

Pastor Stef's Book Review – April 2018

I understand the complementarian vs egalitarian debates going on in the church, and the positions are more nuanced than this, but at its core the complementarian position means that it is the man's role is to lead while the woman *complements* him by following, and the egalitarian position means that men and women equally share in leading and following each other.

In her recent book, ***Gender Roles and the People of God: Rethinking what we were taught about Men and Women in the Church (2017)***, Alice Mathews makes a strong Biblical case for egalitarianism. Her book is divided into three parts. The first part tells the stories of several women throughout the Bible who held significant leadership positions. The second section deals with the three New Testament passages that are used to make a case for complementarianism. And the third section gives a quick history of woman and their place in western society.

I admit to breezing through the first two sections of this book as I have heard the different sides on this topic so often that it is fairly redundant to me and, truth be told, I probably wouldn't have bought the book if it wasn't that I studied under Dr. Mathews while working on my Doctorate of ministry – she was a brilliant and engaging teacher. With that said, these are great sections to read if you are still trying to figure out where you land on this topic.

The last third of the book was utterly fascinating. Chapters 11 and 12 blow the doors off the many myths we have of the “good old days” and the perfect Victorian home. Did you know that in 1800 only 6% of Americans went to church compared to about 40% today? Did you know that the American divorce rate in the late 1800s was three-and-a-half times the population growth and two-thirds of these were pursued by women because of the astonishing rates of alcoholism (almost four times what it is today) and chronic domestic violence? Then there are the astronomically high rates of prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases during the American civil war.

Ironically, I am writing this book review just days after Pastor John Piper has blamed egalitarianism for contributing to the reason for sexual abuse towards women. (See Rachel Held Evans' response to Piper demonstrates here: <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/me-too-john-piper>).

I'm not sure if Piper would read Mathews as he also doesn't believe women should teach men in seminary, but it would be beneficial for him to do so. That fact that so much is now coming out about sexual abuse towards women is not because recent egalitarianism is making it happen, but that it is allowing women to finally feel safe and respected enough to be heard and protected. Unfortunately it seems like Hollywood is taking the lead on this, while the church is catching up.

If anything, reading Mathews will help you break free of the lie that everything is getting worse. Many areas, particularly for women, are better today than they have ever been in history. There is still a long way to go, and I believe that, as a church, we should be the strongest advocates for women. I understand my complementarian friends as I used to be one up until about ten years ago. I know some of the scriptural passages are difficult, and I respect that and your different interpretation, but please don't make nonsensical arguments and blame sexual abuse on egalitarianism.