

**GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE:
WHY I NOW BELIEVE THERE
ARE MORE THAN TWO**

Wayne Grudem

**HUMANITY AS THE DIVINE
IMAGE IN GENESIS 1:26-28**

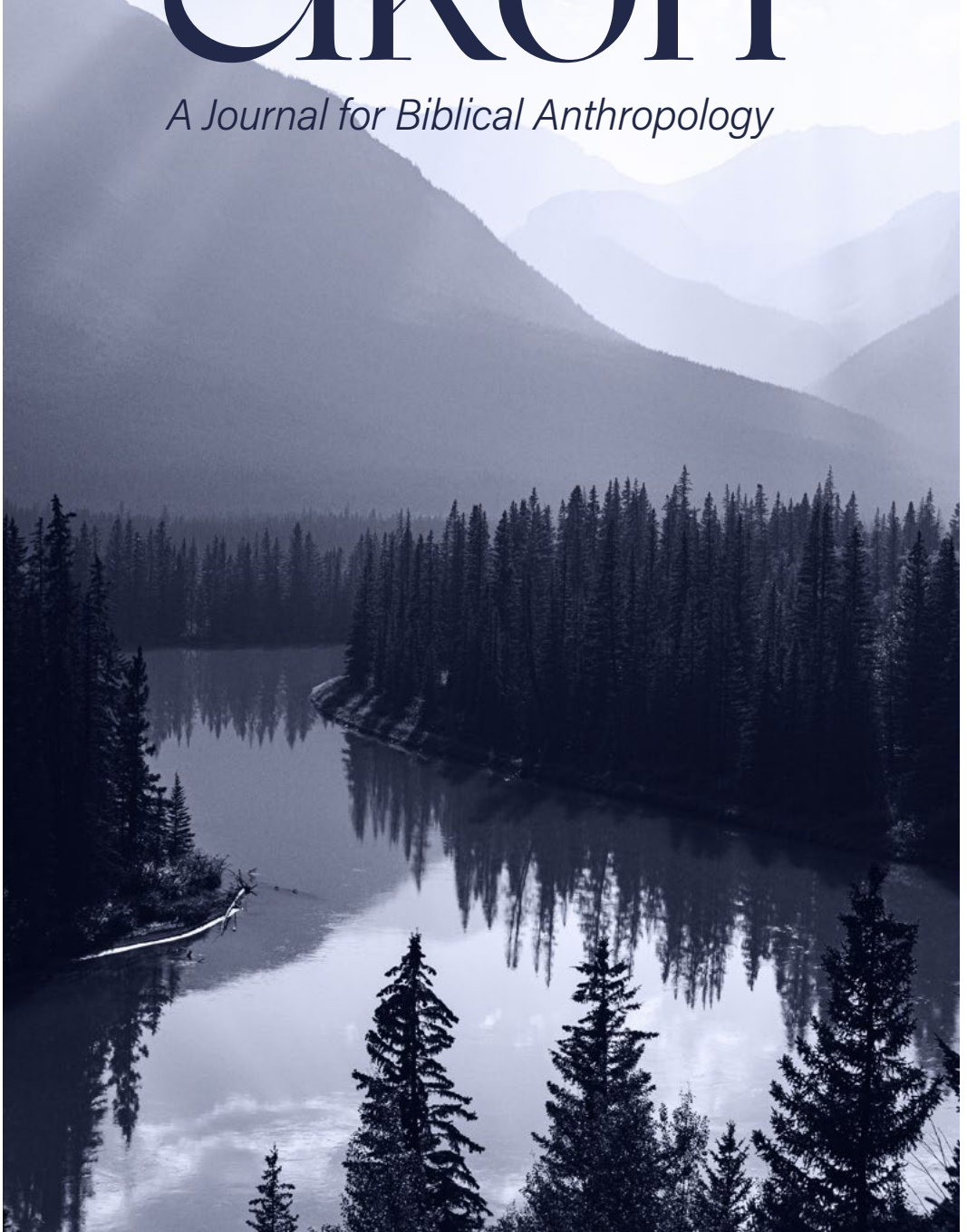
Peter Gentry

**RECOVERING FROM
BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND
WOMANHOOD**

Reviewed by Andrew Naselli

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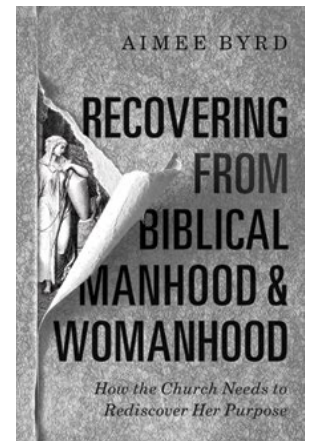
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ANDREW DAVID NASELLI

Does Anyone Need to Recover from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood?

John Piper and Wayne Grudem edited *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* in 1991, and now Aimee Byrd has written *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* some thirty years later.¹ Byrd, an influential author, speaker, blogger, and podcaster,² claims to be recovering from so-called “biblical manhood and womanhood.” For the past several years on her podcast and blog, Byrd has been criticizing the version of complementarianism that leaders such as John Piper teach. (The term *complementarianism* summarizes the theological view of the Danvers Statement and conveys that men and women are both *equal* in value and dignity and beneficially *different*.)³ Byrd has developed and expanded those critiques in her latest book.



Aimee Byrd. *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.

¹John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991); Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020). Piper and Grudem's book is 575 pages, and Byrd's book is 240. Thanks to friends who examined a draft of this article and shared helpful feedback, especially Denny Burk, Tim Challies, Kevin DeYoung, Abigail Dodds, Sam Emadi, Caleb Figgers, Phil Gons, Pam Larson, Steven Lee, Jonathan Leeman, Charles Naselli, Jenni Naselli, Joe Rigney, Colin Smothers, Justin Taylor, Joe Tyrpak, Mark Ward, and Steven Wedgeworth.

²Zondervan's website says, "Aimee is author of several books, including *Housewife Theologian* (P&R, 2013), *Theological Fitness* (P&R, 2015), *No Little Women* (P&R, 2016), and *Why Can't We Be Friends?* (P&R, 2018). Her articles have appeared in *First Things*, *Table Talk*, *Modern Reformation*, *By Faith*, *New Horizons*, *Ordained Servant*, *Harvest USA*, and *Credo Magazine* and she has been interviewed and quoted in *Christianity Today* and *The Atlantic*. She is the cohost of *Mortification of Spin* podcast [with Carl Trueman and Todd Pruitt] for The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and regularly blogs there as well. Aimee and her husband have three children and reside in Brunswick, Maryland." <https://zondervanacademic.com/products/recovering-from-biblical-manhood-and-womanhood> (accessed March 14, 2020).

³See <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>.

Is Byrd's case compelling? I don't think it is. To demonstrate that, I proceed in three steps: (1) *Summarize the argument*. What is the gist of Byrd's book? (2) *Provide some context*. Where does Byrd's book fit on the spectrum of views on men and women? (3) *Evaluate the book*. Is Byrd's book fair and sound?

1. SUMMARY:

WHAT IS THE GIST OF BYRD'S BOOK?

Byrd doesn't explicitly state her book's thesis. Here's my attempt to paraphrase her basic argument: *So-called "biblical manhood and womanhood"—especially as John Piper and Wayne Grudem teach it—uses traditional patriarchal structures to oppress women*. Byrd argues that "biblical manhood and womanhood" is not all biblical. A lot of it is unbiblical. A lot of it is based on cultural stereotypes that wrongly restrict women and thus prevent them from flourishing.

Byrd uses yellow wallpaper as her main metaphor throughout the book. She draws this metaphor from *The Yellow Wallpaper*, an 1892 novel and semi-autobiography by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a utopian feminist. In Byrd's book, the yellow wallpaper symbolizes how "biblical manhood and womanhood" oppresses women:⁴

Today the church's yellow wallpaper manifests itself in much of the current teaching on so-called "biblical manhood and womanhood." . . . We often don't see the yellow wallpaper because it was established as a hedge against real threats to God's people. I believe that is the case with a lot of the teaching on biblical manhood and womanhood. . . . And even though the teaching may have good intentions behind it, it is damaging. . . . This kind of teaching chokes the growth of God's people. . . . The gender tropes of biblical manhood and womanhood . . . keep us trapped in the yellow wallpaper. (19, 21, 22, 229)⁵

Byrd's book proceeds in three parts. In Part 1 (31–95), Byrd argues that we need to recover the way we read Scripture—especially by emphasizing parts that have women-centered perspectives. "Liberal radical feminists like to regard our canon of Scripture as

a 'hopelessly patriarchal construction,'" and Byrd wonders if the way conservative evangelicals "market customized devotions to women sends that same message" (37). "When we examine Scripture, we find that it isn't a patriarchal construction. And we find that it is not an androcentric text that lacks female contribution. In fact, we find that the female voice is important and necessary" (42–43). The book of Ruth, for example, "demolishes the lens of biblical manhood and womanhood that has been imposed on our Bible reading and opens the doors to how we see God working in his people" (49). "The female voice is needed in Scripture. . . . In Ruth men and women see that sometimes we need a different set of eyes to see the fuller picture" (54). In the Bible, "Women aren't left out. They aren't ignored; they are heard. They are more than heard; they contribute" (68).

In Part 2 (99–178), Byrd argues that we must recover our mission through church-based discipleship. The aim of discipleship is not biblical manhood and womanhood.

Byrd qualifies,

There are plenty of helpful teachings in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, written by authors who have benefited the church in numerous ways. This is what makes the troubling teaching all the more disconcerting. I'm not saying that everything the authors have contributed is bad. It's because they have offered so many good contributions to the church that we need to be all the more discerning of their influence on us. (100)

The most serious "troubling teaching" is that God the Son eternally submits to God the Father (100–103 et al.). When Byrd hears complementarian leader Owen Strachan assert, "The gospel has a complementarian structure," she responds, "The implication is that anyone who does not subscribe to his teaching on complementarity, the teaching that directly connects ESS [eternal subordination of the Son] to 'biblical' manhood and womanhood, is denying the gospel. I firmly disagree. This is exactly why I cannot call myself a complementarian" (121).

