

Is an Omni-Male Deity the God of Scripture?

Truth be Told Kenya

September 2016

Pray!

Thank you Revd Dominic, director of EFOGE, Lord Bishop, and colleagues and friends, for your gracious invitation to host this delicious lunch and lecture today. Your hospitality is a fragrance of heaven. Having worked beside so many of you since 2012, it is indeed always a pleasure to return “home” to serve Christ with colleagues such as you, exploring ideas that have enormous impact in the lives of God’s beloved children.

I have been granted permission to explore our topic today: **Is an Omni-Male Deity the God of Scripture?** I selected this title, as someone interested in not only historical theology, but also the social history of evangelicals. It has been my observation that throughout history, Christian faith and practices has been unduly swayed by philosophical currents that perceive maleness as part of God’s being or *ontos*. It is a theological error that sustains a unique identity and purpose (or *telos*) for males as distinct and superior to females. As Mary Daley from Boston College put it this way, if God is male then male is God. To argue that gender and specifically male-gender is essentially and necessarily part of God’s being, is to suggest that males are closer to an image of God more perfectly than females, who are therefore, by virtue of their being in need of male authority. Of course theologians have argued like this for centuries...

Just to refresh our historical memories, here is the short ride over church history, from John Chrysostom to Mark Driscoll.

Slide: Chrysostom to Driscoll

- “let her not teach ... for the sex is weak and fickle (value)...” **Chrysostom**, 347-407
- “it is more consonant with the order of nature that men should bear rule over women, than women over men.” **Augustine**, 354-430

- *Nature*, I say, does paint [women] forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish; and experience has declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel (*value*) . . . a woman's place is beneath man's (*purpose*)." **John Knox**, 1514-1572
- "When it comes to leading in the church, women are unfit because they are more gullible and easier to deceive than men. . . ." **Mark Driscoll**, 2010

Consistently, from the early church period to the present day, Christians have taught that women are, in their being morally, intellectually and spiritually, inferior to males. Holding conferences, publishing and mobilizing church leaders, even this week proponents of Male-Authority aligned with mega-organizations like the Gospel Coalition are working together to advance a "sanctified testosterone" as one leader said in his lecture this year. According to Dr. Owen Straten, an omni-male authority is modeled after the omni-male leadership teachings of Christianity and is therefore a worldview that leads to human flourishing. I agree with Owen, our views on gender do indeed shape a worldview, for better or worse. As Plato said, ideas have consequences and theological ideas, that claim to represent God, have an exalted capacity to shape daily life.

Our challenge as Christians who share the same text, who agree that God speaks to us on the pages of Scripture, does Christianity "sanctify testosterone"? Does it, must it reflect an omni (or all-present)-male deity who created, modeled and instituted an omni-male leadership for God's covenant people. We'll consider, first, the biblical data supporting patriarchy, and second counter not only with a biblical gender-egalitarian perspective, and if there is time we'll thirdly explore research from humanitarians working to dismantle patriarchy as it fuels injustices and human suffering.

It's not only prominent evangelicals who believe Christianity has a masculine feel to it. I like to tell the story of Hilary, who though only eight years of age was old enough to notice the "masculine feel" of her church. As the congregation ended their prayers with the "Amen," Hilary blurted out "**All men!**" A friend seated next to her asked "Why did you say all men?" She said, "Well, look at them," pointing to altar. "They are all men!" For Hilary, the face of Christian leadership is decidedly male. Though her assertion is based on a child's limited experience, yet those with greater learning have raised their voices for the "all men" quality which they believe is both

intrinsic to Christian faith and an attribute within the Godhead itself. How do they arrive at this conclusion?

Slide: A Masculine Feel to Christianity

- Jesus was male
- Scripture reveals God as father not mother. Jesus teaches the disciples to pray to God as Father
- Jesus selects 12 male disciples
- There are many male leaders in Scripture
- Man is called “head” of woman in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23
- Wives are called to submit to their husbands, Ephesians 5:22
- Paul asks women not to teach or hold authority over men, 1 Tim 2: 11-12
- Just as God is “head” of Jesus, man is also “head” over woman, 1 Corinthians 11:3.
Submission within the Trinity should be modeled in the man / woman relationship

These so called facts are the basis for an omni-male god (small g) of Scripture that inform an omni-male authority structure in the church and home, which, for Merriam Webster is the very definition of patriarchy itself.

