

## **A Review of *Recovering From Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (Part 1)**

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### **Introduction**

A large blue paperback volume with yellowing pages sits on one of my shelves. With all the stylistic aplomb of the decade of Lisa Frank, a golden starburst adorns the cover stating, “1993 Christianity Today Book of the Year.” The book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, has served as a sort of complementarian enchriridion for the decades since. Now it would seem, at least for one author, that this oft-admired tome has outlived its usefulness. Aimee Byrd, a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, has published *Recovering From Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, a work positioned as a response to this movement spawned back in those heady days when ‘serious’ bible scholars used the NASB. With an adroit repurposing of the previous work’s title and the sort of thematic book cover that publishers dream of, this volume has quickly risen to the #1 bestseller position in Amazon’s Gender & Sexuality in Religious Studies category.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps more importantly to the reader of this review, Byrd’s work is a matter of conversation throughout both the broader evangelical world and particularly the confessional Reformed circles from which she hails.

There is no reason to bore with such a full recounting of the work as other reviewers have and no doubt will admirably supply. Suffice to say that Mrs. Byrd sees the complementarian movement (and specifically the incarnation of it associated with the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood) as having foisted a load of oppressive baggage upon Christian women, the “yellow wallpaper” which she uses as a compelling image throughout the work. In her own bold summary statement, “This book presents an alternative to all the resources marketed on biblical womanhood and biblical manhood today, focusing on the reciprocity of the male and female voices in Scripture, the covenantal aspect to Bible reading and interpretation, and bearing the fruit of that in our church life.”<sup>2</sup> In both title and declared vision, this volume is expressly committed to leaving the complementarian movement behind for something better.

### **Legitimate critiques of complementarianism**

#### *Trinitarian errors*

As much of this review will necessarily focus upon the deficiencies of Byrd’s manifesto for a new gender movement, it is appropriate to begin by highlighting those points where her critique hits home. There can be little question from those who stand within the confessional Reformed tradition that the teaching of the eternal subordination of the Son (ESS) is a grave blot on the history of the complementarian movement. A serious error in Trinitarian theology, at times manifesting in a divine tri-theism or other such unnerving language, is most certainly a legitimate reason for pause when it comes to a movement. Byrd has been critiqued<sup>3</sup> for mischaracterizing early complementarian teaching as though it were explicitly held 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 [emphasis mine].”<sup>4</sup> As she later directly references Wayne Grudem’s statement that “the orthodox doctrine has always been that there is *equality in essence and subordination in role*,”<sup>5</sup> it is my assumption that Byrd is deriving her summary of ESS more from the consequences than the express

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<sup>1</sup> An honor only somewhat tarnished by the occupant of the #2 spot at the time of this review’s writing, *Legendary Ladies: 50 Goddesses to Empower and Inspire You*.

<sup>2</sup> Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Zondervan, 2020, Kindle Edition), 25.

<sup>3</sup> <https://cbmw.org/2020/05/04/does-anyone-need-to-recover-from-biblical-manhood-and-womanhood-a-review-article-of-aimee-byrds-recovering-from-biblical-manhood-and-womanhood/>

<sup>4</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 101.

<sup>5</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 103.

phrasing of the doctrine. Of course, Grudem goes on to speak of authority and submission as “rooted in the eternal nature of the Trinity for all eternity,”<sup>6</sup> so it is probably best to reckon most of the confusion as stemming from the complementarian side. Byrd notes, “The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood has never retracted their previous teaching on eternal subordination of the Son, none of the popular books teaching it by their leaders have been retracted, nor have they retracted all their conference and journal material that teaches ESS.”<sup>7</sup> This really is one of the most salient issues raised in Byrd’s whole work, despite being relegated to an endnote. This rooting of gender roles in a particular Trinitarian theology was an integral component of complementarian discourse for several decades. Regardless of whether the complementarian position may be *theologically* separated from this teaching, it has not been *historically* separated from this teaching. When serious errors in the very doctrine of God have been a feature of one’s theological movement, the hour demands more than a gradual shift away from this teaching. Plain repudiation and warning concerning previous writings are in order and the absence thereof is no small matter of concern.

### *Women’s ministry resources*

A second area where I find broad agreement with Mrs. Byrd is in her critique of the evangelical subculture of gender-specific spiritual marketing. She takes issue with “froufrou” bible covers<sup>8</sup> and the plethora of devotional Bibles, books, and studies that are promoted as resources specifically for women. Regardless of one’s take on the complementarian movement, I think many of us inevitably reach a point where we wince at yet another flower-adorned “for women” volume on the local Christian bookstore’s shelf. When it comes specifically to Bible publishing, it’s hard to disagree when Byrd points out that gender-specific Bibles send an underlying message “that there is a men’s version and a woman’s version to read.”<sup>9</sup> At times, the women’s section of the local Christian bookstore can practically present such a two-track version of the Christian faith.

One of the most distressing realities in modern evangelicalism is aptly summarized in the following manner,

Titus 2 is often a popular text taught to promote women’s ministries. Rather than upholding the strong connection Paul is making between teaching healthy doctrine and its fruitfulness in our personal lives, the doctrine part gets ignored and women are merely delegated to a domestic sphere that is disconnected from serious theological study. The women’s ministry is often a separate faction of the church that is drowning in theologically anemic books marketed specifically to them.<sup>10</sup>

What a sad and yet accurate commentary on how many churches have handled the discipleship of women. How often have Scripture’s particular applicatory exhortations to women in their callings as wives and mothers been so removed from the greater biblical context as to become the *primary* content of teaching to women. How often has the atmosphere developed in the church’s gatherings where the women must retire to the kitchen or nursery to speak of domestic things while the men “talk theology.” It cannot be denied that a dangerous dynamic has often overtaken portions of the complementarian movement where the biblical prohibition on women becoming *teachers* of the Word (1 Tim. 2:12) becomes a practical discouragement of women becoming *students* of the Word (cf. Acts 17:11). Patrick Fairbairn rightly recognizes the connection between Paul’s practical applications and labours in doctrine when he comments on Titus 2, “Christianity is primarily, indeed, a doctrine, but only that it may be in the true sense a life; and the two can never be kept apart from each other in the public teaching of the church without imminent peril to both.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As cited in Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 103.

