

Honoring Women Mother's Day

Thesis: We want to honor and empower women to be who they are called to be in the Lord. And we desire for people in our culture to imitate Christ in his attitude and actions toward women.

Text: Genesis 1:26-28

Today is Mother's Day. It is our joy and privilege to honor moms.

We want to honor and empower women to be who they are called to be in the Lord. And we desire for people in our culture to imitate Christ in his attitude and actions toward women.

In a culture that expresses a hatred and dismissiveness of women, we want women to hear a different word. Ladies, you are highly valued, honored, cherished, loved, and needed.

Women Are Important in the Kingdom of God and in the Biblical Revelation

1. **Women are created in the image of God, with dignity, grace, and excellence.**

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." 29 then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day (Genesis 1:26-31).

2. **When you compare the Biblical revelation to their cultural contexts, women are seen as important throughout God's Word.**

3. **Women are elevated to a higher place than the cultures in which the Bible was written.**

- a. The Bible also tells the sad truth of women being mistreated and abused.

4. **Women in the Bible stood up against cultural injustice and inequities and brought forth justice and change.**

The daughters of Zelophehad son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. They approached 2 the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly, and said, 3 "Our father died in the desert. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together against the LORD, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. 4 Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father's relatives." 5 So Moses brought their case before the LORD 6 and the LORD said to him, 7 "What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and turn their father's inheritance over to them. 8 "Say to the Israelites, 'If a man dies and leaves no son, turn his inheritance over to his daughter. 9 If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. 10 If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father's brothers. 11 If his father had no brothers, give his inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to be a legal requirement for the Israelites, as the LORD commanded Moses'" (Numbers 27:1-11).

5. **Women in the Scripture were portrayed in many ways:** as mothers, as daughters, as part of the lineage of Jesus, as rulers of nations (Queen of Sheba and others), as public servants (Deborah was a judge), as warriors, as mediators and as sources of wise counsel, as key influencers, as business owners (Lydia), as evangelists, as disciple-makers (Aquila), as missionaries, and as ministers of the gospel. This list isn't exhaustive, just illustrative

6. **Women are anointed instruments of the Holy Spirit.**

- a. Mary, Elizabeth, Deborah, and many, many others

Jesus' View of Women

1. **Jesus treated women with love and respect, thereby breaking all sorts of cultural norms.**

- a. **Woman at the well** (John 4:1-42)

- i. Jesus took the initiative in speaking to a Samaritan woman—an astonishing break with culture and tradition.
 - ii. “The Jews wouldn't have anything to do with the Samaritans. They would, especially, not share eating and drinking vessels with them. And yet Jesus is asking this woman for a drink” (NT Wright, *New Testament for Everyone— John for Everyone*, Part 1: Chapters 1-10).
- b. **Woman caught in adultery** (John 8:1-8)
- i. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees are using this woman as an object—she is objectified as a tool to attack Jesus. They don't care about morality, or they would have brought the man caught in the act of adultery also.
 - ii. Jesus treats this woman with dignity, forgives her sins, and invites her to live in the light of God's mercy, forgiveness, and love.
- c. **Sinful woman anoints Jesus** (Luke 7:36-50)
- i. The balance of the scene is superb, with Jesus keeping his poise between the outrageous adoration of the woman and the equally outrageous rudeness of his host—and yet coming up with something fresh, something which, to the onlookers, was just as outrageous as the behaviour of the other two. The story sweeps to and fro between the three of them with passion and power. [When Jesus brought the kingdom of God, it turned everyone's expectations upside down.] [The coming of the kingdom of God] would be a time of exuberant generosity, surprising grace, and at the same time fierce opposition which would meet God's judgment. Now we see, in a single incident, what this looks like in practice. Social convention is thrown out of the window; forgiveness and love set new standards and raise new expectations; human beings appear, not as society has 'constructed' them, but as God sees them (NT Wright, *New Testament for Everyone - Luke for Everyone*).
- d. **Jesus view of marriage** (Matthew 19:1-9)
- i. In Jesus' day, men were using any and all sorts of reasons to divorce. They even used the law of Moses as justification for divorce. If it is in the law, then it must be ok.
 - ii. Jesus took a stance that elevates marriage to God's original intention. The law is to deal with the rare occasion where divorce happens because of something significant, not for all the ridiculous reasons so that a man could take advantage of a woman.