Slide: Merriam Webster defines Patriarchy as “a family, group, or government controlled by a man or a group of men.”

Let’s consider each in turn, to see if an omni-male deity is truly part of the teachings of Scripture.

Jesus was male

The fact that Jesus was male may lend weight to their argument to a masculine Christianity. Even so, the early Christians strenuously resisted this notion.

Slide: Jesus was Male

1. For them, God is first and foremost Spirit, John 4:24.

- It is not Christ's gender that is essential but his humanity. Those Jesus was born male, Jesus for first and foremost *Anthropos* not *aner*.

Jesus was born male, but is first and foremost *anthropos* (human) not *aner* (male). He was your flesh and mine, and thus gave himself as a sacrifice for all. 1 Timothy 2: 5-6

5	εἷς	γὰρ	Θεός	,	εἷς	καὶ				
	one	indeed	God [there is]		one	moreover				
	Adj-NMS	Conj	N-NMS		Adj-NMS	Conj				
μεσίτης	Θεοῦ	καὶ	ἀνθρώπων	--	ἄνθρωπος	Χριστὸς	Ἰησοῦς	--	6	ὁ
mediator	between God	and	men		[the] man	Christ	Jesus			the [One]
N-NMS	N-GMS	Conj	N-GMP		N-NMS	N-NMS	N-NMS			Art-NMS
δοῦς	ἑαυτὸν	ἀντίλυτρον	ὑπὲρ	πάντων	,	τὸ	μαρτύριον	καιροῦς	ἰδίοις	,
having given	himself	[as] a ransom	for	all		the	testimony	[given] in times	its own	
V-APA-NMS	RefPro-AM3S	N-ANS	Prep	Adj-GMP		Art-NNS	N-NNS	N-DMP	Adj-DMP	

- Fully human and fully divine, Christ's two natures are never comingled or confused that we might impute his maleness onto the godhead, or extend divinity to men. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Christ was fully divine, and born of a woman, fully human.

Ultimately, the point of the incarnation is that Christ becomes your flesh and mine on Calvary. If masculinity were essential to Christ's incarnation, he could not be a sacrifice for women. To absolutize any aspect of the incarnation (Christ's gender, ethnicity, etc.) works to exclude those not bearing such attributes from Christ's salvific work. For Christ to atone for all people, he is *anthropos*, not *aner*, in order to become your flesh and mine on Calvary.

Could Christ have been incarnate female? Why do you think Jesus was incarnate as a male? Anyone? Some have suggested he became male to show us what true power, or true masculinity looks like. Here is how some Christians have answered this question throughout history.

Slide: Jesus was Male but God is Spirit

- For the ancient Church, Christ was born male to represent males, and born of a woman to represent females. (Gregory of Nazianzus, 329-390)
- Christ was born of a woman to represent females and born male to represent males. God's "temporal plan ennobled each sex, both male and female. By possessing a male nature and being born of a woman, Jesus further showed by this plan that God has concern not

only for the sex He represented but also for the one through which He took upon Himself our nature.” Augustine (354–430 A.D.)

- Ambrose, bishop of Milan, (Augustine’s teacher) used feminine metaphors of womb and breast to emphasize God’s nurture and closeness to us. For Ambrose, Christ arises from the “womb,” or substance (*ontos*) of God, to emphasize Christ’s divine nature (*ontos*). Just as Christ was born of Mary and shares our human nature or substance (*ontos*). Christ is therefore fully human and fully divine. **Ambrose** (340-397 A.D.)