<sup>7</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 101, endnote 16.

<sup>8</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 115.

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Fairbairn, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2002), 270.

Far from always driving women to the latest devotional reflection on washing dishes, we in churches which value doctrine should be delighted in encouraging believing women to mine the rich depths of Christian doctrine. If we would see women live in such a way that is not “contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:8), then surely we must encourage them to imbibe both the milk and meat of biblical teaching to be fortified for their godly walks.

This is not to say that there no place for applicatory materials specifically suited to the life of the Christian woman. I would not be misunderstood as condemning applicatory reflections upon washing dishes. It is right and proper for application to be made to all of life (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31) and believers often have need of a word fitly spoken to even seemingly mundane matters. The very practical exhortations of passages such as Titus 2 call for exposition and robust engagement with how the Word speaks to various persons in the particularities of their lives. Yet it does strike me as a dangerously imbalanced when this applicatory focus is pressed into the creation of every category of gender-specific teaching resource. A feminist perspective has almost been adopted by some very conservative Christians in that theology must be explicitly retooled in a “gynocentric” manner for women to engage. While their visions of womanhood may look very different, it is strangely telling that the one unifying trait of your local radical feminist gathering and a conservative Christian women’s book study group is that they are both invariably reading a work by a woman with an explicit orientation towards women.

Conservative complementarian Christians could benefit by recognizing the dangers of developing tunnel vision with these categories. The creation of parachurch institutions such as the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood easily leads to the “when you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail” approach discussed above. While gender distinctions are certainly important, there are also categories and authority relations of parent/child, worker/employer, citizen/governor, etc. which should also be the subject of continual reflection. Over-specialization in one area of application runs the significant risk of missing important exhortations that are deemed outside the scope of the writer. As Byrd points out, a woman who primarily reads materials filtered through the lens of “womanhood” will most likely find much more help for an eating disorder than a pornography addiction.<sup>12</sup> In this manner, the odd conservative complementarian version of “gynocentrism” can actually muzzle the Scriptures from speaking.<sup>13</sup>

### *Preaching to women*

Another area of Byrd’s critique transports me back to the days of seminary preaching practicum with a fair degree of discomfort for this pastor. She raises the important challenge that “in more conservative churches, male pastors tend to be preaching more to the men.”<sup>14</sup> Now up to this point, it has been somewhat comfortable to find some agreement with Mrs. Byrd as I am not a proponent of ESS nor am I particularly involved in generating the never-ending flood of Christian women’s resources. But I am indeed a male pastor in what might be viewed as one of the most conservative Presbyterian churches in North America.<sup>15</sup> As such, I will attempt to take this critique as though it were personally addressed to my own ministry.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I recognize that men and women are uniquely more given to certain areas of sin and would not claim that this is merely a matter of cultural tropes. My point is rather that an all-encompassing perspective that focuses on what is broadly true of the genders will often miss in specific situations. A “masculine” commentary on Scripture which assumes that the reader is endowed with some significant physical strength will fail to speak to the man who through illness or other circumstances finds himself significantly weaker than most in society.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that these issues are not uniquely the province of Christian women when it comes to the conservative evangelical subculture. Any man who has ever run across the Sportsman’s Bible, been to a PromiseKeeper’s rally, or sat through a Wild at Heart study will recognize the same sorts of issues just mentioned. The “packaging” of Christian faith prominent in evangelicalism is not a gynocentric problem.

<sup>14</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 143.

<sup>15</sup> [www.presbyterianreformed.org](http://www.presbyterianreformed.org)

<sup>16</sup> I offer a word of thanks to my PRTS seminary professors for the lesson that ministers must learn to take criticism with humility, soberly assessing whether there is any ring of truth even in the most hostile of

Rather than speaking of any deficiency in the ministries of other men, I would recognize that the named tendency is one with which I myself struggle and require continual conscious effort to correct.

I have a small booklet on my shelf that I pull down from time to time in the week following a Lord's Day's preaching. In Joel Beeke's *How To Evaluate Sermons*, he provides a rigorous rubric for preachers to assess their own fidelity in their calling. Among the many diagnostic questions offered, he asks whether the preacher made "specific applications throughout the sermon relevant to people's lives?"<sup>17</sup> Beeke goes on to remark, "No sermon can do everything, but if your sermons consistently address only some people or certain topics, you may be neglecting the spiritual needs of a significant number of your hearers."<sup>18</sup> There's where the old sinking feeling comes back to the pit of my stomach. There is no question that the easy road to sermon composition is one which will leave many in my congregation unaddressed and unchallenged in their specific circumstances and callings. While it comes naturally to speak from my personal experience, a real conscious effort must be consistently employed to speak outside of my experience to the lives of other hearers sitting in the pews. As a sinner and a weak man, I confess that I have not always been as diligent in such labours as I ought. Byrd's challenge hits home and I accept it gladly.

In my own words, I would positively frame this as a challenge to preach pastorally and experimentally<sup>19</sup> to women. Charles Bridges wrote well that, "Preaching, in order to be effective, must be reduced from vague generalities, to a tangible, individual character—coming home to every man's business, and even to his bosom."<sup>20</sup> We see some examples of this brought home to the experience of women in the teaching of our Saviour himself in Matthew's Gospel. For example, one might note how it is that he considers both men and women in their family relations in Matthew 10:35, "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law." The reality of divine judgment is brought personally home to the experience of female hearers when Christ says, "Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Matt. 24:41). One might also consider how Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to ten virgins and conveys spiritual truth in the language of women's experiences. The varied examples of Christ's preaching and teaching call his ambassadors today to consider both poor and rich, young and old, and certainly male and female in their own pastoral applications.

