

“Wayne Grudem continues to exhibit faithfulness to the biblical revelation and courage in the light of near universal opposition, as exhibited most recently in this superb volume. Sailing under the flag of evangelical work, this new brand of feminism will take the church directly into liberalism. There is not a more important book to read on the subject than this one.”

—PAIGE PATTERSON

President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary,  
Fort Worth, Texas

“The entire Body of Christ owes an enormous debt of gratitude to Wayne Grudem for his courage in taking on what has become a Goliath within the camp of modern-day evangelicalism, and for his noncombative, gracious spirit in doing so. Those who love the truth will find here an invaluable resource in a user-friendly format that is both scholarly and accessible.”

—NANCY LEIGH DEMOSS

Author, radio host, *Revive Our Hearts*

“‘Wherever the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved.’ In keeping with Luther’s observation, Wayne Grudem takes a vital stand and encourages us to join him. He tackles the issue firmly and fairly and with the clarity we have come to expect from his scholarly pen.”

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Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi  
Adjunct Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary

“The egalitarian ideology is one of the most significant theological challenges in our time. Wayne Grudem presents a careful and systematic study of the cause and ramifications of this shift. In his persistent and gentle tone, Grudem challenges egalitarian thinking. While authors and scholars sympathetic to egalitarianism may be loath to consider they may in fact be wrong, Grudem pleads with his readers to reconsider their positions.”

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“However fervently we hope that the answer to this book’s question is a resounding no, Grudem furnishes evidence that cannot be lightly dismissed. His chapters and charges carry varying weights. But they all flow out of solid scholarship, love for the church, and zeal for the truth. All who welcome the Bible’s teaching should welcome the insights of this concise and valuable study.”

—ROBERT W. YARBROUGH

Editor, *Trinity Journal*

Associate Professor of New Testament,

New Testament Department Chair,

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

# EVANGELICAL **FEMINISM**



A NEW PATH **TO** LIBERALISM?

WAYNE GRUDEM

CROSSWAY BOOKS

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*Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?*

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CH	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	09	08	07	06			
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I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

ACTS 20:26-27

. . . warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

COLOSSIANS 1:28-29

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

2 TIMOTHY 2:24-25

# PREFACE

This is not a book that addresses all the questions about men's and women's roles in the home and the church today. I have already edited one such book (of 566 pages), and more recently I have written another one (of 856 pages).<sup>1</sup>

Nor is this a book that gives detailed, practical answers about how churches should teach on men's and women's roles in marriage and the church. I have also written extensively on that topic in my 2004 book *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*.

Nor do I attempt to explain in this book my own position on men's and women's roles in any detail, for I have already done that in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*.<sup>2</sup>

Nor do I explain in this book the areas in which I think the evangelical feminist movement has brought some helpful corrections to evangelical churches and families, so that Christians today have a far greater recognition of the need for husbands to respect and honor their wives, and of the need for churches to encourage more opportunities for widespread ministries by women than they have done in the past. These areas are also covered in those earlier books.

This book is rather an expression of deep concern about a widespread undermining of the authority of Scripture in the arguments that are frequently used to support evangelical feminism. And it is also

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<sup>1</sup> See John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991); and Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 2004). The 1991 book was a collection of twenty-six chapters by twenty-two different authors, and it has been widely used as the standard defense of a "complementarian" position for the last fifteen years. In the 2004 book I sought to produce an exhaustive resource on all questions and topics that have been raised by evangelical authors in this controversial area in the last thirty years, and that book was the culmination of my own involvement in this controversy at the academic level for over twenty-five years.

In addition, I have also edited two other collections of significant essays on this question: see Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002); and Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey, eds., *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> I hold that men and women have equal value and importance to God and somewhat different roles in marriage and in the church, but a detailed explanation of this is found in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (see note 1, above).

Additional resources supporting the "complementarian" position that I hold can be found at the website of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org).

a way of posing a question: can a movement that espouses this many ways of undermining the authority of Scripture possibly be right? If God had wanted to teach us an egalitarian position, would he have made it so hard to find in Scripture that it would require this many incorrect methods to discover and defend it?