Slide: Feminine Metaphors for God

There is an extensive body of scholarship on this point, but until recently, the church from the early centuries through the late middle ages used feminine metaphors for God. Feminine language, like mother, womb and breast helped the church to understand God’s immanence, closeness, nurture and the tender, motherly love of God. By contrast, masculine language was by the church to speak of God’s immanence, unknowableness and distinctness to the created order and humanity itself. Clement of Alexandria wrote:

And God himself is love; and out of love to us became feminine. In his ineffable essence he is **father**; in his compassion to us he became **mother**. The father by loving became feminine, and the great proof of this is he whom he begot of himself; the first fruit brought forth by God is love.”—**Clement of Alexandria(150- 215 A.D.)**

These few examples show that the historic church did not impose Christ’s gender onto the Godhead because God is spirit and Scripture warns against the worship of earthly images (Exodus 20:4). Because the early Christians viewed Christ’s sacrifice as representative of all people, Christ’s gender was not viewed as essential, though his humanity was. The point of the incarnation was that Christ represents your flesh and mine. Perhaps for this reason, Christ’s self-appointed name was most frequently Son of Man (*anthropos*—humankind) not Son of Male (*aner*). Gendered deities were part of the Greek dualistic system, which Jesus, as your flesh and mine, stands against.

Slide: Jesus Prayed to God as Father

Though Jesus called God "Father," it was understood in Jesus' day that it was fathers who passed on inheritance, protection and identity to children, as Marianne Meye Thompson observes in [*The Promise of the Father*](#). Christ also called God *Abba*, or "daddy," as a way of expressing not only intimacy and trust, but also birthright. Like all language used for God, "Father" and *Abba* helps us understand a spiritual or eternal quality: that just as Christ is God's child, in Christ we, too, are heirs of God's kingdom, a point Paul emphasizes in **Galatians 3:27-29**:

"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

In as much as we are born again in Christ, we too, are sons and daughters of Abraham and therefore heirs of God who is our truest, and eternal Father. This is the case regardless of our gender, ethnicity or class specifically because it was *not* Christ's gender, ethnicity or class, but Christ's *humanity*, that makes him a sacrifice to *all* people.

For this reason, many ancient baptismal fonts are shaped like a womb, and inscribed with Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Our truest identity is not our gender (male or female), ethnicity (Jew or Greek) or class (slave or free). Our truest identity and inheritance comes through our rebirth in Christ, whereby we are adopted into God's family, through Christ.

Interestingly, baptismal fonts, throughout the ancient world, were inscribed with Gal 3:28, others were shaped like a womb (**6 Sbeitla Saint Vitalis baptism, 6th c., Sbeitla, Tunisia**). It is our second birth that forms our truest identity, purpose and destiny through adoption into Abraham's tribe who is the heir of God's covenant promise, fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Do you see how the biblical text reframes the paterfamilias or patriarchy of the ancient world. God is not male, or Father, but God is Spirit. When we are born of God's Spirit, we are adopted into the Jesus Tribe, as equal members of God's household, so that the privilege and purpose of the Jew is now that of the Greek, the privilege of the Free is that of the Slave, the privilege of Male is now that of Female. For this reason, we find Paul appeals to Philemon

receive his slave Onesimus as a brother, an equal heir in Christ. Is this simply a statement of Slavic status? Absolutely not, Onesimus becomes bishop of Ephesus. Likewise the Greeks and women to assume the highest positions of leadership, a point we'll explore momentarily.

Interestingly, Nicodemus asks Christ about spiritual rebirth, wondering: "Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is Spirit. ... For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."**John 3:1-21**

In John we observe the integral relationship between rebirth and identity, flesh provides one identity, but spiritual rebirth is an identity that is imperishable, because it comes through our association with Christ on Calvary, where again, what is not assumed cannot be redeemed as Gregory of Nazianzus put it. Christ was your flesh and mine, and for this reason the world is welcomed, redeemed, sanctified and commissioned for service because of their second rebirth. Let's consider some of the women commissioned for service by their second birth.

Slide: Men are Leaders in Scripture

- The very first leadership team included males and females. We find this in Genesis, as Adam and Eve share dominion together, because both are created in God's image. God calls Eve "*ezer*" which means strong help.
- Women, as prophets, corrected both kings and priests.
- Women served as apostles, deacons, teachers, house church leaders.
- The only leader associated with an official church office is Phoebe. She was a deacon in the church of Cenchrea.
- The spiritual gifts are not gender-bound.