I would, however, take issue with Byrd's citation of the findings of Dr. Valerie Hobbs.<sup>21</sup> There's an important rule that is too infrequently applied to criticisms of the church and her ministers: *If Jesus does not meet your standard, find a different standard.* As Byrd calls upon Hobbs' studies, she seems to see the following as evidence of a certain gyno-myopia in the sermons of conservative men:

1. References to named men (excluding Jesus) far outnumbered references to named women...
2. Unnamed women are also rarely mentioned compared to men...
3. There is also evidence that even supposedly gender-neutral pronouns (you, anyone, everyone, whoever, etc.) refer to men...<sup>22</sup>

The problem is that a quick survey of the teaching of Christ will leave you with the conclusion that the Lord himself suffered from this deficiency. Again turning to Matthew's Gospel, a brief survey of Christ's teaching leaves us with named references to at least Moses (Matt. 8:4), Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (8:11),

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comments. As Spurgeon once wrote, "Brother, if any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him; for you are worse than he thinks you to be."

<sup>17</sup> Joel Beeke, *How To Evaluate Sermons* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2012), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Joel Beeke, *How To Evaluate Sermons* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2012), 18.

<sup>19</sup> I use the term "experimentally" here not to speak of women as test subjects, but rather to speak of a preaching which calls female hearers to subject their experience to the Word of God. Cf. <https://presbyterianreformed.org/2015/04/what-is-experimental-religion/>

<sup>20</sup> Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009), 271.

<sup>21</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 143.

<sup>22</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 143.

John the Baptist (11:11-12), Elijah (Matt. 11:14), David (12:3), Jonah (Matt. 12:40), and Solomon (Matt 12:42). The one reference which I could find to a woman was the unnamed queen of the south in the judgment oracle of Matt. 12:42. The reality is that the ratios in Scripture are often far more lopsided than what Hobbs describes in her sermon survey.<sup>23</sup> When we consider the named figures in Hebrews 11's "hall of faith," Rahab stands as the one woman alongside eleven men!

It is true that, at least since the days of William Webb's landmark *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, proponents of a "redemptive-movement hermeneutic" have argued that we need to move beyond the narrow patriarchal context of the New Testament further along a supposed trajectory that Christ and the Apostles intended to set us upon. This, however, is a most dangerous argument in my eyes. Are we to say that Christ failed to challenge a culture of "yellow wallpaper," yet we are to far exceed him in this? What does it do to our vision of the perfect Saviour, the one without blemish or spot, to see him as acquiescing to the oppression of others? No, this sort of view will not do for those seeking to uphold the honor and perfections of Christ. It is therefore that the goal of equal gender mentions cannot be sustained as a standard of Christian preaching and teaching.

The matter of the pronouns is one which also must be discounted by students of Scripture due to a similar issue. There can be little question that the Old and New Testaments are not concerned with bringing a gender-neutrality or equality to the matter of pronoun address. In both the Hebrew and the Greek texts, masculine nouns and pronouns are used in various cases as representative of mankind. Without expounding this at length here, I think it can be biblically shown that the very order of nature renders it fitting for man and woman to be addressed through the single name of man. Indeed, to speak to "men" thus is not inherently exclusionary of the women in our midst.

Despite disagreeing on whether some of the previous stated matters constitute a failure to preach to women, I believe that laudable goals are put forward in "stimulating women to think during the sermon, and asking them good questions during the week to gain insight while preparing sermons."<sup>24</sup> There can be a tendency in some corners of Reformed Christendom towards sermons which become seminary lectures,<sup>25</sup> displaying little connection to a particular flock. This tendency in preaching is simply not compatible with the very name of pastor, the shepherding imagery which makes little sense without a flock in view. The apostolic command is clear: "feed [*lit.* shepherd] the flock of God which is among you" (1 Peter 5:2). There is a pastoral care which is to be exercised in bringing the Word to that particular flock so committed unto the care of Christ's undershepherds.

The example of Samuel Rutherford's particular pastoral care towards women comes to mind. As one reads through his famous *Letters*, it becomes readily apparent that here was a minister who deeply cared for Christ's sheep, male and female alike. Not content to occupy himself with mere studies alone, Rutherford was a man like unto those watchmen that found the bride (Song 3:3), a man taken up in his duties to seek out his flock. Many letters begin addressed to a "well-beloved and dear sister" where we see a glimpse of a pastor weeping with a mother whose son has drowned or counseling a woman struggling with spiritual depression. Commenting on Rutherford's pastoral care, Iain Murray writes, "One illustration of the way such preachers thought about their people is indicated by a phrase that has now passed entirely out of use. They referred to them as their 'books.' By which they meant that, next to the Bible, their flock were what they had to 'read' week by week."<sup>26</sup>

Minister of Christ, if your eyes are passing over these words, will you give heed and join me in taking stock of our care of the flock? Perhaps you have been much in reading of your library, but have you read your 'books'? When you come to the pulpit, can you say that you have made study of your flock in order to feed

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<sup>23</sup> While not having personally verified the totals, it would appear women make up potentially less than one tenth of explicitly named persons in the Bible.

<sup>24</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 145.

<sup>25</sup> This by no means should be seen as a judgment that all seminary lectures are dry and solely intellectual affairs. I have been privileged to sit under many a seminary lecture which was practically a sermon!

<sup>26</sup> Iain Murray, *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2006), 327.

them? Following after the Chief Shepherd, his undershepherds must know the sheep (John 10:14). Begin with your wife, with your children, but do not stop there. Labour diligently in knowing your sheep so that when you stand in that pulpit and look into their eyes, you may speak the Word to their very souls.

### **A warning against errors**

As critiques of our church culture, teaching, and practice come from within the broader circle of confessional Reformed and Presbyterian churches, I have attempted to model how we may employ these opportunities for sober self-reflection and remedy where appropriate. Let us be zealous in defense of the truth, but humble in assessing our own imperfect and sin-stained defenses of the truth.<sup>27</sup> Notwithstanding this posture, I would now turn to plainly warn the reader against the errors that render this work ultimately a threat to the sound doctrine and practice of Christ's flock. In so doing, it is my aim not to mock nor ridicule, but rather to labor to recover those who are being drawn towards error.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Misrepresentations*

Commenting on the Ninth Commandment, Jochem Douma writes, "Truth is a matter of precision, but how often do we not profit by bending someone else's words just a bit? In discussion and public polemics, it is hard to be completely nonpartisan and to treat our opponents with *openhearted fairness*."<sup>29</sup> Sadly Byrd's work seems lacking in both precision and openhearted fairness when addressing those with whom she differs. This can be seen plainly in the manner in which she references and summarizes those views of manhood which she finds objectionable.

