

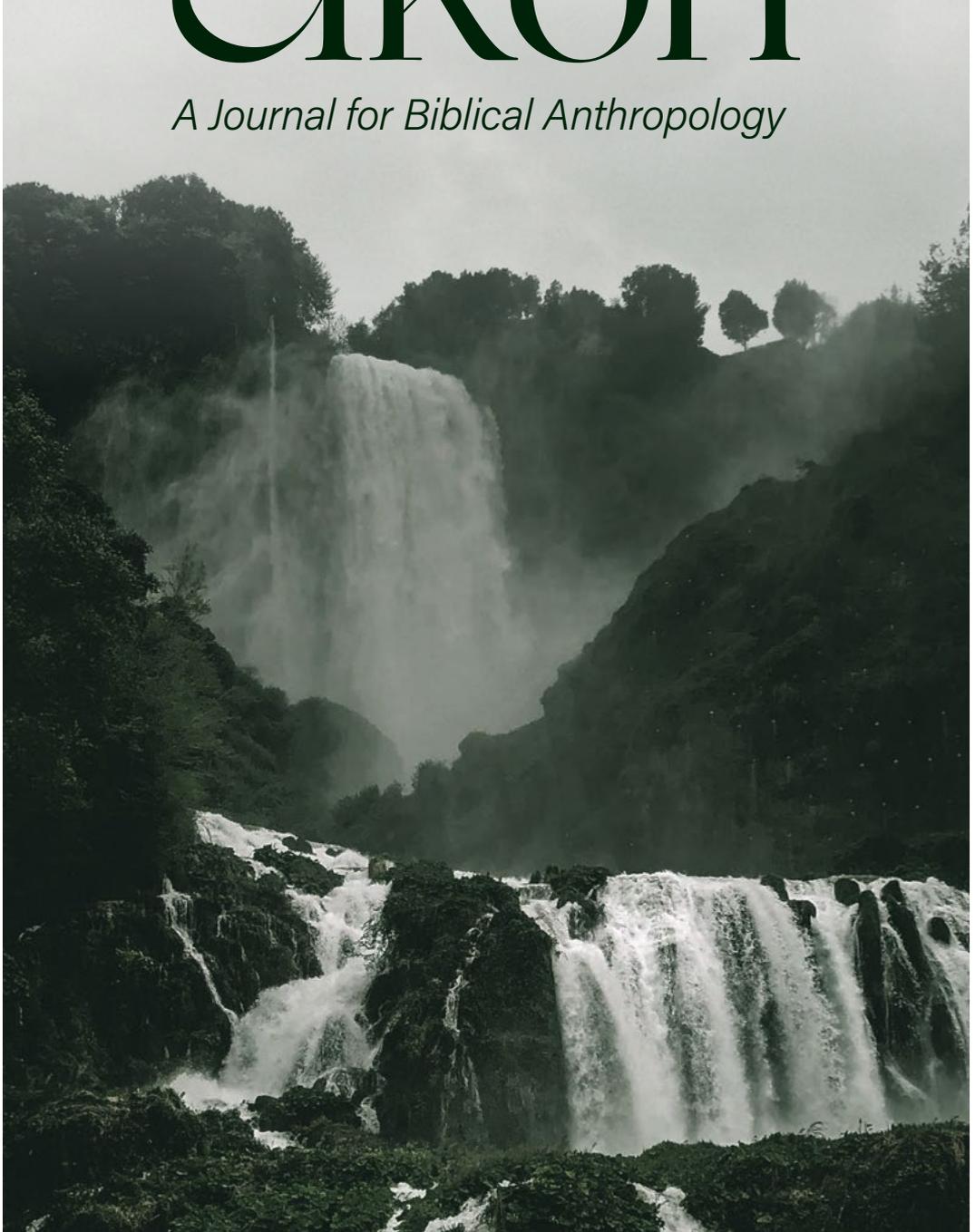
**DOES  
COMPLEMENTARIANISM  
DEPEND ON ERAS?**  
*Stephen J. Wellum*

**ON THE IMPROPER USE OF  
PROPER SPEECH**  
*Kyle D. Claunch*

**DOES COMPLEMENTARIANISM  
LEAD TO ABUSE?**  
*Jonathan Leeman*

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# Editorial

This issue of *Eikon* is devoted almost entirely to a chapter-by-chapter review of the third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality* (DBE). Our reviews reveal that this third edition marks a significant departure from previous iterations of the intra-evangelical debate between complementarians and egalitarians. While most of the book is refreshed and repackaged arguments for egalitarianism, some chapters have given up significant ground to LGBTQ ideology, including an embrace of personhood theory, the use of gender-neutral pronouns for God and preferred pronouns for our neighbors, suggestions of feminine names for God, the promotion of “Side-B Gay Christianity” and same-sex covenanted partnerships — or marriage-lite, as it has been called by critics — and, most alarming of all, a chapter that

entails an endorsement of transgender ideology, including so-called gender reassignment surgery.

Before the publication of DBE’s third edition, evangelical egalitarians have historically and at least nominally maintained orthodox commitments when it comes to LGBTQ ideology and biblical sexuality. But as several chapters in this new edition demonstrate, that commitment seems to be eroding. This erosion parallels the changes that have taken place through successive waves of feminism, each of which has grown more radical in the attempt to downplay and even erase the distinction between the sexes.<sup>1</sup> Feminism greased the skids for functional interchangeability between men and women, and society has slipped right

<sup>1</sup>William Manchester observed this society-upending effect in 1993, less than a decade after CBE was founded: “the erasure of the distinctions between the sexes is not only the most striking issue of our time, it may be the most profound the race has ever confronted.” William Manchester, “A World Lit Only By Change,” *U.S. News & World Report* (October 25, 1993), 6. This quote has appeared in this journal before in Colin J. Smothers, “Creation and Discrimination: Why the Male-Female Distinction Makes a Difference” *Eikon* 1.2 (Fall 2019).

into ontological interchangeability.<sup>2</sup> How are these trends revealed in this issue?

Christa McKirland's chapter, which I review in this issue (Colin), is perhaps the most radical chapter in the book, which is significant because she serves as associate editor for this edition of *DBE*. In her chapter, McKirland not only rejects gender essentialism, but she also uses the gender-neutral pronoun "Godself" in place of masculine pronouns to refer to God. She also uses masculine pronouns to refer to a biological woman and even refers to this woman as a Christian, despite this individual's embrace of a transgender identity. Most troubling, McKirland opens the door for people to undergo so-called gender reassignment surgery, provided they pursue it in submission to the Spirit in order "to become more like Christ."

Another noteworthy chapter is by Ronald Pierce, who is also an editor of this edition of *DBE*, reviewed in this issue by Jonathan Swan. In this chapter, titled "Biblical Equality and Same-Sex Marriage," Pierce endorses the orthodox position on biblical marriage, against our culture's attempt to redefine marriage to include same-sex couples. But as Swan demonstrates, along the way, he treats the matter as if it were a secondary issue about which genuine Christians may agree to disagree. Pierce refers to "Side-A Gay Christians," those who embrace homosexuality completely, as Christians, even though their position distorts the very institution God gave the world to picture the Gospel. He also commends "Side-B Gay Christianity" and their covenanted partnerships and gay identities.

While these chapters are the most alarming, each chapter in this book contains other significant errors. Stephen Wellum and Kyle Claunch helpfully engage and advance the Trinity debate from a complementarian and Nicene perspective, while correcting significant egalitarian errors in their respective chapters under review. Several other reviewers engage and refute the standard egalitarian arguments that have been repackaged for this new edition: Anne Kennedy, Peter Gentry, Andy Naselli, Peter Gurry, Buist Fanning, Ray Van Neste, Alan Branch, Sharon James, and myself (Denny Burk) address these chapters on their own merits and show how a complementarian perspective better accounts for and represents the biblical data. Importantly, these are not just reviews, they are review essays, and each reviewer advances the conversation in a helpful direction. Finally, Jonathan Leeman has provided a *tour de force* answer to the accusation that says complementarianism causes abuse. Leeman's response to this accusation is honest, careful, pastoral, and even practical.

The cultural winds and the spirit of the age are relentless. But we will not relent as long as we have breath. We will continue to cast anchor with Christ, no longer "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Eph 4:14). His Word is good, and it is enough. May this first issue in the fifth volume of *Eikon* demonstrate such. ✕

Colin J. Smothers  
Eikon Executive Editor  
Denny Burk  
Eikon Editor-in-Chief

<sup>2</sup> See Colin J. Smothers, "Is the Slippery Slope Actually Slippery? Egalitarianism and the Open-and-Affirming Position" *9Marks Journal* (December 2019).

# A Return to Counter-Cultural Sexuality

The sexual ethic of the second-century Roman Empire bears some semblance to today's sexual revolutionary era. Sexual promiscuity (especially among men), which included not only heterosexual and homosexual acts, but also pederasty, was considered a societal good. With very few limiting principles, Roman culture encouraged this pursuit of (mostly male) sexual pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

Today, nearly every aspect of our culture is sexualized. Whereas ancient public spaces were filled with sexual images, today we encounter them on television (or streaming), on the internet, and often in public spaces (try going to a shopping mall without seeing them). While Hollywood deserves credit for being the most persuasive purveyor of today's secular ethic, America's new sexual religion pervades its educational institutions, public

libraries, sports, and the market. And with the exception of consent, little to no limiting principles constrain modern sexual practices.

As Western culture's sexual ethic regresses into the forms of paganism known in the second century, the church finds itself with an opportunity once again to bear a powerful, counter-cultural witness. Record of the early church's counter-cultural witness has been preserved in an anonymous letter written by an unknown Christian apologist to an unknown person named Diogenetus.<sup>2</sup>

The letter to Diognetus is one of the earliest works of Christian apologetics. This ancient defense of Christianity contrasts Christian belief and worship with Graeco-Roman polytheism and Judaism. It

<sup>1</sup> Steven D. Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 71–78.

<sup>2</sup> For a helpful introduction to this letter, see: Michael A.G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 49–67. The letter can be read for free online: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.x.iii.html>.



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conveys a stirring image of the Christian way of life in the face of hostility and explains the origins of Christianity with the appearance of Christ, inviting its recipient, Diognetus, to believe and experience the joy of life in communion with God.

### **SIMILAR, YET DIFFERENT**

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In the course of the letter, the Apologist who wrote this historical letter to Diognetus seeks to distinguish Christians from its Pagan and Jewish neighbors. What was it that made them different? To truly understand these differences, the Apologist elegantly explains the ways in which Christians lived similarly to their neighbors. Thus, while it was apparent that Christians held drastically different religious beliefs, the Apologist explains that despite these differences, Chris-

tians embodied ordinary life the same as everyone else. Christians thus

neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>"The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 26. Hereafter referred to as "The Epistle to Diognetus."

Christians lived in the same cities, towns, and villages as the pagan. They spoke the same language. They did not — and could not — live obscurely with respect to the basics of life. As Wayne Meeks asserts, “the daily practice of most church members was doubtless indistinguishable in most respects from that of their unconverted neighbors.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, they ate the food harvested and prepared in their region; they wore clothes reflective of their culture; they went to work alongside their neighbors; they married and had children. And, as Smith argues, “how could it have been otherwise? A person who heard and believed the message about Jesus naturally continued to speak the same language as before — Greek or Latin or whatever — and to work and dress and eat in much the same ways as she had always done.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet, as the Apologist conveys to Diognetus, it was by this “ordinary conduct” that Christians stood out:

They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.<sup>6</sup>

Christians were good citizens and cared for their countries, yet they knew their earthly country — wherever it was — did not constitute their final home. These Christians, while living and seeking the welfare of their city, sought after the city of God.

While living in the city of man yet longing for the city of God, one of the ways Christians set themselves apart was by their sexual ethic:

They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh.<sup>7</sup>

Christians married and bore children like their religious counterparts, but they did not leave their children exposed to die. In other words, they opposed the common Graeco-Roman practice of child exposure — the ancient version of today’s abortion. Whereas in the second-century, unwanted children were killed by exposure, today’s unwanted children are killed mostly — and not without dark irony — in medical facilities. The means are different, yet the outcome is the same. Today’s Christian pro-life movement is merely a continuation of the early church’s biblical ethic to protect the life of children.

The Apologist’s next phrase is noteworthy: “They have a common table, but not a common bed.” Christians, according to the Apologist, were openhanded and hospitable. They willingly shared their goods with one another (cf. Acts 2:44–46; 4:32). But, importantly, they did not share their beds. In other words, they honored God’s gift of sex in its God-designed context: marriage.

It is no surprise that the early church’s counter-cultural witness follows that outlined by Paul:

<sup>4</sup>Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2, quoted in Steven D. Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 107.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 107.

<sup>6</sup>“The Epistle to Diognetus,” 26–27.

<sup>7</sup>“The Epistle to Diognetus,” 26–27.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:15–20, ESV)

We should not downplay the counter-cultural nature of the Christian sexual ethic. As Steven D. Smith writes in *Pagans and Christians in the City*, “This conception expressed a Christian ideal of purity — of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit — that pagans found almost incomprehensible.”<sup>8</sup> And so it is today.<sup>9</sup>

## A TRUE COUNTERCULTURE

---

While Western Christians formerly lived amidst cultures that broadly shared their sexual ethic, that state of affairs is gone. Today, the church is again confronted with a competing sexuality, one complete with religious zeal and moral sanction. Yesteryear’s Graeco-Roman gods of the Roman city-state have merely been displaced by the gods of the authentic self. The Christian, however, has been called to deny himself, pick up his cross, and

follow the way of Jesus (Matt 16:24).

Whether the issue is abortion, divorce, cohabitation, marital infidelity, homosexuality, so-called same-sex marriage, or the legion (pun intended) of issues associated with gender ideology, the church today has the opportunity to present itself once again as a true counterculture. And Christians should seize this opportunity to communicate and demonstrate the fullness of the gospel as a better, richer, fuller, more satisfying way of life — one that honors God by honoring our bodies, our created design, and one another as men and women created in God’s image. This may not be the counterculture of best-selling books, well-paid speaking engagements, or status-affirming columns for leading newspapers, but it is one that can truly reveal the glory of Christ to the world and save many from their sins and suffering.

As our post-Christian society grows in its antagonism towards Christianity, and specifically its sexual ethic, we would do well to remember the Christian way of life described to Diognetus. Let’s pray that the future of Christianity in the West would be characterized by hospitality to our neighbors: “they have a common table” — but not sexual libertinism: “but not a common bed.” In our super-charged sexual age of digital isolation, the church should re-establish itself as a true counterculture marked by hospitality and faithfulness to the biblical sexual ethic. ✕

*Jonathan E. Swan is  
Managing Editor of Eikon.*

<sup>8</sup> Steven D. Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 284.

<sup>9</sup> Kate Cohen, “Why are we so tolerant of churchy bigotry?” *Washington Post*, March 6, 2023, accessed June 1, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/03/06/religious-bigotry-lgbtq-homophobia/>.

ANNE KENNEDY



# Reinterpreting Church History: A Response to Mimi Haddad, “History Matters”

“He who controls the present, controls the past. He who controls the past, controls the future” (11). Thus, quoting George Orwell’s 1984, Mimi Haddad opens the inaugural chapter of the third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality*. Women’s voices, she claims, have been silenced throughout Christian history by those “committed to male authority” (11). Their essential contributions for the advancement of the gospel have been “marginalized,” “omitted,” and “devalued,” particularly by modern-day complementarians, especially in theological institutions (11). Haddad leans on Beth Allison Barr’s analysis of courses and

*Anne Kennedy, MDiv, is the author of Nailed It: 365 Readings for Angry or Worn-Out People, rev. ed. (Square Halo Books, 2020). She blogs about current events and theological trends at Standfirmfaith.com and on her Substack, Demotivations With Anne.*

curricula offered by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to introduce her subject. “Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s biased curriculum,” she writes, “not only damages the credibility of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as a center of higher education, but it reinforces the Southern Baptist Convention’s sexism” (11–12). One of this sexism’s most iconic examples is Paige Patterson, who is reported to have expressed himself happy that an abused woman returned to her abusive husband and there endured yet more abuse (11).<sup>1</sup>

### REREADING CHURCH HISTORY

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To redress this sexism, Haddad profiles prominent women in church history. Beginning with the early Church martyr, Perpetua, she sketches the biographies of Blandina, Crispina, Syncretica, Macrina the Younger, and St. Paula. She goes on to highlight the most prominent medieval mystics — Hildegard, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna — and notes the remarkable stories of Reformation heroines Argula von Grumbach, Lady Jane Gray, and Margaret of Navarre. The real substance of the chapter, however, is Haddad’s turn to the stories of evangelical Conversionism, Evangelicalism’s Golden Era, and what she calls a period of Activism. The well-known names, to me, of Lottie Moon, Sarah Grimke, Amy Carmichael, and Sojourner Truth are joined by the less well-known Mary Prince, Phoebe Palmer, and Elizabeth Heyrick, among others. In all, Haddad discusses the lives and con-

tributions of thirty-four women, if I have counted correctly.

Haddad’s list is an engaging journey through the well-rehearsed tumults of the modern era that finally settled into the entrenched “culture wars” still going on inside American Christianity. Women, of course, played critical roles in overturning the injustice of slavery, spreading the gospel abroad, and calling nominal believers to lives of holiness. Amanda Barry Smith, for example, “was the first African American woman to receive invitations to preach internationally” (22). Phoebe Palmer ignited the Third Great Awakening, and was, amongst all her other accomplishments, “certain that God had called her to preach” (21). Catherine Booth was instrumental in founding the Salvation Army. Amy Carmichael and Lottie Moon both died of ill health in the midst of their tireless work. Every single person Haddad names devoted her life to the work of the gospel. Each felt the call of the Holy Spirit to speak and write and many to preach.

How then, asks Haddad, did the church, corporately, not step into the fullness of egalitarianism? Why aren’t the pulpits of today full of women? “Women,” she writes, “opened new global centers of Christian faith in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, but as their churches and organizations became institutionalized, women were pressed out of leadership” (27). This shift, she writes, resulted from the “fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the mid-twentieth century,”

<sup>1</sup> The judge in a lawsuit against Patterson alleging negligence in his time as President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary recently dismissed all claims against him. See Jonathan Howe, “Claims against Southwestern, Patterson dismissed in Roe case,” *Baptist Press*, April 6, 2023, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/claims-against-southwestern-patterson-dismissed-in-roe-case/>.

“What is most interesting to me is the variety of reasons the place of women in the church and the home was so contentiously debated during this time.”

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during which “mission organizations, Bible institutes, and denominations moved women into support roles to distinguish themselves from a growing secularization of feminism” (27). One might ask, at this point, what it was about secularization and feminism that caused such a shift.

Rather than delving into the explanations that these mission organizations, Bible institutes, and denominations provided, and still provide, for not placing women in leadership roles, Haddad asserts that “Early evangelical biblicism, which sup-

ported abolition, suffrage, and pressing humanitarian work worldwide, gave way to an anti-intellectualism that judged social activism and women’s leadership as liberal” (28). The withdrawal of “conservative” scholarship on this subject — which, one presumes Haddad means by the failure to accept women in pastoral and preaching roles in the church — meant that evangelicals “lost respected positions in the academy and culture.” “It would take,” Haddad appeals to Charles Malik’s 1980 speech opening the Billy Graham Center, “many decades to recover the intellectual and cultural leadership surrendered by fundamentalists and evangelicals after 1950” (28).

The fundamentalist-modernist debate regarding how the church should engage with encroaching modernity and secularism has been litigated effectively elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> What is most interesting to me is the variety of reasons the place of women in the church and the home was so contentiously debated during this time. Haddad unwittingly hints at one major factor without acknowledging the very great weight it held, and continues to hold, for so many Christians. “After WWII,” explains Haddad, “evangelicals celebrated women’s work in domestic spheres, a stereotype explored in Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and declared biblical by Charles Ryrie’s *The Place of Women*” (29). Here, it would be beneficial for egalitarians like Haddad to pause and rest a while. Is that true? Did Ryrie merely take Friedan’s “stereotype” and “declare” it biblical? Is “stereotype” even a reasonable label for the kind

<sup>2</sup> Phil Johnson’s talk on this subject is most informative: “Dead Right: The Failure of Fundamentalism,” [https://www.thegracelifeulpit.com/pdf/deadright\\_.pdf](https://www.thegracelifeulpit.com/pdf/deadright_.pdf)

of lives so many men and women of that period were trying to live?

### WHAT ABOUT THE PILL?

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This would have been the perfect point in the chapter to mention an invention that definitively altered the debate over what it means to be female, both in the home and the church: the Pill. The consequences and implications of this technology for women cannot be explored at too great a depth by modern people trying to understand why things are the way they are. It is true that before the advent of artificial birth control, and the accompanying inevitable rise in out-of-wedlock pregnancy — something blandly referred to by most of us as “the sexual revolution” — the place of women in the shifting cultural malaise brought about by the industrial revolution had not been a settled question.

Mary Harrington, in her new book *Feminism Against Progress*, frames this philosophical debate as a fight between what she calls Team Care and Team Freedom.<sup>3</sup> The Team Care strand of early feminism fought to preserve the essential biological characteristics of women, the bonds they naturally had with their children that undergirded the social fabric of life before the mechanization of every product and factor of daily life. Most of the women on Haddad’s list, I imagine, would have found themselves more at home on Team Care. Team Freedom, meanwhile, while initially redressing the intellectual and social dehumanization women suffered during the Industrial Revolution, ultimately championed sexual freedom over everything else. The loss

of meaningful work and corresponding personhood for women was mitigated in a variety of ways, including the founding of guilds and the work of activists, but the debate “ended in the 1960s with a conclusive victory for Team Freedom, thanks to the mastery granted to women over our bodies via reproductive technology.”<sup>4</sup> The relationship between these two responses to the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution is too immense for a single chapter, of course, but it could be noted, perhaps, by someone so interested in the historical record.

Moreover, that this fundamental disagreement over the essentials of personhood, not to mention the position of women in public and private spheres, should have proven so protracted and bitter in Christian circles, should not surprise us for the simple reason that the question is not purely practical. It is theological. Haddad passes very lightly, with only a bare mention, over what she calls evangelical efforts to harmonize “women’s leadership” with “earlier evangelical traditions” (28). The debate eventually narrowed down to the Bible, as is fitting, and in particular to the meaning of the word “head,” in Greek *kephalē*.

Rather than recapitulating that disagreement, Haddad names various protracted arguments about the Trinity, sociological issues of gender, “ontological gender essentialists,” abuse, and the wage gap between men and women (29–30). She concludes with the following rather astonishing claim: “While complementarians rarely address abuse, biblically or socially, it remains paramount for egalitarians.”

<sup>3</sup> Mary Harrington, *Feminism Against Progress* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2023) 16, Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



“Male headship,” she continues, “construed as control and dominance leads not only to marital dissatisfaction but also to violence; hence egalitarians . . . interpret headship as mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) and Christian service as shared authority (Genesis 1:26-29)” (31). Thus she tidies away over a century of one of the most thorny and bitter issues of modern history.

#### THE SCRIPTURES ARE DETERMINATIVE

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What then, of Haddad’s initial assertion? — Orwell’s potent insight that the person who controls the narrative controls everything, and that, therefore, the complementarian erasure of women from the historical record is illustrative of their abusive, sexist posture towards women in the church? Does she make her case?

Speaking as someone who lived through much of the debate about women firsthand, both as a child on the mission field and in ministry myself — from both ends of the theological spectrum — I must admit to being disappointed with Haddad’s case. An accumulation of facts does not constitute a theological, nor historically-reasoned argument. That women participated meaningfully in the life of the church is not a matter of debate. Of course they did, and do. Nor is it a shocking revelation that abuse exists — and has existed — both inside and outside of the church, in both complementarian and egalitarian spaces. No one’s mind is blown by this revelation. Haddad provides little in the way of evidence for her claim that complementarians rarely discuss abuse while egalitarians make it one of their main emphases. One might rather say that egalitarians often make the *accusation* that complementarianism fosters abuse.

Unhappily, the questions for which our own age beg for answers engender little curiosity for egalitarians like Haddad. Women today have not been meaningfully served by the sexual perversions of our day. The heartbreak of a century of sexual confusion and relational discord runs deep. What is the solution? How might men and women be restored to peace and joy in their Christian lives? Egalitarian efforts offer only one solution to feminine loss of identity and purpose: become the leader. Moreover, it is not simply a matter of trying harder to gain visibility for the “erased” experiences of women. The trouble isn’t awareness — in which even the Christian world is drowning — it is disagreement. Haddad’s predicament is that too many Southern Baptists, as well as other brands of complementarians, still do not agree with her interpretation of the data. They’ve heard her claims, and they still reject them for the simple reason that their own study of Scripture belies her assertions.

Her final point is enough to undo her own argument. Male headship is not, in complementarian circles, “construed as control and dominance,” whatever egalitarians may say about it. Rather, it is the biblical model that follows in the way of Jesus, who laid down his life for his friends. These friends he made by his shed blood into his Bride, the Church. Jesus doesn’t control and dominate the church, but he most certainly has authority over how believers order their common life. The authority and headship of Jesus, as revealed in the perspicacity of his own Word, is the measure of the church today, no matter what happened in the past.

Certainly, we ought to humbly learn from our forefathers and mothers. Though we

ought not to read back in time our own novel ideas about men and women derived from a century of complicated social and philosophical upheaval. Neither the past nor the future are the measures of our obedience — the Scriptures are. Else how would any corrections ever be made to the behaviors and beliefs of Christians? Christians ought not “control” each other, nor the narrative. Rather, under the pure and bright light of the Scriptures, they ought to submit themselves to the very life of charity and service to which God calls men and women of every age. ✕

# Understanding the Image of God: A Response to Mary Conway, "Gender in Creation and Fall"

Chapter two of *Discovering Biblical Equality* is on "Gender in Creation and Fall" and is authored by Mary L. Conway. Much of her exegesis and interpretation represents a fair treatment of the text. Nonetheless, she summarises the teaching of Genesis 1–3 as follows:

In Genesis, before the fall, there was mutuality, equality, and harmony between men and women. Incorrect understanding and false teaching were influences contributing to the sin of Adam and Eve, although deliberate disobedience was certainly a major factor. The fall destroyed the mutuality and harmony between men and women, resulting in millennia of male domination in both the church and in marriage. In Christ, that consequence is undone, and the mutuality and harmony of marriage is potentially restored . . . if the church allows it (52).

So, neither male nor female has a leadership role in relation to the other sex or a responsibility that differs from that of

the other sex in marriage. In the following essay, we shall consider features of Genesis 1–3 that suggest differences in leadership roles and responsibilities, although the term “domination,” in a negative or patriarchal sense, need not be invoked in any way.

We shall evaluate in particular Conway’s treatment of *’adam*, the image of God, helper, the enticement by the serpent, and the consequences of human rebellion.

## **’adam**

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As Conway observes, the Hebrew term *’adam* must be interpreted properly. She is correct to explain that “the Hebrew lexis *’adam* is most often a nongendered/collective term for a specific human or humanity in general, male and/or female, unless its meaning is restricted by context” (36). In Genesis 1–5, this term shifts in usage from referring to humanity in general, to referring to the primal or archetypal man to use as a proper noun, i.e., Adam. Normally when this term has no article, it is used as a name. She does not refer to the definitive study by Hess that details this usage, which would have been helpful.<sup>1</sup> In 3:17 she follows a note in the apparatus of BHS to articulate the noun, although absolutely no witnesses support this in the entire textual tradition.

## **THE IMAGE OF GOD**

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Anyone attending to the text in Genesis 1:26–27 ought to affirm as Conway does, as well as all complementarians,<sup>2</sup> that both male and female are made as the divine image and neither is inferior to the other — both are equal in being (ontology) and worth before God.

To explain “being made in the image of God,” Conway appeals to Middleton’s work as definitive proof that the implications of being created in Yahweh’s image are functional: “the *imago dei* refers to human rule, that is, the exercise of power on God’s behalf in creation” (38).<sup>3</sup> She rightly rejects the claim that being male and female defines the image of God. She could have strengthened her position by reference to our work in *Kingdom through Covenant*. Two clauses at the end of Genesis 1:27 are marked by discourse grammar signals as *comments* or *explanatory footnotes* that

<sup>1</sup> Richard S. Hess, “Splitting the Adam: The Usage of *’ADĀM* in Genesis 1–V,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, edited by J. A. Emerton, (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 41; Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1990), 1–15.

<sup>2</sup> Also affirmed in our work. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, Rev. Ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 2018.

<sup>3</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

*“A merely functional interpretation is inadequate; we must view humanity in holistic terms as the divine image.”*

<sup>4</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 224.

<sup>5</sup> See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 225-238, Peter J. Gentry, *Biblical Studies*, Vol. 1 (Peterborough, ON: H & E Academic, 2020), 1-24. The latter represents all new research since the publication of the revised edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*. See also Gavin Ortlund, “Image of God, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue,” *JETS* 57/4 (2014): 673-88 and especially Catherine McDowell, “‘In the Image of God He Created Them’: How Genesis 1:26-27 Defines the Divine-Human Relationship and Why It Matters,” in Beth Felker Jones and Jeffrey W. Barbeau, eds., *The Image of God in an Image Driven Age: Explorations in Theological Anthropology* edited by (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), 35. See also her doctoral dissertation: Catherine L. McDowell, *The “Image of God” in the Garden of Eden: the Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5-3:24 in Light of the mīs pī pit pī and wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Shiphrut 15; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

prepare the reader for the commands in v. 28. Also note the chiasmic structure:

God created mankind in his image  
according to his likeness:

A in the image of God he created him  
B male and female he created them  
=====  
B’ be fruitful and increase in number  
and fill the earth  
A’ and subdue it  
and rule over the fish/birds/animals

Binary sexuality, i.e., duality of gender, is the basis for being fruitful, while the divine image is correlated with the command to rule as God’s viceroy. These observations from the discourse grammar of the narrative are crucial. They are decisive in showing that the divine image is *not* to be explained by or located in terms of duality of gender in humanity.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, significant further light has been cast on the image of God since the work of Richard Middleton was published.<sup>5</sup> A merely functional interpretation is inadequate; we must view humanity in holistic terms as the divine image. The image describes not only function, but also human ontology and structure. In particular, it describes a covenant relationship between God and humanity on the one hand and humanity and creation on the other. The former portrays humanity as obedient sons and daughters while the latter depicts humanity in terms of servanthood or leadership. Understanding the divine image as

entailing a covenant relationship means that this applies not only to the human-God relationship, but also to the relationships in the human family. Not only in the Bible, but all across the ancient Near East, familial relationships were considered covenantal. This is why family language is used in international treaties (where the partners are called “father” and “son”). I have also shown from Genesis 2 that the image of God assigns the role of priest to humanity and that Adam must give leadership in this role.<sup>6</sup>

The image of God means that humanity is not only connected to God but must reflect him. Later revelation of the economic doctrine of the Trinity shows equality among the persons of the Godhead but also different roles in the economy of salvation. Why shouldn't we expect this in the human family as well?

With regard to “naming” in Genesis 1–3 Conway asserts: “that the man (*ha'adam*) names the woman, as he previously did the animals, however, is also not a sign of the man's superiority or dominance. Naming in the Old Testament is an act of discerning a trait or function or ability that already exists in the person being named, not a sign of authority over that person” (48). Her examples from Genesis 16:13 and Judges 8:31 are not particularly persuasive. She does not account well for the context of Genesis 1–3. In Genesis 1, God names entities and structures created on Days 1–3 while Adam names entities filling the structures created on Days 4–6. It is difficult not to see Adam in imitation of the rule of his Creator and fulfilling the divine image here. Moreover, Conway does not note that in 3:23 Adam names the woman but the name he gives her is perceived as the feminine form of *'iš* (man, male, husband). He sees her as ontologically equal. The terms *'iš* (man) and *'iššâ* are paired in 3:23, but also *ha'ādām* and *'iššâ* are paired in 3:25 as Conway acknowledges.

