

Summer 2020

M Mutuality

Men and women serving and leading as equals



FREEDOM TO FLOURISH

Aligning Christian Faith and Women's
Equality with Humanitarian Work

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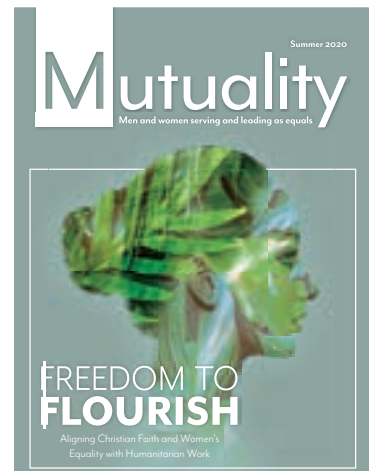
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Mutuality (ISSN: 1533-2470) exists to make egalitarian theology accessible to the non-scholar and to explore its intersection with everyday life.





Everything Is Connected

Our theme for this issue intersects with our 2020 international conference in London, “Men, Women, and God: Theology and Its Impact,” which we have rescheduled for the fall and may delay further. The timing of this issue may now feel strange, but we are excited to expand on these ideas with you. Our goal is to gather theologians, humanitarians, pastors, and social justice advocates to explore the connection between what we believe about women’s calling and gifting for leadership and how that impacts the way we work with and empower women around the world. We want this issue of *Mutuality* to introduce you to some of our speakers and the ideas we will address at the conference when it takes place.

As I edited these articles while sheltering in place, I have struggled with how a magazine can connect with the lives we’re currently leading—let alone articles for a deferred conference, a meeting intended to gather lots of people. I have wondered to myself whether we even still live in the same world where these articles were written. Some days, I am overcome with the disconnection I feel from the city where I live, friends and family, and even our mission as egalitarians. People are sick and dying, losing their jobs and livelihoods, and we are all grieving and in pain. Yet, I am reminded constantly of the ways that women are and will continue to bear the brunt of this pandemic, and I feel resolved to continue with the work of empowering women and men “to promote the biblical message that God calls women and men of all cultures, races, and classes to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and the world.” We need to work together now more than ever.

These articles were written explicitly to show you how everything is connected. What we believe, our theology, is not separate, not something we can compartmentalize away from how Christians minister to the problems of our world. In this issue, you will encounter articles that focus on interpreting the Bible with clarity to uplift women. Andrew Bartlett draws on his investigative skills as a lawyer to examine the puzzles we find in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. His insightful study of the

evidence for how this odd passage may have made it in our Bibles today gives us much to ponder. Grace Al-Zoughbi interprets Genesis 38, walking us through Tamar’s world and experiences to show us how Tamar subverted the patriarchal expectations of her community so that she could find justice for herself.

Other articles show us how our theology plays out in the lives of real women and men around the world. Helene Fisher and Elizabeth Lane Miller of Open Doors International introduce their research on gender-based religious persecution around the world. They illuminate the ways men and women are persecuted based on gender inequalities endorsed by their theology and culture. Jenn Williamson casts a vision for how to build equitable church-planting teams that include both women and men in leadership and evangelism. Mandy Marshall lays bare the truth of domestic violence in churches and shows us how our overly simple and glib responses about divorce hurt women with abusive husbands even more.

Finally, Boaz Johnson introduces us to Pandita Ramabai, an Indian Christian who founded Mukti Mission for low-caste and outcaste girls in India near the turn of the twentieth century. Ramabai’s life and work clearly demonstrates how our theology directly impacts the lives of girls and women. Her work was jumpstarted during the bubonic plague in India, and Ramabai has much to teach us about our present circumstances amid pandemic today. Ramabai is an outstanding model of how correct theology has the power to spiritually, socially, and physically liberate women and girls from danger and mistreatment.

I hope that as you read this issue, you and your loved ones are safe and well. But all is not safe and well in this world, and one of our sicknesses is a theology that keeps girls and women from realizing their full potential as beloved children of God. So, I also hope that these articles bring you some holy discomfort and show you the connection between dismantling theological patriarchy and the lived realities of women and girls and men and boys around the world.

For the Survival of the Church: What Our Theology Has to Do with Persecution

By Helene Fisher and Elizabeth Lane Miller

What Christians believe about men and women matters to the literal survival of the church. That's not just an interesting hypothesis. At Open Doors International, it's our job (*our* being Helene and Elizabeth) to answer the how, why, and what-can-we-do-about-it questions about gender and religious persecution. By investigating the gender-specific aspects of religious persecution, we've uncovered the complex and detrimental impact that gender stereotypes and inequalities have on the stability of the Christian church under pressure for their faith. Protective and cultural prejudices make *both* men and women more vulnerable to religious persecution.

Over the past three years, our research has enabled us to define more precisely why the loss of men in Syria, the rape of women in Nigeria, the targeted seduction of girls in Egypt, and the prejudicial inheritance practices regarding women in sub-Saharan Africa are especially effective tools of religious persecution. The negative way churches respond to these kinds of attacks is the key to understanding their effectiveness.

The Research Question

We began our research journey with one question: What is characteristic of persecution facing individual Christians in the seventy-three countries where Open Doors' World

We have found that religious persecution is almost completely different for women and men in outward, characteristic manifestations.

Watch Research annually investigates to compile the World Watch List (WWL)?

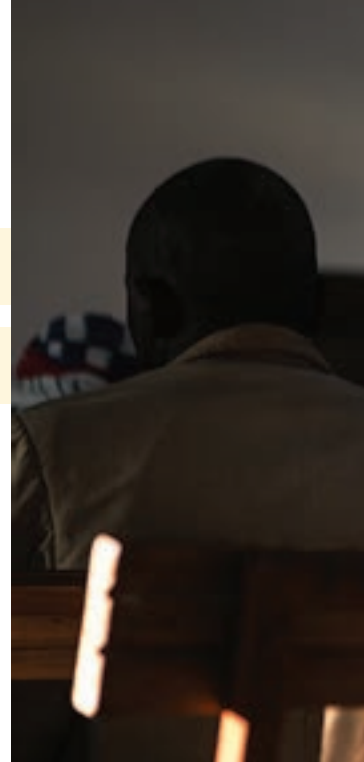
By cataloging and analyzing patterns of what happens to Christian men and women in the WWL's most difficult countries to practice Christianity, we have found that religious persecution is almost completely different for women and men in outward, characteristic manifestations. In our 2020 findings, the top five most common forms of persecution globally for men are physical violence, economic harassment, incarceration by government, psychological violence, and military/militia conscription. For women, the top five are sexual violence, forced marriage, physical violence, forced divorce, and house arrest (which we catalog as domestic incarceration).¹

Religious persecution looks different for men and women because *how* it might happen is based upon the different sociocultural roles and rights of men and women in their specific contexts. Often these sociocultural roles and rights define the value of men and women in a given society. This assigned value in turn defines how men and women will be nurtured, trained, protected, and promoted.

The countries mentioned specifically in this article are visibly at the forefront of Christian persecution, but the same pattern extends to countries where the attacks and pressures on men and women take more subtle forms.

Targeted Attacks on Men

If men's value resides in their physical strength, their role as breadwinner, and their role as church leader, then these





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areas are usually targeted for attack. Why? Undermining men in one of these areas will be most devastating to their own sense of identity and belief. It will also destabilize those in their networks who have relied upon or evaluated them through this aspect of their lives.

Although we see this around the globe, the church in Syria stands as the starkest example today. In a post-war country where many men have been killed or forced to flee, the Christian communities were hit even harder than the general population because Christians are one of the most unacceptable populations to ISIS. Many Syrian churches are completely bereft of the eighteen to forty-year-old male population. This in and of itself is a cause for mourning; however, the strategic significance for the church is cause for considerable lament.

These men were expected to be the leaders and breadwinners, holders of power and agency, so they received the overwhelming bulk of the spiritual training in the congregation. Although the women also attended professional training, including college for many, they had been raised to rely on their brothers' escort for safe passage to school and work and on their fathers or husbands for substantial decision-making, all while quietly attending church. This concentration of knowledge and learning in the men simultaneously made the men visible and valuable targets while seeming to keep the women "safe"

from direct harm.

This is not only a happenstance of official war. In India, being a pastor has been described in our "2020 Gender-Specific Religious Persecution" report as "one of the riskiest vocations in the country today." Across sub-Saharan Africa, men lose their lives as Christian villages and districts are attacked. When this happens, families that relied upon the husband and father for housing, food, and school fees can find themselves in the streets. The next generation is then caught in a cycle of violence and poverty, which is difficult to escape.

Quite apart from the economics, Syrian women don't feel free to step into the void of spiritual leadership due to strict teachings against women in spiritual leadership. These women feel a sense of abandonment. The extremists who attack the Christian communities have reasoned correctly that these women are no threat to leave alive because they have not been given the confidence, knowledge, and experience that rebuilding the spiritual community requires.

Several priests in Syria have bemoaned the "brain drain" from their churches and country. While we might be tempted to take offense that this essentially refers to a loss of the men, it is objectively a loss of the educated and functionally able. Even those women who received more advanced training before marriage will not have had

occasion to hone their skills, test them in practice, or stay up to date on their usage in a context where a “good” wife depends upon her husband’s decision-making and single women are “not well received,” as our contacts put it.