The argument of this book first found expression in a brief chapter in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (500-517). Now in this present book I have added much additional material, including significant interaction with many of the essays in the recent evangelical feminist book *Discovering Biblical Equality*.<sup>3</sup> I have also documented several new developments in denominations and other organizations in which my argument of a “slippery slope” from evangelical feminism to liberalism has received further confirmation. Once an evangelical feminist position is adopted, the development only goes in one direction, again and again.

I wish to thank Phoenix Seminary students Ben Burdick and Chris Davis for research and editing help at various places in this book, and also Chris Cowan and Rob Lister, students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, for their earlier work in helping to adapt significant portions of material in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* to the structure I used for the argument of this book. I am also grateful to my friends Ron Dickison and Trent Poling, who continue to cheerfully solve my computer problems, and to Sovereign Grace Ministries, for a grant that has provided very useful office equipment and research help.

I also wish to thank my wife, Margaret, for her constant support and encouragement as I worked to finish this manuscript.

I have dedicated this book to my “Prayer Partners,” an unnamed group of friends who have quietly and regularly prayed for me for nearly ten years now, and whose specific prayers God has answered many, many times. I am thankful to God for all of you.

—Wayne Grudem  
Scottsdale, Arizona  
June 23, 2006

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<sup>3</sup>Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press: 2004). I have also added new material interacting with the essays in *Discovering Biblical Equality* to a forthcoming book, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism* (to be published by Multnomah in October 2006). That book is a condensed version of my book *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, and it gives an overview of the key arguments in a form suitable for church study groups, college classes, or individuals who want a shorter summary of the entire manhood-womanhood controversy.

**PART I**  
**SOME PATHS TO LIBERALISM**  
**IN RECENT HISTORY**





# INTRODUCTION

I am concerned that evangelical feminism (also called “egalitarianism”) has become a new path by which evangelicals are being drawn into theological liberalism.<sup>1</sup>

When I use the phrase “theological liberalism” I mean a system of thinking that denies the complete truthfulness of the Bible as the Word of God and denies the unique and absolute authority of the Bible in our lives. When I speak of “evangelical feminism” I mean a movement that claims there are no unique leadership roles for men in marriage or in the church. According to evangelical feminism, there is no leadership role in marriage that belongs to the husband simply because he is the husband, but leadership is to be shared between husband and wife according to their gifts and desires. And there are no leadership roles in the church reserved for men, but women as well as men can be pastors and elders and hold any office in the church.

In the following pages, I attempt to show several things:

- (1) that liberal Protestant denominations were the pioneers of evangelical feminism, and that evangelical feminists today have adopted many of the arguments earlier used by theological liberals to advocate the ordination of women and to reject male headship in marriage

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<sup>1</sup>This book is significantly adapted and extended from my article “Is Evangelical Feminism the New Path to Liberalism? Some Disturbing Warning Signs,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 9/1 (Spring 2004), 35-84. That article was itself an adapted excerpt from my book *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 2004). All of the material in this book that overlaps with *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* is used by permission of Multnomah Publishers. (I wish to thank Chris Cowan and Rob Lister of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, for doing much work to adapt the material in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* for publication in the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* article.)

- (2) that many prominent evangelical feminist writers today advocate positions that deny or undermine the authority of Scripture, and many other egalitarian leaders endorse their books and take no public stance against those who deny the authority of Scripture
- (3) that recent trends now show that evangelical feminists are heading toward the denial of anything uniquely masculine, and some already endorse calling God “our Mother in heaven”
- (4) that the history of others who have adopted these positions shows that the next step is the endorsement of the moral legitimacy of homosexuality
- (5) that the common thread running through all of these trends is a rejection of the effective authority of Scripture in people’s lives, and that this is the bedrock principle of theological liberalism

As I have taught for nearly thirty years in Christian colleges and seminaries, people have often asked me, “How do Christian colleges that were once Bible-believing, conservative colleges become so liberal, eventually denying the Bible in what is taught on campus?” Others have asked me, “How have so many denominations that used to be Bible-believing denominations now abandoned belief in the Bible? Why do liberal pastors now preach whatever is popular in the current culture rather than proclaiming the truth of the Bible as the Word of God?”

