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# Why “Together for the Gospel” Embraces Complementarianism<sup>1</sup>

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“Together for the Gospel” (T4G) is a consortium of Reformed evangelicals who are committed to a comprehensive recovery and reaffirmation of the biblical Gospel. I am signer of T4G’s initial doctrinal statement of affirmation and denials. Article 16 of our statement consists of a plain affirmation of a complementarian understanding of gender. It reads:

We affirm that the Scripture reveals a pattern of complementary order between men and women, and that this order is itself a testimony to the Gospel, even as it is the gift of our Creator and Redeemer. We also affirm that all Christians are called to service within the body of Christ, and that God has given to both men and women important and strategic roles within the home, the church, and the society. We further affirm that the teaching office of the church is assigned only to those men who are called of God in fulfillment of the biblical teachings and that men are to lead in their homes as husbands and fathers who fear and love God.

We deny that the distinction of roles between men and women revealed in the Bible is evidence of mere cultural conditioning or a manifestation of male oppression or prejudice against women. We also deny that this biblical distinction of roles excludes women from meaningful ministry in Christ’s kingdom. We further deny that any church can confuse these issues without damaging its witness to the Gospel.

Why did I and the others signers of this document include this statement in our doctrinal statement? There are several reasons.

One, the denial of complementarianism undermines the church’s practical embrace of the authority of Scripture (thus eventually and inevitably harming the church’s witness to the Gospel). The gymnastics required to get from “I *do not* allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man,” in the Bible, to “I *do* allow a woman to teach and to exercise authority over a man” in the actual practice of the local church, are devastating to the functional authority of the Scripture in the life of the people of God.

By the way, this is one reason why I think we just don’t see many strongly inerrantist-egalitarians (meaning: those who hold unwaveringly to inerrancy and also to egalitarianism) in the younger generation of evangelicalism. Many if not most evangelical egalitarians today have significant qualms about inerrancy, and are embracing things like trajectory hermeneutics, etc., to justify their positions. Inerrancy or egalitarianism, one or the other, eventually wins out.

Two, and following on the first point, the church’s confidence in the clarity of Scripture is undermined, because if you can get egalitarianism from the Bible, you can get anything from the Bible. Paul may be excruciating to read aloud and hear read in a dominant feminist culture, but he’s not obscure in his position! In 1 Tim 2:11–12 he says, “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to

remain quiet.” Elsewhere, in 1 Cor 14:34–35, we find the confirming parallel to this previous pronouncement: “The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.” These verses (and many others) are uncomfortably clear and certainly politically incorrect, and though some of us may be consoled by “exegesis” that shows that they don’t really mean that women can’t preach, teach, rule in the church, yet there remains this nagging feeling that such interpretive moves are the victory of present opinion over clear but unpopular biblical teaching. Cultural cooption of the church’s reading of the Bible robs the church’s ability to speak prophetically to the culture and to live distinctively in the culture, which in turns undermines the church’s Gospel witness.

Three, because the very ideal of equality championed by egalitarianism (whether secular or Christian) is a permutation of a particular strand of Enlightenment thought, and because this particular ideal of equality is actually alien to the biblical anthropology and ethic, whenever and wherever it is read into the text of Scripture and its principles are worked out consistently, there is a competition with a biblical view of manhood and womanhood. For instance, try to find this view of equality in Genesis 1—it’s just not there. Consequently, commitment to evangelical egalitarianism opens the door for two competing but incompatible ethical norms and ideals within the individual, family and church. If the egalitarian impulse wins out, the church is compromised precisely at the point where paganism is assaulting the church today. For, as Peter Jones has brilliantly demonstrated, paganism wants to get rid of Christian monotheism by getting rid of the Creator-creature distinction. And one way paganism likes to do that is through gender confusion—hence, the bi-sexual shaman, the sacred feminine, goddess worship, etc. Paganism understands that one of the best ways to prepare the way for pagan polytheistic monism over against the transcendent Creator God of the Bible is to

undermine that God’s image in the distinctiveness of male and female, and in the picture of Christ and the church in marital role distinctions, and in the male eldership of the church. Egalitarianism is just not equipped for that fight, and in fact simply capitulates to it.

Four, when the biblical distinctions of maleness and femaleness are denied, Christian discipleship is seriously damaged because there can be no talk of cultivating distinctively masculine Christian virtue or feminine Christian virtue. Yes, there are many Christian ethical norms that are equally directed and applicable to male and female disciples, but there are also many ethical directives in the NT enjoined distinctly upon Christian men as men and Christian women as women. Furthermore, the NT (and the Bible as a whole) recognizes that men and women are uniquely vulnerable to different kinds of temptations, and thus need gender-specific encouragement in battling against them in the course of Christian discipleship. Evangelical egalitarianism, fearful as it is that any acknowledged difference between men and women could set the stage for inequality of role or status, is utterly unprepared to help the believer with these distinctive commands or temptations. Egalitarian discipleship of Christian men and women has, then, an inherent androgynous bias. But that is not how God made us. He made us male and female. Thus, Paul warns Christian men against the soul-peril of “effeminacy” without in any way criticizing (and, indeed, admiring and encouraging) the “femininity” of women. We need masculine male Christians and feminine female Christians, and that kind of discipleship requires an understanding of and commitment to complementarianism. Hence, denial of complementarianism compromises Gospel discipleship.

For these reasons and more, I think we were right to “deny that any church can confuse these issues without damaging its witness to the Gospel.”

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this article appeared on the website of “Together for the Gospel,” [www.T4G.org](http://www.T4G.org).