

10 Lies the Church Tells Women

For centuries, a patriarchal system of control has kept women in spiritual captivity through distortion of the Scriptures. It's time to debunk the myths.

We live in the 21st century, but if we're honest we have to admit that in some ways the church is still in the Dark Ages—especially when we look at the way we treat women.

Even though the Scriptures never portray women as secondary to men, our male-dominated religious system still promotes a warped view of female inferiority. Women are tired of this, and as a man, so am I—because such demeaning attitudes don't reflect God's heart.

Jesus challenged gender prejudice at its core when He directed so much of His ministry toward women. In a Middle Eastern culture that considered women mere property, He healed women, disciplined them and commissioned them to minister. Yet today we spend much of our energy denying them opportunities—and using the Bible to defend our prohibitions.

I've identified 10 erroneous views about women that for too long have been circulated in the church, preached from pulpits and written in the study notes of popular Bible translations. I believe we must debunk these lies if we want to see the church fully released to fulfill the Great Commission.

Lie No. 1: God's ultimate plan for women is that they serve their husbands.

How sad that so many Christian men view women from a selfish perspective. This view is often promoted by misreading the account of Eve's creation in Genesis 2:18-25, in which Adam is provided a "helpmate." The Hebrew word used here often is

translated “companion,” denoting intimacy and partnership. But through the centuries it has been used to imply that Eve was some type of domestic appendage.

We men have assumed that God gave Eve to fulfill Adam’s sexual needs as well as to serve as his cook, laundress and maid. But the Genesis account does not say this.

After Eve’s creation, God did not tell her: “You are Adam’s helper; I command you to serve him well.” She was not created for servitude; she was fashioned to be a co-laborer with Adam so that they might rule together over creation as God commissioned them to do (see Gen. 1:28).

Lie No. 2: Women can’t be fulfilled or spiritually effective without a husband.

From the time she was released from a German death camp in 1944 until her death in 1983, Corrie Ten Boom taught the world about a Savior who could forgive the cruelest Nazi. Yet she never married. Did the fact that she did not have a husband make her less “complete”? Some Christians would say yes.

We have spent so much energy defending the concept of the biblical family that we are guilty of idolizing it. We’ve preached that a woman’s primary responsibility is to find a godly husband, have lots of babies and stay home to raise them for Christ.

But marital status is not a qualifier for ministry. The Bible does not even state whether certain key followers of Jesus, such as the 12 disciples, were married or not.

The highest calling of all believers—married or unmarried—is to develop a relationship with Jesus. Any other earthly relationship is secondary, and Christ Himself warned us never to allow people we love to become idols that distract us from Him.

Lie No. 3: Women shouldn't work outside the home.

Many evangelical churches have preached that women who work outside the home are breaking a scriptural commandment, but this conclusion can be reached only by distorting the biblical record. The woman described in Proverbs 31 is often used to bolster a traditional view of the June Cleaver-style matron who spends her day baking casseroles while her husband is at the office. But a careful reading reveals that the Proverbs 31 woman, in her ancient Middle Eastern context, functioned as a real estate agent and ran a textile business.

Titus 2:5 instructs women to "take care of their homes" (New Living Translation). But most scholars would agree that this passage simply exhorts married women not to forsake their children.

It is true that, because of ambition or materialism, some Christian women neglect their children even though the Holy Spirit has urged them to put their career objectives on hold. But rather than placing a legalistic burden on women by telling them that having a career is ungodly, we should tell both men and women to submit their career plans to the Holy Spirit's direction.

Lie No. 4: Women must obediently submit to their husbands in all situations.

A distraught Christian woman who was regularly beaten by her husband finally gained the courage to seek counsel from her pastor. After she told him about her husband's fits of rage, the pastor responded, "If your husband kills you, it will be to the glory of God."

The pastor reached this irresponsible conclusion because of a distorted view of "male headship." We often portray marriage as a hierarchy, with husbands on the throne and wives at the footstool, and we use Scripture to justify this view: "to

your husbands as you do to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22).

We assume this verse means women have no say in family matters or that their opinion is second-rate. In extreme cases, women have been told to submit to abuse in order to honor male headship. But this is not a Christian view.

Paul also told the Ephesians, "submit to one another" (5:21, emphasis added). I have heard teachings by male clergy on the subject of male headship, but I've never heard a pastor encourage men to submit to their wives! Yet in a loving marriage, a man and woman will defer to one another as they make decisions.

In my 16 years of marriage, my wife and I have had plenty of disagreements. But when we reach an impasse, I don't announce, "I am the head of this house, so what I say goes." Rather, Deborah and I either agree to pray about the matter, or we choose to defer to one another.

The point is never who is in charge. I view my wife as an equal. I am not "over her." We function as one.

Lie No. 5: A man needs to "cover" a woman in her ministry activities.

This idea came from a distorted interpretation of the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:3, "the head of woman is man" (NKJV). People have used these words to bolster the idea that women are subservient to men or that they cannot approach God without a male authority figure in their lives.

Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 about head coverings is a difficult passage, and Bible scholars don't agree on its meaning. However, most teach that Paul is addressing specific cultural concerns in first-century Corinth and that he is calling for propriety and order in a society where immorality and paganism had blurred gender distinctions.

Paul was not placing men in a position of generic rulership over women. Because there is “no male or female in Christ” (see Gal. 3:28), women can pray, worship, study the Bible or minister without a man present. How silly to think that a man, because of his gender, could add credibility to prayer or Spirit-empowered ministry! To believe this would be to trust in the flesh.