Patriarchy within the church places a target on men’s backs. Attacking them becomes an expedient means to eliminate knowledge and experience, intimidate their followers, and reduce families to a constant scramble for survival.

Targeted Attacks on Women

The other half of the story is the complex, violent, and hidden religious persecution which Christian women face directly. Their religious persecution is equally possible and effective because of their social positioning and conditioning, if not more so.

So, what is valued in women? Our research shows that women are systematically under attack in areas related to their perceived sexual purity and their family status. Some societies explicitly link the sexual purity of women to the family’s honor while others convey this valuing more subtly, but, in the everyday, it often translates into women speaking of one another with respect for a girl’s or woman’s sexual purity, an esteem for marital status, and praising one another for bearing children. These seemingly innocuous conversations, and the protective, habitual practices which develop to reinforce them, have deep and lasting implications for how vulnerable they make persecuted communities.

We (Helene and Elizabeth) have sat with many women in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria who have had these intimate markers of identity snatched away from them in a matter of hours, even minutes. These women were established in their churches, comfortable in their situations, scrupulous about their homes—valued members of their communities—until they were violently assaulted. It is deeply dangerous to entrust our value to a malleable test. It makes for an enticing and effective pathway to destruction for an opposing force. If the Christian community feels it must distance itself from her so-called shame, if her husband can no longer see her as pure and faithful, if her children no longer respect her, then families shatter and communities disintegrate. Sadly, we have all too many examples of this scenario playing out in the aftermath of raids in the CAR and Nigeria.

God is able to do everything. You can see in history that in countries that went through wars, women came out of these wars different.

For a specific example, let’s examine the publicly recorded case of Elina Das in Bangladesh. Ten years ago, her father had a growing ministry as a pastor and evangelist in a hostile context. He was not dissuaded by the attacks and threats on his own person, so one night when thirteen-year-old Elina went to the outdoor bathroom, five men gang-raped her.

This attack on Elina was not only an attack on a vulnerable young woman, but it was also meant to change the behavior of her father by attacking his personal identity. Both his responsibility to protect his daughter and his personal honor were now damaged in the eyes of the community. Elina’s father said, “I have not the slightest doubt that this attack was intended to stop me in my ministry.”

This network of relationships is both the ultimate intended target and the means by which the damage will spread *if* certain beliefs about Elina hold sway. If the community was not attuned to seeing such an attack on a woman’s purity as conclusively devastating to her, her father, and his ministry’s honorable standing, then this form of attack would lose much of its appeal in the eyes of the perpetrators.

In other contexts, when women in a community are raped, the crime is deliberately not reported because of fears around stigmatization. The consequences of this choice are devastating to these women who are refused the opportunity to speak truthfully of their experience or claim justice by their communities and spiritual leaders.



At one level this may be argued as a protective measure, but from a bird's eye view it only serves to create greater impunity for perpetrators, which leads to more violence, not to mention that under-reporting this violence increases shaming and stigmatization for victims. It also increases the likelihood that trauma, physical injury, or any resulting pregnancy will not receive proper consideration, and therefore each of these incidents will further weaken the entire community and ultimately threaten its integrity.

Misguided beliefs about the effectiveness of the patriarchal protection of women and a notion that their security is found in the home have led too many congregations to either promote unequal practices or work intentionally against moves to redress economic, educational, or legal inequalities between men and women. In patterns of persecution around the globe, these very inequalities are repeatedly cited as vulnerabilities for the church: prejudicial inheritance laws for widows, non-application enforcement of child marriage laws, lack of prosecution for domestic abuse, stigmatization for female-headed households, lower employability of women, less freedom of movement for women, and lower wages.

The seemingly protective, or simply cultural, practices ingrained in girls who grow up in a patriarchal context in fact result in vulnerabilities for the Christian community in persecution. Because these women are less equipped for independence in life and less knowledgeable for leadership in the church, their so-called protections directly determine how vulnerable both they and the men of their communities are when experiencing persecution. Most importantly, these seemingly subsidiary differences become crucial components of *how* persecutors choose to persecute Christian communities and *why* it has potential to cause the maximum destructive effect.

Something Good Can Come

Encouragingly, persecution expert Ron Boyd-MacMillan reports that although persecutors' gender-specific targeting often works, sometimes the opposite effect occurs. "In Chinese house churches the catastrophic loss of male leaders in the Cultural Revolution allowed women to flourish as leaders and many networks thrived through

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their new empowerment." It is not impossible for Christian communities today, like those in Syria, to rebuild, even if those left behind are starting with fewer resources and have more learning to do. As one Syrian respondent said,

God is able to do everything. You can see in history that in countries that went through wars, women came out of these wars different. In the war they were pushed to do things they hadn't done before like what we see happening in Syria right now: women driving taxis, tractors or trucks. At the end a


crisis leads to development. A crisis is hard, but on the other hand it is an opportunity.

As we grow in wisdom to counter the schemes used against the church, it is encouraging to identify areas where the church has agency to protect herself. Training women into their capacities of strength and longevity will create a stronger body of Christ before the harshest persecution storms hit, mitigating the ease with which the whole church can be damaged and honoring God by how we value each other and work together in balanced reflection of the Triune God, no matter the storms we face.

I. H. Fisher, E. L. Miller, E. Mayer, "Gender-Specific Religious Persecution: Analysis and Implications," *World Watch Research*, February 2020. Available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GLOBAL-Gender-specific-religious-persecution-report-2020.pdf>.



Helene Fisher and **Elizabeth Lane Miller** cowrite the annual Gender-Specific Religious Persecution Analysis report and codevelop materials to strengthen Christian communities in the face of these pressures for Open Doors, a ministry serving persecuted Christians. Helene Fisher is the Global Gender Persecution Specialist. Elizabeth Lane Miller is a Women's Persecution Specialist.



A TIMELY TRANSFORMATION

Tamar's Quest for Justice in Genesis 38

By Grace Al-Zoughbi



In this article, we will explore the story of Tamar from Genesis 38 as a transforming woman from the Old Testament. After her husband dies, Tamar appears to be a helpless woman, but she knows that she has a right to have a son and does not easily give up on the idea despite the intentional oppression she receives from her father-in-law. Tamar's appearance in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus demonstrates the importance of this woman in the story of salvation (Matt. 1:3). She transformed the narrow and oppressive ways of thinking surrounding her through her courage.

How I understand Tamar's story is influenced by philosopher and ethicist Martha Nussbaum's notion that by participating at a political, social, and economic level, people can change cultures that are male-dominated and oppressive of women. She believes that "even in societies that nourish problematic roles for men and women, real men and women can also find spaces in which to subvert those conventions, resourcefully creating possibilities of love and joy." Tamar's actions can be understood in this same way; women can subvert society's expectations for them to find justice.

TAMAR'S TRANSFORMATION FOR JUSTICE

In the story, Tamar's qualities as a heroine and the role of God's providence are accentuated when she is chosen to maintain the line of Judah (Gen. 38). Tamar makes evident the transforming role of a woman living in a patriarchal society. In fact, "Tamar can be considered as the forerunner of others in later times who found that the only way to move a society dominated by males was to

do the unusual thing." The "unusual thing"¹ that Tamar does is obvious, but it raises the question of whether doing an "unusual thing" is the only way for women to change their situation or alter aspects of a society dominated by men. In contexts of injustice and oppression, are women always condemned to do unusual things? To address this question, we will analyze Tamar's story and discuss the specific obstacles Tamar has to contend with, the way she overcomes them, and the values that motivate her.

ANALYZING TAMAR'S STORY

Tamar's Predicament

Tamar's story takes place in Canaan prior to Israel's settlement in the land. Israel's people live side by side with the Canaanites and intermarry with them. Judah marries a Canaanite woman who gives him three sons. For Er, the elder son, Judah chooses a wife called Tamar who lives in the region. Er dies at the hand of God. Onan, the second son, refuses to fulfill the duty of levirate marriage toward his brother's widow (one brother must marry his dead brother's wife if they do not already have a son, spelled out in Deut. 25:5-10), presumably because he would have to support a child that is legally someone else's. Onan dies too, and Judah is now reluctant to surrender his third son Shelah. Judah instructs Tamar to remain a widow until Shelah grows up. Tamar goes away as a widow, but she is still "engaged" and therefore not free to remarry.

Tamar is left in an awful predicament: "She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage" (Gen. 38:14, NRSV). She has no freedom to remarry into

another family, and she has not been provided with another husband from the family she had married into, despite one being available.² Tamar has become the victim of the absolute power of her father-in-law over her. Through Judah's unjust decision, she has been denied the means of performing her duty toward a husband who has died. She has been robbed of the chance of achieving a sense of self-worth through giving birth to a child, and thereby she has also been prevented from gaining an honorable status in her community and a child to support her as she ages.

