

THE SOVEREIGN GRACE PERSPECTIVES SERIES

Complementarianism

The Glory of God's Created Design

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Complementarianism: The Glory of God's Created Design
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Introduction

The early church father Gregory of Nyssa tells a story about a fourth-century public dispute. The church was debating issues of Trinitarian and Christological theology, and a council had gathered in the city of Constantinople that would produce the creed of the same name.

But the controversy spread from the councils of the church leaders into everyday conversations throughout the city. All Constantinople was abuzz with debates and trigger words and opinions ready to be argued. Gregory humorously complains that even attempting to do ordinary daily interactions—buying a loaf of bread, exchanging money, going to the bath—took you straight into the controversy:

If you ask someone about exchanging a small coin, he will philosophize about begotten and unbegotten. And if you ask about the price of a loaf of bread, “The Father is greater,” he answers, “and the Son is inferior.” And if you say, “Is the bath ready?” he will propose, “From nothing

the Son has his being.”¹

When you read that, you might find yourself wishing for a bygone day when the world was interested in the deity of the Son. Not exactly the stuff of current headlines (though on the other hand, you might have eventually just wanted to buy your loaf of bread without a debate).

But try this as a thought experiment: substitute “the price of a latte” for the loaf of bread, turn the coin interaction into a social media exchange, and imagine these as the competing points: “God made men and women” . . . “trans women are women.” Would the controversy be any less heated, or any less pervasive?

I don’t know whether Gregory was exaggerating about how widespread the debate about Christology was in the fourth-century public square. But I do know that it’s not exaggerating to say that arguments about gender are inescapable in modern Western society. The simplest of interactions in a coffee shop or your workplace now can take you into vehement disputes, and what was once an innocent grammatical choice now signals an entire worldview (for instance, how many of us could even have defined “pronoun” twenty years ago?

We are increasingly a global family of churches in Sovereign Grace, a reality for which we give thanks. That means that some non-American readers within our church family don’t face the kind of controversies I’ve just described in the same way we currently do in the United States. If you’re one of those brothers or sisters reading this book, thank you for living the

1. The original Greek citation may be found in Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio de Deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, (46:557b).

gospel faithfully in your culture. But we're not only a global family of churches; we're also a *confessional* family of churches, a denomination united by a common *Statement of Faith*² and by our *Seven Shared Values*³. Both of those documents gladly and joyfully bind us to the doctrine that is the heart of this book: complementarianism, the belief that men and women are created by God equal in value, yet different in role. As an American pastor, the gender controversies I've described above are the context in which I study, teach, and write about this doctrine. This book is shaped partly in response to those challenges, all of which we could summarize under the heading of the "LGBTQ revolution." Western culture can no longer even agree on whether "male and female" represent a real distinction among human beings, much less on whether there are different roles for men and women. That's a direct challenge to our complementarianism.

For my brothers and sisters in other contexts, I want you to know at the outset that this book, even though it's shaped by those challenges, isn't primarily about American culture. Our beliefs about men, women, marriage, and the church are rooted in Scripture and consistent with the beliefs of the church of Christ in every age and every place. The times and places change, and even some of our particular practices may change—but the Word of God does not change. This book is about those deeper Scriptural and theological convictions that remain unmoved no matter the time or place in which they are expressed.

2. <https://sovereigngrace.com/about/statement-of-faith/>

3. <https://sovereigngrace.com/about/7-shared-values/>

Unfortunately, American culture is good at exporting some of its worst ideas. And that means the LGBTQ revolution won't remain only an American or Western cultural challenge. In a digitally-connected age, the West's gender confusion is a global problem.

In this book, then, we will try to engage that problem and the deeper biblical issues involved, so that we don't only hold on to what's true because it's true . . . but so that we celebrate it, because it is beautiful and good. All cultures in all places have to decide something about gender and marriage and family and child-rearing—otherwise no children will be born to be its future citizens. Only the church, the household of God and an embassy of the age to come, can simultaneously say, “Male and female God created them” and “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb!” Our complementarian convictions live between those two moments: creation and new creation, the beginning of human history and the end of human history. Let's explore them together.