Perhaps one of the less grievous instances occurs when she gives the following rendition of John Piper's words, "Masculine men are the ones who make the final say if there is a disagreement."<sup>30</sup> She later goes on to seemingly deprecate this view,

...has God equipped men for something more meaningful than making the final call in a disagreement? Paul's teaching to the Ephesians would counter this flattening 'husband gets the final say' argument, as husbands are called to sacrificially give for their wives, to put themselves underneath and elevate their wives, promoting their holiness, as Christ does for his church.<sup>31</sup>

But is this really a fair depiction of complementarian views? Note well how John Piper's actual principle of masculinity has an important qualifier attached: "Mature masculinity accepts the burden of the final say in disagreements between husband and wife, *but does not presume to use it in every instance* [emphasis mine]."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as Piper expounds this principle, he notes the qualifications at some length,

...this conviction does not mean that a husband will often use the prerogative of 'veto' over the wishes of his wife or family. He may, in fact, very often surrender his own preference for his

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<sup>27</sup> This must especially be the case in these circumstances where complaint arises within our own churches. Ministers and elders must develop thick skins and tender hearts, ready to receive the piercing arrows of even excessive grievance if by this wounding they might better serve the flock and their Lord. Pastor Michael Ives has written well on the subject of distinguishing between persons and errors in controversy here: <https://westportexperiment.com/2020/05/14/on-naming-names-in-controversy/>

<sup>28</sup> I commend pages 180-181 of James Durham's *A Treatise Concerning Scandal* (Naphtali Press, 1990 edition) as a wise presentation of the minister's conduct when pursuing error within the church.

<sup>29</sup> Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub.), 319.

<sup>30</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 106.

<sup>31</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 107.

<sup>32</sup> John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 40.

wife's where no moral issue is at stake. His awareness of his sin and imperfection will guard him from thinking that following Christ gives him the ability of Christ to know what's best in every detail. Nevertheless, in a well-ordered Biblical marriage both husband and wife acknowledge in principle that, if necessary in some disagreement, the husband will accept the burden of making the choice.<sup>33</sup>

Can such a presentation truly merit characterization as a “flattening ‘husband gets the final say’ argument”? I think not, unless Byrd’s contention is fundamentally with any view of marriage which reserves an ultimate decision-making power to the husband, regardless of how it is framed. This is one of the alarming grey areas in this work. As Byrd belittles a “flat” view of the exercise of marital authority, she fails to directly explain whether she sees any place for a hierarchy of authority in marriage. This is no small matter, for it is one of the core contentions between egalitarian and complementarian views of marriage. Rather than set forth Piper’s view as though it were simplistic, coarse, and unqualified, Byrd must instead explain if she disagrees with a fundamental aspect of the Reformed tradition’s teaching on marriage or simply seeks a refinement thereof. The Christian’s responsibility to true witness-bearing requires as much.

The level of misrepresentation grows more severe as Byrd introduces a mocking tone into her work. Referencing Piper once more, she summarizes,

They also have a manly way of handling a woman's purse, they seat the woman and order for her at restaurants, and they are the designated driver when their wife is with them.... Has God designed men to be so fragile that a woman ordering for herself threatens their manhood? If a husband holds his wife's purse the wrong way, will his man card be taken away?<sup>34</sup>

Contrast this with the referenced material from *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*,

8. *Mature masculinity is sensitive to cultural expressions of masculinity and adapts to them (where no sin is involved) in order to communicate to a woman that a man would like to relate not in any aggressive or perverted way, but with maturity and dignity as a man.*

This would mean dressing in ways that are neither effeminate nor harsh and aggressive. It would mean learning manners and customs. Who speaks for the couple at the restaurant? Who seats the other? Who drives the car? Who opens the door? Who walks in front down the concert hall aisle? Who stands and who sits, and when? Who extends the hand at a greeting? Who walks on the street side? How do you handle a woman's purse? Etc. Etc. These things change from culture to culture and from era to era. The point is that masculine leadership will not scorn them or ignore them, but seek to use them to cultivate and communicate a healthy pattern of complementarity in the relationships between men and women. Mature masculinity will not try to communicate that such things don't matter. Mature masculinity recognizes the pervasive implications of manhood and womanhood, and seeks to preserve the patterns of interaction that give free and natural expression to that reality. A dance is all the more beautiful when the assigned steps are natural and unself-conscious.<sup>35</sup>

Once more, we see that the actual formulation of complementarian principle features subtle qualification and leaves much open to conscience. Again we might ask a plain question: is there any place for rebuking the sin of effeminacy (1 Cor. 6:9) in Byrd’s view?<sup>36</sup> Regardless of the differences between cultural

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<sup>33</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 106.

<sup>35</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> I realize that contemporary Bible translation has done damage to the scriptural witness upon this point, often excising the very term from the text altogether. However, a survey of the other biblical uses of *μαλακός* together with the witness of extrabiblical literature will quickly reveal that there is no reason to limit the scope of this word to the sin of assuming a feminine sexual receptivity in intercourse with another man. As the Pauline list of damning sins clearly extends beyond the outward actions to the very intentions

expressions, is there a foundational level at which we should expect men to “act like men” and not women? Byrd does go on to say, “While I am challenging what many say are essential differences and expressions of femininity and masculinity, I am not saying that we should not affirm biological and even gendered differences between the sexes. I agree with Mark Cortez that we can still affirm some cultural norms associated with gender without holding that these must be essential to our sexuality.”<sup>37</sup> As our prevailing culture continues to make an outright assault upon gender differentiation, there is no place for making a mocking caricature of those who simply advanced the idea that the outward expression of masculinity and femininity *does* matter. Could Byrd write a rebuke of effeminacy and its corollary sin in women? The reader is left unclear as to the answer and such ambiguity opens the door to the world’s onslaught of androgyny.

