach

that women are not allowed to have a governing function in the church and are not allowed to teach men doctrine. I do not think this limitation limits the ability of women to lead at all, as I think there are many leadership roles that a woman could occupy under that of, say, a pastor. I also do not believe this limitation limits the ability of a woman to teach. As there are countless opportunities for women to teach women, to teach children, and students, etc.

Q: How would you evaluate the fidelity of your denomination as a whole and its member churches individually regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women?

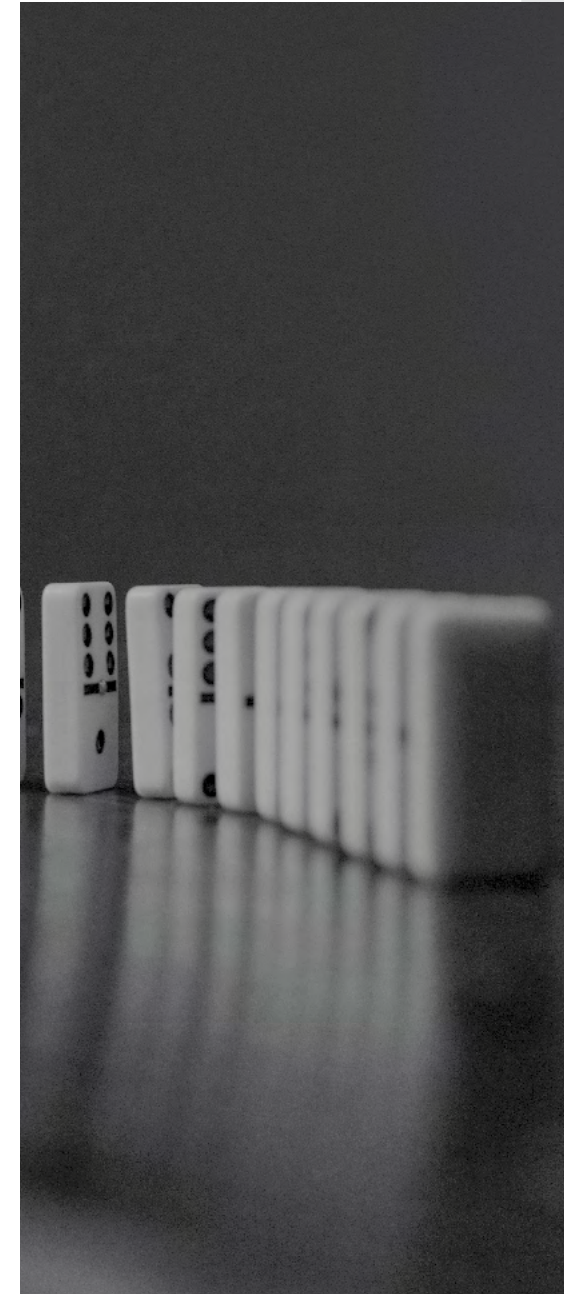
A: I'm a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, and in my view, the SBC is at a crucial time of discerning the answer to this question. I know of too many churches that have compromised on this issue and of too many leaders who are willing to leave the door open to compromise on this issue. Right now, however, I believe the vast majority of Southern Baptists are correct on this issue and want to stay that way. Time will tell.

Q: What direction would you like to see your denomination head regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women?

A: As a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, I think we must remain faithful on this issue. That necessity is true for biblical and theological reasons and for historical reasons. Biblically and theologically, the Bible is perfectly clear on gender and gender roles. To get this matter wrong is to train oneself to impose our authority on that of Scripture and make the Bible say whatever we want it to say.

What that means is that errors here will lead to errors elsewhere. That biblical and theological reality leads to the historical reality that churches and denominations that compromise on this issue are typically not far from compromising on others. ✕

Heath Lambert is pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, FL (SBC).



The State of Complementarianism in the Southern Baptist Convention



Q: What do you believe the Bible teaches about God's design for men and women, particularly in the home and the church? How do you view the relationship between the Bible's teaching on the proper order of the home and the proper order of the church?

A: It was God's good pleasure to fill the earth with dioecious plants and gonochoric animals. Maleness and femaleness are woven into creation and bring forth beauty, love, and life into the universe. The commonalities between both sexes of any species and the separate experiences of being male or female within a species are both extensive, and the expanding horizons of human knowledge have yet to discover the full extent of either. Uniquely among the creation, human beings—

both men and women—are created in the image of God. Being a man and being a woman are biologically fixed realities determined at conception. Human beings are redeemed, adopted into the family of God, brought into the churches, filled with the Holy Spirit, gifted spiritually, and inducted into the universal priesthood to serve Christ spiritually without regard to sex. The experience of being a Christian is one that men and women share in common. The experience of being a son, being a husband, and of being a father uniquely pertain to men. The experience of being a daughter, being a wife, and of being a mother uniquely pertain to women. It is God's design for the home that husbands should lead the home. The New Testament churches are to be governed by their regenerate congregations of men and wom-

en, to whom Christ has promised his presence and the binding/loosing authority of Heaven. God has instructed the churches to set apart men who meet the qualifications given in the New Testament to serve in the two church offices of pastor (also called elder or overseer) and deacon. In the respective ministries of the word and of the table, those who occupy these two offices give leadership to the churches.

Q: What limits, if any, do you believe the Bible places on women serving in the church?

A: I believe that the offices of pastor and deacon are limited to men who meet the scriptural qualifications for those offices. I also believe that the New Testament places certain functions related to governance and proclamation uniquely within the role of Christian men.

Q: How would you evaluate the fidelity of your denomination as a whole and its member churches individually regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women?

A: The Southern Baptist Convention is not, strictly speaking, a denomination. Baptists have a mixed record on this matter. The Baptist churches cooperating through the Southern Baptist Convention have led the Convention to adopt a statement of faith (*The Baptist Faith & Message*) that articulates what I believe is a view of the roles of men and women that is consistent with biblical teaching. Recent votes in the Convention have demonstrated that our churches are overwhelmingly in agreement with our statement of faith, as far as it goes. Article XIII of *The Baptist Faith & Message* states that all Christians, without regard to sex, "are under obligation to serve [God] with their time, tal-

ent, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others." I believe that our statement of faith does a masterful job of calling all believers to active Christian service while maintaining biblical roles for men and women.

Q: What direction would you like to see your denomination head regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women?

A: As Western culture increasingly moves toward a position from which it cannot even define consistently what a man or a woman is, I would like to see Baptists around the world maintain (or in some cases recover) a robustly biblical understanding of the nature and roles of men and women. ✕

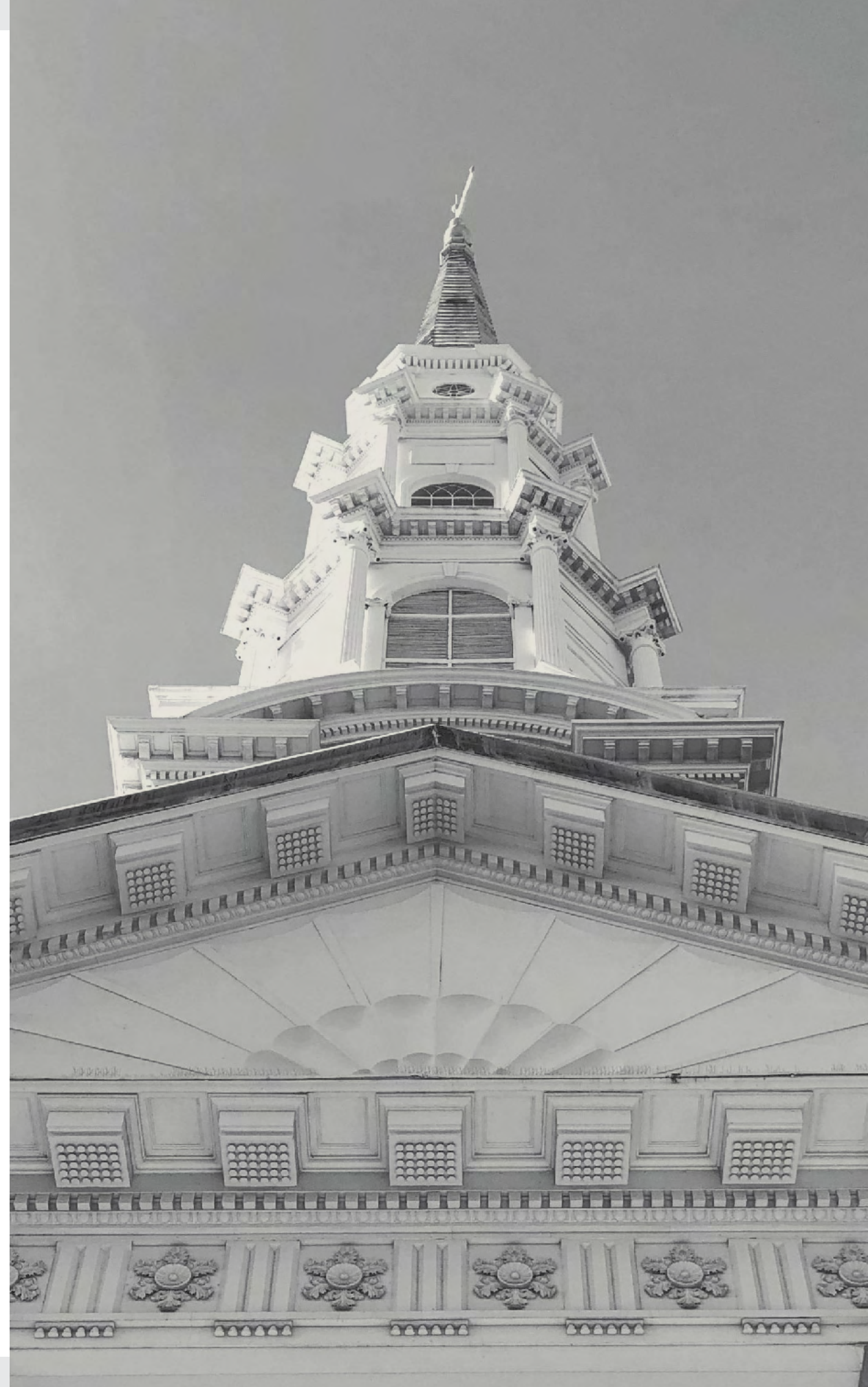
Bart Barber is pastor of First Baptist Farmersville, Texas (SBC) and currently serves as president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The State of Complementarianism in the Presbyterian Church in America

Q: What do you believe the Bible teaches about God's design for men and women, particularly in the home and the church? How do you view the relationship between the Bible's teaching on the proper order of the home and the proper order of the church?

A: Beginning in the creation account of Genesis, God is depicted as making distinctions. The most obvious of which is the distinction between the Creator and his creatures. But distinctions abound. There are distinctions between the darkness of night and the light of day and between the sea and dry ground. There are distinctions between members of the animal kingdom and God's human creatures. And among humanity, those who bear God's image, there is the distinction between male and female. The

differences between the man and woman extend well beyond the architecture of their bodies. Adam bears the responsibility of spiritual leadership and federal headship. This headship is seen in the fact that even though the woman sinned first (1 Timothy 2:8-15), it is the man's sin which is imputed to his progeny (Romans 5:12ff).



That order of creation is reflected in the family as well. The Apostle Paul refers to the husband as “the head of the wife,” and that he is to lead her in a way that reflects the love of Jesus for the church (Ephesians 5:22ff).

Q: What limits, if any, do you believe the Bible places on women serving in the church?

A: Men and women share the burdens and privileges of ministry in the church. But it is clear in Scripture that the role of preaching and teaching in the gathered church is limited to qualified men. What is more, the offices of elder and deacon are limited to qualified men. This is a reflection of the order of creation (Genesis 1&2). Indeed, the qualifications for elders (overseers) and deacons are specified for men (1 Timothy 3:1ff).

These boundaries are to be received joyfully as a reflection of God’s wisdom for his people. There is freedom and protection in this design just as there is in all the boundaries God establishes. To push against this design is to push against the One responsible for those designs.

Q: How would you evaluate the fidelity of your denomination as a whole and its member churches individually regarding the Bible’s teaching on men and women?

A: As a whole, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has made constitutional the matter of male headship in general and the specific requirement that sacred office (elder and deacon) be filled by biblically qualified men. That is, this biblical prescription is part of The PCA’s Book of Church Order (BCO) and therefore must be honored by every PCA church, session, and presbytery. Every elder in the PCA makes sacred vows that he both believes and will uphold these biblical

standards as a condition of his ordination. If a PCA church violates these standards it is subject to discipline by the presbytery or General Assembly.

Q: What direction would you like to see your denomination head regarding the Bible’s teaching on men and women?

A: I would like all of the churches of the PCA to teach well the biblical order of creation and the goodness of God’s design for men and women and how that design plays out in families and the church. I know that many of our churches do that. The members of our churches need biblical instruction so that they can understand the goodness of God’s design for leadership in the family and church.

Some of our ministers have left the PCA for egalitarian denominations. My concern is that, in at least some of those cases, ordained PCA ministers have not personally held to the standards they have vowed to both believe and teach. ✕

Todd Pruitt has been the Lead Pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Harrisonburg, Virginia since 2013. Todd is also cohost of the *Mortification of Sin* podcast and blog.

ANDREW BALLITCH

The State of Complementarianism in The Christian and Missionary Alliance

Q: What do you believe the Bible teaches about God’s design for men and women, particularly in the home and the church? How do you view the relationship between the Bible’s teaching on the proper order of the home and the proper order of the church?

A: The opening chapters of Genesis present men and women as designed by God with distinct, yet complimentary roles. This includes male headship in the home, headship that the New Testament extends to the sphere of the church as well. Proper male and female roles and functions in the home and church are both grounded explicitly in creation by the biblical authors. Headship means that leadership, provision, and protection are all primarily the responsibility of men. Women are to come alongside in submission with an emphasis on helping and nurturing. This in no way implies in-

equality or a hierarchy of importance. Nor is it a commentary on gifting or ability. Rather, it reflects *what* God intended for his glory and human flourishing and *how* he intended both the creation mandate and great commission to be fulfilled. Sin, of course, distorts what God declared good and sinful people rebel against his good purpose.

Q: What limits, if any, do you believe the Bible places on women serving in the church?

A: The Bible reserves the office of elder, with its unique teaching function, for qualified men. Paul makes this argument in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 from creation itself. He forbids women teaching or exercising authority over men, which are two overlapping categories. “Teaching” in the pastoral epistles is the authoritative transmission of truth, in this case, the specific exercise of authority. Authority

in general is entrusted to elders. Only men are to hold the office of elder, therefore, only men are to teach authoritatively in the church. And the church is the gathered assembly, the congregation, the collective local body of Christ. It is when the church is gathered that the Word of God is publicly proclaimed with the authority of the elders and only qualified men are to preach in this setting. Apart from this, women are free and ought to be encouraged to use their gifts, including the gift of teaching, for the edification of men and women and the building up of the body as a whole.

Q: How would you evaluate the fidelity of your denomination as a whole and its member churches individually regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women?

A: The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), as a denomination, has moved away from biblical fidelity on the roles of men and women in the church, while individual churches exist on a spectrum. At General Council 2023, delegates voted to extend ordination to women and to decouple the designation "pastor" from the office of "elder/overseer" and allow local churches to decide whether to use the title "pastor" for women. This position has been officially referred to in denominational circles as "soft complementarianism," because



women are not allowed to hold the office of elder, which due to C&MA polity precludes women from holding the position of lead or senior pastor as well. That said, women can perform any function, including preaching during gathered worship, under the oversight of elders. Some C&MA churches are upset because the 2023 changes are not seen as going far enough, some are excited and see the changes as representative of where the denomination is, others are ok with the change because local churches are not being asked to do anything they don't want to do, and still others are extremely concerned about what the changes mean for biblical authority and hermeneutics in the denomination. So there are C&MA egalitarians, complementarians, and everything in between at the local level.

"Our legacy of gospel preaching churches and great commission work is a stewardship many of us are burdened to protect and see continue."

The complicating factor is that the C&MA is a kind of hybrid between presbyterian and congregational ecclesiology, and every church is required to have a reversionary clause in its bylaws. Licensing and credentialing of ministers and property decisions in the case of a reversionary event are administered by elected district level committees, with unofficial influence from the National Office. Without getting any further into the weeds, it is not as simple as letting individual churches decide what to do with the title "pastor," at least not for those with convictions about the Bible's teaching on men and women.

Q: What direction would you like to see your denomination head regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women?

A: I would love to see my denomination adjust course back to faithfulness to the Bible on these issues. The C&MA, at least officially, had always held pastor/elder/overseer as a single New Testament office reserved for qualified men. Our legacy of gospel preaching churches and great commission work is a stewardship many of us are burdened to protect and see continue. This is the heart behind the 1:9 Alliance

(oneninealliance.org), an initiative born out disappointment over General Council 2023, concern over the troubling trajectory it brought to light, and a longing to keep people in the family and pulling in the right direction, even if that means going against the current right now. The changes made at Council were a wakeup call across the board. For those who pushed them and the National Office that facilitated them and promises that there is room for everyone in the new arrangement, it has become painfully clear that these are not merely policies and procedures that can be tinkered with without consequence, instead they represent fault lines between mutually exclusive ecclesiological positions with deep theological underpinnings. For those of us on the other side, the changes revealed maladies of which the debate over complementarianism is only a symptom and the urgent need for renewed engagement in the denomination. My prayer is that the Lord brings the C&MA out of this current moment of adversity more committed to the authority and sufficiency of his Word and more focused on his mission than ever. ✕

Andrew S. Ballitch (PhD, SBTS) is Associate Pastor of Preaching and Ministries at Westwood Alliance Church in Mansfield, Ohio (CMA).

