

Lies Versus Truth: The Question is Biblical Womanhood

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by Dorothy Patterson

Lee Grady, a former Southern Baptist who now edits *Charisma* magazine, appealed to the Southern Baptist Convention, in June 2001, to rescind changes to the Baptist Faith and Message enacted at annual meetings in 1998 and 2000. Interestingly, he has tied this request to circulation of his book entitled *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women*. In reading through the volume, I find that, at least in Grady's mind, Southern Baptists are the major antagonists for oppressing women.

The New Oxford English Dictionary defines lie as an intentional false statement, an untruth, something that deceives-serious charges coming from an outsider (He is not a Southern Baptist; he is not a woman; he is an "award-winning journalist"; he is an ordained minister, although nothing is said about his experience as a theologian). I will not accuse Mr. Grady of lying, but I can surmise that his position and that expressed by evangelical complementarians, when juxtaposed one with the other cannot both be biblical truth because they are, in fact, contradictory.

The question then becomes: What is truth? Again, the New Oxford English Dictionary uses some precise adjectives to describe this term-accurate, faithful, constant. Truth is fact as it really is, and the dictionary even suggests that truth is in accordance to divine standard.

Let me first give you my own presuppositions:

- Truth is the divine standard expressed in the written Word of God.
- Scripture, the Bible in its entirety is what Francis Schaeffer called "true truth." As such, Scripture says what it means (God-breathed through the Holy Spirit) and means what it says (God-mandated for all generations).
- The church is described in the New Testament as the Bride of Christ, and this body of believers is precious indeed to the Lord Christ, but I do not look to ecclesiastical authority as surpassing or even equal to biblical authority. The same is true of pastors, however godly and orthodox. With Luther I would hold to *sola Scriptura*.

With these guidelines, I would like to respond to Mr. Grady with *Ten Truths the Bible Tells Women*. In doing so, I will try to interact with Grady's *Ten Lies* so that the women who wish to have different viewpoints before them in wrestling with these issues can do so.

TRUTH #1A

God created the woman from the man. Both are "in His image" (Gen. 1:27; 2:22). The woman from her creation is inseparably linked to the man. The man was formed from the dust of the ground, and the woman was made from the rib (Heb. *tsela*, meaning "side") of the man-the same flesh and blood and in her being equal to him in everyway. Thus, her worth and dignity are affirmed even by the act of creation. There is no hint of inferiority. The woman was not a divine afterthought, for the man was created physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually with her in mind. Adam expresses this unity in Genesis 2:23 with a unique play on words (man, Heb. *ish*, and woman, Heb. *ishshah*).

TRUTH #1B

God described His purpose for both the man and the woman. Both bear God's image fully, but each expresses that image in God-ordained ways according to the created order. God commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church—protecting, nurturing, serving, and edifying. This love is not replaced with, but accompanied by, a loving servant leadership in which a husband is concerned with his wife's spiritual, emotional, and physical needs (Gen. 2:15-17; Eph. 5:23-29; 1 Pet. 3:7). Wives were created to be helpers to their own husbands (Gen. 2:18). There is no hint of inferiority in this term since it describes function rather than worth. The wife complements her husband through her own unique function in the divine economy. A wife's submission does not decrease her value but rather increases her worth to the Lord as well as to her husband (1 Pet. 3:4). As headship and submission are enacted within loving, equal, and complementary male-female roles, the image of God is appropriately reflected.

TRUTH #1C

God made our foremother Eve the “mother of all living.” Maternity—the conceiving and nurturing of life—is a unique opportunity given to women. Maternity does not demand the presence of biological offspring. Even women who have never borne a child have this uniquely feminine gift and the opportunity to release a godly legacy to those whom God brings within their influence in extended family circles, churches, and communities.

[Lie #1: God created women as inferior beings, destined to serve their husbands. Grady draws from the ancient Church Fathers to accuse the modern-day Church. However, sometimes what appears to be assigning inferiority to women is merely suggesting the differences between women and men, especially in the physical area.

Clement, for example, was clear in presenting his ideas about the woman's role in her home, to which he admonished her to give her greatest energies, and in relation to her husband, to whom he affirmed she should be in submission. He expressed no difference in their spiritual responsibilities; rather he saw a division in their spheres of activity or function. When he described the woman's position as “inferior,” he considered that to be so as a result of the different responsibilities assigned to her.