⁴In Gilman's story a woman is having continuous nervous breakdowns, and her doctor drives her mad by prescribing that she abstain from any mental, social, or physical activity. Her husband requires her to stay in a room that has yellow wallpaper that is ripped in various spots. She fixates on that yellow wallpaper and thinks that a woman is trapped inside it. She finally pulls most of it off the wall and exults that her husband therefore can't put her back. Her husband faints when he sees what she has done, and the book ends by her stepping over her fainted husband.

⁵All page numbers in the body refer to Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

Another troubling teaching for Byrd is to define masculinity as leading and providing for and protecting women and to define femininity as affirming and receiving and nurturing strength and leadership from worthy men. Byrd writes,

Nowhere does Scripture state that all women submit to all men. My aim in life is not to be constantly looking for male leadership. And it's very difficult for a laywoman like me, who does see some theological teaching for God outfitting qualified men for an office to see this kind of reductive teaching and call it complementarianism. Perpetuating this constant framework of authority and submission between men and women can be very harmful. My femininity is not defined by how I look for and nurture male leadership in my neighbors, coworkers, or mail carriers. I am not denying the order needed in both my personal household and in the household of God, but I do not reduce the rights and obligations in a household to mere authority and submission roles. Paul teaches mutual submission among Christians even as he addresses husbands and wives specifically. I uphold distinction between the sexes without reduction, as Scripture does. (105)

It is unhelpful, Byrd argues, to sharply distinguish between feminine and masculine virtues (106–9). “In Scripture we don't find that our ultimate goal is as narrow as biblical manhood or biblical womanhood, but complete, glorified resurrection to live eternally with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (109). Christ presents virtues for us “in the Sermon on the Mount, which is surprisingly not a gendered pursuit” (109). “There are no exhortations in Scripture for men to be masculine and women to be feminine.” (The translation “act like men” in 1 Corinthians 16:13 is unhelpful [111–12].) “Christian men and women don't strive for so-called biblical masculinity or femininity, but Christlikeness” (114). “The word *complementarian* has been hijacked by an outspoken and overpublished group of evangelicals who flatten its meaning and rob it of true beauty and complementarity” (124).

Church leaders must do a better job at proactively “equipping women well in the church as competent allies to the men” (145). Byrd argues that Paul embraced reciprocity with women by placing himself under Phoebe, who was a leader and ally in a patriarchal culture (148).

Byrd warns,

Parachurch often reinforces bad gender tropes, outfitting and amplifying many of the divisions between men and women in the church. . . . When parachurch organizations such as CBMW [the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood] develop their own confessional statements [such as the Danvers and Nashville Statements], we need to ask if they are replacing the church as an interpretive community in this way. (169)

Byrd explains why she is hesitant to recommend the Nashville Statement:⁶ “CBMW also hasn't retracted any of the hyperauthoritarian, hypermachismo teaching about manhood and their hypersubmissive and stereotypical teaching about womanhood. Instead, I have seen much more of the same by some of their popular leaders” (172).

⁶See <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>.

In Part 3 (181–235), Byrd argues that we should recover the responsibility of every believer, which entails giving women more prominent roles to teach and lead both men and women in the church:

Under the ostensible banner of “complementarianism” women are told they may learn alongside men but are to continuously be looking for, affirming, and nurturing male authority. Many churches thus limit, in ways they do not limit for laymen, the capacity for laywomen to learn deeply and to teach. The consensus is that men are the necessary teachers in the church. While some give the nod for women to teach other women and children, they are sending the message that this is ancillary work to be done. Are the laywomen disciples in your church serving in the same capacity as the laymen? . . . Biblical manhood and womanhood isn't so biblical if women in the early church were able to contribute more than they may today. (188, 202)

So in her book Byrd basically argues that so-called “biblical manhood and womanhood” wrongly restricts women and that women will better flourish if conservative evangelical churches remove what she believes to be unbiblical restrictions (such as not allowing women to teach the Bible in Sunday School classes to adult men and women).

2. CONTEXT:

WHERE DOES BYRD'S BOOK FIT ON THE SPECTRUM OF VIEWS ON MEN AND WOMEN?

Before I evaluate Byrd's book, it would be helpful to locate where her book fits on the spectrum of views on men and women. One way to lay out the spectrum from far left to far right might be something like this:

- LGBTQ+ activism
- radical feminism (e.g., Virginia Ramey Molenkott)
- reformist feminism (e.g., Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza)
- evangelical feminism or egalitarianism (e.g., Christians for Biblical Equality)⁷
- complementarianism (e.g., The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood)⁸
- authoritarianism (i.e., males selfishly abusing authority—what my fellow pastor Jason Meyer calls hyper-headship)⁹

As complementarianism has matured over the past thirty years, complementarians now hold some significantly different viewpoints and leanings and theological instincts. Two versions of complementarianism are now distinguishable: narrow and broad.¹⁰ (See Table 1.)

⁷On CBE, see <https://www.cbeinternational.org/content/cbes-mission>. On the above three categories of feminism (radical, reformist, and evangelical), see Margaret E. Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). According to Köstenberger, radical feminism rejects the Bible and Christianity because of their patriarchal bias; reformist feminism uses the Bible as a means to reconstruct “positive theology” for women; and evangelical feminism says that the Bible, rightly interpreted, teaches complete gender equality (see her table on p. 23).

⁸On CBMW, see <https://cbmw.org/about/mission-vision/>.

⁹Jason Meyer, “A Complementarian Manifesto against Domestic Abuse,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 2 December 2015, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-complementarian-manifesto-against-domestic-abuse>. For another way to lay out the spectrum, see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 54–55.

¹⁰Kevin DeYoung coined the broad-versus-narrow terminology at a private meeting for Together for the Gospel speakers in January 2018. The first article I'm aware of that uses these labels is Jonathan Leeman, “A Word of Empathy, Warning, and Counsel for ‘Narrow’ Complementarians,” *9Marks*, 8 February 2018, <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-word-of-empathy-warning-and-counsel-for-narrow-complementarians/>. It is difficult to sharply distinguish two distinct positions, but a pattern seems to be emerging. See Denny Burk, “Can Broad and Narrow Complementarians Coexist in the SBC?,” *Denny Burk*, 3 June 2019, <https://www.dennyburk.com/can-broad-and-narrow-complementarians-coexist-in-the-sbc/>; Jonathan Leeman, “Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning,” *9Marks Journal* (2019): 8–32.

*"Two versions of
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TABLE 1. NARROW VS. BROAD COMPLEMENTARIANISM

	NARROW (OR THIN) COMPLEMENTARIANISM	BROAD (OR THICK) COMPLEMENTARIANISM
MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD	Men and women are equally in God's image, biologically different, and complementary. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Narrow application:</i> God requires men and women to relate differently to each other in only two specific areas: marriage (a husband is the head of his wife) and ordination (only men may be elders/pastors). • Reluctant to define manhood and womanhood • Reluctant to specify differences between men and women beyond the obvious biological ones • Quick to point out that broad complementarians typically include cultural stereotypes in their definitions • Reluctant to treat manhood and womanhood as significant for Christian discipleship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Broad application:</i> The way God created and designed males and females applies in some way to all of life in the home, church, and society. • John Piper: "At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships. At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships."¹¹ • Matt Merker: "Biblical masculinity is displayed in a sense of benevolent responsibility to tend God's creation, provide for and protect others, and express loving, sacrificial leadership in particular contexts prescribed by God's word. Biblical femininity is displayed in a gracious disposition to cultivate life, to help others flourish, and to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in particular contexts prescribed by God's Word."¹² • Bobby Jamieson: Manhood and womanhood are "the potential to be a father or mother, in both biological and metaphorical senses. . . . To father is not only to procreate but to provide, protect, and lead. To mother is not only to nurture life physically but to nurture every facet of life, to care comprehensively and intimately."¹³
MARRIAGE	A husband should lovingly lead his wife (which entails unselfishly and sacrificially serving her), and a wife should submit to her husband (which entails gladly and intelligently following him). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to emphasize "mutual submission" and not that a husband has authority • Tends to be more open to a mother pursuing vocations outside the home while putting the children in daycare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to emphasize that a husband leads and that a wife submits • Tends to advocate living on the husband's income so that a mother can better nurture the children at home, especially when they are young
CHURCH	Only qualified men should be ordained. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An unordained woman may do anything an unordained man may do (e.g., teach an adult Sunday school class to men and women). 	Only qualified men should teach and exercise authority over the church. This includes the <i>function</i> and not merely the <i>office</i> of elder/pastor.
SOCIETY	Reluctant to specify how men and women should function differently in society	The different ways that God designed men and women apply to how men and women function in society. For example, some vocations are appropriate for males only (e.g., military combat)

TABLE 1. NARROW VS. BROAD COMPLEMENTARIANISM (CONT.)

	NARROW (OR THIN) COMPLEMENTARIANISM	BROAD (OR THICK) COMPLEMENTARIANISM
THEOLOGICAL INSTINCTS, INTUITIONS, AND BURDENS¹⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The biggest problem facing the church's understanding of manhood and womanhood today is that men abuse their authority in the home and church. So we should emphasize that men and women are equal. • Affirms but does not emphasize that men and women are different and that God has given men authority in the home and church • Tends to criticize broad complementarianism rather than to make a positive case for complementarianism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agrees that we should emphasize that men and women are equally made in God's image and that it is sinful for men to abuse their authority. Sinful men and women use any advantage they have to get their way (e.g., privilege, wealth, strength, beauty, brains). Men abusing their authority has been a perennially urgent and major problem since Adam and Eve first sinned. • The most generationally urgent problem facing the church's understanding of manhood and womanhood today is that our culture rejects God-designed differences between men and women. So while our culture is emphasizing an unbiblical androgyny and egalitarianism, Christians should emphasize that God has made men and women with complementary differences and that God has given men authority in the home and church.¹⁵
THEOLOGICAL METHOD	Tends to be more biblicist: narrowly affirms that God requires men and women to relate differently to each other in only two areas (marriage and ordination) because the Bible explicitly addresses those areas	Tends to include nature: broadly affirms different roles for men and women because of exegesis, theology, and natural revelation ¹⁶

¹¹John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined according to the Bible," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 35–52.

¹²Matt Merker, ed., "Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: Biblical Foundations for Gender" (Capitol Hill Baptist Church, 2018), <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/biblical-manhood-womanhood/>.