It would also seem that particular offense was taken to certain comments on the subject of “how muscular a woman can be and still expect her husband to want to care for her.”<sup>38</sup> Byrd is referencing a brief excursus found under Piper’s sixth principle of mature masculinity: “Mature masculinity expresses its leadership in romantic sexual relations by communicating an aura of strong and tender pursuit.”<sup>39</sup> This is a section which notably does not feature any reference to the scriptures and even begins with the statement, “This is very difficult to put into words.”<sup>40</sup> Such should be understood as important clues that Piper’s following remarks are not an integral part of the complementarian platform and should be understood as somewhat more speculative in nature. Yet Byrd cites this section more than once throughout her work as an example of “the yellow wallpaper.”

The actual remarks come within the context of this discussion of romantic sexual relations: “Consider what is lost when women attempt to assume a more masculine role by appearing physically muscular and aggressive... The more women can arouse men by doing typically masculine things, the less they can count on receiving from men a sensitivity to typically feminine needs.”<sup>41</sup> It is true that the attached discussion of the relative sexual stimulation of a “muscular, scantily clad young woman pumping iron in a health club” is just a little weird.<sup>42</sup> One might note that it could be unfair to judge the entire complementarian movement by the musings of the author of the infamous “sexy stones” Tweet. Yet even within this context, there is qualifying content which helps to paint a more balanced portrait. Piper is not only encouraging women to consider appropriate physical presentation and actions which communicate femininity in their intimacy with their husbands. He also speaks to husbands: “Mature masculinity will not be reduced to raw desire in sexual relations. It remains alert to the deeper personal needs of a woman and mingles strength and tenderness to make her joy complete.”<sup>43</sup> From my reading of Piper, I find it hard to believe he has any intention to say that the expectations of a husband’s care are somehow waived by a certain level of female musculature. Yet, without context, Byrd paints exactly such a picture.

I am personally skeptical as to the degree to some of these subjects need to be explored in any depth in writing. There are some things which might be much better left to quiet conversations in the context of personal discipleship. However, it must be noted that Piper is not wholly out of bounds when he remarks, “sexual relations are so basic to human life we would be delinquent not to at least try to say how masculinity expresses itself here.”<sup>44</sup> Is there always offense in any contemplation of how certain physical musculature and aggressive conduct in women may affect marital intimacy? Can we make any application today from texts such as Deuteronomy 22:5 to the manner in which women and men present themselves?

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of the heart (e.g., “covetousness”), so we see may recognize the effeminate as linked to, but not always wholly equivalent to those who become abusers of themselves with mankind in their very physical actions.

<sup>37</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 123.

<sup>38</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 40-41.

<sup>42</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 40-41.

<sup>43</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 40.



Does the very order of nature teach us anything about masculinity and femininity expressed in these matters? While Byrd does bring up complementarian responses to these questions,<sup>45</sup> she does not give a clear affirmative. As we previously saw ambiguity in relation to effeminacy, here there appears ambiguity on effeminacy's corollary sin in women. And the world of 11 year old drag queens will not ignore the cracks emerging in the Christian's armour.

### *Lack of engagement*

At one point in her work, Byrd express her grief over the connection of the term "complementarian" to "an outspoken and overpublished group of evangelicals."<sup>46</sup> It is therefore most interesting to note how little reference Byrd makes to the wealth of published complementarian literature. Byrd quotes once from a book which she explains was personally sent to her by Owen Strachan.<sup>47</sup> One complementarian work is cited only insofar as it appears in the quotation of a critique by egalitarian Kevin Giles.<sup>48</sup> Another is briefly mentioned in an endnote as Byrd refers to a critical review by Rachel Green Miller.<sup>49</sup> A handful of online complementarian resources are referenced throughout the work. If the work is truly "an alternative to all [emphasis mine] the resources marketed on biblical womanhood and biblical manhood today,"<sup>50</sup> then why are these resources so infrequently cited? Such a grand claim surely must be supported by some indication that the author has made a robust and thorough study of such resources.

Beyond these few works mentioned above, she singles out "the most exhaustive resource sponsored by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*."<sup>51</sup> Byrd does offer some praise for this volume as she introduces it,

I do want to note that 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.<sup>52</sup>

The problem is that these helpful teachings never seem to be named. Any veneer of appreciation quickly melts away as Byrd blasts the book's "one-dimensional teachings that promote a factioned and fractioned discipleship centering on male authority and female submission."<sup>53</sup> A reader seeking to understand the positive aspects of complementarianism from Byrd's perspective will find little aid from her, naturally leading such readers to wonder whether complementarian works offer any significant contributions at all.

Both as Byrd cites the complementarian thesis in question<sup>54</sup> and in the very title of her book, it is clear that *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* should be understood to some degree as a response to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. The work is unquestionably oriented as a response and rebuke, not simply a positive presentation of the author's own views. How strange it is then to behold the paucity of interaction with this book! From my own survey of the book's citations, it would seem that Byrd directly references only ten pages of the very book from which she derives her title. Of those ten pages, three are in Grudem's appendix on "The Meaning of Kephale," cited not directly but as the references

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<sup>45</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 112.

<sup>46</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 124.

<sup>47</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 101, 112.

<sup>48</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 124, endnote 61.

<sup>49</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 132, endnote 104.

<sup>50</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 25.

<sup>51</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 99.

<sup>53</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 116.

<sup>54</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 21.

appear in a blog post by Rachel Green Miller.<sup>55</sup> Two pages are referenced from Ligon Duncan's preface to the second edition and the remaining handful of citations all are from John Piper's introductory chapter, "A Vision of Complementarity." As previously noted, even the references which are present are often Byrd's own summaries or lacking important qualifiers present in the immediate context. Can it be considered any form of meaningful response which ignores twenty-five out of twenty-six chapters of the book in Byrd's crosshairs?