Tamar's Reaction

Years pass by and Judah's wife dies. When the period of mourning is over, Judah, now a widower, goes to attend the shearing of his flocks at Timnah, in the hill country (Gen. 38:12). Shearing is a time of eating, drinking, partying, and indulgence. As for Tamar, she has by now realized that she has been doomed to a life of permanent widowhood by her father-in-law. She also "knows her father-in-law well enough, too, so that when the word gets to her that he is going to the sheep-shearing, she knows what sort of things he has in mind."³ So, Judah's journey becomes Tamar's chance to take matters into her own hands and to act. Her plan, however, is bold and dangerous. She will use her own sexuality in a cunning way to get for herself what has been wrongly denied to her: the desired status of a mother.

She intends to turn a situation of an accidental physical relationship into an opportunity to get pregnant and have the child that has been denied to her. The irony here is that the child's father will be the

very man who has wronged her. One can detect revenge in Tamar's decision to entrap Judah into having a physical relationship with her disguised as a prostitute.

Tamar's choice is hazardous in many ways. On a personal level, the only means for rectifying the injustice done to her is for Tamar to use her own body and sexuality. She does not participate in prostitution by free choice.

On a social level, by choosing to prostitute herself, Tamar becomes a "legal outlaw," stepping not only outside the acceptable moral norms expected of a woman but also outside the more general norms of social order. Tamar accepted that she would become an ostracized and despised woman.

Legally, Tamar is bound to chastity by her status as a "chained" widow. She is promised to Judah's third son through the institution of levirate marriage, and as such she cannot engage in sexual activity with any other man. So when Judah hears that Tamar is pregnant, he punishes her for unfaithfulness: "let her be burned!" (Gen. 38:24).

Discovery and Recognition: Tamar's Vindication

Tamar's shame is made explicit when her pregnancy becomes public and she is condemned. She is exposed and condemned to death by Judah, the patriarch bearing authority. Tamar's capital offense is adultery (Deut. 22:23–24) since she is still betrothed to Shelah. But Tamar carefully makes her defense using the pledge (signet, bracelet, and staff) that Judah had left with her, which will justify her.

In this climactic scene of discovery and recognition (Gen. 38:24–26), Judah, the figure of authority and stern judge, is confronted by the evidence of his breach of promise as head of the family, of his blindness as a lover, and of his incest and fatherhood. This is a scene which is heavy with moral recognition. While Judah was seeking to further exert his power over Tamar, she forces Judah to confront the meaning of his action. Judah has to acknowledge: "She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah" (38:26).

A couple of moral points are made in this sentence. First, Judah recognizes that "she was not guilty in fact of harlotry. On the contrary, by playing the harlot, Tamar was only making clear to Judah that he (and his sons) had long been treating her as a harlot, as a woman to be used for pleasure rather than a wife celebrated for fruitfulness."⁴ Second, this statement is an acknowledgment that Tamar has taught Judah "multiple lessons about right and duty: the justice of keeping promises; the justice of treating all sons equally (upholding the levirate duty) . . . ; the duty of fathers to care for all their descendants and not only those they prefer and love."⁵

TAMAR CHALLENGES AND ALTERS AN INJUSTICE

By Breaking the Boundaries of Patriarchy

Bearing children is part of the expectations and requirements of the patriarchal system for women. As a result of this pressure, Tamar is led to do quite an unusual thing. Taking matters into her own hands, she steps outside what is considered a moral life in her society. By this

action, Tamar risks much, but it is also true that she has little to lose, as two attempts to provide her with a husband have failed.⁶ Since justice is the primary goal of Tamar, James McKeown's evaluation seems quite correct: "Genesis does not portray women as weak and defeated, but shows that, given the opportunity, they are not at all inferior and often outwit the men." This comment definitely applies to Tamar who, in her own way, challenges the patriarchal system.

By Affirming Her Right to Be a Mother

Tamar has been wronged by her two husbands and her father-in-law, and she has become a troubled woman who was at odds with society's expectations for her. Due to circumstances beyond her control, Tamar's options in life have become nonexistent, as she is without a husband, children, and ultimately without the support of the family she had married into. Judah had failed to fulfill his responsibilities to Tamar as a father-in-law, and in God's wisdom, for a better purpose ultimately, Tamar was prevented from mothering a child to either Er or Onan. By taking the desperate step of becoming a prostitute, Tamar affirms her right to become a mother.

By Following Her Own Moral Code


The whole story of Tamar is an account of the conflict between a woman and a man who has absolute authority over her. She does not feel it is her place to obey and support the patriarchal authority of Judah by conforming to his demands, nor does she feel that she can conform to the law of society. Against her role as a woman and the rules of her

society, Tamar has an inner moral code that leads her to challenge the injustices done to her. Although it is not openly stated in the story, she must have been evaluating and questioning the authoritative decisions in the light of her own values and desires. In this way, Tamar could be considered to be a champion for many women who live in a male-dominated society and who bring about change by doing the unexpected.⁷

TAMAR SEEKS TO UPHOLD JUSTICE

“Genesis shows that women living in a patriarchal society face many challenges. Their lives seem to be a constant struggle for recognition.”⁸ But Tamar subverts the usual expectations of her society to earn recognition in several important ways. Tamar seeks to protect her right to bodily health and the ability to have children. She maintains her bodily integrity by refusing to follow the order of Judah and deciding to do whatever is needed to have a child. Tamar refuses to accept needless suffering and she takes action to change a life that would have been characterized by fear, anxiety, and worry. She seeks to preserve her self-respect and dignity; she refuses to be humiliated as a childless widow and wants to be treated as a woman with some rights in the patriarchal system.

So back to the question we asked earlier, “In contexts of injustice and oppression, are women always condemned to do unusual things?” Tamar’s story makes us inclined to answer with a yes. The fact that there continues to be injustice and oppression in the world does not mean that transformation will never happen. On the contrary, women’s



TAMAR REFUSES TO ACCEPT NEEDLESS SUFFERING, AND SHE TAKES ACTION TO CHANGE A LIFE THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY FEAR, ANXIETY, AND WORRY. SHE SEEKS TO PRESERVE HER SELF-RESPECT AND DIGNITY; SHE REFUSES TO BE HUMILIATED AS A CHILDLESS WIDOW AND WANTS TO BE TREATED AS A WOMAN WITH SOME RIGHTS IN THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM.

THE FACT THAT THERE CONTINUES TO BE INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION IN THE WORLD DOES NOT MEAN THAT TRANSFORMATION WILL NEVER HAPPEN.

voices, like Tamar's, need to be heard, and society needs to naturally pay these women respect for who they are before they

look for unusual ways to accomplish transformation. We must work to remove the societal challenges that prevent women from achieving the justice that Tamar gained.



Grace Al-Zoughbi teaches at Bethlehem Bible College. She finished her master's program in London and returned to teach and serve

as head of the Biblical Studies department at the college.

1. Ronald S. Wallace, *The Story of Joseph and the Family of Jacob* (Grand Rapids/Edinburgh: Eerdmans/Rutherford House, 2001), 24.
2. Wallace, *Story of Joseph*, summarizes the situation well: "He (Judah) kept one bound whom he intended to defraud," 23. Gordon Wenham also observes: "until this point Tamar has been a passive object, acted upon—or alas not acted upon by Judah and his sons . . . now a clear perception of injustice done here is ascribed to Tamar (v. 14)," *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 367.
3. David M. Gunn, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 38.
4. Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 537.
5. Kass, *Beginning of Wisdom*, 537.
6. McKeown observes rightly that "Genesis shows that women living in a patriarchal society face many challenges. Their lives seem to be a constant struggle for recognition," *Genesis* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 348.
7. F. Van Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal (Sheffield: JSOT/Almond, 1989), 135–156.
8. McKeown, *Genesis*, 348.

