

JOHN PIPER &  
WAYNE GRUDEM

50  
CRUCIAL  
QUESTIONS

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*An Overview of Central Concerns about  
Manhood and Womanhood*

“From the beginning we have insisted at the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood that the complementarian position is firmly rooted in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Here you will find answers to key questions in a concise format from two of the evangelical community’s finest minds. May God use this book to encourage heartfelt obedience to his good and wise design.”

**Randy Stinson**, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Administration, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“To borrow a phrase from C. S. Lewis, there’s a kind of ‘Deep Magic’ about the way God created man and woman—an ancient wonder that few of us postmoderns appreciate. Through a pragmatic arrangement of *50 Crucial Questions*, Piper and Grudem bring out passage after passage of Scripture to awaken our minds and hearts to the wonder of what our Creator has done. This concise treatment of the major questions surrounding our roles in the church and home will catapult readers straight into God’s Word to see what is really there.”

**Gloria Furman**, pastor’s wife, Redeemer Church of Dubai; author, *The Pastor’s Wife and Missional Motherhood*

“The core content of this book was tremendously needed and helpful when it was first published almost a quarter century ago. In our current generation, where there is breathtaking confusion and distortion regarding gender and marriage, it is needed more than ever. There is a desperate need for leaders of the evangelical church to speak with a wise, clear, and uncompromising biblical clarity. Piper and Grudem provide that clear voice, and I pray their answers will be heard and practiced so that God’s glory will be more powerfully displayed through his grand design for men and women.”

**Erik Thoennes**, Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies, Chair, Biblical and Theological Studies Theology Department, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University; Pastor, Grace Evangelical Free Church, La Mirada, California



## *50 Crucial Questions*



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*An Overview of Central Concerns about  
Manhood and Womanhood*

John Piper and Wayne Grudem

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## Preface

This little book was originally published as chapter 2 of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. We coedited that book and wrote several of the chapters, including this one.

Even as early as the 1970s, we were waving the flag of biblical complementarianism (not yet called that) over the emerging gender-leveling impulses of what was then called evangelical feminism or egalitarianism. In the decades since, the response to issues of manhood and womanhood has been neither simple nor unilateral. There is cause for joy and sorrow.

On the one hand, our culture in general has moved with stunning speed away from any Christian consensus on what is right and wrong in the matter of sexual ethics. The flashpoint has moved from male headship to homosexuality. This is no surprise to us, and you can see what we saw coming by reading question 41. The ethical and hermeneutical step from rejecting gender as a factor in what marital couples *do* to rejecting it as a factor in who marital couples *are* was a small one. If gender does not count in what the spouse *does*, then gender doesn't count in who the spouse *is*. That is where our culture has come.

On the other hand, there has been a resurgence of churches and younger Christians who take their Bibles seriously enough

that they are willing to walk dramatically out of step with this culture. They see in the Bible a vision of manhood and womanhood that does not blur the sexes but puts their differences in dazzling color. These churches see the complementarian vision as life-giving for both men and women. They think this is what God has taught. And they believe God is wise and good. His ideas for sexuality are most beautiful and most satisfying.

Most important, the highlighting of male and female differences in the dynamics of marriage puts Christ and his church on display with the greatest clarity. In Ephesians 5, Paul presents the marriage of man and woman as a parable of Christ's covenant relationship with his bride, the church. The husband is to take his cues from the sacrificial leadership, protection, and provision given by Christ, and the wife is to take her cues from the clearheaded respect and glad submission that the redeemed people give to Christ.

Together, in this profoundly loving and Christ-exalting relationship, husbands and wives create outposts of an alternative kingdom in this world. In these kingdom outposts, called families, they aim to raise disciples of Jesus who are wise, bold, and risk taking. And they pray that their families will be a salty witness in a decaying society.

From the beginning, God meant for marriage to magnify the beauties of this divine-human covenant. Both egalitarianism and so-called "homosexual marriage" effectively nullify this marital parable of Christ and the church. It is gratifying to see how many younger Christians grasp the theological significance of marriage and choose to embrace the biblical vision of complementarity, lived out in thriving, mission-oriented churches.

When a person begins to take this vision seriously, questions of biblical interpretation and practical application multiply.

That is why we wrote this book. We believe that these fifty questions are as relevant today as ever. Some of them even more so. And we believe that if you follow the biblical reasoning of these questions, you will probably be able to answer others that arise by following a similar trajectory.

More than ever, we think these issues of manhood and womanhood are crucial. And as we said in the chapter that we wrote twenty-five years ago, our aim and our prayer are for the good of the church, for global mission, and for the glory of God.





# Introduction

## *Complementarity*

The issue we face in this book is how men and women should relate to each other according to the Bible. We are concerned especially with how they relate in the home and in the church. The position we take affirms the complementary differences between men and women and spells out the implications of those differences for the way men and women relate to each other in the most fulfilling way.