Lie No. 6: A woman should view her husband as the “priest of the home.”

Search your concordance. Scripture never describes men as “priests of the home.” This man-made concept was popularized in evangelical churches in the last century. We have one priest, Jesus Christ, whose blood atoned for our sins. It is a mockery of the gospel to suggest that any human being needs an additional priest apart from the Son of God.

The Bible says all believers are priests (see 1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 1:6); there is no gender restriction. Husbands function as priests when they pray for their families or when they minister the Word of God to them, and wives also function in this role.

My experience in marriage has been that God speaks both to me and to my wife. He doesn't say to me, “Since you are the head of this house, I'll tell you my plans for your family, and you can tell the others what I said.” Often God has revealed His plans to my wife before I heard anything!

Christian men need to stop being defensive and recognize that God has called us to function in unity with our wives. We need to listen to their counsel, consider their opinions, and pray together for the mind of the Lord rather than putting our foot down and shouting, “I am the leader of this family, and what I say goes!”

Lie No. 7: Women are not equipped to assume leadership roles.

The most common mistake we make in biblical interpretation occurs when we take one isolated verse and build a doctrine around it—even if the verse seems to contradict other passages. This is often what we do with 1 Tim. 2:12, “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man” (NASB).

Most theologians believe that this passage was addressing an isolated situation in Ephesus. They came to this conclusion after studying the myriad of references in the Bible to women in spiritual authority. The Old Testament records that Deborah was a judge over Israel—and God blessed her leadership in battle (see Judg. 4-5). Other women who held authority over men include Miriam, Huldah and Noadiah.

Jesus issued His first gospel commission to women (see Matt. 28:1-10), and both men and women were empowered to preach on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Priscilla, Chloe and Phoebe were leaders in the early church, and one woman, Junia, is called an apostle by Paul (Rom. 16:7).

The promise of the prophet Joel was that “sons and daughters” would prophesy after the Holy Spirit was given to the church (Joel 2:28, emphasis added). Yet we have taken one misunderstood verse from Paul’s writings and used it to negate hundreds of other passages that support the full release of women into ministry.

Lie No. 8: Women must not teach or preach to men in a church setting.

Since 1 Timothy 2:12 obviously contradicts the overall biblical endorsement of women in authority, how are we to understand it? What is Paul actually saying in this passage?

In their book *I Suffer Not a Woman*, Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger explain that certain cultic worship practices involving female priestesses of Diana had invaded the first-century church. These priestesses promoted blasphemous ideas

about sex and spirituality, and they sometimes performed rituals in which they pronounced curses on men and declared female superiority.

What Paul was most likely saying to the Ephesians was this: "I do not allow a woman to teach these cultic heresies, nor do I allow them to usurp authority from men by performing pagan rituals." He was not saying, as some Christians have assumed, "I do not allow godly Christian women to teach the Bible." In his day, Paul would have been thrilled to have had more skilled women who could teach the truth!

Lie No. 9: Women are more easily deceived than men.

This idea has been taught by twisting the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:14, which says, "It was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (NLT). Some have suggested that because Eve was tricked by the devil, women have a stronger propensity toward deception. Others have gone so far as to insist that women are to blame for all the evil in the world and are therefore under a greater curse than men.

No respectable Bible scholar in the church today would promote such a view. The Bible clearly states that Adam and Eve were both held guilty by God for their disobedience, and they were both punished. In 1 Timothy, Paul cited the creation account not to place extra blame on Eve but to refute a bizarre teaching that was circulating in Asia Minor.

In the first century, Gnostic heretics were mixing Christianity with paganism. One of their teachings stated that Eve actually liberated the world when she disobeyed God and gained secret knowledge from the devil.

Paul was not teaching that women are more prone to deception. He was explaining that what Eve did was not right, and that the Christian view of the creation was that Adam and Eve sinned when they listened to the serpent.

Women are certainly capable of spreading deception because they have a fallen nature as men do, but there is no evidence that they have greater gullibility. That view is rooted in demeaning stereotypes and prejudice.

Lie No. 10: Women who exhibit strong leadership qualities have a “spirit of Jezebel.”

Once I was listening to Bible teacher Cindy Jacobs speak at a prayer conference in Colorado. When she approached the pulpit, two men who were sitting in front of me turned to each other and began to pray softly.

“Lord, we bind the power of the devil from bewitching this audience,” one man said, adding, “We bind the power of Jezebel in the name of Jesus.” These men believed that the crowd would automatically come under a spirit of deception when Jacobs taught them—simply because she was a woman.

How absurd! Was Barak “deceived” when he took orders from Deborah? (See Judg. 4:14.) Did baby Jesus come under a harmful influence when Anna prophesied over Him? (See Luke 2:36-38.) Was Apollos spiritually emasculated when he submitted to the teaching of Priscilla? (See Acts 18:26.) Of course not!

To associate godly women with Jezebel, a wicked Old Testament despot, is unfair and offensive, yet men in the church today often pin Jezebel’s label on strong, anointed women because they feel threatened by them.

Let’s stop the insults. If a woman is using manipulation to usurp authority or if she is spreading heresies, then she certainly deserves the Jezebel label—as do men who do such things. But women who walk in spiritual integrity and preach the Word of God with power deserve our respect.

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