Often egalitarians insist on linking a woman's worth to her “authority” on the one hand and to the man's equity in household chores on the other. Tertullian, who is quoted by Grady, was described as a “woman-hater” because he assigned the difference between men and women to be one of superiority vs. inferiority, but this prejudice was tied to his preoccupation with the woman's part in the “original sin.” However, in this regard, even feminists remind their readers that sexism and feminism, though very much a part of modern society, were not an issue during the first three centuries.

To judge the Church Fathers too harshly is to fall under the spell of anachronistic revisionism—a foolish methodology for serious historians. These Church Fathers were united in recognizing the home as the place for women and affirming the importance of homemaking. They also wrote letters of praise about women who were important to them. (See Dorothy Jean Kelley Patterson, *Aspects of a Biblical Theology of Womanhood*, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1997, pp. 23-30, for direct quotes from the Church Fathers and documentation of points.)]

TRUTH #2

Women are gifted and assigned service in the kingdom. In the Kingdom of Christ, ultimately neither supreme intelligence, unequalled logic, nor extraordinary gifts will determine what women can do. What is relevant for women today may be irrelevant for women in the next generation. In God's created order, manhood and womanhood are the foundation for maintaining order and purpose.

Southern Baptists have made clear that the church following biblical guidelines does not seek to suppress women. Rather full and proper use of their ministries is ensured in a divinely given framework based upon natural order of creation and appropriateness of function-the theological reasons invoked by Paul as he presented boundaries for women in service to the church (1 Cor. 11:9-12; 1 Tim. 2:13-14).

The home and church are inextricably bound together in the divine order. Both are used in Scripture as metaphors for revealing God and how He relates to His creation. Therefore, we cannot negate truths concerning the divine order within home and church just to satisfy a cultural whim or to accommodate higher plateaus of education and opportunity. The guidelines for women, as well as for men, are grounded in timeless, historical, theological arguments. They are not merely illustrations for a particular church or cultural era; rather they are mandates for believers through the ages.

[Lie #2: Women are not equipped to assume leadership roles in the church. Even if the world views the church as "ignorant, insensitive, and irrelevant," as suggested by Grady, the church ought not to be squeezed into the mold of the world. For Grady to be credible in his accusations against the church, he needs to be meticulously careful in what he declares to be in Scripture. Consider the following examples:

- "The women in the upper room . . ." is not in the text (see Mark 14:12-26).
- "In the story of His visit with the Samaritan woman . . . perhaps one of the clearest pictures in the Bible of Christ as an ordainer of women" (see John 4:7-42 in which there is no mention of ordination; in fact, the word is not used in the New Testament to denote the setting apart of men or women for ministry). According to the text, this woman shared a testimony of her conversion-no mention of a preaching woman evangelist!
- The text does not indicate that Mary Magdalene was authorized to speak "for" Christ; rather she is to tell the disciples what she saw and what she heard-another eyewitness testimony (very effective evangelism).
- Where in Scripture is Mary of Bethany identified as a female counterpart to the apostle Peter and what profound doctrinal statement like Peter's words "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" did she utter? (see Matt. 26:6-13 where Jesus is the one doing the talking).
- Miriam is described as "leading congregational worship," while the text says she "led the women with timbrels and with dances" (Ex. 15:20-21).
- About Phoebe, Grady says: "Paul refers to her as a *diakonon*, the Greek word for *deacon*, the word is translated *servant* in many Bible versions. But it is more accurate to place her in the category of deacon with men such as Stephen and Philip . . ." Evidently Grady is unaware that *deacon* is merely a transliteration of *diakonon* into English. Such a transliterated word is without meaning in English except for its original meaning in Greek, which happens to be "servant"!
- According to Grady, "Many scholars note that Paul always uses Priscilla's name first . . . doubtless because her teaching gifts were stronger . . ." Actually, Priscilla is mentioned first in three of six references to her and her husband (see Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19).]

TRUTH #3

Women are given only two prohibitions to observe in their service in the Kingdom: (1) not to teach men and (2) not to rule over men (1 Tim. 2:11-15). The text of Scripture affirms that women with varied positions of service, influence, leadership, and teaching functioned in the early Church with modesty and order (1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:40), and these women did not teach or exercise authority over men (1 Tim. 2:11-15; 1 Cor. 14:33-35). Women can work within biblical guidelines, neither seeking recognition nor demanding higher office, but making every effort to serve the Lord and trust Him to open opportunities appropriate to their gifts, giving usefulness in spite of limitations and beyond expectations.