- iii. Jesus calls us to a high view of marriage between a man and a woman. What does it look like for a man and woman to be loyal to God and to their marriage partner in a marriage relationship?
2. **Women were among the followers of Christ** (Luke 8:1-3).
After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3).
3. **Women were financial supporters of Jesus and his disciples** (Luke 8:1-3).
4. **A woman is the first person who sees the resurrected Christ and is commissioned as an evangelist to tell others the good news** (John 20:1-18).
 - a. Mary Magdalene doesn't feature in John's gospel until her appearance, with the other Marys, at the foot of the cross. John has told us nothing of her history; the little we know, we know from the other gospels. But her place here is spectacular. She is the first apostle (sent one), the apostle to the apostles: the first to bring the news that the tomb was empty. And... a greater privilege yet: the first to see, to meet, to speak with the risen master himself (NT Wright, New Testament for Everyone – John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21).

Dealing with Misunderstandings about Scripture Regarding Women

In our culture today, many people have been taught that the Apostle Paul was a woman-hater. In my sermon notes, which are available online, I have included commentaries that deal with 2 key passages of Scripture which people use to teach that the Bible in general and Paul in particular put down women. Those resources are there for your study and benefit. It is important to interpret the Bible correctly, especially regarding controversial or complicated topics.

Paul's view of women

1. The Apostle Paul served with women. (See Romans 16:1-16.)
2. Paul said women do pray, prophesy, and teach in church (1 Corinthians 11:5).
3. Paul held women in high esteem, as his words in Romans 16 and other passages attest.

Love Motivated Warfare

Last week, I shared on the topic, *Fight the Good Fight of Faith*. In my online notes of this message, I have included an article by Francis Frangipane, entitled *Love Motivated Warfare*. Here is an excerpt from that article that I want to share.

Perhaps a few women among us might argue, "This warfare stuff is a macho thing. I'm just a housewife, a mom. I don't have a war mode." If your child was seriously sick, wouldn't you fight that illness with everything at your disposal? You would fast and pray, and do so from your war mode. If your marriage was under spiritual attack, wouldn't you get before God and war with fervency? The fact is, you know how to fight. Ask your husband if he thinks you have a war mode. You just need something to wake it up, because once you begin to shift into the war gear, in the Holy Spirit you are dangerous!

You see, the war mode is in us all. It may be attached to our instinct for survival, but it is more directly connected with our love for people. I love my nation, so I am warring in prayer on its behalf. Because of love for my family, I war in prayer on their behalf. I love my church, my city and, yes, even my own soul, so I war to protect what I love.

If there is a natural fight instinct, there is a spiritual fight mode as well. It just needs to be awakened, submitted to Christ, and then unleashed against the enemy. If you have a love mode, you also have a war mode. God has created the war mode so we can protect the people we love. (Adapted from Francis Frangipane's book, *This Day We Fight!* available at www.arrowbookstore.com.)

[A Letter from Beth Moore to Her Brothers](#)

In my online notes, you will also find a blog which Beth Moore released on May 3. Beth Moore is a Bible teacher whom I respect and honor. She wrote to deal with how women are treated in the church today. Beth always communicates in a humble, gracious, and sensitive way. I am grateful that Beth Moore had the courage to speak up about how women are treated in the church and how the Lord wants us to treat one another.

