



What We Believe Matters

Some question why CBE invests so much time and resources discussing biblical equality rather than other “more important” theological concerns. They may argue that the role of women is a “secondary issue”—one on which we can agree to disagree. “Afterall,” so the thinking goes, “the greatest impact is on women who want to lead; for men and for women who are not called to leadership, it’s an abstract theological discussion, right?”

Wrong.

Theology is not an abstract exercise with no connection to real life. Theology is a collection of our beliefs and understanding about God, and our beliefs inform our actions. Bad theology is harmful—not in an abstract way, but with real-life consequences. How many people have lost their entire life savings because they invested in a church that promised miracles corresponding to the amount they gave in offerings? How many wives suffer in abusive marriages because they have received bad teaching about marriage and submission?

In an attempt to ensure the dignity of women within hierarchy, some complementarians began to espouse a belief that women are “equal in value but separate in roles.” Whatever the intentions, this argument sounds strikingly similar to another promoted in civic discussions about segregation, an argument that was thankfully debunked and dismantled. When women are prohibited from participating in leadership because of a foundational characteristic of their being—their femaleness—they cannot truly be said to be “equal” to men.¹ And if our theology sustains that women are less than men in some way, in any way, our behavior will reflect that.

If men are the final decision makers, women’s voices matter less. If men are the spiritual leaders over women regardless of spiritual maturity, interpreting Scripture and serving as mediators for them, they place themselves between women and God—a position only Jesus holds. If men are given the responsibility to discern truth while women are believed to be easily deceived, women are taught to trust men blindly, rendering them vulnerable to manipulation.² Whatever the intentions of those involved, *bad theology hurts people*. It hurts our sisters and brothers. It hurts our children. And according to 1 Corinthians 12, when one part of the body of Christ is hurt, the *whole body* is hurt. In the news every day, we are

seeing just how much the bad theology of gender hierarchy hurts the body of Christ. How are we to bring healing and hope to a hurting world if we ourselves are bleeding out?

We want to make room for that pain, to name and acknowledge it—but we don’t want to remain in it. We want to cast a vision of hope and healing, not through toxic positivity,³ but in recognizing the power of the Holy Spirit to work through even our heaviest moments.⁴ The articles in this issue, much like the sessions of this year’s CBE Conference in Chicago of the same theme, explore how we understand hurt and healing within the body of Christ.

Healing can happen in a small group even in the face of discouragement; healing can happen when a church body is accurately represented by its leaders; healing can take the form of welcoming someone to a shared table; healing can even be physical as our bodies and spirits learn to rest through healthy theology and grace. Healing can begin by recognizing the value of each person operating out of their gifts and callings, addressing conflicts and misunderstanding with love, humility, and kindness. As we let go of bad theology, the whole church may be built up. Beliefs inform action: When women are recognized as truly equal to men, they will be able to work alongside them as partners, and women and men alike will benefit. And in this way, the church begins to function as the body of Christ and demonstrates the transforming power of the gospel, giving an example to the world and promoting healing and wholeness beyond its walls.

Notes

1. A more technical formulation of the statement would be: “Ontologically equal but functionally different.” If the basis of her prohibition from leadership is ontological, she cannot be said to be ontologically equal. Many scholars have developed this argument in depth; for further reading, see: Greta L. Bennett and AJ Fletcher, “Separate but Equal: The Great Lie behind Jim Crow and Progressive Complementarianism,” *Priscilla Papers* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2025). <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/women-leadership-and-ordination-in-the-anglican-church-in-nigeria-copy/>.
2. For specific examples of this, see *Mutuality* issues 32.2 *Why Her?*, 31.3 *Bullying in the Body*, 29.3 *The Problem of Porn*, and 26.1 *Everyday Sexism*.
3. Toxic positivity is a form of emotional denial characterized by the belief that people should maintain a relentlessly positive mindset no matter how painful or difficult the situation, suppressing or invalidating negative emotions.
4. Recognizing that the Lord can use terrible situations does not make them less terrible or painful, but it puts them in their place, no longer the end of the story.

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