## A HELPER

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When commenting on Genesis 2:18, “I will make for him a helper corresponding to him,” Conway argues that the term

<sup>6</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 246-253.

<sup>7</sup>D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 27-33.

<sup>8</sup>Rudolf Meyer and Herbert Donner, et al. eds., *Wilhelm Gesenius Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, 18th Edition (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2013), s.v. עֵזֶר.

<sup>9</sup>Katy Faust and Stacy Manning, *Them Before Us: Why We Need a Global Children's Rights Movement* (Nashville: Post Hill Press, 2012), 74-75.

helper does not imply subordination or inferiority. She also states “The phrase *kenegdô* is best translated as ‘corresponding to him,’ a term that implies competence and equality, rather than subordination or inferiority” (41). Moreover, she claims that the term *‘ezer* may well derive from a related root meaning strong. The last point is bad linguistic method, because usage is determinative, not etymology.<sup>7</sup> The best and most recent lexicon of Hebrew also denies this connection.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, however, Conway is right that to describe the woman as a helper does not indicate inferiority. She has strengths that match the man’s weaknesses, and vice versa. They will have to work as a team, but this does not rule out the possibility of the man having a primary responsibility or servant leadership in the relationship. We are getting a one-sided picture from Conway, even if the woman pays a higher price than the man in the task of being fruitful and multiplying.<sup>9</sup>

#### ENTICEMENT OF THE SERPENT

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Let us now consider the enticement of the serpent and the consequences of human rebellion. For the enticement by the serpent, Conway seeks to establish two things: 1) false teaching by the serpent, and 2) a dis-



inction between accidental sin (*šegāgā*) and defiant sin (with a high hand) based on Numbers 15:22-31.

The discourse between the serpent and the woman (with Adam present) in Genesis 3:1-8 cannot be reduced merely to false teaching. Rather we have an anatomy of sin, externally, as disobedience to the will of God (“sin is lawlessness,” 1 John 3:4), and internally, as arising from unbelief in the word of God (John 16:8, Rom 3:18).

The anatomy may be detailed as follows. The serpent begins by questioning the word of God in Genesis 3:1 and in 3:2 Eve entertains the question. (Note that in Gen 3:13-19 Yahweh dialogues with the man and the woman, but he does not dialogue with the serpent). Eve’s conversation with the serpent is the only time that the term *’ēlohīm* is used by itself. The covenant name of God is not used in their conversation for good reason. Second, we see a disparaging of the goodness of God. In contrast to the emphasis of 1:29 and the freedom of 2:16, Eve’s repetition of the command lessens it to a mere permission. She begins to think God isn’t really so great-hearted after all, because he does withhold some things from us. Third, she magnifies the strictness of God by adding to the command in 3:3. In her mind, she made the prohibition more severe than it really was. Fourth, she lessens the judgement of God with the statement “lest you die.” This is different from God’s statement in 2:17: “You shall surely die.” The certainty of God’s punishment is altered to a mere possibility. Conway admits the possibility of Eve receiving the command second-hand from her husband. Adam may not have passed on the command adequately. Fifth, the snake flatly contradicts the word of God in 3:4. The serpent quotes the word of God from 2:17 exactly and precisely and puts a negation in front of it. This is clearer from the word order in the Hebrew. Sixth, the serpent promises benefits from disobedience. He tells Eve that she will be like God, knowing good and evil. This was only a half-truth. He didn’t tell her how she would know it. They would know good with no power to do it and know evil with no power to resist it. Finally, there is deception and rationalisation. The fruit was good for food. The fruit was beautiful and pleasing to look at. It also gave insight and wisdom. According to 2:9, there was some truth in this deception.

<sup>10</sup> J. Michael Thigpen, "Flourishing, Justice, and the Gospel as "Subduing" the Earth," in *Human Flourishing: Economic Wisdom for a Fruitful Christian Vision of the Good Life*, eds. Anthony R. Cross and Greg Forster, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 3–15.  
<sup>11</sup> Thigpen, "Flourishing, Justice, and the Gospel as "Subduing" the Earth," 9-10.

In sum, this is no mere accidental sin or inadvertence, as we see in Numbers 15. Eve was deceived about the outcome or result, but not about defiant rebellion. And her deception does not remove her culpability in covenant disloyalty to God and her husband. But Conway is right that the text lays a greater responsibility on Adam and this is so because he has a greater responsibility in the covenant relationship. As Thigpen wisely notes, the man and the woman failed to subdue the earth.<sup>10</sup> The command "to subdue the earth" in Genesis 1:28 refers specifically to the inhabitants of the earth and not to agriculture as the lexical usage of *kābaš* clearly shows. Thigpen asks:

Returning to Genesis 3, might not the first proper targets of subduing be Adam and Eve themselves? What if Eve had chosen to rule over sin, to subdue herself? What if Adam had subdued the serpent? What if he had intervened and subdued Eve instead of merely standing with her? What if Adam had subdued himself when offered the fruit? Yes, the serpent needed to be subdued, but so much more so did Adam and Eve. They failed to love God and to love each other by failing to rule over their own sin in the first place, and by failing to intervene lovingly with one another.<sup>11</sup>

The verb "subdue" in 1:28 is a strong term addressed to "them" (second person masculine plural) and advised them that they would clearly face opposition in carrying out the mandate given to them.

The text tells us that Adam was created first, that the woman was given life from the man, and that the man was not created on account of the woman, but the woman on account of the man as Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 11. This cannot be explained solely in terms of source. And Conway's examples of children who were preferred over the firstborn's right of pre-eminence only proves this. Most telling is the fact that in God's judgement are two things: God's call in the garden is to the man (second masculine singular): "And Yahweh summoned the man (*hāādām*) and he said to him (3 masc. sg.), 'Where are you?'" (2 masc. sg.). First, God arraigns the man, then the woman, then the serpent. And the judgements are given in reverse order, ending with the man. There is a higher responsibility for Adam. Second, in the judgement, God faults Adam for following the lead of his wife instead of giv-

ing leadership. The role of the man in the relationship is not dominance as in a patriarchal society, but he has the role of servant leader that comes with responsibility as a husband. Humanity's representational reign should be caring and constructive, not domineering and destructive.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF HUMAN REBELLION

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As Conway admits, interpretation of Genesis 3:16 is difficult and the term “desire” only occurs three times in the Old Testament (Gen 3:16, 4:7, Song 7:11). We should note that the first sentence in this verse is a verbless clause, and the second begins with a disjunctive *waw*: “your desire was to your husband but he will rule over you.” A past tense suits the context for the first sentence; the second is in contrast to the first. This is not often observed. For the record, after examining all instances, I would argue that the verb *māšal* (rule) is generic in meaning and need not denote domineering. It is possible that Yahweh is reinstating the roles of husband and wife that went wrong in the Fall. No doubt the relation of the sexes is aggravated after the Fall, but Conway cannot show that this reading is impossible or even implausible. What provides strong support is the exact parallel in syntax and vocabulary in the account of Cain in Genesis 4. There, sin is a metaphorical lion lying in wait to spring upon Cain. It desires to rule Cain, but he must master/rule it.

Proper attention to the image of God and the details in the text reveal that humanity is called to a servant kingship. While the term “rule” (*rādâ*) is generic, the term “subdue” (*kābaš*) expects hostility and implies that this servant kingship may be costly. The man may have to fight to the death to subdue enemies that attack his wife and family. Conway's vision of Genesis 1–3 seems to emasculate the good news of God's kingdom heralded in the first pages of Scripture. ✕

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# Misunderstood Mutuality:

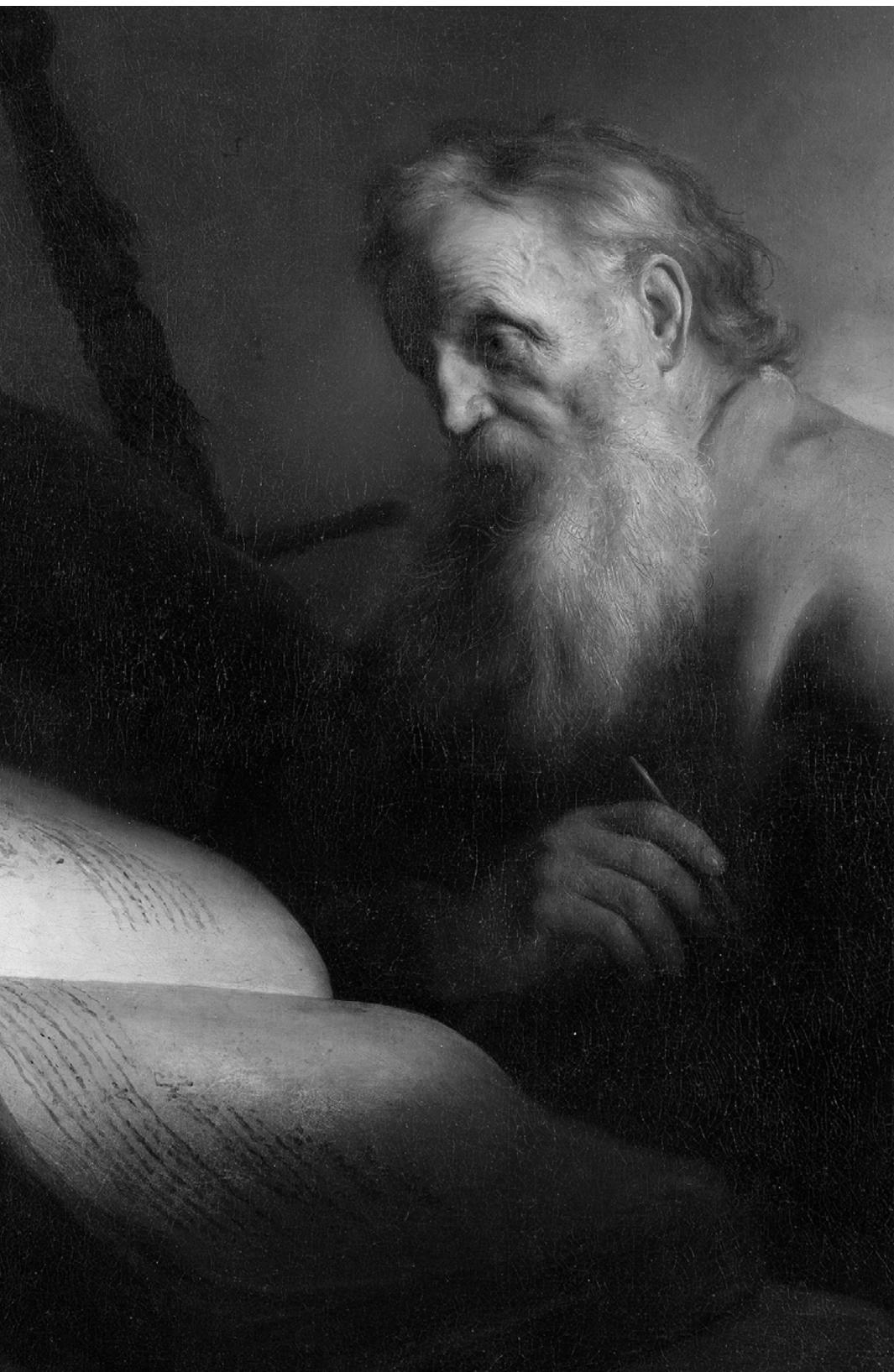
Responding to Ronald W. Pierce  
and Elizabeth A. Kay, “Mutuality in  
Marriage and Singleness”

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Ronald Pierce and Elizabeth Kay have penned a chapter on 1 Corinthians 7:1-40 that they believe fills an important gap in the “evangelical gender debate” (108). They argue that this text is “Paul’s sweeping call” for Christians to practice “mutuality in marriage and singleness” (108). They argue that both egalitarians and complementarians have “neglected” this text, even though Paul’s instructions in this chapter are “three times longer than any gender-related passage in his other letters” (109).

Pierce and Kay contend that this passage, perhaps more than any other in Paul’s writings, demonstrates his commitment to “mutuality” between the sexes. They never define mutuality in this chapter, but earlier chapters essentially treat “mutuality” as another way of describing the egalitarian view.<sup>1</sup> Throughout chapter 6, Pierce and Kay appear to be using the term in the same way — as a synonym for egalitarianism. At the very least, they believe that the mutuality between male and female in 1 Corin-

<sup>1</sup>E.g., In chapter 2, Mary Conway treats “mutuality” as the egalitarian ideal represented in the Garden of Eden that was destroyed by “male domination” after the fall (pp. 47, 52).



thians 7 provides the “seed ideas” for Paul’s fully developed egalitarian views (110).<sup>2</sup>

## SUMMARY

Pierce and Kay contend that 1 Corinthians 7 reveals Paul’s commitment to mutuality both in marriage and in singleness, and this commitment is summed up in twelve principles:

### *Principles of Mutuality in Marriage (1 Cor 7:1-16)*

1. Fidelity in marriage: Each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband (1 Cor 7:2).
2. Spousal obligations: The husband should give to his wife sexual intimacy, and likewise the wife also to her husband (1 Cor 7:3).
3. Yielding authority: Neither the wife nor the husband has authority over their own body — that goes to the other (1 Cor 7:4).
4. Consent for abstinence: Do not deprive one another, except consensually and for a limited time of focused prayer, then come together again to avoid temptation (1 Cor 7:5).
5. Loss of a spouse through death: It is good for widowers and widows to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them remarry (1 Cor 7:8-9).

6. Initiating divorce with a believing spouse: The wife should not separate from her husband, and the husband should not divorce his wife (1 Cor 7:10-11).
7. Initiating divorce with an unbelieving spouse: If any brother has a nonbelieving wife who consents to stay in the marriage, he should not divorce her. If any woman has an unbelieving husband who consents to stay in the marriage, she should not divorce him (1 Cor 7:12-13).
8. Sanctification of a nonbelieving spouse: The nonbelieving husband is made holy because of the believing wife, and the nonbelieving wife is made holy because of the believing brother. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy (1 Cor 7:14).
9. Responsibility when the nonbelieving spouse leaves: If the nonbeliever leaves, let it be so. In such cases a brother or sister is not bound. God has called you to peace (1 Cor 7:15).
10. Salvation of a nonbelieving spouse: How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Cor 7:16).

### *Principles of Mutuality in Singleness (1 Cor 7:25-40)*

11. Thinking carefully before marriage: In view of the present distress it is good for

<sup>2</sup>Pierce and Kay take the concept of “seed ideas” from the trajectory hermeneutic of William Webb, who argues that Bible doesn’t give us the ultimate ethic concerning gender relations but only establishes a trajectory that modern readers have to trace out for themselves. A frequent criticism of Webb’s trajectory hermeneutic is that it calls for a trajectory which may not even have its full realization within the Bible, thus rendering the New Testament’s own moral witness inferior to our own applications. For two critical reviews of Webb’s work, see Thomas R. Schreiner, “William J. Webb’s *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*: A Review Article,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (2002): 46–64; Wayne A. Grudem, “Should We Move beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 2 (2004): 299–346. Grudem observes, “Webb’s entire system is based on an assumption that the moral commands of the NT represent only a temporary ethical system for that time, and that we should use Webb’s ‘redemptive-movement hermeneutic’ to move beyond those ethical teachings to a ‘better ethic’ (p. 32) that is closer to the ‘ultimate ethic’ God wants us to adopt” (p. 337).

# “Pierce and Kay fail to present a coherent case for ‘mutuality’ that would be a defeater of the Bible’s overall complementarian teaching.”

a man or woman to remain as they are — single or married (1 Cor 7:26-28a).

12. Ministry and spiritual calling: Those who choose to marry — men or women — will face worldly problems, as well as distractions from undivided devotion to Christ (1 Cor 7:28b, 32-34).

In all of these ways, Pierce and Kay argue that Paul treats male and female equally — meaning that his instructions to men and women in various married or non-married arrangements are basically equal and not so much sex-specific. Thus they conclude that 1 Corinthians 7 “paints a portrait of the beauty of mutuality in intimate, personal relationships — sexual or not, and whether one remains single or chooses to marry” (124-25). Mutuality, therefore, applies not merely to the marital ideal depicted in the Garden of Eden but also to those who wish to remain single and celibate — including those who are same-sex attracted and who wish to enter into “intimate, nonerotic relationships” with other same-sex attracted people in the church. On this point, Pierce and Kay refer explicitly to the idea of covenanted, celibate partnerships that Wesley Hill commends in his book *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (125).<sup>3</sup> Apparently, the “mutuality” that heterosexual couples enjoy in marriage can also

be experienced by same-sex attracted couples within a celibate, covenanted “spiritual friendship.”

## EVALUATION

While there may be some points in this chapter that would be relatively uncontroversial, Pierce and Kay fail to present a coherent case for “mutuality” that would be a defeater of the Bible’s overall complementarian teaching. In other words, their case for egalitarian “mutuality within marriage” cannot be sustained by their argument. There are several reasons for this.

First, most of the twelve principles enumerated above do not address the actual differences between egalitarians and complementarians when it comes to marriage. The heart of the dispute between egalitarians and complementarians concerns what it means that God calls the husband to be the *head* of his wife and the wife to be the *helper* to her husband (e.g. Gen 2:18, 20; 1 Cor 11:3, 8-9; Eph 5:23). Complementarians see headship as referring to God’s calling on a husband to sacrificially lead, provide, and protect his wife, and they see helpship as God’s calling on a wife to as-

<sup>3</sup> Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015).

sist her husband in the creation mandate and to affirm his leadership in that task. Egalitarians, on the contrary, see headship and helpership simply as two different ways of referring to the equality between male and female roles.

But Kay and Pierce do not address this difference in most of the principles enumerated in this chapter. On this point, they appear to be confusing Paul's giving the same instructions to both men and women with the idea that Paul means to erase the distinct callings that God puts upon a husband and a wife. For example, the fact that God calls husbands and wives to meet their conjugal duties (principles 1 and 2), not to initiate divorce with a believing spouse (principle 6), not to initiate divorce with an unbelieving spouse (principle 7), to sanctify their unbelieving spouse (principle 8), etc. is no grounds for egalitarian mutuality. God addresses both husband and wife in such commands because they are both his image-bearers and they both are fellow-heirs of the grace of life and thus they are both personally responsible to keep the terms of the marriage covenant. But that mutual responsibility doesn't nullify the headship/helpership relationship that Paul specifies elsewhere in 1 Corinthians and in his other letters.

To put this in concrete terms: If all the faculty members at my college receive an email from the President instructing us to turn our grades in on time, he's doing so to inform us of our duty as members of the faculty. But our mutual duty as faculty members doesn't erase the fact that I still have to report to my Dean, who is also a faculty member. Such a conclusion would be absurd, and yet that is the very logic that Pierce and Kay are pressing in

the majority of their principles of mutuality in marriage.

Second, their comments on "authority" are the most salient to the dispute between complementarians and egalitarians, but their exposition is flawed at numerous points. Pierce and Kay point out that 1 Corinthians 7:4 is the "only biblical text that directly and explicitly addresses the question of 'authority' (*exousia*) in marriage — and here it is clearly mutual" (113). They argue that because a husband and wife exercise mutual authority over one another's bodies, this verse is "more important in the gender-role debate than most have been inclined to acknowledge. Paul's point is that neither spouse should claim authority even over their own body. Instead, each should yield that authority to the other" (113-14). They argue further, "Such a radical call to yield authority in marital intimacy could possibly serve as a paradigm for surrendering authority in other areas of marriage, since it is the only explicit statement regarding authority in marriage in Scripture" (114).

While Pierce and Kay recognize that Paul narrowly applies this "authority" language to conjugal rights, they nevertheless attempt to draw wide-ranging implications for the egalitarian-complementarian debate. But these are implications that Paul himself would not recognize. In this very letter, Paul is going to spell out that the husband is the *head* of the wife (1 Cor 11:3). In spite of the authors' protestations to the contrary, Paul's teaching on *headship* in 1 Cor 11:3 has everything to do with a husband's authority in the marriage relationship. Likewise, Paul's instructions to women to keep silent in the assembly are also based on his understanding of the husband as the head of his wife.<sup>4</sup> Pierce and Kay

are simply mistaken when they claim that 1 Corinthians 7:4 is the “only explicit statement in all of Scripture about authority (*exousia*) within marriage” (115). The only way their argument could possibly work is if the Greek word *exousia* were the only term that Paul uses to denote the concept of *authority* in marriage. We know that Paul uses a range of terms to denote authority and leadership in marriage, and it’s an absurd reduction to limit the discussion to the appearance of *exousia* in 1 Corinthians 7:4.

Pierce and Kay aren’t the only egalitarians to mistake this verse for a prescription of egalitarian gender roles within marriage.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, that is not at all what Paul has in mind here. Rather, he is concerned narrowly with the mutual obligation that husband and wife have to one another in terms of physical intimacy. We know this not only because of Paul’s teaching elsewhere on gender roles, but also because Paul’s words focus on the use of each spouse’s “body” in the conjugal act. Verse 4 says that husbands and wives must relinquish to each other the right of control over their bodies. His words are not grounds for one spouse to demand of the other, “you owe me.” They are grounds for each spouse to voluntarily say to the other, “I owe you.”<sup>6</sup> Thus the “authority” that Paul speaks about refers narrowly to the mutual conjugal rights that each spouse owes to the other. It is not a generalized principle designed to nullify *headship* and *helpership*.

Third, Pierce and Kay erroneously extend the “mutuality” of marriage to singles and especially to covenanted partnership between same-sex attracted couples. The

mutuality that Paul commends in 1 Corinthians 7:1-6 refers narrowly to the conjugal union between husband and wife. It requires a marriage covenant and the complementary differences between male and female reproductive structures. Indeed, it requires the regular and repeated *union* of these reproductive structures in the conjugal act. For singles to engage in this kind of “mutuality” would be for them to participate in fornication. The same goes for same-sex attracted couples. And there is no indication that Paul had in mind singles when spelling out the mutual obligations of sexual relations within marriage. When Pierce and Kay extend “mutuality” to singles, they are making a hermeneutical move that cannot be justified by Paul’s words. Indeed, they are making a move that Paul would most likely forbid.

## CONCLUSION

Pierce and Kay have written an interesting chapter that makes the common egalitarian argument for mutuality within marriage. But ultimately, their argument fails to convince. It turns the mutual obligations of marriage into a defeater of Paul’s teaching elsewhere about headship and helpership. It illegitimately reduces Paul’s teaching about authority within marriage to a single word in 1 Corinthians 7:4. And it extends Paul’s teaching about mutual conjugal rights within marriage to singles. These are not conclusions that Paul himself ever reached, and neither should we. ✕

<sup>4</sup> Denny Burk, “Must Women Be Silent in Churches? (1 Corinthians 14:34)” *9Marks Journal*, December 2019, 98–104.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997), 116.

<sup>6</sup> Although I disagree with his interpretation of this text at numerous points, this particular turn of phrase comes from Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 280.

# Yet Another Attempt to Justify What God Forbids:

## A Response to Cynthia Lang Westfall, “Male and Female, One in Christ”

Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” On the basis of that sentence, evangelical feminists (i.e., egalitarians) commonly argue against “hierarchy” in the church and home.<sup>1</sup> That is, women may be pastors, and a wife and husband share equal authority without hierarchy — a wife should submit to her husband only in the same way that a husband should submit to his wife. For many evangelical feminists, Galatians 3:28 is a clear and transcultural text that we should start with and then interpret more obscure passages (like 1 Cor 11:2–16 and 1 Tim 2:9–15) in light of it.



<sup>1</sup> The opening lines on the Christians for Biblical Equality web page titled “CBE’s Mission and Values” quote Galatians 3:28: [https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary\\_page/cbes-mission/](https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/cbes-mission/) (accessed on 28 January 2023).

This article responds to yet another evangelical feminist argument based on Galatians 3:28 — Cynthia Westfall’s new chapter that replaces Gordon D. Fee’s chapter on Galatians 3:26–29 in the two previous editions of *Discovering Biblical Equality*.<sup>2</sup> I proceed by answering three questions: (I) How does Cynthia Westfall’s chapter fit in the conversation about Galatians 3:28? (II) How does Cynthia Westfall’s new chapter compare to Gordon Fee’s old chapter? (III) Is Cynthia Westfall’s argument correct?

### I. HOW DOES CYNTHIA WESTFALL’S CHAPTER FIT IN THE CONVERSATION ABOUT GALATIANS 3:28?

In the debate between evangelical feminists and complementarians, the literature on Galatians 3:28 in the past half-century is too vast to detail here. I’ll highlight just five resources that help us see how Westfall’s new chapter fits into the conversation.

1. Paul Jewett’s 1975 book *Man as Male and Female* ignited the modern debate.<sup>3</sup> John Piper, who was a student of Jewett’s at Fuller Theological Seminary, describes Jewett’s book as “groundbreaking” and qualifies, “At least it was groundbreaking among

the discussions in evangelical circles. That book, I think, was the beginning of the real debate.”<sup>4</sup> Jewett titles his brief discussion of Galatians 3:28 as “The Magna Carta of Humanity.” After Jewett asserts that Paul argues incorrectly in 1 Timothy 2:9–15, Jewett extrapolates that Galatians 3:28 has “social implications” for males and females and that the church must fully implement Paul’s “vision concerning the equality of the sexes in Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

2. S. Lewis Johnson’s 1991 article on Galatians 3:28 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* responds to evangelical feminist arguments.<sup>6</sup> Johnson argues that in the literary context, “Paul is not speaking of relationships in the family and church, but of standing before God in righteousness by faith.”<sup>7</sup>

3. Richard Hove’s 1999 book on Galatians 3:28 is 160 pages of responsible exegesis that responds to evangelical feminist arguments.<sup>8</sup> Hove meticulously explains that “you are all one” does not lexically, syntactically, or contextually overturn what Scripture teaches elsewhere about God’s design for men and women in the home and church. “You are all one” means that diverse people have some-

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Long Westfall, “Male and Female, One in Christ: Galatians 3:26–29,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Cynthia Long Westfall, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 159–84.

<sup>3</sup> Paul King Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, “Manhood, Womanhood, and God Part 1,” *Desiring God*, 20 September 1993, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/manhood-womanhood-and-god-part-1>.

<sup>5</sup> Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, 142–47. See D. A. Carson’s courteous and penetrating review of Jewett in *Northwest Journal of Theology* 6 (1977): 28–37, available at [https://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/carson/1977\\_review\\_Jewett.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/carson/1977_review_Jewett.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> S. Lewis Johnson Jr., “Role Distinctions in the Church: Galatians 3:28,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), 154–64, 490–92.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>8</sup> Richard W. Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999). Cf. “Rick Hove’s important book—Equality in Christ—out of print but available online,” 11 May 2006, <https://cbmw.org/2006/05/11/rick-hoves-important-book-equality-in-christ-out-of-print-but-available-online/>. Hove’s book updates his MA thesis, which he completed under D. A. Carson’s supervision and which Carson (and Wayne Grudem) encouraged Crossway to publish. For a 39-page version of Hove’s argument, see Richard W. Hove, “Does Galatians 3:28 Negate Gender-Specific Roles?,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem, Foundations for the Family Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 105–43, available as a PDF at <https://cbmw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Grudem-Wayne-Biblical-foundations-for-manhood-and-womanhood.pdf>.

thing in common — not that their roles are identical or interchangeable (see Mt 19:6; Mark 10:8; John 10:30; 17:11, 21–23; Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 3:8; 10:17).

4. Gordon Fee’s 2005 article is part of the egalitarian book that responds to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.<sup>9</sup> (I summarize it in the first paragraph of the next section below.)<sup>10</sup>

5. Cynthia Westfall’s 2016 book *Paul and Gender* repeats and updates evangelical feminist arguments.<sup>11</sup> For a summary and critique, see the reviews by Tom Schreiner and Casey Hough.<sup>12</sup> Westfall expands part of her argument in her new chapter.

## II. HOW DOES CYNTHIA WESTFALL’S NEW CHAPTER COMPARE TO FEE’S OLD CHAPTER?

Fee’s old chapter argues that many Christians wrongly read Paul’s letter to the Galatians “through the eyes of Martin Luther”; such a reading is wrong because “the driving issue in Galatians is not first of all soteriology but ecclesiology: who constitute the people of God in the new creation brought about by the ‘scandal of the cross’ (Gal 6:11–16)?”<sup>13</sup> Specifically, in Galatians 3:28, “Paul’s explanatory ‘for’ does not elaborate that all are *equally justified* in God’s sight through faith in Christ Jesus but rather that *all constitute one people* (form one body) by

their equal standing in Christ.”<sup>14</sup> Fee concludes,

It seems arguable, therefore, that even though our text does not explicitly mention roles and structures, its new creation theological setting calls these into question in a most profound way. There is no biblical culture (in the sociological sense) that belongs to all human societies. And to give continuing *significance* to a male authority viewpoint for men and women, whether at home or in the church, is to reject the new creation in favor of the norms of a fallen world.<sup>15</sup>

Westfall’s new chapter agrees with Fee. She repeatedly refers to the traditional view of Galatians 3:28 as wrongly emphasizing an “abstract” or “spiritual” or “individualized” status such as justification (159–60, 165n19, 167, 171n34, 180, 181n53).

Westfall’s chapter differs from Fee’s in two notable ways:

The *first contrast* is that Westfall expresses her conclusions with more certainty than Fee (but without improved arguments). Note that Fee’s conclusion above begins, “It seems arguable, therefore.” That sense of a tentative conclusion — a dialed-down dogmatism — is not present in Westfall’s new chapter. For example, Westfall italiciz-

<sup>9</sup> Gordon D. Fee, “Male and Female in the New Creation: Galatians 3:26–29,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 172–85.

<sup>10</sup> For a summary and critique, see Robert L. Saucy, “Male and Female in the New Creation: Galatians 3:26–29” (Ch 10) by Gordon D. Fee,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 10.1 (2005): 29–37.

<sup>11</sup> Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Paul and Gender: A Review Article,” *Themelios* 43 (2018): 178–92; Casey Hough, “Review of Cynthia Westfall’s *Paul and Gender*,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.1 (2019): 44–47.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, “Male and Female in the New Creation,” 173–74.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 176 (italics original).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 185 (italics original).

es this entire sentence: “*We may confidently conclude that the ways and contexts in which ‘there is no male and female inside him’ will correspond to the ways and contexts that Paul is talking about in Galatians in which ‘there is no Jew or Greek inside him’*” (168, italics original, cf. 175). She concludes the chapter, “In Galatians 3:28, Paul sets an agenda for sweeping changes in racial, social, and gender relationships in the church when this verse is read in the context of what had to change as a result of there being no Jew or Greek because of justification, baptism, and location in Christ” (182).

The *second contrast* is that Westfall uses more rhetorically emotive language than Fee. Here are six examples:

1. To differ from Westfall’s evangelical feminism is to sinfully *discriminate* (and Westfall groups such sexism with racism and classism):

So the question of the scope of “there is no male and female” in the church depends on the scope of Paul’s declaration that “there is no Jew or Gentile,” which is the dominant argument of Galatians. It means that in Christian circles we do not make distinctions or *discriminate* on the basis of race, socioeconomic categories, or gender” (161, italics added; see also 175, 177n46, 178).

2. To differ from Westfall’s evangelical feminism is to mistreat another group because of their *identity*: “Those who have authority or influence in the church should never restrict anyone with a priori rules that *discriminate against another group because of their identity*, however low in the eyes of the world or one’s tradition” (178, italics added).

