

# Out With Chauvinism

Last spring I began working on a book about gender prejudice in the church. Part of my research involved asking Christian women who visit our Web site to share their personal experiences. I wanted to know if they had ever encountered any form of bias, or if they had been denied ministry opportunities because they are women.

“You have no idea what you’re getting yourself into,” one woman told me. She was right. I was not prepared for the onslaught of responses that began to pour into my office from my wounded sisters.

Their e-mails proved to me that the church in the 21st century is stuck in a time warp. We might be singing contemporary songs during our worship services and using the latest technology to spread the gospel, but Christian attitudes about women are downright medieval. We might as well lock ourselves in the tower with the rest of the serfs and pull up the drawbridge!

Do any of  
these horror stories sound familiar?

One Florida woman who has attended seminary was told by her pastor that she couldn’t lead a weekly women’s Bible study unless her husband sat in the back of the room to “watch” her.

An ordained woman minister from Tennessee said many men have

walked out of her meetings after she has been introduced as the guest speaker. When she led a home Bible study for women, a local pastor routinely called those who attended to inform them that it is not scriptural for women to teach.

A woman from Indiana was told that she couldn't ask questions during a Sunday school class "because the Bible says women should go home and ask their husbands."

Another Tennessee woman wanted to co-lead a vacation Bible school for neighborhood children. But the deacons told her husband that he must do all the teaching, even though he felt more gifted in leading music. Later, the deacons forbade this woman from teaching a children's Sunday school class because boys were in it.

A prominent evangelical theologian told me he believes women aren't created by God with the intellectual capacity to understand theology. (Yeah, right, and I guess the Earth is flat, too?)

Remind me again: What century is this? The 14th? The 12th? The Iron Age?

I wonder what the chauvinists would say to missionary Kayy Gordon, who has spent the last 40 years planting churches in Canada's northernmost Arctic territory (see her story on page 46).

I can hear the critics now: "I'm sorry, Miss Gordon. It doesn't matter that you've led hundreds of Inuit men and women to Jesus and established churches and a Bible school in a place where few men were willing to go. Women preachers are

dangerous!”

Sorry, but this “keep the women in their place” argument sounds flimsier by the day. If the church is going to reach this generation, we have to get out of the deep freeze and let the Holy Spirit thaw our insulting, patriarchal views. That won’t happen until we men become “man enough” (and humble enough!) to admit that it’s not the Bible but our male pride and cultural bias that prevent us from releasing women into ministry.

Can we please ditch the insults? Jesus and Paul had women on their teams. Can’t we?