The State of Complementarianism in the Anglican Church in North America

Q: What do you believe the Bible teaches about God's design for men and women, particularly in the home and the church? How do you view the relationship between the Bible's teaching on the proper order of the home and the proper order of the church?

A: The Bible teaches that God has designed men and women to be children of God, joint-heirs with Christ, and servants of God in the church and at home. In addition, though equal before God in both home and the church, God has different functions and responsibilities for the man and the woman. According to Scripture, the man is designed by God to be the head of the family at home as well as in the church. Headship in both the home and the church is a God-given prerogative under God's authority and Word.

I understand the desire of some people have women ordained, but as Christians we are under obligation to follow the teaching of the Bible which clearly prohibits it in 1 Timothy 2:12–15. Paul writes, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”

You hear echoes of the same injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:33–34, 37: “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should

be in submission, as the Law also says... If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.”

We should not allow tradition, feelings, sentiments, culture, reason, or experience overthrow the written Word of God. Sadly, that's the hermeneutic that liberals use to justify all their false teachings. It is unbecoming for Bible-believing Christians to deploy a similar strategy in doing what they feel like doing in the church of God. We must be careful not to rebel against God. God loves women and he has assigned them their proper roles in the church, and humility requires that they follow it gladly without complaining. The warning of Article XX of the 39 Articles of Religion of the Anglican Communion is apropos here, “It is not lawful for the church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.”

Q: What limits, if any, do you believe the Bible places on women serving in the church?

A: The woman is called to serve God in every way in the church except in the headship roles such as the diaconate, the priesthood, and the episcopacy. She can preach, teach, administer, and lead particular ministry responsibilities in the church except that of the leadership of the church as a whole.

Being “silent” in Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:33–34, 37 is neither misogynistic nor discriminatory and has never meant being *quiet in the church*, either historically or exegetically as the context shows. We know from Paul's note in 1 Corinthians 11 that women prayed and prophesied in the first century church when Paul wrote his letters (“But every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven” 1 Cor. 11:5). We also know that women participated in other forms of Christian



“Ultimately, ordination is not about gender roles, but about the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.”

ministry in Philippi. Notice the Apostle’s instruction to the Philippian Christians in Philippians 4:2–3: “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

So we can then deduce from the foregoing that the “quiet” or “silence” stated by the same Apostle Paul has to do with authority over the church rather than all forms of ministry activity in the church. In fact, Paul was clear that women should “not have authority over men” in the church. Authority is what is given to the ordinand when he is ordained by the Bishop. It’s very clear. I’m a Bishop and that’s what I do when I ordain — I give the ordinand authority to lead the church, which is what the Bible says I shouldn’t give to women.

Q: How would you evaluate the fidelity of your denomination as a whole and its member churches individually regarding the Bible’s teaching on men and women?

A: The Anglican Churches around the world in general, with few exceptions, have been rebellious and abysmally unfaithful to the divine standards and teaching in regard to the subordinate and complementa-

ry role of women in church leadership. As the late Anglican theologian Dr. J.I. Packer wrote in *Christianity Today* several years ago, “The present-day pressure to make women presbyters owes more to secular, pragmatic, and social factors than to any regard for biblical authority.” In addition, pastoral sensitivity towards women who have been oppressed by men in the church (patriarchy) has been cited as a good reason to sidestep the teaching of Scripture on this issue. In this regard the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger are instructive: “We wish to make it clear that departure from the Church’s teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral.”

Q: What direction would you like to see your denomination head regarding the Bible’s teaching on men and women?

A: The ACNA began in 2009 by bringing a diverse group of Anglicans together, some who support the ordination of women and many who do not. The Anglican Diocese of All Nations has reaffirmed by resolution that ordination in our diocese will be reserved for men only, and that this diocese will not ordain women to holy orders, now or in the future. We also affirm and bless women in the various other roles and ministries to which

God calls them in homes and in church, and we thank God for the backbone they are in the diocese and shared ministry. We hold this view because we believe that this is the teaching of Scripture. Ultimately, ordination is not about gender roles, but about the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. We must stand by the teaching of the Bible in all things rather than follow the unfortunate contemporary Jeffersonian trend of cutting out what we don’t want from Scripture or picking what we want from Scripture whenever it suits our fancy. In September 2017 the College of Bishops of ACNA stated that “[We] acknowledge that this practice is a recent innovation to Apostolic Tradition and Catholic Order. We agree that there is insufficient scriptural warrant to accept women’s ordination to the priesthood as standard practice throughout the Province.” Biblical consistency is a necessary component of godly integrity.

My hope is that the Anglican Communion, especially the evangelicals who claim submission to Scripture, will actually take the Scriptures seriously and gladly obey its teaching by stopping the ordination of women to the diaconate, priesthood, and the episcopacy. As someone wrote recently, “Our feelings or social convention must give way to the Bible itself and its historical exegetical practice” on this matter, which is, the ordination of qualified and godly men only to the three orders of ministry. <

The Rt Rev’d Dr Felix Orji (OSB, DMin, MDiv, DipCS, MEd, BA.Ed, DD, ECCK) is Diocesan Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of All Nations, Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) in Houston, Texas.

“We must stand by the teaching of the Bible in all things... Biblical consistency is a necessary component of godly integrity.”

The State of Complementarianism in Evangelical Free Church of America

Editor's Note: We posed the following four questions on complementarianism to a variety of leaders in several evangelical denominations. While the majority responded directly to the questions, the following article is a summary response:

1. What do you believe the Bible teaches about God's design for men and women, particularly in the home and the church? How do you view the relationship between the Bible's teaching on the proper order of the home and the proper order of the church?
2. What limits, if any, do you believe the Bible places on women serving in the church?
3. How would you evaluate the fidelity of your denomination as a whole and its member churches individually regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women?

4. What direction would you like to see your denomination head regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women?

ORDINATION

In the EFCA, "the Conference shall be the highest decision-making body of the EFCA" (EFCA Bylaws), which consists of qualified delegates from EFCA churches, under the authority of the Word of God and in submission to the Lord and Head of the church, Jesus Christ. The EFCA position, as determined by the Conference, is that ordination is reserved for qualified men, not women, which is grounded in our understanding of the biblical texts of Scripture (cf. Gen. 1–3; 1 Cor. 11:2–16; 14:33b–36; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18–19; 1 Tim. 2:8–15; 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet. 3:1–7). This is stated explicitly in Ministerial Credentialing in

the Evangelical Free Church of America: "This credential [Certificate of Ordination] may be issued to male candidates . . ."¹

Ordination, as defined by the Conference, means the following: "Ordination in The Evangelical Free Church of America is the act of publicly setting a person apart for Christian ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands by others in ministry and the leadership of the local church; thus recognizing God's call on his life; his gifts and training for ministry; his commitment to teach and preach the sacred Scriptures."¹

Ordination focuses on "pastoral ministry," i.e., the role, implicitly those serving in the role of pastor/elder/overseer, and also the function, that of "preaching and teaching the Word." This is what is stated for the Certificate of Ordination (COO): "This credential is designed for qualified males who serve in pastoral ministry in the local church whose primary ministry responsibility is preaching and teaching the Word . . . there are others who are also eligible to pursue a COO engaged in ministries outside the local church: seminary professors, chaplains, church planters, missionaries [church planters or teachers], institutional ministries, etc." This combines role ("qualified males who serve in pastoral ministry") and function ("whose primary ministry responsibility is preaching and teaching the Word") in the context of the church ("who serve in pastoral ministry in the local church"). In sum, the Certificate of Ordination is intended for "men" who are called to and gifted for "pastoral min-

istry," which consists of a "commitment to teach and preach the sacred Scriptures."

Women can and do serve in ministry, which is affirmed and valued, a commitment that arises from our complementarian convictions. The EFCA recognizes this by granting the Certificate of Christian Ministry to those engaged in qualifying ministries. This Certificate is not just for women, but it is also available for men who are in vocational ministry and are not ordained.

WHERE WE STAND IN THE EFCA

Over the past few years, through a series of questions asked, concerns raised, and criticisms made about or against the EFCA, a Declaration was written to state where the EFCA stands on the issues about which we were asked.² The document addresses eight issues, which were both prompted and limited by the issues raised.

This Declaration was approved by the Board of Directors and the Board of Ministerial Standing, the two boards that are elected by and accountable to the Conference. Subsequently, it was affirmed by the District Superintendents of the EFCA. As with all statements that are not formally approved by the Conference, this statement and the biblical-theological commentary are not binding on our churches, but it represents who we are as an association of churches.³

One of the issues addressed is the question about complementarianism and egalitarianism. What follows is the state-

¹"Credentialing in the EFCA," Evangelical Free Church of America, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://helps.efca.org/resources/credentialing-in-the-efca>.

²"Where We Stand in the EFCA: Denials and Affirmations," Evangelical Free Church of America, June 21, 2023, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://www.efca.org/where-we-stand-in-the-efca-denials-and-affirmations>.

³"Where We Stand in the EFCA: Denials and Affirmations: A Biblical-Theological Commentary" Evangelical Free Church of America, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://helps.efca.org/resources/where-we-stand-in-the-efca-denials-and-affirmations-a-biblical-theological-commentary-1>.

ment, that which we deny and that which we affirm, and the biblical-theological commentary:

Statement

We are not egalitarian in our understanding of the roles and functions of men and women in the church, but we do believe that the gifts and ministries of women are essential to the health and fruitfulness of churches and ought to be sought out and multiplied in ways that arise from and are consistent with our complementarian convictions, as reflected in our EFCA ordination policy.

Biblical-Theological Commentary

God, in his wisdom, created human beings in his image as male and female (Gen. 1:27). There is sameness in essence or being (ontology), since both are in the image of God, and there is distinction, since they are male and female. We believe this distinction in creation ought not to be ignored, but is significant and ought to be appreciated and valued.

The distinction between men and women can have no bearing on their oneness in Christ (Gal. 3:16-19) or on husbands and wives as “fellow heirs of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). Both men and women are equally valuable as persons created in the image of God and as recipients of the grace of God in Christ (1 Cor. 11:11-12; Gal. 3:28).

Within the context of marriage, the Bible teaches that the husband has a role of headship, analogous to that of Christ toward the church. This role calls the

husband to self-giving, sacrificial love toward his wife, in which he is to seek her welfare, and especially her spiritual well-being before God (Eph. 5:25-30; Col. 3:19; 1 Pet. 3:7). The appropriate response by the wife, and her responsibility, is submission to her husband (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; cf. also 1 Pet. 3:1; Tit. 2:3-5).

Submission is not in any way degrading for the Christian (cf. 2 Cor. 9:13; 1 Tim. 2:11; 1 Tim. 3:4), for all believers are called to submit to others in various contexts (Eph. 5:21), including to governing authorities (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13,14) and to leaders within the church (Heb. 13:17). Jesus himself was submissive to his earthly parents (Luke 2:51), to the earthly authorities (John 19:10,11), and to his heavenly Father (Matt. 26:39; John 5:30; 6:38; Phil. 2:8).

It is challenging today to hear the word submission without negative connotations. At times submission has been hurtful, and forced submission is always destructive. However, our understanding and application of submission must be grounded in and guided by Scripture. God’s divine design and order are “very good” (Gen. 1:31), and for all to submit joyfully to this truth is the God-ordained means by which we all flourish. It is the gospel alone that enables us to see this and empowers us to live it.

Submission in this larger context refers to a woman’s worshipful learning in the context of the local church and under the authority of the el-



ders/pastors, not to every man nor in every context (1 Tim. 2:11). One translation captures this notion: “Let a woman receive training in a quiet demeanor with complete respect for order.” Even though this requires further explanation, it conveys submission to the biblical order of God’s design for men and women that was universal in the churches (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

The local church operates as a community modeled in some sense on the extended family household (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15; 5:1,2,16). The office of elder/pastor reflects that of the husband/father in the family unit (cf. 1 Tim. 3:4-5). As shepherds of God’s flock, these men have the primary responsibility for the spiritual oversight of the church family, including

the proper teaching of the Word of God and protection from false doctrine. In the EFCA, ordination is the recognition by the broader church of a man’s calling, character, and competence to fulfill this pastoral office and function.

Both women and men have important contributions to make to the church in corporate worship (1 Cor. 11:4; 14:26), and in teaching and theological training (Acts 18:26; Tit. 2:1-15). The biblical limitation of women from “teaching or having authority over a man” in the context of instructions for Christian worship (1 Tim. 2:11,12) is not simply a cultural necessity limited in application to the particular circumstances of the church in Ephesus. Rather, this provision is grounded in the created

“We need all the gifts to be exercised according to God’s divinely-given order in the church.”

order (2:13,14; cf. 1 Cor. 11:2-16) and assigns to the elders of the church the responsibility for doctrinal fidelity (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), reflecting the notion of male “headship” in the household. This principle is reflected in the EFCA policy of reserving ordination to qualified men, while qualified women are eligible for other ministerial credentials.

Women have always had a very important role in the life of the church as evidenced by the many references to women as fellow-workers in the gospel in the letters of Paul (cf., e.g., Rom. 16:1-15; Phil. 4:2-3; Acts 18:26), and in the history of the Free Church women have served in prominent roles as evangelists and missionaries. The contribution of women to the work of the church today cannot be overstated. We need all the gifts to be exercised according to God’s divinely-given order in the church (1 Cor. 12; 14:40; 1 Pet. 4:10). Therefore, women as well as men need to be equipped and trained for gospel

work, and the ministry of women in the church ought to be encouraged and appreciated.

LOCAL CHURCH AND ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES: AUTONOMY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

The EFCA is “an association and fellowship of autonomous but interdependent congregations of like faith and congregational government.”⁴ As with all other associations of churches structured around congregational polity, we experience a tension between autonomy and interdependence. Too much autonomy results in independence. Too much mandated interdependency results in external authoritarianism.

Over the past many years, we have adopted credentialing policies, held conferences, and made statements that affirm the complementarian understanding of the Scriptures. This position is affirmed by the vast majority of those who participated in our five-year Doctrinal Survey in 2023 (the results are not yet posted), which consisted of all senior or lead pastors (not all are cre-

denialed) and all EFCA credentialed leaders (not all are in EFCA ministries): 90.4% affirmed complementarianism, which remained the same from our 2018 Doctrinal Survey.⁵ At the same time, we also strongly affirm “that the gifts and ministries of women are essential to the health and fruitfulness of churches and ought to be sought out and multiplied in ways that arise from and are consistent with our complementarian convictions.” For example, Prepared, a gospel-centered, systematic, two-year program for women in ministry, provides an opportunity for women in the EFCA to be trained biblically and theologically, to be equipped and prepared to serve the Lord and others faithfully and fruitfully in ministry in the local church. This ministry is grounded in and guided by our complementarian convictions.⁶

Even with this Conference decision and the other statements made, there is a tension with congregationalism. As a denomination, we are complementarian, but local churches are not required to be complementarian in their polity. Because we engage in ministry in both the now and the not-yet of the kingdom, there is no pure church, and thus we are not a pure association of churches. But even with the tension of our congregational polity — our autonomy and interdependence — we remain committed to doctrinal purity (biblical truth/the gospel) and relational unity (a manifestation of the truth/gospel in life and ministry), and we seek to affirm and implement our complementarian convictions faithfully and joyfully.

Based on the Conference decision, only

qualified men can be ordained, those who are called to and gifted for “pastoral ministry,” primarily the role of senior or lead pastor, which consists of a “commitment to teach and preach the sacred Scriptures” (the function of pastor/elder/overseer). This means the EFCA is prescriptively complementarian. And based on the fact the vast majority of our senior or lead pastors and credentialed leaders affirm complementarianism, as evidenced in the 90.4% response in the Doctrinal Survey, we are also descriptively complementarian (results of our Doctrinal Survey do not carry the same weight as the Conference decision or the biblical-theological exposition. Biblical truth is not determined by a majority perspective. But the results reflect that the great majority of EFCA senior or lead pastors and those credentialed in the EFCA confirm [descriptive] the EFCA’s complementarian convictions [prescriptive]).

In conclusion, we affirm complementarian ekklesiai and congregational order and ardor, which is grounded in the Word of God, and guided by biblical principles, theological practices, and pastoral wisdom. In keeping with Christ’s precedent, direction, and mission, optimal realization of personal and corporate love for God in Christ and true flourishing occurs. This is manifested in the synergy of women’s and men’s shared walk with Christ, promotion of each other, devotion to each other, and self-sacrifice for Christ’s sake. Complementarian convictions and practice — the order revealed by God and the ardor empowered by the Holy Spirit — seek to maximize the transformative

⁴ “EFCA Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws,” Evangelical Free Church of America, June 21, 2023, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://helps.efca.org/resources/efca-articles-of-incorporation-and-bylaws>.

