

Book Review

Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006): 272 pp.

Grudem's thesis in this book is simple and straightforward. He persuasively argues that evangelical feminism ("egalitarianism") is a new path to liberalism. In particular, Grudem draws parallels between the drift a generation ago of mainline Protestants toward liberalism and the dalliance of many contemporary evangelicals with egalitarian views on the roles of men and women within the family, church, and society. The "common thread" in the two movements has been the denial of the authority of Scripture (p. 16).

In Part I ("Some Paths To Liberalism in Recent History") Grudem charts the following "predictable sequence" already fully underway among most mainline Protestants and some evangelicals. It also threatens to occur on a more widespread scale in many more evangelical churches, denominations, and institutions (p. 28):

1. abandoning biblical inerrancy
2. endorsing the ordination of women
3. abandoning the Bible's teaching on male headship in marriage
4. excluding clergy who are opposed to women's ordination
5. approving homosexual conduct as morally valid in some cases
6. approving homosexual ordination
7. ordaining homosexuals to high leadership positions in the denomination

Grudem notes that to date only the Episcopal Church has followed the sequence completely through, but many others are slipping into the vortex of this downward spiral.

After introducing his thesis, Grudem devotes most of the book (Part II: "Evangelical Feminist Views That Undermine Or Deny The Authority of Scripture," pp. 33-152 and Part III: "Evangelical Feminist Views Based On Untruthful Or Unsubstantiated Claims," pp. 153-222) to specific hermeneutical examples in which evangelical scholars deny a straightforward reading of Biblical texts in order to uphold an egalitarian viewpoint. The many examples include Gordan Fee and others' unfounded textual attacks 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 (see pp. 49-52); William Webb's "redemptive-movement" approach which claims that the Biblical texts on manhood and womanhood are on a "trajectory" toward the egalitarian position (pp. 65-80); the claim that Paul's urging of women to keep silent in Corinth was a special case for some disruptive women and not a universal rule for the church (pp. 159-63); and the claim that "head" (Greek *kephale*) in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23 means "source" and not "person in authority over" (pp. 193-198). Those familiar with Grudem's past works in the complementarian cause will recognize many of the salient textual and theological issues he covers in these sections.

In the final section (Part IV: "Where Is Evangelical Feminism Taking Us?") Grudem traces the "predictable" stages of egalitarian compromise. First, he argues that at the foundation of egalitarianism is "a dislike of manhood itself" (p. 223). He notes current

efforts to produce gender-neutral Bible versions (such as the NRSV, the NLT, and the TNIV) and the effort to remove masculine language from hymns. Once feminism controls a church or denomination “the teaching will tend increasingly toward denial of anything that is uniquely masculine other than the obvious physical differences” (p. 225).

The next step would be the effort “to blur and then deny God’s identity as our Father” (p. 227). This includes efforts to call God “Mother.” Here Grudem cites the actions of “disillusioned Southern Baptists” in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship whose worship at their annual assemblies feature “songs of praise to God as Mother” (p. 233). Grudem reflects, “Changing our idea of God is nearly the final step on the path toward liberalism” (p. 235).

The final step, however, is the approval of homosexuality. Though acknowledging that “very few evangelical egalitarians up to this time have advocated the moral validity of homosexual conduct” Grudem sees this as the inevitable end point for those who set down the egalitarian path (p. 237). Again, he notes how this trend worked out among mainline Protestants. The Episcopal Church, for example, began to ordain women to ministry in 1976, appointed the first woman as Bishop in 1989, and then elected its first openly homosexual Bishop, Gene Robinson, in 2003.

In his closing comments, Grudem acknowledges that many complementarians have not helped their cause either by being harsh and abusive or by being cowardly and silent. Next, he traces places where evangelical feminism is now dominant. Among colleges these include Wheaton College and Azusa Pacific University. Among seminaries, Fuller, Denver, Gordon-Conwell, Bethel, Asbury, and Regent-Vancouver are noted. The largest number of evangelical feminist books are being published by InterVarsity Press (USA) and Baker Books. Parachurch ministries with egalitarian bents include InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Youth With A Mission. Denominations in this camp include Vineyard Churches and those in the Willow Creek Association. Finally, the central issue is the authority of Scripture. Grudem asks if evangelicals will stand by Biblical teaching on manhood and womanhood, “Or will we turn aside to evangelical feminism and be led step by step down the path to liberalism and to an ever-increasing denial of the authority of the Word of God?” (p. 263).

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