Current reality

1. In a culture that expresses a hatred and dismissiveness of women, we want women to hear a different word. Ladies, you are highly valued, honored, cherished, loved, and needed.
 - a. Things must change. The church must repent of all forms of gender injustice. We need men and women equally empowered for ministry so we can fulfill the Great Commission.... This is a cry from the heart of God, who created "both male and female" in His divine image and commanded them both to rule over the earth (see Gen. 1:26-28) (Lee Grady, [Why Beth Moore's Challenge Can't Be Ignored](#), 5/9/18).
2. I want to repent for how men in our culture have marginalized women.
3. I want to repent for how men in our culture have been dismissive of women.
4. I want to repent for how men in our culture have objectified women.
5. I want to repent for how men in our culture and religious cultures have put obstacles and barriers in the way of women.
6. I want to repent for how men in our culture have abused women.
7. And, I am sorry for how women have been jealous of other women and have attacked other women out of their own pain and suffering.

Preferred future

1. To all women: we call you forth to serve the Lord and be who he has made and called you to be.
2. To all women: we stand with you as rulers and priests to serve our God and to reign with our God on the earth for all eternity.
3. May we together live missionally in community, partnering together on mission with the Lord Jesus Christ and with one another.
4. May people in our culture imitate Christ in his attitude and actions toward women.
5. May you as women step into your spheres of influence as daughters of the Most High God, as sisters of Christ, as ambassadors of the King of Kings, as ministers of the gospel of the kingdom of God, as anointed agents of the Holy Spirit, and as ministers of reconciliation and restoration.

Love Motivated Warfare

Jesus knew this world was a realm under satanic siege. Planet Earth was not a place of peace but a realm at war. From the casting out of Lucifer and his angels from Heaven, to the temptation in the Garden of Eden, to Babylon and the multiplication of nations under satanic influence, planet Earth has been an embattled world. The idea that somehow our era is less threatened by evil is the height of deception. We must fight if we will follow Christ into victory.

No matter how beautiful the world around us seems, remember there was a serpent lurking in Paradise itself. If Adam and Eve had possessed a war mode mentality, they never would have casually accepted the lies of Lucifer. Likewise today, we need to be wise and walk carefully for "the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). You see, Jesus was always aware that He lived in a war zone. No matter what He was doing -- whether He was laughing with sinners or driving out demons, whether He was healing the sick or training followers -- beneath the surface of His outer activities, the "war mode switch" in Jesus' mind was always "on."

Perhaps a few women among us might argue, "This warfare stuff is a macho thing. I'm just a housewife, a mom. I don't have a war mode." If your child was seriously sick, wouldn't you fight that illness with everything at your disposal? You would fast and pray, and do so from your war mode. If your marriage was under spiritual attack, wouldn't you get before God and war with fervency? The fact is, you know how to fight. Ask your husband if he thinks you have a war mode. You just need something to wake it up, because once you begin to shift into the war gear, in the Holy Spirit you are dangerous!

You see, the war mode is in us all. It may be attached to our instinct for survival, but it is more directly connected with our love for people. I love my nation, so I am warring in prayer on its behalf. Because of love for my family, I war in prayer on their behalf. I love my church, my city and, yes, even my own soul, so I war to protect what I love.

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NT Wright, New Testament for Everyone -- Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Male and Female in the Worshipping Church

Many years ago I was lecturing as a guest in a college in the United States. After my lecture I was told that several of the students had been studying St Paul; would I be happy to answer questions about particular passages and topics? I readily agreed.

What I hadn't realized was that many of the women students had been taught that Paul was a woman-hater, and that this present passage was the most obvious example of his prejudice. Now I have to admit that I didn't understand this passage then, and I'm not sure I've understood it yet. But I think we can see the main point Paul wanted to make, even if the reasons why he's put it like this may still be puzzling.

Paul wasn't, of course, addressing the social issues we know in our world. Visit a different culture, even today, and you will discover many subtle assumptions, pressures and constraints in society, some of which appear in the way people dress and wear their hair. In Western culture, a man wouldn't go to a dinner party wearing a bathing suit, nor would a woman attend a beach picnic wearing a wedding dress. Most Western churches have stopped putting pressure on women to wear hats in church (Western-style hats, in any case, were not what Paul was writing about here), but nobody thinks it odd that we are still strict about men *not* wearing hats in church.