⁵ “EFCA Doctrinal Survey Results (2018),” Evangelical Free Church of America, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://helps.efca.org/resources/efca-doctrinal-survey-results-2018>.

⁶ “Prepared,” Evangelical Free Church of America, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://prepared.ministries.efca.org>.

power of the gospel and joy of the Lord by living out those convictions and practices, exuding an aroma of Christ.



Greg Strand is Executive Director of Theology and Credentialing for the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA).

JASON K. ALLEN



Advocates, Not Merely Adherents:

Lay-of-the Land Observations and Challenges for Complementarians

Editor's Note: This article is a transcript of Dr. Jason Allen's CBMW Banquet Address at the 75th Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas.

My first encounter with the Danvers Statement and CBMW was in the late 1990s. I was a young man in college, and I was at my church, a rather large Southern Baptist church, and I was talking to a staff member in his office, and I saw on his bookshelf a big, thick, blue book that said *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. There were two names on it: Wayne Grudem and John Piper. I had heard the latter name, not the former. But I had never heard of the topics to which that book was addressing. And I asked the staff member, "What is this book

about?" And he said, "Well, it's about complementarianism," and I responded, "What in the world is that?" And he began to unpack it just a little bit to me that summer afternoon, and I stood there really mystified by the whole reality. I grew up in a conservative home and a conservative church, and I knew that generally, men were supposed to lead in the home, and in the church, and that women were not to preach, but little more than that.

As a college student in the late 1990s, the whole topic struck me as an awkward anachronism, a doctrinal hot potato, an angular, often inconvenient truth to which we were to hold. But I sensed then that men and ministers both would speak of these things only when necessary,

and then do so only uncomfortably. And when it was necessary to speak to them, it would usually be with some glib, throw-away line along the lines that, “When we got married, I told my wife I would make all the major decisions, but in 30 years of marriage, there has never been a major decision!” That was my encounter and my understanding of complementarianism in the late 1990s.

Then you move into the early 2000s, and a huge surge of awareness — thanks to CBMW primarily — took place. The TNIV pushback even had leading voices arguing for a return to the phrase and the concept of “biblical patriarchy,” a call to recover that term. That concept and the room seemed set. And it seemed as though this renewal of Reformed theology, the New Calvinism, that complementarianism was really part and parcel of that movement. Yet over the past five to ten years, it seems to me that we have had a swing of momentum: self-inflicted wounds; moral failings by leaders; crudeness and rudeness on social media and other places; militant egalitarianism that is always on the hunt for a complementarian to shoot down. All of this and more presents those of us who are complementarians with significant challenges.

Then we come to my own denomination — speaking of challenges — the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). In recent years, the issue has become fever pitch. It really burst just a few years ago when Beth Moore tweeted in the lead-up to Mother’s Day that she would be preaching. And that set off a conflagration. Then, of course, more recently, Rick Warren announced an exegetical breakthrough, not just permitting women to preach and to lead in the church, but *necessitating* they do so.

Before us now is the Law Amendment that many of you have heard about, and read about — an admittedly blunt instrument, but seemingly a necessary one. And some of those opposed to it are making the argument that sounds something like this: “This is a red herring in our convention, because only a handful of churches are in danger of being afoul of the BF&M 2000. But if we adopt it, we will alienate an intolerably high number of churches that would then be outside of the BF&M 2000.” Well, which is it? We are a free church denomination, and we understand that swapping inconsistent nomenclature is part of that cooperation. We seek to find reasons to work together, not to come apart. But our response should be to educate, not to excuse, to reaffirm and rearticulate, not to shrug off, not to say things like, “On the one hand, these issues are rooted in the created order, but as long as we do not violate it too often, then it is no big deal.”

FOUR OBSERVATIONS ON THE LAY OF THE LAND

In what follows, I will make four observations as I see the lay of the land, and then bring six words of challenge to card-carrying complementarians.

1. America is spiraling into greater darkness than any of us fully realize.

I was in the United Kingdom recently for our acquisition of a Spurgeon collection at MBTS. I was in the London area in a car with a minister from there. We were at a red light, and to the left of the light was a large building with a sign. On the sign was a man — clearly a man with large muscles and a beard, exuding masculinity in every way by the muscles and the facial hair —

wearing lingerie. The minister said to me, “You know, Jason, America has exported that to us.” It struck me at that moment not only was he right, but he was tragically so, because until very recently we were on the receiving end of such exports: Europe sent us their nonsense. Now we are sending ours to them. We used to be the arsenal of democracy. We used to export virtue. Now we are the arsenal of hedonism, exporting perversion.

2. The greatest threat to complementarianism is not that we fail to persuade the culture, but that we fail to persuade our own families and churches.

In the lead-up to America’s interest in World War II, FDR famously observed that to be the President in these times required that the President be the Educator in Chief. And for us in the room who love our sons, daughters, spouses, congregations, and extended family, my great concern is not so much that the culture will not hear and heed, but that our own loved ones and our own churches are not hearing from us, and thus not heeding accordingly the clear teachings of Scripture.

3. There is no mushy middle.

Stop trying to find the mushy middle. If you want to see people looking for it, you do not have to attend a feminist conference these days. You just have to attend ETS. But there is, in the final analysis, no mushy middle. That phrase first hit me over a decade ago when I had just moved to Kansas City. I was visiting a couple of regional institutions that were in proximity to MBTS, and I was attempting to get to know those presidents. I did so partly out of curiosity and partly to be cordial. Well, one such institution I visited had a

female president, and on her office wall she had a picture of the Last Supper. But the scene was unique because the Last Supper portrait portrayed all the apostles and our Lord himself as women. Of course, I asked her about the painting. And she said, “Oh, it is no big deal. It is just a reminder that God loves women, too.” And I thought to myself: there are other ways to express this sentiment. We continued to talk candidly about her faculty, which I pointed out was clearly to the left of the denomination they were under. She said, “Jason, my plan is to hang out in the mushy middle as long as we can.” That is, of course, dishonorable, but it is also no longer tenable. There is no mushy middle.

4. We aren’t doing a good job of arguing for biblical complementarity on the merits.

Whenever these issues pop up in the social media sphere or any other sphere in which we find ourselves, we are inclined to give acknowledgment and support of these issues, but to always come with a caveat. We say something like, “Well, he should have said it nicer. Could have had a better tone. Yes, but . . . I wouldn’t have said it that way.” We have got to find our footing and argue for the issues on the *merits* themselves.

SIX CHALLENGES FOR CARD-CARRYING COMPLEMENTARIANS

Now that I have shared four observations, I have six challenges for card-carrying complementarians.

1. As leaders, we must die to the idol of reputation.

The quicker that we die to the idol of rep-

utation, the better position we will be in to honor the Lord in our ministries and to honor the Lord in our theological and biblical standards. If you care what random people at ETS think, you are not in a good place. If you care what random people at SBL think, you are in a *really* bad place. The Lord is kind and knows my heart. At the end of the day, if I am honorable before the Lord, my wife, my family, the elders and fellow members of my church, and my close colleagues — that is who ultimately matters. And it does not matter one bit what people on social media think or what people who are pre-committed to hate complementarianism believe anyway. And the quicker we get to that place in our lives, the better we will be. My challenge to you is to die to the idol of reputation.

2. As leaders, we must resist the temptation to engage in what I refer to as rhetorical Hagarism.

What is rhetorical Hagarism? We know the story in Genesis 16, where God had made a promise to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham would be the father of a great nation. That promise was looking rather dim, given their advanced age. His “helpful” wife Sarah came up with a plan. She brought a woman, Hagar, to help God out. And we know the tragedy that followed. At times we are tempted to feel that if we could just say things a little nicer, a little better, a little sweeter, if we could just get the tone perfect, *then* the culture will understand; then the broader evangelical world would understand. Yes, we are to speak the truth

in love, brothers and sisters. But we must understand that, given the issues we stand for, given the topics and textual debates that CBMW speaks to, there is no tone that is perfect for our culture or for what falls under the label of evangelicalism.

As leaders, we must defend these biblical views on the merits. It is God’s design, and it is good. It is good for marriage. It is good for the family. It is good for the church. And yes, it is good for society. Otto von Bismarck famously said, “Political genius is hearing the hoofbeat of history and then leaping to catch the passing horsemen by the coattails.” Our culture has made the leap and, in the main, evangelicalism has or is making the leap. Let us be the ones who cheerfully, confident-

ly say, “Heavens no! We are not going to make that leap, because to make that leap would be to divide God’s word and to dishonor God himself.”

3. Prioritize our own families and churches first.

Over the culture and more broadly, the social and political realm, I believe any renewal will come by building from the *inside-out* and from the *bottom-up*. Evangelicalism and all that is crammed under that label these days has mostly lost its mind. What we need is for sons and daughters to see dads that love and lead their families and their churches, to see godly men who preach the word and graciously lead, who hold forth these texts and these truths — not with timidity and



embarrassment, but with confidence and with comfort, knowing it is God's standard and it is good.

4. Be willing to let our confessional commitments define our coalitions and not vice versa.

We must have the theological self-confidence to be okay with letting our confessional commitments define our coalitions, to love the truth enough to speak it and to believe it, and to contend for it, while understanding that not everyone is going to agree with us. Even erstwhile brothers and sisters are not going to be okay with this. Winston Churchill famously chided Neville Chamberlain in the context of the Munich appeasement by saying of Chamberlain: "He had the choice between war and dishonor. He chose dishonor; he shall have war." We may have the choice between dishonor and division in our own denominational/ecclesial circles. Let us choose honor because division will likely come regardless.

5. Fight for personal holiness.

There is a crudeness in our culture, a comfort with sin, a perversion that is around us and often amidst us. And I beg of us not to normalize that, not to celebrate that, not to choose as normal entertainment that which dishonors our Lord. Because doing so compromises our own integrity and our own inner desires, whether we realize it or not. We must guard our lives. Every moral failing, every crude comment, every unkind tweet gives our critics a club with which they hit not just us, but our church and the Lord himself. Let us be the first and loudest to advocate for personal holiness, to guard our marriages, to hon-

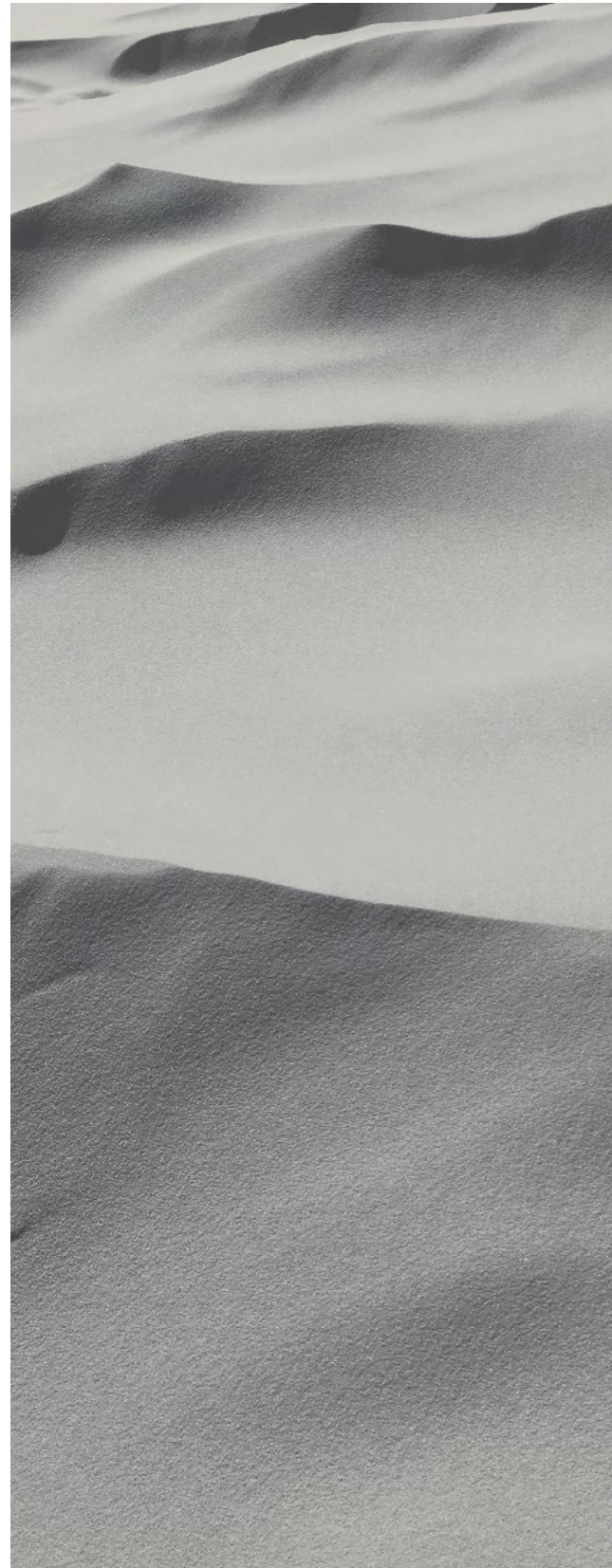
or the women in our lives, to cherish our wives, to protect our daughters, and to appropriately uplift and honor the women in our lives and in our churches.

6. We must differentiate between adherence and advocacy, and not settle for the former.

I really want to drive this final point home. *We are called to be advocates, not just affirmers. We are called to be articulators, not just adherents.* Compromise usually begins with silence. It ends with disavowal. And we must have an ear for the silence. Yes, each of us will have different ministry passions or commitments. But we must keep before us an ever-present awareness that these issues are being threatened by the day, in our families and in our churches, and we must be those who are willing to confidently and cheerfully speak and advocate to these great truths, especially as codified in the Danvers and Nashville Statements. Silence often is deafening.

This really resonated with me a few years ago when I was given a referral for a potential faculty member of an accomplished scholar who teaches at a well-known but thoroughly evangelical, thoroughly egalitarian institution. And this person was looking to leave and came to me, highly recommended by a friend in ministry. And my friend said, "You should consider hiring X. He can sign all of your confessional statements." At Midwestern Seminary, we have the Baptist Faith & Message, the Chicago Statement, the Danvers Statement, and the Nashville Statement. My friend assured me that this scholar could sign all of them.

Well, we did not really have an opening for this scholar. I was not looking, but I



was really curious. I thought, "How do you teach at this egalitarian institution for all these years and happily exist there, if you really can, at the same time, eagerly, wholeheartedly, sign our statements." So I did a little digging, just out of personal curiosity. I looked at books and articles this scholar had written, tweets that had been shared, sermons and lectures that were given. And for the life of me, I could not find anything from his public ministry anywhere that indicated an adherence to our statements. As someone making hires at a conservative, evangelical institution, there is no way I am going to hire some person — though they give a great assurance that they affirm our statements — who has never been moved throughout a long public ministry to ever advocate for these great truths. Such a person might be where they need to be when their job is on the line. Such a person will not be where they need to be when the institution is under fire over these issues.

Rufus Fears has famously said, "The difference between a politician and statesman is the politician has an antenna and a statesman has a compass." God has given us a great compass: the Word of God. Scripture speaks so clearly to these issues as summarized so beautifully and so clearly in the Danvers Statement and the Nashville Statement. Let us be men and women who are hopeful and cheerful, yet confident and clear about these great truths that we hold so dear. And may we be faithful to not just *adhere* to them, but to *advocate* for them in this generation. ✕

Dr. Jason K. Allen is the President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Side by Side:

Complementarity in
Ministry with
Anne Dutton and
George Whitefield



George Whitefield (1714–1770) may have preached the good news of the gospel to more people than anyone before him in history, but on October 29, 1747, he had tragic news to report. From a small town in South Carolina, he penned a heartfelt letter to a dear friend, explaining that her husband's ship had foundered at sea. There were no survivors. The subject of the letter was a Baptist pastor from rural England who was returning home after raising funds for his church through a preaching tour in the American colonies.¹ The pastor's wife, Anne Dutton (1692–1765), was now widowed for the second time. Dutton was a valuable contributor to Whitefield's growing transatlantic network of evangelicals, so the itinerant preacher sought to comfort her, even inviting her to live with his family when they returned to England.² Such an offer revealed the depth of their relationship and Whitefield's personal concern for his friend, who had labored side by side with him in the gospel (cf. Phil. 4:2) in her own unique way.

While Whitefield's contributions to the Evangelical Awakening are well known,³ Dutton is perhaps less familiar to modern readers, despite being one of the most published females of the eighteenth century.⁴ She authored more than fifty works and published hundreds of letters, demonstrating a combination of theological acumen, spiritual wisdom, and fervent piety that came to be appreciated on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵ How did a Baptist pastor's wife in a remote English village contribute to the evangelistic labors of the most celebrated preacher of her day? This article briefly examines the ministry partnership of George Whitefield and Anne Dutton, noting how it proved to be intentional, consequential, and mutually beneficial.