¹³Bobby Jamieson, "Book Review: *On the Meaning of Sex*, by J. Budziszewski," *9Marks Journal* (2019): 255–66, esp. 264–65.

¹⁴Leeman explains that one's cultural context can affect our intuitions: "In the home, for instance, one husband and wife will read the Bible and feel burdened for the wife to remain at home while the children are young, while another Christian couple won't. What's the difference? The two couples have different instincts based on how they were raised, the friend groups they keep, the church they attend, the decade they occupy, the social class they occupy, and what's generally treated as 'normal' around them." Leeman, "Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning," 14.

¹⁵For a biblical understanding of authority and equality, see Leeman, "Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning," 19–24. E.g., "Godly authority . . . is seldom an advantage to those who possess it. . . . Those 'under' that authority often possess most of the advantages. They're provided protection and opportunity, strength and freedom. . . . Godly equality feels no threat from God-given roles, responsibilities, and even hierarchies. It delights in difference, trusting that every God-assigned distinction possesses purpose and contributes to the countless refractions of his glory. It doesn't assume that God's assignments of different stewardships and stations, responsibilities and roles, undermines equality. Rather it views them as so many parts of one body, each part purposed with doing the work of the whole body" (pp. 21, 23).

¹⁶See Joe Rigney, "With One Voice: Scripture and Nature for Ethics and Discipleship," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.1 (2019): 26–37. Cf. Matthew Mason, "The Authority of the Body: Discovering Natural Manhood and Womanhood," *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 4.2 (2017): 39–57.

Here are four clarifying thoughts on Table 1:

1. CBMW is an organization that prominently represents complementarianism—both narrow and broad (though most CBMW leaders are probably broad complementarians). *Complementarianism* summarizes the theological view of the Danvers Statement. According to Denny Burk (CBMW's current president), John Piper drafted the Danvers Statement, and Piper, Wayne Grudem, and some others coined the term *complementarianism* in 1988. Burk then argues that the Danvers Statement itself is *mere complementarianism*—that is, what all complementarians affirm.¹⁷

2. Both narrow and broad complementarians affirm that women may teach in various ways. Grudem, for example, lists four areas:

Not all teaching is prohibited: Other kinds of teaching and speaking by women that Scripture views positively. [1] *Acts 18:26: Explaining Scripture privately, outside the context of the assembled congregation. . . . This passage gives warrant for women and men to talk together about the meaning of biblical passages and to "teach" one another in such settings.* A parallel example in modern church life would be a home Bible study where both men and women contribute to the discussion of the meaning and application of Scripture. In such discussions, everyone is able to "teach" everyone else in some sense, for such discussions of the meaning of the Word of God are not the authoritative teaching that would be done by a pastor or elder to an assembled congregation, as in 1 Timothy 2. Another modern parallel to the private conversation between Priscilla and Aquila and Apollos would be *the writing of books on the Bible and theology by women. . . .* [2] *1 Corinthians 11:4–5: Praying and prophesying in the assembled congregation. . . .* [3] *Titus 2:3–5: Women teaching women. . . .* [4] *John 4:28–30 and Matthew 28:5–10: Evangelism.*¹⁸

3. It might be helpful to suggest some examples of current proponents of narrow and broad complementarianism. Narrow complementarians probably include J. D. Greear,¹⁹ Kathy Keller,²⁰ and Beth Moore. Broad complementarians include Denny Burk, Kevin DeYoung,²¹ Abigail Dodds, John Piper, and Tom Schreiner.

4. There's a spectrum within narrow complementarianism and within broad complementarianism, and sometimes it is challenging to distinguish someone as either narrow or broad.²² For example, John Piper is broad, and Wayne Grudem is narrower but not quite as narrow as the narrow complementarian column in Table 1. Piper and Grudem speak differently about the role of men and women in society. Piper more broadly applies what the Bible and nature teach by arguing that it is not fitting for a woman to be a police officer or a drill sergeant.²³ Grudem is uncomfortable arguing that way:

We cannot assume that the general pattern of restricting *civil government* leadership over the people of God to men would also apply to the New Testament age, where the civil government is separate from the government of the church. The positive examples of women involved in civil leadership over nations other than Israel (such as Esther and the Queen of Sheba) should prevent us from arguing that it is wrong for women to hold a governing office. . . .

¹⁷See Denny Burk, "Mere Complementarianism," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.2 (2019): 28–42.

¹⁸Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 75–78.

¹⁹J. D. Greear, "One in Christ Jesus: The Role of Women in Ministry at The Summit Church," 15 March 2019, <https://jdgreear.com/blog/can-women-teach-in-the-church/>.

²⁰Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry*, Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

²¹Kevin DeYoung, "How Are Men and Women Different?," *9Marks Journal* (2019): 147–57.

²²Leeman qualifies, "Many complementarians defy easy categorization as either fully broad or fully narrow. A person might combine both broad and narrow instincts in both. For instance, writer and speaker Jen Wilkin talks at length about design differences (broad). She is unafraid to fill in the blanks on 'Men are ___' and 'Women are ___' and builds her argument for single-sex learning environments off of those differences. Yet she also pushes hard at programmatizing female leadership in the church without necessarily defining the nature of that leadership (narrow)." Leeman, "Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning," 13–14. See J. T. English, ed., "The Role of Women at The Village Church," 2018, https://d1nwfrzxhi18dp.cloudfront.net/uploads/resource_library/attachment/file/937/Institute_-_2017_-_The_Role_of_Women_at_The_Village_Church-Long-Paper.pdf. That PDF is 64 pages; for a 3-page condensed version, see <https://www.thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Beliefs/Institute%20-%202017%20-%20The%20Role%20of%20Women%20at%20The%20Village%20Church%20-%20Condensed%20Version.pdf>. J. T. English and Jen Wilkin label their view "generous complementarianism" in a May 16, 2019 podcast: <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/podcasts/44-a-generous-complementarianism>.

²³John Piper, "Should Women Be Police Officers?," *Desiring God*, 13 August 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-women-be-police-officers>. Cf. Rigney, "With One Voice," 36–37; Rigney argues, "There are some things that we need the Bible for. Nature will not tell you that Christ died for sinners and calls you to repentance and faith. You need a Bible for that. But you do not need a Bible to know what a man is, and what a woman is, and what marriage is, and what sex is for. Such things are a part of natural revelation and are sufficiently clear to all men everywhere that our refusal to acknowledge them will condemn us on the last day. . . . In my judgment, one of the crying needs of the hour is for Christians to know in their bones that our view of men and women and marriage and sexuality is not simply the product of Bible verses, but is itself natural, normative, and universally binding on all people because we live in the world God made. It's incumbent upon pastors and teachers to instruct the church of God, not only what the Scriptures require, but to point to the reasons beneath the rules that make God's written laws intelligible and reasonable. Our social context—what we often call the World—can easily deceive us here. Because the World is moving in one direction, we begin to feel that we are the weird ones. We are the outliers. We begin to believe the propaganda that we are the last holdouts on the wrong side of history. But we're not the weird ones. Not just God in his Word, but all of heaven and earth testifies to God's design for men and women and marriage and sexuality."

We are simply to obey the Bible in the specific application of these principles. What we find in the Bible is that God has given commands that establish male leadership in the *home* and in the *church*, but that other teachings in His Word give considerable freedom in other areas of life. We should not try to require either more or less than Scripture itself requires.²⁴

Some within broad complementarianism are broader than John Piper. For example, Michael Foster and Bnonn Tennant reject the term *complementarianism* and prefer the term *patriarchy*—that is, “the doctrine that men are made to rule in behalf of their Father, and that this naturally begins in their houses, and continues out into the larger houses of nations and churches.”²⁵ The label *patriarchy* captures the concept of authority, but most complementarians agree it has insurmountably negative connotations.²⁶

Within narrow complementarianism, some are narrower than others. For example, some affirm that God requires men and women to relate differently to each other in marriage, but they are neutral regarding whether women may be elders/pastors.²⁷

So where does Byrd’s book fit on the spectrum of views on men and women? Her book addresses an in-house debate among complementarians, though she identifies with neither complementarianism nor egalitarianism. She seems to overlap with parts of both views. By affirming male-only ordination she overlaps with narrow complementarianism, but many of her arguments overlap with egalitarianism. She argues in line with Rachel Green Miller’s *Beyond Authority and Submission* (for which Byrd wrote the foreword).²⁸ Both Miller and Byrd write their ex-complementarian books from within “the complementarian camp” so to speak since both Miller and Byrd are members of churches in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church denomination.

3. EVALUATION: IS BYRD’S BOOK FAIR AND SOUND?

Now we’re ready to evaluate Byrd’s book. As I evaluate it, I share the attitude that Tom Schreiner recently expressed:

I worked and studied in schools for 17 years where I was a minority as a complementarian. I thank God for evangelical egalitarians! And I thank God for complementarians who I think are slipping a bit. Still, what we do in churches is important, and I don’t want to say it doesn’t matter. It does matter, and I am concerned about the next generation. But we can love those who disagree and rejoice that we believe in the same gospel. The cultural forces are incredibly strong, and our society in my judgment overemphasizes freedom and equality, and doesn’t value sufficiently authority, obedience, and submission. Are complementarians like me too strong sometimes? Do we make mistakes in how we present our view? Of course! *Simul iustus et peccator!* But it doesn’t follow from this that the view itself is wrong.²⁹

I agree with Byrd in many areas. Here are four examples: (1) Some complementarians define masculinity and femininity in a way that is more cultural than biblical. (2) Women are indispensable, and men need to hear their perspective and learn from them. (3) Women can minister in many ways, and pastors should encourage women to study the Bible and theology just as seriously as men should. Bible studies for women should focus on exegesis and theology and not always focus on marriage and childrearing. I’m grateful Byrd has been motivating women to study the Bible and think deeply about theology. (4) A person’s local church—not parachurch organizations—should have the most disciple-shaping influence on a Christian man or woman.

Yet Byrd’s overall approach to manhood and womanhood in her book is misleading and misguided.

²⁹Cited in Burk, “Can Broad and Narrow Complementarians Coexist in the SBC?”

²⁴Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 140, 393.