There are several different reasons, of course. But giving in to cultural pressure is often a significant factor. In every generation there are popular views in the culture that contradict what the Bible says, and it is so easy to compromise at one point or another.

In the early twentieth century it was so easy to give in to the liberal emphasis on “the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man” and say that people are essentially good, and they don’t need a Savior who died for their sins, and there is no such thing as hell. By following this reasoning many Christian churches followed the culture and drifted into liberalism.

Through much of the twentieth century it was easy to give in to the dominant “scientific” worldview and say that genuine miracles can’t happen because they violate the “laws of nature,” and so the virgin birth of Christ and other miracles in the Bible did not really happen, but that does not matter because the Bible still teaches us how to live a moral life. By following this reasoning many Christian churches followed the culture and drifted into liberalism.

Today, for scholars who work in the scientific community, it would be so easy to give in to the dominant view in the culture and say that all living things simply “evolved” from nonliving matter through random mutation and did not come about by direct design and creation by God. But those who adopt evolution as their explanation for the origin of life just follow the culture and drift into liberalism.

It can happen in any area. It happens when people grow weary of defending Jesus’ words, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Then it can be so easy to give in to the pressures of our tolerance-riddled culture and say that “all religions are different paths to the same God.” And then the unique message of the gospel that alone tells us how our sins can be forgiven is lost, and Christian churches just follow the culture into liberalism.

I believe the same thing is happening today with evangelical feminism. There is tremendous pressure in present-day culture to deny male leadership in the home and the church. To prove that, just ask any pastor if he enjoys preaching and teaching about male headship in marriage and the church today. Almost nobody wants to tackle the subject! It is “too controversial,” which means it will stir up objections and many people will be upset. It is not easy to stand against the culture. It is much easier to give in and say women can do whatever men can do in the church and in the home.

But what about all those Bible verses that talk about male leadership in home and church? Something has to be done with them, so for the last thirty years evangelical feminist scholars have devised thousands of pages of arguments attempting to show that those parts of the Bible don’t apply to us today, or don’t mean what people have always thought they mean, or aren’t part of the Bible, or are contradicted by experience, or are simply wrong. And so, as I explain in the following pages, the authority of the Bible is undermined.

When that happens, little by little, step by step, colleges and churches and denominations start to slide toward liberalism. This is because the claims and arguments that evangelical feminists adopt about these specific passages in the Bible set in motion a process of interpreting Scripture that will be used increasingly to nullify the authority of Scripture in other areas as well. One by one, the teachings of Scripture that are unpopular in the culture are rejected, and, one issue at a time, the church begins to sound more and more like the secular world. This

is the classic path to liberalism. And I believe that evangelical feminism is leading Christians down that path one step at a time today.

The late Francis Schaeffer, one of the wisest and most influential Christian thinkers of the twentieth century, warned of this exact trend just a few months before his death in 1984. In his book *The Great Evangelical Disaster* he included a section called “The Feminist Subversion,” in which he wrote:

There is one final area that I would mention where evangelicals have, with tragic results, accommodated to the world spirit of this age. This has to do with the whole area of marriage, family, sexual morality, feminism, homosexuality, and divorce. . . .

The key to understanding extreme feminism centers around the idea of total equality, or more properly the idea of *equality without distinction*. . . . the world spirit in our day would have us aspire to autonomous absolute freedom in the area of male and female relationships—to throw off all form and boundaries in these relationships and especially those boundaries taught in the Scriptures. . . .

