

Why Beth Moore's Challenge Can't Be Ignored

Bible teacher Beth Moore is one of the most gracious, polite and approachable ministers I know. This is not just because of her Southern accent or her folksy Texas humor. She is a genuine Christian who takes her calling as a preacher of God's Word very seriously—yet she's humble enough to know she's not all that. She's just a servant of the Lord.

Maybe Moore's humility is the main reason she waited until last week to address the most glaring, unresolved issue in the modern evangelical movement. She dared to open the can of worms we all knew would have to be exposed sooner or later. On May 3, she released a blog titled "A Letter to My Brothers," and it rattled denominational offices, infuriated her critics and even got the attention of the good old boys' club.

Her article, which went viral on social media as soon as it was posted, reminds me of Martin Luther's post on the Wittenburg Door. Beth stuck her neck out further than she ever has, in an act of prophetic bravery, to challenge the spirit of patriarchal pride that has infected our churches for too long.

"Many women have experienced horrific abuses within the power structures of our Christian world," Moore wrote. "I'm asking that you would simply have no tolerance for misogyny and dismissiveness toward women in your spheres of influence."

Moore knows what she's talking about. She has been on the receiving end of chauvinistic put-downs and sexist comments since she began her ministry—which started as an outreach to Southern Baptist women. Today she's one of the most popular speakers on the wider evangelical scene, but her success has been accompanied by a lot of pain.

As Moore points out in her blog, male colleagues have ignored her in public settings or made her the brunt of jokes. Male seminary students have talked down to her. She was even asked to wear flat-soled shoes instead of heels because she might appear taller than another male speaker. And since 2016, hyper-conservative fundamentalists have labeled her a heretic because men listen to her preaching.

Moore's most vehement critics won't even give her a chance to prove her credibility. When she asked one ultra-conservative group if they had actually researched her many Bible studies to confirm that she teaches heresy, they said no—because it is against their religious convictions to study what a woman teaches. (Never mind the fact that these “scriptural” Christians are maligning another believer, in direct disobedience to Scripture.)

About a year ago another incident happened that convinced Moore she had to go public with her uncomfortable prophetic message. She had an opportunity to meet with a male theologian whom she greatly respected. She was excited about sharing a meal with him to talk theology. But it didn't go so well.

Moore wrote: “The instant I met him, he looked me up and down, smiled approvingly and said, “You are better looking than _____.” He didn't leave it blank. He filled it in with the name of another woman Bible teacher.”

That's sick on so many levels—but mostly because this crude incident exposes what's at the root of religious resistance to women in ministry today. Too often, even Christian men look at women as sex objects and can't view them as anointed instruments of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we've cheapened women's value and barred them from using their gifts to further Christ's kingdom.

Like Moore, I've listened to countless women who've suffered because of chauvinism and misogyny in the church. I've prayed

with women who were told to submit to their husbands' physical abuse, no matter how violent. I've listened to professional Christian women share how they were viewed with suspicion because they didn't choose the traditional role of wife and mother. And I've wept with women who have obvious gifts of preaching, teaching or leadership but were told they have "a Jezebel spirit."

Things must change. The church must repent of all forms of gender injustice. We need men and women equally empowered for ministry so we can fulfill the Great Commission. This is not just an appeal from a respected woman minister named Beth Moore. This is a cry from the heart of God, who created "both male and female" in His divine image and commanded them both to rule over the earth (see Gen. 1:26-28).

The crude jokes and sexist comments must stop. Domestic abuse in the church must stop. The devaluing of women's spiritual gifts must stop. And we must renounce the attitude that says, "If we just ignore this issue, it will go away." God is using the Harvey Weinstein scandal to expose this problem in the secular world—but we have our own ugly version of it in the church.

Thank you, Beth Moore, for having the courage to address the elephant in the room.

I'm standing in full solidarity with my sister. The Holy Spirit is speaking through her. I hope we all are listening.