Byrd rightly notes that the Reformation principle of *sola scripture* "does not mean that we read it alone, isolated from the community of faith and our historical confessions."<sup>56</sup> This is a laudable sentiment, but one which does not seem to have substantially affected her practice. If the Holy Spirit "has been working in the church universal through the centuries, preserving orthodox profession and testifying to the truth of God's Word,"<sup>57</sup> then it seems that the practice and testimony of the church throughout those centuries would be deemed highly relevant to the work at hand. If ecclesiastical confessions are to serve as "guardrails," then the reader might expect a careful consideration of how those confessions might provide a framework for these theological reflections.<sup>58</sup>

Engagement with confessional statements is simply not a prominent characteristic of this book. There are only two areas in which I see any sign of such engagement. First, Byrd argues that the ecumenical creeds helps us to see that "eternal subordination of the Son contradicts the orthodox understanding of the Trinity."<sup>59</sup> I agree. That being said, the point is more asserted than argued, as the book is not really written to provide a refutation of this teaching. Beyond this, the only other true instances in which some form of confessional statements are brought into the argument are when CBMW's Danvers and Nashville Statements are mentioned for the purpose of critique. Now I am in great sympathy with Byrd when she explains her suspicion of parachurch organizations producing confessional statements.<sup>60</sup> But she has effectively left the reader to conclude that the confessional heritage of the church has nothing substantive to say regarding biblical manhood and womanhood.

It may perhaps be that Byrd has seen the lack of any distinct chapters regarding biblical manhood and womanhood in the historic confessions of the Reformed churches and has concluded therefore that the confessions do not address these matters in any substance. An uninformed modern reader might be forgiven for reading the twenty-fourth chapter of the Westminster Confession and wondering why matters of marital and familial order are not explicitly addressed. However, I would have higher hopes for any Presbyterian church member at all familiar with the Westminster Standards and their historical context. Creeds and confessions are forged through the trials of the church as truth is challenged and vindicated. While acknowledging the presence of certain egalitarian movements at the time of the Assembly,<sup>61</sup> it is clear that gender egalitarianism was not a prominent threat. This was the era of Levellers, not Libbers.

It is thus not surprising that some specificity is given to subjects of controversy such as religious toleration, but little directly said to address gender egalitarianism. This relative lack of focus, however, should not be mistaken as though the documents which came out of the Assembly and the Church of Scotland have nothing to say to our present questions. To the contrary, these documents simply assume that our present questions have already been answered in particular ways.

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<sup>55</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 132, endnote 13.

<sup>56</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 160.

<sup>57</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 167-168.

<sup>58</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 168.

<sup>59</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 102.

<sup>60</sup> "When parachurch organizations such as CBMW develop their own confessional statements, we need to ask if they are replacing the church as an interpretive community in this way," Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 169.

<sup>61</sup> Here I use the term 'egalitarian' as inclusive more broadly of various movements which opposed relations of authority in social order, not just those pursuing equality between the sexes.

One example would be found in the original Directory for Publick Worship as vows are given for the solemnization of marriage. During the marriage ceremony, the man is to take the woman by her right hand and say the following words,

I [*name*] do take thee [*name*] to be my married wife, and do, in the presence of God, and before this congregation, promise and covenant to be a loving and faithful husband unto thee, until God shall separate us by death.

Then the Directory instructs the woman to take the man by the right hand, and say these words,

I [*name*] do take thee [*name*] to be my married husband, and I do, in the presence of God, and before this congregation, promise and covenant to be a loving, faithful, and obedient wife unto thee, until God shall separate us by death.

A careful comparison of the vows will reveal one glaring disparity between them: the obedience vowed by wife to husband.<sup>62</sup> This is a hard word. It is not to be found in any form in the Danvers Statement which Byrd so dislikes, nor is it found prominently in most contemporary complementarian literature. It is a word which expresses an authority relation in the most forthright manner. It is a word liable at least to raise eyebrows when heard at any wedding today. And yet any instruction on this prominent contrast between the duties of husband and wife is casually assumed to fall under the minister's brief declaration of "the institution, use, and ends of marriage, with the conjugal duties." The obedience of wives was not a controversial idea in the days of the Westminster divines.

As with the Directory, so also we find that the Larger Catechism is written with the assumption of this marital order. As a minister who has received and adopted the Catechisms as faithful subordinate standards, I am thankful for our catechetical heritage concerning the relations we bear to others. In setting forth the teaching and application of the Fifth Commandment, the Larger Catechism understands the scope of the command to include "not only natural parents," but also those persons "as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth" (WLC 124). How is it that there may be another category of authority in the family beyond our parents? As we shall see, this is clearly an application of the Fifth Commandment to a familial/marital order that extends beyond just parent/child, but to the recognition of father and husband as head.

The relations described in the Larger Catechism are summarized with the terms "inferior" and "superior." Although our contemporary ears inevitably strain to catch a disparaging note in these words, they are simply a candid description of a world ordered by God where equality is not an all-encompassing *telos*. If there is any question as to how marital relations are viewed, this is settled when one consults the prooftexts appended to each portion. Sarah's obedience to Abraham, calling him "lord," is referenced from 1 Peter 3:6 in terms of the honor which inferiors owe to their superiors (WLC 127). Superiors are to love their inferiors as Paul teaches that husbands are to love their wives (Col. 3:19 as appended to WLC 129). Peter's instructions to husbands to give honour to their wives as unto the weaker vessel is cited as an example of countenancing inferiors which do well (WLC 129). There can be no question that the Westminster Larger Catechism must be understood to address husbands as those who are placed, by God's ordinance, over wives and children within the family.

At the same time, the framework of the Larger Catechism also may provide some helpful "guardrails" against the sort of hyper-patriarchalism which sees all things through the lens of gender. When speaking of the honor in behavior which inferiors owe to their superiors, we find 1 Kings 2:19 given as a prooftext. Here we find one who is both a man and king bowing before a woman, for she is his superior both in age

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<sup>62</sup> Comparison might be made with the public declarations of consent given in the contemporary "Suggested Form for a Wedding Service" of Byrd's own Orthodox Presbyterian Church (<https://opc.org/BCO/Services.html>, accessed 5/22/2020). One does wonder why the aspect of obedience has been removed from the vows themselves when all else clearly teaches an order of headship and submission.

and specifically in terms of the parental relation. The perspective of the Divines is no friend to egalitarianism, but neither is it friendly to those who would exalt gender as the ultimate arbiter of all authority relations. Further prooftexts such as Lev. 19:3, Prov. 23:22, and Prov. 31:28 are appended in such a way as to present mothers in their parental relation as superiors to children of both sexes. As the citation of 1 Kings 2:19 exhibits, this relation of superior/inferior is one which does not cease to exist as a man passes into adulthood. While this does not stand in opposition to the natural ordering of men to authority and women to submission, it does pull hard against the tendency of some to translate this principle into a prescription for every relation which we bear to another.