Some evangelical leaders, in fact, have changed their views about inerrancy as a direct consequence of trying to come to terms with feminism. There is no other word for this than accommodation. It is a direct and deliberate bending of the Bible to conform to the world spirit of our age at the point where the modern spirit conflicts with what the Bible teaches.<sup>2</sup>

My argument in the following pages demonstrates that what Schaeffer predicted so clearly twenty-two years ago is increasingly coming true in evangelicalism today. It is a deeply troubling trend.

I am not the only one who has reached this conclusion. In the widely influential blog “Together for the Gospel,” Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., recently wrote:

<sup>2</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1984), 130, 134-135, 137, italics in original.

it is my best and most sober judgment that this position [egalitarianism] is effectively an undermining of—a breach in—the authority of Scripture. . . . it seems to me and others (many who are younger than myself) that *this issue of egalitarianism and complementarianism is increasingly acting as the watershed distinguishing those who will accommodate Scripture to culture, and those who will attempt to shape culture by Scripture.* You may disagree, but this is our honest concern before God. It is no lack of charity, nor honesty. It is no desire for power or tradition for tradition's sake. It is our sober conclusion from observing the last 50 years. . . .

Of course there are issues more central to the gospel than gender issues. However, *there may be no way the authority of Scripture is being undermined more quickly or more thoroughly in our day than through the hermeneutics of egalitarian readings of the Bible.* And when the authority of Scripture is undermined, the gospel will not long be acknowledged.<sup>3</sup>

On a more personal level, I want to say that I consider a number of the authors whom I name in this book to be my friends. And I consider a number of the executives at many of the colleges, seminaries, and publishing houses that I name in this book to be my friends as well. I want to say something to you at the outset.

I realize that many of you have not personally moved along the path toward liberalism that I describe in this book. You simply decided (for various reasons) that you thought the Bible does not prohibit women from being pastors or elders today, and you have changed nothing else in your theological system. You haven't moved to liberalism and you wonder why I wrote this book arguing that evangelical feminism leads to liberalism.

In fact, I agree with your strong desire to see women's gifts and ministries developed and encouraged in our churches, and I have written elsewhere about the many important ministries that I think should be open to both men and women.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, I realize that most of you do not think you are leading

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<sup>3</sup>“Undermining Tolerance of Egalitarianism,” posted May 31, 2006 by Mark Dever at <http://blog.togetherforthegospel.org>, accessed 6/23/06; supporting comments were later posted by Albert Mohler, Ligon Duncan, and C. J. Mahaney.

<sup>4</sup>See Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 84-101.

churches and schools toward liberalism at all. After all, you personally love Jesus Christ and love the Bible and teach it effectively. How, you might think, could that contribute to liberalism? And furthermore, you know others who take the same approaches, and they haven't become liberal, have they?

In fact, I have a number of egalitarian friends who have not moved one inch toward liberalism in the rest of their doctrinal convictions, and who still strongly believe and defend the inerrancy of the Bible. I include among this number strong defenders of biblical inerrancy such as Stan Gundry (senior vice president and editor in chief of the Book Group at Zondervan Publishing Company); Jack Hayford (founding pastor of the Church on the Way, Van Nuys, California); Walter Kaiser (former president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary); Roger Nicole (former professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and at Reformed Theological Seminary–Orlando); and Grant Osborne (professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois). These men are respected senior scholars and leaders in the evangelical world. If they can hold to an evangelical feminist or egalitarian position without moving toward liberalism themselves, then how can I argue in this book that evangelical feminism is a new path toward liberalism?

I do so *because of the nature of the arguments used by evangelical feminists*, arguments that I explain in some detail in the following pages. I realize that a person can adopt one of these arguments and not move any further than that single step down the path to liberalism for the rest of his life. Many of these leaders have done just that. But I think the reason they have not moved further toward liberalism is that they have not followed the implications of the kind of argument they are using and have not taken it into other areas of their convictions. However, others who follow them will do so. Francis Schaeffer warned years ago that the first generation of Christians who lead the church astray doctrinally change only one key point in their doctrinal position and change nothing else, so it can seem for a time that the change is not too harmful. But their followers and disciples in the next generation will take the logic of their arguments much further and will advocate much more extensive kinds of error. I think that is happening in a regular, predictable way in evangelical feminism, and I have sought to document that in this book.