AN INTENTIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Although Dutton believed she possessed a divine call to the

¹ The pastor was Benjamin Dutton (1691–1747). For more, see Matthew D. Haste, "The Fall and Rise of Benjamin Dutton: An Early Evangelical Narrative of Conversion and Holiness," *Journal of Andrew Fuller Studies*, no. 8 (Spring 2024): 27–44. Both Benjamin and his wife wrote spiritual autobiographies that supply details on their life together: Anne Dutton, *A Brief Account of the Gracious Dealings of God, with a Poor, Sinful, Unworthy Creature, in Three Parts, in Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton: Eighteenth-Century, British-Baptist, Woman Theologian*, vol. 3, *Autobiography*, ed. JoAnn Ford Watson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), 1–251; Benjamin Dutton, *The Superaboundings of the Exceeding Riches of God's Free Grace towards the Chief of the Chief of Sinners* (London: J. Hart, 1743).

² "This is indeed a heavy stroke," he wrote, "But omnipotence can enable you to bear it. Now is the time to prove the strength of Jesus Christ." Letter of condolence from George Whitefield to Mrs. Anne Dutton, October 29, 1747, Huntingdonshire Archives, UK. Whitefield's letter informing Anne of Benjamin's death is included with the will of Benjamin Dutton. Whitefield generously closed the letter as follows: "I can only say that if our Lord brings me to England next year, you shall be heartily welcome to live with me. My dear yokefellow joins most cordially in this invitation. I hope you will accept it."

ministry of writing, she recognized the unique obstacles a female author faced in the eighteenth century.⁶ She published under various pseudonyms and penned an *apologia* on the subject that demonstrated her circumspect approach to writing as a woman.⁷ While affirming that Scripture forbade women from “public authoritative teaching in the church,”⁸ she argued that her written works were a form of private instruction that did not violate such prohibitions. As such, her publications followed the biblical precedent of Priscilla’s private instruction to Apollos (alongside her husband in Acts 18:26), and provided a legitimate way for her to edify her brothers and sisters in Christ (in accordance with biblical exhortations such as Romans 14:19).⁹ As she assured her readers, her only design in publishing her works was “the glory of God and the good of souls.”¹⁰ Thus, she exhorted her detractors, “Imagine then, my dear friend, when my books come to your houses, that I am come to give you a visit; (for indeed by them I do) . . . Who knows but the Lord may ordain strength out of the babe’s mouth and give you a visit himself, by so weak a worm, to your strong consolation?”¹¹

Whitefield involved women in various ways in his revival work, but as Thomas Kidd has noted, he “never seems to have seriously entertained the possibility of allowing women to assume official pastoral positions.”¹² In Dutton’s case, Whitefield intentionally expanded her influence within his transatlantic network as he grew to trust her as a spiritual



guide.¹³ To this end, he exhorted her to write to particular individuals and sought appropriate ways to bring her wisdom to a broader audience — such as helping her writings get published in evangelical periodicals and having her letters read aloud at the London Tabernacle.¹⁴

A CONSEQUENTIAL PARTNERSHIP

Dutton first initiated her correspondence with Whitefield because she desired to express her support after reading the accounts of his early travels.¹⁵ The evangelist grew to appreciate Dutton through her book *Walking with God*, which became a popular devotional resource among his friends in America.¹⁶ In the subsequent years, Whitefield asked her to correspond with various people associated with his ministry.¹⁷ Through these connections, Dutton

³ Key biographical resources on Whitefield include Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale, 2014); Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); and Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, 2 vols. (London: Banner of Truth, 1970, 1980).

⁴ The majority of Dutton’s works are now available in a seven-volume set: JoAnn Ford Watson, ed., *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton: Eighteenth-Century, British-Baptist, Woman Theologian* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003–2015). Key biographical studies on Dutton include the following: Michael A. G. Haykin, *8 Women of Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 53–65; Michael D. Sciretti Jr., “Feed My Lambs: The Spiritual Direction Ministry of Calvinistic British Baptist Anne Dutton During the Early Years of the Evangelical Revival” (PhD thesis, Baylor University, 2009). See also my work on Dutton in Matthew D. Haste, *Helped on Our Way to Heaven: Eighteenth-Century English Baptists on Marriage*, Monographs in Baptist History (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023).

⁵ The London publisher John Lewis (d. 1755) said of Dutton, “I believe [she] is as eminent a saint, and as useful a member (in her sphere) in the Church-Militant, as any our Lord has.” John Lewis to Thomas Prince Sr., August 20, 1743, Davis MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society, cited in Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 286.

⁶ For more see Helen M. Jones, “A Spiritual Aristocracy: Female Patrons of Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck W. Lovegrove (New York: Routledge, 2002), 85.

⁷ See Anne Dutton, *A Letter to Such of the Servants of Christ, who May have any Scruple about the Lawfulness of Printing Any Thing Written by a Woman* (1743), in Watson, *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 3:253–58.

⁸ Dutton, *Letter about Lawfulness of Printing by a Woman*, 3:254.

⁹ In a different letter, she reiterated this point, “No teaching or preaching Christ is forbidden to private Christians but that which peculiarly refers to the ministry of the Gospel, or the public ministration thereof in the church. All other ways of preaching Christ and his truths to all, are duties incumbent upon all believers. And printing, sir, is a private way of saints’ instructing, comforting, and edifying one another.” Anne Dutton, “Letter XVI,” in Watson, *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 1:125.

¹⁰ Dutton, *Letter about Lawfulness of Printing by a Woman*, 3:254.

¹¹ Dutton, *Letter about Lawfulness of Printing by a Woman*, 3:257.

¹² Kidd, *America’s Spiritual Founding Father*, 143.

¹³ After their first face-to-face visit, Whitefield reported to his colleague Jonathan Barber (1712–1783), “Her conversation is as weighty as her letters.” Barber provided pastoral oversight at Bethesda, the orphan house Whitefield started near Savannah, Georgia. George Whitefield, “Letter 306,” in *Letters of George Whitefield: For the Period 1734–1742* (1771; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 280.

¹⁴ In one letter, after listing various individuals by name, Whitefield concluded, “Pray answer them. I would have your correspondence enlarged.” George Whitefield, “Letter 464,” in *Letters*, 449. The *London Weekly Papers* and the monthly “Letter-Days” at the London Tabernacle were each instrumental in supplying revival news from abroad to evangelicals in England.

¹⁵ “When I first heard of you,” she wrote, “. . . my Heart was knit to you; and I could not bear to think that such a dear Servant should be raised up, and such a great Work done in the World by him, without signifying my Heart-Union with the one, and my Joy in the other.” Cited in Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 261.

¹⁶ George Whitefield, “Letter 267,” in *Letters*, 250. Whitefield mentioned how he and others in South Carolina had benefited from this book.

¹⁷ According to Watson, Dutton wrote at least seven letters to Whitefield and ten letters to his various associates at his request. Watson, introduction to *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 1:x.

exchanged letters of spiritual encouragement with a broad range of individuals, including a bookseller in Scotland, members of an orphan house in Georgia, and a group of converted slaves in South Carolina.¹⁸

When Whitefield traveled through England in the summer of 1741 to raise funds for his orphan house, he preached at Great Gransden, and the Duttons hosted him in their home. Though they were influenced by the hyper-Calvinist tradition in their early years, their relationship with Whitefield indicates that their application of the doctrines of grace was more in line with Evangelical Calvinism.¹⁹ While many Baptists remained skeptical of the Revival, Benjamin traveled to Wales to partner with Howell Harris (1714–1773) and preached in America alongside Whitefield's associates.²⁰ For her part, Anne sided with Whitefield in print by publicly opposing the theology of John Wesley (1703–1791) during the so-called “Free Grace Controversy.”²¹ A close reading of Anne's letters to Wesley demonstrates the correspondence between her theology and that of Whitefield.²²

A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIP

The letters exchanged between Whitefield and Dutton reflect mutual respect and a desire to encourage one another in their respective ministries.²³ Dutton urged the evangelist, whom she considered the “eminent instrument in this glorious work of reformation,”²⁴ toward perseverance in his itinerant ministry, envisioning herself as holding up his hands in service to the Lord.²⁵ In at least one letter, she comforted him in the midst of a particular season of

¹⁸ For the latter, see Anne Dutton, *A Letter to the Negroes Lately Converted to Christ in America*, in Watson, *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 5:363.

¹⁹ I explore this issue in a forthcoming volume entitled *The Theological Tracts of Anne Dutton* (Peterborough, Ontario: H&E, forthcoming).

²⁰ On Benjamin's ministry in America, Anne recorded, “His labours in the gospel of Christ, were blest for the edification of the saints, and for the conversion of some sinners, not less than eleven or twelve souls.” Dutton, *A Brief Account*, 3:240. The money he raised was sent back to Gransden on a separate vessel.

²¹ For an overview, see Kidd, *America's Spiritual Founding Father*, 78–83.

²² Anne Dutton, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley in Vindication of the Doctrines of Absolute, Unconditional Election, Particular Redemption, Special Vocation, and Final Perseverance* (London: John Hart, 1742), in Watson, *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 1:63. Compare with George Whitefield, “A Letter to John Wesley,” in George Whitefield's Journals (London: Banner of Truth, 1960), 575.

²³ There are at least five letters from Whitefield addressed to Dutton. In the Banner of Truth reprint of his letters, they are numbered as letter 96, 267, 301, 361, 464 respectively.

²⁴ This description of Whitefield appears in Anne Dutton, *A Caution Against Error, When it Springs up Together with Truth. In a Letter to a Friend*, in Watson, *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 6:205.

²⁵ Cited in Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 266.



Matthew D. Haste is Associate Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Biblical Counseling, and Director of Professional Doctoral Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

suffering, which may have coincided with the death of his son.²⁶ In each letter, she reiterated her support of his ministry and affirmed their shared theological convictions.²⁷

Whitefield's confidence in Dutton allowed him to share with her the burdens of his soul.²⁸ He also prayed for her work and encouraged her to continue her ministry of letter writing. He recognized that enlisting Dutton to correspond with others multiplied his own ministry. As Michael Sciretti summarized, "Faced with the reality of his own incapability to correspond and counsel a growing number of men, women, and children clamoring for his spiritual wisdom, Whitefield viewed Dutton as a worthy substitute."²⁹ In this way, their friendship formed a remarkable relationship between a man and a woman for the time.

The ministry partnership of George Whitefield and Anne Dutton was intentional, consequential, and mutually beneficial. Each person contributed to the Evangelical Awakening in a unique way, strengthened by the spiritual bond between them. Whitefield traveled the English-speaking world, preaching to thousands. Dutton lived her entire life within a hundred miles of her birthplace but sent her books abroad.³⁰ They labored in the gospel together, each seeking to multiply their ministries through biblically appropriate means, and they provide a thoughtful example for the church today. ✕

²⁶ Sciretti, "Feed My Lambs," 265.

²⁷ See, for example, her arguments against Wesley's perfectionism in Anne Dutton, *A Letter from Mrs. Anne Dutton to the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield*, in Watson, *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 1:4.

²⁸ Whitefield, "Letter 267," 250.

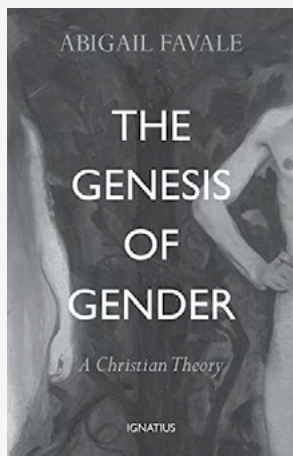
²⁹ Sciretti, "Feed My Lambs," 259.

³⁰ She explained her hope for her books in a letter to a friend: "When, therefore, we print books for the use of the saints or reproof of sinners, let us do it just as if we were going to give every one of the persons into whose hands the books may fall a private visit, and to have a little talk with each one by himself in his own private house. And let us pray the Lord to go with us into every place where our books may come, and bless his great Name for the wisdom and goodness of his providence in finding out his way to extend our conversation and usefulness to thousands, which otherwise must necessarily have been limited to a few." Dutton, "Letter XVI," 1:125.

BOOK

REVIEWS

Review of *The Genesis of Gender*



Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2022.

Abigail Favale has written a book that does many things at once. Formerly a professor in feminist theory, Favale's book is some parts memoir, other parts historical survey; some parts polemic against the cultural revolution, other parts invitation into the mystery of Christianity. It's difficult to review a book like this. One could focus on Favale's stinging critique of the so-called "gender paradigm" — that is, the "radically constructivist view of reality, then reifies it as truth, demanding that others assent to its veracity and adopt its language." Or one could focus on her stimulating diagnoses of transgenderism, or still more. She not only explains concepts that are often befuddling to lay readers not well-versed in the talmudic textual world of gender theory, but gives her readers the *feel* for why these things are so compelling in the first place.

I write this review as a convictional evangelical Protestant, writing to other evangelicals like myself. *The Genesis of Gender* is a wonderful book that I hope gains a wide readership among evangelical co-belligerents. Favale understands that the Christian vision of man and woman is not only true, but compelling when seen on the inside. If the Christian witness is going to be compelling to a lost and dying world, Christians must testify to the internal coherence and beauty of the Christian life.

CATHOLICISM

The Genesis of Gender joins the litany of conversion narratives in the Roman Catholic tradition, from classics like John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, to contemporary accounts like Sohrab Ahmari's *From Fire by Water*. At its heart, it's a mem-

oir about conversion — an *exitus-reditus* from cultural evangelicalism to radical feminism and finally to rest in the arms of the Roman Catholic Church. This may sound loathsome to the evangelical readers of this review, and no doubt for some this will be a bridge too far. But if one is patient to hear Favale's story, it can serve evangelical readers as a twin encouragement and rebuke.

The encouragement for an evangelical readership is the hope that Christians can have for the lost, especially those bewitched by graven ideologies. Favale does not mince words about the bankruptcy of feminism and the "gender paradigm" — the "radically constructivist view of reality, then reifies it as truth, demanding that others assent to its veracity and adopt its language" (30). She has been to the edge of the abyss and has lived to tell the tale.



Favale understands that every ideology, like every lie, contains something of the truth. The problem is the admixture of error. “Like most things in this world, especially most philosophies, there is in feminist thought a mixture of good and bad, truth and falsehood. It’s overlooking that mix that can get one into trouble” (28). If sin is the privation of the good, the work of the Christian is to identify the privation in every lie, while affirming that which is good. This was as true in the Garden as it is of feminism today.

If Favale’s narrative serves as an encouragement for an evangelical readership, it also serves as a rebuke for the deficient ways in which evangelicals have sometimes taught on sex, gender, and bodily reality. Her story about going to a Christian undergrad, dipping her toes into the feminist literature, and then adopting the “Christian feminist” moniker is pitifully familiar and all too common. Right or wrong, many evangelicals who desire to revere the Bible as the principle of knowing, confuse theological method with attaching a Bible verse to

every truth claim. Instead of viewing the world *through* the Bible, many earnest evangelicals proof-text life and suffer blind spots on issues to which Scripture and the light of nature speak clearly.

Consider the current issues in the Southern Baptist Convention about who can serve as a pastor. The Bible puts forward a vision that gender is a good gift from God, an embodied reality that is true for every man or woman, and that the book of Genesis, along with the rest of Scripture, “affirms a balance of sameness and difference between the sexes,” a difference that is “asymmetrical but complementary” (39). Too often gender discussions in evangelical churches boil down to crude generalizations, or discussions about the limiting principles for women in ministry. Throw in the pragmatic impulse and anti-authoritarianism of evangelicalism, and gender difference seems capricious at best, and malicious at worst. With such a thin biblical world-and-life view, it’s no wonder that many young evangelicals flee their churches for something with more

substance. And so it is with the many young adults who fill the classes of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults at the local Roman Catholic parish.

Techné

One of those blind spots for evangelicals is the dehumanizing potential of technology — the human effort to dominate reality.

There has been a spate of books in recent years that have explored the intellectual conditions that gave rise to modernity. One thinks of Charles Taylor’s magisterial, if abstruse, *A Secular Age*, or more recently Carl Trueman’s surprise bestseller *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, or Joseph Minich’s *Bulwarks of Unbelief*, which specifically explores the technoculture that gives rise to modern atheism. With each book, the genealogy the author puts forward helps to map modernity. They help us understand where we’re standing and why.

The most uncomfortable truth readers are likely to encounter in *The Genesis of Gender* is Favale’s genealogy of the medicalization of sex. In short: you don’t get transgenderism without the Pill.

Starting with Margaret Sanger and the modern birth control movement, Favale highlights the eugenicist-tinged motivations of those, like Sanger, who viewed female fecundity as a pathology that needs fixing. Women are oppressed by their own bodies, and they need liberation. “Female fecundity thus becomes the scapegoat for woman’s oppression, as well as everything wrong with the world” (89). The ultimate aim is control, no longer subjecting a woman’s body to the horror of childbearing.

By marketing contraception as “reproduc-

tive health,” Sanger’s vision has won the day: a “clever term that sounds pro-woman but actually pathologizes natural biological realities that are unique to women, namely fertility, pregnancy, and childbirth” (p. 91). This is all made possible by things like hormonal contraceptives. We all live in Margaret Sanger’s world now.

This vision firmly embedded in society means that the crucial link between sex and procreation has been severed. The Pill, and other hormonal contraceptives, depersonalize sex. And this revolution is not good for women, nor society:

We now live in a state of perpetual dissonance. Our shared cultural imagination, as well as the norms and expectations shaped by that understanding, is at odds with reality. We now think of sex as a recreational, rather than procreational activity. The connection between sex and the possibility of new life has been severed. We think of women, and women think of themselves, as naturally sterile beings. Pregnancy is often seen as a sexual mishap, a case of sex-gone-wrong, rather than the very outcome that sexual intercourse is designed to bring about. The procreational potential of sex is viewed as a switch that can be flipped, if desired, but whose default setting is “off” (101).

