

# Is Feminism Good for the Church?

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Laura Turner writes on the “Her•meneutics” blog at *Christianity Today* that feminism is the Christian f-word. Turner argues that evangelicals have wrongly dismissed feminism as “anathema” to the body of Christ. She contends that feminism has not been a curse but a blessing both to the world in general and to the church in particular. She writes,

The church needs feminism because at its core, feminism affirms to us what our faith teaches us about male and female in God’s Kingdom and what Jesus himself preached throughout the New Testament.

Feminism is simply the belief that women are equally as human as men—equal in the eyes of God, equal in image-bearing, equal in ability...

Jesus’ care for the oppressed, the marginalized, cannot be ignored in the New Testament. As men continue to hold the reins of power in the church—2,000 years after the weak were made strong and the low made high in Jesus—we should welcome efforts to uplift and incorporate people who have been sidelined in Christianity, including women,

including people of color, including LGBT folks.<sup>1</sup>

I think there are a number of problems with the claims made in Turner’s essay, not the least of which is the claim that feminism has mainly been a force for good. The chief problem with this claim is its failure to account for the length and breadth of modern feminist ideology, which is anything but benign in its relation to the Christian faith. If feminism were defined solely by the likes of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Turner’s claim would not be nearly as controversial. But second and third wave feminism is a far cry from Stanton, and the radical claims of these feminists are not featured at all in Turner’s article.

Does the church “need” the feminism of Judith Butler who treats gender differences as socially constructed and who says that sexual differences between male and female are a farce?<sup>2</sup> Third wave feminists such as Butler are very much aligned with mainstream queer theorists on these matters. The normalization of homosexuality and transgenderism has ideological roots in the gender

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theory of third wave feminists such as Butler. The last thing one could conclude is that this kind of feminism “affirms to us what our faith teaches us about male and female.” This brand of feminism—which is perhaps the dominant type today—is a direct challenge to what the Bible teaches about male and female (Gen 1:26–27; Matt 19:4–5).

Feminism has also had a poisonous effect on Christian theology. Does the church really “need” the feminism of Virginia Mollenkott, whose Christology contends for the “Androgyny of Jesus”?<sup>3</sup> Can we really claim that the world “needs” the feminism of Mary Daly? She argues that we must cast aside any notion of God as Father and that Christians need to get over their “fixation upon Jesus” as a uniquely masculine image for God.<sup>4</sup> These kinds of contributions from feminist theologians have been anything but “needful.”

For these reasons, it is fundamentally in error to say that “the church needs feminism” or that “feminism affirms to us what our faith teaches us about male and female in God’s Kingdom.” Feminism has proven to be one of the great ideological competitors to Christianity in our time. It has been nothing short of a sustained assault upon Biblical authority and Christian orthodoxy. In these ways feminism has been a true enemy of Christianity.

We must also question Turner’s contention that LGBT should be “incorporated” into the body of Christ. What does she mean by this? I agree that LGBT people are welcome and invited into Christ’s church, but they must be welcomed to the table on the same terms as everyone else—through repentance and faith (Mark 1:15). But this is the point that is at best unclear and at worst misleading in Turner’s article. Can we “incorporate” into the body of Christ those who disagree with what the Bible teaches about homosexuality and who continue to engage in homosexual behavior? As I said, Turner is at best unclear on this point.

Further complicating the matter is the fact that she puts LGBT persons in parallel with “women” and “people of color,” which seems to suggest that LGBT is simply another facet of diversity that we need to embrace within the church (à la Gal 3:28). Does she really mean to say that LGBT

is as morally neutral as being a woman or being a person of color? Does she mean to suggest that homosexual behavior is compatible with being a disciple of Jesus? The 2,000 year old consensus of the Christian church has been that homosexual behavior is a sin and incompatible with being a disciple of Christ. Is Turner within or outside of that consensus?

Second and third wave feminism have attempted to redefine Christianity and in some cases to destroy it altogether. And that is why I think Turner’s article fails to convince. It does not deal seriously with the main features of feminist theory or with the key revisions of feminist theology. Nor does it account for modern feminism’s ideological alliance with radical gender theorists. In light of that, it’s just not credible to contend that “the church needs feminism.” It most assuredly does not.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Laura Turner, “The Christian F-Word: Letting Go of Our Outdated Fear of Feminism,” *Her\*meneutics*, September 25, 2013, accessed December 26, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2013/september/christian-f-word.html>.

<sup>2</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>3</sup>Virginia Mollenkott, “The Androgyny of Jesus,” *Daughters of Sarah* 2, no. 2 (March 1976), <http://www.virginiamollenkott.com/androgynyJesus.html>.

<sup>4</sup>Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 70 – 71.