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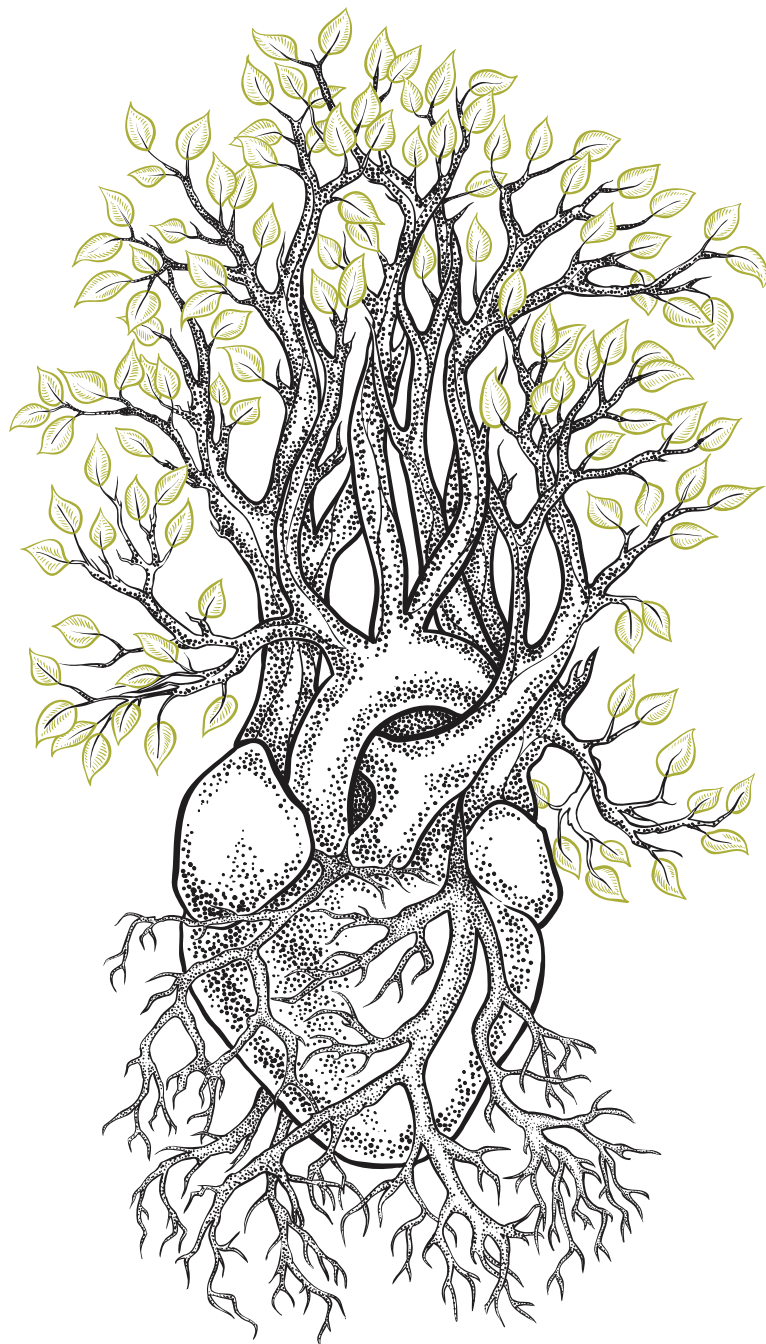
MEN, WOMEN, AND GOD: THEOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT

LONDON SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Rescheduled for August 2021.

Specific dates to be announced.

Check cbeinternational.org for updates



BUILDING STRONG MINISTRY TEAMS

Women and
Men Planting
Churches
Together

By Jenn Williamson

The local church is a present outpost of the future, coming kingdom of God. This kingdom is unlike any the earth has known; it is led by Christ, and all are living in harmony with his will and his ways. The church is composed of living examples of God's holy plan for human life and relationships. When Christian men and women work together to plant churches, their cooperation becomes a compelling witness to God's goodness and grace. Beyond the theological reasons, research shows that women are highly effective at evangelism and church planting, even in countries where they are disempowered socially and their work is not validated.¹ Imagine what could happen if the body of Christ fully supported and empowered the efforts of both male and female church planters! And

whether the lead planter is male or female, there needs to be a full embrace of partnership between men and women in order for a church to rightly represent the body of Christ. I'd like to offer a vision of what that looks like and a game plan for how to get there.

A VISION OF MEN AND WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In John 17 Jesus prays for the unity of all believers. Jesus concludes his prayer by saying the result of this unity will be that "the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23). In essence, our oneness is our witness. The fact that Jesus

prayed for unity presumes both the presence of diversity and the challenges diversity creates. When women and men work together in healthy and holy ways, their unity in Christ increases the redemptive impact of the church in the world.

Mutual respect and mutual submission motivate gift-based ministry, resulting in Spirit-empowered work for the kingdom of God, for God's glory. In an oversexualized world that declares sexual tensions to be inescapable, the local church can be a countercultural place of welcome and rest, where genuine *phileo* love (or friendship) reigns without awkwardness or reserve. In a world that wields power for selfish purposes, the church can be a place where individuals carefully steward and humbly share leadership. As the church incarnates God's design for love and faith in how we live and work, people in the world will see the difference.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

1. We prioritize God's mission.

God has called all of us to make disciples, which should ultimately lead to the planting of new churches (Matt. 28:19). To reach the whole world with the good news, we need the whole church to be on mission together. When only one gender is engaged in this process, it's as if the body of Christ has had a stroke and lost all function

**WE DO NOT NEED A ONE-
SIZE-FITS-ALL RULE;
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of one side. Movement becomes terribly difficult, awkward, and ineffective. Stimulating a church-planting movement across any nation will require full-body participation, coordination, and integration. This needs to be our priority.

The famous, so-called Billy Graham rule has been justifiably scrutinized over the past few years because of how it necessarily excludes women from key conversations with male leaders. My biggest complaint against the Billy Graham rule is that it prioritizes fear of potential sin over our united call to mission. It wrongly assumes that we who have been redeemed cannot have victory over lust. It permanently casts women in the role of temptress and men in the role of predator. This is not who we are in Christ!

The countercultural kingdom of God does not use barriers to heal broken relationships. Jesus breaks down barriers and sets us in right relationship with God and each other. We do not need to cut ourselves off from the opposite sex out of fear of temptation, depriving the church of the many benefits that come from collaboration between women and men. We can instead build holy, redeemed, and authentic relationships with each other that are no longer defined by our sin natures.

In the book *Mixed Ministry*, authors Sue Edwards, Kelley Matthews, and Henry Rogers suggest that Christians can have genuinely affectionate relationships with the opposite sex by learning to value and appreciate each other as "sacred siblings."² Just as brothers and sisters in a biological family love, protect, help, and inspire each other without the "cloud of lust,"³ so can brothers and sisters in Christ.

Sadly, there are many cases where Christians have fallen prey to sexual sin, so we should not be naive. I am not proposing that we completely ignore our capacity to sin but that we do not let that potential become the basis for how we engage in ministry. Rather than limit our contact with the opposite sex, we need to commit to finding ways to move forward in mission together without compromising integrity. We do not need a one-size-fits-all rule; rather we need to be self-aware and sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Bring every encounter before Christ, inviting him to guide us in each situation.

2. We communicate with wisdom, verbally and nonverbally.

Words have power and can shape our culture. How we speak about God and each other will influence how we engage in ministry. This begins with our choice of Bible translation. Choosing translations that accurately reflect the inclusive nature of the kingdom of God will equip

team members to be inclusive in their preaching and teaching. Jesus is our model for inclusive preaching. Many of his parables were taught in pairs, using imagery and examples that spoke to both men and women: farming and baking, shepherding and housekeeping, winemaking and robe-mending. Jesus was not enforcing stereotypes; he was making his kingdom teachings accessible to all.

Communication involves not only our message but how we interact with our brothers and sisters. When speaking to and of another, our words should never be disparaging, belittling, or sexist. This does not mean that we cannot disagree but rather that even our disagreements are marked by careful listening, kindness, and respect. When I was a pastor of women's ministries, I had a zero-tolerance policy for husband-bashing. We created a culture where we spoke well of our spouses and of men in general.

Beware of ambivalent sexism, revealed in blanket statements such as, "Women are just naturally more nurturing than men." According to an article in *Christianity Today*, "This type of sexism undermines opportunities for women through emphasizing the nurturing role of women (particularly in raising children) and the male role as protector of and provider for women."⁴ In a church-planting team, individuals should be appreciated for the gifts that they bring to the table and empowered to contribute according to their specific experience and ability.

Nonverbal communication is also important. In her book *Making Room for Leadership*, Dr. MaryKate Morse explains that leaders need to be aware of how they are stewarding their power through body language. "It is thousands of little body postures, gestures, nuanced voices and intricate, intuitive engagements with others. It is how you enter a room, position yourself to speak, modulate your voice and use your eyes, while at the same time assessing others who are sharing that same space."⁵ For men and women to work together, we need to be aware of how power is expressed within a team, and that includes our nonverbal signals.

3. We see diversity as a strength.

If men and women were the same, it wouldn't matter if a church-planting team comprises only one gender. It is precisely because we are different that both are needed. *Forbes* recently published an article titled, "What Do

Countries with the Best Coronavirus Re-sponses Have

**BUILDING STRONG
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in Common? Women Leaders."⁶ COVID-19 presented the world with a new challenge, one for which women leaders have demonstrated certain skills that have not been as prevalent in their male counterparts. According to Wittenberg-Cox, these include trust, decisiveness, and love. The author concludes with these words: "There have been years of research timidly suggesting that women's leadership styles might be different and beneficial. Instead, too many political organizations and companies are still working to get women to behave more like men if they want to lead or succeed."⁷

Indeed, it is of no value to a church-planting team if women must behave more like men in order to participate, and vice versa! But what this means is that there will be diverse leadership styles, diverse worship preferences, diverse biblical interpretations, and diverse interpersonal styles. A church-planting team that can embrace those differences will be highly effective at reaching their community with the gospel.

Unfortunately, many tend to seek out teammates that resemble themselves instead of those that complement them. The result may be fewer disagreements but also bigger and more glaring blind spots. During our wedding ceremony, the pastor said something that has stuck with us through almost thirty years of marriage. He said, “When you argue, rather than seeing the disagreement as David versus Jenn, see it as David and Jenn presenting two sides of an issue in an attempt to discern God’s best for the family.” What each person brings has value, and when it is heard and honored, it will make the end result stronger.

Building strong mixed-gender ministry teams is not only possible, it is what Christ asks of us. We are his disciples,

invited to join in his work, for his glory. We are all called to make disciples, and we need each other in that process. If are to reach the world, we will have to work together, focusing on God’s mission, being wise about how we communicate God’s message, and celebrating the diversity of God’s kingdom.