²⁵See <https://itsgoodtobeaman.com/complementarianism-presupposes-androgynism/>. Cf. <https://itsgoodtobeaman.com/where-we-stand-on/>. In 2006 Russell Moore defended the term *patriarchy*. See Russell D. Moore, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Gender Debate,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 569–76.

²⁶Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Of Professors and Madmen: Currents in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship,” *Faith and Mission* 23.2 (2006): 13–14; D. A. Carson, “What’s Wrong with Patriarchy?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 14 August 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/08/14/whats-wrong-with-patriarchy/>; Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” 32–33.a

²⁷Grudem labels this “one-point complementarianism” (*Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 518–21).

²⁸Rachel Green Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church, and Society* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019). See the penetrating review by Steven Wedgworth, “A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ? A Review of Rachel Green Miller’s *Beyond Authority and Submission*,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.2 (2019): 103–15.

**3.1. MISLEADING:
BYRD MISREPRESENTS COMPLEMENTARIANISM**

To prepare for reviewing Byrd's book, I carefully reread what I think are the three most significant books that present and defend complementarianism:

Piper, John, and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991. 575 pp. (This is the ur-text of complementarianism.)

Grudem, Wayne. *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. 856 pp. (This reprints the 2004 edition that Multnomah published. It responds to egalitarian arguments clearly, concisely, and comprehensively.)

Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds. *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 415 pp. (This is the definitive analysis of a central passage that directly addresses the role of men and women in the church.)

Given the polemical title of Byrd's book, I was expecting her to make a case against complementarianism as the above books present it. I thought Byrd might write a narrow complementarian version of the egalitarian response to the Piper-Grudem book, something akin to *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*.³⁰ Or maybe a biblical-theological survey in a style similar to what the Köstenbergers wrote.³¹ I was expecting substantive arguments and counterarguments.

But Byrd doesn't address the most significant biblical texts or engage the strongest complementarian arguments. Instead, she repeatedly misrepresents complementarianism and thus knocks down straw men. (As I interact with Byrd's book, I purposely cite Piper and Grudem most often because they, as the most prominent proponents for "biblical manhood and womanhood," are the primary targets of Byrd's book. But broad complementarianism is much bigger than Piper and Grudem.)³²

Byrd Asserts That Complementarianism Teaches That All Women Must Submit to All Men

Byrd argues that John Piper's definitions of biblical manhood and womanhood "appear to say that all men lead all women. A man needs to be leading a woman, many women, to be mature in his masculinity. A woman's function is to affirm a man's, many men's, strength and leadership" (22). Byrd says over and over, "We don't find a command anywhere in Scripture for all women to submit to all men" (25; cf. 105, 109).

But complementarians don't teach that. For example, Piper writes,

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands" [1 Peter 3:1]. Notice the word *own* in "your own husbands." That means that there is a uniquely fitting submission to your own husband that is not fitting in relation to other men. You are not called to submit to all men the way you do to your husband.³³

Similarly, David Mathis, Piper's longtime assistant and one of his protégés, writes this in an article on the website of Piper's ministry: "God's call to a wife is to affirm, receive, and nurture her husband's loving leadership in marriage. Her husband is unique for her. God does not call a wife to submit to all men—no way. Only to her *own* husband (Ephesians 5:22; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1, 5)."³⁴

"..Byrd doesn't address the most significant biblical texts or engage the strongest complementarian arguments."

³⁰Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).
³¹Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).
³²Other notable resources include Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women, Equal yet Different: A Brief Study of the Biblical Passages on Gender* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1999); 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), 265-327 (also 106-10, 191-95, 264-68); Kevin DeYoung, *Freedom and Boundaries: A Pastoral Primer on the Role of Women in the Church* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2006); J. Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, *Women's Ministry in the Local Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006); Köstenberger and Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman*.
³³John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 95.
³⁴David Mathis, "The Story of Marriage in Seven Verses," *Desiring God*, 19 March 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-story-of-marriage-in-seven-verses>.

Byrd Asserts That Complementarianism Teaches That the Key Aim of Discipleship Is Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

Byrd asks, “Will Christian discipleship become irretrievably damaged if biblical manhood and womanhood are not the key aim for preaching, teaching, and discipleship?” (109). Complementarians say that biblical manhood and womanhood are *important*—especially in our cultural moment that dogmatically rejects God’s sexual ethic. But I am not aware of any who say that it is *the key aim*.

Byrd Presents a Particular View of the Trinity as Essential to Complementarianism

In June 2016, a theological debate erupted regarding whether the Father-Son relationship of authority and submission is eternal (and thus applies to the immanent or ontological Trinity) or whether it applies only to Jesus’ earthly ministry (and thus applies only to the economic or functional Trinity).³⁵ Byrd has been at the center of this debate and has argued against the eternal relations of authority and submission view of theologians such as Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware.

I agree with Byrd’s theological position on this issue. But the way she articulates it is misleading for four reasons:

1. Byrd misrepresents the eternal relations of authority and submission view when she writes, “This doctrine teaches that the Son, the second person of the Trinity, is subordinate to the Father, not only in the economy of salvation but in his essence” (101). Grudem and Ware and others who hold to eternal relations of authority and submission would not affirm that statement; they would explicitly reject it.³⁶

2. Byrd misrepresents the motives of those who teach this view when she asserts that they employ “an unorthodox teaching of the Trinity, the eternal subordination of the Son (ESS), in order to promote subordination of women to men” (100). But the motive for such a teaching is to elevate women and dignify the submission that God calls them to.³⁷ The motive for such a teaching is to attempt to explain

and apply passages about authority and submission such as 1 Corinthians 11:3: “I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”³⁸

3. Byrd implies that theologians such as Grudem and Ware are heretics and thus not genuine Christians. She argues that such theologians hold unorthodox teachings “on a first-order doctrine,” (121) and that they are “unorthodox teachers that are not in line with Nicene Trinitarian doctrine” (173). But the eternal relations of authority and submission position that Grudem and Ware defend is not heresy.³⁹

4. Byrd repeatedly writes (especially in ch. 4—pp. 99–132) as if the eternal relations of authority and submission position that Grudem and Ware defend is essential to complementarianism. I understand why some might assume it is essential since Grudem is a leading proponent of complementarianism. But some complementarians intensely criticized Grudem and Ware on this matter, and most complementarians realize that Grudem and Ware made some theological missteps—even Grudem and Ware acknowledge that!⁴⁰ More importantly, complementarianism does not stand or fall regarding whether the eternal relations of authority and submission view is true. That view is not part of the Danvers Statement, which states what all complementarians affirm. Complementarianism is not intrinsically tied to that particular view of the Trinity.

³⁵See Jack Jeffery, “The Trinity Debate Bibliography: The Complete List—Is It Okay to Teach a Complementarianism Based on Eternal Subordination?,” *Books at a Glance*, n.d., <http://www.booksataglance.com/blog/trinity-debate-bibliography-complete-list/>.

³⁶Both Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware confirmed that in emails to me on 19 March 2020.

³⁷E.g., Kathy Keller, “Embracing the Other,” in Tim Keller with Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 170–91.

³⁸Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

³⁹See R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Heresy and Humility—Lessons from a Current Controversy,” 28 June 2016, <https://albertmohler.com/2016/06/28/heresy>. Cf. Hangyi Yang, *A Development, Not a Departure: The Lacunae in the Debate of the Doctrine of the Trinity and Gender Roles*, Reformed Academic Dissertations (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018). Fred Sanders writes the foreword to Yang’s book; Robert Letham, Tom Schreiner, Robert Yarbrough, Malcolm Yarnell, and others endorse her book not necessarily because they agree with all her conclusions but because her approach is constructive and her conclusions reasonable.

⁴⁰Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), chap. 14; Bruce A. Ware, “Unity and Distinction of the Trinitarian Persons,” in *Trinitarian Theology: Theological Models and Doctrinal Application*, ed. Keith S. Whitfield, B&H Theological Review 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2019), 17–61 (also 129–37).

Byrd Implies that Complementarianism Inevitably Leads to Abuse

Byrd writes,

I hear from women who are in and who have come out of abusive situations under this kind of irresponsible teaching. When this so-called complementarian teaching, advocating such poor theology and environment for women, is presented as our design from creation and part of the gospel structure, I'm not surprised that some end up questioning their faith. (131)

Complementarianism firmly and resolutely opposes abuse. Grudem explains, "It is not biblical male leadership but distortion and abuse of biblical male leadership that leads to the abuse and repression of women. . . . Biblical male headship, rightly understood, protects women from abuse and repression and truly honors them as equal in value before God."⁴¹ Studies actually show that nominal Christianity (not complementarianism) leads to abuse.⁴²

Byrd doesn't substantively engage with John Piper's inclusion of *protecting others* in his definition of masculinity. Men protect others. That's part of what it means to be a man. Grudem explains,

Biblical support for the idea that the man has the primary responsibility to protect his family is found in Deuteronomy 20:7-8 (men go forth to war, not women, here and in many Old Testament passages); 24:5; Joshua 1:14; Judges 4:8-10 (Barak does not get the glory because he insisted that a woman accompany him into battle); Nehemiah 4:13-14 (the people are to fight for their brothers, homes, wives, and children, but it does not say they are to fight for their husbands!); Jeremiah 50:37 (it is the disgrace of a nation when its warriors become women); Nahum 3:13 ("Behold, your troops are women in your midst" is a taunt of derision); Matthew 2:13-14 (Joseph is told to protect Mary and baby Jesus by taking them to Egypt); Ephesians 5:25 (a husband's love should extend even to a willingness to lay down his life for his wife, something many soldiers in battle have done

throughout history to protect their families and homelands); 1 Peter 3:7 (a wife is a "weaker vessel," and therefore the husband, as generally stronger, has a greater responsibility to use his strength to protect his wife).⁴³

When I was teaching through 1 Corinthians to a group in my church several months ago, some of my sisters asked thoughtful questions about manhood and womanhood. One in particular was trying to put her finger on what makes a man a man and a woman a woman. How do we relate to each other differently? I shared something like this: "I relate to you as my sister in Christ. I don't lead you like I lead my wife, and you don't submit to me like my wife submits to me. But I do feel a responsibility to protect you that you shouldn't feel toward me. For example, if you and I walked out to the church's parking lot and a gunman started randomly shooting people, I would protect you with my body. That's just the kind of thing a man instinctively does." She was OK with that.

