



## Introduction

Paris. London. New York. Hong Kong. If you've ever had the chance to visit one of these remarkable cities, you know that the experience is far different than the preparation. Before you go, you surf the web, check out a few local restaurants near your hotel, and watch a video about an exciting attraction you'll see—a world-class museum, the theatre, a bookstore among them for many of us. But all the preparation does little to acclimate you to the breathless feeling you get when you're actually *there*, when you can smell, see, and hear a thriving metropolis in all its glory.

I (Owen) remember the first time I visited New York City. To walk through Central Park was a very different reality than glimpsing it in a film. To simply turn around 360 degrees and take the forest-turned-free-for-all in was



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nearly overwhelming. As I strolled around, I saw effortless shaping of my surroundings. The park stretched before me and seemed to swallow me whole. The whole experience was deeply pleasant, and I'm eager to make this same discovery, to taste what you can only call serendipity, in other global cities.

This common experience relates to the theme of this book. Gavin and I tackle in these pages an introduction to biblical manhood and womanhood. Our subject is complementarity, the way in which men and women find happiness in owning their God-given identity and filling their God-given roles. Equal in dignity and worth, men and women share much in terms of Christian discipleship. But we are not the same. Unlike what egalitarianism would argue, men and women have different roles to play in life. We thus cannot agree with the idea that men and women alike lead in the home and church, as our egalitarian friends would say. The gospel of grace does not erase sexual difference and role distinctions; the gospel actually opens our eyes to savor divine design and our God-formed responsibilities.

The Lord has made us for his own pleasure, and he has given us unique form and calling. In the chapters that follow, we will show that the plan of God for men and women is not incidental, boring, or of glancing importance. It is a crucial part of Christian faith and practice. We think that what awaits you is much like what awaits a first-time traveler to Paris. You know some stuff about the City of Lights. You have a small sense of what this will be from past reading and browsing. You're happy to hear more and learn more, and you anticipate croissants and good coffee and lots of walking. For all your previous noodling, Paris in all its grandeur, all its beauty, is a discovery you can only make in person. It awaits



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you. It will intoxicate you. It will leave a mark on you, and you won't ever be the same.

This is true of biblical complementarity, as we will shortly see. We're not about to talk abstract pieties and numbing statistics. We're going to unfurl the beauty of God's creative work. We get a chance in this short book to savor the grand design of God. Many of us know that the creation is brimming with vitality and beauty. We can easily spot the smile of the Lord in the sea and the trees. But when it comes to our own bodies, to our own identities as men and women, the screen loses its color. The story fizzles. A gender-neutral world convinces us that manhood and womanhood aren't important. Complementarity is a fiction. It's no big deal to be a man or a woman.

Many people today believe secularism. They pursue androgyny. As a result, boys want to be girls today and girls want to be boys. Many men embrace the traits and attitudes traditionally associated with womanhood. Many women do the same with manhood. Both sides avoid at all costs hard-and-fast stereotypes. The ultimate transgression today is to fit into past conceptions of the sexes. Nobody wants to be some sort of manly man's mountain man or a Victorian-era tea-sipping countess. Men have grown increasingly passive, effeminate, and unsure of themselves. Women have grown increasingly manly, aggressive, and unsure of their future. These are hard words today, but they sum up the drift of a secularizing world.

In 2016, the sexes have lost the script for their lives, and so many of us don't know what role to play in life. Try asking a male friend at a coffee shop, "What is your manhood *for*? What's the purpose of being a man?" Or try querying a young woman at the local university, "What meaning does womanhood



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have? Does it matter at all?” A good number of folks would, in being asked these kind of questions, look at us like we had just invited them on a lunar cruise in a tugboat. Outside of affirming feminism, transgender identity, and shape-shifting sexual orientation, it’s taboo today to speak of manhood and womanhood in any fixed way. This is true in secular circles, and it’s increasingly true in even Christian circles.

This confusion extends to sex. When it comes to this perennial hot topic, we are told that fluidity trumps biology. There is no specific meaning of manhood and womanhood, and thus there is no structure or plan for sex. You just be who you choose to be, and you experiment with whoever strikes your fancy. You don’t need to wait, you don’t need to restrain your natural desires, you don’t need to commit yourself. You need only to act on your impulses. When you’re doing so, in fact, you find out who you truly are. You’re then happy, alive, liberated, and *human*.