But, what about the fact that Jesus called 12 men as disciples?

Slide: Christ Called 12 Males as Disciples

- The 12 disciples represent a reconstitution of the 12 tribes of Israel into the New Covenant, as God had promised.
- It was more important that the 12 were Jewish than male.
- Yet, the 12 disciples consistently fail where women in the gospels succeed. It is outsiders and women whose faith, courage, wisdom and initiative exceed that of the 12 disciples, despite the privilege they possess as males and Jews.

Some Christians point to the twelve male disciples as evidence that church leadership is limited to men only. At face value this may sound compelling. However, the twelve were not only male, they were also Jewish. In reality, it is much more important to consider the ethnicity of the twelve. Apart from this, their gender is insignificant. Why?

The twelve represent the reconstitution of the twelve tribes of Israel into the New Covenant, as God had promised. These tribes are organized by male clan leaders, as was the custom in a patriarchal culture. To make gender a prerequisite for leadership, while ignoring what these twelve represent, is to sanctify the patriarchy of the ancient world, missing the point entirely! The point of the twelve was to celebrate God's faithfulness to Israel, which the twelve symbolize. After all, Jesus was sent to the Jews, and like Paul, much of his attention was devoted to reaching them with the good news that God has fulfilled his promises to God's covenant people.

While Christ worked closely with 12 male disciples, they slow to grasp Christ's mission and message. For example, when confronted with 5,000 hungry people, the twelve ask to send the crowd away. Jesus has to tell them, "You give them something to eat!" Yet, one chapter later we meet an outcast, a Syro-Phoenician woman, whose faith far overshadows that of the twelve. This marginalized woman tells Jesus that she will be nourished even by the crumbs scattered on the floor (Mark 7:24-30).

Consider the Samaritan woman, Jesus travels well out of his way to engage a Samaritan woman at a well in John chapter 4, where he holds the longest conversation with any human being in Scripture. It is interesting that Christ discloses his messianic mission first to a woman who was also a Samaritan, given the fact that her tribe and the Jews hated each other. To this despised

culture, Jesus reveals his identity as the Son of God the Messiah to whom both Jews and Samaritans had long awaited. Jesus tells this outcast, a woman, that he is the Messiah. It is to her, and not the disciples, that Christ makes this known his identity as Savior, which John notes in 4:26. This takes place, long before Christ asks his disciples, who do you say I am? And, the disciples are both surprised and disappointed to see Jesus talking with a woman, and a Samaritan in broad daylight. Perhaps they were aware of the content of their conversation. Clearly they were disturbed that Jesus so readily breaks gender and ethnic customs in speaking with a woman who was also part of a hated tribe. What is worse, by revealing his identity as Messiah Christ enlists her as an evangelist to a despised people, knowing that she would do what any Jew or Samaritan might with his revelation. She made haste, leaving her jar at the well, she runs to tell her community that she met a man who knew all about her. Could he be the Messiah? She becomes the first evangelist, proclaiming the good news that God has sent a redeemer and that, lowly and outcast as she is, he seeks her out specifically, personally. Several verses later we learn that many Samaritans come to faith because of her testimony. She provided a strong rescue as ezer, though she was an unlikely choice as a female and as a Samaritan. Unlike the disciples who could not answer Christ's question correctly "Who am I?" correctly. The Samaritan woman could.

Scripture very clearly compares the failures of the twelve to the courageous faith of women. The twelve grasp for power; they want to sit at Christ's right and left hand (Mark 10:37); they forbid even children to approach Jesus (Mark 10:13); they are outraged and humiliated when Christ speaks with women openly (John 4:27); they steal money, and one even betrays Christ. When Christ is arrested and crucified, the twelve disperse, one denies Christ openly, and others hole up behind locked doors. Not the woman! They understand that Christ's work is completed on a cross and they prepare him for his greatly work of all, death on Calvary.