3. To differ from Westfall’s evangelical feminism is to support male *dominance* with





the same rationale as arguments for *slavery* and *racism*:

Johnson qualifies Paul's statement so as to argue against it, because he assumes that differences in identity in the creation of male and female mandate discrete roles and hierarchy in all contexts. This understanding of Scripture is traditional because it characterized the Western Christian worldview during the European colonial period, which presupposed *discrete roles, hierarchy, and enslavement* on the basis of differences of identity in race, cultures, and social status, based on similar theology, narratives, and arguments. Paul teaches that difference does not correspond to dominance in the church (181, italics added).

The theology and rhetoric of gender roles may be the last stand of the Christian colonial worldview and *reflect the mentality of racism and the exclusion laws against minorities* such as the Jim Crow laws, the new Jim Crow laws, and the exclusion laws against

minorities such as Chinese immigrants in the past (181–82n56, italics added).

4. To differ from Westfall's evangelical feminism is to unbiblically subjugate women, and God calls his people to resist such patriarchy:

Teaching that *unilaterally subjugates women and restricts their function* in the church because of gender roles is based on human commands and teaching that *override or marginalize the lordship of Christ, the will of the Holy Spirit, and clear commands in Scripture*. So, we are called to *biblical resistance* .... I tell women, "Go ahead and do what you are called to do. ... Be committed to doing what God created you to do" (183, italics added).

5. To differ from Westfall's evangelical feminism is to support one of many "systemic injustices" (183).

6. To differ from Westfall's evangelical feminism is to *oppress* people. She concludes the chapter with this sentence:

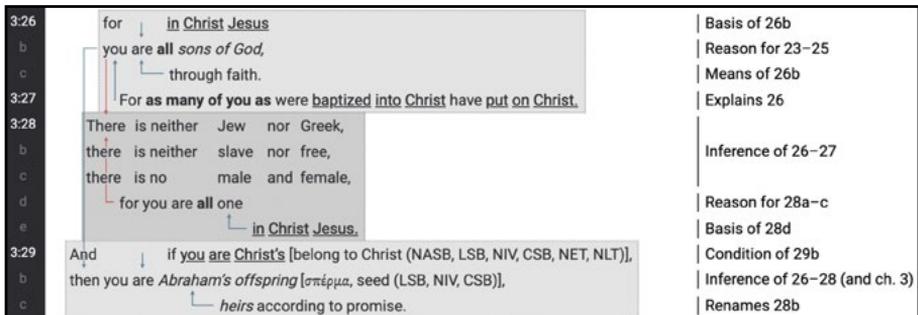
When we pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” we must consider how what Paul said to the Galatians in the first century now speaks to extending our kingdom relationships in the church to our mission on earth in balanced gender relationships, *resisting discrimination and ending oppression* (184, italics added).

### III. IS CYNTHIA WESTFALL’S ARGUMENT CORRECT?

More than twenty years ago, Tom Schreiner began a book review article with an observation that has stuck with me. Here’s the gist of what Schreiner observed: evangelical feminist arguments keep morphing with a new exegetical argument or a new argument from the alleged historical-cultural context; in contrast, complementarian arguments may seem rather boring because the basic argument has not changed.<sup>16</sup>

I resonate with Schreiner’s observation as I consider Cynthia Westfall’s new chapter. The heart of her argument is simply not what Paul intended to communicate in Galatians 3:28. Her argument wrongly assumes that male headship is a result of the fall and not part of God’s original good creation.<sup>17</sup> But the main weakness of her argument is that she misreads the immediate literary context. She then concludes that Galatians 3:28 has necessary *social implications* that contradict other passages in Scripture (e.g., 1 Cor 11:2–16; Eph 5:22–30; Col 3:18–19; 1 Tim 2:9–15; 1 Pet 3:1–7).

The following phrase diagram shows how Galatians 3:28 fits in its immediate literary context (Gal 3:26–29).<sup>18</sup> In this phrase diagram, (1) boxes emphasize short units; (2) underlining emphasizes our connection to Christ; (3) **bold** emphasizes *all*; and (4) *italics* emphasizes the sonship language that frames this passage.



<sup>16</sup> See the introduction to Thomas R. Schreiner, “William J. Webb’s Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: A Review Article,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6.1 (2002): 46–65.

<sup>17</sup> See Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 30–41, 102–30. (Grudem’s controversial tenth argument — “the parallel with the Trinity” — is not necessary to prove the point.)

<sup>18</sup> A phrase diagram is a type of argument diagram. An *argument diagram* graphically displays the text’s logical flow of thought (1) by dividing up the text into propositions and phrases and (2) by specifying how the propositions and phrases logically relate to each other. A *phrase diagram* (1) indents clauses and phrases above or below what they modify and (2) adds labels and symbols like arrows to explain how the propositions and phrases logically relate. See Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 121–61.



Two observations support the traditional reading of Galatians 3:28:

1. The point of the three contrasts in v. 28 is that all those in Christ Jesus without exception are one in Christ. Paul rhetorically refers to all humanity in three parallel pairs:

- all humanity from the perspective of ethnicity: Jew and Greek
- all humanity from the perspective of law: slave and free
- all humanity from the perspective of sex: male and female

The evangelical feminist argument misreads and misapplies Galatians 3:28.<sup>19</sup> Paul's point is that diverse people are "one" in the sense of having something in common but without obliterating distinctions. For example, "He who plants and he who waters are one [i.e., in purpose]" (1 Cor 3:8), and "we, though many, are one body in Christ"

(Rom 12:5). As Piper and Grudem explain,

The context of Galatians 3:28 makes abundantly clear the sense in which men and women are equal in Christ: they are equally justified by faith (v. 24), equally free from the bondage of legalism (v. 25), equally children of God (v. 26), equally clothed with Christ (v. 27), equally possessed by Christ (v. 29), and equally heirs of the promises to Abraham (v. 29). . . . He does not say, "you are all the same in Christ Jesus," but, "you are all one in Christ Jesus." He is stressing their unity in Christ, not their sameness.<sup>20</sup>

2. If the evangelical feminist argument is correct, then social implications that logically follow *contradict* what Paul writes elsewhere: (1) Paul says that Jews and Gentiles are *not* the same (e.g., Rom 9–11); (2) Paul says that slaves and masters are *not* the

<sup>19</sup> "This text [Gal. 3:26–29] hasn't seen its context since it left the hand of Paul's amanuensis. I exaggerate. But it has *rarely* seen its context in a populist American culture. Our American ears cannot help but hear some egalitarian mandate here ...." T. David Gordon, *Promise, Law, Faith: Covenant-Historical Reasoning in Galatians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019), 161 (italics original).

<sup>20</sup> John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions: An Overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 43–44 (italics original). Cf. Peter R. Schemm Jr., "Galatians 3:28—Proof-text or Context?" *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8.1 (2003): 23–30.



same (e.g., Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22–4:1); and (3) Paul says that males and females are *not* the same (e.g., Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19).<sup>21</sup> In 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:10–11 (the two most parallel passages to Galatians 3:28 in Paul’s letters),<sup>22</sup> Paul uses the Jew-Gentile and slave-free categories in literary contexts that *distinguish* how men and women serve God (1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:34–35; Col 3:18–19).

Another logical (but unscriptural) social implication of the evangelical feminist reading of “there is no male and female” is that homosexuality is now permissible and that it is oppressive and unjust to teach that God created marriage for only one man and one woman.<sup>23</sup> (Westfall does not argue for that position.)

Only very recently in church history have Christians argued that Galatians 3:28 supports evangelical feminism. Westfall’s

chapter is yet another recent attempt to re-interpret God’s words to justify what God forbids. ✕

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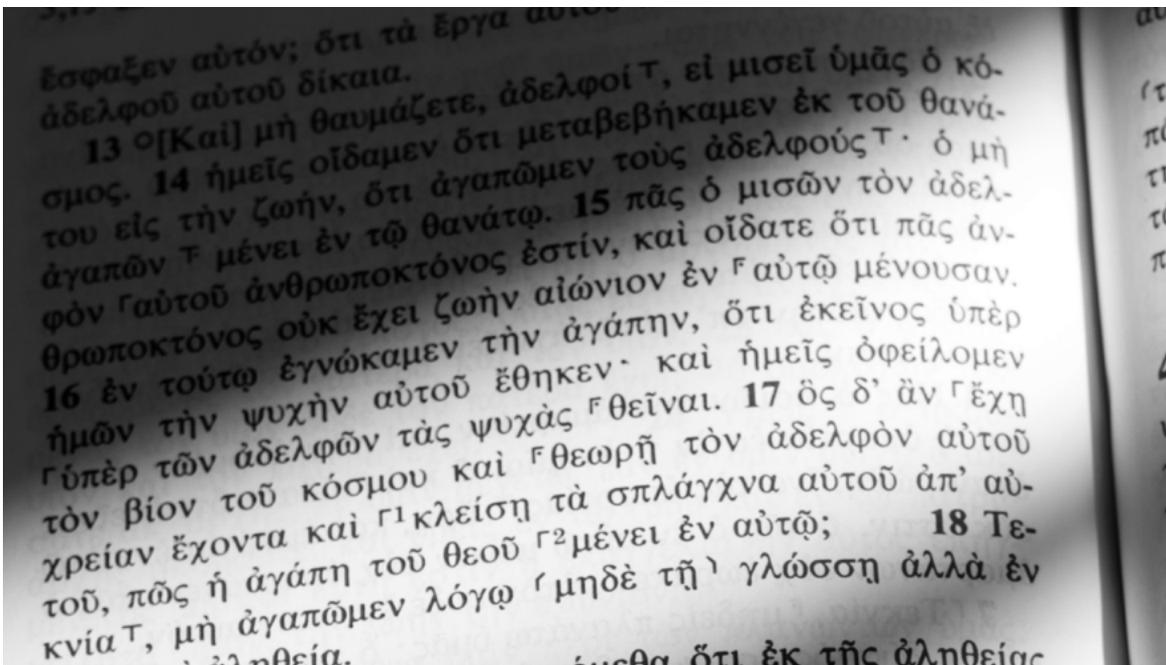
<sup>21</sup> Cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 258–59.

<sup>22</sup> See the table in Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 253.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, “Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck, 2nd ed., Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 280–81; Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 102–3.

# A Textual, Lexical, and Ethical Challenge to the “Principle of Reciprocity”:

A Response to Lynn H. Cohick,  
“Loving and Submitting to One  
Another in Marriage”



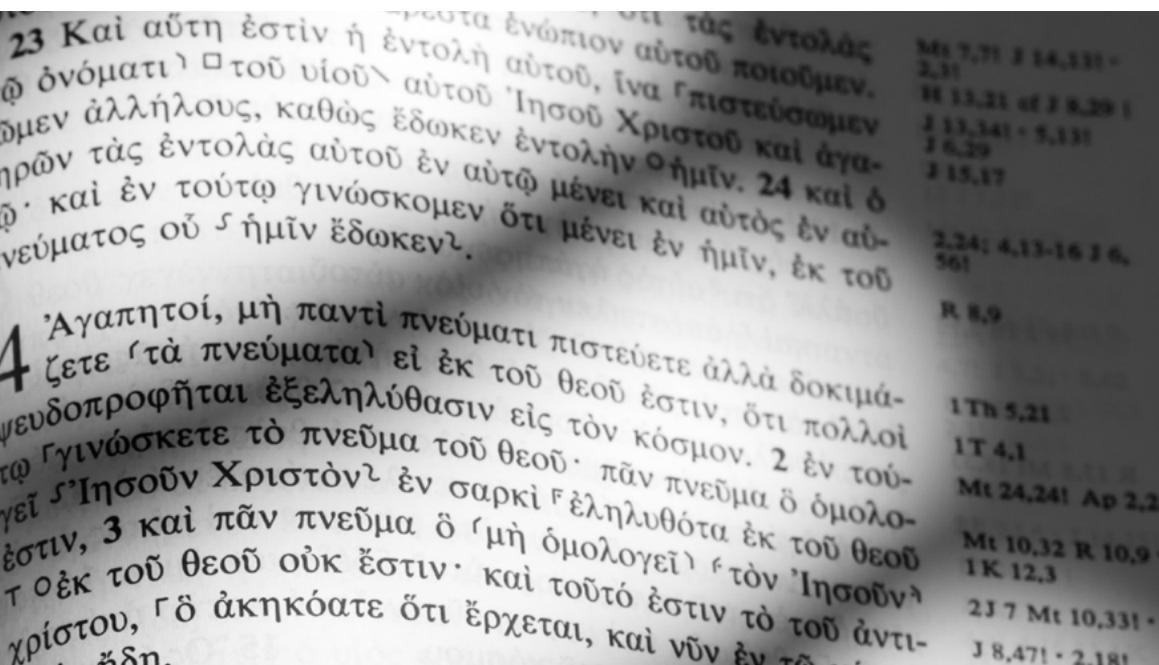
Lynn Cohick’s chapter replaces I. Howard Marshall’s in the previous edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality*, and the editors have chosen well. Cohick has not only done careful work on cultural backgrounds throughout her career, but she has recently written commentaries on both Colossians and Ephesians. For those reasons and more, it is a pleasure to interact with her work here.

The chapter begins with a brief look at the social setting of Paul’s two letters before turning to the so-called household codes in Colossians and Ephesians. The latter gets the bulk of attention, which is not surprising given that it is more detailed and has occupied center stage in modern debates. Using Nympha (Col 4:15) as a window into the complexities of social status, Cohick argues for a Paul who presents the gospel within the cultural constraints of his day in a way that challenges those same constraints.

Paul is said to challenge his culture’s expectations for gendered virtues in such a way that discipleship “does not come in pink and blue options” (190). What we have instead is a more androgynous ethic. Even in marriage, Paul’s commands to husband and wife speak “not at all of roles for women and men, even less about headship or leadership” (203). While love and submission are countercultural in how Paul applies them to marriage, they are virtues expected of any Christian toward any other (202). There is, thus, an ethical interchangeability within marriage in what Cohick calls the “principle of reciprocity” (197). Such a conclusion obviously conflicts with a complementarian view of marriage. But before looking at why I take a different view, I want to highlight important areas of agreement.

#### AGREEMENT

My agreement starts in the first paragraph, where Cohick affirms the need to hold



# “How different would the debate about Paul and gender be if we lived in a culture where submission was highly valued?”

together the twin truths that the Bible is God’s Word to us and that it was written to people at different times and places. Applying the Bible today requires that we consider where our cultures may differ in relevant ways. In these general terms, all evangelicals should agree. In the same vein, it is encouraging to see that Cohick does not appeal to a trajectory hermeneutic as Marshall did in the previous edition.

Second, I agree that the household codes in Colossians and Ephesians are not additions to Paul’s thought or cultural holdovers that domesticate the gospel. Though I disagree on just how much they challenge Paul’s own culture, I completely agree that they are “meant to demonstrate the power of Christ’s work at the basic level of everyday life” (193). This view contrasts with that of someone like Paul Jewett who sees features in the household codes that reflect “the historical limitations of [Paul’s] Christian insight.”<sup>1</sup>

Third, it is refreshing to hear an acclaimed egalitarian note that submission *per se* is not a “negative posture in the ancient world” and that it is *our* culture that devalues it in favor of “individualism and independence”

(197). How different would the debate about Paul and gender be if we lived in a culture where submission was highly valued?

## DISAGREEMENT

Despite these agreements, I find myself in disagreement with Cohick’s conclusion for reasons that are textual, lexical, and ethical. I list them here in order of importance.

### *Textual*

One of the central issues of debate is how to relate Ephesians 5:21 and Ephesians 5:22–24, and this depends in large part on whether there is a main verb in v. 22. Like many, Cohick follows the UBS/NA text, which lacks a main verb (lit. “wives, to your own husbands as to the Lord...”). This shows that Paul “links his discussion of household with the house church” and this, in turn, implies that Paul expected mutual submission in both contexts (196). In this view, Paul never even commands wives to submit since there is no imperative verb.

But there is every reason to think Paul did write an imperative as found in all but two of our 500+ Greek copies of Ephesians and

<sup>1</sup> Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 138.

found today in the Tyndale House Greek New Testament. The two manuscripts that support the lack of a verb (P46 and B/03) simply omitted the verb by accident when the scribe's eye skipped across similar endings (ἀνδράσιν ὑποτασέσθωσαν κτλ).<sup>2</sup> As a result, the reading with this third-person plural imperative is better attested, explains both the other readings, and fits with Paul's style better.<sup>3</sup>

The implication is that we should not try to read the mutual submission of Ephesians 5:21 into 5:22–33. Rather, Paul's household instructions start with 5:22, and this new unit of thought is needed precisely because the mutual submission of 5:21 does not apply to Christian marriage in the same way it does in the church generally.<sup>4</sup> This also explains why Paul is clear to instruct wives to submit to their *own* husbands. The marital relationship, like parent-child and slave-master, is unique and requires specific instructions.

### Lexical

The second point of disagreement is the vexed debate about the meaning of κεφαλή. Cohick argues that we have almost no evidence for the word meaning “leader” in Greek and that “source,” “honored part,” or “prominent” is more likely. She also highlights Paul's surprising use of the head-body metaphor in which the head (Jesus) dies to protect the body (the

church). Usually, the body sacrifices itself to preserve the head.

The first thing to say in response is that, as a complementarian, I appreciate her focus on the surprising use of the metaphor. Complementarians have always argued for the idea of the husband being like Christ in providing for and protecting his wife in sacrificial ways. Where I disagree with Cohick is in her denial of any sense of leadership in the metaphor. This is for several reasons.

First, while there is not a great deal of evidence for κεφαλή used for leadership, there is even less for it meaning “source.” Cohick says nineteenth and twentieth century lexicons support her claim (200), but this is true only by neglecting the standard New Testament lexicon (BDAG), the most recent Septuagint lexicon (Muraoka), and the recently translated *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. All these offer “leader” or the like, and they do so on the basis of such clear cases in the Septuagint as Judges 10:18; 11:8, 9, 11; 2 Samuel 22:44; Psalm 18:44; Isaiah 7:8–9 (4×).<sup>5</sup> The more recent *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* does not have this gloss for the simple reason that it does not cover the Septuagint or Paul.

When it comes to the meaning “source” we find three examples in Liddell, Scott, Jones's *Greek-English Lexicon* (LSJ), s.v. κεφαλή, def II.d). One of these is dubious as it refers to

<sup>2</sup> P46 is known for omitting text and even makes this same one in 1 Cor. 8:12 (συνείδησιν ἀσθενοῦσαν).

<sup>3</sup> For the full argument, see Peter J. Gurry, “The Text of Eph 5.22 and the Start of the Ephesian Household Code,” *New Testament Studies* 67 (2021): 560–81.

<sup>4</sup> Aside from the textual problem, scholars rarely discuss the function of Paul's asyndeton in Eph 5:22. For an overview of options, see Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek*, 118–20. In footnote 14, Levinsohn says a vocative (which we have in 5:22) is a common way to spot the start of a new unit of thought.

<sup>5</sup> BDAG, 542, s.v. κεφαλή, def. 2a; T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain, Peeters, 2009), 396, s.v. κεφαλή, def. 4a; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. for English by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1120, s.v. κεφαλή, def. C. What many seem to miss in citing LSJ is that its entry for κεφαλή includes only a single citation from the LXX and none from the NT. Its lack of “leader” or the like is hardly surprising. Other uses of κεφαλή for “leader” can be found in the evidence from Aquila's revision of the Old Greek (see Deut. 5:23; 29:9).

the mouth of a river, not its source, and one of the others is in the plural, not the singular. Significantly, we never find κεφαλή used to mean “source” in the Septuagint but rather ἀρχή (Gen 2:10) or πηγὴ (Lev 20:18; Baruch 3:12; Dan 5:5). The citations of Cyril of Alexandria and Chrysostom offered as support are also not especially helpful since both are discussing 1 Corinthians 11, not Ephesians or Colossians. More pertinent is Chrysostom’s sermon on Ephesians 5:22–24 where he says of Paul’s use of “head” that it “places the one in subjection, and the other in authority, that there may be peace; for where there is equal authority there can never be peace; neither where a house is a democracy, nor where all are rulers; but the ruling power must of necessity be one.”<sup>7</sup>

Of course, lexicons and patristic sermons do not determine a word’s meaning. Context does. And the best reason to believe that κεφαλή in Paul’s metaphor includes provision, protection, *and authority* is the context. As Gregory Dawes writes, “Now, whatever other senses the word κεφαλή may have had, the context in which it is used in Eph. 5:22–24 demands that the meaning ‘authority over’ be adopted. For in vv. 22–24 the word is used (as we have seen) to reinforce the case for the ‘subordination’ of wives. It can only fulfill this function if it carries with it some sense of authority.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Ethical**

The two previous objections lead to what is the fundamental division between egal-

itarian and complementarian readings. It is one that Cohick puts her finger on when she asks whether we “can find the principle of reciprocity within marriage as we do within the life of the church” (197). If I have read her correctly, her answer is something like yes, we can, though Paul had to say it in such a way that it could puncture his patriarchal culture.

But, if the two previous points are correct, then this cannot be the case. The head and the body form a beautiful unity, and they do so by retaining their distinctives. Body parts are not interchangeable physically or metaphorically (cf. 1 Cor 12:19–20). After all, the reciprocal submission called for in the church in general in Ephesians 5:21 is *not* predicated on church members being each other’s heads. But that is precisely the reason (ὅτι) given in Ephesians 5:23 for the submission of the wife to the husband. Likewise, while church members certainly love one another, they are not called, as church members, to love each other *as a head should love its own body*.

Thus, in Ephesians 5:22–33, Paul’s ethic is not reciprocal but rather is based on the asymmetry essential to marriage. This is an asymmetry that, while it certainly includes biology, goes beyond it to reflect the relationship of Christ and the church. As important as love and submission are when shown member-to-member, they do not serve this unique function. The very reason for Paul to address wives and husbands

<sup>7</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 20 (NPNF1, 13:147).

<sup>8</sup> Gregory W. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21–33* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 134. We might also note that Michelle Lee-Barnewall, who Cohick cites for support, also includes authority and leadership as part of the metaphor. See Michelle Lee-Barnewall, “Turning Κεφαλή on Its Head: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Ephesians 5:21–33” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, TENTS 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 613.

directly, especially in Ephesians, is because marriage is unique. When two Christians get married, they not only have a new arena within which to exercise their shared Christian virtues, they also have a new form of those virtues to exercise that fits the unique shape of their covenantal bond.

As our society clamors for an equality between the sexes that requires sameness or interchangeability, Paul's picture of marriage is a more beautiful one that calls for a unity of difference. That beauty is still ours to claim and live out. ✕

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# Rejecting Gender Essentialism to Embrace Transgenderism?:



A Response to Christa McKirland,  
"Image of God and Divine Presence"

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Some errors are explicit and easy to spot, while others are not stated in so many words and only manifest by way of implication. Christa McKirland's chapter falls squarely in the first category. Historically, egalitarians have attempted to draw a bright line between themselves and those who would advocate for LGBTQ identities. Christa McKirland's essay, however, is the first I've seen that not only rejects gender essentialism but also embraces transgenderism. And that is what, in the end, sets this chapter apart from previous editions of *Discovering Biblical Equality*.

The thesis of Christa McKirland's chapter, "Image of God and Divine Presence: A Critique of Gender Essentialism," is nearly summed up in its title. McKirland is criti-

cal of gender essentialism, which she defines as the idea that "men and women are *essentially* different on the basis of being a man or a woman" (283). Instead of gender essentialism, McKirland proposes that human nature is defined quite apart from masculinity or femininity, and instead by the image of God, which includes having special status in being like God, special function through exercising dominion, and special access to and representation of God's presence — all of which are equally shared between men and women.

McKirland is up front about the payoff of rejecting gender essentialism: "the Scriptures do not make maleness and femaleness central to being human, nor can particular understandings of masculinity

and femininity be rigidly prescribed, since these are culturally conditioned” (286). If one wonders what McKirland means by critiquing “gender essentialism,” whether she means masculinity/femininity or maleness/femaleness, one has already identified a central problem with her proposal. At times, she seems to be rejecting cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity, while in the end she seems to reject as normative maleness and femaleness altogether. Importantly, this rejection is not just an entailment of her ideas, but at the very heart of her proposal as she embraces transgenderism in the concluding section of the chapter.

### REJECTING GENDER ESSENTIALISM

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McKirland’s chapter is a veritable parade of egalitarian commitments and implications when it comes to gender. There are fundamental questions at the heart of the complementary-egalitarian debate that McKirland’s proposal, and the broader egalitarian

project of which she is a part, is hard-pressed to answer reasonably. What is a woman? What are the differences between men and women? If differences are identifiable, which matter for how we live as men and women? What is the connection between manhood and maleness, womanhood and femaleness? McKirland’s anti-gender essentialism is not only unable to answer these questions in a satisfying way, but she heaps up a pile of error on this unsure foundation at just the point where our culture is most confused today, transgenderism, because of an inability to answer these questions properly.

McKirland does not explicitly define her understanding of “essence” and “accident” in her rejection of gender essentialism. But I do think she assumes the philosophical definition: “essence” refers to a property something must have, while “accident” refers to a property something happens to have but could lack. This is why McKirland spends much of the first part of her chapter attempting to define humanity’s



essence apart from maleness and femaleness. If gender is not essential to humanity, what is? For McKirland, a human's essence is defined by the image of God — a property, importantly for McKirland's egalitarian project, that is shared by both men and women. Here I should like to register a point of agreement: complementarians also believe that a human person's essence should be defined in part by the image of God, in which men and women are made equally. The image of God is what sets humanity, both men and women, apart from the rest of material creation. But now a disagreement: the Bible also teaches that humans are psychosomatic units, body and soul, which means embodiment is part of a human person's essence. Embodiment, for instance, is one aspect of what sets humanity apart from angels. And with embodiment comes a sexual distinction — human bodies are either male or female, and this according to God's design through the presence or absence of a Y chromosome, which contributes to the formation of primary and secondary sex characteristics.

The dimorphic nature of humanity as man or woman, male or female, is established from the very first chapter of the Bible. But McKirland's project leads her to downplay differences in Genesis 1 and 2: "The focus of the texts of Genesis 1–2 is on humanity's unique relationship to God and their function on behalf of God." While this may be true at face value, this statement leads McKirland to ignore other, obvious features of the text — even important features Paul himself draws on when he speaks to the church about men and women in, for example, 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2.

For instance, McKirland nowhere men-

tions that the creation mandate in Genesis 1, where she rightfully gets her understanding of dominion, also includes the command to be fruitful and multiply, which requires sexual complementarity. Neither does she mention that Genesis 2 teaches that the man was created first, from the ground, and the woman from his side. Neither does McKirland mention that Genesis 2 says the woman was created by God to be a "helper suitable" for the man. Without evidence, McKirland argues that "while maleness and femaleness do feature in these creation accounts, masculinity and femininity do not" (296). By any definition of masculinity and femininity *vis a vis* maleness and femaleness, this is simply not true. In the original Hebrew, God's special creation of man is referred to in Genesis 1:27 as "male" (*zakar*) and "female" (*neqebah*) — terms that make literal reference to complementary sexual reproductive organs. Then in Genesis 2, man is referenced not by sex — maleness and femaleness — but by gender — masculinity and femininity. God first makes the man (*adam*) out of the ground, and then subsequently makes the woman (*isha*) out of his side and brings her to the man (*ish*) to be named.

This divine action precipitates the first marriage between the first man and first woman, which becomes the paradigm for all human marriages: the male man and the female woman joined together by covenant in a complementary, one-flesh union. McKirland mentions this union, but she contends it is the relationship, not complementarity, that is in focus: "The reason the relationship is the focus, and not the maleness or femaleness of the parties, is its intimacy and voluntary nature: 'the relation of Christ and church must be as close as

that” (298). But this raises a question: does this mean that any intimate, voluntary relationship is a marriage? Gay marriage proponents would say — do say — exactly what McKirland argues here. But a biblical account of the first two chapters of Genesis does not downplay sexual differences and recognizes that marriage, and the offspring of the covenant union, is the meaning of these differences, contrary to McKirland’s emphasis on “relationship.”

One wonders if it is McKirland’s willingness to downplay difference by an avoidance of these significant points in God’s revelation that leads her to be comfortable using the gender-neutral pronoun “Godself” (292), something that is nowhere attested in the Scriptures and contradicts the historic Christian creeds and orthodoxy such as the Apostle’s Creed, where Christians universal-

“the Bible presents Adam as the covenant head of all humanity by virtue of physical descent ... while also failing to appreciate Christ’s federal headship of all the redeemed, precisely because he comes as the second Adam.”

ly confess “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, *His* only Son Our Lord.” His, not “Godself,” is the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

But these exegetical points aside, what would it mean to say that McKirland is right that gender is not essential? Wouldn’t this necessarily mean that a human person could exist without being a man or woman? In other words, if we are to follow McKirland down this road of rejecting gender essentialism, how do we not end up promoting androgyny?

One might respond that a rejection of gender essentialism does not mean a rejection of sex essentialism. But this does seem to be part of what is entailed in McKirland’s project. Later in her chapter, McKirland argues that if being male or female is essential to being human, then Jesus, as a male, could not have redeemed the female half of humanity, because he did not assume their female nature, and thus left off some “essence” of humanity that was not redeemed. But this line of argumentation fails to grapple with how the Bible presents Adam as the covenant head of all humanity by virtue of physical descent — he didn’t have to be female to pass on a female nature to his daughters, for instance — while also failing to appreciate Christ’s federal headship of all the redeemed, precisely because he comes as the second Adam.

#### **EMBRACING TRANSGENDERISM**

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But instead of recognizing and pulling back from the logical entailments of rejecting gender essentialism for what it means to live as men and women according to God’s design, McKirland doubles down on



the most heterodox implications by concluding her chapter with a full embrace of transgenderism.

A radical rejection of gender essentialism severs gender from sex. But what, then, do we do with sex? Toward the end of her chapter, McKirland seems to recognize this dilemma and wrestles with it when she says, “we do follow Jesus as embodied persons, and for this reason our bodies matter. What is accidental (in the philosophical sense, meaning that one would be human regardless of one’s sexed embodiment) is not therefore incidental” (305). If sex is not essential, but neither is it incidental, what is it? Right after this statement McKirland claims that “a rejection of gender essentialism does not entail a rejection of sex difference or a rejection of the importance of sexed embodiment.” Good as far as it goes, and perhaps the reader could believe her that her egalitarianism does not commit her to seeing sex as incidental — if she would have stopped there.

But instead, McKirland follows this statement with the testimony of an individual named Austen Hartke, who identifies as a “transgender Christian man” (306). Before we go on, it is important to cut through the doublespeak and confront reality: this is a biological female who claims to be a man. But McKirland treats Hartke’s biology as incidental and uncritically uses masculine pronouns for this woman.

Speaking of Hartke, a biological female, McKirland writes,

He suggests that, for some transgender persons, the feeling of dissonance between the body that they were born with and the gender that they believe themselves to be is rooted in ‘the gendered expectations that other people hold them to that cause a problem.’ When we have rigid definitions of what it means to be masculine or what it means to be feminine, which are bound to per-

sonhood, and a person does not fit into his or her assigned gender category, then there can be a feeling that a person is in the wrong body. Hartke suggests that this transgender experience is an external effect of the fall — when the expectations of others cause personal angst. Given what has been argued thus far in this chapter, this is an angst that could be lessened by a loosening of the definitions, surveillance, and enforcement of masculinity and femininity. Thus, the compassionate, sensitive, theatrical boy is no longer shamed for being girly, nor is the headstrong, agentic, athletic girl shamed for being boyish (306–7).

