

## **Are Women Finding Their Voices?**

Ephesians 5:21-33

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The conviction of comedian Bill Cosby and the arrest of movie mogul Harvey Weinstein have shaken Hollywood.

We've seen the worst fears of any parent come true with the abuse of dozens of gymnasts and the arrest and conviction of their sexual abuser, Dr. Larry Nassar, former U.S.A. Olympic Gymnastics doctor.

Unfortunately, the cover-up by Michigan State University of Dr. Nassar's actions shows how unwilling our society is to hold people like him accountable for their actions.

We are learning that these are not isolated incidences. What these and other cases are showing us is that there is a pattern of female sexual abuse by men in this country and an unwillingness by the rest of us to acknowledge it.

Women have felt powerless because they cannot get justice. They are afraid to speak up because they are afraid if they tell their story no one will believe them.

They might even be made out to be the ones responsible.

Sometimes women are made to believe that if they speak out, their lives will get worse rather than better.

Too many times this has proven to be true. Women, teenage girls, and sometimes children have felt trapped in a man's world.

Other times, women are made to feel that they caused or deserved the abuse, or that it was somehow normal, or that it didn't even happen.

We do not live in Saudi Arabia, but our country has not come nearly as far as it needs to come in how we treat women.

But women have begun to feel empowered, just as they did when they campaigned for the right to vote a hundred years ago.

Sometimes, there is comfort in numbers. When one woman has the courage to step forward and speak up, it gives others the courage to come forward.

This has happened in each of the cases I have mentioned.

American Actress Alyssa Milano encouraged women to tweet about their experiences of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace, with the hashtag "Me Too," and the Me Too movement was born.

Eventually, this movement seeped down into the religious circles of our country, resulting in the resignations of megachurch pastors in Tennessee and Illinois.

Evangelist and Author Beth Moore tweeted last year that at age 25 a well-meaning mentor told her that people could not handle hearing about her sexual abuse and it would sink her ministry. She was advised not to talk about but she did. “It didn’t,” sink her ministry she wrote.

(<http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/2017/october/brave-women-in-church-come-forward-with-metoo-in-wake-of-hollywood-sex-abuse-scandal>)

She also wrote to women, “We have a voice. For all the times we were bullied into silence, we get to speak up and call wrong WRONG.” (Ibid)

“We too get to stand on solid ground and be counted. We too get to help other girls stand. We too get to say, ‘I understand. I believe you.’” (Ibid)

For years now, women like her have been petitioning the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention to put together a database of sexual offenders so people that have been dismissed in Southern Baptist churches due to a sexual offense could not leave that church and move to another church without any warning to an unsuspecting congregation.

The leadership of convention has been opposed to any such idea, believing that only the Roman Catholics have any issues with clergy who deal with problems related to sexual abuse

Perhaps now they will begin to listen. Even though many other cases have been cited, now two of the most high-profile members of the Southern Baptist Convention have been caught up in abuses of women this year.

Frank Page has been the president and chief executive officer (CEO) of the Southern Baptist Convention’s executive committee since 2010. In this position he oversaw hundreds of millions of Cooperative Program dollars.

Not long ago, he tried to abruptly retire from his job, not giving the true reason for his abrupt exit. But the next day he issued a statement saying that he was leaving due to a “personal failing” and “personal indiscretion.”

Nothing more was said.

Nathan Norman is a young millennial pastor and a blogger. He wrote an open letter to Frank Page.

In it he wrote, “I can only assume from your follow-up statement to your first resignation that you mean *adultery* when you say “personal failing” and “personal indiscretion.”

“If this is the case, please clarify your sin. We live in a culture that uses language to minimize sin. Adultery is not an affair, a fling, or a personal indiscretion. When we minimize sin, we minimize our need for the Savior.”

This pastor goes on to say something that men of position and power need to hear. We all know that it takes two people to commit adultery, but when one person is in a position of power and authority, this pastor says that the sin goes beyond adultery and should be called sexual abuse.

He writes, “Perhaps it is not sexual abuse that is illegal but remember that the law is the absolute bottom of morality, not the top. Just because something is legal, does not mean it is moral or acceptable in God’s eyes.”

Then he reminds us that his is the kind of abuse that King David committed against Bathsheba.

When Nathan the prophet confronted the king with the parable of the man taking his neighbor’s one lamb to feed it to his guest, he said “the rich man *devoured* the lamb.” He abused it for his own personal use.

This pastor said it is very clear that this is what David did in taking Uriah’s wife for himself. In a very real way,” the pastor says, he “David destroyed Bathsheba.”