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Was Love the Motive

for Women's Silence in

1 Corinthians 14:34–35?

A Lawyer's Study

By Andrew Bartlett

My professional career as a lawyer has influenced the way that I read the Bible. Lawyers investigate human behavior like scientists investigate the natural world, looking for the explanation that best fits all the available data. What happens when we apply that approach to the puzzle of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35? These verses say, “The women should be silent in the assemblies. For it is not permitted to them to speak but they should be put in subjection as also the Law says. If there is anything they

desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in an assembly” (author’s translation).

FIVE PUZZLES

These verses from 1 Corinthians have at least five puzzling features. The first is that they appear to be in conflict with chapter 11 of the same letter, where Paul regulates

Which verse says that women are not permitted to speak or that they should be put in subjection? There isn't anything in the Old Testament that says that. What's going on? Has Paul made a mistake?

how men and women *pray and prophesy*. But these verses say that women must *keep silent* in the church assembly.

Second, they appear to be in conflict with chapter 12 and with chapter 14 all the way up to verse 33. In chapter 12, Paul is saying that spiritual gifts are given to all believers and that all should use them. He makes no distinction between gifts given to men and gifts given to women. These gifts include ones which may be exercised in the assembled church, such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, or a message of wisdom. This discussion continues through chapter 14. Consider verse 29: "Two or three prophets should speak and the others should discern." We know that prophets include women, so the two or three prophets who speak could include women. And the others who do the discerning, the weighing up of what is said, may also include women. So, women may be both giving prophecies and evaluating them. It is clear that women are speaking in the Corinthian assembly, and they are encouraged to do so in an orderly way, because it is their Christian duty to use their gifts to build up the body of Christ.

Third, consider the first reason given for women's silence, which is in 1 Cor. 14:34: "For it is not permitted to them to speak, but they should be put in subjection, as also the Law says." When Paul refers to the Law, he means what Christians usually call the Old Testament. So, what statement in the Old Testament is being referred to here? Which verse says that women are not permitted to speak

or that they should be put in subjection? There isn't anything in the Old Testament that says that. What's going on? Has Paul made a mistake?

This issue becomes even more uncomfortable when we recognize the historical context. There is evidence of a misconception among Greek-speaking Jews in the first century that there was indeed a Scripture about woman being subordinate, as apparently cited in 1 Cor. 14:34. Such a belief can be seen in the Jewish historian Josephus, writing about 95–100 AD (*Against Apion* 2.25): "for, says the Scripture, 'A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.' Let her therefore, be obedient to him." Strangely, verse 34 seems to reflect this misconception.

Anyone familiar with the quality of Paul's writing, and more especially anyone who regards the New Testament as God's Word, must view with surprise and discomfort a text where Paul apparently refers to an Old Testament Scripture which does not exist, but which some Jews of his day mistakenly believed to exist. This instance is unique in Paul's letters.

The fourth puzzling feature is in the second reason given for women's silence in 1 Cor. 14:35: "If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in an assembly." This reason directly reflects the prevailing culture. In Greek and Roman public assemblies, women were not allowed to speak. This would be regarded as disgraceful. But it doesn't make any sense for Paul to say that these cultural rules should be applied in this way. He's already considered in chapter 11 what was honorable or disgraceful in the culture, and there he permitted women to pray and prophesy and did not require them to be silent.

Fifth, there are theories which propose that Paul does not really mean that women should be silent. He means only that a certain *kind* of speaking by women is prohibited. Some say the ban is on women asking questions, others that it is on women's noisy or disruptive chatter, or on women speaking in tongues, or on women evaluating prophecies, or on women failing to conform to the proper order of worship, or on women teaching falsely, or on women making an uneducated contribution. All these theories run up against the feature that silence is commanded in unqualified terms and this unqualified ban is stated three times ("women should be silent," "it is not permitted to them to speak," "it is disgraceful for a

So, what should we do with 1 Cor. 14:34–35? Assuming these verses are authentic, no one has yet found a satisfactory solution for these five puzzles.

woman to speak in an assembly”). Each such phrase, even on its own, indicates a complete ban on women’s speaking in the assembly. And the forcefulness of the complete ban is intensified by the rhetorical use of repetition. To make the same point three times in different ways was a common device in both Jewish and Greco-Roman discourse for expressing maximal emphasis. The combination of unqualified words and threefold repetition is an extreme difficulty for all proposals that only a particular kind of speaking is being prohibited. That is not what the words convey.

WHAT TO DO?

So, what should we do with 1 Cor. 14:34–35? Assuming these verses are authentic, no one has yet found a satisfactory solution for these five puzzles.

When I researched these verses for my book, *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts*, I was surprised to learn that there is historical manuscript evidence which strongly suggests that these two verses are not an authentic part of Paul’s letter. Part of the evidence is that surviving manuscripts have the words of what we call verses 34–35 in two different positions. In most manuscripts they appear after verse 33. In some they appear after what we call verse 40.

What solution best fits all the available evidence? If they are authentic, no one has come up with a convincing explanation of why they appear in two different places in the manuscripts. I conclude in my book that these verses were probably added into Paul’s letter (see chapter 10 for discussion of the evidence and the competing theories).

You may wonder: How could that happen? How could these out-of-context words get added into copies of Paul’s letter?

SILENCE ADDED—BUT HOW AND WHY?

In the early decades after Paul’s martyrdom in Rome (about 67 AD), his letters were collected and copied. Circumstances had changed since Paul had written his first letter to the Corinthians (about 55 AD). The assemblies of Christians were larger and had greater public visibility. Paul had laid down a clear principle in 1 Cor. 10:31–11:1 that believers should not give unnecessary offense but should be imitators of Christ, who always put others’ interests before his own. Within chapters 11–14 Paul had shown how this principle of unselfish love for others should be applied in orderly worship. For example, those who might otherwise exercise too freely their gift of speaking in tongues should consider the negative effect on inquirers who might come into the assembly and should restrain themselves (14:23–28). Paul had also written elsewhere about this same principle of loving self-restraint for the purpose of making the Christian gospel more attractive to outsiders (Titus 2:5, 9–10). Outsiders who came into the assembly would be unlikely to receive the good news of Christ if they were shocked by a lack of decorum.

In a more public setting, women’s silence could therefore be seen as a necessary restriction, with an evangelistic motive. Paul had imposed a restriction on some women at Ephesus when circumstances required (1 Tim. 2:11–12). In the newly visible public assemblies of the church, where women’s public speaking would cause offense to unbelievers, it would have made sense to extend the Ephesian restriction so as to ban speaking by women “in the assemblies.” This would have appeared as a wise and loving strategy for diminishing social friction in a patriarchal culture. It would make it easier for outsiders to receive the Christian message.

It appears probable that in the latter part of the first century, when Paul’s letters were being collected and copied, a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian considered it important to write a comment in the margin, explaining that women should be silent in the assemblies in order to avoid disgrace in the eyes of outsiders. This would have been motivated by loyalty to the principles Paul had laid down, and by love and concern for outsiders.

If women were going to be silent, this would mean that they could not even ask questions. Aware of Paul’s teaching that women, not just men, should learn (as in 1 Tim. 2:11), he included the suggestion that, if there

was anything they desired to learn, they should ask their husbands at home.

When copyists saw something written in the margin, they had a decision to make: was this just someone's comment, or was it part of the main text, which had been written in the margin because the previous copyist had initially left it out by mistake? If it belonged in the main text, there should be a mark showing where to insert it, but such marks could wear off, or otherwise become invisible or smudged. If in doubt, scribes would tend to include the words in the main text, rather than miss anything.

Living in a patriarchal culture where women rarely spoke in public, scribes may not have been troubled by any appearance of inconsistency. They may readily have assumed that the words they saw in the margin were Paul's words, motivated by a concern for not alienating outsiders and being an application of the Lord's command to love, similar to that in 1 Cor. 14:23–28.

If this is right, it explains why the words appear in different places in the manuscripts. If verses 34–35 originated as an early marginal comment, written to give guidance on how to apply Paul's principles to the new situation, there was no editing mark showing where the words should be inserted into the main text. So, scribes

had to decide where to put them. It wasn't clear where the words belonged. Thus, some opted for one position, some for the other.

At the least, our Bibles should have a footnote along the lines of: "Manuscript evidence indicates that verses 34 and 35 may be a later addition, not original to Paul, and should be omitted." Better, verses 34–35 should be placed in italics or in a footnote, together with an explanation that the nature of the discrepancies in the manuscripts suggests that they are of doubtful authenticity.

Those who regard verses 34–35 as an inauthentic addition to the text of Paul's letter sometimes think of the addition as a power grab by a man who wanted to enforce patriarchal culture on the church. I think it is more likely that it was a well-intentioned effort to apply our Lord's principle of love to a new situation.



Andrew Bartlett QC is based in London. His main work is as an international arbitrator, deciding multinational commercial disputes in various countries around the world. He has a BA in Theology (University of Gloucestershire; first class honors and Bible Society prize). He has served in several churches as elder or churchwarden.

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*"This teaching is
so clear!"
— Mimi Haddad, Ph.D.*

Fact or Theory?