Related: Biblical manhood opposes not just domestic abuse but the cowardly activity of indulging in pornography. That is the opposite of masculinity because—among other sins—it exploits women instead of protecting them.⁴⁴

Byrd Argues against Broad Complementarianism without Substantively Engaging Its Strongest Exegetical and Theological Arguments

The strongest exegetical and theological arguments for complementarianism are rooted in texts such as Genesis 1-3; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:29-35; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; and 1 Peter 3:1-7. Byrd either fails to consider those texts, or she interacts only superficially with them. This is the most misleading aspect of Byrd's book.

⁴¹Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 490-96. Cf. John Piper, "Clarifying Words on Wife Abuse," *Desiring God*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/clarifying-words-on-wife-abuse>.

⁴²Caleb Morell, "Nominal Christianity—Not Complementarianism—Leads to Abuse," *9Marks Journal* (2019): 37-43.

⁴³Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 44.

⁴⁴See the final reason in Andrew David Naselli, "Seven Reasons You Should Not Indulge in Pornography," *Them* 41 (2016): 473-83.

(1) Genesis 1–3

Byrd interacts sparsely with Genesis 1–3, mainly to argue that the Hebrew word *ezer* refers not merely to a helper but to a necessary ally (188–89). She does not engage the best complementarian arguments. For example, Grudem lists nine arguments that demonstrate that God designed male headship in marriage before the fall.⁴⁵

- (1) *The order*: Adam was created first, then Eve.
- (2) *The representation*: Adam, not Eve, had a special role in representing the human race.
- (3) *The naming of woman*: The person doing the “naming” of created things is always the person who has authority over those things.⁴⁶
- (4) *The naming of the human race*: God named the human race “Man,” not “Woman.”
- (5) *The primary accountability*: God spoke to Adam first after the Fall.
- (6) *The purpose*: Eve was created as a helper for Adam, not Adam as a helper for Eve.
- (7) *The conflict*: The curse brought a distortion of previous roles, not the introduction of new roles.
- (8) *The restoration*: When we come to the New Testament, salvation in Christ reaffirms the creation order.
- (9) *The mystery*: Marriage from the beginning of Creation was a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church.

Embedded in those arguments are foundational principles that apply to more than just marriage (more on that below regarding 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2). Byrd does not interact with these principles.

(2) 1 Corinthians 14:29–35

Paul writes, “The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says” (1 Cor 14:34). Byrd asserts, “Many affirm that these passages [i.e., 1 Corinthians 11–14] teach a silence of the women in worship. In fact, a Biblicist reading of 1 Corinthians 14:34 can be pretty scary for women to read” (193). She gives the impression that complementarians teach that women must be absolutely silent in church meetings (193–200). She does not engage complementarian arguments that argue that Paul means *women should not audibly evaluate prophecies during church meetings*. Byrd briefly argues for that view herself, but she presents it as if she is refuting complementarianism (197). But complementarians such as D. A. Carson, Wayne Grudem, and Thomas R. Schreiner recognize that Paul cannot mean that women must never speak at all during a church meeting because in this same letter he encourages women to pray and prophesy during church meetings with their heads covered (1 Cor 11:5, 13).⁴⁷

Further, Byrd appeals to three egalitarians (Kenneth Bailey, Cythnia Westfall, and Ben Witherington III) to argue that based on the historical-cultural context of 1 Corinthians 14:34 what Paul says is not transcultural (198). Byrd does not explain what “as the Law also says” means in 1 Corinthians 14:34, nor does she harmonize her position with 1 Timothy 2:12: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.”

⁴⁵See Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 30–41; cf. 102–30. I am not including Grudem's tenth argument here (“the parallel with the Trinity”). Cf. Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), 95–112, 479–83; John M. Frame, “Men and Women in the Image of God,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 225–32, 506–8; Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” 293–313.

⁴⁶Cf. Joe Rigney, “Faithfully Naming the Past: A Theological Exploration of the Discipline of History” (MA thesis, New Saint Andrews College, 2014).

⁴⁷Cf. D. A. Carson, “‘Silent in the Churches’: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), 140–53, 487–90; Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 232–47; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 296–99.

(3) *Ephesians 5:21–33 and Colossians 3:18–19*

Byrd does not quote or cite or explain Colossians 3:18–19: “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.” And one of the few times Byrd mentions Ephesians 5:21–33 is as a proof-text for a single sentence in which she asserts with no argument, “Paul teaches mutual submission among Christians even as he addresses husbands and wives specifically” (105).

Byrd defines husbandly submission as “sacrifice of the man’s own rights and body for the protection of the temple and home and out of love for his wife” (117), and she affirms Andrew Bartlett’s defining submission in general as “humbly ranking others as more important than oneself” (230).⁴⁸ Byrd does not engage complementarian arguments that while a husband and wife should sacrificially and unselfishly love one another, Paul does not command a husband to submit to his wife; in all Greek literature the word translated *submit* refers to *being subject to someone else’s authority*.⁴⁹ The most culturally offensive element of complementarianism is authority and submission. Even egalitarians seem to want to be complementarians as long as it excludes authority and submission.⁵⁰ Steven Wedgeworth’s evaluation of Rachel Green Miller’s *Beyond Authority and Submission* applies to Byrd’s book:

Miller also devotes little time to the more complicated aspects of leadership. She encourages love, service, sacrifice, and mutual submission, but she never discusses how real-life disagreements are to be resolved. Miller presents the notion of a husband’s tie-breaking authority as one of the unhelpful notions argued for by complementarians (120). She does not explain what she would put in its place. . . . But if they ought not to think of their authority as tie-breaking authority and should not attempt to enforce their authority, how and in what way is their authority actually authoritative? Can it really be possible that submission will always come so easily, that a husband and wife will not find themselves in a significant disagreement? And how would submission that only occurs after both parties reach an agreement be different from the egalitarian position, which would

propose all disagreements be handled as negotiations apart from any singular leading authority? This does not actually follow from the Christological example, either. After all, Jesus will indeed “enforce” His authority. Without further explanation, no actual new position has been advanced.⁵¹

(4) *1 Peter 3:1–7*

Byrd does not mention 1 Peter 3:1–7. This passage directly addresses how God commands husbands and wives to relate to each other:

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Likewise, husbands, 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 3:1–7)

The commands to wives and husbands are different.⁵² Husbands and wives have different obligations that flow from their distinct identities as men and women.

⁴⁸Editor’s note: See Sharon James’s review of Andrew Bartlett’s *Men and Women in Christ* in this issue of *Eikon*.

⁴⁹Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 188–200.

⁵⁰Note the subtitle of Pierce and Groothuis’s egalitarian response to Piper and Grudem: *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*.

⁵¹Wedgeworth, “A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ?” 111–12.

⁵²See Wayne Grudem, “Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them: 1 Peter 3:1–7,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), 194–208, 499–503.

(5) 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 and 1 Timothy 2:8–15

Most astonishing of all, Byrd’s book does not address 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 or 1 Timothy 2:8–15. In 1 Timothy 2:12–14, Paul writes, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” I won’t repeat the exegetical arguments in Köstenberger and Schreiner’s *Women in the Church*. Instead, I’d like to highlight how Paul argues here.

Why does Paul prohibit a woman from the *function* (not just the *office*) of teaching or exercising authority over a man when the church gathers to worship?⁵³ Note the first word of v. 13: “For” (the Greek word *gar*). Paul gives two *reasons* for his prohibition:

1. God formed Adam first, and then he formed Eve.⁵⁴
2. Adam wasn’t deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Those are two principles that Paul cites to support his application in v. 12. *That means that these principles support other applications, too.* For example, I could say, “I do not permit my daughter to marry a woman. For [i.e., here’s the reason] God created marriage for one man and one woman.” The reason is a principle that applies to more than just that one application. It also applies to why I don’t permit my daughter to marry a snake or a donkey or a child. Paul frequently reasons this way. Here are a few other examples from Paul’s same letter:

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for [Gk. *gar*—here’s the reason, which is a principle that applies in more than one way] this is pleasing in the sight of God. (1 Tim 5:4)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For [Gk. *gar*] the Scripture says, [reason 1] “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, [reason 2] “The laborer deserves his wages.” (1 Tim 5:17–18)

In the very next paragraph after 1 Timothy 2:8–15, Paul writes that an overseer (i.e., a pastor or elder) “must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim 3:4–5). There’s a connection between a *man* leading his home and a *man* leading a church. It’s *fitting* for a man to lead.

⁵³See Denny Burk, “Should Churches Allow Women to Preach to Men?” *Denny Burk*, 8 May 2019, <http://www.dennyburk.com/should-churches-allow-women-to-preach-to-men/>; Thomas R Schreiner, “Should Women Teach (1 Timothy 2:12)?” *9Marks Journal* (2019): 104–12.

⁵⁴Cf. Marjorie J. Cooper and Jay G. Caballero, “Reasoning through Creation Order as a Basis for the Prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12,” *Presb* 43.1 (2017): 30–38.



Paul argues in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 11:7–9: “A man ought not to cover his head, since [i.e., here is the reason] he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. [Gk. *gar*—reason 1] man was not made from woman, but woman from man. [untranslated Gk. *gar*—reason 2] Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

Here are some critical questions for narrow complementarians and for egalitarians:

Why does God command wives to submit to husbands, and *why* does God command that only men teach and exercise authority over the church? Is it arbitrary? Could God have flipped a coin with men on one side and women on the other? Or is *fittingness* involved?

If fittingness is involved (which is how Paul argues in 1 Timothy 2:12–14 and 1 Corinthians 11:7–9), then does that fittingness principle apply to anything else at all beyond marriage and ordination? If not, why not?

I’m not sure how Byrd would answer the question about a wife’s submitting to her husband because she argues that a husband should also submit to his wife (see above on “mutual submission”). Here is the only argument I could find in Byrd’s book for why God commands that only men teach and exercise authority over the church:

A visitor to our church should notice a different dynamic in corporate worship from the rest of the activity of church life: God has summoned us to come and receive Christ and all his blessings. The prominent voice we should be hearing, which is spoken through the preached Word, is Christ’s. Our voices in worship are responsive to his. This is part of the apologetic in churches that hold to male-only ordination—Christ, our Bridegroom, would be best represented by a man. (231)

But *why*? Why is it most fitting for a man to teach and exercise authority over the gathered church? Does the Bible give no further reasons beyond that Jesus is male? And why is it most fitting that Jesus be male?