In Paul's day (as, in many ways, in ours), gender was marked by hair and clothing styles. We can tell from statues, vase paintings and other artwork of the period how this worked out in practice. There was social pressure to maintain appropriate distinctions. But did not Paul himself teach that there was 'no male and female, because you are all one in the **Messiah**' (Galatians 3:28)? Perhaps, indeed, that was one of the 'traditions' that he had taught the Corinthian church, who needed to know that Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female were all equally welcome, equally valued, in the renewed people of God. Perhaps that had actually created the situation he is addressing here; perhaps some of the Corinthian women had been taking him literally, so that when they prayed or prophesied aloud in church meetings (which Paul assumes they will do regularly; this tells us something about how to understand 14:34-35) they had decided to remove their normal headcovering, perhaps also unbraiding their hair, to show that in the Messiah they were free from the normal social conventions by which men and women were distinguished.

That's a lot of 'perhaps'es. We can only guess at the dynamics of the situation—which is of course what historians always do. It's just that here we are feeling our way in the dark more than usual. But, perhaps to the Corinthians' surprise, Paul doesn't congratulate the women on this new expression of freedom. He insists on maintaining gender differentiation during worship.

Another dimension to the problem may well be that in the Corinth of his day the only women who appeared in public without some kind of headcovering were prostitutes. This isn't suggested directly here, but it may have been in the back of his mind. If the watching world discovered that the Christians were having meetings where women 'let their hair down' in this fashion, it could have the same effect on their reputation as it would in the modern West if someone looked into a church and found the women all wearing bikinis.

The trouble is, of course, that Paul doesn't say exactly this, and we run the risk of 'explaining' him in terms that might (perhaps) make sense to us while ignoring what he himself says. It's tempting to do that, precisely because in today's Western world we don't like the implications of the differentiation he maintains in verse 3: the Messiah is the 'head' of every man, a husband is the 'head' of every woman, and the 'head' of the Messiah is God. This seems to place man in a position of exactly that assumed superiority against which women have rebelled, often using Galatians 3:28 as their battle-cry.

But what does Paul mean by 'head'? He uses it here sometimes in a metaphorical sense, as in verse 3, and sometimes literally, as when he's talking about what to do with actual human heads (verses 4-7 and 10). But the word he uses can mean various different things; and a good case can be made out for saying that in [verse 3](#) he is referring not to 'headship' in the sense of sovereignty, but to 'headship' in the sense of 'source', like the 'source' or 'head' of a river. In fact, in some of the key passages where he explains what he's saying (verses 8, 9 and 12a) he is referring explicitly to the creation story in Genesis 2, where woman was made from the side of man.

The underlying point then seems to be that in worship it is important for both men and women to be their truly created selves, to honour God by being what they are and not blurring the lines by pretending to be something else. One of the unspoken clues to this passage may be Paul's assumption that in worship the creation is being restored, or perhaps that in worship we are anticipating its eventual restoration (15:27-28). God made humans male and female, and gave them 'authority' over the world, as Ben Sirach 17:3 puts it, summarizing Genesis 1:26-28 and echoing Psalm 8:4-8 (Ben Sirach was written around 200 BC). And if humans are to reclaim this authority over the world, this will come about as they worship the true God, as they pray and prophesy in his name, and are renewed in his image, in being what they were made to be, in celebrating the genders God has given them.

If this is Paul's meaning, the critical move he makes is to argue that a man dishonours his head by covering it in worship and that a woman dishonours hers by *not* covering it. He argues this mainly from the basis that creation itself tends to give men shorter hair and women longer (verses 5-6, 13-15); the fact that some cultures, and some people, offer apparent exceptions would probably not have worried him. His main point is that in worship men should follow the dress and hair codes which proclaim them to be male, and women the codes which proclaim them to be female.