Now if McKirland stopped here, we would have significant problems with her use of masculine pronouns for a female, but we could perhaps see the point about the potential harms of stereotypes. But it would certainly be relevant to note that our age, which is characterized by the complete overthrow of such stereotypes and gender bending, has only seen a proliferation of individuals identifying as, and playing up the stereotypes of, the opposite gender.

But McKirland continues in what I might offer as the most radical paragraph of this

book, which is not insignificant, as she is one of the book's editors:

However, Hartke goes on to describe another experience that he classifies as an internal effect of the fall. For those for whom the feeling of being in the wrong body 'would exist even if you picked them up and set them on a desert island,' he comments that, in his view, 'this is the only point at which it might possibly be justifiable to think of gender dysphoria as a product of the fall — the point at which the trans person experiences suffering that is neither self-inflicted nor caused by others.' In these cases, for whatever reason, trans persons genuinely feel like they should have differently sexed anatomies. Given what has been discussed above in terms of sex chromosomes and sexual development, in utero, to puberty, and throughout life — sexed embodiment is complicated. Consequently, for some people their givenness is not experienced as a gift. For some people, things do not seem as they should be. Where intense controversy remains is in how to address this; Mark Yarhouse's work provides several frameworks from which to think through how these persons might move forward. The

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*“our age ... has only seen a proliferation of individuals identifying as, and playing up the stereotypes of, the opposite gender.”*

implications of this chapter, however, are not to provide a moral prescription for transgender persons, but to (1) show how gender-essentialist logic may actually be contributing to the internal angst of some trans persons, and (2) to emphasize that the priority of the scriptural text is on following Jesus, not being 'real men' or 'real women.' For those who are discerning whether their givenness should be altered, the New Testament rubric for any such choice (which would include all bodily modifications, not just those affecting sexual anatomy) is how such can be done in submission to the Spirit and in order to become more like Christ (307–8).

To reread that last sentence is to understand not only the trajectory, but the application, of the egalitarian hermeneutic. If there are no meaningful differences between men and women, then there are no meaningful differences between males and females. The functional interchangeability of the egalitarian project and its rejection of gender essentialism inevitably leads to an ontological interchangeability, which is the complete abandonment of God's design, who makes us male and female in his image.

Before the third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality*, complementarians had to demonstrate the connection between egalitarianism and the erasure of male-female distinction by logic and inference.<sup>1</sup> But now McKirland's chapter connects the dots for us, and it brings the Christian to a decision point. Instead of rejecting gender

essentialism to embrace an ideology that leads to the overthrow of the very foundations of nature in God's good design, we should hold fast to everything that is good, true, and beautiful, which includes complementary humanity created male and female in God's image for his glory. ✕

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Colin J. Smothers, "Is the Slippery Slope Actually Slippery? Egalitarianism and the Open-and-Affirming Position" *9Marks Journal* (December 2019), 168–77; "The Fallacy of Interchangeability," *Eikon*, 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019), 8–14.

# Returning to God's Design:

## A Response to Stanley E. Porter, "Gender Equality and the Analogy of Slavery"

<sup>1</sup> See hesitations about Webb's approach in this new edition of *DBE* at pp. 328, 336, 343, and 349. Also there is a veiled critique of his work on p. 54: "This is similar to William J. Webb's model developed in *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001). However, we are not suggesting that this movement need go beyond the New Testament to arrive at gender equality for men and women in Christ, since this is accomplished within the New Testament."

It is good to see the essay by Stanley Porter on "Gender Equality and the Analogy of Slavery" in the new edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality* (*DBE*). As its editors say, the new edition attempts to articulate its egalitarian stance "based on the tenets of biblical teaching" (7), and this essay provides a treatment of the topic that is more solidly grounded in New Testament (NT) exegesis itself as compared to the contribution on slavery by William Webb in the two previous editions of *DBE* (2004, 2005).<sup>1</sup> Arguments for gender equality in the wider culture — and by some in the church — that are based on the analogy of slavery are often a distracting debater's trick with no basis in biblical teaching itself (i.e., "the Bible endorses slavery as well as oppression of women, but now we know better"). Porter mentions this approach at the outset of his essay and moves on from it without direct critique (an oblique rejection of it appears on pp. 327–28). The approach he



espouses is that “there is an imperfect analogy between slavery and gender equality in the Bible.” He argues that the NT, especially Paul, advanced “a countercultural view of slavery that called for liberating treatment of slaves,” even while accommodating itself generally to the wider first-century culture. And “the analogy with gender equality is similar, in that the New Testament promotes gender equality that . . . is grounded in fundamental scriptural passages” (328). Porter does not discuss the Bible’s teaching on gender equality at length (leaving that to other essays in the book) but instead concentrates his attention on what the NT says specifically about slavery. The point of his essay, however, is to argue that “the analogy of slavery is in fact an appropriate one for gender equality,” and that “the Bible, and especially the New Testament, has analogous liberating views of both slavery and gender equality” (333).

As a frame of reference for this response to Porter’s essay, I would express the NT teaching on slavery in three broad points. First, the NT did not condone or command slavery but gave instructions to regulate the conduct of Christian masters and slaves within the established institution of the Roman world of its day. It never commands slavery and never commends it as a good thing. Second, its

instructions to regulate the life of masters and slaves are based on transcultural principles that undermine slavery as an institution and lead ultimately to its abolition in later centuries. These principles include the shared spiritual freedom and familial unity between masters and slaves (1 Cor 7:21–22; Gal 3:28; 1 Tim 6:1–2; Philem 15–16), their submission and accountability to the same Lord (1 Cor 7:22–23; Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22–4:1; 1 Pet 3:18–19), and more broadly the shared image of God among all humans (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1–3; 9:6; James 3:9). And my third point is that the NT never grounds the institution of slavery itself in God’s design for humans from creation or in distinctions in nature or essence between slaves and masters.

### **THE DOG THAT DIDN'T BARK**

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My evaluation of Porter’s discussion of slavery in the NT is that he does a fine job of arguing for the first two points above, although he may not express them exactly as I have done. His treatment is well-informed, well-presented, and well-grounded in exegesis and biblical theology. He argues effectively against the views of some that the NT leaves the question of slavery open, to be resolved by the church at a later date. He also counters the idea that its teaching



on slaves as well as women was simply an accommodation to the non-Christian values of its wider culture. All of this is to be commended.

But Porter completely ignores that third important facet of the issue, a common failing among egalitarians who have a high view of Scripture as well as ones who set aside the Bible's authority altogether. This constitutes "the dog that didn't bark"<sup>2</sup> in Porter's argument that "the analogy of slavery is in fact an appropriate one for gender equality" (333; see also 349–50). In fact, the biblical texts calling for a distinction in roles for men and women in marriage and the church definitively anchor that teaching in God's good design for male and female in creation (Gen 1:26; 2:18–25; 1 Cor 11:3–16; 14:34–35; Eph 5:22–33; 1 Tim 2:8–15). On the other hand, nothing of this sort is ever said about the mutual relations of slaves and masters. Unlike some features of the race-based slavery found in the American South and elsewhere, slaves are never portrayed in the Bible as sub-human or different from masters in their God-given status as persons. Not to discuss this feature of "what the NT says about slavery" is a notable omission, especially when arguing for an analogy with gender relations in the family and in the church. Even if Porter prefers to read these NT references to God's design differently, they should be acknowledged and a different approach declared. This point about grounding in creation or the lack of it is a significant element in complementarian interpretation of the slavery question as compared to the issue of gender roles.<sup>3</sup> It should not have been ignored altogether, even if more detailed discussion of the topic appears elsewhere in this edition of *DBE*.

### **BUT WHAT IS "GENDER EQUALITY"?**

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This omission on Porter's part leads to a further critique of his essay. He uses the phrase "gender equality" some twenty-five times, but nowhere does he specifically define or explain what he means by "equality" of men and women. When he does approach a definition, he sends mixed signals. In an admittedly "brief summary" of "Gender Equality in the Bible," he works with Genesis 1:26–27 and says that God made "a distinction within humanity" of male and female but that "humanity was created equally

<sup>2</sup> "The dog that didn't bark" is a trope taken from Arthur Conan Doyle's story of Sherlock Holmes in "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" (1892). It illustrates the point that investigators should explore not just the factors that are clearly present in a situation but also the evidence that is absent but could be expected. Noticing what is not there can be significant.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1980), 158, 260–62; and John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991, 2006, 2012), 65–66, 176–77.



with both male and female.” It is a “gender-equal creation account” (331–32). Does this mean equality in person or essence but differentiation in role or function? Is it equality before God but distinction within human relations? On the next page, Porter summarizes the household codes of Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, etc. and says they show that “the relationship between men and women is reciprocal, indicating a relationship of equality rather than hierarchy” (332). In his conclusion he states that “the biblical and especially New Testament evidence for gender equality . . . indicates that the early church was to be a community of equals because they [i.e., women] are equals.” And he cites Galatians 3:28 as giving “a powerful egalitarian statement regarding both slavery and gender relations when Paul states that, in Christ, there is to be no distinction between them for the purposes of membership within the Christian community, grounded in a more fundamental equality” (349–50). So does this equality focus on full acceptance in the community and in relationship to God but not in regard to role distinctions within the community? Porter seems to leave that possibility open.

In addition, in Porter’s more detailed comments on Ephesians 5, he writes, “in Paul’s code, wives are to be submissive, and husbands are to love sacrificially and in the same way as they love themselves, a reciprocal relationship with more demanded of the husband than the wife” (345). On Colossians 3 he says, “The first section addresses wives and husbands, with wives to be submissive to their husbands and husbands to love their wives and not embitter them (again, demanding more of the husband)” (346). Doesn’t this reciprocity itself imply different roles for males and females in marriage? Isn’t submission a feature of hierarchy? This seems to conflict with the detailed definition of gender equality in the editors’ introduction to the book (1–2, also 5n6) and raise questions about whether Porter is taking a different (more biblically faithful) line.

One final brief observation. Porter comments quickly that mention of slavery in the Gospels and Acts is of a different literary character than its treatment in the Epistles (337): “these narrative accounts [of slavery] are not primarily concerned with providing social commentary while tracing the ministry of Jesus and his early followers. . . . We must

turn instead to exhortative material that has a conscious intention to address social behavior, especially within the church.” Yet when he briefly summarizes “gender equality in the Bible,” he relies heavily on how Jesus included women in his circle and how Paul mentions women who served in the churches (Lydia, Phoebe, Junia, Priscilla, and others in Rom 16) to offset the “potentially problematic passages” of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 (332–33). This is a common strategy employed by egalitarians. Yet it violates the hermeneutical principle that Porter affirms on page 337. The principle is that central passages (i.e., ones specifically intended to give instruction about church order or marriage) should take priority over incidental or peripheral mentions.<sup>4</sup> To allow Romans 16, Philippians 4, etc. to override 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2 is inconsistent with the solid observation about genre that Porter makes earlier.

## RETURNING TO GOD'S DESIGN

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By way of conclusion, I offer this exhortation: God's good intention for humans in his design from creation for the family and the church should be emphasized more than ever in contemporary Christian teaching. This is not just a matter of over-punctilious exegesis. In these days of great confusion in the wider culture about sexuality and personal identity, Christians need a solid foundation grounded in God's intent for humans from the beginning. They must understand clearly that the NT teachings about men and women in the family and in the church are not *ad hoc* ideas drawn from the ancient writers' personal preferences or cultural milieu, but from God's good design for humans made in his image as male and female. This is a significant element in a biblical theology of sex and gender. Christian teaching that avoids such questions out of fearful silence or desire to avoid controversy should no longer be an option.<sup>5</sup> ✕

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Discussions of divorce and remarriage in the Bible should give greater priority to Matt 5 and 19 and 1 Cor 7 rather than Rom 7.

<sup>5</sup> It is ironic that neglect of these ideas on the part of pro-LGBTQ Christians today reflects the same conformity of biblical interpretation to contemporary social values that were exhibited by pro-slavery interpreters of the Bible in ante-bellum America. See Carl Trueman, “Baptizing the Status Quo, Then and Now,” *First Things*, March 30, 2023.

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# Does Complementarianism Depend on ERAS?: A Response to Kevin Giles, “The Trinity Argument for Women’s Subordination”

Over the years, the doctrine of the Trinity has been at the center of discussion in the larger complementarian and egalitarian debates. For some, one of the key theological arguments for complementarianism has been a Trinitarian argument. This argument depends on a specific view of how the divine persons are distinguished from each other *ad intra* (or within God) due to their eternal relations and ordered authority roles. Today, this view is identified by the acronym ERAS (“Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission”).

ERAS, in agreement with Nicene orthodoxy, affirms that the divine persons are equally and truly God, since they share the one undivided divine essence. Also, ERAS agrees with the classical view that the divine persons are distinguished by their eternally

ordered relations of origin (i.e., paternity, filiation, and spiration). In contrast to Nicene orthodoxy, however, ERAS contends that the eternal relations between the Father, Son, and Spirit also entail a hierarchy of authority roles, thus resulting in the eternal priority of the Father’s authority, the Son’s eternal submission to the Father’s will, and the Spirit’s eternal submission to the will of the Father and the Son. For ERAS, these ordered authority relationships do not result in any ontological subordination within God, since the divine persons share the one divine essence. Instead, these hierarchical authority roles are the means by which the divine persons are distinguished as persons. As ERAS is applied to human relationships, specifically the relationship between men and women, the argument is this: analogous to the Trinity, men and women

are ontologically equal as image-bearers but functionally distinguished by their authority role differences in marriage, the church, and the larger society.

In recent years, however, due to a renewed study of historical theology, ERAS has come under serious scrutiny, especially regarding how it distinguishes the divine persons *ad intra* by hierarchical authority roles and relationships. Historically, classical Trinitarianism has affirmed that the only way to distinguish the divine persons is by their eternally ordered relations, but these ordered relations do not entail a hierarchy of authority roles between the divine persons. Instead, divine authority is what the Father, Son, and Spirit have in common, because they equally share and subsist in the one divine essence. In fact, if the Son is eternally distinguished by his submission and obedience to the Father's will, this would seem to require that the Father and Son have distinct wills — a point that Nicene orthodoxy rejects. Thus, as pro-Nicene Trinitarianism has been retrieved and viewed as the more biblical and theologically viable position, a number of egalitarians have concluded that since one

of the key theological arguments used to warrant complementarianism is no longer valid, this in turn requires a corresponding rejection of complementarianism. At least this seems to be the argument of Kevin Giles in his chapter, "The Trinity Argument for Women's Subordination: The Story of its Rise, Ascendancy, and Fall."

But is this actually the case? Is complementarianism dependent on a specific view of the Trinity, as Giles and others seem to assume? And if one rejects ERAS, does this require one to give up complementarianism? In this review article, I will reject Giles's linkage of ERAS with complementarianism. No doubt, for some complementarians both past and present, ERAS has been used to account for how men and women are equal in nature but also different in authority roles in marriage, the church, and even the larger society. For a vast number of complementarians, however, including myself, we do not argue for a complementarian view based on an ERAS view of the Trinity. Instead, we affirm a classical view, yet argue that Scripture teaches a complementarian view regarding the relationship between men and women.



As such, an ERAS view of the Trinity is not required to uphold a complementarian view. In fact, a complementarian view stands on its own due to the teaching of Scripture. Although Scripture will draw an analogous relationship between theology proper and creaturely relationships, what must always be preserved is that these relationships are only analogical due to the Creator-creature distinction.

My review of Giles's chapter proceeds in three steps. First, I offer a brief summary of his chapter, and then secondly, I offer a number of critical comments. Lastly, I outline how complementarianism stands on its own, independent of a specific view of the Trinity, thus rejecting Giles's seeming assumption that complementarianism depends on a specific view of the Trinity — especially the notion that if this view of the Trinity is undermined, so is complementarianism.

### **SUMMARY OF GILES'S OVERALL ARGUMENT**

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The basic thesis of Giles is this: Up until 2016, the complementarian view was tied

to a specific view of the Trinity, namely ERAS. In fact, Giles seems to assume that complementarianism only gained ascendancy due to its appeal to an ERAS view of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, however, when serious challenges were raised against ERAS, according to Giles the theological warrant for complementarianism was undercut. Thus by implication, with the theological rationale for complementarianism gone, the only viable option is to embrace an egalitarian view. Of course, for this argument to work, it must assume that complementarianism requires ERAS; indeed it assumes that both stand and fall together. Since Scripture provides no grounds for thinking there are ordered authority relationships between men and women, as Giles contends, the best argument for complementarianism has been the Trinitarian argument, which has now been defeated.

How does Giles demonstrate his overall point? He first argues for the dependence of complementarianism on ERAS starting in the 1970s, which buttresses his assumption that both are mutually dependent on each other. Then, by documenting how

<sup>1</sup> Giles argues that “the primary basis for the hierarchical ordering of the sexes, was invented, was popularized, and gained ascendancy in the evangelical and Reformed world” due to its dependence on ERAS (352).



in 2016 ERAS was rejected by many, he assumes that complementarianism must also be rejected. For Giles, it seems that complementarianism has no biblical and theological warrant apart from ERAS.

In recounting how complementarianism hitched its wagon to ERAS, Giles argues that it was George Knight III who was the first to do so.<sup>2</sup> According to Giles, “[Knight] rejected the historic way of speaking of men as ‘superior’ and women ‘inferior’ . . . arguing instead that men and women are ‘equal’ yet ‘role differentiated’” (352). In fact, Knight was the first to use the language of “roles” to distinguish essential differences between men and women *and* to speak of “the essential difference between the divine three persons” (353). Thus, in a novel way, Knight linked ERAS and complementarianism together, which allowed him to ground his complementarianism within the triune personal relations. For Knight, the “Son and women *are defined by their subordination*” (353), and as such complementarianism and ERAS now stand or fall together.

After Knight, Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware solidified the link between ERAS and complementarianism,<sup>3</sup> which in turn became the primary warrant for complementarianism. Others followed suit, but Giles’s main point is this: if ERAS is true, then complementarianism stands; but if ERAS falls, so does complementarianism. This is why the year 2016 is so crucial for Giles. With the increased scrutiny of the biblical, theological, and historical legitimacy of ERAS, and its ultimate rejection by many, this resulted in the fall of complementarianism.

### CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON GILES’S ARGUMENT

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What are we to think of Giles’s overall argument? Let me offer three critical reflections before I explain why complementarianism stands on its own independent of views of the Trinity.

First, in terms of historical reconstruction, there is truth in what Giles documents, but also some historical revisionism and overstatement. No doubt since the

<sup>2</sup> See George W. Knight III, *New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) and Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005).



1970s, many prominent people argued that ERAS provided a theological warrant for complementarianism (e.g., Wayne Grudem, Bruce Ware, Michael Ovey, etc.). These same people, however, argued that the ultimate reason for their embrace of complementarianism is due to biblical authority and not merely their understanding of the Trinity. For example, Giles charges Knight with circular reasoning by introducing the concept of “roles” into human relationships, and then reworking the Trinity to make it fit with his construction (353). But this is hardly what Knight is doing. In Knight’s work, he makes strong exegetical arguments based on a proper understanding of creation, fall, and redemption, as well as biblical connections between the Father, Son, and humans that Scripture itself teaches (e.g., 1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:21–33; 1 Tim 2:11–15). In fact, in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Knight primarily explains the phrase “God is the head of Christ” in relation to the *incarnate* Christ, although he later extends this relation back into the immanent life of God.<sup>4</sup> I disagree with this latter extension, but one can hardly charge Knight with circular reasoning; Knight is doing careful exegesis of the biblical text.

Second, Giles gives the impression that until 2016, ERAS and complementarianism were organically one, “with no dissenting voices” (351). But this is simply false. No doubt, within conservative evangelicalism, ERAS was taught as a kind of default

position. In fact, during my years at TEDS in the 1980–90s this was the case. Due to the work of Richard Muller, Carl Trueman, and many others, however, at the end of the 1990s and into the early 2000s the social trinitarian emphasis of much of the theological world was challenged (including aspects of ERAS), as a retrieval of Nicene orthodoxy occurred. Thus, although it was not loudly stated, ERAS was losing traction long before 2016.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as many of us were moving away from ERAS, the important point to note is that we continued to affirm and defend complementarianism. In other words, the relation between ERAS and complementarianism is not as tight as Giles presents.

Third, although Giles’s chapter correctly documents the loss of influence of ERAS within evangelical theology, he does not demonstrate the truth of egalitarianism unless he assumes that ERAS and complementarianism are mutually dependent on each other. This is a false assumption, however, and for many complementarians today, complementarianism stands independent of one’s view of the Trinity. In fact, when Giles attempts to give a brief rebuttal of ERAS and complementarianism (358–61), he either distorts ERAS or fails to wrestle with Scripture. For example, in terms of ERAS, he charges it with Arianism, which is false (368). Or in terms of Scripture, when he appeals to 1 Corinthians 11:3, he

<sup>4</sup> See Knight, *New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*, 32–33, 55–56.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Keith E. Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism: An Augustinian Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011). Also, see Kyle Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life*, ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 65–93, who argues for a classical view of the Trinity in contrast to ERAS, yet he defends a complementarian view. In fact, Giles mentions this book but he fails to acknowledge that all of the authors do not affirm ERAS such as Claunch. Also see my *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), where I argue for a classical view of the Trinity and Christology, which was submitted to Crossway before 2016. Also, Bruce Ware has been my colleague since 1999, but we have debated the merits of ERAS long before 2016, along with some of my other colleagues at Southern Seminary. But all of us are complementarian.

*“The main warrant for complementarianism, however, is Scripture itself, starting in creation and culminating in the new creation.”*

strangely states that it is not a Trinitarian text because the Spirit is not mentioned (360) and also dismisses that *kephalē* can mean “head” in specific contexts, instead opting for “source,” contrary to all the evidence that it means both “head” and “source” and that context is determinative.<sup>6</sup> Overall, Giles has documented the declining influence of ERAS, but he has not demonstrated that complementarianism demands ERAS.

#### **ARGUING FOR COMPLEMENTARIANISM ON SCRIPTURAL GROUNDS**

Much could be said regarding the overall biblical-theological argument for complementarianism, but my point is that the warrant for complementarianism is Scripture, not a specific view of Trinity. This is not to say that there is nothing analogous between theology proper and human relationships. In fact, Giles goes too far in saying that we “must completely separate the doctrine of the Trinity

from [our] doctrine of the sexes” (360). I understand his point, and I basically agree; however, Scripture draws analogous relations between God and ourselves, as evidenced in 1 Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5:21, etc. If Scripture does so, then so must we. But as we do, we must always preserve the Creator-creature distinction and never read back into the eternal relations of the divine persons what we see in creation. In fact, when Scripture does unpack the relation between husbands and wives as analogous to Christ and the church, and how God as the head of the *incarnate* Son (1 Cor 11:3) is analogous to human relations, it is not in terms of the eternal relations among the persons, but more in terms of the incarnation and the divine economy.<sup>7</sup>

The main warrant for complementarianism, however, is Scripture itself, starting in creation and culminating in the new creation. I cannot unpack the entire argument here, but suffice it to say,

<sup>6</sup> See Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 812–22; Wayne Grudem, “Does *Kephalē* (“Head”) Mean “Source” or “Authority Over” in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6, no. 1 (1985): 38–59; idem, “The Meaning of *Kephalē* (“Head”): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged,” *JETS* 44 (2001): 25–65. Cf. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” 69–75.

<sup>7</sup> For a helpful way of unpacking the analogy between theology proper and human relationships, see Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ.”

creation establishes that men and women are equally created as image-bearers (Gen 1:26–27), yet designed for complementary relations. Both have dominion over the world, but according to how God has created us as male and female. Men and women are created for each other, but in creation there is a clear order and complementary nature of the sexes (Gen 2:18–25). Woman is created as a “helper” fit for man, which expresses both equality and difference. Nothing in the text suggests that “helper” means inferior, but it does speak to authority role differences, which is precisely how Paul argues as he explains how male-female relationships ought to function in the church (1 Tim 2:11–15) and the home (Eph 5:21–33). As one works across the canon, taking into consideration the effects of the fall and then our redemption in Christ, the equality *and* complementarity of men and women are made evident. This is why in Ephesians 5, the husband is the “head” (having authority over) of his wife as Christ is the “head” of the church, and the submission of the wife speaks of her complementarity in marriage, not her inferiority.

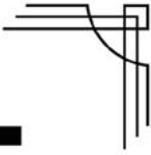
Much more could be said, but the biblical and theological warrant from complementarianism is Scripture itself, not any particular appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity. In the end, Giles recounts what has happened in evangelical theology regarding discussions of the Trinity, but he has not established in the least that his egalitarian view is warranted by Scripture itself. The case for complementarianism rests not on appeal to the eternal personal relations of the Trinity, but on what Scripture teaches regarding how God has created, ordered, and designed men and





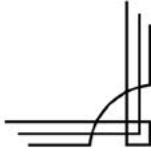
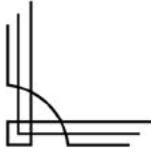
women. On this last point, this teaching is something we desperately need to recover in a day and age that is totally confused on what humans are, specifically what it means to be a man and woman. ✕

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General Editor

# 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”

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## INTRODUCTION

In their essay, “Biblical Images of God as Mother and Spiritual Formation,” Ronald Pierce and Erin Heim seek to “explore and contemplate God’s self-revelation through Scripture’s metaphors of motherhood as they relate to our personal spiritual formation, that is, asking how these metaphors inform, form, and shape our identity as God’s people” (372). The authors hope that Christians, after reading the essay, will “understand better and experience more fully the person [sic] and work of the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, who is also portrayed in terms of motherhood” (373). After summarizing the chapter, I will critique the essay for its inadequate and imprecise account of

theological language. It will be shown that the chapter does not, in fact, help readers “understand better and experience more fully” the triune God. Rather, the profound lack of theological precision in matters of great weight and consequence leads to a collapsing of important distinctions and thus diminishes understanding rather than deepening it.

## SUMMARY

Pierce and Heim begin by sharing their personal experiences with their respective mothers and how such experiences have profoundly influenced their own paths of discipleship. This is followed by a brief but important discussion of “The Triune

God and Gender.” Joining the chorus of all orthodox voices throughout church history, Pierce and Heim remind readers that “God is spirit” and, as such, is neither male nor female in terms of having a sexed body. Furthermore, the authors make clear that they will not be advocating for replacing the designation “God the Father” with “God the Parent” or “God the Mother” (374). Alongside the masculine metaphors for God in Scripture, they wish to highlight the feminine imagery, especially that of motherhood. They explain, “Motherhood language predicated of Yahweh in the Hebrew Scriptures is true of the whole Trinity, revealing something just as true about God’s essential nature as masculine metaphors” (375). For Pierce and Heim both the name “Father” and the images of motherhood are metaphorical when spoken of God. It follows, therefore, that God may be referred to as “Mother” in addition to the more common designation of “Father.” They cite Julian of Norwich favorably in this regard: “God is our mother as truly as he is our Father” (375).<sup>1</sup>

The next section of the essay discusses “Metaphor in Scripture and Theology.” The authors’ understanding of the use of metaphorical language in Scripture is of great theological consequence. Pierce and Heim assert, “The majority of the language used of God in Scripture is metaphorical” (376), an assertion that places the biblical naming of God as Father on the same conceptual plane as the metaphors of motherhood spoken of God’s

acts in Scripture. Thus, the authors’ stated wish for readers to “inhabit Scripture’s metaphors of God as mother” (377) represents a kind of balance to the supposed tendency to inhabit only the masculine language used for God.

The bulk of the chapter is devoted to exegetical analysis of the motherly metaphors for God used in Scripture. Attempting to follow an explicitly Trinitarian structure, Pierce and Heim first consider “Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel” (379–83), Jesus the Messiah second (383–87), and the Holy Spirit third (387–90).<sup>2</sup> Sustained attention is given to prophetic texts in which Yahweh carries Israel in the womb (Isa 46:3), experiences birth pangs for Israel (Isa 13:6–9), nurtures Israel like a nursing mother (Isa 49:14–15), and cares for Israel like a mother cares for her weaned child (Hos 11:4, 8). Pierce and Heim seek to demonstrate that motherly metaphors communicate profound truths about the love and fierceness of God in his covenantal devotion to his people. Furthermore, the text about Jesus longing for the people of Jerusalem like a hen desires to gather her chicks (Mt 23:37) is considered against a multi-faceted Old Testament background to demonstrate that the use of distinctly feminine imagery is not incompatible with the God of the Bible nor with the male Jesus of Nazareth describing his love for the people of God. Finally, John 3:1–8 is analyzed as a text in which profoundly feminine, motherly imagery is used of the Spirit. To be “born again” is

<sup>1</sup> The logic here is very similar to the more expansive treatment of these issues in Amy Peeler, *Women and the Gender of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022). She writes, “To think of God as beyond gender in the sense that God encompasses aspects of both genders, that God is Parent or Mother and not only Father, helps to work against the ‘phallacy’ that God is male” (17).

<sup>2</sup> I use the word “attempting” to register my hesitation with the designation, “Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel” in reference to God the Father exclusively. YHWH is a proper name for the triune God and can thus name all three persons. The NT demonstrates this by associating the name YHWH with all three divine persons (see, e.g., 2 Cor 3:15–18 [of the Spirit], Heb 1:10–12 [citing Ps 102:25–26, of the Son], Mt 22:43–45 [citing Ps 110:1 in which Jesus identifies YHWH with the Father]).



to be “born of the Spirit” according to Jesus’s teaching. For Pierce and Heim, this association of regeneration with birthing imagery suggests that the Spirit relates to the people of God in motherly ways.

Before offering a few enumerated points of application by way of conclusion, the authors consider some of the metaphors used by the Apostle Paul in his care for the churches at Galatia, Thessalonica, and Corinth where the apostle declares that he is in labor pains while waiting for Christ to be formed in the Galatians (Gal 4:19), that he cares for the Thessalonians as a nursing mother cares for her child (1 Thess 2:7–8), and that he gives milk to the Corinthians rather than solid food (1 Cor 3:2). Paul, then, is an example of how to inhabit the metaphors of divine motherly care in our own spiritual formation and care for others.

### CRITIQUE

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Pierce and Heim correctly state that God is not sexed as male or female, and they

identify multiple biblical texts that undeniably describe the relation of God to his people using distinctly motherly (and thus, feminine) metaphors. Further, insofar as creatures participate analogically in the divine life, possessing as capacities *of* our natures what God *is* by nature, God’s motherly care and affection for his people should be emulated by Christians seeking to image him to the world. Putting forward the Apostle Paul as an example of what this looks like in ministry is a fitting move to which few would object. However, the essay as a whole suffers from an imprecise and inadequate account of theological language, leading to deep confusion and potentially serious error in the doctrine of God.

### METAPHOR AND THEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE

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Is it true that “the majority of the language used of God in Scripture is metaphorical” (376), as Pierce and Heim assert? It is certainly the case that all true speech about God is analogical, but this is not the same

thing as saying that all such language is metaphorical. To say that all language about God is analogical is to recognize two facts. First, God has chosen to reveal himself truly to creatures in a way that can be understood by creatures, namely through created words. Second, words predicated of God do not mean *exactly the same thing* in God as when predicated of creatures. Rather, words predicated of God are true of God in ways that transcend the limits of created reality. In any analogy, two things correspond to one another in ways that are similar and dissimilar. In the case of analogical language predicated of God, the two things, words and God, do not bear an exact similitude with no remainder. Rather, the fullness of God's being transcends the capacity of meaning conveyed by finite words.