***The Truth About Women in
Church History and the Bible***

**INTRODUCTION AND
HISTORY OF WOMEN IN
CHRISTIANITY**



1

**HOW THE BIBLE
AFFIRMS WOMEN IN
MINISTRY**



2

**DOES THE BIBLE LIMIT
WOMEN IN MINISTRY?**



3

**JESUS'
REVOLUTIONARY
TREATMENT OF
WOMEN**



4

**RECONCILIATION
BETWEEN MEN AND
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5

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Jane L. Crane is a gifted leader and speaker who has taught this material on five continents. She was the Lausanne Movement's first Senior Associate for the Partnership of Men and Women and holds a Masters in Peace and Justice.

Jesus Didn't Die for Marriage

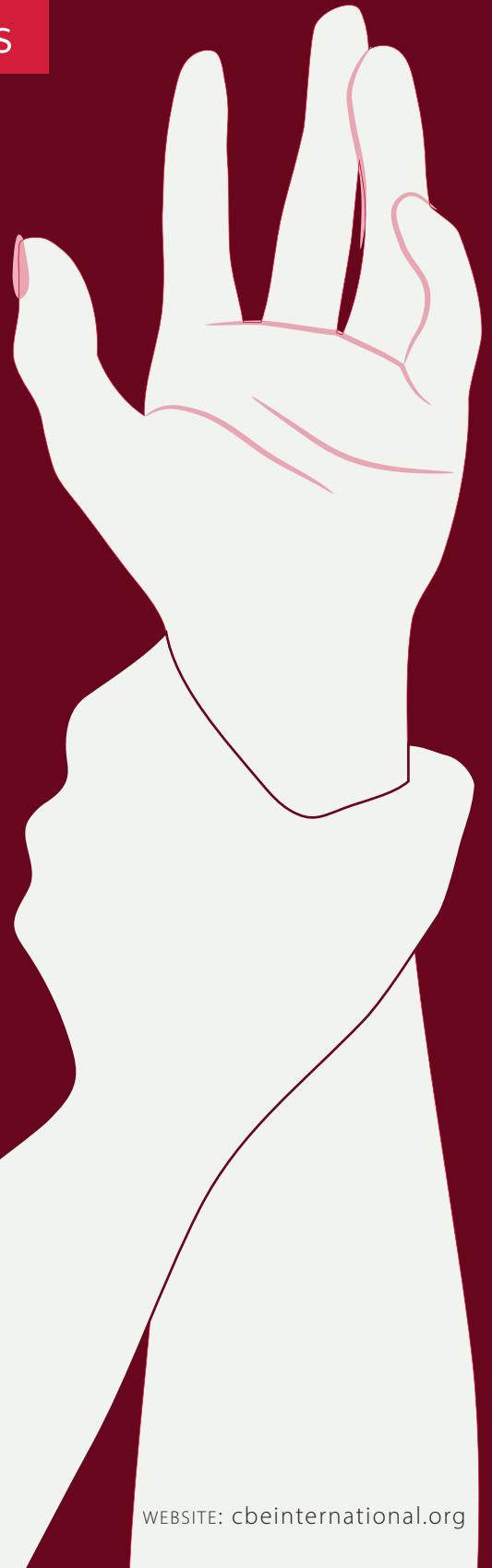
Why Churches Need to Address Domestic Violence

By Mandy Marshall

“On the night he attacked me, I was strangled to unconsciousness. My friend came round and saw my burst blood vessels in my face, and I was still in shock. She took me to the vicarage, and I was asked, ‘So did you have an argument then?’ . . . The following Sunday the bruising around my eyes had come up. No one at church asked me if I was OK.”

—Susie

(name changed, and story shared with permission)



Over the years I have heard many stories like Susie's, where a church's response to abuse was wholly inadequate, where some misunderstood the serious nature of domestic abuse, and where they were paralyzed to act. When Restored, a Christian charity working to end domestic abuse, raised awareness with churches on the prevalence of domestic abuse in the UK, some responded with disbelief. People were quick to respond by saying, "surely not in our church." Or if they were able to acknowledge the existence of abuse in church communities, many would say it "wasn't being done by Christian men." Unfortunately, they're wrong. Domestic abuse is prevalent among Christians and often perpetuated by the way churches respond to women who report, which is reinforced by common unbiblical teachings on divorce. Churches must do better if we want to address this crisis of domestic violence.

Research on Prevalence of Abuse in Churches

These myths of abuse were challenged head-on with groundbreaking research, "In Churches Too: Church Responses to Domestic Abuse—A Case Study of Cumbria"¹ by Kristin Aune (University of Coventry) and Rebecca Barnes (University of Leicester), looking at church responses to domestic abuse across Cumbria, a region in the northwest of England famed for the Lake District National Park. This serene and seemingly idyllic place saw one in four churchgoers experiencing abuse in their current relationship. This rose to over 42 percent when previous relationships were taken into account. Moreover, the research revealed that over 90 percent of the abuse was committed by men, and 56 percent of these were churchgoers. This evidence

shows that domestic abuse happens in churches too and is often perpetuated by Christian men.

It's easy for Christians who don't understand the prevalence of abuse to wonder how a seemingly lovely man who sits on the leadership of the church or passes out bulletins or helps with the youth group could be such a monster in private. Because Christians are ready to give people the benefit of the doubt, they fail to see how a reputable churchgoer can have a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality. But the denial or minimization a survivor faces in a church after a disclosure of abuse can close them down from speaking up and getting the help and support they need.

Pleading in Prayer

Survivors will tell me about their abusive husbands and how they have tried everything to appease him, please him, and have prayed for things to change. Sometimes they ask me to pray with them that he will change back into the man they once knew and married. They commonly say things like, "If he just went back to the man I married . . .," or "He was so lovely when we first got married," or "He was Mr. Charming, and all my girlfriends were jealous that I got to marry him." Their pain is heartbreaking.

When I ask how he is working on himself to change, their faces are often downcast and they say things like, "He thinks I need to change," "He thinks I'm crazy," or "He doesn't see anything wrong with what he is doing."

Victims and survivors of abuse often minimize the abuse when speaking out at first. Some do not think they are being abused because their husband hasn't physically injured them yet. Prayer becomes their last hope, and sometimes it's a killer

hope. Hope, along with a load of church culture that pressures women to stay no matter what, leaves a woman feeling totally trapped with nowhere to go and no hope but to pray for change when the abuse escalates. Often, Christian women who are being abused by their husbands/partners feel they are unable to leave him or divorce him because it is not biblical. Common church teachings are what keep women from escaping their abusers instead of empowering them to find help.

God Hates Divorce

"God hates divorce" is one of the most-used justifications for encouraging a woman with an abusive husband to stay in the relationship. When Christians use this justification, they become complicit in the abuse. Yes, God absolutely hates divorce because of the immense hurt, pain, and destruction that it brings. It tears hearts into pieces and can take years to repair. No loving God would want to see any of his children go through that. Of course, God hates divorce—who doesn't?

This common quip actually represents a misinterpretation of Malachi 2:16, which says, "'The man who hates and divorces his wife,' says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'does violence to the one he should protect.'" Clearly, the man who does violence against his wife has already, in a spiritual sense, divorced her. A woman who files for divorce from her abuser is then making legal the reality he has forced upon her spiritually. Even though God hates divorce, he does allow for it (Matt. 19:8), and it is therefore not a reason to send a woman back to her abusive husband. In fact, it could be very dangerous to do so.

Till Death Us Do Part

“Marriage is for life” is another frequently cited justification for encouraging women to stay with abusive partners. This idea refers to our belief that marriage is a covenant agreement made before God to respect, love, and cherish one another. In cases of abuse, it is the abuser who has broken the covenant, not the survivor. We need to place the responsibility where it lies: with the person who is abusing. The marriage covenant was not meant to be upheld under any circumstance. Abuse, coercive control, infidelity, and abandonment are all events that break this covenant. Forcing a woman to accept these circumstances is not loving or just. It is more akin to abandoning our Christian duty to care for the hurting, and instead choosing to walk on the other side of the road as the priest and Levite did in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37).

How have we arrived at a place where a woman is encouraged to stay with a husband who is choosing to abuse her because she made a vow of “till death us do part”? It can be very dangerous and lead to the loss of life. Whose death are we talking about? In the UK, on average, two women a week are murdered by their partner or ex-partner, according to a study by the Office for National Statistics. If we advise women to remain and reconcile, we could be placing a death sentence on the woman or encouraging her to return to a marriage where her safety, sanity, and dignity are not being upheld. No Christian or church leader wants to be a part of a domestic homicide review trying to justify why they advised a woman to return to her abusive husband or partner, rather than refer her to the professional services available.

Do the church and Christians really put the institution of marriage above life itself? Do we think Jesus died to uphold the institution of marriage? Clearly, we should not.

Jesus didn’t die for marriage or to elevate the institution of marriage above everything else. No, Jesus died to bring us back to God and show a way of love and peace. The New Testament reprioritizes marriage so that following Jesus is placed above it and all other earthly things. Jesus taught that at the resurrection we will not be married (Matt. 22:30), and Paul teaches a preference for singleness in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:8, 32–35). Thus, we should not be afraid to hold men who abuse accountable, and we should not hinder women seeking to divorce their abusive husbands.