Why then does he say that a woman 'must have authority on her head because of the angels' (verse 10)? This is one of the most puzzling verses in a puzzling passage, but

there is help of sorts in the **Dead Sea Scrolls**. There it is assumed that when God's people meet for worship, the angels are there too (as many liturgies, and theologians, still affirm).

For the Scrolls, this means that the angels, being holy, must not be offended by any appearance of unholiness among the congregation. Paul shares the assumption that the angels are worshipping along with the humans, but may be making a different point.

When humans are renewed in the Messiah and raised from the dead, they will be set in authority over the angels (6:3). In worship, the church anticipates how things are going to be in that new day. When a woman is praying or prophesying (perhaps in the language of angels, as in 13:1), she needs to be truly what she is, since it is to male and female alike, in their mutual interdependence as God's image-bearing creatures, that the world, including the angels, is to be subject. God's creation needs humans to be fully, gloriously and truly human, which means fully and truly male and female. This, and of course much else besides, is to be glimpsed in worship.

The Corinthians, then, may have drawn the wrong conclusion from the 'tradition' that Paul had taught them. Whether or not they could follow his argument any better than we can, it seems clear that his main aim was that the marks of difference between the sexes should not be set aside in worship. At least perhaps.

We face different issues, but making sure that our worship is ordered appropriately, to honour God's creation and anticipate its fulfilment in the new creation, is still a priority. There is no 'perhaps' about that (NT Wright, New Testament for Everyone - New Testament for Everyone – Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16).

NT Wright, New Testament for Everyone - New Testament for Everyone – Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Last night I stood in awe at a mosaic dating from the sixth century. It is a picture of Jesus himself, 'coming on the clouds', and it's in the domed apse above the altar in a church in Rome. Peter and Paul are standing on either side of Jesus, presenting to the risen Lord two saints of the period, the brothers Cosmas and Damian. As often in ancient mosaics, there are animals and birds, and the whole thing looks incredibly bright and vivid. It's hard to believe it is a millennium and a half old.

Or at least, that most of it is. There was an earthquake in Rome in the Middle Ages, and the great bell-tower that used to stand there collapsed onto the roof of the apse, crashing through and damaging part of the picture. It was restored; but in restoring it the new artists added a few touches of their own, making allusions to their own time. This doesn't spoil the picture, and indeed it adds a sense of continuity as different generations made their contribution.

Similar things happened from time to time to ancient books (and indeed some modern ones). It didn't always take an earthquake; sometimes it was simply a careless scribe, or in other cases an over-zealous one. We know this because the manuscripts of the New Testament that we possess—there are hundreds of them—all differ slightly in (mostly) very small details. In one or two well-known cases, with the ending of Mark being a good example, it seems that some early Christian scribes were determined to make good what they saw as gaps or deficiencies.

(We should note, in saying this, that the New Testament is by far the best preserved book from the ancient world. Most of the great classical texts such as Homer and Virgil, Sophocles and Cicero, are preserved in only a few copies, all much later than most of the New Testament manuscripts we've got, some of which date from very early on, some even from within one or two hundred years of the time of Jesus.)

This problem about variations between different manuscripts doesn't greatly affect the letters of Paul, except for one or two examples; and this present passage includes one of the most famous. Verses 34 and 35—the command to women to 'keep silence in the assemblies'—don't occur here in some of the manuscripts. Instead, they are added on at the end of chapter 14, seemingly as a kind of appendix. Since the verses are in any case very odd—Paul clearly assumes in 11:2-16 that women are going to speak during worship—many serious scholars have concluded that the verses were not by Paul, and were added by a scribe who was anxious to keep public worship a matter of male leadership only.

This could be the case, although equally wise and learned people have concluded that Paul really did write the passage. But if he did, as on balance I am inclined to believe, what can he have meant by it?