Christians have something better to offer—something impossibly better. We have an altogether different vision of human flourishing. The Scripture shows us that flourishing as a human means, ultimately, thriving as a man and a woman. This is a foundational truth of our existence, proceeding from pages 1 and 2 of the Bible. This means that coming to faith entails learning what manhood is and what womanhood is. It means we learn what our bodies are for, for learning about our bodies necessarily entails discovering who we are. God is no exotic gender theorist, separating anatomy from identity. As we shall see, the teaching of Scripture is that your body and your identity are bound, a whole, constituting a person, namely, *you*. Me.

The gospel unlocks these discoveries. When we trust Christ as our Savior, the beauty of God’s design comes into view.



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Our conversion opens our eyes to the nature and purpose of our God-given sex. We see the body not as a blunt instrument for our lusts, but as the gift of God for his glorification. We see our relationships with the opposite sex not as a power play, but as an opportunity to serve others in the name of Christ. We see the plan of complementarity, the roles we have the privilege of filling, not as a sentence to misery but as a summons to happiness. These discoveries come through the eyes of faith. We most savor the grand design when we know the great designer.

For some readers, this big vision of the sexes may sound a bit odd. Is it really *that* big of a deal to be a man or woman? Sure, you may affirm the reality of two sexes, but aren't things less strict than they used to be? Maybe you wonder if the apostles who wrote the New Testament were simply men of their time, and so their exhortations and teachings matter less to us than first-century readers. Plus, we've all seen ways in which men and women both can overdo things. Some have grown up in genuinely restrictive environments and have been wounded by past instruction. Where this is the case, we grieve these abuses, which are no part of God's good will. Any perversion of biblical teaching owes not to the Word of God, but to the sinfulness of man, which unfortunately plays out all around us every day. It is not chauvinism or feminism that Scripture supports. God has something vastly better than what a broken, confused, predatory world offers us.

We're going to step in the Central Park of the universe in this book. Accustomed to disillusioning chaos and polluted streets, we're going to breathe fresh, clear air. We will see that all the Bible is pure, and reflects God's own mind. Neither jot nor tittle has passed away, Jesus said, which tells us that

the Bible still instructs us in principle where it does not any longer instruct us in practice (Matt. 5:18).

This reflects the cherished words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3. “All Scripture is breathed out by God,” the apostle informs us, “and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This means that all the written revelation of God has direct effect on our life, doctrine, and spirituality. We evangelicals may have been told that some parts of the Scripture are really important, some are kind-of-important, and some you can take or leave. But as we’ll show in the pages to come, this ranking system will not do.

Yes, some doctrines reside at the burning core of living faith. You must believe them to know God. Salvation hinges on them. No, not every matter in the Bible is equally easy to parse out (eschatology, for one). Yes, we have charity toward younger Christians who may not know all their theological niceties. No, there is not complete agreement among complementarians (those who hold, at base, to male leadership and feminine submission in the home and church) on all the outworkings of scriptural teaching.

Get ready, friends. We want to do something radical in our time: we want to celebrate God’s Word. We want to savor a crucial part of the whole counsel of God. After all, we are not the too-cool-for-school postmodern cynic who deigns to assent to the parts of Scripture that strike his fancy (and that sound good to his non-Christian friends). We are the Psalmist, exclaiming, “Oh, how I love your law!”

We’re not in this for condemnation. We’re in this for exaltation. We’re in this for delight. We want to see men and women captured by the gospel come alive to the beauty of



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manhood and womanhood. We want to see marriages roar to life, children well-taught and well-loved, singles filled with hope, churches pulsing with happy holiness, and societies influenced by gracious and convictional complementarian witness.

We know that this is a big vision and a big goal. But we worship a big God and trust a great gospel. It is a gospel so great that it takes ruined, messed-up, confused people and turns them into living doxology. We are called to a way of life that shows that Jesus is more than fire insurance. The faith is a worldview, an embodied worldview. When we trust Christ, we inherit a new way of seeing. We are like new arrivals to a thrilling city. It's fun to look at a street map or a café website. But we are those who see not only the details, the raw data of a new and better place, but the grand design of it all.

*To that spectacular design we now turn.*