Broad complementarians are simply trying to argue like Paul. When John Piper considers whether it is fitting for a woman to be a police officer or a seminary professor,⁵⁵ he is trying to reason from rock-solid principles—including the *reasons* Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 and 1 Timothy 2:12–14—to particular applications in the nitty gritty of life. That doesn’t mean Piper’s applications are correct (though I think they are). But at least he’s *trying to apply biblical principles*. And instead of attempting to reason the way Paul does, Byrd ridicules Piper for being so traditional and culture-bound and unfair and disrespectful to women.⁵⁶ The reader wonders what Byrd thinks of Paul’s logic in 1 Timothy 2:12–14 and 1 Corinthians 11:7–9.⁵⁷

Contrast Byrd’s logic:

Bonus question for complementarian churches: If there are no female teaching voices in seminary, how do we expect the pastors graduating *not* to shepherd a church with a distinctly male culture? If men and women are distinct sexes, how do we train pastors to preach for and shepherd both men and women in their congregations? How do we expect them to value the female voice if they are told they should not learn from them in seminary? (235)⁵⁸

⁵⁵Piper, “Should Women Be Police Officers?”; John Piper, “Is There a Place for Female Professors at Seminary?,” *Desiring God*, 22 January 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-there-a-place-for-female-professors-at-seminary>.

⁵⁶I concede that some of Piper’s specific applications are awkward; there is room for broad complementarians to disagree on specific applications, and Piper is not infallible. But there is a way to criticize without maligning a faithful pastor who is simply trying to help God’s people faithfully live out what it means to be a man and a woman. If the way God made humans as male and female applies broadly to not just marriage and the church but to all human relationships, then should we ridicule pastors who try to faithfully apply the Bible (especially passages such as 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11) to all of life?

⁵⁷The way Byrd critiques Piper’s definitions of manhood and womanhood sounds like how feminists critique 1 Corinthians 11:8–9: “Rather than woman having a unique contribution, the biblical manhood and womanhood definitions above describe the woman’s contribution as parasitic” (Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 106).

⁵⁸When Abigail Dodds (a fellow church member and an M.A. student at my school) shared feedback on a draft of this review article, she responded to Byrd’s questions: “We expect pastors to be able to shepherd women well because they have the Holy Spirit and also because they have women in their lives (mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, friends) whom they are living with, learning from, etc. Priscillas exist in the church, and men do well to listen to them. But that does not mean women must get a paycheck or a pulpit or a formal position of authority over men in order to faithfully fulfill what God calls them to do.” See also Sam Emadi, “The Conversation behind the Conversation: How Ecclesiological Assumptions Shape Our Complementarianism,” *9Marks Journal* (2019): 44–51; Sam Emadi, “You’re Not a Healthy Church Unless You Care About Titus 2,” *9Marks Journal* (2019): 205–8.

Byrd quotes a string of New Testament passages that call God's people to teach (Col 3:16; Heb 5:12; Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:31; 14:1, 26) and concludes,

There's no qualifier in these verses, saying that men are not to learn from women or that women are only to teach their own sex and children. Any divinely ordained differences that men and women have do not prohibit women from teaching. It would be disobedient to Scripture to withhold women from teaching. (174)

Byrd asks, "Are the laywomen disciples in your church serving in the same capacity as the laymen?" (188). If not, then Byrd thinks that your church is unfairly limiting women and not treating women as equal to men. But Byrd has not proven what she asserts because she doesn't address 1 Timothy 2:12–14 and 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 and show how such passages harmonize with what she asserts.⁵⁹



⁵⁹For an instructive exchange on whether women may preach to a church under the authority of that church's elders, see John Piper, "Can a Woman Preach If Elders Affirm It?," *Desiring God*, 16 February 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/can-a-woman-preach-if-elders-affirm-it>; Andrew Wilson, "Women Preachers: A Response to John Piper," *Think*, 16 May 2015, http://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/women_preachers_a_response_to_john_piper; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Why Not to Have a Woman Preach: A Response to Andrew Wilson," *Desiring God*, 7 May 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-not-to-have-a-woman-preach>; Andrew Wilson, "Women Preaching: A Grateful Response to Tom Schreiner," *Think*, 13 May 2015, http://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/women_preaching_a_grateful_response_to_tom_schreiner; John Piper, "Should a Woman Preach Next Sunday? Digging for the Root Difference with Andrew Wilson," *Desiring God*, 19 May 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/should-a-woman-preach-next-sunday>; Jonathan Leeman, "Can Women Teach under the Authority of Elders?," *9Marks*, 22 May 2015, <http://9marks.org/article/can-women-teach-under-the-authority-of-elders/>; Mary A. Kassian, "Women Teaching Men—How Far Is Too Far?," *Desiring God*, 21 May 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/women-teaching-men-how-far-is-too-far>. Leeman insightfully explains, "What seems to be driving the different approaches to 1 Timothy 2:12 are Presbyterian versus congregationalist conceptions of teaching and authority" ("Can Women Teach under the Authority of Elders?").

3.2. MISGUIDED: BYRD SHOWS FAULTY JUDGMENT OR REASONING

In addition to misrepresenting complementarianism, Byrd's book is misguided in at least five ways.

Byrd Focuses on Stories (While Largely Ignoring Direct Teaching on Men and Women)

While Byrd never interacts with some key passages that directly and didactically address what God says about how men and women should relate to each other (e.g., 1 Cor 11:7–9; 1 Tim 2:8–15; 1 Pet 3:1–7), she spends large portions of her book "focusing on the reciprocity of the male and female voices in Scripture" (25). She conjectures about woman-centered perspectives in a small selection of Bible stories—Ruth, the Egyptian midwives in Exodus 1, Deborah, Jephthah, Rahab, and Mary and Martha (49–95, 181–88). Byrd argues, for example, that the way "the female voice functions" in the book of Ruth "demolishes the lens of biblical manhood and womanhood that has been imposed on our Bible reading and opens the doors to how we see God working in his people" (49).

Byrd repeatedly calls such episodes *gynocentric interruptions*. The reader may wonder if she thinks church life should mirror the proportions of the man-centered perspectives to the woman-centered perspectives in the Bible.

It's noteworthy that Byrd does not focus on the story that Peter tells women to remember and imitate. In that story how does the female voice function? She obeys her husband and calls him lord. That woman was Sarah, whom Peter describes as a holy woman who hoped in God and who adorned herself by submitting to her own husband (1 Pet 3:5–6).

Byrd Constructs Overimaginative and Unlikely Scenarios

In a book that responds to biblical manhood and womanhood, Byrd spends a disproportionately large space speculating about what some texts might be saying while disregarding central passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12–14 that explicitly address the issue. She presents three unrealistic arguments for why women should serve as key church leaders (190–92, 213–35):

1. Byrd argues that the women who were benefactors of house churches did not merely open their homes but helped plant and lead those churches. But her argument hinges on what it means to *lead* a church. There's a kind of leading that only the elders/pastors do. Were these women teaching the gathered church in the 1 Timothy 2:12 sense?

2. Byrd argues that Phoebe, under whose patronage Paul placed himself, delivered Paul's epistle to the Romans and therefore authoritatively taught it to men and women. Byrd does not demonstrate how this harmonizes with 1 Timothy 2:12: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." (Byrd's argument is very similar to N. T. Wright's.)⁶⁰

Piper and Grudem explain,

Paul praises Phoebe as a "servant" or "deacon" of the church at Cenchreae since, as he puts it, she "has been a patron of many and of myself as well" (Rom. 16:1-2). Some have tried to argue that the Greek word behind "patron" really means "leader." [Endnote: The Greek word *prostatis* does not mean "leader" but "helper" or "patron." In the Bible it occurs only here.] This is doubtful, since it is hard to imagine, on any account, what Paul would mean by saying that Phoebe became his leader. He could, of course, mean that she was an influential patroness who gave sanctuary to him and his band or that she used her community influence for the cause of the gospel and for Paul in particular. She was a very significant person and played a crucial role in the ministry. But to derive anything from this term that is contrary to our understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12, one would have to assume that Phoebe exercised authority over men. The text simply doesn't show that.⁶¹

3. Byrd argues that Junia in Romans 16:7 was a woman, an apostle, and likely the same person that the Gospel of Luke calls Joanna, who witnessed Jesus's empty tomb (Luke 8:3; 23:55; 24:10). But Piper and Grudem explain, (1) we can't know with certainty whether the Greek name refers to a woman (Junia) or a man (Junias); (2) the reading "They are well known to the apostles" is more likely; and (3)

the word *apostle* has various levels of authority in the New Testament and can refer broadly to a messenger or to someone serving in some kind of itinerant ministry.⁶² Schreiner assesses, "Bauckham's . . . claim [which Byrd repeats] that Junia is to be identified with Joanna (Luke 8:3) is speculative and thus unlikely."⁶³

Byrd applies Phoebe's and Junia's service to how women should have expanded teaching roles to adult men and women when the church gathers:

If Phoebe can deliver the epistle to the Romans, a sister should be able to handle delivering an offering basket. Backing it up a little more, are laypeople teaching adult Sunday school in your church? If so, are both laymen and laywomen being equipped to do that? If Junia can be sent as an apostle with Andronicus to establish churches throughout Rome, then you should at least value coeducational teaching teams in Sunday school. Do the men in your church learn from the women's theological contributions? . . . Sisters make great adult Sunday school teachers when invested in well . . . (233)

⁶⁰See Denny Burk, "Engaging a Viral Interview with N. T. Wright about Women in Ministry," *CBMW*, 25 February 2020, <https://cbmw.org/2020/02/25/engaging-a-viral-interview-with-n-t-wright-about-women-in-ministry/>.

⁶¹John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions: An Overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 36-37. This book lightly expands and updates chapter 2 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. See also Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 263-68, 660n12, 706; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 759-61.