Sadly, evangelical engagement historically has been shallow on the revolutions that technology ushers and the ways those technologies often dehumanize and depersonalize. When I have conversations with young couples pursuing marriage, I find that the assumption is often that they approach the



topic of hormonal contraceptives from the assumption that they will and are coming to me to receive counsel to convince them why they shouldn't. They haven't stopped to consider that the world that the Pill promises is not the world God created.

METAPHYSICS

The world that God created is good. There is a givenness in creation that speaks to the deeply profound fecundity of the triune God who alone is life in himself, is good, and does good. All of creation testifies to the beauty of this God and the fabric of the world he's called his creatures to inhabit.

Marriage, as an institution given by God, goes with the grain of this created world. In marriage, passions are subdued and directed; the couple learns to give themselves sacrificially; the partners nourish the other as they would their own bodies, "for," the Apostle Paul writes, "no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church" (Eph. 5:29).

The problem with the gender paradigm is that it goes against the grain of creation. The creation, in the gender paradigm, is not something good, but rather something to be dominated. Biological realities do not speak to any deeper realities about the human person — e.g. the potential of woman to bear a child and become a mother — but rather are mere accidents of nature.

The fundamental issue, which cuts like a knife to the heart of the question, is metaphysical: what is reality? Is it given to us? Or is it something that one needs to subject to our domination?

This is at the heart of Favale's return to

Christianity. Her coming face-to-face with the child in her womb, and the fruitful potencies that her womanhood supplied her, are an encounter with reality that theory cannot eliminate. And not only hers, but others, including her transgender friend Daisy, who discovered Christianity in the midst of her detransitioning.

What I see happening in the convergence of Daisy's metamorphoses is not about rule-breaking and reproof, but rather entering into a different way of seeing. The first and most significant shift happens when Daisy began to see herself as a creation of God. Considering oneself as a being who is created moves the discussion of identity to new ground, setting the frame of a transcendent order — an order beyond the natural that sustains its existence and safeguards its meaning. To be a creature, rather than an accident, establishes the human person as a being-in-relation with the divine. We are not alone in the cosmos; always, whether we acknowledge it or not, whether we are aware or not, we live and move and have our being in God (224).

Christianity is an invitation to see the world as it is. It's an invitation to live with, rather than against, the grain of creation. It's an opportunity for creatures who are made in God's image to learn his ways and walk in his steps. Christianity dignifies human nature and causes wayward sinners to run to the good whence they came. Faithful witness requires not dignifying a lie (as is the case with so-called "pronoun hospitality"), but inviting sinners to see God, the world, and themselves as they truly are. It is to understand and embrace the reality of things.

AUTHORITY

What are we to make of Favale's brilliant *apologia pro genus sua*? As I hope is evident from this review, I think this book should be read widely by evangelicals and Roman Catholics alike. Evangelicals can, and should, see writers like Favale as fellow travelers in the world the gender paradigm built. I have already recommended this book to people in my church, and cited it approvingly in a Sunday school class.

Yet I must confess that I had a tinge of sadness while reading this book. One is left with the conclusion that the rebuttal to the gender paradigm is not the arms of the church, but *the Roman Catholic Church*. I am sincerely thankful for Abigail Favale's conversion from the pit of gender theory, as well as the wisdom from papal documents like *Humanae Vitae* and Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. Yet I can't shake the nagging feeling that there are sufficient resources within our own magisterial Protestant tradition that can combat the lies of our day — especially in the Scriptures our tradition is rooted in. Just as one should not neglect the helpful writings of Roman Catholic writers because of the papacy, so also should one not assume that to embrace truly *catholic* Christianity means submitting to the Bishop of Rome.

Evangelical Protestants should not look longingly to Rome for tradition, stability, and a body of moral teaching when our own tradition, rooted firmly in Scripture, supplies us with all that we need to understand and respond to the *sturm und drang* at the heart of our cultural decay. May we bring them to bear for the crises we face. ✕

Scott Corbin is a lay pastor at Trinity River Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX.

Review of *Nobody's Mother*



Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 have long been a watershed in the debate between complementarians and egalitarians. In these verses, Paul addresses both men and women as they come together for public worship as well as the particular danger women face in childbearing. Complementarians have generally understood Paul's prohibition in verse 12 to restrict women from certain governing and teaching roles within the church and have understood "saved through childbearing" in verse 15 to relate in some way to the special calling of motherhood. Egalitarians have construed these texts to have no restrictions on women in teaching or leadership, even as they acknowledge the dangers associated with childbearing. Over the last several decades, barrels of ink have been spilled trying to sort out the issues with both sides trying to win the battle of persuasion. The controversy shows no signs of abating anytime soon.

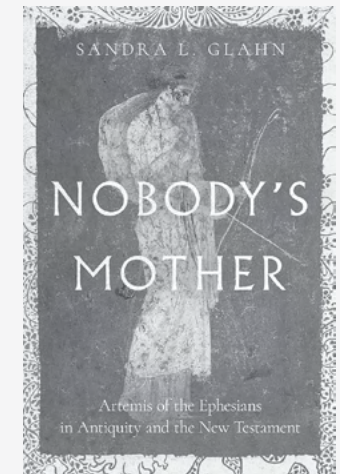
Enter Sandra Glahn, professor of media arts and worship at Dallas Theological Seminary. She advances a provocative and somewhat novel thesis in her new book *Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament*. The book is one-part personal narrative and another part study of New Testament backgrounds. She focuses on how the worship of the goddess Artemis in first-century Ephesus should inform our interpretation of the Pastoral Epistles. In particular, she is concerned with how false teaching emanating from the local Artemis cult shapes our understanding of Paul's contention that women will be "saved through childbearing" (1 Tim. 2:15). Along the way, Glahn also offers a fresh interpretation of the entire paragraph (1 Tim. 2:9-15), including comments on the much-disputed prohibition in verse 12, "I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain qui-

et." Her conclusions fall in line with the egalitarian stream of interpretation of this watershed text.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Glahn says the impetus for her project is very personal. Having grown up in a Christian home, she witnessed a vision for biblical womanhood in her own mother. Consequently, Glahn aspired to be like her. She wanted a husband, children, homemaking — just like her mother. That was her vision of the good life and of what God had called her to be. However, after getting married, infertility shattered all those dreams. She had to reckon with the question, "What now?" She had a gift for teaching the Bible and had planned to deploy that gift in rearing and discipling children. With her hopes dashed, what now?

She found herself on the horns of a dilemma.



Sandra L. Glahn. *Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament*. Lisle, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2023.

She had 1 Timothy 2:15 saying that motherhood was the proper context for stewarding her teaching gift. But motherhood was not an option. Perhaps then she would exercise her teaching gift in the church. But 1 Tim. 2:12 told her she wasn't allowed to teach or exercise authority over men. So what was left for her? Something had to give.

In Glahn's case, what "gave" was her interpretation of Scripture. Her understanding of 1 Tim. 2:9–15 became transformed by an in-depth study of the Artemis cult in first-century Ephesus. Her foils in this study are two Bible scholars named Richard and Catherine Kroeger, who wrote a book in 1992 contending that Artemis worship was the background to Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:9–15.¹ The Kroegers argued that Artemis was a "mothering fertility goddess" whose cult had made inroads into the Ephesian church through false teaching (156). The apparent prohibition against women teaching men in church (1 Tim. 2:12), therefore, is actually a warning against a specific Ephesian doctrinal error and not a general instruction. From an extensive examination of ancient literary sources (ch. 3), inscriptions (ch. 4), and architecture/art (ch. 5), Glahn contends — contrary to the Kroegers — that Artemis was not connected with fertility but with virginity and midwifery (156). Thus, Artemis was "nobody's mother" (116).

Nevertheless, though Glahn believes the Kroeger's understood the Artemis cult incorrectly, she argues that the Kroegers were absolutely right to read 1 Timothy 2:9–15 as a refutation of false teachers who were under the spell of the Artemis cult. In this light, "saved through childbearing"

should be understood as a local proverb (perhaps derived from the Artemis cult) that assures Ephesian women that they do not need the help of the divine midwife Artemis to be safe during childbearing. On the contrary, "a woman who converted from worshiping Artemis to following Jesus" would be kept safe through childbirth and would not die (155). According to Glahn,

Artemis was thought to deliver painlessly or euthanize women in childbirth. But Jesus is better. He will save through childbearing those who continue in faith, love, and holiness with self-control. (143)

She continues,

This is not to suggest Paul is making a universal statement that would be true of all women in all eras. Rather, it would be true in the case of Timothy and his congregation in the short term, a promise that in this foundational period of their assembly, their God would prove himself bigger than the god of the surrounding culture (146).

Likewise, Paul's prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12 is not a universal command intended for all people at all times. Paul merely addresses a local problem in Ephesus in which husbands and wives were particularly rancorous during worship (139). While husbands need to put away "anger" and "dispute" (130), wives need to stop teaching with a view to domineering their husbands (139). When Paul grounds this prohibition in the fact that "Adam was formed first" (v. 13) and that "Eve was

deceived" (v. 14), he is not appealing to creation order or natural differences between men and women. On the contrary, he's simply correcting a false story (in which Artemis is first) with a true story (in which Adam is first, p. 143).

INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE

If *Nobody's Mother* were merely an analysis of Artemis worship in first-century Ephesus, this volume would be grist for scholars to discuss but hardly worthy of a review in a forum like this one. But that's not the kind of book Glahn has written. She has amassed research on the Artemis cult as the *hermeneutical key* to Paul's meaning in 1 Timothy. Her argument is that if readers fail to recognize Paul's words as a polemic against the Artemis cult, then they will not understand what "saved through childbearing" means in 2:15, much less Paul's apparent prohibition on women teaching in 2:12.

And this is the primary weakness of *Nobody's Mother*. Glahn asserts that the Artemis cult is the foundation for everything that Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:9–15 without demonstrating it to be the case. There is a reason for that. It cannot be supported from the text of 1 Timothy. Paul never mentions Artemis. He never refers to the temple devoted to Artemis. He never refers to the cult. He never refers to mythology about Artemis. There is no evidence whatsoever in the Pastoral Epistles that Paul has Artemis in mind at all. This was one of the chief weaknesses of the Kroegers's work back in 1992, and Glahn has repeated their mistake in *Nobody's Mother*.

Glahn's main argument in favor of reading Paul through the lens of the Artemis cult

doesn't come from 1 Timothy but from Acts 19, which records Paul's confrontation with worshipers of Artemis in Ephesus. Glahn contends that Acts 19 "reveals a major religious context from which false teaching of concern to Paul likely originated: the Artemis cult" (38). She even goes so far as to suggest that female believers in Ephesus may have been praying to Artemis while being Christians (153). Leaving aside the fact that such a practice is incompatible with any credible claim to following Christ (Matt. 6:24; cf. 1 Cor. 10:14–22), there is no evidence in Acts 19 that the Ephesian believers were Artemis worshipers. On the contrary, the sign that they were indeed believers was that they had turned decisively from such things (Acts 19:19, 26). Indeed, a riot broke out against the new believers in Ephesus precisely because the Christians were perceived as a threat to the Artemis cult (Acts 19:24). The idea that Artemis worship had a continuing hold on the believers in Ephesus has no basis in Acts 19. Nor does it have a basis in any later development. Indeed, by the time John writes Revelation, the Ephesian church had established a reputation for doctrinal fidelity and resistance to false teaching (Rev. 2:1–7).

In any case, Paul never mentions Artemis or her cult to ground his argument in 1 Timothy. He does, however, mention *explicitly* the creation order in Genesis 2: "Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:13–14). Paul also alludes to the curse on Eve's fertility in Gen. 3:16 in the phrase "saved through childbearing" (1 Tim. 2:15). Why should anyone read the text as a coded "polemic" against Artemis worship (118) when Paul explicitly ap-

¹ Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

peals to Genesis 2–3 as the primary background? Glahn does not provide sufficient justification for such a move.

SELF-CONTRADICTORY INTERPRETATION

In her interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12, Glahn marshals a grab-bag of egalitarian exegesis that results in interpretive incoherence. For example, Glahn argues that Paul does not issue a universal prohibition on women teaching men. Rather, Paul means to address only husbands and wives in particular (134).² Moreover, by saying “I am not allowing a wife to teach a husband,” Paul merely cites his preference for this particular local situation where the Artemis cult had unduly influenced Christian wives (137–38). Nevertheless, Glahn then argues that “to teach or exercise authority” is really one idea (not two) and that the exercise of authority should

be viewed negatively. Thus, she interprets Paul as saying, “I am not permitting a wife to teach *with a view* to domineering a husband” (139).

Glahn doesn’t seem to realize that it is incoherent to argue that Paul prohibits wives from domineering their husbands while also arguing that the prohibition addresses only a local situation. While both of these are common egalitarian interpretations, they do not make sense when held together. If Paul addresses only a local situation and does not give a universal principle, wouldn’t that mean that Paul personally doesn’t allow wives to domineer their husbands in Ephesus but he might allow it elsewhere? Since it’s not an apostolic prohibition but a personal preference, wouldn’t that mean that other churches might allow wives to domineer their husbands? Glahn’s interpretation is incoherent at this point.

² Gordon Hugenberger recently made this argument in “Joint Heirs: Complementarians and Egalitarians Are Not as Divided as Some Think,” *Christianity Today* 68, no. 3 (April 2024): 44–47. Tom Schreiner offers a compelling refutation of Hugenberger’s contention that 1 Timothy 2:12 refers only to wives and husbands. See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Are Husbands and Wives Addressed in 1 Timothy 2:9–15? A Response to Gordon Hugenberger,” *CBMW* (blog), April 8, 2024, www.cbmw.org.

SHAKY SCHOLARSHIP

Glahn’s exegetical work supporting these contradictory claims leaves much to be desired. She argues that the present tense of “I am not allowing” emphasizes that this is merely Paul’s personal practice in Ephesus. But the present tense in Greek does not indicate any such thing. She says the fact that Paul uses the first-person pronoun “I” lends this interpretation even more credibility. Yet the Greek text does not have a first-person personal pronoun. These are basic mistakes in Greek, and yet she cites them as justification for reducing Paul’s apostolic prohibition to a mere unauthoritative opinion (137–38).

Crucial to Glahn’s case is the assertion that women were among the false teachers in Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul tells Timothy, “Remain on at Ephesus in order that you may charge certain men not to teach strange doctrines.” Glahn observes that “certain men” translates the Greek pronoun *tisin*, which is neuter. She alleges that because Paul employs a neuter pro-

noun, it can refer to both men and women (123). Again, there are elementary linguistic problems here. If the expression were neuter, it would not be referring to any person at all. Even though the form of the word in verse 3 is the same for masculine/feminine/neuter, the same word appears in verses 6 and 8 where both are clearly masculine. Likewise, the related participle “desiring/wanting” in verse 7 is also clearly masculine. Also, “charge” in verse 3 reappears in verses 5 and 18, which connect Paul’s admonition to specific male apostates in verse 20. Indeed, the only false teachers named in 1 Timothy are men.

The technical errors in Glahn’s work are damaging, but there are also other examples of shaky scholarship. For example, Glahn follows the work of egalitarians Philip Payne and Linda Belleville to establish that Paul means to prohibit wives teaching with a view to domineering their husbands (138–39). She then summarily rejects the work of complementarians, calling out “Schreiner and Köstenberger” on this point yet provid-



ing no citation of their work (139). Elsewhere, she does cite the important edited volume by Schreiner and Köstenberger, but she interacts only with the 2005 edition and not the 2016 edition. This may seem like straining gnats, but it really isn't. The 2016 edition of Schreiner and Köstenberger's *Women in the Church* is the most important work refuting the claims of the scholars Glahn relies on in *Nobody's Mother*.³ Glahn has no critical interaction with this edition anywhere in *Nobody's Mother*. Consequently, she completely overlooks crucial exegetical evidence that undermines her case.

Glahn wishes to convince readers that Paul does not give a universal prohibition on women teaching and having authority over men. Yet her exegesis on all these points is too flawed to be persuasive.

"SAVED THROUGH CHILDBIRTH" A LOCAL SAYING

Glahn argues that the words "saved through childbearing" do not derive from Paul but likely derive from the Artemis cult. The women in Ephesus knew that Artemis was a midwife who would either save women from the perils of childbirth or who would gently euthanize them to spare them pain (150). Paul picks up the expression to communicate that Ephesian women don't have to look to Artemis for help during childbirth. They can trust in Jesus, who will save them from dying due

to complications in childbirth. This is not a promise for all Christian women, but only for the Christian women in Ephesus during this period.

This interpretation is perhaps the most unpersuasive of all. In order to establish "saved through childbearing" as a slogan from the Artemis cult, Glahn appeals to instances in 1 Corinthians in which Paul quotes local slogans (147–48). This overlooks the fact that Paul's rhetorical strategy in 1 Corinthians differs dramatically from that of 1 Timothy. It also overlooks specific criteria for identifying slogans in 1 Corinthians — criteria that are largely absent in 1 Timothy.⁴ For these reasons and more, Glahn's explanation of "saved through childbearing" is also unpersuasive.