He clearly doesn't mean that no women must speak during worship. As we saw, chapter 11 assumes that women will take leadership roles in praying and 'prophesying' just as much as men will. And I simply don't think Paul has any agenda about keeping women in a downtrodden condition, as has often been suggested. What we have to reckon with is a possible scenario, or a set of possible scenarios, that might explain the sudden need for a commandment of this type.

The whole passage, and indeed most of this long chapter, is about speaking and being silent in public worship, and about making sure that everything is done out of a concern to build up God's people, and out of a belief that the God we worship is the God of peace, not of confusion or chaos. This suggests that, if Paul did indeed write these words, one or both of the following problems may have occurred.

It is likely that the men and women were segregated during worship, as in synagogues, and as in some churches to this day in the Middle East and elsewhere. But if public worship was conducted in the main formal language of the day—in Corinth, obviously, mainstream Greek—many of the women, who might only understand their local dialects, would not always be able to grasp what was being said. (Like some other things in this letter, this isn't to say that Paul approves of a situation where women would be less educated than men, but he has to deal with the real problems he faces, not with an ideal situation.) As still sometimes happens today in such cases, the women might become bored and begin to talk among themselves. Or they might start calling across the central division to their husbands to explain what had been said. Either way, Paul says, this can be disruptive and should not be allowed.

That is one possibility. Another is that with Paul's instructions in verse 29, according to which the congregation should reflect on what a prophet said and 'evaluate' it, some of the women in the congregation might have taken it upon themselves to 'evaluate' what their own husbands had said, and do so rather too personally and sharply. In that case, it would be far better, Paul believes, to have them take the matter up at home, rather than airing what could be, at least by extension, a domestic disagreement within the context of public worship.

Either of these may describe the situation Paul faced; or there may have been another possibility. We don't know. What is clear is that this is a particular problem posed from within the cultural setting of the time, and that Paul's overriding concern (if the passage is indeed written by him) is for order, peace and mutual upbuilding when the

congregation comes together for worship, rather than for chaos, interruption and dissension.

Of course, there are many churches today where there is so much order and peace that Paul might have wondered if everyone had gone to sleep. That poses different problems, which a fresh and lively engagement with the gospel itself, and the personal challenges it poses, should begin to address. **But in Corinth at least the problem was one of worship meetings bordering on the chaotic—and chaos, as always, provides an opportunity for those with the loudest voices or the slickest operating skills to come out on top, while those with gentler voices and more humility can get crushed in their path.** The issue, in other words, may well not be simply about how to order public worship, **but how to prevent bossy and overbearing Christians exploiting an extemporaneous worship service in order to show off their gifts and strengths.** That problem is not unique to 'free' services such as those in Corinth.

In particular, Paul issues specific instructions as to the exercise of the gifts he has been talking about. **The main principle remains that everything should be done with an eye to building up the church.** Beyond that, at most three people should speak in tongues, and then only if one of them can 'interpret', in other words, put into plain speech what it is that has been said. Paul would have no time for people who wanted to go on and on in a free-floating way with different gifts being exercised. Spontaneity is no guarantee of spirituality, and to think otherwise is to entertain wrong ideas about God himself (verse 33).

When it comes to prophecy, again two or three is to be the rule; the rest must be silent, but certainly not passive; they must consider carefully what has been said. Nobody must try to shout down another; if God gives a second person something to say, the first should give place. Again, spontaneity is not enough. Prophets must take charge of what's going on in their own 'spirits', and should be self-disciplined in their speaking (verses 29-33).

The final commands, after the puzzling passage about the women keeping silent, comment ironically on what's just been said (verses 37-38): anyone who thinks they have prophetic or spiritual gifts should see, by such means, that what Paul has said really is a command of the Lord! He doesn't want to squash the work of the spirit (see 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20); he wants to encourage it. But the important thing is that everything be done in a fitting and appropriate manner, and with proper order. It's better to drink wine from a wine glass than to lick it off the tablecloth (NT Wright, New Testament for Everyone – Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians).