In Matthew 26:6-13, a woman tenderly prepare his body for death at the last supper. She has an alabaster jar, filled with expensive perfume. Despite the disapproval of his disciples, this woman pours the perfume on Christ's head, despite the displeasure of the disciples who said the perfume could have been sold for a great sum. They viewed the anointing of Jesus as a waste, again displaying their ignorance. What the 12 did not realize which this woman did, was that the perfume was preparing Christ for his greatest work of all, his death on the Cross which would bring reconciliation between God and

sinners, and healing between people hostile to one another. By pouring the oil on Christ's head, this woman was anointing the Lord of Lords, and King of kings, just as the priests of Israel anointed kings for their work in leading Israel.

Jesus was aware of the significant task this woman was performing in preparing him for the grave. So, he corrects the disciples for their ignorance and faithlessness. He says, “Why are you bothering her. She has done a beautiful thing to me... When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I tell you wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done for will also be told, in memory of her.

Unlike the disciples, the women remain with Christ during his crucifixion, and wrap his body in grave clothes. Outside the tomb, they wait faithfully—a vigilance that Christ rewards. A woman—Mary—is the first to meet the risen Lord. Christ tells her to go to his disciples with the good news! Do they believe her? Did they believe Christ? Even as Jesus appears to them, Thomas asks to touch his wounds just to be sure it *is* Christ.

Though they were marginalized by their culture by their gender, poverty, ethnicity, ritual uncleanliness, and acts of adultery and prostitutes, women teach us more about discipleship than the twelve disciples do. The Bible juxtaposes the women’s faith with the twelve’s failures. What is more, Jesus unhesitatingly engages women as if to challenge their devaluation. He expects them to respond not as a distinct class, but as people, disciples, and heirs of God’s kingdom. Jesus broke social and religious taboos related to gender, and he consistently challenged the patriarchal devaluation of women. We see this when Christ heals a hemorrhaging woman in public (Luke 8:40-49). It was assumed that if he touched her, he too would be unclean, a belief he overturns by allowing her to touch him in public, with many witnesses, declaring that she had been healed of her disease.

Unlike the other rabbis of his day, Jesus allows women to sit at his feet and study his teachings (Luke 10:38-42)—preparing them for service as disciples, evangelists, teachers, apostles and martyrs. In all ways, the equality and full humanity of women was self-evident, implicit, and consistently part of Christ’s teachings and practice. Through his practices and teachings, Jesus opposes patriarchy.

Slide: Women leaders in the Jesus Tribe

When a woman called out to Jesus, saying, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you,” Jesus responded, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:27-28). For Jesus, a woman’s value resides not in her gender roles, but in her response to God’s revelation. This becomes the standard for every member of Christ’s New Covenant—male and female. Women are now daughters of Abraham (Luke 13:16), a phrase first used by Jesus to welcome God’s daughters as heirs and full members of Christ’s body, the church.

Women are also prominent at Pentecost—the birth of the church. Men and women of all tribes prophesy and declare the truth of God authoritatively, through the power of the Holy Spirit showing that access to God is no longer mediated through an elite group of Jewish males, but through God’s Spirit poured out on many tribes and nations, on both men and women. There is no gender, ethnic, or age preference noted in the birth of the church, or the gifts expressed at Pentecost.

Similarly, baptism welcomes not only the marginalized, but *especially* women, because baptism replaces circumcision as the outer expression of our inclusion in God’s Covenant people. Whereas circumcision was for Jewish men alone, baptism is for *all* people, male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free. The inclusivity of Christian baptism is emphasized by Paul in Galatians 3:28, a verse inscribed on many early Christian baptismal fonts. To be united with Christ not only realigns our identity and status with respect to God, but our union with Christ also redefines our relationships to one another. Just as Christ established peace and reconciliation between sinners and God, our rebirth in Christ also inaugurates harmony and mutuality between the members of His body—the church. As [Gordon Fee](#) notes, to be in Christ is never simply a statement about our redemption but salvation directly influences our relationships with one another, as members of Christ’s body.

Sociologists view Galatians 3:26-29 as the most welcoming text to women from all of antiquity. Paul offered these words to a world in which women and nearly half of the general population were slaves. In a profound way, Galatians 3:28 is a radical social statements because one’s identity, dignity and sphere of influence was, in the ancient world, largely determined by one’s ethnicity, gender and class.