(<https://www.nathanjamesnorman.com/blog/an-open-letter-to-frank-1-page> )

These pastor’s words are powerful. They are not said often enough from the pulpit. Not enough male pastors are being advocates for women in their churches from the pulpit. Why is that?

I think Al Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary may have given us a clue in an article he wrote recently for “Christianity Today,” when he surprisingly raised some questions about the theology he advocated in the “2000 Baptist Faith and Message.”

He asked whether the problem we are seeing in the moral failings of our spiritual leaders may be attributed to complementarianism, which is the theology that teaches that the male is the head of the home and the church.

This theology teaches that while men and women are equal, their roles are different. Because of that, there are some things women are not allowed to do that men are because that’s how God designed the world.

President Mohler still believes in this theology, so just to hear him raise the question was startling.

However, many women will tell you that there is no equality when you are told that you cannot lead or be in a certain positions of leadership because you were born the wrong gender, even if you feel called by God to lead.

President Mohler is asking whether men have started to abuse their role as “the leader.” Of course, there is no question that many men have and historically, men always have.

Kendall Rae Rothaus is the senior pastor of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas. She answers his question directly in an article on women’s voices in the Me Too movement she wrote last May.

She said “until the church and its seminaries are unequivocal about the equality of men and women, the church is contributing to an atmosphere that makes abuse possible.”

[https://baptistnews.com/article/paige-patterson-womens-voices-and-the-gaping-hole-in-education/?utm\\_source=BNG+Headlines&utm\\_campaign=76744c1e04-RSS\\_EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_dd0edff639-76744c1e04-53694045#.WwhSLa2ZOdW](https://baptistnews.com/article/paige-patterson-womens-voices-and-the-gaping-hole-in-education/?utm_source=BNG+Headlines&utm_campaign=76744c1e04-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_dd0edff639-76744c1e04-53694045#.WwhSLa2ZOdW)

I think she is right. I believe this is what we are now seeing. The chickens are coming home to roost.

For example, we see more abuse of women in the Old Testament than in the New Testament because women were treated as property. They had no rights, but they WERE submissive, totally and completely.

When Jesus came he radically introduced the idea that men had to stop discarding women as wives for any and every reason, leaving them helpless and needy.

He told men that they must stop treating women as objects by committing adultery with them in their hearts.

He allowed women to be taught at his feet, just as a man could, something no other Rabbi did.

Women that were prostitutes were usually forced into that line of work and these women were likely sexually abused people.

Unlike other people, Jesus reached out to these women with compassion and love, even as the righteous condemned him for doing so.

Women traveled with Jesus and his disciples and contributed to his ministry out of their own pockets.

Women were the first to be given the news of the Resurrected Lord and the first to tell of his Resurrection.

In the New Testament church, women served as evangelists and deacons, sharing the gospel and ministering to the church.

At a time when women had been bound by thousands of years of patriarchal rule, Jesus and the New Testament Church were liberating. So much so that it surely caused some problems in the church at Corinth and caused Paul to have to ask the women there to be silent.

Their newfound freedom was clashing with old norms of their society and some compromise needed to be reached.

While we no longer live in the days of the Corinthian church, we have not been short of those people that keep wanting to carry us back there.

That is most often done by saying that the man is the head of the woman and that the woman should be submissive to the man in all things.

Where does this come from? Well it comes from the Bible, doesn't it?

According to Ephesians, husbands and wives are to be submissive to one another. It's not just the wife that is supposed to be submissive to the husband, but that's not the way you often hear it.

When you hear people quote "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord," without quoting "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," they are often practicing selective literalism.

The passage begins with the command for both the husband and the wife to submit to one another.

If you want to break down the Ephesians passage, the husband has the greatest and most difficult task, which is to love his wife as Christ loves the church. (v. 5:21)

If men would love our wives with this kind of sacrificial, unselfish, life-giving love, the submissive part of the relationship for women would not be controversial.

Submission is difficult when men act selfish, self-centered, angry, rude, and arrogant. When we refuse to be transparent, trustworthy, vulnerable, honest, compassionate, kind, and thoughtful, what woman wants to submit to that kind of man?

God never intended for a woman to have to submit to an arrogant, abusive man.

The Me Too movement has given women across this country a voice, including Southern Baptist women.

When a recording surfaced not long ago of the President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary telling a story about sending a woman with two black eyes back home to pray for her abusive husband, people were outraged.