One more example can be derived from the Church of Scotland's Directory for Family Worship, which was adopted alongside the rest of the Standards. The Directory speaks of cases where someone with a troubled conscience needs to seek out a pastor or mature believer for help. Part of the counsel given speaks directly to questions of gender relations amongst believers today,

If the person troubled in conscience be of that condition, or of that sex [emphasis mine], that discretion, modesty, or fear of scandal, requireth a godly, grave, and secret friend to be present with them in their said address, it is expedient that such a friend be present.

While I am loathe to wade deeply into the matter of another of Mrs. Byrd's books, I cannot help but note that the Directory here seems to encourage something at least roughly akin to the "Pence Rule." In the very least, there is a recognition that differences of sex do have some impact on pastoral and Christian relations. "Discretion, modesty, or fear of scandal" are legitimate considerations which must not be discounted when it comes to such matters.

By no means do I mean to suggest that a full-fledged theology and practice of biblical manhood and womanhood is expounded within our Reformed confessional standards. As noted, I believe much by way of specifics were assumed rather than explicitly affirmed, especially as the Divines would have seen most of these matters as a matter of basic natural revelation. But it does strike me that Mrs. Byrd has failed to employ the sort of confessional "guardrails" of which I've given example above. In her work, the only positive mention of submission or obedience seems to come in her affirmations of a mutual submission between the sexes and an obedience of all unto God. I strain to locate a single positive word towards a "submission" or "obedience" of women towards men which could at all be framed as that of inferior towards superior. Does Mrs. Byrd object to the wedding vows which are our ecclesiastical heritage? Does she chafe at the hierarchical language of the Larger Catechism, especially as it is applied to biblical texts concerning men and women? Has Mrs. Byrd considered the advice of the Directory for Family Worship when it comes to men and women in intimate conversation? If she has rejected the Larger Catechism's interpretation of the Fifth Commandment, then this must be brought out into the daylight. If not, she has produced a work which has failed to apply her own church's Standards to the matters at hand.

One further brief word might be offered on the subject of this book's failures in engagement. If this work has failed to adequately engage with the modern complementarian movement and the church's confessional heritage, it has also failed to engage whatsoever with the teaching heritage of the church throughout the ages. We see that the early church fathers may be summoned when helpful for Byrd's understanding of Junia,<sup>63</sup> to uphold Trinitarian doctrine,<sup>64</sup> or even as one's writings reflected the impact of his sister.<sup>65</sup> We see that John Calvin may be referenced several times in his comments upon the book of Ruth.<sup>66</sup> Matthew Henry helps to highlight Ruth's meagre circumstances.<sup>67</sup> The American Puritans are mentioned as they are derided for their treatment of Anne Hutchinson.<sup>68</sup> Herman Bavinck is allowed to speak of Christ's

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<sup>63</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 223.

<sup>64</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 220.

<sup>65</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 221-223.

<sup>66</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 64-65, 86, 90.

<sup>67</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 58.

<sup>68</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 34-36.

exaltation.<sup>69</sup> Yet one can find nary an instance of engagement with any pre-modern theologian *on the subject matter of biblical manhood and womanhood*. It seems the pot is calling the kettle black when Byrd excoriates proponents of ESS for failing to retrieve “what has been faithfully handed down to us from centuries of the Holy Spirit’s work through tradents of the faith.”<sup>70</sup>

### *Mishandling of Scripture*

Another danger of Byrd’s work is the manner in which she handles the Scriptures. The book displays a consistent pattern of tenuous assumptions undergirding many of Byrd’s interpretations. There is also a propensity to ignore passages and interpretations which might run contrary to her arguments. While I understand that this book was not intended to represent a comprehensive response to complementarian scholarship and difficult passages, it does strike me as odd that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 seems to merit no mention throughout the work. Complementarian scholars have devoted entire works to this particular passage of Scripture,<sup>71</sup> so it is a strange absence.

Without attempting to present a complete response to every passage quoted, the treatment of a few texts might yet be highlighted. One such instance is found in Byrd’s description of Phoebe as derived from Romans 16:1-2. Byrd here relies upon the work of evangelical egalitarian scholars Lynn Cohick, Philip Payne, and Michael Bird. Cohick is called upon to explain that “a careful examination of the *diakonia* word group suggests a sense of representation or agency.”<sup>72</sup> While certain uses carrying a sense of representation or agency may lie within the semantic range of the word group, I struggle to understand how this meaning may be imported to every instance of *διάκονος*. When one views the literal usage in passages such as John 2, it is immediately apparent that the term does not emphasize the authority of the subject. Christ’s usage of the term in Matthew 23:11 contextually emphasizes the humiliation of the *διάκονος*, not their exaltation. To put this in plain English, a “servant” *may* represent or act as an agent of their master, but not every use of the word “servant” is intended to indicate a delegated authority. Yet Byrd specifically latches on to Cohick’s interpretation of Phoebe as Paul’s representative “with his authority.”<sup>73</sup>

Another issue arises in the attempt to endow Phoebe with a certain authority from her description as *διάκονος*. If this term indicates that Paul is identifying Phoebe as his agent, we would expect to see her named as Paul’s *διάκονος*. However, the following genitive does not further this argument: τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς (Rom. 16:1). She is a *diakonos* of the church in Cenchrea (a Corinthian port). If one is arguing that this language conveys a representative agency, then it would have to be in relation to the Corinthian church, not Paul. But Byrd continues with the opposite assumption, speaking of Phoebe as the one whom Paul sent to deliver Romans “with his authority.”<sup>74</sup> It might also be mentioned that Paul’s commendation of Phoebe has other plausible explanations than service as a courier. The practice of letters of commendation is explicitly mentioned within the Corinthian context by Paul (2 Corinthians 3:1). Apollos carries one such letter as he journeys to Achaia (Acts 18:27). While Phoebe may well have carried the Roman epistle, there is nothing directly in the text which requires this to have been the case. To go further and assume that Phoebe would have been an authoritative interpreter of this letter is unfounded speculation. Byrd’s conclusion that Phoebe bore the Apostle’s “authority” cannot be deduced by good and necessary consequence from the text.