To argue that Christianity has “a masculine feel” is to fail exactly where the twelve failed. They, too, were slow to see how Christ’s victory ushers in a new creation where identity and service is no longer limited to the ethnic, gender or socioeconomic of our human birth, but defined by our rebirth in Christ, whereby we are made equal heirs of Christ’s kingdom. To focus exclusively on the gender of the twelve as the unassailable quality of leadership while overlooking the receptive faith, courage and initiative of women—whom Christ treated as equal members of the New Covenant community—is to confuse the patriarchy of first-century culture with the moral teachings of Scripture—that through Christ the outsiders are now insiders, the weak are made strong, and the strong of this world are weak in their own might. The portal to leadership is not gender but newness of life in Christ!

We *must* recognize Christ’s engagement with the marginalized, particularly the women sidelined by an ancient culture. These women, interestingly, exhibit the greatest faith in Jesus—a faith that puts the twelve to shame! If the example of the twelve disciples teaches us anything, it demonstrates how easy it is to overlook what God is doing right in front of our noses. The example of the twelve often teaches us what NOT to do.

Slide: Man is Head of Woman

“Head” means source in 1 Cor 11: 3-5. Here Paul rehearses the chronology of the 2nd creation account: Christ is the source who created man, just as man was the source of woman’s body, and God is the source of Christ’s incarnation. However, now all males come from women, just as all things come from God, therefore, males and females are interdependent, 1 Cor 11:11-2, Ephesians 5:21-33.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul mirrors the “source” and chronology logic of the creation account in Genesis by using the term *kephale*—a word that means “head,” as in the physical top of the body. *Kephale* often implied “source” or “origin” rather than “authority.” Echoing the chronology of the second creation account in Gen. 2: 20-22, Paul notes that Christ is the head or source of man (*andros*—Greek for the “male” gender of humanity), because Christ as a member of the Trinity was active in Genesis 1:26, “let us make human beings (‘*adam*—“human being” in Hebrew) in our image,” creating them male and female (Gen. 1:26, 2:20-22). As in Genesis, Paul

observes, also in 1 Corinthians 11:3, that man (*aner*, which means specifically “man” or “male” in Greek for the male gender of humanity) is the source of woman because Eve was formed from Adam’s side (Gen. 2:21-22).

Finally, God is the source of Christ, because Christ was born fully human through Mary, and fully divine through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31-32). Lest anyone assign authority or an extra portion of dignity to males because man is the source of woman, Paul is quick to point out that source grants neither male nor female elevated status. After all, “as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God” (1 Cor. 11:12). While others attempt to use source logic to devalue women, Paul makes it clear that source logic, when seen in its fullness, stresses two points: that humanity is interdependent, and that it derives its identity from one source—God.

Because woman comes from man and man comes from woman, we are interdependent as male and female, a point Paul makes in Ephesians 5:21-33. Here Paul makes clear that all relationships in the New Covenant Community are characterized by mutual submission. Since every Christian (single or married) is a member of Christ’s body, we are all called to mutual submission, Eph 5:21. So too married couples, Eph 5:22.

Because all Christians are to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). One example of mutual submission is that of wives submitting to their husbands, just as husbands sacrifice themselves for their wives. Why? Because the husband is head (*kephale* or source) of the wife, just as Christ is head (*kephale* or source) of the church (5:23). As Christ sacrifices for the church, so too husbands are to sacrifice themselves for their wives. Unlike the head of Rome, who demanded obedience of the empire, his body: As head or source of the church, Christ gave up his life that many might become spiritually alive. As head or source of their wives, Paul requires husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, sacrificing even their own lives if needed.

Ten times, Paul asks husbands to love their wives as they love themselves, because her body is his, and his body is hers. Husbands and wives have authority over one another’s bodies, a point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 7:3-7. How radical this must have seemed to first-century husbands!

Remember, first-century men held ultimate authority over women and husbands could require the sacrifice (even the very lives) of their slaves and wives. The freedom, mutuality, and interdependence of the Gospel necessitated a complete reframing of gender, power, and authority.