([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/05/04/southern-baptist-leader-who-advised-abused-women-not-to-divorce-doubles-down-says-he-has-nothing-to-apologize-for/?utm\\_term=.f955cabdb89](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/05/04/southern-baptist-leader-who-advised-abused-women-not-to-divorce-doubles-down-says-he-has-nothing-to-apologize-for/?utm_term=.f955cabdb89))

He said he was happy he did it because later the man came back and repented of his sin. (Ibid)

However, this struck a nerve with many women across the Southern Baptist Convention and beyond who had been abused by their husbands verbally and physically and knew that the end result did not justify the poor counseling or the lack of empathy she received from this pastor.

Thousands of women began to protest against the President until the chorus of protest got loud enough that it got the attention of the Board of Trustees.

It also got the attention of another woman that knew President Page Patterson years ago when he was President of Southeastern Theological Seminary.

While pursuing a master of divinity degree in women's studies at that school, this woman said she was a victim of date rape.

She ended up sharing the story of the alleged rape in detail with the President. The advice the President gave her was for her not to report the rape to police and to forgive the assailant.

([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/05/22/southern-baptist-leader-encouraged-a-woman-not-to-report-alleged-rape-to-police-and-told-her-to-forgive-assailant-she-says/?utm\\_term=.85e5207b675](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/05/22/southern-baptist-leader-encouraged-a-woman-not-to-report-alleged-rape-to-police-and-told-her-to-forgive-assailant-she-says/?utm_term=.85e5207b675))

Not only that, but the woman was put on probation for two years, apparently for being alone with another man in her apartment, which was against seminary policy. (Ibid)

She had kept this story to herself, even from her husband all these years, but the Me Too movement gave her courage to come forward. “The Washington Post” ran her story after corroborating it and it got the attention of the trustees of Southwestern Theological Seminary.

Initially, the petition from thousands of women across the country had caused them to give the President an early retirement and all the perks that go along with it, including a title of President Emeritus.

They could now see a deeper problem and they stripped him of all the accolades and gifts. He is yet to acknowledge any wrong doing in these matters.

Now, enough finger pointing of these men in high places.

I want to return to the blog of Pastor Nathan Norman. In his open letter to Frank Page, he was confessional.

It is at this point that I want this sermon to turn and become personal for every man here.

If we leave here and you think this sermon was about a few rotten eggs in Hollywood and a few fallen stars among our Baptist ranks, you are wrong.

Nathan the prophet is roaming among us and he is peering into each one of our hearts and asking every man to examine how we treat women, what we think about women, and the attitudes we have toward them.

In his letter to Frank Page, Pastor Nathan writes, “Your sin terrifies me. Not because it is so foreign and unthinkable, but because it is very near to me. While I have never committed physical adultery or fornication, I know that I very well could do so. I know that sexual sin frequently comes knocking on the door of my heart.”

“So, I too need to repent. I repent in the hopes that I will rely on the strength of God the Holy Spirit and not myself. I repent, trusting that the sacrifice of Christ is not only enough to forgive me of my sins, but to keep me from falling.”

Repentance is needed for each husband that has failed to love his wife as Christ loves the church.

Repentance is needed for each man who arrogantly believes that he is better qualified to fill roles of leadership just because he was born a male.

Repentance is needed for each man who sees a woman as an object of desire and not as a human being that God loves and expects us to love as He does.

81 million people view porn every day and most of this is done by men viewing women, whom they see as objects of pleasure and not as people of worth.

Repentance is needed for each man who has demeaned, abused, or mistreated another woman either verbally or physically.

Repentance is needed for each man that has used his power, position or influence to instill fear, persuade or influence a woman for his own selfish motives.

Repentance is needed for each man who has not created a safe environment for women, teenagers, or children to be without being harassed or abused by other males.

Repentance is needed for each man who does not treat a woman the way he would want to be treated if he were in her shoes. Using Jesus' Golden Rule, I think each man would say we would like to be treated equally, with love and respect.

It's time we stopped seeing the result of the fall of humankind as woman's punishment, that man would rule over her, and understand that the goal is to move beyond our sinful nature and return to what God intended, which was the kind of equal status that Adam and Eve had before sin entered this world.

Perhaps Paul summed it up best: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."  
Galatians 3:28

Prayer:

Heavenly Father: Lord, our problem is that we don't love you as we should. It is our own selfishness that keeps us from loving others as we should love them. It is our own jealousy that keeps us from recognizing the gifts of others to lead, regardless of their gender. We confess our sin of sexism and ask that you heal us. Amen

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