

How Can Graciousness Forward the Message of Equality?

By Alvera Mickelsen

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How do we forward the cause of biblical equality?
The same way wise people forward any other cause:

1. Understand to whom you are speaking and/or writing. What are their interests? What do they feel strongly about? What do they understand about their own position or yours?
2. Do not push your beliefs on this or any other subject. After other people find you to be a thoughtful, gracious person, they are more likely to listen to your views when the subject arises naturally in conversation.
3. Very few people are won to any cause by direct confrontation. Most people are not won to Christ by being told what dreadful sinners they are. They are won when they see the loving message of Christ lived out in us. When you have the opportunity, you can express how the belief in biblical equality has helped your marriage, home, work or the way you see yourself, etc. You are not telling them what they ought to do or think, only sharing your personal experience.
4. Commend a person, a group, or your church when you see any evidence of biblical equality in action. Express your appreciation when a woman is invited to participate in some way—to lead in prayer, read Scripture, or head a committee. And don't say, "It's about time we had a woman doing. . ." Instead say something like, "I was especially blessed when Jane Jones read the Scripture this morning. I felt as though I were a real part of the service." You have not found fault with anyone—you have just commended someone for ministering to you.

5. Use humor when you can. Recently I heard someone say, "It isn't a question of whether women can preach and teach. They have been doing that through the centuries. The question is—'Who can listen?'" Depending on the circumstances, you might add, "I wonder why men have put up with those restrictions on them for so long?"

6. In everyday contact with people, look for ways to recognize and commend every small step toward equality. When you see a husband do a thoughtful act of mutuality toward his wife, you can say, "That was a very thoughtful act on your part." Commend your children's teachers when they help children to step out of "gender-based roles."

The issue of egalitarianism is far more emotional than theological. The theological questions are relatively easy to deal with. The prejudices and emotional threats are far more difficult. And they must be dealt with on emotional levels, demonstrating the gentleness and strength of Jesus, our Lord.



Alvera Mickelsen was a founder of CBE and CBE's first board chair in 1997. She worked with grassroots CBE chapters and served for years as a CBE board member. A gifted teacher, writer, and editor, Alvera authored accessible books that remain bestsellers not only in CBE's community, but around the world.

Disturbed by the shallow reading of Scripture used by many Christians to marginalize women's gifts, Alvera frequently wrote for and edited CBE publications and spoke at CBE events and those of her denomination—the Baptist General Conference.

A key visionary within CBE and a tough debater, Alvera was intensely gracious to all she engaged. She was a sought-after mentor for younger egalitarians, writers, scholars, and leaders. She was in constant contact with her students and served as a faithful guide to many aspiring movers and shakers.

Alvera was a people's theologian, bending her enormous talents toward fanning into flames God's gifts and call in everyone's lives. She was enormously successful because she was far more interested in seeing everyone become an advocate for biblical justice than she was in her own success or reputation.