Therefore, to all of my egalitarian friends, I ask you to consider care-

fully the arguments and the pattern of arguments that I discuss in this book. You may think you are doing nothing wrong, or you may think that if you adopt a doubtful or questionable interpretation here or there, it won't matter much. But I am asking you to stop and consider what is happening in the evangelical feminist movement as a whole, how the trend is to undermine the authority of Scripture again and again at this verse or in that phrase or this chapter or that context.

You may think your own role in this does not influence the larger debate, but, like the soldier in a battle line who thinks that his place is not that important, if you give way at one point you may provide a huge opening for an enemy to flood in and overrun large sections of the church.

It is easy to pick up a new article or book, skim through the argument, and think, "Well, I can't agree with his (or her) approach to this verse, or that argument, but at least the book is supporting what I know to be right: the inclusion of women in all aspects of ministry. Maybe this argument or that one is not acceptable, but I can approve the result just the same." And so, one after another, the egalitarian arguments that I list in this book accumulate and the Christian public accepts them.

But what if the assumptions made, and the interpretative principles used, actually do undermine the authority of Scripture time and again? *Does that make any difference to you?* If you allow arguments to stand that undermine Scripture again and again, just because you think the author "got the right answer for the wrong reason," isn't that eroding the foundation of your church for the future? If Scripture-eroding arguments go unchallenged in your circles, how can you protect your church or your organization in the future? While you personally may not change much else in your beliefs, your students and others who follow your leadership will take the principles you have used much further and will abandon much more than you expect.

Please consider what I say in these pages. I hope you will be persuaded, and will perhaps even change your mind on some of the arguments you have used, or even on the conclusions you have drawn. But even if at the end you are still convinced that an egalitarian position is correct, will you at least decide to challenge publicly some of the evident steps toward liberalism that other egalitarians have supported? With all of the steps toward liberalism that I detail in these pages, it surprises me

to see how few egalitarian leaders publicly object to any of these arguments. I hope I can count on some of you to do so.

To other readers who are undecided on this question or who are already complementarians, I would say this: As you read this book, if you become increasingly troubled about the trends I describe, then I hope you will pray and speak up and serve in your own churches in such a way that any trends toward liberalism can be stopped, so that your church will remain faithful to God's Word for the next generation.

But I also want you to be careful not to overreact and start to become more "conservative" than the Bible! This would lead to a wrongful legalism that would restrict mature, godly, gifted women from rightful ministries, as has too often been done in the past. Such legalism can lead to a loss of God's blessing as well, and it can destroy churches as readily as liberalism (see Gal. 2:4-5; 5:1; Titus 1:10-11). I have explained elsewhere in some detail where I believe the Bible gives freedom and encouragement for women to minister in many different ways in churches today,<sup>5</sup> and I will not repeat that discussion here. Stated briefly, I believe that "some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men,"<sup>6</sup> but apart from those specific governing and teaching roles all ministries are open to both men and women alike. We must obey every part of the Bible that applies to our situations today, but we also must be careful not to add to the rules of Scripture and place more restrictions on others than the Bible itself teaches (see Rom. 14:1-10; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Ps. 119:1; Prov 30:5-6). It is possible to make a mistake in both directions.

"You shall not *add* to the word that I command you, nor *take from* it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you" (Deut. 4:2).

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<sup>5</sup> See Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, especially 84-100.

<sup>6</sup> *The Danvers Statement*, affirmation 6, from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood; see [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org).