The idea that all language about God is analogical stands in stark contrast to two alternative proposals. First, the theory of analogical language stands in contrast to the theory of *univocal language*. If words spoken about God are univocal, then the meaning of the word discloses exactly what is true about God without remainder. The implication of this theory is that God can be comprehended intellectually (i.e., exhaustively understood) by finite creatures. Most theologians in the classical tradition have recognized that this would blur the Creator/creature distinction by reducing the being of God to the level of creatures. Second, the theory of analogical language stands in contrast to the theory of *equivocal language* about God. If words spoken about God are equivocal, then the meaning of a word does not disclose anything true about God. To equivocate is to express two altogether different things with the same word. To hold a theory of equivocal language about God would be to embrace a kind of functional deism in which all speech about God is

merely a blind guess concerning the reality of one who is utterly unknowable. The analogical theory of theological predication affirms the fittingness of created words spoken about God to reveal truth concerning him (John 17:17) while acknowledging that the LORD's being is ultimately beyond all comparison (Isa 46:5, 9) and his ways "inscrutable" on account of his infinite glory (Rom 11:33).

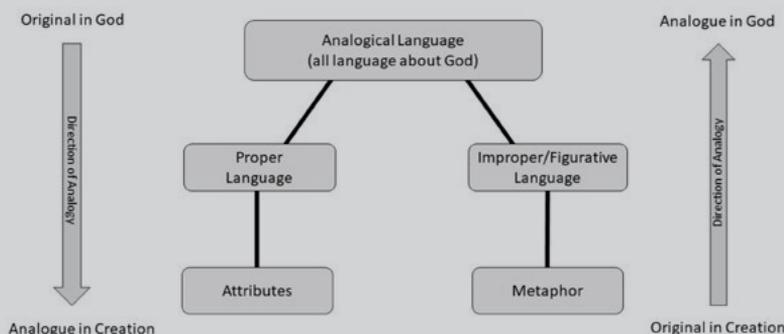
How does the notion of metaphorical language fit this account of analogical theological language? Even within the broad classical Christian commitment to analogical language, it is acknowledged that some words predicated of God are proper while other words spoken of God are improper or figurative. For example, when Scripture speaks of the LORD's power, it speaks what is proper to God. Power is the right word to describe God's capacity to act externally to his own being. Of course, power is predicated of God analogically, not univocally. That is, God's power is not exactly the same thing as creaturely power. Creatures possess power as an *accidental* property and in varying degrees. God is power *essentially*, and his power is without any externally imposed limits. Still, power is attributed to God properly, not figuratively. On the other hand, something is predicated of God figuratively if that which is predicated is not proper to God's being, but rather signifies something proper by way of the figure of speech. For example, when the prophet Isaiah says, "The LORD's hand is not short, that it cannot save" (Isa 59:1), readers should understand that a hand and its relative size are not attributed to God properly. Rather, speaking of the LORD's hand is a way of signifying his power (which is proper) with the imagery of a hand (which is improper). Of course, one knows that a hand is not proper to God because of the clear biblical testimony that God is an infinite, immaterial,

invisible Spirit (1 Kgs 8:27; John 1:18; Rom 1:19–20; 1 Tim 1:17, 6:15–16). Predicating a hand of God is certainly metaphorical language, and as such belongs to the category of improper or figurative predication. This form of speech should be carefully distinguished from proper predication. Both kinds of predication are found abundantly in Scripture.

Another way to think about the difference between proper and improper analogical language about God is to note which direction the analogy runs. In other words, which side of the comparison is the original, and which is the analogue? Predication is *proper* to God when the original is in God and the analogue is in creation. Again, consider divine power. Being proper to God, power is something true of God in himself but also true of creatures in a similar yet dissimilar way. Because God is the Creator, there is an ontological priority to divine power over creaturely power. In other words, creaturely power is a derivative of divine power. Alternatively, in *improper* or *figurative* speech about God, the

original is in the creation, and the analogue is applied to God. Since a hand is not proper to God, the very idea of a hand is drawn from created reality and applied to God derivatively, in that it signifies what is proper to God by terms that are improper to him.

To sum up thus far, all language about God is analogical. Under the universal category of analogical language, classical Christian theologians have always recognized that some language about God is proper while some is improper/figurative.<sup>3</sup> Proper language is true of God in such a way that a term applied to creatures is understood to be derivative of the original reality in God. Improper language is true of God in such a way that the term applied to God is understood to be derived from creation so that what is original to creatures signifies some truth about God by means of figures of speech. Divine attributes (such as power) classically understood, belong to the proper category while metaphors belong to the improper/figurative category (see Figure 1. “Mapping Theological Language”).



**Figure 1. “Mapping Theological Language”**

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas gives a careful treatment of the nature of analogical language, contrasting it with univocal and equivocal language in the *Summa Theologiae* (ST) I, q. 13, a. 5. Under the broad heading of analogical predication, Thomas recognizes a very clear distinction between proper and improper language, locating metaphor explicitly on the improper side, a distinction essential to the proper interpretation of Scripture (ST I, q. 1, a. 10 and q. 13, a. 6; see also *Galatians Commentary*, c. 4, l. 7). It can be argued that Thomas’s conceptual terminology and clear distinctions represent a general consensus of Christian tradition up to his time. It is beyond dispute that this theory of theological language was a mainstay of later theologians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. On the Protestant side, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1131; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 1, 187–91; Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Vol. III: *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 195–201; and Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol II: God and Creation*, 107–110.

Against the backdrop of this overview of theological language in classical Christian theology, it becomes clear that Pierce’s and Heim’s categories are inadequate and imprecise, though they are dealing with a subject (language used to speak of God) that demands the greatest care and precision. When they claim that “the majority of the language used of God in Scripture is metaphorical,” they are failing to account for such vital distinctions in theological language as those outlined above, distinctions drawn from Scripture’s own pattern of speaking about God.

#### **GOD THE FATHER: PROPER OR IMPROPER PREDICATION?**

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So, what does all this talk of theological language have to do with Pierce and Heim’s discussion of motherhood language for God? A great deal, it turns out. Pierce and Heim operate with the uncritical assumption that motherhood imagery and the name Father both occupy the same linguistic and theological space — metaphor. They seem to be unaware of the broader category of analogical language and the important distinction between proper and figurative language under that broader category. Their logic seems to be: because God is not biologically sexed as male, it follows that the name Father must be a metaphor for God since all created fathers are biologically sexed as male. However, this line of reasoning assumes that the name Father has creatures as its original designation. That is, it assumes the direction of the analogy runs from creation to God. However, if the direction of the analogy runs the other way, i.e., if fatherhood is somehow original to God and is spoken of creatures by way of analogical correspondence, then the name Father is

proper to God, not merely a metaphorical figure of speech.

The following three observations demonstrate that the name Father is, in fact, proper to God and therefore not a metaphor. First, in Ephesians 3:14–15, Paul states explicitly that fatherhood is proper to God and that fatherhood in creation is derived from its original in God: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” The word “family” in v. 15 translates the Greek word *πατριὰ*, which means fatherhood. It is true that this word can be a general designation for the family unit as a whole, but this extension of the meaning of the word only makes sense because of the ubiquitous recognition that it is fitting to name the family in terms of its covenantal head. Nearly all the major English translations provide some kind of marginal note pointing out the semantic overlap of the word “father” in v. 14 (*πατήρ*) and the word translated “family” in v. 15 (*πατριὰ*). The ESV even suggests “fatherhood” as an alternate translation. Paul is stating here that fatherhood in creation (“in heaven and earth”) derives its name from God the Father, to whom Paul and all faithful Christians bow the knee. Dutch Reformed Theologian Herman Bavinck captures the sense well:

This name “Father,” accordingly, is not a metaphor derived from the earth and attributed to God. Exactly the opposite is true: fatherhood on earth is but a distant and vague reflection of the fatherhood of God (Eph. 3:14-15). God is Father in the true and complete sense of the term... He is solely, purely, and totally Father. He is Father alone; he is Father by nature and Fa-

ther eternally, without beginning or end.<sup>4</sup>

Note that Bavinck is recognizing the direction in which the metaphor runs as distinguishing how one should understand the name or attribution. “Father,” he says, is not “derived from the earth and attributed to God.” The opposite is true. The analogue runs from God to creation. Centuries before Bavinck, Thomas Aquinas cited Ephesians 3:14–15 as a prime example of the distinction between proper and metaphorical predication. Because the name Father has its origin in God and its analogue in creation, it is therefore a proper designation for God rather than a metaphorical one.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the classic Trinitarian doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son gives the theological ground for saying that the name Father is proper to God. Before God created the heavens and the earth, before any created father ever had a child, the one true and living God existed perfectly, simply, and immutably as three persons in eternal relation. The first person of the undivided Godhead is named Father, not by way of metaphorical association with created fathers, but by way of his eternal relation to the second person of the Godhead, who is named Son. The Son of God is “the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18). Scripture speaks consistently of the Father-Son

relation in God as an eternal relation that transcends all categories of created time and space. This consistency is matched by the language of classical Christian theology throughout all centuries. Fatherhood is predicated properly of the eternal first person of the Trinity in relation to the second person long before it is ever predicated of a creature. The original is in God; the analogue is in creation.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the fact that God is not male in no way undermines the reality that fatherhood is proper to God. This is where the category of analogical language is so important. Though fatherhood is proper to God, it is still analogical. There is similarity in the signification of the word to God and creatures, and also dissimilarity. While the nuances of similarity and dissimilarity would take us far beyond the scope of this essay and deep into the glorious mysteries of Trinitarian theology, a couple of points of clarification will still be helpful. To be a human father is to be the source of life to another human person. This is a point of limited similarity in that God the Father is the source of the eternal and uncreated divine life of God the Son (see John 5:26).<sup>7</sup> To be a human father also involves a biological male in a sexual relationship with a biological female. This is a point of profound dissimilarity at many levels, not the least of which is the fact that the biological/sexual category of

<sup>4</sup> *Reformed Dogmatics*, II: 307–8.

<sup>5</sup> *ST* I, q. 13, a. 6.

<sup>6</sup> This brief discussion has focused on the name Father as a proper personal name in that it is proper to only one person of the Trinity and names his relation to another divine person. It should be noted, however, in Scripture the name Father is predicated of God essentially as well. That is, God is named Father in such a way that the name applies fittingly to all three persons because it is predicated of the divine being and names God in relation to creation. Even in this way, the name is still proper to God, not merely metaphorical, but a full discussion of this will have to await a future article.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, even with a point of similarity, the similarity is not exact. Human fatherhood involves chronology (the father exists before the child), procreation (the father is not the sole source of the child), and duplication (the production of another human nature) whereas God the Father generates the Son eternally (no before and after), exclusively (no partnership with another being), and identically (the Son's nature is numerically the same as the Father's, even though the Son is *God from the Father*).

maleness (and femaleness) does not apply to God, who is an infinite, invisible, incorporeal Spirit. Thus, male sexuality is a reality of creaturely fatherhood but not a reality of divine fatherhood, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name.<sup>8</sup> In short, given the basic framework of analogical language, God's non-sexual nature does not warrant the conclusion that the name Father is a mere metaphor.

### MOTHERLY METAPHORS FOR GOD

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Pierce and Heim rightly identify a number of biblical texts in which distinctly motherly imagery is used to describe God's covenantal relation to his people. Because they fail, however, to articulate or even assume appropriate categories of theological language, they believe that such metaphorical imagery legitimizes the use of other names to complement the name "Father," such as "mother" or "parent." But Pierce and Heim's



understanding of theological language cannot account for the fact that Scripture explicitly and frequently names God as Father (in addition to fatherly imagery used to describe him) while it never names him as Mother (in spite of some motherly imagery used to describe him). A classical account of theological language, like the one given above, accounts for this phenomenon of the biblical text quite well. God is never explicitly named Mother because such imagery only describes him figuratively. God is explicitly named Father because this designation properly names God in a non-figurative way. The way Pierce and Heim appeal to Paul's use of motherly metaphors to describe his love for those under his care actually illustrates this principle quite well. While Paul uses decidedly feminine/motherly metaphors in some texts, it does not follow that Paul could ever be called a woman — or a mother. This is because the feminine metaphors only signify truth about Paul's love for the churches improperly by a figure of speech.

The essay by Pierce and Heim in the third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality* replaces R. K. McGregor Wright's essay, "God, Metaphor, and Gender: Is the God of the Bible a Male Deity?" in the second edition.<sup>9</sup> Wright sets out to argue definitively that God is not properly a male deity. In the course of his essay, Wright asks whether the personal Trinitarian names,

<sup>8</sup> More needs to be said about the proper fatherhood of God, especially what makes the eternal relation between the first and second persons of the Trinity a Father-Son relation as opposed to a Mother-Daughter relation. Beyond this, the consistent Scriptural use of masculine pronouns for God needs to be discussed. These questions are beyond the scope of this review essay and will also have to await a later article.

<sup>9</sup> R. K. McGregor Wright, "God, Metaphor, and Gender: Is the God of the Bible a Male Deity?" in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2nd Ed, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 287–300.

Father and Son, suggest that God is male. He answers in the negative because, just like the names Lamb, Branch, Shepherd, and Lion are metaphorical, so the name Father is metaphorical when spoken of God (295). Because Father is a metaphorical name, one should not conclude that God is male. Interestingly, Wright goes on to say that the name Father is not interchangeable with nor complementary to alternatives, such as Mother or Parent. On this point, Wright disagrees with Pierce and Heim (and many other egalitarians). Wright's insistence, however, that the name Father is merely metaphorical seems to undermine his claim. Since images of motherhood are clearly used of God metaphorically, it seems to follow that God can be called Mother as well as Father if Father is only a metaphorical name. Wright's concern is to let Scripture speak for itself. Since Scripture never explicitly names God as Mother, neither should we. But Wright's inattention to proper theological categories leaves him without explanation as to *why* Scripture speaks of God explicitly as Father but not as Mother.

## CONCLUSION

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Pierce and Heim rightly observe that Scripture describes the LORD's relation to his covenant people in metaphorical terms of motherhood. Furthermore, there are appropriate ways for God's people to imitate his tender care as they love and care for one another, a pattern exemplified by the Apostle Paul, who describes his care for the Galatian and Thessalonian churches using the imagery of motherhood. Unfortunately, Pierce and Heim give inadequate attention to the nature of created language

and its legitimacy and limitations when spoken of God. By subsuming all (or nearly all) speech about God under the heading of metaphor, they have left no space for analogical predication of God that is proper as opposed to merely figurative or metaphorical. Thus, they have reduced all descriptions of God to the level of imagery drawn principally from creation and have not accounted for descriptions of creation that have their origin in God. The implications of this imprecision are theologically significant, minimizing the consistent biblical testimony to the proper name of the first person of the Trinity in relation to the second. Additionally, such imprecision undermines believers' confidence that we can speak anything properly of God, or indeed that God can speak anything properly concerning himself to creatures, however inexhaustive such speech may be. Therefore, the chapter by Pierce and Heim does not help readers "understand better and experience more fully" the triune God (373). Rather, the lack of theological precision in matters of great weight and consequence leads to a collapsing of important distinctions and thus diminishes understanding rather than deepening it. ✕

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# Testing Egalitarian Translation Theory in Matthew's Gospel: A Response to Jeffrey Miller, "A Defense of Gender-Accurate Bible Translation"

<sup>1</sup>Vern Poythress & Wayne Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (Nashville: B&H, 2000).

The debate over the use of gendered words in Bible translation has been significant and has raised numerous important and valuable questions. Despite the rhetoric at times, everyone agrees that context must guide our translation of any word and that we must pay attention to meaning and connotation in the receptor language.

The third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality* includes a new chapter on this topic, "A Defense of Gender-Accurate Bible Translation," by Jeffrey D. Miller. To make his point, Miller focuses on the subtitle of a book published by Wayne Grudem and Vern Poythress in 2000, "Muting the Masculinity of God's Words."<sup>1</sup> Miller notes that the Bible was produced in patriarchal cultures and contains "considerable androcentric language" (473). He seems to take for granted that this is something we will want to overcome in translations, without raising the question of what is merely cultural and what is God's design. God did of course choose the times and cultures in which to inspire Scripture. These are complex issues which must be dealt with and not merely assumed or skirted.



At the heart of the chapter is a comparison of the number of times *ἀνὴρ* (“man, husband”) occurs in the New Testament (NT) with how many times “man” or “husband” show up in English translations. Whereas there is no great discrepancy between the occurrences of *γυνή* (“woman, wife”) in the NT and of “woman” or “wife” in English translations, there is a large increase of “husband” or “man” over the occurrences of *ἀνὴρ*. This is taken to demonstrate that most English translations have inserted masculine references where they are unwarranted. Thus, translations like the NIV are actually restoring the less gendered realities of the Greek text.

I think this approach misses the more important, deeper issues of translation theory. Miller’s chart showing the number of occurrences of “man/husband” in English translations, however, seems to make a strong point. Why do these English words show up three to five times more often than the Greek word *ἀνὴρ*? Miller suggests several reasons, including that translators often wrongly translate *ἄνθρωπος* as “man” when it should be translated without gender reference, using something like “humanity.” He also points to the translation of masculine nouns and pronouns, and a few other issues. He suggests this piling up of unnecessary masculine terms does damage by its cumulative effect (487).

What shall we make of this? First, I will make a couple of general observations and then test his primary thesis about translating the word “man.”

## OBSERVATIONS

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Most of Miller's chapter, appropriately, is taken up with lists of examples of translations he contests. What is odd is that so many of his examples are drawn from the KJV. We all recognize that the KJV was translated in a different time. The ESV looks gender-neutral in comparison to the KJV. Whatever the reason for this preponderance of KJV examples, it gives the appearance of choosing the easiest opportunities for critique.

Secondly, though related, many of the examples where Miller calls for a broader translation (e.g., "people" rather than "men") fall under the category of "permissible" changes in chapter five of the Grudem and Poythress book whose subtitle he critiques. The possibility and potential value of this translation is agreed upon. Miller has taken an uncontested point, proved it, and then suggested this refutes the other side when, in actuality, he is simply saying things with which we all agree.

Third, Miller's chart seems to suggest that only *άνήρ* can properly be translated as "man" (since other occurrences of "man" in translations are presented as suspect). This misses the fact that there are several other Greek words for male humans. A quick look at Louw & Nida provides this list: *άρσενοκοίτης* (2x), *άρσην* (9x), *εὐνουχίζω* (2x), *εὐνοῦχος* (8x), *γέρων* (1x), *πρεσβύτης* (3x), *πρεσβύτερος* (66x; in certain uses), *νεανίσκος* (11x), *νεανίας* (3x), *παρθένος* (Rev 14:4). The inclusion of these terms would significantly affect the data.

Fourth, Miller seems to be unaware of the discussion about the generic "he," even though Grudem and Poythress devote 120 pages to this topic.

## THE PRIMARY POINT

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Miller's chart, though, bears investigation. Even the numerous examples Miller gives from across so many different translations do not get to the heart of the discrepancies implied in the chart. In order to provide a closer examination, I chose one English translation (ESV) to examine every place it uses the word "man" or "husband." Due to time and space limitations, I had to limit my

investigation to Matthew. I chose the ESV since it is probably the most popular translation among complementarians, and it has a worse score in Miller’s chart than the CSB. While it would be beneficial to examine the complete NT, Matthew does contain 117 of the 799 occurrences of “man/husband” in the ESV, so it would seem to provide enough material for decent comparison.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, ἀνὴρ occurs only eight times in in the Greek text of Matthew, so the discrepancy between occurrences of that word and the English words “man/husband” is much higher than in the rest of the NT. So, this should make for a good test.

In Matthew, ἀνὴρ is twice translated “husband” (1:16, 19), and this is not disputed. That leaves us only six occurrences translated “man” with 111 other times the ESV translates “man/men” without ἀνὴρ present. Does this show an unfair bias toward inserting masculinity? Thirty instances are occurrences of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου which Miller acknowledges is a special case. So, setting that aside, we have eighty-one more cases. Here is what is behind the translation “man/men” in these cases:

Other masculine noun	2x
Masculine participle	5x
Masculine adjective	15x
Pronouns	13x
αὐτός	1
τίς	1
δεῖνα	1
οὗτος	10
Numbers	2x
εἷς, δύο (once each)	
No Greek word (23:9)	1x
ἄνθρωπος	43x

Let’s examine each category.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, it is possible that the idiosyncrasies of one author might skew the results, but I offer this study until further work can be done.

### ***Other Masculine noun (2x)***

In Matthew 19:20 and 19:22 the word *νεανίσκος* is properly translated “young man.” I mentioned above the problem with leaving words like this out of the Miller’s count.

### ***Participles (5x)***

Five times masculine participles are translated with the word “man.” Three of these instances are the participle *δαιμονιζόμενος*, where they clearly refer to men (Mt 8:28, 33; 12:22). In Matthew 13:48, the participle *ἀναβιβάσαντες* is translated as “men drew” a net ashore. Jesus is comparing the kingdom of God to the work of fishermen, who in this setting would have been men. All of these make good sense incorporating the word “man/men” into the translation.

The ESV translates Matthew 12:48, “he [Jesus] replied *to the man who told him*,” with the italicized portion being the rendering of a masculine singular participle form of *λέγω* (I say, speak). The participle could reasonably be translated here as “the one who told him,” though the use of the masculine singular form of the participle would suggest the speaker is masculine. The masculine plural form would often refer to men and women, but the singular suggests the speaker was male.

### ***Adjectives (15x)***

Fifteen times adjectives in masculine form are translated using the word “man.” Joseph is a “righteous man” (Mt 1:16, *δίκαιος*) as is Jesus (27:19). The magi are “wise men” (*μάγοι*, 2:1, 7, 16 [2x]). Jesus encounters “blind men” (*τυφλοί*, 9:27, 28; 20:30) and accuses the religious leaders, all of whom were male, of being “blind men” (23:19). Jesus heals a “mute man” (*κωφός*; 9:23). Jesus refers to binding “the strong man” (*ἰσχυρός*, 12:29 [2x]), and the guards at the tomb were like “dead men” (*νεκροί*, 28:4). In each of these cases the context makes clear that men are in view, so the use of “man” in the translation is justified.

One could question the translation of *σοφοὺς* in Matthew 23:34 as “wise men.” It is used in a series between prophets

and scribes. Several translations opt for “sages,” which catches the sense without gender reference (NIV, CSB, NRSVUE) and seems perfectly fine.

### ***Pronouns (13x)***

Thirteen occurrences of pronouns are translated using “man” in the ESV. One of these is the use of the third person masculine pronoun, *αὐτός*. In Matthew 26:48, Judas gives the soldiers a sign, “The one I will kiss is the man [*αὐτός*]; seize him [*αὐτός*].” Conceivably the translation could read, “The one I will kiss is *he*,” but I am not sure what that accomplishes, and it is awkward with the following “him.” The pronoun refers to Jesus, so “man” is contextually appropriate.

The indefinite pronoun *τις* is translated as “a man” in Matthew 22:24. One might expect to translate this word as “someone,” but in the context this refers to a husband who dies without children. Thus, “a man” is a contextually helpful translation. In 26:18 Jesus directs his disciples to “a certain man.” The word here is *δεῖνα*, an NT hapax, another indefinite pronoun where the next referent is a masculine pronoun. BDAG suggests the same translation ESV uses.

The most common pronoun translated “man” in the ESV is *οὗτος* (10x). In seven of these instances the reference is to Jesus (Mt 8:27; 9:3; 12:24; 13:54, 56; 26:61; 27:47). One refers to Peter (26:71), one to Simon of Cyrene (27:32), and another (in the plural) to the ones accusing Jesus before the Sanhedrin (26:62), which would have been men. All of these, then, are fitting translations.

### ***Number (2x)***

The Greek word for “one” (*εἷς*) is translated as “a man” in Matthew 19:16 introducing the man we often refer to as the rich young ruler. It clearly refers to a man, though I would prefer to retain the number in translation in some way. Still, there is no augmenting of masculine referent in the use. In 24:40 *δύο* is translated “two men” referring to two individuals going into a field. One might say that these could be two women. However, the masculine form

<sup>3</sup> Vernard Eller's book *The Language of Canaan and the Grammar of Feminism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) deserves more attention than it has received in more recent years.

<sup>4</sup> 5:13, 16, 19; 6:1, 2, 5, 14; 7:9, 12; 10:36; 11:19 ["him"]; 12:11, 31, 35 [2x], 36, 43, 45; 13:28, 45, 52; 15:11, 18, 20; 16:13; 18:7, 23; 19:3; 20:1; 21:33; 22:2, 16; 23:4, 5, 7, 13, 28. The most common glosses in these cases are "people" and "others."

of "one" (εἷς) is used when describing what one did and then the other. Furthermore, the next example Jesus gives refers to women using the feminine form of "one" (μία).

### **No Greek Word (1x)**

There is one instance in Matthew where the word "man" is simply supplied. Matthew 23:9 could be woodenly rendered, "Do not call your father on earth." For clarity, English requires the addition of another noun or pronoun. One could say "Call no one on earth your father" (similarly, NIV, CSB) but since it is a father in view, it is reasonable to supply "man," as the ESV does.

### **ἄνθρωπος (43x)**

The big issue, however, is how ἄνθρωπος is handled. Interestingly, a large percentage of the uses of this word in Matthew are clearly masculine. This calls into question the assertion of Miller and others that it should almost never be translated man.

Of these forty-three instances, sixteen of them do in fact, in my understanding, refer to humanity in general (Mt 4:4, 19; 9:8; 10:17, 32, 33; 12:12; 13:44; 15:9; 16:23, 26 [2x]; 19:6, 26; 21:25, 26). In many of these cases another word could have been used, though I think it is appropriate to use the word "man" to refer to humanity — especially when one considers the orthodox theological position of the representative headship of the first man, Adam (cf. Rom 5:12–21). There are forty-two other instances in Matthew where the ESV does not translate ἄνθρωπος as "man" but uses some other non-gendered translation.

However, there are twenty-five instances where ἄνθρωπος clearly refers to men. Fourteen of those times ἄνθρωπος is used with direct reference to a specific man, like Matthew (Mt 9:9), or John the Baptist (11:8), Judas (26:24 [2x]), or Jesus (26:72, 74), or Simon of Cyrene (27:32), or Joseph of Arimathea (27:57). Also in this category are instances referring to men Jesus healed (9:32; 12:10, 13), to the twelve disciples (8:27), to a father (21:28), and a centurion using ἄνθρωπος to refer to himself (8:9).



In eight more of those twenty-five instances, the general context makes it clear that ἄνθρωπος is referring to a man: a master of a house (Mt 13:24), his field hands (13:25), and similar examples (13:31; 17:14, 22; 22:11; 25:14 [2x]).

Then there are the three instances where ἄνθρωπος is used to refer to man *vis-a-vis* a woman, the category Miller seems to argue is only reserved for ἀνήρ. In Matthew 10:35 Jesus says he has come to “set a man [ἄνθρωπος] against his father and a daughter against her mother.” Matthew could have used the word “son,” but he uses ἄνθρωπος as a distinctly male referent. In 19:5 Jesus quotes Genesis 3:24 (LXX) on the creation of marriage where the LXX (and thus also Matthew) uses ἄνθρωπος in the phrase, “a man shall leave his father and mother.” Following Jesus’s teaching, his disciples then refer to “a man with his wife” (Mt 19:10) using ἄνθρωπος again.

## CONCLUSION

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This brief analysis has only examined the Gospel of Matthew, but it already raises serious questions about the methodology of Miller’s chapter. His chart of occurrences of ἀνήρ in the GNT and of “man/husband” in English translations is very misleading. The data he presents are insufficient to limit the acceptable referents for “man” to ἀνήρ. Other Greek words carry this meaning, including ἄνθρωπος in quite a few cases. ✕

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# The Unstable Logic of Egalitarianism:

A Response to Ronald W. Pierce,  
“Biblical Equality and Same-Sex Marriage”

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## INTRODUCTION

Ronald Pierce has been engaged in the gender debates for decades.<sup>1</sup> As a contributor to this ongoing discussion, he has served as an editor to all three editions of *Discovering Biblical Equality* (DBE). His essay addressing same-sex marriage in the latest edition of DBE replaces William Webb’s chapter, “Gender Equality and Homosexuality,” in the previous two editions.<sup>2</sup>

While Pierce’s essay serves as a replacement to Webb’s, his goal is to answer the same question: how can one be egalitarian without approving homosexuality? Pierce, after

disclosing his own change of conviction to affirm egalitarianism, states his position and the goal of his essay: “Nevertheless, my ongoing studies continue to lead me to a welcoming, yet non-affirming position. Yes, I have changed my mind on one ‘gender question,’ so why have I not done so on the other? This essay is my answer to that lingering question” (491–492). The restatement of this question in the form of a new essay confirms that a connection between the affirmation of egalitarianism and homosexuality continues to linger in the minds of many — and for good reason, as this essay hopes to demonstrate.

<sup>1</sup> Ronald W. Pierce, “Evangelicals and Gender Roles in the 1990s: 1 Timothy 2:8–15: A Test Case,” *JETS* 36, no. 3 (September, 1993), 343–355. And previous to this piece explicitly affirming an egalitarian reading of 1 Timothy 2, he wrote an article exploring the reasonableness (“logic”) of God’s leadership restrictions in the New Testament based on gender. See Ronald W. Pierce, “Male/Female Leadership and Korah’s Revolt: An Analogy?” *JETS* 30, no. 1 (March, 1987), 3–10.

<sup>2</sup> The editors of the third edition of DBE also replaced Webb’s article on slavery: William J. Webb, “A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: The Slavery Analogy” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 382–400.

Both Webb and Pierce begin their essays by stating the question, albeit somewhat differently, in order to frame their response. Webb puts it this way:

When Christians discuss the issue of gender equality, often someone will ask, “Doesn’t acceptance of egalitarianism logically lead to acceptance of homosexuality?” Lying behind this question in part is a concern for consistency in how one interprets and applies the Bible. How is it, some argue, that egalitarians do not directly apply some very clear New Testament statements about women’s submission yet still accept the Bible’s prohibitions of same-sex relationships?<sup>3</sup>

Webb frames the question in terms of hermeneutics, and utilizes his novel and complex “redemptive-movement” method to argue that “the hermeneutic by which egalitarians reject female subordination to male rule as

transculturally normative is the same hermeneutic by which egalitarians affirm the Bible’s prohibition of homosexual behavior as a universal norm.”<sup>4</sup>

Pierce, however, sidesteps the hermeneutical aspects raised by Webb and seeks to answer the question through exegesis. His more generic statement of the question is noticeably different:

Students in my undergraduate Creation, Sexuality, and Gender course sometimes ask, “As an evangelical who affirms mutually-shared leadership for men and women in marriage and ministry, do you affirm same-sex marriage for Christians as well?” Often my response is, “For me, it is not about hermeneutics as much as it is about the exegesis of the relevant passages in Scripture.” Consequently, the focus of this essay is exegetical (489).



<sup>3</sup>William J. Webb, “Gender Equality and Homosexuality” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 401.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*,

Rather than exploring the question related to hermeneutics assumed in the question, Pierce points his readers to Cynthia Westfall's chapter, "Interpretive Methods and the Gender Debate," which replaces Roger Nicole's chapter on hermeneutics in the previous two editions of *DBE*.<sup>5</sup>

## SUMMARY

Pierce's focus on exegesis leads him to summarize and compare the interpretations and conclusions of evangelicals (the designation is discussed below) who hold to what he labels "affirming" (those who approve same-sex marriage) and "nonaffirming" (those who believe Scripture forbids homosexuality and same-sex marriage) positions related to homosexuality.

The bulk of Pierce's essay consists then in two major sections that summarize and contrast the affirming and non-affirming views on prescriptive texts related to

marriage as well as prohibitive texts related to homosexuality.