The second term which Byrd relies upon is Phoebe’s description as a *προστάτις* (Rom. 16:2). Referencing Philip Payne’s work, Byrd states “This is a leadership term, which ‘almost always refers to a position of

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<sup>69</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 137.

<sup>70</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 159.

<sup>71</sup> E.g., *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> As cited by Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 146.

<sup>73</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 147.

<sup>74</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 147.

authority.”<sup>75</sup> In keeping with the general tone of the book, she does not go on to share Payne’s following conclusion: “Since her leadership was in the church, it would entail spiritual oversight.”<sup>76</sup> This is one of the alarming features of this work. Byrd often directly references and adopts egalitarian exegesis as her own. While she may employ these arguments for somewhat more modest claims of ministers laboring beside “laywomen,”<sup>77</sup> there are no such restraints in the material from which she draws. Spiritual oversight and leadership are pulled forth from the etymology of a term which clearly may be rendered as patroness or “benefactor” (cf. even the NRSV’s rendering). Read in context, the preferred rendering seems clear. Paul is relating Phoebe’s help to the help which he is asking others to give to her. This is a fitting subject for reflection, but not in such a way that intrudes extraneous discussion of “leadership” and “authority” into this passage.

Slightly further down in the last chapter of Romans, the “mysterious”<sup>78</sup> figure of Junia becomes further grist for Byrd’s mill. She speaks of translators changing “the feminine ‘Junia’ to the masculine ‘Junias’” in their rendering of Romans 16:7.<sup>79</sup> This is really a form of begging the question as the key issue is whether the accusative Ἰουνιᾶν reflects a feminine or masculine nominative form. She also advances the claim that “there are no records of the name Junias.”<sup>80</sup> If Mrs. Byrd had read carefully in the work from which she derives her book’s title, she would have found that her claims were out of date several decades ago. As John Piper and Wayne Grudem pointed out at that time, there is an undeniably masculine instance of Junias given by “Epiphanius (A.D. 315-403), the bishop of Salamis in Cyprus” in his *Index of Disciples*.<sup>81</sup> A Latin translation of Origen also gives us a masculine Junias.<sup>82</sup> In the least, the case for a female Junia is not as airtight as Mrs. Byrd would have her readers believe.

More question-begging occurs as Byrd speaks of translation which “removes the vocation of apostleship from the two (spouses? siblings? collaborators?).”<sup>83</sup> The grammar leaves the question open as to whether the two named persons are to be noted as apostles themselves or rather are known/respected by the apostles. Charles Hodge argues for the latter view for three contextual reasons,

1. Because the word *apostle*, unless connected with some other word, as in the phrase “messengers (apostles) of the churches,” is very rarely applied in the New Testament to any other than the original messengers of Jesus Christ. The word has a fixed meaning, from which we should not depart without special reason.
2. Because the article, among *the* apostles, seems to point out the definite well-known class of persons almost exclusively so-called.
3. The original, of course, admits this interpretation; it is the simple meaning of the words.<sup>84</sup>

Byrd’s argument for the former reading is not substantial. She comments, “In doing this, it really doesn’t add anything meaningful to their description— why would Paul mention that they are well known to the

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<sup>75</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 148.

<sup>76</sup> Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 63.

<sup>77</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 151.

<sup>78</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 223.

<sup>79</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 223.

<sup>80</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 223.

<sup>81</sup> Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 79.

<sup>82</sup> Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 80.

<sup>83</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 224.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1837), 430.

apostles? For what?”<sup>85</sup> This seems like an odd question, for the answer is apparent. The Apostle is commending various persons as he sends greetings. As John Murray writes, it is to say that “these persons were well known to the apostles and were distinguished for their faith and services. The explanation is ready at hand; they were Christians before Paul and, no doubt, were associated with the circle of apostles in Judea if not in Jerusalem.”<sup>86</sup>

It is on this shaky foundation that Byrd begins to venture out with “historical imagination,” essentially spending multiple pages on mere speculation about this purported female apostle. The danger is that the reader may be lulled into accepting an interesting story as though it were historical fact. As with much of egalitarian exegesis, Byrd is willing to spend a fair bit of time on “unverifiable but incredibly fascinating and plausible” matters.<sup>87</sup> In these pages, we hear the siren song of a compelling narrative that often lures unsuspecting Christians away from the safe harbor of the biblical text itself.

The conclusion to this portion is one of the more disturbing passages in Byrd’s work. She writes,

The difficult part to wrestle with for complementarian churches, and for the first time in this book, is that we are moving a little further past lay work here. Apostle is a fairly big title. What do we do with this now? We no longer have apostles in the church, but how does this presentation of Junia translate into contemporary ministry? Churches may not all come to the same conclusions, but this is something that we all need to wrestle with. What principles do we find here, and what is the Holy Spirit saying through his Word here to our churches?<sup>88</sup>

As throughout the work, she doesn’t quite cross the line into directly advocating for female office-bearers in the church today. It is, however, strongly implied that Junia represents some form of ordained apostolic office-bearer in the church’s early history. I struggle to see what restraint will prohibit an eager reader from taking the logic to its conclusion and advocating for women in church office today. There can be little doubt that this is precisely what egalitarian scholar Michael Bird has in mind in his own advocacy of women in “key roles.”<sup>89</sup> As Byrd declares, “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.”<sup>90</sup> Why stop with the “at least”? While Byrd may stop short of challenging her own church’s practice in relation to church office, others certainly will not. She has built a foundation of tenuous exegetical assumptions that will lead to full-blown egalitarianism if left unchecked.

*(To be continued in Part 2...)*

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<sup>85</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 224.

<sup>86</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 230.

<sup>87</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 226.

<sup>88</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 227.

<sup>89</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Romans*, *Story of God Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 528. As cited in Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 235.

<sup>90</sup> Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 233.