There is much more to *Nobody's Mother* than what I have covered in this brief review. For example, I haven't addressed her use of ancient sources, some of which were written too far after Paul's time to be relevant (e.g., 72, 75, 88, 89, 92, 93). Nor have I discussed the problematic use of "trigger warnings" appearing here and there in her discussion of ancient sources (55, 58, 64, 65).⁵ Nor have I scrutinized her controversial claims that complementarianism is a break with the tradition of the Christian Church and that women's ordination is an idea that goes back to Pentecost and not merely to twentieth century feminism (21, 24). I will have to leave these and other worthy topics to other reviewers.

Glahn's conclusions are a broadside against complementarian interpretations of this text. This book will take its place in the long line of egalitarian works that have in one way or another reduced Paul's words to a local concern with no abiding prohibition on women in church leadership. What I hope readers will be able to discern from this review is that the main argument of the book falls apart at numerous points. For all of the scholarship she marshals to sketch the contours of the Artemis cult in first-century Ephesus, she never really establishes the relevance of the cult to the interpretation of 1 Timothy. As a result, her interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is ultimately unpersuasive. ✕

³ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

⁴ E.g., Denny Burk, "Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of the Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18, no. 1 (2008): 99–121.

⁵ E.g., Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt: "Universities should also officially and strongly discourage trigger warnings. They should endorse the American Association of University Professors' report on these warnings, which notes, 'The presumption that students need to be protected rather than challenged in a classroom is at once infantilizing and anti-intellectual.'" See Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, "The Coddling of the American Mind," *Atlantic Monthly* 316, no. 2 (September 2015): 52. See also Sarah Roff, "Treatment, Not 'Trigger Warnings,'" *Chronicle of Higher Education* 60, no. 38 (June 6, 2014): B2.

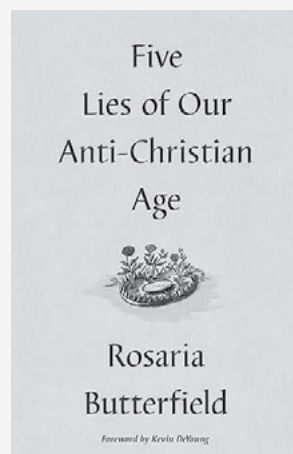
Denny R. Burk is President of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and Editor-in-Chief of Eikon.

Review of *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*

I struggled with an eating disorder in college. I told myself it was just a stage, that I could stop the vicious cycle anytime I wanted. But I was wrong. It took the grace of God working through the forthrightness of a biblical counselor for me to stop.

“This will kill you,” she told me at the start of one of our sessions. She then led me through the scientific facts and Scriptural truths to support her dire warning. I knew she was right, and I didn’t want to die at twenty-two. So I quit.

I often wonder where I would be if she had not been honest with me that day. She knew I would be offended. She understood there was a risk I would walk out



Rosaria Butterfield, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023.

in anger. But she cared enough to tell me what I did not want to hear. She had done enough of validating my feelings and listening to my pain. It was time for her to say things plainly. In doing so, she potentially saved my life.

We live in an age when pointing out the repercussions of bad behavior is *verboten*. In fact, even saying that some behavior is objectively wrong is often deemed judgmental or cruel. The mainstream view is that hurting someone’s feelings is worse than whatever the consequences of their actions may be.

But our comfort has a cost: lives are at risk when we choose cowardice over courage.

In theory, Christians know this. “The wages of sin is death,” Romans 6:23 warns. Yet our actions often fail to reflect our purported theology, particularly when it comes to calling out the sexual sins that have been embraced wholesale by American culture. Homosexuality, transgenderism, the subversion of gender roles, and promiscuity are all manifestations of depravity even Christians are reticent to condemn for fear of appearing unloving.

But if we really believed what we say we do — that sin brings death and God’s ways bring life and goodness — then we would stand firm against the lies of our age, warning in love anyone who will listen: “This will kill you.”

In *Five Lies of our Anti-Christian Age*, Rosaria Butterfield fills the role of both a trusted counselor and pleading prophet, lovingly yet insistently urging Christians and unbelievers alike to wake up to the

dire situation in which America’s sexual and gender-based idolatry has placed us:

[T]he world is in chaos, and the church is divided because we have failed to obey God and value his plan for how men and women should live,” Butterfield writes. Christians have been deluded into believing that we could reject God’s definitions of and callings for men and women “and somehow reap God’s blessing.” That’s impossible, she argues, since the sexes and God’s plan for them is “central — not peripheral — to the gospel (6).

Butterfield compares America to the Tower of Babel: a state of utter disarray wrought by those who have decided they know better than God. We have not only embraced Satanic lies regarding morality, sexuality, and identity, we have also codified them. To our shame, our nation has normalized, glamorized, and institutionalized behaviors and unions which God has deemed spiritually deadly and physically harmful (Rom. 1:18–32), and too many Christians have stood by as the sexual revolution has run roughshod through our culture.

This happened because society — much of the church included — has imbibed these five lies:

1. Homosexuality is normal.
2. Being a spiritual person is kinder than being a biblical person.
3. Feminism is good for the world and the church.
4. Transgenderism is normal.
5. Modesty is an outdated burden



that serves male dominance and holds women back.

Confronting each myth, Butterfield cuts to the root, explaining the ideology and idolatry within the theories of intersectionality, psychology, feminism, and evolution and how they have duped believers and non-believers alike into accepting and celebrating sexual immorality and gender deception.

In our postmodern age, the mainstream view is that it is perfectly acceptable for a person to “reject truth, not because it’s false, but because it hurts,” Butterfield asserts (58). Butterfield understands the persuasive power of one’s feelings, because her own conversion to Christianity required a slow and painful repudiation of whom she deeply felt she was.

Decades ago, Butterfield was a lesbian, fem-

inist professor at Syracuse University, teaching queer theory and advocating for gay rights. God used the persistent evangelism of a neighbor to win her to Christ. After she was convinced of the truth of the Scriptures, she wrestled with the desire to reconcile her homosexuality with her new Christian identity. Ultimately, God’s Word won.

“God used the offense of God’s Word for the good of my soul,” Butterfield writes (47). She learned the difficult lesson that just because something is offensive does not mean it is untrue, and because it is true, it must be accepted, even if it offends us. Like antiseptic in a wound, the truth that stings can bring necessary healing.

Butterfield’s vulnerability has been a hallmark of each of her books, but in *Five Lies of an Anti-Christian Age*, she demonstrates unique humility by openly repenting of the role she’s played as a Christian

writer in helping solidify the lies she is now warning against.

Butterfield confesses to employing language that affirmed worldly ways of thinking about sexuality, gender, sin, and repentance: she used the preferred pronouns of trans-identifying people, condemning change-allowing therapy (known pejoratively as “conversion therapy”) as a name-it-and-claim-it “heresy,” and using secular terms like “homophobia.” Her word choice was motivated by compassion for the lost LGBTQ-identifying person, but she allowed her empathy to supersede God’s Word, and in doing so she failed to biblically love the very people she sought to help.

In *Five Lies*, Butterfield not only arms readers with wisdom, she also provides an example. Her tactics are equipment; her testimony is encouragement. For Christians who fear being categorized as hate-

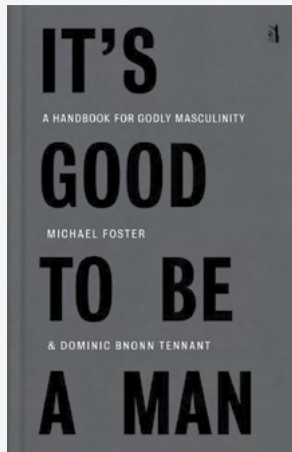
ful when shining a light on the deadliness of sin, Butterfield demonstrates how to be uncompromising yet gentle, clear yet compassionate. Ultimately, Butterfield makes the case for obeying the Lord, even at the expense of the approval of others.

Butterfield effectively urges Christians to reject the false idea that love means avoiding hurt feelings at all costs. Love is not synonymous with empathy and affirmation. Love is being willing to say to a person: your sin is killing you.

If Christ followers truly believe that, they will don the courage necessary to speak life and truth to a deceived world. Consequently, they can bring order to Babel and serve as a refuge for victims of our nation’s cultural chaos. This has always been the call of the Christian, and it remains so today. Lives — and souls — depend upon it. ✕

Allie Beth Stuckey is host of the Relatable podcast where she analyzes culture, news, and politics from a biblical perspective.

Review of *It's Good to Be a Man*



Michael Foster and Dominic Bnonn Tennant, *It's Good to Be a Man: A Handbook for Godly Masculinity*, Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2021, 2022.

The title of Michael Foster and Dominic Bnonn Tennant's book, *It's Good to Be a Man*, may not have made sense had it been published twenty or thirty years ago. But times have changed. Rampant fatherlessness and cultural headwinds have men questioning not only what it means to be a man, but whether it's worth being one at all.

This is why Foster and Tennant have not set out to write a timeless book, but "a timely one" (x), one addressing current issues. While *It's Good to Be a Man* is for the same audience as previous books aimed at Christian men, the books of decades past shared an assumption that can no longer be granted: that it's okay, or even good, to be masculine. Foster and Tennant go further back and start there.

APPRECIATION

Foster and Tennant have written a useful guide that understands the times, and there are many things to appreciate. For one, they grasp the role of nature in understanding manhood — that men are, by nature, built to lead: "Male rule is natural, and so it is inevitable...because it is natural, it cannot be destroyed—but it can be twisted" (5). The question is not *whether* men will lead, but what *kind* of men will lead and how they will do so. Would that this were widely acknowledged.

Second, they give strong, sound counsel throughout the book. For example, an entire chapter calls men to cultivate gravitas as a masculine virtue. Lest that be too abstract, the following chapter describes what gravitas looks like. Positively, it looks like growing in wisdom, workmanship, and strength (145–49). Negatively, it calls men to stop seeking praise, stop being self-deprecating, stop complaining,

stop making excuses, and stop breaking promises (150–52). Any man would do well to listen to such exhortations.

Third, Foster and Tennant extol the ancient paths of marriage, fatherhood, and work. Their chapter on fatherhood is especially helpful, as they see the absence of fathers to be the source of so many cultural ills. They use the phrase "clueless bastards" to refer to the young men who grew up without good fathers, rightly claiming that "the collapse we face today is primarily caused by clueless bastards who don't know how to be fathers—upholders of order. And they don't know this, because they have not had fathers" (113). They cite both data and Scripture to show how a good father is an unparalleled force for good, and urge those without good examples to find a good church and emulate the godly men there. Amen all around.

While I would recommend the book — and have already referenced it positively in conversations with people in my church



— I would not recommend it without qualification. The problems fit into two categories: theology and precision.

THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

Many evangelicals were sharpened by the Trinitarian conversation of 2016 and chastened not to play fast and loose with appeals to theology proper. Unfortunately, *It's Good to Be a Man* runs afoul on a similar point. Foster and Tennant do not appeal to distinctions within the Godhead — which was at issue in 2016 — but rather to the distinction between God as Creator and his creation.

Understanding the Creator-creature distinction is vital for faithful doctrine. If that line of distinction gets blurry, there will be, and have been, negative theological consequences. It is not that the distinction between Creator and creature gets blurred in *It's Good to Be a Man*, but that it gets misapplied:

Man is the image of God; yet also, male and female are an image of the creator and creation. . . . the principle of male and female doesn't originate in Adam and Eve, but in God and creation. . . . What happens when [man] denies the distinction between God and creation? He continues following the devil in confusing, denying, and ultimately trying to obliterate the *image* of that divide (61, emphasis original).

If I understand the claims correctly, Foster and Tennant argue that the distinction between men and women is akin to the distinction between Creator and creature. Why is this problematic? Because the dis-

inction between God and his creation is absolute — there is an ontological chasm between God and man that finds no parallel among image bearers. Further, the Creator-creature distinction, in addition to highlighting the superiority of God over his creation, actually accentuates the *similarities* between men and women, not their differences: both bear the divine image, both are given the creation mandate, and both reside on the “creature” side of the distinction.

It is, therefore, a misuse of the Creator-creature distinction to say that it is imaged in the difference between men and women.

In addition to being a misuse of the category, this appeal is also unnecessary. Scripture already supplies metaphors that describe the distinction between men and women. For example, the Bible claims that a husband's relationship to his wife images God's relationship to his people (Is. 54:4–8; Eph. 5:22–33). The Bible also claims that a husband's headship images the Father's headship over Christ with respect to his mediatorial office (1 Cor. 11:3). However, these are images of *roles* and *relationship*, not ontology. The Creator-creator distinction is not given to highlight relational truths — the way these images are — but ontological ones.

This theological misapplication could go badly in the wrong hands. If a husband believes himself to be as superior to his wife as the Creator is to his creation, it is not hard to imagine poor outcomes. Foster and Tennant are right to emphasize the important and underappreciated differences between men and women, but the Creator-creature distinction is not the way to do it.

PRECISION PROBLEM

The second problem has to do with the way the book is written. Specifically, the consistent overstatements, generalizations, and lack of precision all undermine what the book aims to do.

For example, consider these statements from the book:

- “Feminism reigns in the Church” (ix).
- “Most Christians today spend very little time in Genesis. When they are not actively embarrassed by it, they are indifferent to it” (18).
- “This is a point lost in modern Christianity, where the focus is almost exclusively on the model of Jesus in the gospels” (23).
- “Men today...reserve sharp cuts exclusively for those who call us to imitate the whole Christ” (25).
- “The Western Church is overwhelmingly comprised of women—of both sexes” (86).
- “The Church has for centuries emphasized wisdom...always seeking respectability in the academic world and fearing to be cool-shamed for thinking God's ‘backwards’ thoughts” (149).
- “The Church has betrayed you for a kiss” (160).

My issue is not with strong speech or a sharp tone, but with precision. How does one establish whether feminism “reigns” in the church? And on what basis can an author claim that “most Christians” are “indifferent” to the book of Genesis? And in what ways has “the Church” “always” sought respectability or betrayed men for a kiss?

At best, these are overstatements that cannot be proven. At worst, some of them come awfully close to slandering the bride of Christ. Additionally, these kinds of generalizations are at odds with the virtuous, temperate, measured, self-controlled, and gracious speech that should mark men and that Proverbs commends (e.g., Prov. 10:19; 17:27; 22:11).

There are other matters of precision that could be mentioned, such as the lack of clarity over whether the dominion part of the creation mandate is given to men *and* women or to men only. At times, the authors affirm that Genesis 1:26–28 is given to both men and women, yet at other times the emphasis is that dominion is given to men. These statements are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they were not clarified and explained. There are also occasional appeals to men-as-victim that are counterproductive. But these problems are less worrisome than the others.

CONCLUSION

The strengths of *It's Good to Be a Man* outweigh the weaknesses, but the weaknesses are not to be overlooked. I commend Foster and Tennant for writing a guide that addresses the issues men are facing, but a more carefully written book would have better accomplished the task. ✕

Matt Damico is the pastor of worship and operations at Kenwood Baptist Church in Louisville.

Review of *After the Revolution*

Oliver Perry famously wrote to William Henry Harrison, “We have met the enemy, and they are ours.” This line has become a proverb for the sober moments when the difficulties and problems we think are caused by others are actually traced back to us. It’s an aphorism that’s appropriate for what David J. Ayers lays bare in *After the Revolution: Sex and the Single Evangelical*, a meticulously researched confrontation with the sexual habits of professing evangelical Christians.

After the Revolution is not a pleasant read. It may, in fact, be one of the most discouraging and uncomfortable books you have read in a while. The data Ayers presents is a straightforward story of moral compromise, thin discipleship, and a potentially disastrous future. Ayers couples this re-



David J. Ayers. *After the Revolution: Sex and the Single Evangelical*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2022.

search with reflection that is simple and unsparing, but not hopeless. If *After the Revolution* comes up short as a truly transformational work, it shines an important light on the state of conservative Protestantism today.

Ayers’s book essentially poses three questions: What is the biblical teaching on sexuality? How do the sexual habits of evangelical Christians compare with this teaching? And what is the long-term outlook for a Christian culture that gets this wrong? The first question yields (thankfully!) no surprises, as Ayers offers a traditional, exegetically responsible summary of the Bible’s sexual ethics. Culturally, Ayers writes a concise and helpful summary of the social transformation of sexual mores, arguing that Western society has migrated from “an ethic of covenant to an ethic of consent.” But the major contribution of *After the Revolution* is the use of data from the General Social Survey (GSS), National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), and others, to assemble a reliable narrative of how evangelical Christians in Western society are living compared to the mainstream.

The results are unequivocal: A significant percentage of professing Christians in the United States express either uncertainty, ambivalence, or outright approval of sex outside marriage. A solid 35% of evangelical men *and* women say that sex between unmarried adults is “not wrong at all” (78). Evangelical habits support this confusion. A clear majority of evangelicals in their thirties say they have cohabitated with a partner at least once, including 62% of evangelical men and 72% of evangelical men aged 29–34 (117). Sexual activity among unmarried evangelicals rises

when the topic expands from intercourse to include things like oral sex, which over 80% of evangelical men and women aged 23–32 say they have done (113). Ayers produces many such poll results, often zeroing in on a demographic or a particular sexual habit. While self-identified “evangelicals” have less extramarital sex than other Christian subgroups, the results throughout the book suggest more assimilation than difference.