Part of Pierce's aim is to demonstrate that both sides appeal to Scripture to support their views, and to do so he outlines exegesis on both sides of the debate beginning with prescriptive texts related to marriage. Pierce includes Genesis 1–2 as well as New Testament (NT) texts such as Matthew 19:4–6, 1 Corinthians 6:15–17, and Ephesians 5:31 that "cite the 'one-flesh' metaphor from Genesis 2:24" (492).

Pierce helpfully pulls together arguments from both positions, though it is clear that the basic issue is whether or not one believes Genesis 1–2 provides an abiding pattern and prescription for marriage. Pierce rightly summarizes the affirming view, which argues that "Although the pattern of marriage between a man and a woman continues to be the *norm*...it was not intended by God to be *normative*" (495).

<sup>5</sup>Cynthia Long Westfall, "Interpretive Methods and the Gender Debate," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 431–450. See especially pp. 448–450.



The non-affirming side, however, believes male-female marriage is God's prescriptive design that remains morally binding today: "In comparison, nonaffirming arguments emphasize marital unity with sexual diversity *as part of God's design for humanity*, who was created male and female (cisgendered), yet each as a whole and complete person in the divine image" (496, emphasis mine).

Pierce spends more time describing and contrasting the prohibitive texts, presumably because he cites these texts as the primary reason for his non-affirming position (507). Pierce identifies a number of texts that "comprise the substance of the ongoing debate on same-sex marriage" (496), which include Genesis 19:1–10, Judges 19:1–30, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:18–32, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, and 1 Timothy 1:8–11.

Pierce shows that for each of these texts, affirming theologians argue their case by narrowing the scope of the sin presented in Genesis 19 and Judges 19, narrowing the scope of the prohibitions in an appeal to pagan religious background (Lev 18, 20), citing a change of law from the Old Testament to the New (e.g. Gal 2:1–16), positing a change of focus in the New Testament to the spiritual family over biological families (e.g. Matt 22:29–30), pointing to Jesus' humanitarian practice on the Sabbath (e.g. Matt 12:9–13), and employing revisionist interpretations of Romans 1 (500–501).

After summarizing non-affirming interpretations of the key texts, Pierce concludes that the non-affirming arguments "better uphold male-and-female marriage as the God-designed context where sexual intercourse occurs" (503).

## COMMENDATION

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We commend Pierce for his defense of the non-affirming position. In light of the number of evangelicals who have recently decided differently, his essay maintains orthodox interpretations of numerous key texts. One reason for these interpretations may be found in his understanding of Genesis 1–2 as prescriptive. Contrary to the affirming position, Pierce believes that male-female marriage of Genesis 1–2 provides a prescriptive model, stating that "the creational model of male-female marriage consistently remains evident in the New Testament" (507). In a helpful footnote, Pierce mentions that he would prefer the term "creational" over "nonaffirming" to represent his view, but that he uses the latter since it "communicates most clearly the differences in the two main views at this time within evangelicalism" (490n5).

But what seems even more important to Pierce are the prohibitive texts, which he believes are still in force today. He cites these texts as the main reason he has not changed his mind regarding homosexuality (507). We rejoice that Pierce continues to affirm God's male-female creational design for marriage.

We further commend Pierce for his concern of the church's ministry to those who experience same-sex desire. He rightly draws attention to the "emotional loneliness that can accompany lifelong celibacy" and rightly argues that "No one in our contemporary churches should have to go it alone, if we really believe the church is family" (504). He further calls churches "to embody what is [sic] means to be a family to support, live together with, and be a safe place for those with same-sex attraction,

as well as to create more infrastructure (both internal and external) to see God do the seemingly impossible” (504–505). We could not agree more. The church *must* take center stage in the lives of those who choose chastity and celibacy.

Insofar as Pierce is calling churches to practice meaningful church membership, where members practice hospitality with one another, bear one another’s burdens, confess sin together, pray together, counsel one another, and encourage one another’s sanctification directed by the Word and empowered by the Spirit, he is spot on. If the church wants to be faithful to its calling in this age, it must position itself with open arms to love and serve those who struggle with same-sex desire as well as all other sexual sins. The church cannot just preach against these sins, but it must sacrificially care for those seeking refuge in Christ.

#### **HOW DO WE CARE FOR SAME-SEX ATTRACTED CHRISTIANS IN THE CHURCH?**

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Regrettably, Pierce undermines his desire to minister effectively to Christians who battle same-sex desire by advocating for what Wesley Hill has popularized as “spiritual friendships.”<sup>6</sup> Just before calling the church to act as family, he recommends same-sex relationships that bear a strong resemblance to marriage, but without sexual intimacy: “the church must regain the lost virtue of cultivating nonsexual, yet deeply intimate and covenanted spiritual friendships — perhaps even ones that could be recognized in civil law as ‘partnerships’ or ‘unions’” (504). While very few will disagree with the call to cultivate deep friendships within the church,

it is another thing entirely to suggest that these friendships should be “covenanted,” or legally recognized as a “partnership” or “union.”

Pierce does not explain why these friendships ought to be covenanted or recognized by the state, nor does he explore what Christians struggling with same-sex desires seek to attain from a state-recognized, covenanted friendship that cannot be attained through non-covenanted friendship. It is, moreover, puzzling that Pierce would propose such relationships be recognized by the state. This recommendation appears oblivious to the historically orthodox position that the state should recognize and privilege marriage because it is ordered to serve unique societal purposes — namely procreation and childrearing. Thus, the state should not recognize marriage (or any other relationship) merely because it provides committed companionship, but because the marriage relationship is ordered towards procreation and is the best suited context in which to raise children — profound societal goods which no other relationships can produce. But Pierce seems to be advocating for same-sex unions to be given a similar kind of recognition, social privilege, and affirmation as marriage. It is difficult to conceive, from a Christian perspective, how this kind of civil arrangement strengthens marriage or promotes human flourishing.

Curiously, when Pierce recommends these “covenanted spiritual friendships,” he cites a chapter titled “Cultivating Spiritual Friendships” by J.P. Moreland and Klaus Issler in their book, *The Lost Virtue of Happiness: Discovering Disciplines*

<sup>6</sup> Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015).

of the Good Life. Their chapter, however, does not discuss covenanted, legally-recognized friendships of the kind advocated by Pierce.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in many respects, the kind of deep friendship Moreland and Issler do encourage believers to pursue is certainly needed within the church.

Guided by the creational model of marriage, Pierce attempts a theological justification of covenanted spiritual friendship that is inferred from the prohibition texts:

Though it is true that none [of the prohibitions] speaks directly to the question of covenanted, monogamous, Christian, same-sex marriage, it is precisely the sexual component of such an intimate relationship that seems to be at issue in Scripture. Beyond that, covenanted and deeply intimate spiritual friendships that are not sexual in nature should be encouraged and celebrated between all believers — although these should not be called marriages (507).

Let's try to untangle this logic. Pierce identifies the prohibitions against same-sex intercourse as the specific issue in the Scriptural passages and then goes on to encourage the other parts of the marriage relationship that are non-sexual. Yet, because he believes the creational model of marriage is normative, these should not be called marriages. His reasoning, however, seems to recommend covenantal unions

between same-sex couples that could be recognized by the state — a relationship that would resemble marriage but should not be called marriage.

This journal has addressed this issue before, proposing that we ought not “give the impression that longings for same-sex intimacy, though celibate, should find satisfaction in relationships that, apart from sexual expression, resemble marriage.”<sup>8</sup> We maintain that perspective and also commend a more recent statement in the Presbyterian Church of America's *Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality*, which communicates the problems with “spiritual friendships” more directly:

While friendships can be deep and abiding, they are not by nature romantic or exclusive. The attempt to retain aspects of the marital relationship in the context of celibate partnerships is fundamentally a category mistake: it seeks to have aspects of romance or marriage without its fullness, instead of rightly rooting this type of deeply caring, same-sex relationship in its proper relational category of family or friendship. The attempt to bring aspects of the marital relationship into a non-marital relationship is itself a violation of the seventh commandment.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of promoting covenanted friendships, we ought to cultivate a culture of personal discipleship in which all believers

<sup>7</sup> By citing this chapter, Pierce may be drawing too much from a statement made by the authors related to examining the character of a prospective friend: “Before welcoming another into a deep and mutual commitment of close friendship, Aelred advised that we look for evidence of the characteristics important for good friendships. He proposed a process of getting to know people who might become our friends, a process somewhat comparable to our contemporary dating and courtship practices that can lead to marriage.” J.P. Moreland and Klaus Issler, *The Lost Virtue of Happiness: Discovering Disciplines of the Good Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 190–191.

<sup>8</sup> Derek Brown, “A Review of Wesley Hill. Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian” *JBWW* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2015), 58.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality to the Forty-eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (2019–2020). <https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20-1.pdf>.

might experience meaningful friendships within the context of church membership — the context God has ordained for such purposes. How might this look? Rosaria Butterfield, who is no stranger to this question, offers a word of advice:

My answer is to come to the table together. Stand side by side. Share real life together in real time. We do the same thing we would do with any other sister or brother, any other image bearer, and any other soul. We open our hearts and our homes. We open the Word. We answer the phone at midnight, and we interrupt in a permanent, consistent, and organic way seasons of loneliness for our friend. We find out where the hard places are and bring in comfort. And we keep an eagle eye on our own prejudices and assumptions, our privileges and our blind spots. We stop telling people that their problems are not big. We don't flatten the terrain of unwanted homosexual desire by using analogies that may not fit. For example, we must stop claiming that the singleness experienced by people with unwanted homosexual desires is just like heterosexual singleness. For some, this may be so. But for others, the unique fingerprint of pain and loneliness conjured by unwanted homosexual desire is brought to a place of agony by such comparisons. In other words, we listen and we create real and regular friendship.<sup>10</sup>

So while we align with Pierce's desire to address the profound difficulties experienced by our brothers and sisters who struggle with same-sex desires, we find his recommendation of covenanted spiritual friendships to be deeply misguided.

### **SHOULD I ADOPT A "GAY CHRISTIAN" IDENTITY?**

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Related to spiritual friendship is the issue of identity. Pierce states that "our core identity in Christ needs to play a more central and practical role in our understanding of the many identities we use to characterize who we are, including our personal gender or sexual identities." He rightly speaks of our union with Christ as "who we are at our core, and as such must be related to the question of same-sex marriage" (506). Perhaps this is a subtle correction to the Side-B "gay Christian" position on this issue, but he regrettably passes by an opportunity to speak so clearly. We may, however, surmise his position by the fact Pierce does not use terms such as "gay Christian" to refer to Christians who experience same-sex attraction. But again, Pierce does not directly confront this question. Instead, he accuses both sides (affirming and non-affirming) of being deficient in understanding their identity in Christ: "Sadly, this has been lacking in both affirming and nonaffirming arguments" (506). While those on the non-affirming side need to better understand what it means to be united to Christ, the critical issue evangelicals face right now is whether or not Christians can adopt a self-conception that is contrary to God's

<sup>10</sup> Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ*, (Pittsburg, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications), 140–141.



created design.<sup>11</sup> Pierce, therefore, neglects to speak clearly and prophetically on this critical issue.

#### **AFFIRMING AND EVANGELICAL?**

It should also be noted that Pierce believes this debate between those who affirm homosexuality and those who don't is an in-house debate among evangelicals. By providing a narrow definition of "evangelical," related solely to one's use of Scripture, Pierce seeks to include affirming theologians under the umbrella of evangelicalism:

[Evangelical] is used more narrowly to mean a way of coming to a text that demonstrates a respect for the inspiration and authority of Scripture by paying careful attention to its historical, cultural, and literary contexts, while not dismissing its teachings as irrelevant to contemporary readers or showing disregard for the authorial intent (490).

By adopting a drastically narrow definition of "evangelical," Pierce can include affirming scholars, such as Megan K. DeFranza, Matthew Vines, and James V. Brownson, within evangelicalism.

But more important than designating affirming scholars as evangelical is the lack of moral clarity exhibited by Pierce in the article. If the the Apostle Paul is right that the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 7:9-10), then the question of same-sex marriage is one of life and death — Heaven and Hell. Therefore, it constitutes a profound lack of moral clarity when Pierce refers to his interlocutors as "fellow believers who arrive at a different answer to this question" (389), or as "sacred siblings in Christ — who arrive at different conclusions" (507). This disagreement is not, as the Nashville Statement says, "a matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christian should agree to disagree."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The Nashville Statement, for instance, clearly addresses this question in article 7: "We affirm that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture. We deny that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption." *The Nashville Statement: A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality*, art. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *The Nashville Statement: A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality*, art. 10.

## CAN EGALITARIANS REMAIN NON-AFFIRMING?

As stated at the outset of this essay, Pierce's new chapter seeks to answer an important question for egalitarians: does egalitarianism "logically lead" to affirming same-sex marriage? (507) Pierce makes the case that his egalitarian commitments do *not* logically lead to an affirmation of same-sex marriage. He concludes,

After a thorough reexamination of this question in preparation for this essay, my mind has not yet changed. Why? Although there is not one explicitly prohibitive passage in Scripture against mutually shared leadership in a Christian marriage, there are five prohibitive texts against same-sex sexual intimacy (507).

This reasoning is curious in light of numerous positive commands in the New Testament toward husbands and wives that reflect a relationship of authority and submission (Eph 5:22–32; Col 3:18–19; 1 Pet 3:1–2). Unsurprisingly, in *DBE*, each of these clear commands are reinterpreted "against the background of Paul's call for a mutual yielding of authority" in 1 Corinthians 7 in order to support egalitarianism.<sup>13</sup> While we rejoice that Pierce remains committed to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, egalitarian exegesis of these passages exhibits a similar revisionism to affirming exegesis of the passages prohibiting homosexuality.

## *The Place of Prohibitions*

But are prohibitions the only or most important category for determining God's will for his created order? Does not the revelation of God's creational design for the roles of men and women (Gen 1–2),<sup>14</sup> confirmed and complicated — but not created — by sin (Gen 3:16), which is then reaffirmed in the NT by positive commands (Eph 5:22–32; Col 3:18–19; 1 Pet 3:1–2) and prohibitions (1 Cor 11:3,8–9; Tim 2:12) that are grounded in creation make this kind of reasoning superficial? This is not to mention evidence of Adam's role as head of the human race (Rom 5:12), which corresponds to the biblical pattern for male headship in marriage (1 Cor 11:3) and the New Testament's explicit connection of male headship in marriage with Christ's headship of the church (Eph 5:23).

Even if one left out the prohibitions mentioned in the previous paragraph as evidence for God's complementarian design for men and women, it is quite clear that appealing to the absence of "one explicitly prohibitive passage" constitutes reductionistic argumentation. There are a variety of ways we come to understand God's will for men and women, which, while including prohibitions, is not exclusively established by prohibition.

## *Arguments from Creation*

Pierce's argument for a non-affirming position is strengthened by his commitment

<sup>13</sup> Pierce directs his readers to chapters on each of these passages in *DBE*. See Denny Burk's essay in this journal rebutting this thesis derived from their exegesis of 1 Corinthians 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ray Ortlund's essay in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* remains a helpful guide to these teachings in Genesis 1–3. Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 95–112.

to the prescriptive nature of male-female marriage in Genesis 1–2. But the larger argument of his chapter — that egalitarianism does not lead to affirming same-sex marriage — is not. The reason is that his appeal to creation in support of his non-affirming position reveals the inconsistency of egalitarian exegesis of texts that appeal to creation in order to establish gender roles in marriage and the church.

While Pierce follows the biblical authors and grounds his support of male-female marriage in God’s creational design, he is unwilling to follow the biblical authors who do the same with respect to male-female roles in the home and the church. This inconsistency is no more evident than in Pierce’s difficulty making sense of Paul’s appeal to primogeniture in 1 Timothy 2:13 as his rationale for male leadership in the church. Because Pierce rejects the idea that male-female complementarity was established at creation, he finds it difficult to understand Paul’s argument that refers back to the order of creation:

The most difficult part of any interpretation of the 1 Timothy passage is not 2:15, as so many claim, but rather Paul’s enigmatic reference to the creation and fall narratives in vv. 13–14, especially the reference to Adam’s priority in creation. Introduced by the preposition “for” (*gar*), these might imply to the casual

reader that a logical reason is being given for the restriction. But if this is so one still must ask what kind of logic is being employed. Can we say with certainty that it is a more formal, western style of reasoning, perhaps reflecting the Greco-Roman setting of the letter?<sup>15</sup>

If one is committed to the idea that equality requires interchangeability, and that submission implies inferiority, then it makes sense how Paul’s arguments from creation would seem illogical or arbitrary.<sup>16</sup> And thus, another reason (or logic), beyond the plain one given by Paul, must be suggested to make sense of Paul’s seemingly illogical argument.

When Pierce argues that the prohibitive passages *confirm*, rather than *contradict*, God’s created design, he does well. But he fails to recognize that the NT also grounds its argument for gender roles in the created order. Far from demonstrating consistency in egalitarian exegetical method, Pierce’s essay provides an example of the inherent inconsistency of egalitarian exegesis.

### ***The Logic of Egalitarianism***

While Pierce has demonstrated how his exegesis of prescriptive and prohibitive texts lead him to a non-affirming position, he does not address a fatal logic inherent in egalitarianism — the logic of interchangeability.<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps this logic,

<sup>15</sup> Ronald W. Pierce, “Evangelicals and Gender Roles in the 1990s: 1 Tim 2:8–15: A Test Case,” *JETS* 36, no. 3 (September 1993), 350.

<sup>16</sup> In a previous article, Pierce identified the difficulty of Paul’s arguments to the modern person: “No ‘logical’ link is present in the formula to connect the ancient event [creation] with Paul’s restrictions. Consequently the reasoning does not appear logical (from a human perspective) to the modern reader.” Not only that, “it means that from a human perspective God sets the general boundaries for religious leadership arbitrarily.” Ronald W. Pierce, “Male/Female Leadership and Korah’s Revolt: An Analogy?” *JETS* 30, no. 1 (March 1987), 8.

<sup>17</sup> For further discussion of this idea, see Colin J. Smothers, “The Fallacy of Interchangeability” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019), 8–14; and Colin J. Smothers, “Is the Slippery Slope Actually Slippery: Egalitarianism and Open and Affirming?” *9Marks Journal*, December 2019, 81–85.

more than anything else, that continues to carry evangelicals into the apostasies of homosexuality and transgenderism.

The danger of egalitarianism is not just that it utilizes similar exegetical methods and argumentation to those who are affirming of homosexuality, but that it also shares in the logic of interchangeability.<sup>18</sup> It does not require exceptional reasoning to see how the idea that men and women are *functional* interchangeable has the natural propensity to lead to the idea that men and women are *sexually* interchangeable. And, it no longer takes any imagination to see how *functional* and *sexual* interchangeability has the propensity to lead ultimately to *ontological* interchangeability.<sup>19</sup> In fact, one only has to read the most recent edition of *DBE*.

The power of this logic is evident in a new essay included within the latest edition of *DBE*, wherein one of its editors takes the egalitarian logic of *functional* interchangeability to its logical conclusion by affirming transgenderism:

The implications of this chapter, however, are not to provide a moral prescription for transgender persons, but to (1) show how gender-essentialist logic may actually be contributing to the internal angst of some trans per-

sons, and (2) to emphasize that the priority of the scriptural text is on following Jesus, not being 'real men' or 'real women.' For those who are discerning whether their givenness should be altered, the New Testament rubric for any such choice (which would include all bodily modifications, not just those affecting sexual anatomy) is how such can be done in submission to the Spirit and in order to become more like Christ (307–308).

Far from making a case that egalitarianism offers a consistent hermeneutic and application of Scripture that safeguards orthodoxy, the most recent edition of *DBE* illustrates in real time how the egalitarian logic of interchangeability works itself out.

It is warranted, therefore, to assert that if you give up the creational model of complementarianism, which upholds both functional *and* ontological distinction, in favor of egalitarianism, which only upholds the latter, you may not be *logically committed* to affirming homosexuality, but you are *logically oriented* in that direction. Colin Smothers aptly explains this logic:

this *functional* interchange paved the way for a formal one. If a woman can do anything a man can in the home,

<sup>18</sup> Wayne Grudem has previously documented the path from egalitarianism to liberalism and the affirmation of homosexuality, which continues apace today. His predictions have regrettably been more than vindicated: "Egalitarianism is heading towards an androgynous Adam who is neither male nor female, and a Jesus whose manhood is not important. It is heading toward a God who is both Father and Mother, and then only Mother. And soon the methods of evading the teachings of Scripture on manhood and womanhood will be used again and again by those who advocate the moral legitimacy of homosexuality." Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 517.

<sup>19</sup> Egalitarianism fails to recognize the significance of male-female embodiment with respect to the God-given roles of men and women, thereby denigrating the importance of sexed differences. Likewise, worldviews that affirm homosexuality and transgenderism deny the importance and meaning of the body in determining the ethical legitimacy of either practice. See Nancy R. Percy, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), especially her introduction and chapters 5 and 6.

why the need for a man in the home at all? Would not two women suffice? Would not two men? If a woman can be anything a man can, who's to say she can't be a father? In other words, the fallacy of functional interchangeability makes plausible a more fundamental, formal and sexual interchangeability, and with it nothing less than the redefinition of society. It turns out that using androgynous standards in every sphere of life leads to androgyny in every sphere of life."<sup>20</sup>

Affirming the logic of interchangeability that is inherent in homosexuality and transgenderism is not logically possible if one affirms both the functional *and* ontological differences of men in women that God has revealed in Genesis 1–2 and confirmed throughout all the Scriptures. But, as we have seen, rejecting these complementary differences results in catastrophic consequences.

We should note that these claims are nothing new. As CBMW founders John Piper and Wayne Grudem previously warned decades ago: “we believe that by minimizing the difference in sexual roles, feminists contribute to the confusion of sexual identity that, especially in the second and third generations, gives rise to more homosexuality in society. Some evangelicals who once disapproved of homosexuality have been carried by their feminist arguments to the approval of faithful homosexual alliances.”

We rejoice that Pierce continues to uphold the orthodox, non-affirming position,

even if his exegetical methods, as well as the inherent logic of egalitarianism, works against his upholding it. ✕

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<sup>20</sup> Colin Smothers, “Is the Slippery Slope Actually Slippery: Egalitarianism and Open and Affirming?” *9Marks Journal*, December 2019, 84

# Fully Pro-life or Partly Pro-life?:

A Response to Heidi R. Unruh and  
Ronald J. Sider, "Gender Equality and  
the Sanctity of Life"





In the most recent edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality*, Ronald Sider and Heidi Unruh offer an egalitarian perspective of the sanctity of human life and argue for a moral stance they call “fully prolife.” In the chapter titled “Gender Equality and the Sanctity of Life,” Sider and Unruh insist sanctity of life questions need to be stretched beyond the narrow focus of abortion and euthanasia to include other questions such as hunger, poverty, and racism. While they make some sound observations, their argument is substantively weak.

Ronald Sider (1939–2022) was a profoundly influential advocate for social justice. He earned his PhD in history from Yale in 1969 and taught for many years at Palmer Seminary (previously known as Eastern Baptist Seminary). He was the founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, a group which changed its name to Christians for Social Action in 2020. His most

well-known book was *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), which he modified through six editions. Heidi R. Unruh is a graduate of Palmer Seminary, where she earned an MA in Theology and Public Policy (1996) and is now a ministry consultant living in Hutchinson, KS, where her husband is part of the ministerial staff at First Mennonite Church. Together, Sider and Unruh published several articles and books, including *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community With Good News and Good Works* (2002) and *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry* (2005).

What does it mean to be “fully prolife”? Sider and Unruh say,

To be fully prolife means to intervene wherever the flourishing of human life is threatened. This threat may result

either from direct actions that degrade and destroy life, such as war, human trafficking, and capital punishment; from lack of access to food, health care, and other life-giving necessities; or from the ruin of the environment on which all of life depends (513).

Sider described this same view prior to the 2016 election in the Bruderhof journal *Plough* and said, “When we turn to the whole of Scripture, it quickly becomes clear that the God of the Bible cares about both the sanctity of human life and economic justice (especially for the poor); about both marriage and peacemaking; about sexual integrity, racial justice, and creation care. The political vision of the Bible is what I call ‘completely pro-life.’”<sup>1</sup> In this manner, the term *sanctity of human life* is expanded from bioethical discussions regarding abortion and euthanasia to encompass nearly every aspect of life and government policy.

Sider and Unruh’s chapter makes the same move by redefining the term “prolife” from a focused analysis of bioethics regarding abortion, euthanasia, and human research to encompass a broader discussion of social justice. The authors posit a dichotomy between prolife and feminist camps, suggesting they have a better third way, saying:

Yet there have always been those who did not feel wholly at home in either camp — those who have upheld the sanctity of life within the womb, while also caring deeply about the human rights and freedom of the mother and her access to health care, childcare, education, and economic support.

Today, a growing number are claiming to be both pro-woman and prolife, redefining established labels. Rather than taking sides, they are changing the debate (522).

Indeed, Sider and Unruh are changing the debate — they are doing so by engaging in confused moral argumentation about the moral status of preborn human life.

### **CONFUSING THE DEBATE ABOUT PRE-BORN PERSONHOOD**

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“Gender Equality and the Sanctity of Life” begins with an accurate summary of the image of God in relation to the sanctity of human life, but then follows this summary with confused argumentation regarding the concept of personhood. The authors begin the article by citing Genesis 1:27 as evidence of the “unique status and equal dignity of every person” (510). They continue by saying, “The image of God is not measured by qualities such as capacity for self-fulfillment, autonomy, quality of life, or social usefulness. No attribute belonging to a human — gender, age, physical or mental maturity or ability — affects their essential humanness and thus the sanctity of their life” (515). If Sider and Unruh had stopped here, their position would have been stronger, but sadly they slip into muddled argumentation that serves to devalue the preborn.

Immediately following a clear assertion that all people are made in the image of God, the very next paragraph says, “This foundation [the image of God] . . . does not settle the question of abortion because

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Sider, “Womb to Tomb: Imagining a Completely Pro-Life Politics,” *Plough* October 12, 2016, <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/justice/culture-of-life/womb-to-tomb>.



we are still faced with a crucial question: Are the unborn human?” (515). They then add, “Mere biological continuity does not tell us, however, at what point the *imago Dei* is fully present” (518). The authors equivocate on the terms *imago of God* and *human*. In one paragraph, they assert all humans regardless of their status are made in the image of God, and then make the completely opposite assertion insisting we still have to decide when people are human and when the *imago Dei* is fully present.

How can the authors assert such seemingly contradictory ideas? By smuggling in a vague notion of *personhood*. They state, “Scripture nowhere teaches explicitly that the being in the womb is a person” (515). Later they ask, “When should this prenatal human be considered a *person*, created in God’s image, ‘crowned . . . with glory and honor’ (Ps 8:5)” (518)? Here we see equivocation, as a vague philosophical notion of person is substituted for the image of God. While giving perfunctory acknowledgement to the force of the doctrine of the image of God, Sider and Unruh actually describe the developmental personhood view, saying, “We ought to

assume that, at some point in a pregnancy, an abortion would end an irreplaceable life sacred to God” (519). Here, the authors modify the way they use the word *life* without telling the reader: To the average person, *life* refers to biological life and there is no debate about when human life in this sense begins — biological life begins at conception — but when Sider and Unruh say “life” they actually have in mind philosophical, extra-biblical debates about *personhood*.

Debates about the use of the word *person* can be confusing because the average person uses the terms *human person* and *human life* as synonyms. But in debates about the bioethical issues of abortion and euthanasia, *person* is used as a different conceptual category than *life*. Merely having human *life* doesn’t guarantee one is a human *person*. The developmental personhood view defines a human *person* based on cognitive abilities, emotional response, and the ability to interact with others. Based on this view, humans **develop into** beings which possess an abstract trait called “personhood.” Of course, if humans develop into persons, it is also possible to develop out of being a person, meaning a

sick person suffering from dementia or in a comatose state at the end of life may no longer be a person. Personhood is a trait that comes and goes based on our human abilities.

Robert P. George and Christopher Tollefsen explain two flawed assumptions undergirding the developmental personhood view. The first assumption is that the human person and the human body are separate entities, dividing human beings into two distinct realities at the same time: a person and a subpersonal body.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the body which exists prior to personhood is *not* the person. Life begins at conception; personhood does not. The second assumption is that the person began at a later moment in time than the body, thus the human life conceived in the womb is one kind of substance and the later person is a second kind of substance. When human life is conceived, it is a particular expression of a type of substance we might call a “human animal,” but this human animal does not possess personhood. *Persons* are a different type of substance who do not come to exist until the onset of psychological traits, and this occurs later — much later according to some theories — than the conception of human life. George and Tollefsen explain, “Because persons are taken to have some set of psychological properties essentially, it is held that entities of the person sort cannot come into existence before these properties emerge, and that entities of the person sort cease to exist when these properties disappear.”<sup>3</sup>

For the developmental personhood view, human life and human personhood are

separate ontological categories. The view does not deny that human life begins at conception; the view denies that human personhood begins at conception, and only persons get legal protection. Since the preborn human is not a person, it is morally permissible to end the life. This is exactly the sort of argumentation Justice Blackmun used in *Roe*, and Sider and Unruh reflect almost the identical stance regarding preborn human life.

### **DEVELOPMENTAL PERSONHOOD IS CONTRARY TO GOD’S WORD**

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The developmental personhood view is in direct conflict with the striking way Genesis separates the creation of the rest of the universe in Genesis 1:1–25 with the creation of humans in Genesis 1:26–28. In Genesis 1:1–25, both plants and animals are repeatedly described as being made “after their kind,” the idea being there are lots of similar things in the category of “kind.” The divergence in Genesis 1:26–28 is striking: Humans are not made “after their kind;” humans are made *in the image of God*. We find points of reference for understanding animals and plants by examining other things made in the same “kind.” But the primary reference for understanding humans is *not other humans*; man’s image is not simply of himself oriented to other humans made after the same kind — man also shares a likeness to his Creator in a way nothing else in creation does.<sup>4</sup> The image of God is not an attribute bestowed on us by other humans as we develop; from conception to natural death the ontological reality is all humans are made in the image of God.

<sup>2</sup> Robert P. George and Christopher Tollefsen, *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 76.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>4</sup> John Sailhamer, *Genesis, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 37.

“conception is the only non-arbitrary marker for protection of preborn human life in opposition to theories of developmental personhood which lead naturally to abortion and infanticide.”

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The *imago Dei* dignifies every human being. The Bible never gives a specific definition of the “image of God,” but the term clearly assigns a unique value to human life. At the most basic level, the fact humans are made in the image of God means the ethical value of human life does not come from humanity but from God. As Dan Heimbach says,

“[The image of God] is a matter of reflecting or expressing something beyond ourselves, which makes it something we cannot generate or lose, do not share with animals, do not control, do not own, and all bear the same regardless of gender, age, intelligence, health, wealth, or social status.”<sup>5</sup> Fundamentally, the image of God is a status, not a function, and it is a status granted to humans by their Creator. It is not a status humans grow into; to be human is to be in the image of God. The image of God is not distributed to some more than others. Thus Sider and Unruh’s musings about when the *imago Dei* is “fully present” are as confused as the disciples asking Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” (John 9:3)

If one is wondering when human life begins, there is no argument: Human life begins at conception; there is no human who did not begin at conception. Yet Sider and Unruh would have us believe that at some point in pregnancy, a living human entity possibly does not have the image of God and thus is not a person. In contrast, conception is the only non-arbitrary marker for protection of preborn human life in opposition to theories of developmental personhood which lead naturally to abortion and infanticide. Other than conception, any other suggested marker for when human life begins and deserves protection is subjective and based on the personal opinion of the individual arguing for his or her position.

