

# Chivalry Is Not Dead: Protecting and Defending Beauty in the Church

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Men who love women have for centuries sacrificed their jackets, relinquished their seats, and held doors open for women. In recent years, some have considered manners like these to be “chauvinistic,” but, for egalitarian men, politeness has the added benefit of hard lessons learned. As a result, we see these protective respectful acts of kindness including more than just opened doors and sacrificed jackets. They also include the role of advocating for women.

Having graduated way beyond the knee-jerk reaction years of the 1960s and 1970s, when a man who offered a seat to a woman was called “sexist,” we now see that our wake-up call to women’s social injustice triggered an overreaction, dragging with it centuries of valuable social customs. Trying to replace the best of these social civilities, many Christian men are more than stepping up to the plate. They are also carrying good manners beyond opening heavy doors to include addressing what they believe are the very problems that led to the rejection of chivalry in the first place.

More and more evangelical Christian men are sloughing off what they see as the myths of male superiority and entitlement and are focusing on repairing mistakes of the past. Men are uplifting and edifying their sisters in Christ by accepting and defending women’s full equality in the home and the church, and they are bravely speaking about this to the rest of us.

A perfect example of a man speaking up for women can be found in well known and well-respected Christian leader and author, Richard Foster. Foster sees God’s plan for marriage and ministry throughout Scripture and says, “Gender equality in privilege, responsibility, service, and ministry is a gospel imperative. It is an imperative rooted in the creation narrative, fulfilled in the revelation of Jesus Christ, and explained in the fundamental expression of Christian liberty given to us in the Epistle to the Galatians.”<sup>1</sup>

Another familiar face advocating for women is John Ortberg. In a Seeds Tape Ministry tape series titled, “What the Bible Says About Men and Women,” this pastor and author reveals what is often overlooked, stating that the Bible “teaches the full equality of men and women in status, giftedness, and opportunity for ministry.”<sup>2</sup>

Then there is Billy Graham. When asked about the ordination of women, he said, “Women preach all over the world. It doesn’t bother me at all from my study of the Scriptures.”<sup>3</sup>

Taking a closer look at the Bible, pastor and author Rich

Nathan challenges traditional interpretations and fully supports women serving in the church. Addressing a common argument used to bind women, Nathan believes that, even though the twelve disciples were all male, this commonality is not a justifiable reason for restricting women from the pastorate. He says the twelve disciples were also all Jewish and asks, “Does this mean Jewish believers should be given a privileged place in the body of Christ over Gentiles when we choose leaders?”<sup>4</sup>

Although many of these defenders of femininity do so in their individual writings and sermons, ordained minister and editor of *Charisma* magazine, J. Lee Grady, dedicates a whole book to the subject, boldly titling it *10 Lies the Church Tells Women*. Known as one of the most valiant champions of Christian women, Grady writes, “Nowhere in [God’s] Word does He endorse the idea that women are inferior to men or that the spiritual gifts and callings of the Holy Spirit are conferred only upon males.”<sup>5</sup>

And then there is Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian, co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church. He is known as one of the boldest defenders of Christian womanhood. He argued for women serving in all areas of Willow Creek ministry and promised to withdraw from leadership if women were denied. This author of *Beyond Sex Roles* says policies restricting women in marriage and ministry are deviant teachings of the world that have found their way into the church. He unapologetically calls them “satanic legacies of the fall.”<sup>6</sup>

Bilezikian claims restriction on women is the result of paying selective attention to a handful of misinterpreted Bible passages taken out of context, meanwhile selectively ignoring passages that support women in leadership. He tells us, “Women had access, under apostolic sanction, to the highest levels of ministry in the early church. Equivalent ministries should likewise be accessible to women in the modern church.”<sup>7</sup>

Joining the legions of men listening to Christ’s call to turn away from worldly entitlement, John R. Kohlenberger is yet another exemplary model of biblical chivalry. Turning away from his own worldly entitlement, Kohlenberger wrote *From Male Superiority to Mutual Submission*. Shining a spotlight on his own sin of male entitlement, this author of the award-winning *NIV Exhaustive Concordance* and *The NIV Bible Commentary* confesses, “I’d heard many sermons on wives submitting to husbands, but never heard anyone deal with the fact that, in Ephesians 5:21, submission is to one another; in other words, husbands were to submit to wives as well.”<sup>8</sup> Biblically justifying his support for women’s full discipleship, Kohlenberger writes that Paul named “women as his partners in ministry in Romans 16:3–15, as sharing his struggles in Philippians 4:3; calling Phoebe a ‘deacon’ in Romans 16:1 (NRSV) and Junia an ‘apostle’ in Romans 16:7 (NRSV).” He

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concludes with this exhortation: "I encourage everyone, men especially, to embrace the truths of biblical equality."<sup>9</sup>

Rich Nathan also carries this recruiting torch through the halls of Christian manhood, writing: "I make an appeal with all my heart to fellow pastors and leaders: Bless women in your congregations. Affirm their gifts. Actively work to promote them in various roles. In your messages, use women as examples of leaders. In so doing, you will be providing 'a ministry of welcome' to all women. And you will be following the path of your Lord."<sup>10</sup>