# THE HISTORICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN LIBERALISM AND THE ENDORSEMENT OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION IN THE CHURCH

**W**hen we look at what happened in the last half of the twentieth century, quite a clear connection can be seen between theological liberalism and the endorsement of women's ordination. In an important sociological study published by Harvard University Press, Mark Chaves traces the history of women's ordination in various denominations in the United States.<sup>1</sup> From Chaves's study, we can observe a pattern among the mainstream Protestant denominations whose leadership is dominated by theological liberals (that is, by those who reject the idea that the entire Bible is the written Word of God and is truthful in all it affirms).<sup>2</sup> Chaves notes the dates when ordination of women was approved in each of these denominations:

Methodist Church	1956
Presbyterian Church (USA)	1956 (north), 1964 (south)
American Lutheran Church	1970

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> A more precise statement of a clear dividing line between liberals and evangelicals is found in the statement of faith of the Evangelical Theological Society, which says, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs" (that is, in the original manuscripts) (available online at [www.etsjets.org](http://www.etsjets.org)).

Lutheran Church in America <sup>3</sup>	1970
Episcopal Church	1976 <sup>4</sup>

Chaves notes an interesting example with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). In 1964 the SBC approved women's ordination (that is, a local congregation ordained a woman and this action was not overturned by the denomination itself). But in 1964 the denominational leadership and the control of the seminaries were in the hands of the more liberal "moderates" (the SBC term for those who did not affirm biblical inerrancy). However, in 1984, after conservatives recaptured control of the SBC, the denomination passed a resolution "that we encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work *other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination*."<sup>5</sup> This means that when the conservatives who held to biblical inerrancy recaptured the denomination, the denomination revoked its previous willingness to ordain women.<sup>6</sup>

Chaves lists dates for the approval of women's ordination for some other denominations that are not completely dominated by theological liberalism but that are broadly tolerant of liberalism and have seminary professors and denominational officials who have moved significantly in a liberal direction. (These categorizations of denominational doctrinal positions are not made by Chaves, who simply lists the denominations and the dates; they are my own assessment.) Consider the following denominations:

Mennonite Church	1973
Evangelical Covenant Church	1976
Reformed Church in America	1979

<sup>3</sup> The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America are presently combined into a single denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

<sup>4</sup> Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 16-17. Chaves lists many other denominations, such as some Baptist and Pentecostal denominations, that were ordaining women much earlier and were not affected by theological liberalism. Many of these other groups placed a strong emphasis on leading and calling by the Holy Spirit (such as Pentecostal groups) or on the autonomy of the local congregation (such as many Baptist groups) and therefore they were not adopting women's ordination because of theological liberalism. My point here is that when liberalism was the dominant theological viewpoint in a denomination, from 1956 onward it became inevitable that the denomination would endorse women's ordination.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 35, italics added.

<sup>6</sup> A much stronger action than the resolution Chaves mentions was taken in June 2000, when the SBC added to "The Baptist Faith and Message" (its official statement of doctrine) the following sentence: "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture" (added to article 6, "The Church").

Another example that occurred after Chaves finished his book was the Christian Reformed Church, which in 1995 approved the ordination of women.<sup>7</sup> Chaves does note, however, that the Christian Reformed Church “shifted its official position away from inerrancy only in 1972.”<sup>8</sup>

Are there any types of denominations that are resistant to the ordination of women? Chaves indicates the following results of his study:

Two groups of denominations are particularly resistant to women's ordination: denominations practicing sacramental ritual and *denominations endorsing biblical inerrancy*. . . . Biblically inerrant denominations are . . . resistant to formal gender equality.<sup>9</sup>

By “denominations practicing sacramental ritual” Chaves refers especially to Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Episcopalian denominations, who think of the priest as standing in the place of Christ at the Lord's Supper. Chaves thinks that explains why the Episcopal Church was rather slow in endorsing women's ordination in comparison to other denominations. But he notes that for “biblically inerrant denominations” the argument that the Bible prohibits the ordination of women is by far the most persuasive argument.<sup>10</sup>

I think that Chaves's observation that “denominations endorsing biblical inerrancy” are “particularly resistant to women's ordination” can be reinforced if we consider three influential evangelical denominations in the United States: the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). All three have the following characteristics in common:

- (1) they have fought major battles with liberalism recently enough that such conflicts are still part of the personal memories of current leaders;

<sup>7</sup> See “CRC Reverses Decision . . . Again,” *CBMW News*, August 1995, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 86.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85, italics added.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-91. Chaves strongly favors the ordination of women and goes on to argue that the Bible does not prohibit it.