⁶²Piper and Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions*, 58-61, 91. See also Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 223-27; Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, "Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Reexamination of Romans 16:7," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 6.1 (2001): 4-11; Al Wolters, "IOFNIAN (Romans 16:7) and the Hebrew Name Yēhunnī," *JBL* 127 (2008): 397-408; Michael H. Burer, "Ἐπίσημοι 'Ἐν τοῖς Ἀποστόλοις in Rom 16:7 as 'Well Known to the Apostles': Further Defense and New Evidence," *JETS* 58 (2015): 731-55.

⁶³Schreiner, *Romans*, 669.

Byrd Supports Her Conjectures by Citing Evangelical Feminists

To support her conjectures, Byrd interacts primarily with egalitarian works and repeatedly cites them—authors such as Richard Bauckham, Kenneth Bailey, Lynn Cohick, Kevin Giles, Carolyn Custis James,⁶⁴ Philip Payne, Cynthia Westfall, and Ben Witherington. As Byrd selectively quotes egalitarians to support her arguments, she usually assumes the egalitarian reading is correct without interacting with robust complementarian arguments.⁶⁵ This suggests that she shares many philosophical principles with egalitarianism.

Byrd Does Not Specify How Men and Women Are Different

Byrd affirms that men and women are different, but she does not specify precisely how they are different beyond being biologically male or female:

My contributions, my living and moving, are distinctly feminine because I am a female. I do not need to do something a certain way to be feminine (such as receive my mail in a way that affirms the masculinity of the mailman). I simply am feminine because I am female. (114)

I don't need to *act* like a woman; I actually *am* a woman. (120)

Byrd is correct that what makes a human a woman is that God created her female. She's right that she *is* a woman and doesn't need to *act* like a woman in the sense of *pretending* to be a woman. But is it possible for a woman to be masculine or for a man to be effeminate? Do those categories exist? Or are all biological females automatically always and only feminine, and are all biological males automatically always and only masculine?⁶⁶ Biblical womanhood refers to how women live in a way *that accords with* how God created them female. That entails living in an appropriately *feminine* way. I admit that it's difficult to define exactly what it means to be feminine and that good-intentioned Christians can wrongly bind consciences by dogmatically proclaiming specific ways that women must be feminine. But it shouldn't be controversial among Christians to affirm that women must live in an appropriately feminine way.⁶⁷

Byrd is determined not to associate any kind of subordinate role to women. She asks, "If women's key distinction from man is ontological subordination, how is she then equal to him?" (118). While complementarians don't describe their view as "ontological subordination" (it's more common to say, "Men and women are equal in value and dignity," and "men and women have different roles in marriage as part of the created order"),⁶⁸ Byrd's argument is a classic egalitarian response. She argues, "We need to stop using the word *role* in reference to permanent fixed identity" (120).

According to a typical dictionary, *role* means "the function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation." The word *role* is misleading if we think we must *pretend* to act out our maleness or femaleness—as opposed to our maleness or femaleness incorporating our entire beings. But the word *role* can be helpful if it refers to how God designed men and women—that it is a necessary entailment of how God made males and females.

This is the closest Byrd comes to specifying how men and women are different:

As we think about two ways of being human, as males and as females, do our physical differences mean anything other than the fact that women are men's sexual counterparts? What is the meaningfulness in being male and female? What is beautiful about it? It is certainly important to note that men and women are sexual counterparts—woman is not made as a sexual counterpart for woman, and vice versa. It is the union of man and woman that is considered one flesh.

⁶⁴In 2008 my wife reviewed James's book on Ruth and was concerned about her egalitarian arguments and trajectory. See Jennifer J. Naselli, "Is This Good News for Women? A Review of Carolyn Custis James, *The Gospel of Ruth*," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13.2 (2008): 79–81. Now James is unambiguously promoting an evangelical feminist view in her speaking and writing.

⁶⁵Again, Wedgworth's evaluation of Rachel Green Miller's *Beyond Authority and Submission* applies to Byrd's book: "One cannot help but notice how often Miller's biblical argumentation relies on modern commentators, including egalitarian ones. ... It may be the case that these new readings of the Scriptures are the correct ones, but that argument would need to be demonstrated. *Beyond Authority and Submission* makes no attempt to do this, and it often leaves us with more questions than answers as to what any given New Testament text means." Wedgworth, "A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ?," 112.

⁶⁶Cf. Jason S. DeRouchie, "Confronting the Transgender Storm: New Covenant Reflections on Deuteronomy 22:5," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21.1 (2016): 58–69.

⁶⁷Thanks to Abigail Dodds for helping me craft this paragraph.

⁶⁸Gudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 25–30.

And this union is fruitful. Some have written about how a woman's body is continuously preparing itself to receive and create life within herself, in contrast to how man creates life outside of himself, leading to different dispositions or "complementary roots of femininity and masculinity." In this teaching, a woman "has the disposition to receive and foster the growth of particular persons in her sphere of activity; a man has the disposition, after accepting responsibility for particular persons in his sphere of activity, to protect and provide for them." (124–25)

Byrd is quoting *The Concept of Woman* by Prudence Allen, who here "is summarizing Pope John Paul's teaching on the genius of women and men" (125n80). The final sentence above almost sounds like John Piper. Does Byrd agree with Allen?

I agree with the teaching in so far as men and women have something distinct to give. And yet both genders are called to all these virtues in our spheres of activity. So I would not want to overgeneralize every man's or woman's disposition. Even in Scripture, we see women, such as Moses's mom and sister, and Pharaoh's daughter, receiving and letting go to foster growth and protect. I wonder about being too rigid by assigning these dispositions as masculine and feminine when, for example, as a mom I intimately know how fierce my disposition to protect is. (125)

Byrd quickly moves away from thinking about how nature might have anything to do with what it means to be a man or a woman. When Byrd addresses masculinity and femininity, she seems uncomfortable. She hesitates to define and explain. She rushes to change the subject and emphasize *sameness*. She does not distinguish *headship* (which is for only men in the home and the church) from *influence* (which women should have in every sphere). She does not emphasize the *primary* roles that men have to tend God's creation and to provide for and protect others and to express loving, sacrificial leadership in various contexts. She does not emphasize the *primary* roles that women have to cultivate life and to help others flourish and to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy

men in various contexts. To paraphrase the gist of her message, "Yes, men and women have some differences—at least biologically and maybe in some other ways. But we can't be sure what those other ways are. It's more important to focus on how men and women are equal and similar." In other words, a fitting term to describe Byrd's emphasis is *functional androgyny*. She wants to emphasize *humans in general*, not humans as male and female. She intentionally underemphasizes sexual distinctions and hierarchy. And she doesn't specify what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman beyond being biologically male or female.⁶⁹

"...Christlikeness looks different in different areas"

Byrd commits a category error when she asserts, "Christian men and women don't strive for so-called biblical masculinity or femininity, but Christlikeness" (114). But Christlikeness looks different in different areas—for parents and children, for pastors and other church members, for government leaders and regular citizens, for employers and employees, and for men and women. The goal for Christians in every domain is Christlikeness, but what exactly that looks like may be a bit different for people based on a variety of factors—including whether a person is male or female. What does Christlikeness mean for a man and for a woman? Does it always mean exactly the same thing?⁷⁰

⁶⁹Byrd is inconsistent at best. On the one hand, she concedes that men and women offer "two distinct ways of being human" (124) and different "dispositions" (125) and that together they abide in "dynamic, fruit-bearing communion" (130). She rejects androgyny (19, 104, 111). On the other hand, she does not put any substance inside of those different "ways" or "dispositions." She affirms that God created us male and female and that therefore they are not identical, but like so many egalitarians and narrow complementarians, she does not say what that something is. Again, Wedgeworth's evaluation of Rachel Green Miller's *Beyond Authority and Submission* applies to Byrd's book: "Her [i.e., Miller's] position looks more like a variation of egalitarianism, albeit an egalitarianism which still restricts church ordination to men. Indeed, Miller's thesis is that there really is no such thing as 'masculinity' or 'femininity', at least not when it comes to Christian piety or vocational purpose. . . . For her, masculinity is nothing other than a person being biologically male and femininity is nothing other than a person being biologically female. Does this also mean that there are no temperamental, cognitive, behavioral, or vocational characteristics which should be associated with masculinity and femininity? Again, this is closer to the egalitarian position than the complementarian one." Wedgeworth, "A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ?," 110–11.

⁷⁰See Jonathan Leeman, "Biblical Manhood and Womanhood—or Christlikeness?," *9Marks*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.9marks.org/article/biblical-manhood-and-womanhood-or-christlikeness/>.

Byrd Uses the “Biblicist” Hermeneutic She Denounces

Byrd repeatedly accuses complementarians of “biblicism” in a derogatory sense. For example,

Rather than the passing down of the apostolic traditions and ministering Christ to us through ordinary means of grace and church accountability, the parachurch has often embraced a Biblicist method of teaching Scripture. Biblicists rightly uphold the authority of Scripture but often read the Bible with a narrow, flat lens of interpretation, zooming in on the words in the texts themselves while missing the history, context, and confessing tradition of the faith. Biblicists emphasize proof texting over a comprehensive biblical theology. What often happens unintentionally is that the Biblicist readers become their own authority, since they often don't notice they are also looking through their own lens of preconceived theological assumptions. Indeed, this is something we all need to be aware of in our Bible interpretation. The troubling teaching of biblical manhood and womanhood has thrived under this rubric of popular Biblicist interpretive methods.

I demonstrated this in chapter 4. The unorthodox teaching of the eternal subordination of the Son was conceived by Biblicist interpretive methods.⁷¹ Rather than a more systematic approach of stepping back from the words of the text “to consider the One who is present in the entirety of the text” and what we can know about him from all of Scripture, and without retrieving what has been faithfully handed down to us from centuries of the Holy Spirit's work through tradents of the faith, Biblicists employ a fundamentalist approach to God's Word that doesn't take into account how the church and the Scriptures go hand in hand. Biblicists believe that since the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, then all they need to look to is their Bible to understand what God wants to say to them. But that begs the question of how we read our Bibles. (159; cf. 27, 165, 169, 193)

We can quibble over how to define biblicism.⁷² But what's striking here is that the hermeneutic Byrd denounces is the same one she uses to defend a position that celebrates expanded leadership roles for women—a position that is relatively new and unusual in the history of the people of God, especially in the Reformed tradition of which Byrd is a part (as a member of an OPC church).⁷³ Not only do such arguments fail exegetically (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2); they are based on a narrow biblicism that fails to incorporate both natural theology and robust historical theology.