Getting one’s head around these numbers is challenging. While most pastors would probably not be shocked to find young singles in their churches who were sexually active, these results suggest that evangelical virginity is a relative rarity. Why? Ayers offers a reasonable, if somewhat anticlimactic, explanation: “Antinomianism is a major problem among modern evangelicals,” he writes, “and in many ways reflects the sensate mindset in which sexual sin is evaluated based on its perceived impact on people, or lack thereof, rather than as an offense against a just and holy God” (146).

Ayers offers an extended analysis of moralistic therapeutic deism, the term coined by sociologist Christian Smith for Western society’s me-centered, feelings-oriented civil religion. In the absence of robust catechesis, Ayers argues, contemporary evangelicals have absorbed the ambient culture’s values. “Almost half of evangelicals and over 60 percent of Pentecostals do not believe in absolute truth,” he records “Roughly 70% in both religious classifications rejected the idea that God is the basis of all truth” (167). It’s not surprising that such uncertainty about the very existence of transcendent truth would express itself in unbiblical sexual habits, particu-

larly in a post-sexual revolution world.

After the Revolution is a unique book. Its combination of social science, ethics, cultural analysis, and pastoral reflection makes it a valuable work. What's more, *After the Revolution* is one of the only books offering evangelical church leaders both a data-based and doctrine-oriented look at evangelical sexuality. Whereas many books about these topics are either purely polemical (e.g., a defense of Christian sexual ethics) or purely observational (e.g., here's what the surrounding culture is up to), Ayers's project helps church leaders interpret their context intelligently and theologically.

In further evaluating the book, however, I'd like to offer three rejoinders. One is simply an observation, one a question, and one a critique.

First, *After the Revolution* offers clear, scriptural reflection on sexual ethics, but the emphasis on worldview seems to be somewhat at odds with the book's premise. Assuming these data sets are accurate, evangelical adults are living far beneath their stated worldviews. Ayers seems to assume that this means their actual worldviews are not what they say they are; otherwise, these evangelicals would be leading much different lives. While worldview is certainly a legitimate angle by which to interpret evangelical sexual habits, the discrepancy between how people self-identify theologically and how they choose to live would seem to invite a rethinking of just how effective "worldviews" are in shaping life.

Second, I have a question about the research methodology. In a helpful appen-

dix, Ayers details how he extracted his data from the GSS and NSFG. As someone untrained in demographics or social science, I was a little confused by the total numbers. After combining eight years worth of GSS surveys in order to get a sample size large enough, Ayers ends up with responses from just over 2,700 evangelicals, 1,400 mainline Protestants, 800 Black Protestants, and 2,600 Catholics.

In terms of evangelicals, this seems like a very small sample size. It's important to note that Ayers uses denominational affiliation as the key discerner of "evangelical" data, rather than trying to identify evangelical respondents based on a metric such as how they live. This leads to some confusing statements at different parts of the book (more on that shortly). But the bigger question is: In a nation where evangelicals, understood demographically, make up potentially 100 million people, how representative are 2,700? Should a pastor or church leader look at the data in *After the Revolution* and infer the situation in his church from it?

Finally, I want to offer some critique of the way Ayers uses "evangelical." Part of the tension in *After the Revolution* is that the respondents who own the term "evangelical" in some ways clearly disown it in others. Ayers wants readers to accept that tension rather than try to relieve it. "I am assuming that 'evangelicals' are historically orthodox Protestants with a high view of the accuracy and ultimate authority of the Bible," he writes. Ayers establishes his definition of evangelical theologically; evangelicals "believe that people who have become true Christians endeavor to grow in holiness and obedience to God by his grace" (75). This, of course, leads to a nat-

ural question: if someone demonstrates by their lifestyle an ambivalence toward biblical teaching and apathy toward sanctification, is this person still an evangelical? Ayers anticipates this question:

Moreover, there are many who affiliate with evangelical churches whose beliefs and lifestyles are out of alignment with those of the church and denomination they are attached to. These and other pitfalls are why it is necessary to measure other aspects of religious belief and commitments when looking at the sexual views and practices of evangelicals...However, the fact is that pastors, church leaders, parachurch workers, parents, and many others in evangelical churches deal with the congregations they are in and with all of the individuals in them. They do not have the right to narrow down their responsibility to a subset of ideal, "purer" evangelicals within their fellowships. Therefore, they need to be informed accurately about the range of sexual beliefs and practices that might exist among the people in their churches. (76)

The problem is not what Ayers says here, but what he says later. Ayers clearly states later in the book that 70% of evangelicals do not believe God is the basis of truth. But by his own definition of evangelical, this is an oxymoron. How can 70% of people with a high view of the authority of God's Word deny the authority of God's Word? At another point, Ayers recounts something that "an evangelical lesbian college student" told him (156). I circled this phrase in my copy of the book and wrote a question mark. If "evangelical lesbian college student" is a coherent catego-

ry, then clearly the definition of evangelical used in *After the Revolution* is weighed much more heavily toward self-identification in a social group, rather than a theologically-defined subset of conservative Protestantism.

Ayers is absolutely correct that Christian leaders cannot let themselves or their churches off the hook by saying that "real evangelicals" are virgins until marriage, and anyone who falls short of this should not be considered in evaluating the state of the evangelical church. But there's a profound difference between an evangelical church that is in crisis because a massive percentage of its disciples have consciously and willfully disobeyed Scripture, and an evangelical church that is populated by many who don't and possibly never intended to obey.

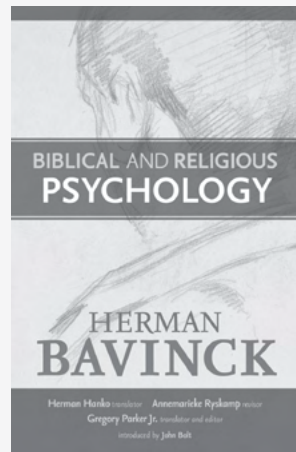
Despite these concerns, *After the Revolution* is a trustworthy guide to interpreting a culture and a church that is deeply shaped by sexual libertinism. Pastors and others who want a compact yet thoughtful primer on these topics should consult the valuable information that David Ayers assembles here, and think long and prayerfully about what it could mean in their own contexts. ✕

Samuel D. James serves as a developmental and acquisitions editor at Crossway. He is the author of Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age (Crossway, 2023).

Review of *Biblical and Religious Psychology*

HERMAN BAVINCK ON THE DUTY OF CHRISTIAN PARENTS AND EDUCATORS IN VIEW OF CHILDREN'S DEFECTS AND DEVELOPMENT

In his superb introduction to the newly-translated-in-English *Biblical and Religious Psychology* (*BRP*), John Bolt helps today's reader see what animates Bavinck's design in writing this book a century ago. Bavinck claims there are "precious few books on biblical psychology" for Christian teachers, and in *BRP* he is attempting to help "Christian educators...be more attentive to children's psychological makeup and development, what the Bible says about their nature, their faculties, and abilities" (xvi). Reading with this contextual backdrop in mind amplifies the book's pastoral and paternal nature.



Bavinck, Herman. *Biblical and Religious Psychology*. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2024.

Bavinck seeks to equip Christian parents/teachers with a biblical rationale for understanding the psychological, moral, and religious development of children. And he does so after establishing a broader biblical psychology of humanity (in the first half of book), before focusing on how Christian parents/educators need to think about the development of children as humans into greater depths/experience of their human personality (in the second half of the book).

The debate surrounding psychology in Christian circles was not all that different in Bavinck's day than it is ours, and he is a significant figure in the Reformed tradition as it relates to engaging empirical psychology dogmatically. In *BRP*, we encounter the thinking of the mature Bavinck. This two-part book was published between January 1912 and April 1920, meaning this was one of the last works before his death on July 29, 1921 (xv). He was aware that his teaching on "human nature" in his magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics* was somewhat lacking, as evidenced in a letter written to William Kuyper on September 20, 1897, where he claims: "The doctrine of man is incomplete [from *Reformed Dogmatics*]. Therefore, in a couple of months I shall publish a small, separate work: *Beginselen der Psychologie* [*Foundations of Psychology*]."¹ In the author's preface to the second edition of *Foundations of Psychology*, dictated by Bavinck over twenty years later on his sickbed in 1921, he writes, "The foundations described in the book have had my

lifelong acceptance and they remain powerful principles deserving use and expression alongside empirical psychology."² As Matthew Lapine has pointed out,

The earlier book [*Foundations of Psychology*] seems to be an attempt to provide a psychology that is conversant both with contemporary psychology and with the Christian tradition, especially the psychology of Aquinas, yet contains less than ten biblical references. In the latter book [*Biblical and Religious Psychology*], Bavinck is more obviously engaged in biblical reasoning.³

In what follows, I will focus my summary and evaluation on Bavinck's chapters entitled "Children's Defects" and "Religious Education" from the second part of the book: "Religious Psychology." I do this because much of this work is somewhat repackaged content which those familiar with Bavinck will have encountered in *Reformed Dogmatics* and/or *Philosophy of Revelation*. I find his interaction with the influence of Rousseau, Darwin, and Freud on the development and formation of children to be an outstanding example of how to critically evaluate psychology while also highlighting where their concerns/criticisms may have validity. I will also draw out a disagreement that I have with Bavinck, related to his understanding of the Covenant of Grace (CoG), and its implications on child-rearing for Christian parents/educators.

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Foundations of Psychology* (*Beginselen der Psychologie*), trans. Jack Vanden Born (Master's Thesis, Calvin College, 1981), vii.

² Herman Bavinck, *Foundations of Psychology* (*Beginselen der Psychologie*), trans. Jack Vanden Born, Nelson D. Kloosterman, and John Bolt, 2nd ed. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1923), ii.

³ Matthew A. Lapine, *Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 205–6.

CHILDREN'S DEFECTS

Bavinck pushes back against two extremes when it comes to raising children. He claims that in earlier times it was common to emphasize the doctrine of original sin, such that, "Until God converts the children, nothing good dwells in them and they must be bridled by strict discipline" (153–154). Often accompanying this misconception, he says, is the "spirit of abstinence," which he contends was evident in Roman Catholicism, as well as pietistic Protestant circles, like the Methodists (154). His concern with this approach is how it so emphasizes the spiritual and the afterlife that it neglects the earthly calling, or the "right of natural life" (154). This preoccupation with asceticism and pietism in child-rearing leaves "little sympathy for the free, unrestrained, spontaneous life of the child; they nurtured an instinctive aversion to [the] happy laughter and joyful play of children" (154).

Bavinck then highlights how in the seventeenth century, church and theology "had taken precedence and set the tone," but that instead of setting forth reforming principles, "they used this precious opportunity to create more and more division and to engage in endless dispute" (155). This exhausted many, and the close conceptual union between natural morality and the Christian religion (which ultimately would take the fall for the dissension) caused the "humanitarian philanthropists" (progressives) to want to work back from "culture" to "nature." Bavinck explains, "Previously people had always tried to make Christians out of ordinary people; now the time had come to turn Christians back into human beings" (156). One hundred years later

we see this same strategy on the part of progressivism, in which Christianity is no longer viewed as exemplary, but as bigoted, harmful, and repugnant.

Bavinck uses Rousseau, Darwin, and Freud as a sort of unholy trinity to represent this error. Reading Bavinck almost feels like reading sections of Carl Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* for kids, because he essentially shows how the rotten fruit of "expressive individualism" undermines parenting/teaching children well. He argues that Rousseau wrongly taught "children were born good and uncorrupted, because everything was good as it came forth from the hands of the Creator of all things, but that everything was spoiled at the hands of man. And nowadays, criminals are frequently treated as if they were sick, and prisons are increasingly more seen as a kind of hospital" (157). Thus, society and culture are the root of all evil, and the "experts" (who are somehow immune) must diagnose the disease and prescribe treatment for improvement, which takes on a revolutionary character. Which is why, Bavinck reminds, "Rousseau emphasized sexual education...Sex education is now regarded by many as a remedy in times of distress" (172).

Darwin, Bavinck contends, set forth the theory that not only species traits, but also *acquired* traits are inherited...However, "this theory has gradually faced strong oppositions because numerous facts contradict it" (158). While he is clear that heredity does play a significant role in both intellectual (e.g., music, mathematics) and physical (e.g., athletics, diseases like tuberculosis, alcoholism, facial features) aptitudes, he is strongly against the no-

tion that we can draw a direct line from the inherited aptitude to the activity or disease itself (158). He concludes, "Augustinianism has been proven right, but it has to incorporate the undeniable truth found in Pelagianism, namely the influence of the environment, the power of imitation" (159). It is worth noting that Bavinck considers lying and sexuality together, highlighting how Rousseau was equally wrong about the former, "believ[ing] the lies of children were entirely the work of educators" (166). In contradiction to this logic, he demonstrates how children lie because they are sinful and predisposed to self-preservation, which at times fuels lying, and/or they are imitating the deception they witness from others (168–9).

Freud, according to Bavinck, "Overlooks that a child's love for its parents, especially its mother, in the early years bears an entirely unique character and by no means is or needs to be of an erotic nature" (173). Bavinck avers the *sensual* and *sexual* are "two distinct things, in adults

and even more so in children" (173). The intimacy of a mother and child ought not be distorted and sexualized but revered and guarded. He concludes that contemporary culture has wrongly awakened sensual desires in children and then turned to sexual education to solve the problem it creates, stating that "the fear is not unfounded that the remedy may prove worse than the ailment" (175). Bavinck laments that "contemporary culture, through various means and methods (such as provocative literature, cinema, photography), promotes the awakening of sexual desires," which essentially interrupt and intervene upon the child's "soul-life," not allowing the gradual development of their faculties and powers (175). I would add here that I can only imagine what his concern would be in view of the invention of the laptop, tablet, and smartphone since his day.

Since the physical and psychological, the intellectual, religious, and ethical aspects of human existence are all deeply inter-



connected, Bavinck advocates for both the “ethical” and “psychological” method, so that parents/teachers can “judge with truth and equity concerning one or another evil” that a child commits, so that we can “first, [possess] a standard or rule according to which that wrongdoing must be measured,” and second, [have a] “precise knowledge of the person who committed the wrongdoing and the circumstances under which they committed it” (160–161). The problem with the “humanitarian” theory of parenting that Bavinck is critiquing in his day (or what we may call “gentle parenting” today) is that it requires abandoning the normative character of ethics and reduces child-rearing to merely “a description of moral phenomena...Punishment then naturally gives way to being a means of education and improvement” (161). Bavinck criticizes the “welfare education” of specialized institutions in Germany, which separate kids who were diagnosed as “simpletons, psychopaths [into] strict schools, correctional schools, educational institutions...There has even emerged a distinct science, which bears the name ‘therapeutic’ or ‘remedial pedagogy’” (160). Against this, Bavinck contends,

The holy Scriptures, although often speaking openly about human sexuality, never mention a word about sexual education for children. Instead, they repeatedly admonish parents to raise their children in the instruction and admonition of the Lord [Eph. 6:4]. They do not condemn the sexual life as many ascetics of the past and present have done, nor do they demand the emancipation of the flesh, as various kinds of libertines have advocated, especially in our century (176).

One can only imagine Bavinck’s horror at the thought of puberty blockers and the chemical castration of children increasingly prevalent in our day, which is the tragic logical entailment of “emancipating the flesh” of those whose innocence is destroyed by a wicked and perverse generation. Instead, Bavinck contends that “teachers who interact with children daily and gain knowledge of all their virtues and vices through experience” are best equipped to disciple them physically and psychologically (165).

He concludes his argument in this chapter by reminding parents/teachers that we must distinguish between sin and the sinner because, “The sinner may remain the object of compassion and love, but sin itself must be measured solely by the incorruptible moral law” (178). It is within the confines of a loving Christian home/school where children receive the immeasurable gift of being raised by a compassionate normative standard.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

I have one significant disagreement with this book. In his chapter on “Religious Education” Bavinck brings together his religious-ethical conception of child-rearing by advocating for the children of believers being in the CoG by virtue of their infant baptism. He explains that “children of the covenant” have a threefold privilege and duty: (1) Parents and educators have “the right and obligation to consider and treat their children as though they are raising Christian children,” (2) The CoG provides “strong support in combating the evil that resides in the thoughts and desires of the children’s hearts,” and (3) “Parents may proceed from the idea that their children,

in principle, partake in the promises of that covenant until it is proven otherwise through their confession and conduct later in life” (220–1).

