

The Danvers Statement

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The Danvers Statement is a theological summary of biblical gender roles. This statement was penned in 1987 at a gathering of evangelical leaders—both men and women—who met in Danvers, MA, to discuss biblical manhood and womanhood. This group was concerned about the impact of secular feminism, along with the correlative decline of biblical gender roles in the church and the home. While many have rightly observed that the Danvers Statement articulates an evangelical viewpoint, those familiar with church history recognize that there is little that is new in this theological summary, as the Danvers Statement merely expresses the historical view of the church on biblical gender roles. While the Danvers Statement does not cite any specific biblical passages within its text, it is informed by a traditional interpretation of passages such as Genesis 1–3; 1 Cor. 11:2–16; Eph. 5:21–33; 1 Tim. 2:12–15; and 1 Pet. 3:1–7.

The year following the publication of The Danvers Statement, at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Wheaton, IL, the same group of leaders who penned the Danvers Statement introduced a new term to the church: complementarianism. This teaching is the idea that men and women are created by God with equal value, dignity, and worth; yet, men and women have distinct, complementary roles to fulfill within the church and the home. In short, complementarianism teaches that as image-bearers of God, men and women are ontologically equal, yet functionally distinct. An important part of this teaching is that God did not arbitrarily assign differing roles to men and women; rather, God created men and women to specifically fulfill the distinct roles that he revealed to them. This is an important nuance, for it means that, in practice, gender roles ought not to be a matter of grudging obedience but of joyful fulfillment.

The Danvers Statement itself contains two main sections that articulate ten rationales and ten affirmations about biblical gender roles. Upon a reading of the Danvers Statement, it becomes clear that the authors were concerned with far more than just the biblical functioning of the church and the home. Indeed, this group of evangelical leaders was bothered by many issues that accompany the erosion of biblical gender roles, including sexual abuse, gender confusion, the decay of culture, and the loss of public witness, among other matters. Indeed, the last sentence in the Danvers Statement seems intentionally positioned to resonate in the minds of its readers: “We are convinced that a denial or neglect of

these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.”

The Danvers Statement did not originate from a particular denomination. Rather the group of leaders who penned this document came from many different evangelical Christian backgrounds. Among Southern Baptist seminaries, the Danvers Statement has been promoted and affirmed by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In summary, since it first appeared in 1987, conservative evangelicals have affirmed the Danvers Statement to voice their commitment to what the Scriptures teach regarding the equal value, dignity, and worth of all men and women, as well as the distinct roles God has given men and women as they bear his image in both the church and the home.

Rationale

We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern:

1. The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
2. the tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;
3. the increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;
4. the widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;
5. the growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality;
6. the upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;
7. the emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to Biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of Biblically faithful witness;
8. the increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts;
9. the consequent threat to Biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;
10. and behind all this the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical Biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture.

Affirmations

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9).
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4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16).
 - In the home the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
 - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 - In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).
 - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).

7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2).

8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.

9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor 12:7-21).

10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.