Holding Abusers Accountable

As a church, we should be angry at the men who choose to abuse. We should not punish women who are being abused and then prevented from speaking up about the horror of their situation. We silence women when we tell them that they cannot speak out because it will give Christianity, the church, or the abuser’s ministry a bad name. The blame must be placed on the perpetrator. It is he who is at fault, who has sinned. If anyone gives the church or Christianity a bad name, it is the perpetrator of abuse.

We also need to remember that God has survived many a scandal over thousands of years, and the church will survive without the ministry of a man who is choosing to abuse his wife. It’s not going to ruin God’s name by speaking out but rather the reverse. By not speaking out we bring the reputation of the church under question and derision. We need to act justly, love mercy, and

walk humbly with our God (Mic. 6:8). It is our responsibility to call out abuse and bring about justice.

Call to Action

We need to look at ourselves and examine what assumptions we have imbibed via our patriarchal church culture, or teachings that misinterpreted Scripture, regarding marriage and domestic abuse. We need to recognize the damage that these assumptions have done to us mentally, spiritually, and physically and mourn the pain and hurt that they have caused. It may take some time to grieve through this because our assumptions could be deeply ingrained. Remember though that in Jesus we have complete freedom. Jesus came to bring healing to the brokenhearted and to break the chains of injustice.

If you are able, discuss these assumptions with a safeguarding officer (child protection person) at your church, or raise it with your church leader or pastor. Open up a debate about the messages that these assumptions can bring to those who are being abused. Restored has provided a resource for churches, which can be downloaded in different languages and adapted for different countries: www.restoredrelationships.org/churchpack. The US version can be found here: <https://www.restoredrelationships.org/resources/info/147/>.

1. Report can be accessed here: <https://www.restoredrelationships.org/resources/info/142/>.



Mandy Marshall is the cofounder of Restored, a UK-based Christian charity working to end domestic abuse. Mandy left Restored in March 2020, after ten years, to take up the role of Director for Gender Justice at the Anglican Communion.

pandita ramabai's legacy

How a Gender-
Conscious Bible
Translation Impacts
Christian Ministry

By Boaz Johnson

In 1989, the government of India issued a stamp finally acknowledging a woman that Hindu India did not want to recognize. Her name was Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922), and this stamp was issued on the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Mukti Mission, a place of refuge she founded in 1889 for low-caste and outcaste girls who were trafficked and abused. I would like to introduce some thoughts on Ramabai's work during the great bubonic plague pandemic which struck the world, and especially India, between 1896 and 1918. Those were the most crucial years of Ramabai's work, especially her Bible translation work.



Keep an eye out for a follow-up article on
CBE's blog on this topic.

Ramabai's Early Life and Conversion

Pandita Ramabai was born in 1858. Her father was a wandering Hindu Brahmin priest, which meant that his family traveled with him from one temple to another in South India, and they lived on the alms given by the devotees of the gods and goddesses. She lost her father, mother, and sister during the great famine of 1876–78, which killed an estimated five million people. Ramabai and her brother fled South India for Calcutta, where they wandered from one Hindu temple to another.

Ramabai was trained in Sanskrit and in the knowledge of the Hindu texts by her father and mother. She was a skillful interpreter, though her knowledge was technically forbidden. Yet reading these Hindu texts also made Ramabai intensely aware of the unjust place given to women in Hindu society. In her autobiography, she wrote, "There were two things on which all those books . . . were agreed: women of high and low caste, as a class, were bad, very bad, worse than demons, and that they could not get Moksha [salvation] as men."¹

Ramabai's quest for a solution for girls, widows, and low-caste women led her to explore the teachings of Jesus from the book of Luke, which she found in her husband's library. She wrote, "I had found a little pamphlet in my library. I do not know how it came there, but I picked

Against the advice of people around her, she decided to do something. Her desire to serve was fueled by two Scripture verses: “Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee” (Deut. 15:15, KJV), and “Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esth. 4:14, KJV).

it up and began to read it with great interest. It was St. Luke’s Gospel in the Bengali language.”² The story of Jesus’s interactions with women in particular grabbed her attention. Throughout the text, whenever women encountered Jesus, he elevated their status and offered them spiritual, emotional, and social salvation. This was a great contrast to the place of women in Hindu texts.

Against the advice of her Hindu leaders, Ramabai became a follower of Jesus, and her work with the low-caste and outcaste women of India began. She deemed it “of first importance to prepare the way for the spread of the gospel by throwing open the locked doors of Indian *zenanas* [a place of seclusion in the house for women], which cannot be done safely without giving suitable education to the women.”³ The emancipation of low-caste girls and women became her life’s work.

Ramabai’s Motivation to Rescue

When the bubonic plague hit Mumbai and Poona (today called Pune) in 1896, Ramabai knew that low-caste girls and women would face the worst of the pandemic. Girl babies and sacred prostitutes from low castes were offered to the gods Ganesha and Yellamma. Ganesha’s vehicle, the rat god, was worshiped alongside him, with rats living and fed in temple precincts. Because rats were also one of the primary ways the plague spread, low-caste girls were the most vulnerable to infection. During the pandemic, girls were secluded by high-caste authorities on the pretext that they were being checked out for signs of the plague. Then the girls would disappear from these seclusion centers, becoming sexual slaves/mistresses to these high-caste men. Ramabai knew the

truth about what was going on, so she went deep into villages to rescue these girls.

In a letter to her supporters in 1897, she wrote that she had no choice but to do something about the plight of these women and girls. “My heart sank within me, and I cried to God for help. I feel deeply for these poor dying people.”⁴ Against the advice of people around her, she decided to do something. Her desire to serve was fueled by two Scripture verses: “Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee” (Deut. 15:15, KJV), and “Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esth. 4:14, KJV).⁵

Ramabai was also motivated by her memories of her own state of servitude in Hindu society. She sought to always remember what Hinduism did to her sister: her father married her teenage sister to a much older man who severely abused her. She died at a very young age in poverty, hunger, and disease. Ramabai herself must have suffered much during the wanderings from one temple to another as an orphan with her brother.

Ramabai established Mukti Mission, “House of Salvation,” for these girls. She rescued girls and women from the brothels of Mumbai and Poona, and widows and low-caste girls from the local villages. High-caste men would promise low-caste and outcaste parents in villages that their daughters would get good jobs in big cities. When they were brought to cities, they were sold into brothels. Sadly, this happens even today. When low-caste girls today must travel away from low-caste and outcaste villages, they are raped by high-caste young men. It was worse during the time of Ramabai.

Ramabai is an amazing model of
how correct understanding of the
Bible leads to liberation of the weak
and the vulnerable.

The Daughters of Ramabai

The 1896 bubonic plague in India was a massive tragedy. Ramabai knew that there was a direct connection between the bubonic plague, Hinduism, and gender injustice against low-caste people. Ramabai tirelessly sought to right this injustice. At her own personal risk, she went on bullock carts to rescue hundreds of low-caste

girls, orphans, and widows, to bring them to safety and nurture them to health. Ramabai is an amazing model of how a correct understanding of the Bible leads to liberation of the weak and vulnerable. In history, the weak and vulnerable have often been women.

In my last visit to the red-light districts of Pune and Mumbai, I saw freed and bold “daughters of Ramabai” do amazing work. They are freeing today’s slaves because of the impact of Ramabai’s Bible translation and legacy on their lives. I also find fascinating that during the coronavirus shutdown in Mumbai and Pune, the red-light districts are empty of high-caste men. They did not care about passing on their sexually transmittable diseases to these village girls previously. But now, scared of the coronavirus, they have disappeared. The only people holding the hands of the prostitutes of Mumbai and Pune today are the “daughters of Ramabai”! What a lasting legacy!