Nathan felt led to encourage women after learning just how many doubted the Holy Spirit's call in their lives. Having been told they should not teach and lead men, women mistook God's leading as their own ego and ambitious pride. Nathan pleads with church leaders, "Do not allow women in your congregations to spend years wrestling like this."<sup>11</sup> Grady says it this way, "Christian men must vocally defend the right of women to preach the gospel and lead the church. It is time for men to stand on the right side of this issue. If the Lord of the harvest is sending our sisters, who are we to stand in their way?"<sup>12</sup>

Gordon Fee approaches the subject a little differently. Viewing the restriction of women as the equivalent of the restriction of the Holy Spirit that dwells within women, Fee says, "My advocacy is not so much on their behalf, as it is on the behalf of the Holy Spirit."<sup>13</sup>

Noble advocacy is also happening in lesser known circles, but not without consequences. This brings new meaning to the "dangers" of chivalry. As told in Christians for Biblical Equality's *Mutuality* magazine, missionaries Ron Hankins and Lydia Barrow-Hankins' sending denomination recently set marriage and ministry boundaries for women (reversing decades of men and women serving equally alongside one another). The couple refused to sign a document agreeing with the new restrictions. Instead, Ron released his own statement, saying, "Christian women, although fully capable of defending themselves their call, should never have to; they have Christian brothers to stand with them. I stand as a brother— and as a husband— and I cannot and will not sign any statement of faith that undercuts the ministry of godly women."<sup>14</sup> After twenty-one faithful years in the mission field, the missionary couple was fired, losing their salaries and benefits as well as termination courtesies.

Christian college student Dave Hunt is another chivalry casualty story noted in *Mutuality* magazine. When Hunt noticed what seemed to be college-wide opposition to women in leadership, he felt led to respond, later saying, "I wanted to stand in solidarity with women whose gifts were ignored based on a faulty exposition of Scripture."<sup>15</sup> As co-editor of the student newspaper, Hunt planned to initiate a discussion and began an article. Interviewing the head of the Bible department, Hunt asked him what he thought of women in church leadership. The recounted response: "Those who attend a church led by a woman

would be unable to experience the full blessings of God."<sup>16</sup> The story never made it to press.

Whether in the halls of academia or through writings and sermons, evangelical Christian men are embracing what they believe is the biblical fullness God intends for their sisters in Christ, and they are bravely defending this stance to the rest of us. Increasingly, when we see men opening those heavy wooden church doors for

women, we know more and more men are also lifting restrictions that burden and limit gifted women.

When we see men giving up their claimed and established seats on the bus, sacrificing their comfort so women can experience comfort, we can know this same kind of dynamic is happening in many of our churches. Men are sacrificing their claimed and entitled places so women can also share fully in Kingdom-building.

A growing number of Christian men are reclaiming the noble role of (as Pastor Terry Timm of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania calls it) "protectors and defenders of beauty." Part of this "beauty," they believe, is the truth of Scripture. They are feeling called to raise the sword of the Word as they defend women's original Pentecost release. They are also working to eliminate the weeds of misinterpretation choking the fields of women's calls to serve.

And chivalry gloriously lives!

## Endnotes

1. Richard Foster, "Growing Edges: The Ministry of Reconciliation," *Perspective* 6,1 (Jan. 1996): 1, available at [http://www.renovare.org/readings\\_perspective\\_06\\_1.htm](http://www.renovare.org/readings_perspective_06_1.htm).
2. John Ortberg, "What The Bible Says About Men & Women," Seeds Tape Ministry, a ministry of Willow Creek Community Church, July 1999.
3. Billy Graham, quoted by Joe Trull in *Putting Women in Their Place* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 2003), 13; this quote came from from Billy Graham's May 30, 1997 PBS interview with David Frost that was published in Gary E. Parker, "Women in the Pulpit?," *Religious Herald* (June 15, 2000): 8–9.
4. Rich Nathan, *Who Is My Enemy?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 115.
5. J. Lee Grady, *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2000), 2.
6. Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 117.
7. *Ibid.*, 140.
8. John R. Kohlenberger, "From Male Superiority to Mutual Submission," *Christian Management Report* (March/April 2000): 15. Available at [http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/pdf\\_files/free\\_articles/mutualsubmission.pdf](http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/pdf_files/free_articles/mutualsubmission.pdf).
9. *Ibid.*, 15–16.
10. Nathan, *Who Is My Enemy?*, 158.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Grady, *10 Lies the Church Tells Women*, 195–96.
13. Gordon Fee, quoted by Joanne Nystrom in "Effortless Egalitarianism," available at: <http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/about/Gordon.Fee.shtml>.
14. Ron Hankins, "I Will Not Undercut the Ministry of Godly Women," *Mutuality* 10,4 (Winter 2003): 8.
15. Dave Hunt, "Dismissed," *Mutuality* 10,4 (Winter 2003): 11.
16. *Ibid.*