

# Hiding Prejudice Toward Women Behind Religious Mask

Baptist author and Bible study leader Beth Moore [published](#) “A Letter to My Brothers” last week, in which she shared, lovingly but honestly, her experience as a woman in the male-dominated world of evangelicalism in general and the patriarchal SBC in particular.

If you haven’t read it, you should.

The tone of the article isn’t angry. That’s not the type of person Moore is; she’s not out to attack or destroy anyone.

The tone is sadness and disappointment, not so much because when she was relatively unknown that she had to put up with being dismissed, ignored and patronized by her male “colleagues,” but that, 30 years later, she still has to endure it.

I’m sure this has been brewing in her for a while, and I’ve often wondered how she has been able to endure it. I didn’t know the specifics, but I know quite well the crowd she’s had to run in.

As we are learning through the brave women who are coming forward in the #MeToo movement, it’s never been easy to be a woman trying to make it in a so-called “man’s world.” But in evangelical circles? Baptist circles? Forget about it.

Early in my ministry, I saw the vehemence with which my colleagues in ministry would argue against ordaining women as deacons or, with vein-popping fierceness, as ministers in the church.

They would quote Paul chapter and verse, though out of context and sometimes mistranslated; Paul was actually a champion of women in ministry.

And they would state that women were last in creation and first in the Fall, so should stay out of the pulpit. Seriously, they said that.

I would read the verses they would quote and note that it's possible to come to the same conclusion.

But then I would read the verses they didn't quote, about Phoebe being a "diakonia en ecclesia" ("deacon in the church"), Junia an apostle (though for a while she was [turned into a man](#)), and Mary being first at the resurrection.

This made me wonder if their position had less to do with the Bible and more to do with their prejudice and need to protect their status in society and the church.

A few years ago, at a luncheon with other Baptist pastors in Maryland, I heard one of those pastors mitigate his previous position and say that he had no problem with a woman being ordained to the ministry "as long as she served under the authority of a man."

Seriously, he said that. And I thought, "Well, that's at least a little progress." Seriously, I thought that.

But I also wondered what the biblical justification was for that half-measure. Answer: There is none.

It was clearly his prejudice and need to protect his status in society and the church and not his desire to follow the teachings of the New Testament that was at work.

I know that sounds judgmental, but Beth Moore came to the same conclusion. She wrote, "I came face to face with one of the most demoralizing realizations of my adult life: Scripture was not the reason for the colossal disregard and disrespect of women among many of these men. It was only the excuse. Sin was the reason. Ungodliness."

I came to a similarly demoralizing realization a few years ago.

I had operated for most of my ministry under the optimistic, idealistic and utterly naïve belief that Bible-believing Christians who touted the authority of Scripture over their lives and that of their churches would allow Scripture to challenge and ultimately change their prejudices, even if it threatened their status and place in society and church.

In too many cases - not all, gratefully, but in far too many - I found people who used Scripture to back up their prejudices and status, quoting it selectively and out of context, and not quoting it quite selectively, in or out of context.

And they weren't interested in a conversation or a discussion. An argument, perhaps, made with vehemence and sometimes vein-popping fierceness, but never a conversation or discussion. They were interested in changing my mind, but never their own.

I'm grateful for Beth Moore, both for her ministry of Bible teaching, and for her courage to speak up. Speaking up wasn't easy, but listening is, and we should all listen to her.

Christ would not tolerate any form of misogyny in his church, any kind of dismissiveness toward women or any persons or people group.

Neither can we.

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