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#### **A “PROLIFE” POSITION THAT FAILS TO PRIORITIZE LIFE**

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Sider and Unruh’s “fully prolife position”

<sup>5</sup> Daniel R. Heimbach, *Fundamental Christian Ethics* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2022), 325.

# “Abortion is not just a prolife concern; abortion is the preeminent prolife concern.”

fails to prioritize rightly the issue of abortion. They say, “Abortion, which ends nearly one in five pregnancies in our country, is a prolife concern” (513).<sup>6</sup> They follow this statement by listing several other issues which they identify as prolife concerns, such as mothers who die in childbirth, malnutrition, and political corruption. Yes, all of these are issues which should be of concern to right-thinking Christians, but one of them has a place of logical priority: abortion. Why? Because if someone is not allowed the right to be born, then that person will never get to exercise any other right. Hypothetically, I can be wrong on some matter related to economics and my wrong stance could negatively affect another person, yet it is possible for the affected person to overcome misguided policies related to economics and live a thriving life. But if I advocate a wrong view of abortion and a child is killed, that child will never be able to recover from the consequences. Abortion is not just a prolife concern; abortion is *the* preeminent prolife concern.

Sider and Unruh’s “fully prolife” position seems to embrace everything under the rubric of the sanctity of human life, and thus winds up poorly protecting all people. By insisting all manner of issues be addressed

under the banner of the sanctity of human life, abortion gets pushed to the side as one issue among many. But doing this blurs the helpful distinction between the sanctity of life issue in bioethics regarding how we as a culture should treat the very young and very sick as opposed to economic issues, which have a tertiary sanctity of life component. By adding in other issues, Sider and Unruh dilute the force of the term *prolife*.

Furthermore, fiscal and public policy conservatives challenge the premise that the expanded statist interventions Sider and Unruh have in mind will actually reduce poverty (529n60). Broadening state-sponsored programs requires higher taxes and a larger government footprint. Here we encounter the opportunity cost of spending, in that when the state takes money from its citizens, Christians in particular will have fewer resources to share in a generous manner to help their neighbors. Though Sider modified his views on the idea of redistributing wealth throughout the various editions of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, he still seemed to have Rawlsian views about wealth. Yet, in my opinion, the very economic policies Sider suggested would not reduce poverty on a broad scale but instead weaken the entire economy and increase the number of peo-

<sup>6</sup> “Gender Equality and the Sanctity of Life,” 513.

ple in poverty. If the premise of Sider and Unruh’s “fully prolife” ethic is that poverty is a prolife issue, the very policies they advocate which increase poverty should be opposed.

A fully-orbed prolife stance will certainly do more than merely urge someone not to have an abortion. From a complementarian perspective, the issue of widespread demand for abortion emerges from a complex of ideas conditioning men to see women as objects for sexual gratification as opposed to fellow image bearers. In a culture that persistently degrades women via pornography, the moral thinking of men is warped to view a pregnant woman as a broken sexual toy which an abortion can fix.

Frankly, there have been some in the prolife movement who seem to forget it takes two people — a male and a female — to conceive a baby, and too often rhetoric has focused solely on the pregnant woman and little attention has been given to the men fathering the children. Often, a pregnant woman’s boyfriend will say, “If you abort, I will stay with you, but if you choose to have a baby, I’m moving on to someone else.” Sider and Unruh recognize these dynamics and say, “All too often it is not safe, advisable, or even possible for women to consult the biological father about their reproductive choices” (527). The Danvers Statement points the way towards addressing these issues when it says that among its purposes are “to bring healing to persons and relationships injured by an inadequate grasp of God’s will concerning manhood and womanhood.”

“Gender Equality and the Sanctity of Life” seems aware of the need to stress the goodness of marriage, but doesn’t emphasize enough the large number of pregnancies and abortions among single women. For example, Sider and Unruh say, “The majority of women who have an abortion already have at least one child” (533). Though they don’t give a source, they apparently have in mind data from a widely cited 2021 CDC report which said about 59% of women who abort already have at least one child. Yet Sider and Unruh do not note that the same report said around 85% of women who abort are unmarried. Taking these two data points together indicates a large percentage of women who abort aren’t just mothers, they are *unmarried* mothers. Clearly, data indicate becoming pregnant while married is strongly correlated with a decision not to abort. The strongest antidote to abortion is a man who loves his wife as Christ loves the church and respects the gift of sex as a treasure to be shared in the covenant of marriage.

Sider and Unruh have a flawed view of the image of God and its relation to preborn human life, and their “fully prolife” stance dilutes clear thinking on the moral status of preborn human life. Though they have a dim view of abortion, they advocate a form of developmental personhood popular among people who want abortion on demand. The “fully prolife” moral position advocated in “Gender Equality and the Sanctity of Life” is more accurately, at best, a partly prolife position, and at worst obscures the truly prolife position altogether. ✕

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<sup>7</sup> Katherine Kortsmit, Michele G. Mandel, et al, “Abortion Surveillance – United States, 2019,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 70.9 (November 26, 2021): 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

# Does Complementarianism Lead to Abuse?:

A Response to Mimi Haddad,  
“Helping the Church Understand  
Biblical Equality” and Kylie Maddox  
Pidgeon, “Complementarianism and  
Domestic Abuse”

My official assignment is to respond to two chapters in the third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives*: Mimi Haddad’s “Helping the Church Understand Biblical Equality” and Kylie Maddox Pidgeon’s “Complementarianism and Domestic Abuse: A Social-Scientific Perspective on Whether ‘Equal but Different’ Is Really Equal at All.”

Haddad’s chapter possesses a pastoral purpose — to help readers lead a church toward accepting and following her view of biblical gender equality. Pidgeon’s chapter



has a polemical one — to persuade readers from social science research that complementarianism creates and fosters discriminatory practices that in turn “facilitate gendered violence” (595).

Both chapters offer a charitable tone toward those who, like me, adopt an “equal but different” complementarian position. Both present their case in measured tones without over-speaking or caricaturing. And both, I trust, seek the good of the body of Christ. I am grateful for all this, and I hope to follow their example in these ways.

Yet I am not convinced either author adequately understands authority or equality, and in that way reflect the weaknesses of egalitarianism generally. Rather than responding line by line to their arguments, therefore, I would like to frame my response around the question, does complementarianism lead to abuse? I will consider the two authors’ claims along the

way, yet the larger answer requires us to think more carefully about authority and equality, which means I am attempting not merely to respond, but to offer my own substantive contribution to the conversation. I will do all this in seven points.

### **1. COMPLEMENTARIANS SHOULD WORK HARDER THAN ANYONE IN OPPOSING ABUSE.**

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Egalitarians may critique complementarianism for making women susceptible to abuse. Yet a complementarian’s first word of reply should be, “Thank you for opposing abuse. We stand with you against it,” even if some egalitarians will reject that partnership.<sup>1</sup> Using authority to harm people, which is how I define “abuse,” is terrible both for what it does to the victim and for how it lies about God. It dehumanizes both the abuser and the abused, and it destroys faith. It is wicked.

I am not arguing that we should adopt an

<sup>1</sup> See both the statement against abuse and the article explaining the Christians for Biblical Equality’s rejection of such a partnership on page 3 of this newsletter: <https://cbmw.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/1-1.pdf>.



egalitarian's definitions and indictments of abuse wholesale. "Concept creep" can be a problem when locating and defining abuse.<sup>2</sup> Still, concept creep is a problem if for no other reason than we do not want to discount real cases of abuse, as with those who heard the boy crying wolf. And we want to hear the real cries.

A World Health Organization (WHO) study based on data from 161 countries between 2000 and 2018 shows that 26–28 percent of "ever-married/partnered women" between the ages of 20–44 "have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former husband or male intimate partner at least once in their lifetime."<sup>3</sup>

Another study compiled from 66 surveys in 44 countries, representing 481,205 women between 2000 and 2013, says that nearly one in three women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime, with a less than 4 percent prevalence in high-income countries and at least 40 percent prevalence in some low-income settings.<sup>4</sup>

Complementarians should care about and highlight this kind of data. Within their own churches, moreover, complementarians should be at the forefront of fighting against abusive husbands and pastors. We believe God has specially tasked men with protecting wives and flocks. Therefore, we should be first in line both in training men not to abuse their authority as well as in disciplining, even excommunicating, those who do.

In other words, if we would presume to teach about the goodness of good authority, we bear a special responsibility to also teach against the badness of bad authority. Jesus does (Mark 10:42). Paul and Peter do (Eph 6:4; 1 Pet 3:7).

Along these lines, Pidgeon's chapter helpfully distinguishes between different kinds of abuse (physical, sexual, financial, spiritual, emotional, and so forth). As a pastor, I have seen them all. Her chapter does a good job chronicling some of the effects of abuse. And it rightly targets the unconscious and conscious biases Christian men (whether complementarian or egalitarian, I would add) can sinfully bear toward women.

One crucial way to work against such biases is to recognize the "essential and indispensable" role women play in the work of the church and the spread of the gospel.<sup>5</sup> Haddad's chapter, in that regard, helpfully chronicles the marvelous ways God has used women in Scripture and church history to expand the gospel's reach. At several points, my margin notes read, "Amen!" She also lists six practices churches can use to transition toward egalitarianism: use couples as greeters and ushers; have women read Scripture aloud in church; give women the opportunity to pray publicly when opportunities arise; encourage women to participate in church business meetings; ask women to serve on church committees; have women share leadership of house

<sup>2</sup> Nick Haslam "Concept Creep: Psychology's Expanding Concepts of Harm and Pathology," *Psychological Inquiry: An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory* 27 (2016): 1–17.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, "Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018 – Executive summary," last modified March 7, 2021, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240026681>.

<sup>4</sup> Lori L. Heise and Andreas Kotsadam, "Cross-national and multilevel correlates of partner violence: an analysis of data from population-based surveys," *The Lancet* Vol 3 (June 2015): 332–340, <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2214-109X%2815%2900013-3>.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Leeman, "Essential and Indispensable: Women and the Mission of the Church," *9Marks*, last modified December 10, 2019, <https://www.9marks.org/article/essential-and-indispensable-women-and-the-mission-of-the-church/>.

groups. The funny thing is, except for that last example, every complementarian church I know practices the first five. Perhaps our churches do not neglect the ministry of women as much as she imagines?

In short, complementarians and egalitarians agree on this much: we hate abuse. The difference is our solution. Egalitarians say, "Let's dismantle the structures." Complementarians say, "Good structures can be abused. Let's get better at teaching the structure and disciplining every wrong use." I will return to this.

## **2. THE DATA ON MALE HEADSHIP'S CORRELATION TO ABUSE IS MIXED.**

That spousal abuse occurs is clear. Do views of male headship or hierarchical gender norms contribute to this violence?

Pidgeon says yes, and I do not believe she is entirely wrong. She points to a WHO Fact Sheet that says, "community norms that privilege or ascribe higher status to men and lower status to women" act as a risk factor for violence against women.<sup>6</sup> Though this statement does not offer the research basis for this claim, it is not hard to imagine that men who regard their wives as possessing a "lower status" might find it easier to justify abusive behavior (to be clear, complementarianism does not teach that women possess a "lower status"). She also points to an article by four Australian researchers who conducted interviews with leaders and members of various faith

communities (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Jewish) and determined that abuse remains poorly understood in those communities.<sup>7</sup> Too often, they treat abuse as a taboo topic. Too often, such communities can minimize abuse, blame the victims, overemphasize forgiveness to the neglect of protecting women, or encourage women to remain in abusive situations. I do not believe these things happen only in complementarian churches, but they do sometimes happen in complementarian churches. That should not be.

Beyond what Pidgeon highlights, it is not difficult to find studies that demonstrate some type of link between hierarchical gender norms and abuse. One of the massive studies I cited in section 1 above observes that "especially predictive" of partner violence "are norms related to male authority over female behaviour, norms justifying wife beating, and the extent to which law and practice disadvantage women compared with men in access to land, property, and other productive resources."<sup>8</sup> No complementarian would justify wife beating, of course, but what does the report mean by "norms related to male authority over female behavior"? To answer, it points to a further OECD Development Center study which measures for several items: early marriages for women ages 15 to 19, norms condoning domestic violence, female genital mutilation, the bias toward sons as seen in abortion rates (think India and China) and inheritance laws, access to land ownership and finan-

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization, "Violence against women," last modified March 9, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

<sup>7</sup> Mandy Truong, Bianca Calabria, Mienah Zulfacar Sharif, and Naomi Priest, *The Conversation*, "New study finds family violence is often poorly understood in faith communities," last modified April 17, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/new-study-finds-family-violence-is-often-poorly-understood-in-faith-communities-115562>.

<sup>8</sup> Heise and Kotsadam, "Cross-national and multilevel correlates of partner violence," *The Lancet*, <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2214-109X%2815%2900013-3>.

cial services, and equal civil liberties and political participation. The only criteria which would potentially apply to complementarianism is “unpaid care work,” referring to higher rates of mothers caring for children in the home than fathers.<sup>9</sup>

Best I can tell, such criteria are typical in the world of social science surveys. They indicate that, yes, gender norms that grant higher status and power to men over women from womb to tomb tend to correlate with comparatively higher rates of abuse.

That said, these studies act like massive fishing nets that capture, from a Christian perspective, both the tuna they should catch and the dolphins they should not, as it were. That is, they measure for a host of things that biblical complementarianism (not to mention Christianity) utterly opposes as well as a few things it might endorse (though a researcher at WHO or the OECD would not). Such is the case for the surveys Pidgeon cites as well. She mentions “community norms that privilege or ascribe higher status to men” from the WHO Fact Sheet, which itself is left undefined. Yet right next to that criterion is another: “harmful masculine behaviours, including having multiple partners or attitudes that condone violence.” To draw lessons for complementarianism from such studies, in other words, is a bit like surveying “feline attacks on humans” and including in your sample set both wildcats and house cats but not specifying the difference.

Are there any studies which come closer to comparing apples to apples — Christian complementarian marriages versus Christian

“To draw lessons for complementarianism from such studies, in other words, is a bit like surveying ‘feline attacks on humans’ and including in your sample set both wildcats and house cats but not specifying the difference.”

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non-complementarian marriages? In fact, there are, and these studies treat gender-traditional marriages as presenting either the lowest rates of domestic violence or at least differences that are statistically negligible. Simultaneously, such studies present so-called “gender-traditional” women as happiest.

University of Virginia sociologist Bradley Wilcox, in his 2004 book *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and*

<sup>9</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Social Institutions & Gender Index: Synthesis Report (OECD, 2014), 9, 16, <https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/BrochureSIGI2015-web.pdf>.

*Husbands*, draws from his studies to argue,

Contrary to the assertions of feminists, many family scholars, and public critics, [churchgoing conservative Protestant men] cannot be fairly described as “abusive” and “authoritarian” family men wedded to “stereotypical forms of masculinity.” They outpace mainline Protestant and unaffiliated family men in their emotional and practical dedication to their children and wives... and they are the least likely to physically abuse their wives.<sup>10</sup>

Further,

churchgoing conservative Protestant men “spend more time with their children; they are more likely to hug and praise their children; their wives report higher levels of satisfaction with the appreciation, affection, and understanding they receive from their husbands; and they spend more time socializing with their wives.”<sup>11</sup>

With regard to domestic violence itself:

churchgoing conservative Protestant men register the lowest rates of domestic violence of any group in this study. Indeed... churchgoing conservative Protestant family men have the lowest rates of domestic violence of any major religious group in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, Wilcox concludes that conservative values are not the problem; nomi-

nalism is, as shown in the following graph:

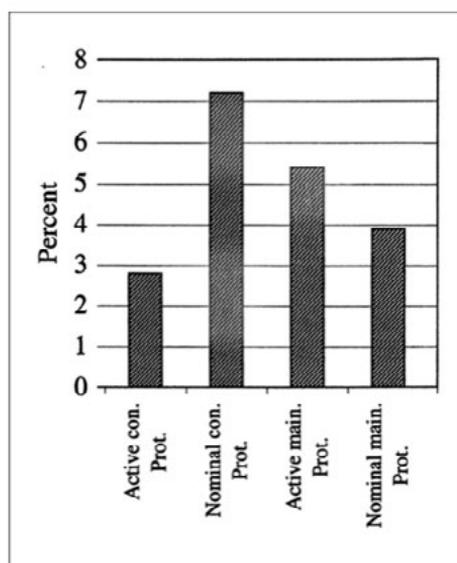


Figure: *Husbands who commit domestic violence* | Source: NSFH2 (1992–1994)

Why would this be? The Bible’s teaching about male headship seems to restrain faithful Christian men, while nominal Christian men are more likely to twist it for their own authoritarian purposes. Do not forget: the devil knows how to use the Bible, too (Matt. 4:6). Progressive Christian men, meanwhile, fall somewhere in the middle.

In 2017, critics of the survey that Wilcox relied on remarked that the survey used over twenty-year-old data, that it was restricted to the United States, and that it depended on men’s reporting of perpetration and not women’s reporting of victimization.<sup>13</sup> In 2019, however, the Institute for

<sup>10</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 199–200.

<sup>11</sup> Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 206–207.

<sup>12</sup> Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 207.

<sup>13</sup> Pidgeon points to the methodological criticisms of the “church-attending men have lower rates of violence” argument listed in this article: Mandy Truong, Naomi Priest, and Nicholas Biddle, *The Conversation*, “Domestic violence and Australian churches: why the current data have limitations,” July 23, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/domestic-violence-and-australian-churches-why-the-current-data-have-limitations-81467>. To be clear, neither she nor the authors here provide counter evidence. Their concerns are methodological.

Family Studies published similar findings to those reported in Wilcox's 2004 book in the World Family Map, which draws from eleven countries and cites both women's victimization and male perpetration.<sup>14</sup> When it turns to measurements of intimate partner violence (IPV), the World Family Map affirms Wilcox's 2004 book as pertains to the distinction between nominal and faithful Christian men.

Religiosity, or religious commitment, seems to be the determining factor, not religious tradition, and it seems that nominal religiosity may present the most risk, with both the nonreligious and the religiously devout being less likely to perpetrate IPV than are those who attend religious services infrequently.<sup>15</sup>

As pertains to the distinction between traditional and progressive on IPV, the map cites differences that are statistically negligible:

Popular accounts suggest the idea that wifely submission to husbands provides theological cover for abusive relationships — or at least for men to abuse women. We see little evidence of this here, though. Women in highly religious couples, be they patriarchal or egalitarian, are not statistically different from any other group of women...Headship beliefs themselves (i.e., not in combination with couple religiosity) are not associated with women's victimization.<sup>16</sup>

Critics had also faulted the 1990 survey

with only pointing to physical abuse. Interestingly, however, the surveys informing the World Family Map found that “highly religious gender traditional” women express the highest rates of “contentment, satisfaction, and stability” in their marriages (17.02 on their index) relative to every group, including “highly religious gender progressive” women (16.76). Also, “less/mixed religious gender traditional” women (15.59) scored higher than “less/mixed gender progressive” women (15.22).<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the most significant differences showed up in the surveys on women's sexual satisfaction. The study reports, “With sexual satisfaction, a different pattern emerged with highly religious traditional women being significantly more likely to be sexually satisfied than women in all other groups – including highly religious progressive women.”<sup>18</sup> In terms of women who strongly agreed with the statement, “I am satisfied with my sexual relationship with my partner,”

- 56% of “highly religious gender traditional” versus 37% of “highly religious gender progressive” women strongly agreed;
- 36% of “less/mixed religious gender traditional” women versus 29% of “less/mixed religious gender progressive” women strongly agreed;
- And 31% of “secular gender conservative” versus 32% of “secular gender progressive” women strongly agreed.

In the *New York Times*, Wilcox summa-

<sup>14</sup> Institute for Family Studies and Wheatley Institution, *World Family Map 2019: Mapping Family Change and Child Well-Being Outcomes*. <https://ifstudies.org/ifs-admin/resources/reports/worldfamilymap-2019-051819.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> *World Family Map 2019*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> *World Family Map 2019*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> *World Family Map 2019*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> *World Family Map 2019*, 26–27.

rized what the surveys behind the World Family Map teach: regular church-attending, conservative-gender women are, far and away, the happiest of any group. Among regular church attenders, 73% of conservative-gender women report happy marriages versus 60% of egalitarian women. Interestingly, secular progressive wives are happier than secular conservative wives: 55% to 33%, respectively. Meanwhile, 46% of wives in the religious middle, who attend infrequently or have husbands who do, report happy marriages.<sup>19</sup>

Why would gender traditional wives among the church-attending subset and the egalitarian wives among the secular subset each be happiest in their subset? Wilcox remarks in his *Times* piece, “It turns out that feminism and faith both have high expectations of husbands and fathers, if for very different ideological reasons, and that both result in higher-quality marriages for women.”

What can we conclude from all this data? Authority is a tool that can be used for good or for ill, like computers, scalpels, or dynamite. With dynamite, for instance, you can blow up a home or lay a railroad line. Likewise, the feminist and egalitarian agenda rightly reports of the damage done by sexist gender norms around the world. Therefore, they seek to eradicate those norms, throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The baby they throw out is all the good that a husband and pastor’s

authority can do. Their analysis, finally, is one-sided.

Reading through Pidgeon’s chapter, I kept waiting for her to present evidence that complementarian men abuse their wives at a higher rate than egalitarian or non-Christian men, but it never comes. Still, she concludes the chapter, “It is no longer credible to simply state from the pulpit that complementarianism, due to its loving kindness, does not facilitate gendered violence.” How does she arrive at this conclusion absent evidence? It’s baked into the premises of her overall argument. In the final analysis, her argument is not based in social science but ideology. Her argument is not, “Look at all these complementarian churches where rates of abuse are comparatively high.” Rather, her argument is, complementarianism and domestic abuse operate by the same power dynamics: both limit women. And since any affirmation of authority that limits what a woman might do is bad (the implicit premise), of course complementarianism leads to abuse. She then doubles down on this instinct when she says that refusing to acknowledge that “gender inequality” (she employs the United Nations’ definition) is the basis of abuse “is itself an act of abuse.”

Notice, then, how her question-begging argument works: the premise becomes the conclusion. Namely, since limiting women is abuse (premise), limiting

<sup>19</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox, Jason S Carroll, and Laurie DeRose, “Religious Men Can Be Devoted Dads, Too: Faith, like Feminism, Sets High Expectations for Husbands,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2019, accessed May 31, 2023, [https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/18/opinion/sunday/happy-marriages.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=WoMOBdl6MyC1Yab1Xn9fwLihFzewlUqD2E\\_GKDFVfY2N4pM4w1FhbQjcaj4lsyCVtMMGBcO5C5OAqwbZWltsOJZ8niUBcNGuVXzIObnFRbCgGJliKvPQyGJJ\\_bYuACdSt6bLLv5AbDgqECc2hcu5d8XeMJChUi7YwxJH1u8rC7-kMzbSFXVaoQNu4iuXOIFXCQJkGaCyyu2CbRkDfVn5LOhf3WB45gMd\\_HYBynBEZxFWkLdZxIvi\\_OtjqOAtSJccY7mZd72aKUUcdKQWBLMk-jn6zO5Q9XBGXW6x06E\\_cyy75noDEx73X2htgPNPqkDU-ov9vd8MUAg8sunA2gDw&smid=url-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/18/opinion/sunday/happy-marriages.html?unlocked_article_code=WoMOBdl6MyC1Yab1Xn9fwLihFzewlUqD2E_GKDFVfY2N4pM4w1FhbQjcaj4lsyCVtMMGBcO5C5OAqwbZWltsOJZ8niUBcNGuVXzIObnFRbCgGJliKvPQyGJJ_bYuACdSt6bLLv5AbDgqECc2hcu5d8XeMJChUi7YwxJH1u8rC7-kMzbSFXVaoQNu4iuXOIFXCQJkGaCyyu2CbRkDfVn5LOhf3WB45gMd_HYBynBEZxFWkLdZxIvi_OtjqOAtSJccY7mZd72aKUUcdKQWBLMk-jn6zO5Q9XBGXW6x06E_cyy75noDEx73X2htgPNPqkDU-ov9vd8MUAg8sunA2gDw&smid=url-share).

women leads to abuse (conclusion). That is the chapter. Another way to state this premise is, authority is bad because it places limitations on people, a point I will turn to next.

Yet what if she believed in the goodness of good authority, and that some limitations on people are not always bad, and that a man's authority in the home and church really could serve a woman's good?

### **3. EGALITARIAN ARGUMENTS CONCERNING ABUSE PUT AUTHORITY IN A WHOLLY NEGATIVE LIGHT.**

This one-sided analysis means that egalitarian arguments concerning abuse tend to put authority itself in a wholly negative light.

Pidgeon's chapter, for instance, spends three pages using the story of David and Bathsheba to teach the lesson that "Each degree of power and privilege that a person holds add more scope for abuse" (581). Power corrupts, she observes. So far, so good. Yet where she goes next seems unfortunate for her argument. David was able to take advantage of Bathsheba, she remarks, because "Bathsheba did not have equal authority." She then draws the parallel: in complementarianism, "Women are denied equal authority." The solution, then, is to take away the man's authority, lest it lead to domestic abuse. The implication, working backward to David and Bathsheba, though, is that David should never have been given authority either.

Whether she means to or not, her arguments indict authority itself. To continue following the logic, we should remove the

authority of government so it cannot be abused. So with parental authority and managerial authority and every authority. Even God's authority, frankly, begins to look a little suspect.

I am highlighting the wholly negative instincts toward authority at play here because it is the deep and entrenched bias of our postmodern generation. The Enlightenment tradition, which postmodernity ironically depends upon, is one sustained argument against all forms of authority, whether epistemological, religious, political, moral, scientific, linguistic, and finally gender. We have fixed both eyes on the badness of bad authority.

Yet the solution to bad authority is not no authority, but good authority. Civil rights advocates in the 1960s responded to racist local and state authorities by appealing to federal authorities. Likewise, those opposing child abuse in the home or church appeal to state authorities in the form of child protective services.

Just because power can be corrupted does not make authority any less God-given. Human agency itself is corrupted, but God still gives it. The lesson of David and Bathsheba is that David wrongly used his authority and needed to be disciplined, as the prophet Nathan did. The lesson is not that David's possession of authority is altogether illegitimate and that no one should possess governing authority. God made him king, after all. David's authority was legitimate, even if used wrongly.

Pidgeon is right: more power and privilege adds scope for abuse. Let us always keep one eye fixed on that reality. Yet do not throw the baby out with the bath-



water, as I said. As Christians, we also need to keep one eye on good authority. Speaking of...

#### **4. AUTHORITY, AS GOD INTENDS IT IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION, IS GOOD AND LIFE-GIVING.**

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The Bible teaches that *authority-in-the-fall* is bad and destructive. Egalitarianism gets this much right. Being “under” a fallen person can be a disadvantage. It can make children vulnerable, citizens vulnerable, church members vulnerable, wives vulnerable. Complementarians and egalitarians alike must not deny this, but attend to it. Bad authority discourages, cripples, wilts, sucks dry, dehumanizes, snuffs out, annihilates. It uses, but does not give. It is political imperialism, economic exploitation, environmental degradation, business monopolization, social oppression, spousal and child abuse.

What people today overlook, however, is that *authority-in-creation* and *authority-in-redemption* are good and life-giving. Good *author-ity* *authors* life. To hate authority is to hate the act of creating, because creating something — a game, a computer, a car, a marriage, a house, a book — requires design principles which then govern (rule) that which is created. Creation and authority are utterly intertwined. God the ruler is God the Creator, because good rule creates and creation requires rule.

Good authority does not just work from the top down, but also from the bottom up. Good authority says, “Let me be the platform on which you build your life. I’ll supply you, fund you, resource you, guide you. Just listen to me.” Good authority binds in order to loose, corrects in order to teach, trims in order to grow, disciplines in order

to train, legislates in order to build, judges in order to redeem, studies in order to innovate. It is the rules for a game, the lines on a road, a covenant for lovers.

Good authority says, “Trust me, and I will give you a garden in which to create a world. Just keep my commandments. I love you.” Good authority loves. Good authority gives. Good authority passes out power.<sup>20</sup>

It is to a person’s advantage to be “under” a good authority because it strengthens and grows. Everyone who has ever had a good teacher, coach, or mother knows as much. For instance, my boss, Ryan, shoulders final responsibility for the challenges and anxieties of our organization. I get to go home and leave all this behind. He does not. Meanwhile, he builds a track for me to run on in my writing, teaching, and speaking. His authority does not hinder me, it frees me.

In other words, authority in creation and redemption is good not only for what the person on the top gets, but as much as for what the person on the bottom gets. The person on top, in fact, should bear the greatest burdens and costs of all. He or she possesses power not to horde it but precisely so that it might be spent on others’ behalf. As with our Lord Jesus, who gave his life as a ransom for many, so it is with a good husband, pastor, governor, parent, teacher, pilot, or army officer. Good school principals tend to arrive earliest and leave last. Good store owners absorb the costs of employee mistakes and offer a second chance. Good pastors hear and weep more for the sins of the church than anyone. Good husbands do not push anxieties and fears downward onto their wives and children, but draw them up onto themselves.

David had his terrible moments, but he also had his good ones. Listen to these hard-won “last words” of David:

When one rules justly over men,  
ruling in the fear of God,  
he dawns on them like the morning light,  
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,  
like rain that makes grass to sprout  
from the earth. (2 Sam 23:1, 3-4).

Christians, again, must keep one eye on bad authority and one eye on good authority — one eye on David with Bathsheba, one eye on the call to “rule in the fear of God” like sun and rain on the grass. We cannot forsake either. No doubt complementarians can take their eyes off the bad when they commend a husband’s headship. Yet egalitarian arguments like Pidgeon’s, as a posture, seem to have taken an eye off the good.

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##### **5. BY TARGETING AUTHORITY INSTEAD OF THE SELFISH USE OF POWER, EGALITARIANISM PICKS THE WRONG FOE AND IN SO DOING WEAKENS MARRIAGES.**

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Crucial for understanding the debate between complementarianism and egalitarianism is the distinction between authority and power. Power is the ability or capacity to do something — the ability, say, to pick up a boulder or solve a math problem or fix a leaky faucet. Authority, on the other hand, is *the moral right* or *license* to make decisions with that power. It is an *authorization* to do something. The reason the distinction is crucial is, just because you take away someone’s authority does not mean you have taken away their power.

<sup>20</sup> This and the previous paragraph come from my book *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming September 2023).

The Bible establishes offices of authority in those places where power exists by nature, which is to say, by God's creation design. God's revealed law, in other words, maps over his natural law. Parents naturally have power over their children. Therefore, the Bible gives structure, order, and purpose to parental power (e.g. Deut 6; Eph 6:1-4).

Humans naturally possess power over the resources of the earth. Therefore, the Bible gives structure to governments and rules for due process insofar as fallen humans fight over those resources (e.g. Gen 9:5-6).

By the law of averages and creation design, husbands and wives also naturally possess varying forms of physical, emotional, and social power, and their procreative roles necessarily differ. Therefore, God maps over husband and wife distinct sets of duties, responsibilities, and obligations, ones that broadly correspond with their distinct grants of power and possibility.

Suppose, then, you have a man who physically abuses his wife. Neither the complementarian nor the egalitarian would say he possesses the authority — the moral right — to hit, threaten, or intimidate her. Authority, formally at least, is not the problem. What is? It is the fact that, even if you take away his authority as a husband, you cannot take away his physical power, and he is using that power selfishly and proudly. So say whatever you want about his authority, the real monster remains unaddressed: a selfish and proud employment of power. Egalitarianism, in other words, offers a kind of misdiagnosis by pointing to authority as the problem.