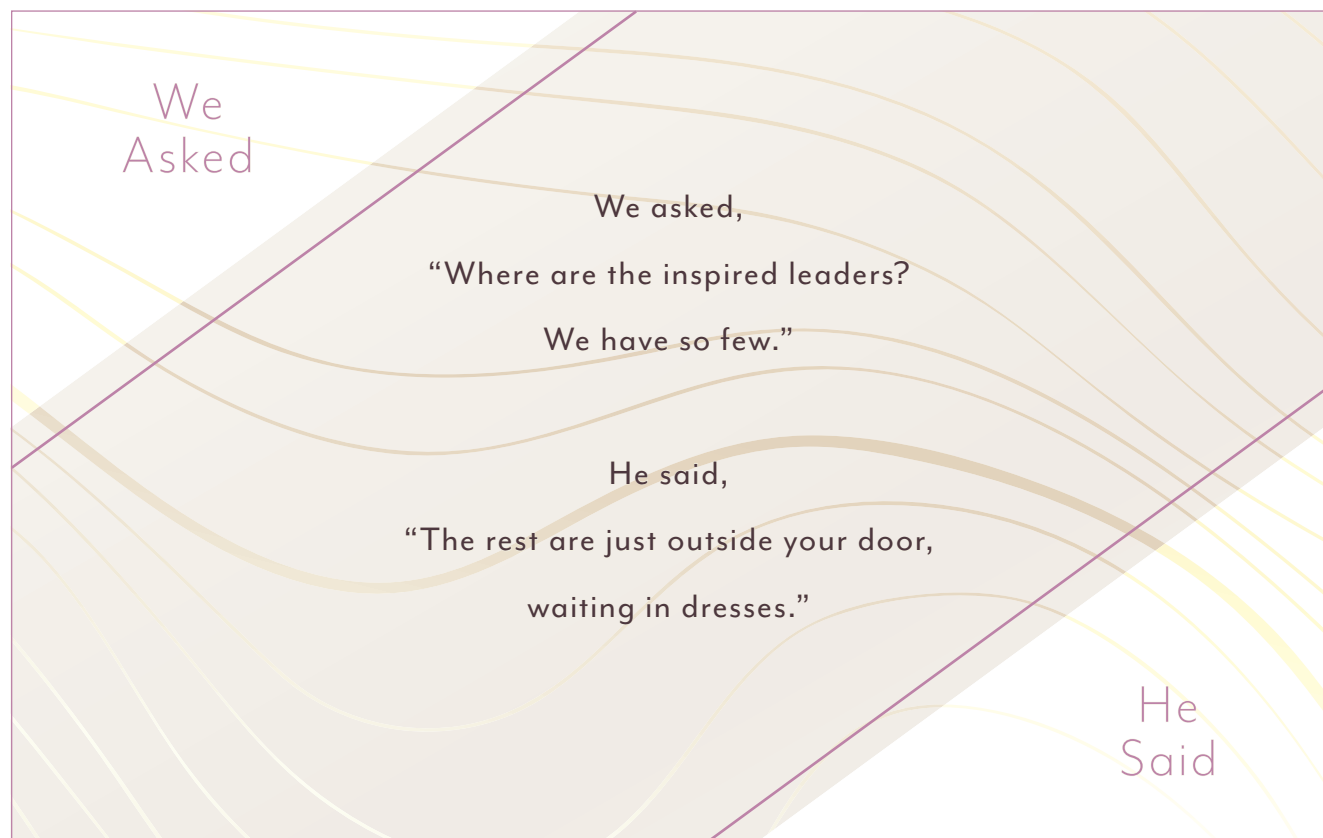
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Boaz Johnson is professor of biblical and theological studies at North Park University in Chicago. He is a board member of CBE International. Boaz has a PhD from Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL. He has taught internationally. Boaz’s wife is a clinical mental therapist. They have four grown children and seven grandchildren.

1. Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony: of Our Inexhaustible Treasure* (Kedgaon, MA: Mukti, 1907), 6.
2. Ramabai, *A Testimony*, 9.
3. Ramabai, *A Testimony*, 118–19.
4. Meera Kosambi, *Pandita Ramabai: Life and Landmark Writings* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).
5. Kosambi, *Pandita Ramabai*, 223.

Reflect With Us by H. Edgar Hix



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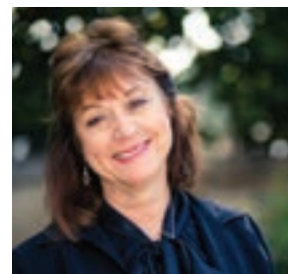
Praise and Prayer

Praise

- Thanks to generous donors and the new software they made possible, CBE's staff team was able to quickly adapt to shelter-in-place rules and move the mission forward while working from home.
- CBE successfully launched our new website!
- Many amazing scholars, humanitarians, and church leaders are planning to speak at CBE's 2020 conference in London. We are grateful for their gracious flexibility as we negotiate the travel and event realities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- CBE will award THREE Alvera Mickelsen Memorial scholarships again this summer, thanks to the generous CBE community.

Prayer

- Please pray for the safety and well-being of our CBE community during this pandemic, and especially for CBE's staff who will transition back to our offices this summer.
- May CBE's new website better serve those looking for biblical solutions to Christian patriarchy.
- Pray that new donors find and support CBE to replace those who recently have had to reduce their giving.
- The final editing and design of *Created to Thrive*, CBE's new pastor/church resource on preventing abuse, is underway and marketing will begin soon. Please pray for wisdom and creativity.



Theology and Human Flourishing

The most prominent indicator of whether a female will be trafficked, killed as a fetus, abused in her family, or denied food, healthcare, legal support, or an education is not her gender but the value a society attributes to females compared to males. Known as *the girl effect*, researchers show that when communities esteem both males and females and invest in their potential equally, these communities are *less* likely to encounter suffering and are more likely to enjoy flourishing. Both secular and Christian humanitarians increasingly recognize the influence faith leaders have in promoting the dignity and agency of females. To speak for God is the greatest power a leader has. Yet, when male authority is framed as God's design, patriarchy gains an unfathomable force!

A large majority of the world follows a faith tradition. Since most religious traditions have supported male authority, fostering gender equality represents a significant opportunity for humanitarians, especially among Christians. The good news is that the teachings and practices of Christianity have, from the beginning, largely identified with the oppressed. The challenge is that Christians have assumed men in authority is the biblical ideal. Even among egalitarians, who affirm gender equality as coherent biblically, male leaders outnumber female in many fields, especially in the academy and the church. As Karen Longman has shown in her research on women in leadership, women in the Christian academy do half as well as women in secular institutions. And women represent less than 6 percent of members of the Evangelical Theological Society where membership is only given to those with terminal degrees.

While 5 percent of Americans share the concern that significant obstacles still make it harder for women to get ahead compared to men, research from Barna Group has shown that three in ten people believe gender obstacles are largely gone. Women, however, are more likely to believe those obstacles exist compared to men (59 percent vs. 6 percent). Significantly, Barna reports that “evangelicals are the most skeptical of the existence of barriers for women in the workplace. Less than one-third (2 percent)—fewer than any other segment Barna studied—believe significant obstacles still exist.”

This is why theologians, pastors and Christian humanitarians are convening at CBE International's conference in London to explore the social impact of failed biblical interpretations. Our goal is to consider the confluence of three different yet overlapping spheres: (1) global development/humanitarian work, (2) Christian faith, and (3) gender equality—three distinct disciplines that when aligned hold unrealized and extraordinary potential for human flourishing. The diagrams below represent both the challenge and the unique opportunity the conference sessions will address. Conference sessions will consider both the theological flaws of male-only authority while also showing the impact of gender equality in humanitarian work. When harmonized, the gospel frees us to build a more just world to the glory of Christ. We hope you'll join us!

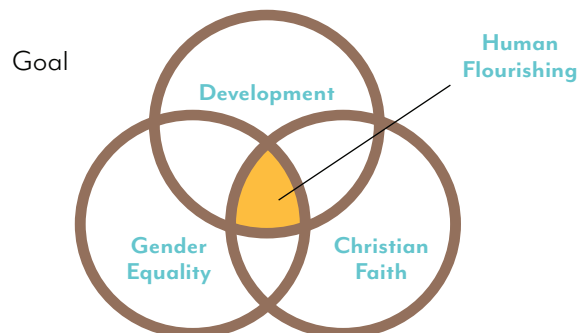
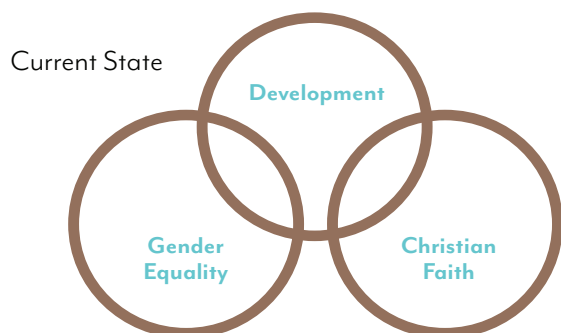


Image by Sean Callaghan

CBE INTERNATIONAL (Christians for Biblical Equality)

Mission Statement

CBE exists to promote the biblical message that God calls women and men of all cultures, races, and classes to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world. CBE's mission is to eliminate the power imbalance between men and women resulting from theological patriarchy.

Statement of Faith

- We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons equal in power and glory.
- We believe in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We believe the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We believe that women and men are equally created in God's image and given equal authority and stewardship of God's creation.
- We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.

To learn more about CBE's values, history, and ministry, visit **cbe.today/info**.

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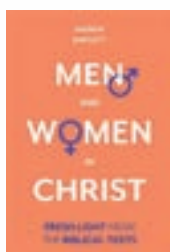
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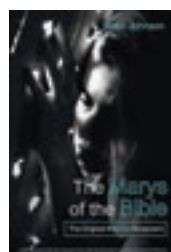
Men and Women in Christ

Andrew Bartlett



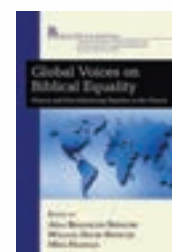
Altogether Lovely

Havilah Dharamraj



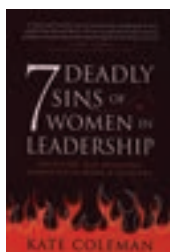
The Marys of the Bible

Boaz Johnson



Global Voices on Biblical Equality

Aida Besançon Spencer
William David Spencer
Mimi Haddad



7 Deadly Sins of Women in Leadership

Kate Coleman



Scars Across Humanity

Elaine Storkey



Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women

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