- Regarding natural revelation: What is most fitting? Do typical characteristics of men and women indicate that God has designed them to be biological and metaphorical fathers and mothers?
- Regarding historical theology: What do significant exegetes and theologians in church history say about men and women in the home, church, and society? Quotations from Chrysostom and Calvin and Luther about women could make us blush today.⁷⁴ Why has the church traditionally embraced broad complementarianism, and why are egalitarianism and narrow complementarianism relatively new? Is it possible that the spirit of our age has significantly influenced how we think about men and women?

I have a friendly suggestion for my Reformed friends who are leaning toward a narrow complementarianism: read Herman Bavinck's *The Christian Family*.⁷⁵ Reformed theologians (rightly) love Bavinck, the Dutch theologian who wrote the massive four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* (which Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* basically condenses). Byrd quotes Bavinck favorably on the doctrine of the church (136–37). Bavinck's *The Christian Family* is incredibly relevant to contemporary debates about complementarianism.

⁷¹When Steven Wedgworth shared feedback on a draft of this article, he responded to Byrd's sentence above, “Ironically, the original motivation for ESS was an extrabiblical question regarding the concept of equality. Certain complementarians were attempting to answer the feminist claim that any appearance of hierarchy would stand in contradiction to equality. The ESS advocate looked to the doctrine of the Trinity as a rebuttal to that argument. They did often treat certain Bible verses in a biblicistic way, but the most basic issue was actually philosophical.”

⁷²Cf. John M. Frame, “In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism,” *WTJ* 59 (1997): 269–318; R. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, “In Defense of Proof-Texting,” *JETS* 54 (2011): 589–606.

⁷³Editor's note: See David Talcott's article in this issue of *Eikon*, which reflects on complementarianism in church history and why the theological retrieval movement has neglected it.

⁷⁴Cf. Steven Wedgworth, “Male-Only Ordination Is Natural: Why the Church Is a Model of Reality,” *The Calvinist International*, 16 January 2019, <https://calvinistinternational.com/2019/01/16/male-only-ordination-is-natural-why-the-church-is-a-model-of-reality/>.

⁷⁵Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library, 2012).

4. CONCLUSION AND FOUR EXHORTATIONS

Here's what I've argued:

1. Summary: The gist of Byrd's book is that biblical manhood and womanhood—especially as John Piper and Wayne Grudem teach it—uses traditional patriarchal structures to oppress women.
2. Context: On the spectrum of views on men and women, Byrd's position overlaps partly with the far left side of narrow complementarianism and partly with egalitarianism.
3. Evaluation: Byrd's book is misleading because she misrepresents complementarianism, and it is misguided because she shows faulty judgment or reasoning.

I conclude with four final exhortations to my brothers and sisters who affirm complementarianism and to others who may be on the fence between complementarianism and egalitarianism:

1. Study this issue for yourself.

Many Christians today have not carefully studied for themselves what the Bible teaches about the way God created and designed males and females. Some have inherited complementarianism and are not deeply convinced that the Bible teaches it. Don't accept something simply because John Piper or Aimee Byrd or whoever says so. Carefully read and reread the Bible. Read *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, and compare how egalitarians respond in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*.⁷⁶ Survey Grudem's *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, and weigh the arguments in Köstenberger and Schreiner's *Women in the Church*. Read old voices such as Bavinck's *The Christian Family*. Read new voices such as Kevin DeYoung and Joe Rigney. Contrast Byrd's approach with writings by women such as Abigail Dodds, Elisabeth Elliot, Carolyn Mahaney, Rebekah Merkle, and Claire Smith.⁷⁷ Those refreshing voices winsomely present what the Bible teaches and cheerfully follow it as part of our Creator's good design for men and women.

2. Beware of the ditches on either side of complementarianism.⁷⁸

The ditch on the right is a version of authoritarianism or hyper-headship in which men have abused their authority and hindered a woman from flourishing. The ditch on the left is a version of egalitarianism or feminism.

Understanding these two ditches is important as we analyze why we might struggle with complementarianism. An increasingly popular view in complementarian circles right now is that we need a progressive complementarianism that is more egalitarian—or at least that is kinder, gentler, more affirming, and more liberating to women. What do we make of Christian women who testify that they need to recover *from* biblical manhood and womanhood? To recover means to return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength. If a woman genuinely needs to recover, then the problem isn't biblical manhood and womanhood. The problem is probably one of those two ditches.

Consider an analogy: What do you make of a fifteen-year-old girl who testifies that she needs to recover from overbearing parents? It's certainly possible that her parents may be sinfully domineering. It's also possible that the problem is primarily not her parents but her own rebellious attitude that is chafing against the God-given authority of her wise and loving parents.

⁷⁶Note counterarguments to that book in the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* Spring 2005 issue (101): <https://cbmw.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/10-1.pdf>.

⁷⁷Abigail Dodds, *(A)Typical Woman: Free, Whole, and Called in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); Elisabeth Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman: Notes to My Daughter on the Meaning of Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1976); Elisabeth Elliot, *The Mark of a Man* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1981); Carolyn Mahaney, *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Mahaney Whitacre, *Girl Talk: Mother-Daughter Conversations on Biblical Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Whitacre, *True Beauty* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014); Rebekah Merkle, *Eve in Exile: And the Restoration of Femininity* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2016); Claire Smith, *God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says about Men and Women* (Kingsford NSW, Australia: Matthias Media, 2012). Smith wrote *God's Good Design* after she wrote a published PhD dissertation on the topic: Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities': A Study of the Vocabulary of 'Teaching' in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, WUNT 2/335 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

⁷⁸Cf. Meyer, "A Complementarian Manifesto against Domestic Abuse."

On the one hand, the reason some women feel like they need to recover from the male leadership in their home and church is that the male authorities in their lives are abusive. Abuse is evil, and complementarians must be self-critical about whether they are tolerating it.⁷⁹ On the other hand, the reason some women may feel like they need to recover is not that their male authorities are abusive. It could be that women are rebelliously chafing against the God-given authority of godly and unselfish husbands and pastors. Or it could be that their husbands and pastors are complementarian in name only—that is, the men affirm the biblical concept but do not actively practice it; instead, they are wimpy and passive. When men characteristically fail and disappoint the women they are supposed to be leading, women may become embittered toward biblical manhood and womanhood.

3. *Discern which ditch you are more prone to fall into.*

Or as my colleague Joe Rigney puts it, a helpful diagnostic question to ask yourself is “Which slope is most slippery for you?”⁸⁰ He explains,

When it comes to complementarianism, everyone acknowledges that biblical truth can be misused and abused. The truth that men are the head of their homes (Eph. 5:25) and that wives should submit to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord (Col. 3:18) can be twisted to justify domestic tyranny, oppression, and even abuse. The truth that “there is no male and female in Christ” (Gal. 3:28) can be used to deny the glorious and complementary differences between men and women and the goodness of male headship in proper contexts.

Given what you know of your heart, your background, and your context, which error are you more prone to? Rigney suggests,

As elders and church leaders attempt to steer between the two ditches, one (though not the only) way to diagnose our particular danger is to ask a simple question: when it comes to preaching and teaching my congregation, which truth am I eager to say out loud and clearly, and which truth am I reluctant to speak, or only speak with layers upon layers of qualification and nuance? Put another way, if you want to know your danger, ask which passage in the Bible you’re eager to preach and which one you’re reluctant to preach. Which one can you preach straight down the middle, and which one do you feel the need to tread carefully with? . . . When it comes to in-house complementarian debates, we can make the question more concrete. Ask yourself, Which passage would I rather preach on: “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them?” (Col. 3:19) or “Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18)? For my own part, in our present climate, I’m willing to bet that large numbers of complementarians would be eager to preach the first sermon, summoning men to love and sacrifice for their wives like Christ did. They would preach it clearly, straight down the middle. On the other hand, there would be some fear and trepidation about preaching the second one, and everything would be handled with massive amounts of nuance and qualifications. . . . In our egalitarian age, I can imagine significantly more churches that are eager to preach Christ-like headship, and tiptoe around Sarah-like submission.

*“Which slope is most
slippery for you?”*

⁷⁹See CBMW’s “Statement on Abuse,” 12 March 2018, <https://cbmw.org/about/statement-on-abuse/>. Cf. Chris Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men Who Use Control and Violence in the Home* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2015). Albert Mohler warns complementarians of two dangerous blind spots: (1) equating complementarianism with “male superiority” and (2) “failing to correct abuses that come in the name of complementarianism.” R. Albert Mohler Jr., “The State of Complementarianism,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.2 (2019): 99–100.

⁸⁰Joe Rigney, “A Simple Question for Complementarians,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 27 December 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/simple-question-complementarians/>.

4. *Love and celebrate how God has designed men and women.*

We shouldn't be satisfied with dutifully going along with what God has revealed to us in his word even if it doesn't make sense to us. That's immature obedience. That's better than disobedience, but a mature obedience is ideal. A mature obedience understands the underlying reasons God gives for what he commands; it loves and praises God for how he brilliantly designed it all—including how he created and designed men and women.

Some complementarians think complementarianism is embarrassing. They'd rather not talk about it. They'd prefer not to emphasize or celebrate it. They hold to it reluctantly because that's what the Bible says even though it might not make sense. They believe it, but they don't love it. That's not how we should think about what God has revealed. We must not only believe whatever God reveals to be true; we should cherish it. It's not okay to say, "The Bible teaches that, but I don't like it." It's a bad sign if we want to ignore or apologize for what God has revealed in the Bible. If we have a problem understanding the nature and rationale of what God has revealed in his word, then the problem is with us—not with God and not with the truth he has revealed.⁸¹

We shouldn't reluctantly affirm biblical manhood and womanhood, nor should we follow it while thinking it seems arbitrary or even a bit illogical. We should *love* and *celebrate* biblical manhood and womanhood as good and wise and beautiful and fitting. It's how God himself designed men and women to flourish. Nobody needs to recover from it. In a culture that rejects God's design for men and women, many need to recover it. ✕

Andy Naselli is associate professor of systematic theology and New Testament for Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis and one of the pastors of Bethlehem Baptist Church.

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