Yet the problem is worse than just misdiagnosis. Removing the man's authority or office removes the restraints on power. Why does God establish authoritative offices? He establishes them both to empower *and* to constrain. To give freedom *and* to give responsibility. To present opportunity *and* to impose accountability. The authority of an office binds office holders as much as it looses them. If authority is the lines on the road, as I said above, egalitarianism takes away those lines and speed limit signs while doing nothing to slow down the car.

In Scripture, the grant of authority comes with an increased accountability. Notice:

- the increased accountability of an elder: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account" (Heb 13:7);
- the increased accountability of a husband: "live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet 3:7);
- the increased accountability of a parent: "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Col 3:21);
- and the increased accountability of a master or employer: "Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him" (Eph 6:9).

Again and again, the Bible stresses that the authority figure bears the heavier judgment (see also James 3:1).

# *“Doing away with the office of authority, in other words, actually weakens and endangers a marriage. . .”*

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The tragic irony of egalitarianism is that, in the attempt to protect women, it actually lightens men’s accountability. One thing I have observed among immature married men in counseling situations is their instinct to blame their wives for difficulties in the marriage. They squabble like children: “But she...” “But he...” “But she...” Even if these men claim to be complementarian, they argue like functional egalitarians, which is to say, as if everyone possesses equal responsibility when the relationship hits rougher waters.

A more biblical complementarianism, however, recognizes that, while men and women can equally sin, men bear the greater responsibility to patch up the problem and find a solution, as every leader does. A husband does not get to say, “But she...” Rather, he must always look at the bigger picture. Maybe they are squabbling about “x.” He should ask himself: what could he have done to prevent “x” in the first place? Or, if “x” was beyond his control, how does God intend him to love and lead his wife through “x”? In other words, he must no longer play the childish tit-for-tat game. Rather, the buck stops with him. When something goes wrong in a marriage, Jesus

will knock on his door first — just as God did in the garden when he came looking for Adam when he and Eve had sinned. Therefore, a man must die to his ego, absorb whatever blame or cost he must, and get to work taking responsibility for the whole.

Doing away with the office of authority, in other words, actually weakens and endangers a marriage. To be sure, abuse is one very serious problem. But probably the more common problem a pastor like me observes on an everyday basis is the problem of plain old immature and selfish men who will not take responsibility for ending the argument, for putting themselves in harm’s way, for using their strength for her good, for being the first to apologize, for recognizing that Jesus has tasked them with bearing the burden and initiating peace, who refuse to absorb an injustice, who insist on going tit-for-tat, who, in short, act like six-year-olds by insisting that everything is “fair” and “equal,” especially when they do not get their way and life gets difficult.

Yet these are the kinds of men egalitarianism licenses — thin-skinned, defensive, buck-passing men. It does not call them to

something higher, harder, tougher, more selfless, more generous, more self-forgetful, more initiative-taking, more thick-chested and self-sacrificing. Instead, it is a worldview that teaches men and women alike to think in terms of my gifts, my rights to use them, my self-discovery, and my self-expression. And so we all become more centered on ourselves.

How many times have I sat alone with a married man who keeps saying, “But she...” To which my response is something like, “I’m sorry. That sounds hard. But, brother, I’m calling you to step up and die to yourself. Enough with the blame game. Jesus is knocking on your door. Forget all the petty childish stuff. How are you taking responsibility? What are you doing to build up, encourage, unify, and lead? Have you convinced her that you are 100 percent for her, or do you give her reason to think you’re really out for yourself?”

Fallen husbands and wives both will use their physical, emotional, and social power selfishly. This is true of every culture in every time and every place. The feminist and egalitarian solution is to dispense with all hierarchies and structures in order to protect the self and its ambitions. The biblical solution is to place husband and wife into a structure that insists that each person takes the focus off of themselves and serves the other, each according to their natural grants of strength, whether physical, emotional, or social.

**6. EGALITARIANISM FAILS TO RECOGNIZE THAT EQUALITY, LIKE AUTHORITY, DIVIDES BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD VERSIONS.**

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Egalitarianism, as the name communi-

cates, is driven by a vision of equality between men and women. One need read no further than Haddad’s title to see this: “Helping the Church Understand Biblical Equality.” The trouble is, she, like egalitarians generally, fails to recognize that equality, like authority, divides between good and bad versions. The good version roots in Genesis 1 and our creation in God’s image. The bad version is a product of Genesis 3: “You will be like God.” And it is the more common version of equality in our fallen world.

The bad version presumes to be God’s equal. It says your basic instincts and desires are good. You can define and create the universe for yourself. You become equal by self-discovery and self-assertion.

This brings us to where we need to engage with Haddad’s chapter. The burden of Haddad’s piece is to help church leaders persuade their congregations of egalitarianism. The teaching about biblical equality has been circulating for nearly five hundred years, she observes, yet most churches still practice men-preferred or male-only patterns of leadership. What should church leaders therefore do? Following Everett Rogers’s book *Diffusion of Innovations*, Haddad’s chapter lays the five basic elements that Rogers says are necessary for helping a new idea or change diffuse through a group: use understandable language, show how the new idea improves people’s lives, connect the idea to people’s core beliefs, model, and provide easy starting points.

Yet as Haddad walks through these five elements, a common theme emerges: a focus on people’s gifts. Since element one in the science of diffusion is using simple

language, Haddad advises: “instead of using the term *egalitarianism*, we can speak of gift-based ministry” (541). Since element two is showing how a new idea improves people’s lives, Haddad encourages asking church members, “Will the traditional view of male leadership and female submission provide for the fullest development of the gifts God has given [our daughters]” (544)? Since element three is connecting an idea to core beliefs, Haddad suggests, “we can also speak of the rich tradition of women throughout the history of the church who brought many to faith by using their gifts of preaching and teaching” (547). Since element four is modeling, Haddad observes, “We cannot underestimate our need to observe women using their gifts in the church” (549). Since element five is providing easy starting points, Haddad offers, “Egalitarians can help their brothers and sisters in Christ try out or sample the message by empowering them to use their gifts” (552).

A focus on an individual’s gifts is the thread that ties the chapter together. Gifts — the language of gifts, the demonstration of gifts, the connectedness of gifts, the modelling of gifts, the discovery of gifts — provide the concept that should bear the weight of persuasion. As she says, she means to replace a ministry that is “gender-based” with one that is “gift-based” (544).

In these ways, Haddad’s chapter sounds utterly consistent with so much evangelical discipleship literature from the second half of the twentieth century. How many Sunday School programs and leadership guides emphasized “spiritual gift tests” and “every member ministry” that called people to employ their gifts? Church members

dissected Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, asking which gift they had. Youth and college pastors talked about the gift of singleness from 1 Corinthians 7 and the call to missions. If nothing else, Haddad knows her audience.

Well before reading Haddad’s chapter, in fact, I had noticed that this discipleship emphasis from the 1980s and 90s had migrated into conversations questioning complementarianism in the 2000s and 2010s. The topic of gifts has become one of two bells (the other being abuse) being rung over and over by godly friends who know their Bibles, who tacitly accept the complementarian readings, who sincerely mean to serve the church, and yet who wonder, what about women who are gifted to preach, teach, or lead? The answer “teach other women” is unsatisfying. Still, I trust the question is usually earnest and rooted in love for other women, their development, and the good of the church and kingdom.

To answer more fully, then, there is a right and wrong way to think about the gifts that God gives us. A right view of a person’s gifts keeps a loose grip on them. It is better to discover and employ them than not. We should encourage young Christians to do so. Yet we should not place a primary value on them, as if our sense of our gifts should determine the structures of our churches or the ministries we are entitled to. That is the wrong way of viewing them: “I’m an amazing singer; you must feature me up front.” “I’m not good with children; you should not ask me to serve in childcare.” Rather, we are to place all our gifts and talents and resources at God’s feet, and ask him to use them as he will for his purposes and glory. “Okay, maybe I’m not gifted at working with children. But will it allow the

two-year-old's parents to sit in service and be refreshed and edified? Sure, sign me up. I can serve the church that way" (see 1 Cor 14:12). That is why the male-only elders in my church serve in childcare. What is more, we all will discover the better and truer versions of ourselves not through self-expression but through self-sacrifice: "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24).

Oftentimes, God prefers to use us where we are weak and not gifted, as with Moses who was not gifted to speak, requiring God to supply Aaron's mouth; or with Gideon, who was not gifted with large forces, yet God determined to give him victory anyway; or with the person gifted with tongues, but who chooses to give priority to prophecy since prophecy builds up the church (1 Cor 12:2-5). This way, God receives the glory. Our gifts are merely tools to be used at the Lord's discretion. They are not a Christian's identity or boast. Our identity and boast are already secure in the vicariously received worthiness, righteousness, and giftedness of Christ.

My concern with the emphasis or pride-of-place given to gifts is that it sounds less like the Bible and more like the individual expressivism of our historical moment — the post-Rousseau, post-Marx, post-Freud, postmodern assumption that my deep-down inner self is my truest self and that my fullest potential depends upon casting off the socially constructed constraints that get in the way of that emerging self. This emphasis can too easily depend on an atomistic "just let each flower bloom" anthropology, which works hand-in-hand with a romanticized worldview. Ariel wants to walk on land, Belle wants more

than a provincial life, and Queen Elsa employs all her ice powers. That is the fulfilled life. The whole world should be available to me if I believe something accords with my gifts and inner self.

The entire construct makes little room for the possibility that God might have communal purposes that transcend any one of us individuals, and that he might put different groups of people to work in different ways so that the whole body can be built up. Consider the biblical image of church as "family," with mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers (1 Tim 5:1-2); or the church as a "body," in which the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you," with the weaker parts deemed indispensable and the less honorable parts receiving greater honor (1 Cor 12:21-23).

How much more colorful and resplendent is God's picture than Disney's picture of Queen Elsa, declaring that she would no longer conceal who she is, but would take her stand and "let it go," self-discovery and expression being the paramount good.

Haddad wants a gift-based ministry. I think the better model is an obedience-based and family-based and commission-based and sacrificial-love based ministry, in which the call to obedience and family and commission and love determines how and when we use our gifts, not the other way around.

Or let me use structural language. A church's "structure" is nothing more or less than a set of rules or obediences required by King Jesus for how we live our life together: "Baptize them..."; "When you come together to eat..."; "An elder must be..."; "...tell it

to the church.” Church structure, in other words, is whole-church ethics. And the lesson here is that biblical structures should determine how we use our gifts. They both empower and constrain our use of our gifts. Yet Haddad and the egalitarian agenda ask us to fix our eyes on our gifts and let those determine our church structures — our requisite obediences. I fear that is backward. It risks becoming a Christianized version of individual expressivism.

All this brings us back to the right and wrong way to think about equality. The wrong way looks inward, lists the self’s assets and virtues, and then asserts itself by comparing itself to others. “I’m as smart as he is.” It possesses a strong sense of entitlement. It lives by making demands. “I deserve this. I have a right to that.” It has little to no room for assigned roles, responsibilities, differences, and, most of all, hierarchies. Rather, it seeks to level all hierarchies because the self’s sense of the self is rooted in the self and can therefore tolerate few externally imposed limitations. It despises any role for submission or talk of constraint. It lives on continual self-assertion.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the right way of thinking about equality begins with the fact that God assigned all of us inestimable and equal worth by creating us in his image. All human beings possess equal, God-imagining value — from the embryo in the womb to the king on the throne. In that sense, Christianity offers a more radical egalitarianism than anything else. Yet then God puts us all to work and is not nearly as worried about our rank and status as we are, as if our worth depended upon this-world hierarchies. Rather, God is doing something bigger. Getting on board with his agenda means being willing to be last instead of first, lowest instead of highest. It is the person who says, “Lord, I’m happy to be lowest and last,” whom God grabs and says, “You’re just the kind of worker I’m looking for. I’ll put you first” (Matt. 20:16).

In short, good equality works together with good authority. People hear “authority” and think immediately of a one-dimensional — higher or lower — hierarchy. That dimension exists. Yet the bigger picture is multi-dimensional and communal. To establish an authority is to establish an *office*, complete with responsibilities, obligations, purposes,

<sup>21</sup> This paragraph and the next few adopt heavily from my forthcoming book *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming September 2023).



and accountability mechanisms. And God puts us all to work in various offices because every office serves a much bigger purpose than itself. He gives one job to the husband, another to the wife; one to the pastor, another to the member; one to the parent, another to the child; one to the governor, another to the governed; some “higher,” some “lower,” but all for the sake of his larger purposes in our lives, in the church, and in creation. Every office, moreover, comes with a theological lesson. The office of earthly father teaches us something about our heavenly Father (Eph 3:15). The offices of husband and wife teach us something about Christ and the church (Eph 5:22–31). Offices of son and daughter about being God’s children and our promised inheritance (e.g. Gal 4:1–7). Offices of brother and sister about being a fellow heir with Christ, our firstborn brother (Rom 8:17). The office of governor about the wrath of God against sin (Rom 13:4).

The exercises of authority and submission, two sides of one coin for a human, always teach theology, whether we are teaching rightly or wrongly. To be in authority you must be *under* authority, and to be *under* it is to be *in* it. By being *under* or *in* it, then, we teach the world what God is like, even as the incarnate Jesus ruled by submitting to his heavenly Father entirely, showing the world what the heavenly Father is like.

## **7. COMPLEMENTARIANS MUST TEACH THAT A HUSBAND AND ELDER’S AUTHORITY DOES NOT INCLUDE THE RIGHT TO DISCIPLINE.**

Finally, complementarians must do a better

job of teaching in their churches that God does not give husbands and elders the right or power to discipline. And such teaching should also function as an abuse-preventer.

Let me explain. God has established two types of authority on earth. Both types of authority possess the authority to issue binding commands. Yet only one type may compel obedience externally with the threat of discipline (*examples*: state with the power of “the sword”; parents with the power of “the rod”; church with the power of “the keys”). The other type may not apply external pressure. Instead, it is a form of authority suited to the new covenant and the gospel. It therefore seeks to compel action by appealing to internal desire (*examples*: husbands by the power of love and empathy; elders by the example of a righteous life). I have labeled these two types the *authority of command and authority of counsel* elsewhere,<sup>22</sup> and expand on it at length in my book on authority.<sup>23</sup>

The parent of a three-year-old can unilaterally enact consequences for disobedience. So can a policeman. So can a church over its members. A husband cannot, and an elder cannot (I say this as a congregationalist). Rather, these latter two possess an authority of counsel.

An authority of counsel is a real authority, because God commands the wife and church member to submit. Wives and members possess a real moral obligation that God will one day enforce. Yet the husband and elder, in the here and now, lack an enforcement mechanism. Instead, their form

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Leeman, “Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning (Part 3),” *9Marks*, December 11, 2019, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.9marks.org/article/complementarianism-a-moment-of-reckoning-part-3/>.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming September 2023).

of authority forces them to love, to live with in an understanding way, to teach with great patience, to wait, to woo, and in all things strive toward provoking that internal desire (e.g., see 1 Tim 1:5; Philem 8, 9, 14).

As such, an authority of counsel does not use force, but renounces force because doing so requires it to rely on the beauty of whatever compels those new desires. It works best by pointing to that beauty. By inviting. By compelling with kindness. Then the hearts “under” it *want* to follow. It is a form of authority suited to partnership, collegiality, and oneness.

More specifically, God gives husbands the opportunity to exercise this type of authority with the drawing power of a Song-of-Solomon-like love. This is his common-grace gift for all creation, and part of the underlying logic of the typological connection between husbands and wives and Christ and the church. God then gives elders the special-grace opportunity to exercise it with compelling lives of righteousness. Their righteousness should prove attractive to a born-again congregation, so that elders can say with Paul, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

A good husband or pastor does not want to force decisions now, as a parent of a three-year-old must from time to time. What good is “forced love” from a wife? And how righteous is “forced righteousness” from a member? That is not gospel righteousness. Rather, good husbands and pastors play the long game. Their question is not, “How can I get her to be a perfect wife today, or them to be perfect members?” Their question is, “How can I help her and them to look more like Jesus over the next fifty years by acting like Jesus my-

self?” That is the job to which biblical complementarianism calls men.

All of this means that an authority of counsel is essentially evangelistic. You invite. You do not force. You exercise a comparatively light hand, not a heavy one. You work at being present and with. You do not make pronouncements from on high or without investing in the relationship and earning trust. Sometimes you correct, but mostly you compel with hope. You point to the law, but mostly you announce grace. You speak plainly, but you also speak kindly, because your goal is to win people over — wives toward unity, members toward righteousness, non-Christians to the gospel. You are not to be a pushover, any more than Jesus was a pushover, nor to capitulate, any more than Jesus capitulated. Yet like Jesus calling his disciples from their fishing nets, so husbands and elders exercise authority by initiating and pointing in love toward the path forward. Wives and members, in turn, possess an obligation to follow whenever the husband or elder leads, even as the non-Christian hearing the gospel does.

The type of authority God gives to elders and husbands, in other words, is not the stuff of abuse. When exercised as God intends, it is the stuff of love, tenderness, compassion, strength, and a godward direction.

## CONCLUSION

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Does complementarianism lead to abuse? No. When practiced biblically, it’s an abuse preventer and a woman protector.

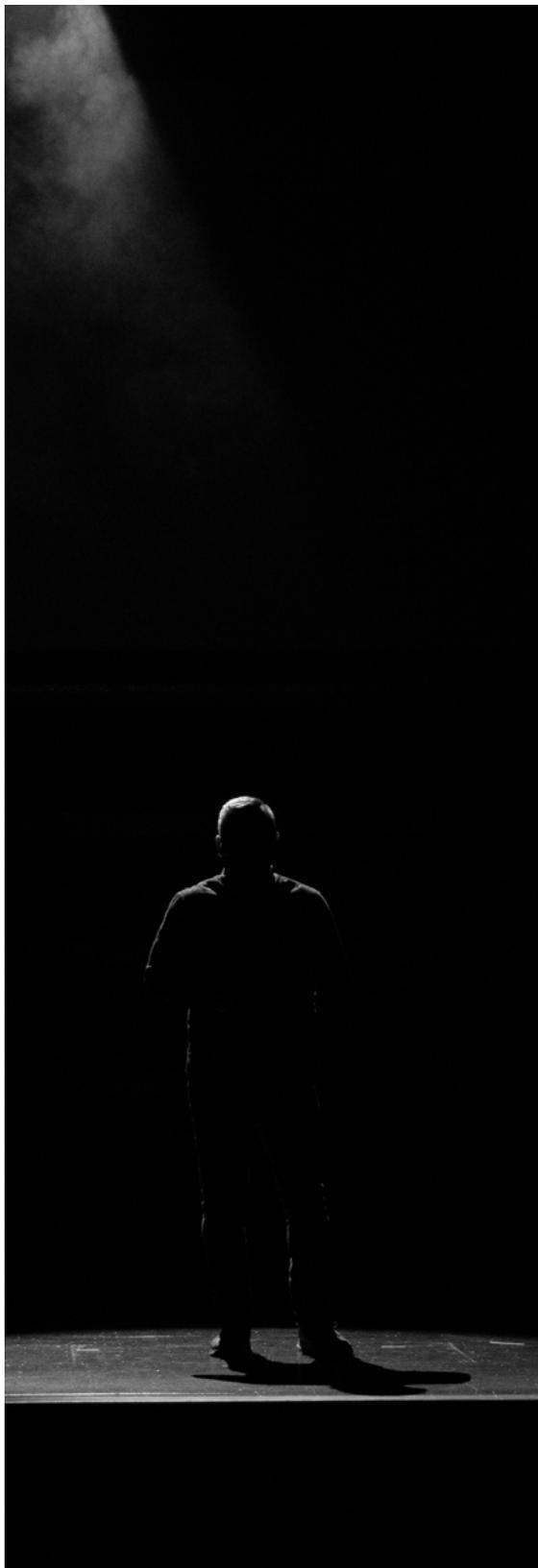
Do abusive men love to use Scripture and complementarian theology to maintain control? Yes. Again, Satan likes to use the Bible for his wicked purposes (Matt 4:6),

because abuse always lies about God. It teaches us that God uses his authority for wicked and deceitful purposes and that we cannot really trust him.

That means pastors possess a special responsibility to speak against abuse. Here is one practical tip for pastors: As you are preparing a sermon, ask yourself how an abuser might misuse your biblical text, and perhaps include a warning against such misuses in your sermon. Especially include those warnings with the abuser's favorite texts, like "turn the other cheek"; "do everything without grumbling or complaining"; "bear with one another"; "wives, submit to your husbands"; and so forth.

I am grateful Pidgeon wants to prevent abuse, and Haddad wants to help women fully realize and employ their gifts. I just think there is a better way to accomplish both goals, one that begins with all of us, men and women, submitting to the structures — that is, commands — of his Word. That includes teaching others to do the same and correcting, even excommunicating, the abusers who do not. ✕

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# Neglecting the Whole Story:

A Response to Mimi Haddad,  
“Human Flourishing”

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## SUMMARY

The thirtieth chapter of *Discovering Biblical Equality* opens with the statement, “The face of poverty, illiteracy, disease, starvation, and abuse is predominantly female” (620). Mimi Haddad then comments on gender-based violence and asserts that “patriarchy is increasingly viewed as one of the most malicious and debilitating forces in history” (621). She offers a selection of evidence for this statement from a variety of locations across the world. She comments, variously, on gender pay gaps, abuse uncovered in the Southern Baptist Convention, abuses such as female genital mutilation and early marriage, lack of educational opportunities for females, sexual harassment, the #MeToo movement, and the violence associated with pornography. Haddad concludes that human flourishing is horribly diminished due to the authority and dominance of men, which has been



reinforced by cultural and religious teaching. The “toxic force of patriarchy” (624) has prevailed throughout history and expresses itself in violence toward women across the globe today. The “ubiquitous presence of patriarchy . . . shields perpetrators, obstructs justice and demeans survivors.” God’s ideal is “shared governance of men and women,” which is also the “bedrock of human flourishing” (634).

### **CRITICAL EVALUATION**

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The presuppositions of modern feminism frame Haddad’s discussion throughout her chapter. Any role distinctions between men and women are viewed as evidence of oppression.

Since mankind’s fall into sin, too often men *have* used their superior physical strength to exploit women. Sadly,

<sup>1</sup> Sharon James, *God's Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2019), chapter 4, "The Bitterness of Betrayal: Seven Ways Feminism Failed us All", 65-79.

<sup>2</sup> Obianuju Edeocha, *Target Africa: Ideological Neo-colonialism in the Twenty-First Century* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2018); Gabrielle Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom* (Kettering: LifeSite, 2015); Katy Faust and Stacy Manning, *Them before Us: Why We Need a Global Children's Rights Movement* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Ryan T. Anderson and Alexandra de Sanctis, *Tearing Us Apart: How Abortion Harms Everything and Solves Nothing* (Washington DC: Regnery 2022).

sometimes the Bible *has* been wrongly used to justify abuse. But God created men and women with equal dignity *and* significant differences. We only uphold the true interests of both sexes when both facts are respected. Any supposed "remedies" for injustice, however well-intentioned, that undermine the truth of God's Word and the truths found in creation, always make things worse.

### **1. HADDAD'S CHAPTER FAILS TO DEAL WITH GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN FLOURISHING FROM A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION.**

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A biblical discussion of human flourishing has to be based on the conviction that the Creator God provided humanity with the moral law and creation mandates. Where these are respected and upheld, human flourishing will be promoted. Where they are denied or undermined, human flourishing will be compromised.

Haddad assumes that human flourishing demands gender equity, or equal outcomes. But, in the quest for equal outcomes, modern feminism has *opposed* biblical norms for family life and the complementary roles of men and women, fathers and mothers. There has been wholesale support for the sexual revolution. There has been a destructive unravelling of the creation mandate for marriage and family life, as well as hostility to God's moral law. This has fuelled the sexual revolution, the increase in pornography (and associated human trafficking), the rise in family breakdown, and escalating sexual abuse. All this has been immensely damaging to the safety and wellbeing of women. Modern feminism has betrayed the real interests of women.<sup>1</sup> Genuine social justice is best secured by following the Creator's design for social structures.

Throughout this chapter, Haddad commends the various initiatives of international bodies such as the World Health Organisation and the United Nations' conventions on women's rights. These international bodies are at the frontline of promoting abortion, contraception, sterilization, and comprehensive sex education. They defy God's moral law. They oppose the real interests of women.<sup>2</sup> Women are horribly damaged by abortion, for example. It

leaves grievous physical, emotional, and spiritual harm, which is unsurprising as it is both a direct assault on the life of their unborn child, and a violation of the dignity of motherhood.<sup>3</sup>

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## **2. HADDAD'S CHAPTER FAILS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE TREMENDOUS ADVANCES IN THE REDUCTION OF POVERTY IN RECENT YEARS.**

A responsible discussion of global perspectives on human flourishing would acknowledge the astonishing reduction in global poverty that has taken place in the relatively recent past. As Christians, we care deeply about poverty and injustice. Where the biblical worldview has had the deepest impact, there human flourishing has increased. As Christians, we care about the wellbeing of men, women, and children. Poverty is not a zero-sum game with men as the oppressors and women as the victims. Global poverty has dramatically decreased over the past 200 years at the same time as enormous population growth. The proportion of people living in extreme income poverty worldwide plunged from forty-three percent in 1990 to twenty-two percent in 2008. That has been of benefit to men and women and children. The evidence shows that it is when biblical principles are followed, including respect for God-ordained family structures, that cultures conducive to wealth creation are fostered.<sup>7</sup>

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## **3. HADDAD'S CHAPTER FAILS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY HAS HAD ON THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN OVER THE PAST 2,000 YEARS.**

Haddad presents a random list of statistics and anecdotes with little context. In this chapter, we hear variously about female oppression caused by Islam and other non-Christian religious systems (mostly not identified as such); the suffering resulting from sexual permissiveness (mostly without clearly identifying the cause); repression which comes from an overstatement of traditional Christianity (in places confused with complementarianism); and any disparity of outcomes caused by the real differences between the sexes. All

<sup>4</sup> James R. Rogers, "What's Behind the Stunning Decrease in Global Poverty?" *First Things*, 26 November, 2013, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/11/whats-behind-the-stunning-decrease-in-global-poverty> (accessed March 27, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Sharon James, *How Christianity Transformed the World* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Rogers, "Global Poverty?"

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 256-257.

*“One of the reasons why Christianity spread so rapidly during the first three centuries was the dignity and worth it afforded to women.”*

are placed under the umbrella of “patriarchy,” which is never defined. Where abuse is challenged, Haddad nearly always references women opposing that abuse. Men, it seems, cannot be trusted to oppose violence and injustice against women.

Haddad fails to clearly acknowledge that today, the countries where women are held back, forbidden an education, married off as children, and subjected to systematic abuses such as honor killings and genital cutting are those countries where Christianity is disallowed. She fails to celebrate the God-honoring account of how true followers of Christ (men and women) have worked to uphold human dignity throughout the centuries. This has had a transformative effect on whole nations. It has been the single most important factor in the elevation of female dignity.<sup>8</sup>

Greek and Roman society was infused with the assumption that women are inferior. But not just women. It was socially acceptable for male freemen to use women, young men, children, and slaves for their own gratification — the level of sexual violence is indescribable. At the time of Christ’s birth, male citizens in the Roman Empire enjoyed *patria potestas*. This was the absolute right of life and death over their wives and children (and slaves). One of the reasons why Christianity spread so rapidly during the first three centuries was the

<sup>8</sup> James, *God’s Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion*, chapter 1; James, *How Christianity Transformed the World*, chapters 5 and 8.

dignity and worth it afforded to women. In a culture where female infants were regularly exposed and killed, and fathers routinely gave away their daughters as child brides, as Christianity spread, each of these abuses was outlawed. With the expansion of Christianity, an ethic of monogamy and fidelity prevailed as well, and many of the worst excesses of sexual exploitation were restrained. The sexual slavery endemic in the ancient world was dispelled by the advance of Christianity. It's advancing again today, not because of Christianity, but fuelled by the global pornography industry, which Christians oppose.

Christians have historically regarded universal literacy as essential so that everyone could read the Scriptures for themselves. The Reformer Martin Luther believed that it was a crime for parents not to ensure the education of their children. During the Reformation in Europe, there was a surge in the building of girls' schools in Protestant areas. One example from what Haddad would consider a "patriarchal" Christian society is Anna Maria Van Schurman (1607–1678), who was a skilled linguist, with knowledge of thirteen languages. Brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church, in 1638 she published a treatise on the need for women to be educated: "Ignorance is not fitting for a Christian woman," she wrote.<sup>9</sup>

Considering the mission movement and the expansion of Christianity worldwide, one of the first indicators of Christian influence was the provision of education for girls as well as boys. Haddad doesn't mention missionaries such as Ann Judson or Fidelity Fiske, who promoted female education *and* upheld biblical teaching relating to the complementarity of the sexes.

Ann Judson sailed from America for Burma in 1813. With her husband Adoniram, she pioneered Christian mission in Burma, but she especially focused on educating girls. Ann believed that Christian education for women was the means by which Asian females could be liberated from what was all too often a degraded and miserable life.<sup>10</sup>

In 1843, Fidelity Fiske travelled from America to Persia (now Iran) to pioneer female education.<sup>11</sup> After sixteen

<sup>9</sup> Sascha O. Becker and Ludger Wößmann, "Luther and the Girls: Religious Denomination and the Female Education Gap in 19th Century Prussia", IZA Discussion Paper No. 3837, November 2008, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp3837.pdf> (accessed 27 March, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Sharon James, *Ann Judson: A Missionary Life for Burma* (Darlington, Evangelical Press, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> D. T. Fiske, *The Cross and the Crown*; or, *Faith Working by Love: The Life of Fidelity Fiske, Missionary to Persia 1843-1858* (reprint, Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2005), 91-92.

years she had established a successful school for girls, and the lives of many women had been transformed. Returning to America, she continued to promote female education.

William Carey, the “father of modern missions,” together with his fellow missionaries, set up the first schools for girls in what is now India. By means of female education, they hoped to break the practice of marrying off little girls from infancy onwards. If women were educated and able to earn a living, this would break the practice of widow burning, which was practised partly because widows were regarded as an economic liability (they were forbidden to earn a living *and* forbidden to remarry). Carey campaigned ceaselessly against the practice of widow burning. One of his great allies in England was William Wilberforce. The practice was finally outlawed in India in 1829.

Over the centuries, those who have been willing to sacrifice their lives to try to protect women from abusive cultures have been Christian missionaries.

We could also consider the impact that revival has on communities. Whole communities in eighteenth-century England were transformed by evangelical revival. Men who had previously been addicted to alcohol, violence, gambling, and other behaviors destructive to family life were converted to biblical Christianity. It was their wives and children who benefited most. Haddad fails to acknowledge the contribution to the dignity of women played by social reformers such as Hannah More and Josephine Butler — among others — who maintained the biblical teaching on the complementarity of the sexes.

## CONCLUSION

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Today it is impossible to ignore the real cost to women of the false claims of modern feminism.<sup>12</sup> It is disappointing, then, that Haddad uncritically supports “gender equality” and “women’s rights” programs which work *against*

12 Non-Christian writers who acknowledge the harms of modern feminism include Laura Perry, *The Case against the Sexual Revolution* (Cambridge: Polity, 2022) and Mary Harrington, *Feminism Against Progress* (London: Forum, 2023).

female flourishing.<sup>13</sup> The greatest single factor throughout history in the elevation of the dignity of women has been the promotion of biblical Christianity. This is the good news story that Haddad lamentably fails to tell. ✕

13 See footnote 2.

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Himself is God;  
It is He who has made  
us, and not we ourselves;  
We are His people and the  
sheep of His pasture.*

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