



Birds of Prey

By Mark Powell

An ugly furore has erupted recently involving Aimee Byrd and the hostile response to her book, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Zondervan, 2020). The reaction to Byrd's work by some has been ungodly—to say the least—as can be evidence by the screen shots that Byrd herself has published.

What's more, Byrd claims that she has also been "de-platformed" by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals in a way that appears to be terribly unprofessional. Although, to be fair to them, they had asked her publicly a series of nine questions about concerns numerous people but Byrd has refused to respond to them all, which only further added fuel to the fire.

All this has only added weight to the claims of egalitarians that those who identify as "complementarian" don't really have the well-being of their Christian sisters at heart. Worse, that it is being used as a smokescreen to justify the misogynist attitudes and behaviour that exists within the conservative evangelical church.

To their credit, a number of ministers and elders from within the Presbyterian denomination of which Byrd herself belongs have issued an "open letter" of rebuke for how she has been treated. We should clearly and consistently condemn any physical or verbal abuse of another person, and *especially* when a man commits this against a woman. 1 Peter 3:7—a passage that Byrd strangely never refers to in her book—is more than apt.

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

While the above passage explicitly outlines how husbands should treat their wives, all believers are exhorted to speak the

truth to one another in love (Eph. 4:15) as well as commanded to act with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col. 3:12). If as husbands we fail to treat our wives with due consideration and respect, then our own fellowship with the LORD will be impacted.

How Aimee Byrd has been treated clearly grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:29-32). And the fact that many of the men who are guilty of such sins are office bearers in Christ's church is a timely warning and exhortation for us all to repent and refrain from any such conduct.

There are some, though, who think that this is all that we should say on the issue. However, there are a number of reasons why both Byrd's book and her actions since it has been published should also be addressed.

Firstly, Byrd's book is deeply flawed in a legion of different ways. For a fuller critique see the two excellent reviews by Mark Jones and Andrew David Naselli. My own reservations about the book are as follows:

- Byrd does a very poor job in handling the Scriptures. Significantly, passages which are integral to the entire debate are completely ignored (i.e. 1 Tim. 2:8-15, 1 Pet. 3:1-7). This is inexcusable, especially when Byrd is arguing that women should take up teaching and leadership roles in the church and that obscure New Testament figures such Phoebe, Lydia and Junia were "church planters" and even apostles.
- Byrd's treatment of Genesis 1-3 is superficial at best. She argues that there is no creation paradigm involving authority and submission between Adam and Eve. That is patently untrue.

- Byrd follows the popular feminist trope and anecdotally argues that complementarianism leads to domestic violence (DV). But as Dr. W. Bradford Wilcox, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, argues in his book *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, not only are the rates of DV higher amongst those who are egalitarian, but Protestant men who are complementarian and attend church regularly have the lowest rates of DV for any group in society.
- Byrd makes some incredibly serious personal allegations against Dr. Bruce Ware and Dr. Wayne Grudem, two of the world's most respected Biblical scholars and theologians, repeatedly accusing their views regarding the Trinity as "heretical", "unorthodox" and "errant".
- Byrd misrepresents the position of the "complementarians" she specifically attacks, particularly Grudem and Piper. Neither Ware nor Grudem believe that Jesus - the Son of God - is "ontologically" subordinate to the Father, but only "economically" (or functionally). Similarly, Byrd accuses Piper of teaching that all women should submit to all men - something he has clearly and consistently repudiated.
- Byrd argues for what I refer to as a "sexist hermeneutic". Byrd believes that Scripture is inherently 'androcentric' (male-centred) and that we should adopt a "Gynocentric (feminine) Reading of Scripture". This is an expression that Byrd uses no less than twenty-three times. Her point is that while women are not the centre of the Bible's message, the feminine perspective should be one of the grids through which we interpret it. The problem with this approach is that it de-thrones Christ from being the lens through which we interpret God's Word (e.g. Luke 24:27).
- Byrd condemns an entire movement by attacking a minority of its representatives. When *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* was first published in 1992 it received Christianity Today's "Book of the Year". And while Piper and Grudem (the book's editors) are repeatedly attacked, Byrd never engages with the chapters—written by women—which specifically deal with what Biblical femininity actually looks like, notably the chapters by Elisabeth Elliot, "The Essence of Femininity" and Dee Jepsen, "Women in Society: The Challenge and the Call".
- Byrd contends that complementarians are "biblicists" who "emphasize proof texting over a comprehensive biblical theology" and that "they often don't notice they are also looking through their own lens of preconceived theological assumptions". Ironically, though, this is what Byrd herself is guilty of doing. Her entire book is framed by the classic feminist metaphor of peeling back the "yellow wallpaper".

And as such, it is her own philosophical feminism which wallpapers over the meaning of the Biblical text.

- Byrd shows a lack of understanding for church history. Byrd argues that complementarians "...employ a fundamentalist approach to God's Word that doesn't take into account how the church and the Scriptures go hand in hand." And yet, the only historical example she gives is that of Anne Hutchinson, a seventeenth century Puritan who was convicted of heresy. Byrd states that this was only because she had become a threat to male authority, but it was actually because Hutchinson had rejected biblical authority and believed that she was receiving authoritative teaching directly from God and that contradicted the Bible!
- Byrd relies heavily upon egalitarian theologians to support her case, and fails to deal with the best of evangelical scholarship. This is really a fatal flaw for anyone who wants their work to be treated seriously.

Since the book's publication, Byrd has set out to "dox" those who have spoken out against her on social media, "to search for and publish private or identifying information about (a particular individual) on the Internet, typically with malicious intent." As Carl Truman and Todd Pruitt—Byrd's former co-hosts—have written:

Over the last 48 hours we have heard from many pastors who never took part in the ungodly chatter on the GC site. Some of them left over a year ago. However, they are now being harassed and their employers being pressured to fire them. In some cases, their spouses are facing possible termination of their employment. It is unconscionable that this would be done to hundreds of innocent men and women all in the name of the peace and purity of the church.

Byrd has been treated and spoken about in an indefensible way, but we are not to "return evil for evil" (1 Peter 3:9). 'Doxing' does not purify the Church.

Ultimately, Christ's Name has been dishonoured both in how some leaders in the church have treated her, but also in the teaching which Byrd herself has published. James 3:1-2 seems especially pertinent:

"Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check."

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