- (2) these leaders recognize that the liberal groups from which they are separate now aggressively promote women's ordination (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church–USA, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship [CBF]);
- (3) these leaders and their denominations are strongly opposed to women's ordination.

In the Southern Baptist Convention, conservatives who held to inerrancy regained control of the denomination over a ten- or fifteen-year period beginning in 1979.<sup>11</sup> The SBC in 2000 added a formal provision to its doctrinal statement that “The office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture” (article 6 of “The Baptist Faith and Message”).

The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in 1974 dismissed the president of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, a measure that soon led to the angry resignation of forty-five of the fifty faculty members of the seminary, thereby removing most of the influence of theological liberalism that denied the complete truthfulness of Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

Yet another example is the Presbyterian Church in America, which was formed when conservatives left the more liberal Southern Presbyterian Church in 1973.<sup>13</sup>

In each of these three denominations, people who currently hold positions of leadership remember their struggles with theological liberalism, and they remember that an egalitarian advocacy of women's ordination goes hand in hand with theological liberalism.

Another example of the connection between tendencies toward liberalism and the ordination of women is Fuller Theological Seminary in

<sup>11</sup> Conservatives regained control of the Southern Baptist Convention beginning with the election of Adrian Rogers as president of the denomination in 1979 (see Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000], 99).

<sup>12</sup> The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod had been drifting toward a liberal view of Scripture for perhaps twenty or thirty years when conservatives within the denomination effectively regained control with the election of J. A. O. Preus as the denomination's president in 1969. The denominational convention in 1973 in New Orleans affirmed its clear adherence to biblical inerrancy, and with this victory the denominational leadership suspended the president of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, John Tietjen, on January 20, 1974. In February 1974, forty-five of the fifty faculty members at Concordia Seminary left in protest, but new faculty members were appointed, and the seminary and the denomination after that remained in the control of conservatives who held to biblical inerrancy. (See Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1979], 244–274, especially 259–270.)

<sup>13</sup> See Susan Lynn Peterson, *Timeline Charts of the Western Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999), 248.

Pasadena, California. Though Fuller began as a conservative evangelical seminary, it removed the doctrine of biblical inerrancy from its statement of faith in 1971, and today there is significant influence from theological liberalism among its faculty. In addition, full-fledged advocacy of the ordination of women reigns on campus, and I doubt that Fuller would hire as a professor anyone holding another position (or if someone were hired, I doubt that he would be allowed to express his opposition to women's ordination publicly).

As long ago as 1987, the egalitarian viewpoint was so firmly entrenched at Fuller that even a responsible academic statement of a complementarian view was effectively silenced by a barrage of protests. In May 1987, I received the following letter from a New Testament professor who had been invited to teach a course at Fuller on the Pastoral Epistles:

What reminded me to write this letter was the class on the Pastorals that I am teaching at Fuller. . . . Boy did I get in trouble. One lady walked out, incredibly irate. The Women's Concerns Committee sent a letter to all my students, claiming that I should never have been allowed to teach this and that they would try to censor any further teaching along traditional lines of interpretation. So much for academic freedom and inquiry. I wrote to the dean and will be interested to see how the actual administration will react. I find it incredibly interesting, and inconsistent, that they allow the teaching of universalism . . . but our view of the women's passage must be banned.<sup>14</sup>

Two months later I received a follow-up letter:

For two and a half weeks I was slandered up and down campus. I was the major subject on the declaration board, etc. It was a real mess. . . . The vast majority of the letters were from students who were not in the class. . . . 2 1/2 weeks after the fact . . . Dean Meye finally called and we had dinner together. . . . He asked if I would be willing to retell the class what my actual intention was, and without groveling or backtracking, say that to whatever extent I was responsible for the