A Letter to My Brothers

May 3rd, 2018

Beth Moore

Dear Brothers in Christ,

A few years ago I told my friend, Ed Stetzer, that, whenever he hears the news that I'm on my deathbed, he's to elbow his way through my family members to interview me about what it's been like to be a female leader in the conservative Evangelical world. He responded, "Why can't we do it before then?"

"Because you know good and well what will happen," I answered. "I'll get fried like a chicken." After recent events following on the heels of a harrowing eighteen months, I've decided fried chicken doesn't sound so bad.

I have been a professing Evangelical for decades and, at least in my sliver of that world, a conservative one. I was a cradle role Southern Baptist by denomination with an interdenominational ministry. I walked the aisle to receive Christ as my Savior at 9 years old in an SBC church and exactly nine years later walked the aisle in another SBC church to surrender to a vocational calling. Being a woman called to leadership within and simultaneously beyond those walls was complicated to say the least but I worked within the system. After all, I had no personal aspirations to preach nor was it my aim to teach men. If men showed up in my class, I did not throw them out. I taught. But my unwavering passion was to teach and to serve women.

I lack adequate words for my gratitude to God for the pastors and male staff members in my local churches for six decades who have shown me such love, support, grace, respect, opportunity and often out right favor. They alongside key leaders at LifeWay and numerous brothers elsewhere have no place in a larger picture I'm about to paint for you. They have brought me joy and kept me from derailing into cynicism and chronic discouragement amid the more challenging dynamics.

As a woman leader in the conservative Evangelical world, I learned early to show constant pronounced deference – not just proper respect which I was glad to show – to male leaders and, when placed in situations to serve alongside them, to do so apologetically. I issued disclaimers ad nauseam. I wore flats instead of heels when I knew I'd be serving alongside a man of shorter stature so I wouldn't be taller than he. I've ridden elevators in hotels packed with fellow leaders who were serving at the same event and not been spoken to and, even more awkwardly, in the same vehicles where I was never acknowledged. I've been in team meetings where I was either ignored or made fun of, the latter of which I was expected to understand was all in good fun. I am a laugher. I can take jokes and make jokes. I know good fun when I'm having it and I also know when I'm being dismissed and ridiculed. I was the elephant in the room with a skirt on. I've been talked down to by male seminary students and held my tongue when I wanted to say, "Brother, I was getting up before dawn to pray and to pore over the Scriptures when you were still in your pull ups."

Some will inevitably argue that the disrespect was not over gender but over my lack of formal education but that, too, largely goes back to issues of gender. Where was a woman in my generation and denomination to get seminary training to actually teach the Scriptures? I hoped it would be an avenue for me and applied and was accepted to Southwestern Seminary in 1988. After a short time of making the trek across Houston while my kids were in school, of reading the environment and coming to the realization of what my opportunities would and would not be, I took a different route. I turned to doctrine classes and tutors, read stacks of books and did my best to learn how to use commentaries and other Bible research tools. My road was messy but it was the only reasonable avenue open to me.

Anyone out in the public eye gets pelted with criticism. It's to be expected, especially in our social media culture, and those who can't stand the heat need to get out of the kitchen. What is relevant to this discussion is that, several years ago when I got publically maligned for being a false teacher by a segment of hyper-fundamentalists based on snippets taken out of context and tied together, I inquired whether or not they'd researched any of my Bible studies to reach those conclusions over my

doctrine, especially the studies in recent years. The answer was no. Why? They refused to study what a woman had taught. Meanwhile no few emails circulated calling pastors to disallow their women to do my "heretical" studies. Exhausting. God was and is and will always be faithful. He is sovereign and all is grace. He can put us out there and pull us back as He pleases. Ours is to keep our heads down and seek Him earnestly and serve Him humbly

I have accepted these kinds of challenges for all of these years because they were simply part of it and because opposition and difficulties are norms for servants of Christ. I've accepted them because I love Jesus with my whole heart and will serve Him to the death. God has worked all the challenges for good as He promises us He will and, even amid the frustrations and turmoil, I would not trade lives with a soul on earth. Even criticism, as much as we all hate it, is used by God to bring correction, endurance and humility and to curb our deadly addictions to the approval of man.