We defend what Larry Crabb calls “enjoying the difference,” namely, that “the sexes are distinct in what they were fundamentally designed to give and in what brings them the greatest joy in relationship. . . . At the deepest level, a man serves a woman differently than a woman serves a man.”<sup>1</sup>

We resonate with Chuck Colson when he laments the destructive tendencies of gender blending throughout our culture. We stand with him when he says, “God created two distinct types of people—male and female, masculine and feminine—with different roles and abilities for the propagation and nurturing of the race.” We agree that “it assaults a basic truth of creation” when

a female reporter demands access to a male locker room, when homosexual men adopt babies and use surrogate nursing bras, when female prison guards do body searches on male inmates, and when popular rock stars reverse every sexual distinction.<sup>2</sup>

This is why we call ourselves *complementarians*. Our vision of manhood and womanhood is shaped by a passion for reality—the beautiful reality of complementary differentiation that God designed for our joy in the beginning when God created us male and female equally in his image.

If one word must be used to describe our position, therefore, we prefer the term *complementarian*, since it suggests both equality and beneficial differences between men and women. We are uncomfortable with the term *traditionalist* because it implies an unwillingness to let Scripture challenge traditional patterns of behavior, and we certainly reject the term *hierarchicalist* because it overemphasizes structured authority while giving no suggestion of either equality or the beauty of mutual interdependence.

Lengthy volumes have been written on this issue, including our own *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.<sup>3</sup> But most people do not have time to read several books on each of the pressing issues of modern life. Often what we need are concise answers to particular questions. That is what this book is meant to offer.

## 50 Crucial Questions

In 1987, a group of Christian men and women, deeply concerned about certain trends both in secular society and more specifically in the evangelical religious world, formed an organization called the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW). The stated purpose of the new organization was to “set forth the teachings of the Bible about the complementary differences between men and women, created equally in the image of God, because these teachings are essential for obedience to Scripture and for the health of the family and of the church.”<sup>1</sup>

To state publicly their concerns and goals, these Christians issued a proclamation called the *Danvers Statement* (prepared at a CBMW meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts, in December 1987). Then the newly formed Council began issuing a series of booklets addressing various aspects of biblical manhood and womanhood. In 1991, these booklets were combined with other essays and expository articles to form a 566-page volume, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*.<sup>2</sup> The book contains twenty-six chapters written by twenty-two men and women, and it was voted Book of the Year for 1991 by the readers of *Christianity Today*.

## *Question 1*

This short book, *50 Crucial Questions*, is adapted from chapter 2 of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. It offers an overview of the vision of manhood and womanhood presented in the larger volume by giving cogent summary responses to the most common objections to that vision. Because every effort to answer one question (on any important issue) begets new questions, the list of questions here is not exhaustive. Nonetheless, we hope to give enough trajectories that readers can track the flight of our intention to its appointed target: the good of the church, global mission, and the glory of God.

### **1. Why do you regard the issue of male and female roles as so important?**

We are concerned not merely with the behavioral roles of men and women but also with the underlying natures of manhood and womanhood themselves. Biblical truth and clarity in this matter are important because error and confusion over sexual identity lead to (1) marriage patterns that do not portray the relationship between Christ and the church<sup>3</sup> (Eph. 5:31–32); (2) parenting practices that do not train boys to be masculine or girls to be feminine; (3) homosexual tendencies and increasing attempts to justify homosexual alliances (see question 41); and (4) patterns of unbiblical female leadership in the church that reflect and promote the confusion over the true meaning of manhood and womanhood.

God's gift of complementary manhood and womanhood was exhilarating from the beginning (Gen. 2:23). It is precious beyond estimation. But today it is esteemed lightly and is vanishing from much of modern society. We believe that what is at stake in human sexuality is the very fabric of life as God wills it to be for the holiness of his people and for their saving mission to

the world. (See the “Rationale” of the *Danvers Statement* at the end of this book.)

**2. What do you mean by “unbiblical female leadership in the church” (in question 1)?**

We are persuaded that the Bible teaches that only men should be pastors and elders. That is, men should bear primary responsibility for Christlike leadership and teaching in the church. So we believe it is unbiblical, and therefore detrimental, for women to assume this role. (See question 13.)

**3. Where in the Bible do you get the idea that only men should be the pastors and elders of the church?**

The most explicit texts relating directly to the leadership of men in the church are 1 Timothy 2:11–15; 1 Corinthians 11:2–16; 14:34–36. Chapters 5, 6, and 9 of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* present detailed exegetical support for why we believe these texts give abiding sanction to an eldership of spiritual men. Moreover, the biblical connection between family and church strongly suggests that the headship of the husband at home leads naturally to the primary leadership of spiritual men in the church.

**4. What about marriage? What do you mean by “marriage patterns that do not portray the relationship between Christ and the church” (in question 1)?**

We believe the Bible teaches that God intends the relationship between husband and wife to portray the relationship between Christ and his church. The husband is to model the loving, sacrificial leadership of Christ, and the wife is to model the glad



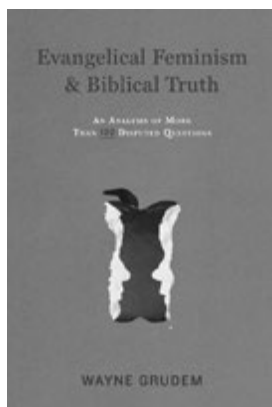
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# COMPELLING ANSWERS KEY QUESTIONS

“There is a desperate need for leaders of the evangelical church to speak with a wise, clear, and uncompromising biblical clarity. Piper and Grudem provide that clear voice, and I pray their answers will be heard and practiced so that God’s glory will be more powerfully displayed through his grand design for men and women.”

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RANDY STINSON, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Administration, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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