A new Christian culture was forming. The free are now slaves and the slaves are now free (1 Cor. 7:21-22). Paul places the burden of sacrificial love squarely on the shoulders of those who held the most cultural authority—men. Husbands are those whom Paul primarily addresses in Ephesians 5, asking them to live out kingdom values in imitation of Christ, reminding them not to be deceived by their cultural authority which is temporal. For this world in its present shape is passing away (1 Cor. 2:6, 1 Cor. 7:31).

Paul realized that God was building a new creation—the church, with each member born of the Spirit, and joined equally to Jesus as head. The new wine of Jesus would require a new wine skin where slaves and women can serve equally in accomplishing the purposes for which God had called and gifted them. For this reason, the New Testament does not hesitate to celebrate women in positions of leadership, like Junia an apostle (Rom. 16:7); or Phoebe, a deacon and prostates, or “leader,” in the church of Cenchrea (the only person in the New Testament associated with a church office [Rom. 16:1-2]). Paul and the other apostles do not shy from citing the accomplishments of teachers like Priscilla, who instructed Apollos—one of the most gifted teachers in the New Testament (Acts 18:24-26)—in her home, in the very city (Ephesus) where Paul limits the teaching of certain women who usurp authority and domineer in ways that oppose the gospel (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Priscilla was a leader in her house church, just as Lydia, Chloe, Nympha and Apphia were also house church leaders. Slaves, Gentiles, and women serve with equal authority beside free people, Jews, and men in the purposes for which God had called and gifted them, because they too are born of the same Spirit that gifts Christians with power for service, never limited by gender (Rom. 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:7-11, Eph. 4:11-12).

Finally, we consider the idea that Jesus submits to God because God is head of Christ.

Slide: The Eternal Subordination of Christ to God the Father?

God is the “head” or source of Christ, because Christ was born fully human through Mary, and fully divine through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31-32). Even so, some evangelicals are “determined to see in God, what they wish to see in humanity, a subordination in role or function that does not compromise (they insist) an essential equality of being,” as Phillip Carey observed. The subordination of God the Son to God the Father is made in order to justify the subordination of women to men though without compromising an equality of being, which of course is metaphysical bungee jumping. Whether its members of the Trinity, males or females, how can you be equal in being but unequal in authority? To do so renders the word “equal” meaningless. And, what is most significant, the “separate but equal” or “equal but different” rhetoric was used in the United States to segregate schools, restaurants, restrooms, hotels, buses and even churches according to skin color—which is a fixed and unchangeable condition. The courts decided that separate is never equal because “separate” too easily creates segregated social structures that are *inherently* unequal and unjust. Even so, Christians employ the same flawed argument to exclude women out of positions of authority in the church. To deny females equal authority not because of their character, their intimacy with Christ, their giftedness, but solely because of gender—which is a fixed and unchangeable condition—is to create communities, organizations, churches, or marriages that are *inherently unjust*.

As sexist exegesis maneuverings continue to captivate the time and energies of the Church, we tragically export our patriarchal worldview to communities around the world where women and girls are without legal systems of protection. Christians and humanitarians, working to end the global sex-trade are asking whether these crimes against humanity are not worsened by the devaluation of females always the logical outcome of male-rule said to be God’s ideal, we worsen their lives and greatly diminish human flourishing. Ideas have consequences.

Until the church corrects its theological errors, a patriarchal worldview will weaken our capacity to identify and address injustices. It truncates the goodness of the Gospel, not only by marginalizing God’s gifts to women, but devaluing females at the level of being. We must remove the log in our own eye, or we will lack not only credibility, but also the moral and spiritual teeth needed to advance the gospel in word and deed, here or anywhere.

There is no time to loose, because as Amartya Sen observed 23 years ago, 100 million girls are missing from the planet. This is the largest human holocaust in all of history and when will the church rise to meet this challenge. Ideas do have consequences and I pray our reforming work will fully and finally dismantle a patriarchal worldview, in which male rule is viewed as a biblical ideal an idea with consequences that shame the gospel and create a caste system in the church and make it too easy to ignore the enslavement and annihilation of females in our world.