

Should Christians Use the F-Word (Feminist) or Not?

A few months ago, former *Charisma* editor J. Lee Grady penned a powerful column headlined “Why I Don’t Use the F-Word.” Of course, he was talking about the F-bomb, the nasty four-letter word that’s worked its way into mainstream conversation with text shortcuts like WTF, PG-13 movies and more.

But there’s another F-word in question this week, one that Laura Turner over at *Christianity Today* calls the “Christian F-word” in her recent column, which seems to play off Grady’s opener about his sheltered childhood experiences and how he had never heard obscenities. Turner says she was 12 the first time she heard the F-word—*feminist*—uttered in public.

The younger generation tells me the word *feminist* doesn’t carry the same insurgent connotation it did in the 1970s, when bra burners and radical lefties forwarded the women’s rights movement. But there are still plenty of Christians from that era who shudder at the word. I suppose I am somewhere in the middle—too young to have witnessed the movement through eyes of understanding and too old not to understand the controversy surrounding it.

For example, I do remember black-and-white images of Gloria Steinem with her huge glasses and zinger soundbites like, “A liberated woman is one who has sex before marriage and a job after.”

Steinem, who had an abortion in London at age 22, rose to fame covering the pro-abortion movement and penned articles with lines like, “I think the person who said, ‘Honey, if men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament,’ was right.”

With statements like that, it’s no wonder Christians from that era of American history cringe when they hear the F-word. And

to my ears, it still carries a negative connotation. Case in point: In my article "Why Traditional Religion Is Threatened by Women in Ministry," I made the statement, "I'm by no means a feminist (I can hear that accusation in the spirit even now)," because I identify the word *feminist* with more than the dictionary definition of the "theory of political, economic and social equity of the sexes." I still think of "women's lib" as seeking reforms around reproductive rights—namely, abortion.

Despite my own reaction of the F-word, the tide seems to be turning. Sarah Bessey has been promoting her forthcoming book, *Jesus Feminist*, for months. Apparently, a publisher was willing to invest in the notion that the word *feminist* would resonate with many Christian women who adore Jesus.

Here's the premise of the book: "For centuries, the role of women in the church has been a subdued one, with many limitations. The time has come, argues Sarah Bessey—called an 'accidental grass-roots voice for postmodern and progressive evangelical women'—to take a new look at Scripture and challenge old assumptions. *Jesus Feminist* urges the church to stop asking 'man or woman' as a qualification for ministry and to start helping everyone find freedom in the fullness, hope, glory, and work of Christ."

So is it OK now to use the F-word? Or is *feminism* still an obscenity in the mainstream church? Do we really need to conjure up a term that has a history connected with controversy—even abortion—to protect the role of women in the modern church? Does the fact that the younger generation is reviving this term signal some underlying problem in the body of Christ? And if so, would it be better addressed without such a polarizing word?

What do you think? Are we opening the door to rebellion in the quest for equality by reintroducing a term that encouraged a pro-abortion revolution? Or is it time, as many in the younger

generation suggest, to redeem the F-word?

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