I accepted the peculiarities accompanying female leadership in a conservative Christian world because I chose to believe that, whether or not some of the actions and attitudes seemed godly to me, they were rooted in deep convictions based on passages from 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14.

Then early October 2016 surfaced attitudes among some key Christian leaders that smacked of misogyny, objectification and astonishing disesteem of women and it spread like wildfire. It was just the beginning. I came face to face with one of the most demoralizing realizations of my adult life: Scripture was not the reason for the colossal disregard and disrespect of women among many of these men. It was only the excuse. Sin was the reason. Ungodliness.

This is where I cry foul and not for my own sake. Most of my life is behind me. I do so for sake of my gender, for the sake of our sisters in Christ and for the sake of other female leaders who will be faced with similar challenges. I do so for the sake of my brothers because Christlikeness is at stake and many of you are in positions to foster Christlikeness in your sons and in the men under your influence. The dignity with

which Christ treated women in the Gospels is fiercely beautiful and it was not conditional upon their understanding their place.

About a year ago I had an opportunity to meet a theologian I'd long respected. I'd read virtually every book he'd written. I'd looked so forward to getting to share a meal with him and talk theology. The instant I met him, he looked me up and down, smiled approvingly and said, "You are better looking than _____." He didn't leave it blank. He filled it in with the name of another woman Bible teacher.

These examples may seem fairly benign in light of recent scandals of sexual abuse and assault coming to light but the attitudes are growing from the same dangerously malignant root. Many women have experienced horrific abuses within the power structures of our Christian world. Being any part of shaping misogynistic attitudes, whether or not they result in criminal behaviors, is sinful and harmful and produces terrible fruit. It also paints us continually as weak-willed women and seductresses. I think I can speak for many of us when I say we are neither interested in reducing or seducing our brothers.

The irony is that many of the men who will give consideration to my concerns do not possess a whit of the misogyny coming under the spotlight. For all the times you've spoken up on our behalf and for the compassion you've shown in response to "Me too," please know you have won our love and gratitude and respect.

John Bisagno, my pastor for almost thirty years, regularly said these words: "I have most often seen that, when the people of God are presented with the facts, they do the right thing." I was raised in ministry under his optimism and, despite many challenges, have not yet recovered from it. For this reason I write this letter with hope.

I'm asking for your increased awareness of some of the skewed attitudes many of your sisters encounter. Many churches quick to teach submission are often slow to point out that women were also among the followers of Christ (Luke 8), that the first recorded word out of His resurrected mouth was "woman" (John 20:15) and that

same woman was the first evangelist. Many churches wholly devoted to teaching the household codes are slow to also point out the numerous women with whom the Apostle Paul served and for whom he possessed obvious esteem. We are fully capable of grappling with the tension the two spectrums create and we must if we're truly devoted to the whole counsel of God's Word.

Finally, I'm asking that you would simply have no tolerance for misogyny and dismissiveness toward women in your spheres of influence. I'm asking for your deliberate and clearly conveyed influence toward the imitation of Christ in His attitude and actions toward women. I'm also asking for forgiveness both from my sisters and my brothers. My acquiescence and silence made me complicit in perpetuating an atmosphere in which a damaging relational dynamic has flourished. I want to be a good sister to both genders. Every paragraph in this letter is toward that goal.

I am grateful for the privilege to be heard. I long for the day – have asked for the day – when we can sit in roundtable discussions to consider ways we might best serve and glorify Christ as the family of God, deeply committed to the authority of the Word of God and to the imitation of Christ. I am honored to call many of you friends and deeply thankful to you for your devotion to Christ. I see Him so often in many of you.

In His great name,

Beth