<sup>14</sup> Personal letter from William D. Mounce to Wayne Grudem, received May 14, 1987, quoted by permission.

misunderstanding, I apologize. . . . So I agreed and it went very well. . . . The next day Meye was deluged with letters and visits from my students who were very upset at the committee and his handling of the situation. . . . Meye never apologized, said that he or the school had behaved improperly, or that anything was mishandled except that I was allowed to teach what I thought. He accused me of such dastardly deeds as presenting my personal views with more force than the other views. . . . People need to be aware of what will happen at their schools if this situation is not dealt with properly.<sup>15</sup>

Endorsement of the ordination of women is not the final step in the process, however. If we look at the denominations that approved women's ordination from 1956–1976, we find that several of them, such as the United Methodist Church and the United Presbyterian Church (now called the Presbyterian Church–USA), have large contingents pressing for (a) the endorsement of homosexual conduct as morally valid and (b) the approval of homosexual ordination. In fact, the Episcopal Church on August 5, 2003, approved the appointment of an openly homosexual bishop.<sup>16</sup>

In more liberal denominations such as these, a predictable sequence has been seen (though so far only the Episcopal Church has followed the sequence to point 7):

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<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Personal letter from William D. Mounce to Wayne Grudem, received July 23, 1987, quoted by permission.

<sup>16</sup> "Episcopal Church Elects First Openly Gay Bishop," [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com), August 6, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> In the United Methodist Church, however, in April 2004, "a clergy jury in the [United Methodist Church's] Pacific Northwest regional unit voted to retain the ministerial credentials of Karen Dammann, a self-avowed lesbian who recently 'married' her partner. . . . Church members looking to their bishops for a decisive response in defense of church discipline didn't get one. In a wobbly statement, the 15-member executive committee of the UMC Council of Bishops in effect said that the bishops are committed to upholding the church's laws but what

I am not arguing that all egalitarians are liberals. Some denominations have approved women's ordination for other reasons, such as a long historical tradition and a strong emphasis on gifting by the Holy Spirit as the primary requirement for ministry (as in the Assemblies of God), or because of the dominant influence of an egalitarian leader and a high priority on relating effectively to the culture (as in the Willow Creek Association). But it is unquestionable that theological liberalism leads to the endorsement of women's ordination. While not all egalitarians are liberals, all liberals are egalitarians. There is no theologically liberal denomination or seminary in the United States today that opposes women's ordination. *Liberalism and the approval of women's ordination go hand in hand.*

Does it seem likely that all of the liberal churches who no longer believe the Bible have suddenly gotten the interpretation of the Bible regarding men's and women's roles exactly right, and that the most conservative churches who hold strongly to biblical inerrancy have gotten it exactly wrong? And does it seem likely that as soon as a denomination begins to abandon belief in inerrancy it suddenly discovers new skill and accuracy in interpreting the Bible on the roles of men and women so that it finally arrives at the correct answer?

In fact, the methods that evangelical feminists use today to interpret away the teachings of Scripture on male leadership in the home and the church are effectively undermining the authority of Scripture in their churches, and in that way they are contributing to a trend similar to step #1 above that was taken earlier by the more liberal churches.

It is to those methods of undermining the authority of Scripture that we now turn in the next several chapters.

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regional conferences do is their own business" (Edward E. Plowman, "None of Our Business," *World* [magazine], April 17, 2004, quoted from [www.worldmag.com/world/issue/04-17-04/national\\_5.asp](http://www.worldmag.com/world/issue/04-17-04/national_5.asp)). This is an indication that the United Methodist Church in one large region has reached point 6 in the seven-point sequence noted above, though the denomination's national governing body, the General Conference, took steps in May to minimize the impact of that decision. (The Methodist Church approved the ordination of women in 1956.)