As a convinced Baptist, I reject the notion that my children are members/partakers of the CoG (or better yet, the new covenant, apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit and their subsequent profession of faith and baptism), while rejoicing in the reality that they receive the blessed and holy influence of growing up as wards of the church.⁴ However, I fully agree with Bavinck’s argument, “If parents exclude religion from their children’s upbringing, they sin against the nature of their children, against the light that shines in their reason and conscience” (214). One reason that I as a Baptist catechize my children and expect them to join my wife and I in private and corporate worship is because they are indeed religious beings, “not by coercion or force but by the voice of nature” (214). To not provide this religious formation for them is as much a failure of my natural duty as a father as not providing them with shelter, food, clothes, etc. But it does not follow that my children are therefore members of the new covenant. This blends together moral/natural law and covenantal membership in a way that undermines the nature and structure of the new covenant in Christ.⁵

CONCLUSION

I commend this book to Christian par-

ents looking for a deep dive into Scripture and for a guide in conversing with contemporary psychology. Though Bavinck’s conversation partners are a bit antiquated, their influence is certainly felt today. There is indeed nothing new under the sun. I was most impacted by how holistically Bavinck views humans – and specifically, children – seeking to faithfully raise/educate them as fallen yet moral, rational, ethical, and religious beings. He seeks to avoid the false antithesis between Scripture and Nature, and between nature and nurture, providing a robust foundation for childhood development. Even while putting the covenants together differently, I resonate strongly with his urgent reminder that Christian parents/educators have a *moral* duty, flowing from the moral law, to raise their children in the nurture and fear of God. This is a blessed, weighty, challenging, and joyful vocation. ✕

Michael Carlino is Operations Director for CBMW and Adjunct Professor of Christian Theology at Boyce College.

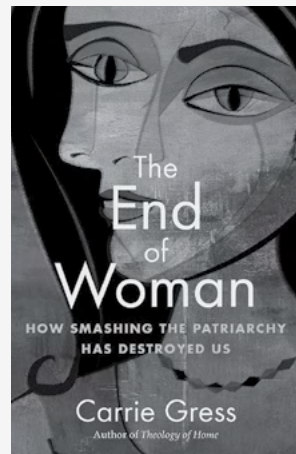
⁴ For an excellent treatment of how Baptists can and ought to think of raising their children, see Richard Furman, “The Children of Church Members,” *Christ Over All*, last modified May 15, 2023. <https://christoverall.com/article/longform/a-short-introduction-to-richard-furman-and-his-letter-the-children-of-church-members/>.

⁵ For a sound Baptist treatment of the biblical covenants as it relates to baptism and the new covenant, see Stephen Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants,” from *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 105–170.

Review of *The End of Woman: How Smashing the Patriarchy Has Destroyed Us*

In a time when dismayed observers of culture are treated to any number of fine accounts of how we got here, like Carl Trueman's *Strange New World* (2022) and recently Andrew Wilson's *Remaking the World* (2023), Carrie Gress joins the conversation with a specific word for women. Like a wise mother writing to her daughters on the ways of the world, Gress quickly helps us understand that the destroyed "us" of the subtitle is "all of us" in Western culture. Men must listen in on this conversation, too, and all are well-rewarded if they do.

As the title indicates, it is the feminist agenda of patriarchy-smashing that earns Gress's ire for the plight of women today, where "what it means to be a woman has dissolved and is now an unanswerable



Carrie Gress, *The End of Woman: How Smashing the Patriarchy Has Destroyed Us*. Washington, DC: Regnery, 2023.

question" (128), where men in dresses and heels edge women from prized positions, and where women are statistically less happy than ever before (xxvi). But this is no misplaced etiological claim. Gress has the receipts and treats the reader to a well-written and accessible account of feminism's calamitous beachheads in the war to overthrow the patriarchy, the so-called "last frontier of the masculine world" where men control women (118).

Along the way, readers meet the "Lost Girls" (Part 1) — the "broken women surrounded by awful men" — and the intellectual world they inhabit in their quest to "become free of the demands of men, children and family" (2). Indeed, half of the book is taken up by these "mothers" and leading lights of feminism. It is a well-researched tale revealing the tragic lives, choices, and ideologies that have shaped the feminist agenda to the present. Beginning with Mary Wollstonecraft (d. 1797), who started it all, we learn of the moral and sexual perversion, occultism, atheism, and anarchy of the Romantic cads shaping her and other feminist founders (chapters 1 and 2). There's the explicit anti-Christian, occultic spiritualism of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (d.1902) (chapter 3), the communism of Betty Friedan (chapter 4), the godless existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir (chapter 10) and much, much more.

But these are no mere tales for salacious gossip. Throughout the book, Gress is keen to show how all of feminism's foundational "isms" not only ruined the lives of their early promoters, but how they each gave shape to the present day where "woman" is gone. The chapters in Parts II and III, "Mean Girls" and "No Girls" re-

spectively, continue the litany into more modern times of the Sexual Revolution where the pill and abortion provide the key external means of achieving the feminist utopia. Beyond that — and this is a decided strength of Gress's work — she shows clearly the family tree of feminist narrative that brings us to modern "gender ideology" where the body is completely divorced from informing human identity of both men and women (chapter 10).

The antidote to feminism's ruinous contagion comes in the two chapters of Part IV, "The Way Home." Here Gress offers a two-pronged remedy: (1) understand the battle of narratives we face (chapter 11) and (2) return to defining "woman" on its own terms, instead of just the "incomplete males" of feminism (Chapter 12, "Mother"). The latter means a return to and celebration of the essentialism of a distinct female maternal vocation God has given to all women. Like other recent Catholic voices on the topic, including John Grabowski (*Unraveling Gender*, 2022) and Abigail Favale (*The Genesis of Gender*, 2022), Gress fills in the maternal vocation with metaphors of "birthing," that is, bringing forth human life whether literally or figuratively (180), "nourishing," or trying to give others what they authentically need to flourish (181), and "holding" or being a "shelter in which other souls unfold" (182).

The power and appeal of the beautiful difference God created in men and women shines in this book as Gress both exposes and recalibrates the ruinous effects of feminism on our culture. To my mind, just one point profits from more nuance for Gress to fully break free of the feminist alt-nar-

rative she confronts. That is, Gress allows the feminist shibboleth *patriarchy*, actually of communist origin (67), to still control her narrative, at least on the surface. When she defines patriarchy as the “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (xvii), the answer to patriarchy-smashing can’t be to “restore the patriarchy” as Gress claims (172). What she means to restore throughout and brilliantly expounds is a biblical essentialism where men and women are not reduced to interchangeable sameness (122), androgyny (159), or a competitive, zero-sum contest (125). This is not patriarchy, but biblical *patricentrism* as Daniel Block has helpfully expressed it (see his chapter in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, IVP, 2003). Restore this biblical vision and culture will return to its divinely intended means of flourishing. Carrie Gress offers us a readable and researched way forward. ✕

Mark Saucy is a professor of theology at Biola University. He and his wife, Michele, have four married children and live in Brea, California.

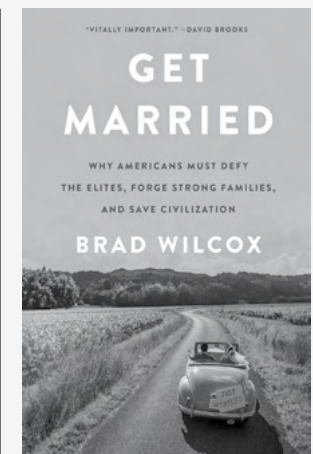
REVIEWED BY G. SHANE MORRIS

Keep to the Old Roads:

A review of Brad Wilcox's *Get Married*

In his 2012 song, *You'll Find Your Way*, Andrew Peterson urges his son to “keep to the old roads.” It’s profound advice for faith and life in a time when so many in our culture are attempting to blaze new trails. From sexuality and gender to spirituality and family, modern people seem intent on rejecting the “life scripts” that guided previous generations, and are instead opting for new identities, values, beliefs, and approaches to love.

Marriage, in particular, has fallen on hard times. Many are convinced it no longer works, is outdated, or won’t serve their interests. In *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*, University of Virginia sociologist Brad Wilcox argues from the data that this widespread rejec-



William Bradford Wilcox. *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*. New York: HarperCollins B and Blackstone Publishing, 2023.

tion of marriage has been a mistake. He thinks the “old road” of matrimony is not only still viable, but is the most dependable route to happiness, prosperity, lasting love, and a meaningful life. He also suggests the reason millions have given up on marriage is that our elites, influencers, and pop culture tastemakers have lied to us about it for fifty years.

THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN HEART

It started with what Wilcox calls “the Me Decade,” a time when Americans shifted their priorities from family and community to chasing their own gratification: “The promise held out in the 1970s was that casting aside the values and virtues of an older era and focusing on your own needs, your own desires, and your own projects would bring you happiness.”¹ This was when divorce began to skyrocket,² abortion became legal nationwide, the Pill was introduced, and out-of-wedlock births began the process of more than doubling.³ Today, the heedless hedonism of the Baby Boomers, taken up by their adult children, has soured into record loneliness, single-ness, childlessness, and depression. You’d think we’d finally question the anti-marriage philosophy that got us here. But a new generation of opinion-makers is doubling down on anti-marriage rhetoric. Wilcox points to social media influencers on the “red-pilled” right like Andrew Tate

and Pearl Davis, and feminist journalists on the left like Molly Smith, all of whom argue that marriage is not only obsolete, but is a kind of “death sentence” for professionally and financially ambitious men and women (ix-x). We’re all better off without the ring, both sides seem to agree. Their message has sunk in. The US marriage rate is hovering around an all-time low (8), and single, childless adults have eclipsed the population of married adults with children for the first time in American history (12). This widespread abandonment of the family life-script is close to the new normal for millennials and generation Z. Wilcox describes it as “the closing of the American heart” — an unprecedented generational surrender to the forces driving us apart and keeping us from forming families.

The irony and tragedy is that the anti-marriage messages are mostly lies, and getting hitched is still a statistically reliable road to a prosperous and happy life. Wilcox marshals an impressive battery of social science, drawn largely from his work with Wendy Wang of the Institute for Family Studies, and interspersed with illustrative real-life stories to show that “get married” is still fundamentally sound advice.

THE TRUTH ABOUT MARRIAGE, BY THE NUMBERS

Modern discourse on marriage runs large-

ly on anecdotes and “vibes,” which tend to select for horror stories and grievances. But a look at hard data shows that marriage is still an unbeatably good deal for most people.

For starters, half of marriages do not end in divorce. As of 2021, divorce rates had fallen by 40 percent, to below where they were in 1970 (6). And notwithstanding “red-pill” personalities who describe marriage as suicidal for men due to the danger of women taking their children and half their money, it turns out stably married men in their fifties have over 30 times the assets of never married men, and even divorced and remarried men come out well ahead of the lone wolves (42).

It turns out the idea that marriage is miserable or stifling is propaganda, too. Wilcox shows that married people are, on average, the happiest folks around. They’re certainly in a better mood than their unmarried peers, with married men 20 percent more likely than single men to describe themselves as “very happy,” and married women 16 percent more likely (51). Married parents are also 15 percent less likely than single, childless people to describe themselves as “lonely most or all of the time” (49). And it turns out marriage is associated more closely with happiness than a college degree, a higher income, or a good job. In fact, having a satisfying marriage is 400 percent more likely to predict happiness than having a satisfying job is (4).

One clue that we’ve been misled about this is how many of the very people spreading progressive, post-family propaganda live surprisingly traditional lives. This is a major point in the book.

Even as our elites have pushed ideas that “demean marriage, cast aside the normative guardrails that forge strong families,” and “passed laws that penalize marriage for the poor and working class...” they have “figured out ways to protect their own families...” (xx).

One of those has been by shepherding their children through the so-called “success sequence” of graduating high school, staying employed, and not having children of their own before marriage, all while a growing share of Americans fail at all three. In public, the elites “talk left,” promoting sexual liberation and all kinds of novel family arrangements, but at home they tend to “walk right,” following prudent patterns that conduce to upper middle-class life. This is part of how they stay elite!

It turns out the diverse lifestyles and family forms promoted by the ruling class do the exact opposite of what we’re told. Wilcox punctures myths about the wonders of “flying solo” in life, the idea that “love and money, not marriage, make a family,” and the notion that the key to marital bliss is finding one’s “soulmate.” All of these, he argues, are not only demonstrably false, but have hurt us as a society and left us far lonelier, less hopeful, and less capable of forming stable, fulfilling relationships.

This is one case where the world as seen through social media, entertainment, or even the opinion sections of major newspapers bears little resemblance to the real world. Marriage truly is the gold standard for lasting happiness and wellbeing, and to the extent that we believe some other new arrangement is preferable, we’ve been duped.

¹ Brad Wilcox, *Get Married*, Broadside Books, 2024, xvii.

² “Divorce, More Than a Century of Change, 1900-2018,” Valerie Schweizer, Bowling Green State University, November 22, 2020, Accessed May 28, 2024, <https://www.bgsu.edu/ncfmr/resources/data/family-profiles/schweizer-divorce-century-change-1900-2018-fp-20-22.html>.

³ “How We Ended Up With 40 Percent of Children Born Out of Wedlock,” Robert VerBruggen, Institute for Family Studies, December 18, 2017, Accessed May 28, 2024, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/how-we-ended-up-with-40-percent-of-children-born-out-of-wedlock>.

THE CONDITION FOR UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Behind the scientific objectivity of *Get Married* is a moral lesson Wilcox occasionally makes explicit: that human beings were not made to live for ourselves, and the surest route to being happy on our death beds is to value permanent relationships over career, money, and self-expression. It just so happens God built such a relationship into the fabric of human nature, and those who live in light of this fact, unsurprisingly, do better on average than those trying to re-create human nature. Wilcox refers to marriage as a “keystone institution” because of the way it tends to make many other aspects of life and society fall into place. It binds men to the children they father. It stabilizes fickle romantic relationships between adults, and channels sexuality — which is normally so disruptive — toward the creation and care of new people. It builds households and neighborhoods instead of revolving doors for transient singles. And it classically foregrounds a vow as the basis for love, rather than the other way around. This last tendency is crucial, and part of why the message behind this arsenal of pro-marriage statistics is so timely. As Jordan Peterson says, marriage is (or should) amount to a promise that “no matter what you tell me, I won’t run away.”⁴ In other words, marriage creates the condition for unconditional love. It moves people beyond the “trial period” in a relationship by decisively and permanently defining the relationship and (ideally) cutting off all possibility of retreat. It sounds crass to modern ears, but as Wilcox joked

in our interview on the Upstream podcast, there was a reason Roman generals burned the bridges behind their advancing armies: being “all in” changes the dynamics of both love and war!⁵

We can see this play out in the lives of Wilcox’s “masters of marriage — those segments of the population disproportionately getting and staying married. Regular churchgoers, Asian Americans, and college-educated, higher-income Americans are all (often for different reasons) walking the “old road” of family formation, which depends on permanence and unconditional devotion. Such couples agree that marriage is for life (143) and embrace a “we before me” mentality about their relationship (103). They tend to prioritize the practical duties of life together over intense emotional connection, (92) often embody traditionally masculine and feminine traits (156), and notably tend to view children as a core purpose of their marriage (121).

Religious observance, especially, turns out to be a powerful predictor of successful marriage (224–225). The mutually-reinforcing “double helix” connecting family with faith is something authors have written about for years (see, for instance, Mary Eberstadt’s *How the West Really Lost God*). But Wilcox reveals surprising ways active religious faith promotes happiness *within* marriage. For instance, couples who shared the same faith reported more frequent and better sex (188) and greater overall marital happiness and life satisfaction (176–177). In our discussion, he speculated that this has to do with the trust

“If we honor these
time-worn paths,
they will teach us
and shape us
until, at the end,
we find we are
different people.”

engendered between spouses by transcendent vows and a believing community that reinforces them.

I’ve seen the power of this unconditional vow and mutual commitment to God play out in my own marriage. During the darkest days of the last thirteen years, it was not simply feelings or a desire for a “soulmate” that kept Gabriela and me together, but the conviction that our union was the work and will of a higher power. The inventor of marriage knows better than any of us how difficult love can be, and perhaps if we could foresee all He sees, no one would ever get married. But that’s the genius of the “old roads.” In many ways, they embody a wisdom beyond our self-insight, shaping us toward ends we were too foolish to pursue when we began. If we honor these time-worn paths, they will teach us and shape us until, at the end, we find we are different

people. As Andrew Peterson writes in another song about marriage that echoes the words of Christ (Matt 16:24–26), maybe “the only way to find your life is to lay your whole life down.”⁶

Get Married is a powerful antidote to decades of anti-marriage propaganda and the pervasive modern cynicism about the most important institution of human society. Brad Wilcox has provided a “one stop shop” for those interested in learning and making the case that, despite what you may have heard, marriage is still good and good for us. But he has also given us an understated reminder that the “old roads” are wiser than we are, and that the thing so many in today’s world are searching for — love — may be right where we left it. ✕

G. Shane Morris is a senior writer at the Colson Center and host of the Upstream podcast.

⁴ Quoted from this TikTok clip of Jordan Peterson, posted by ImpulseMan, Accessed 5/28/24: <https://www.tiktok.com/@theimpulsemann/video/7306605054084107563>.

⁵ “Defy the Elites, Get Married,” Upstream, March 19, 2024: <https://colsoncenter.org/upstream/defy-the-elites-get-married-brad-wilcox/>.

⁶ Andrew Peterson, “Dancing in the Mine Fields,” YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Gs3fg_WsEg&ab_channel=AndrewPetersonVEVO.

eikon

*Know that the LORD
Himself is God;
It is He who has made
us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the
sheep of His pasture.*

PSALM 100:3, NASB



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