[Lie #3 Women must not teach or preach to men in a church setting. Again Grady ignores the precise wording of Scripture, which simply sets forth the truth already mentioned. He further accuses the church, or perhaps even Paul (the antecedent is unclear) of “seriously flawed” logic and further states that 1 Timothy 2:12 cannot be interpreted “solely on what it says or on what we think it says, but on what the rest of the Bible says” Again, one must tread carefully when even hinting that Scripture contradicts itself so that the clear message of one passage would be in contradistinction to the rest of Scripture. Nor is it logical to take a completely unrelated passage and use it as a grid to interpret another verse.]

TRUTH #4

Women are to have provision, protection, and leadership from their husbands. Earlier discussion affirms this from Scripture.

[Lie #4: A woman should view her husband as the “priest of the home.” Grady cites Groothuis in her discussion of headship as “life-giving” in Genesis 2 and “life-ruling” in Genesis 3 after the Fall. The problem arises in that there is no hint of this distinction in the text. Headship in the creation order is affirmed in the description of the woman as the man’s “helper.” Though the entry of sin does indeed taint both the man’s headship and the woman’s submission, God’s redemptive plan as beautifully presented in Ephesians does not erase the standard nor prohibit the effects of sin in the world; rather it presents a way of escape in Christ, who Himself exemplified both servant leadership and willing submission (Eph. 5:21-31). The husband’s headship was established by God before the Fall and was not the result of sin (see Gen. 2:15-17; Num. 1:2-4). Furthermore, I am unaware of any evangelical position that places in the hands of men or women “the authority of Christ” to pull anyone “out of disobedience and unbelief,” as Grady suggests. Prayers do indeed move the heart of the Father, but they are tools for intercession and not keys to spiritual authority. The text rather affirms that a wife’s humble and voluntary yielding to her husband’s leadership becomes a resource for evangelism (1 Pet. 3:1-4).]

TRUTH #5

Husbands are to encourage and edify their wives. The equality of both husband and wife in Christ is affirmed in the New Testament (Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:7). As the wife submits to her husband’s leadership, the husband humbles himself to meet his wife’s needs for love and nurture (Eph. 5:25-29; 1 Pet. 3:7). He is also responsible for knowing her so intimately that he can edify her and help her to maximize her potential. God’s plan has a unique reciprocity that enables both the man and woman to fulfill God’s plan for dominion over the earth and in the process to experience their own respective fulfillment.

[Lie #5: A man needs to “cover” a woman in her ministry activities. Grady describes a husband’s “slyly” manipulating a service so that instead of his preaching as the inviting church officials planned, his wife extended her “greeting” to “numerous Scripture references . . . and more than an hour” of “bold”

preaching. Again, I am at a loss to find any endorsement of such methodology in Scripture. There follows an account of healing a paralyzed man whose skull was “miraculously repaired.” However, there is no documentation for this from objective sources. I would have thought such a phenomenon would be broadcast abroad through every news outlet available.]

TRUTH #6

Women who pursue biblical patterns of feminine leadership are a blessing to the kingdom. Of course, women exercised leadership in the Bible—Miriam, Deborah, Lydia, Phoebe. The real issue is not whether or not women can be leaders but rather how they use their leadership. Nothing in Scripture indicates that godly women assumed positions of authority over men in the home or in the church. Miriam is clearly noted to be a leader of women; Deborah was primarily a judge and even called Barak to lead the troops into battle; Lydia *hosted* a house church; Phoebe delivered a letter, whether as a courtesy during a prearranged business trip or as a service to the apostle.

[Lie #6: Women who exhibit strong leadership qualities pose a serious danger to the church. This statement is a real shocker to me since I am Professor of Women’s Studies in one of six Southern Baptist seminaries, all of which have special programs for women and all of which are supervised by women who are well prepared and capable leaders, yet who willingly and with determination stand under Scripture, including the mandates found in the Pauline epistles. However, a woman does not have to be an “apostle” to exercise leadership. Again I am unaware of any texts in Scripture that would suggest Priscilla functioned “in an apostolic role as a teacher and church planter.” In private conversation Priscilla and her husband explained or expounded (Greek *ektithemi*, prefix *ek* meaning out of and root *tithemi* meaning to expose or advise or set forth) to Apollos a better understanding. This nuance of meaning certainly is no strong case for identifying Priscilla as a teacher.]

TRUTH #7

Eve was deceived in the garden. This fact is found in Scripture both in the Old Testament, where the record states that Eve chose to believe Satan’s lie, placing her will above God’s will (Gen. 3:1-7), and in the New Testament (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14).

[Lie #7: Women are more easily deceived than men. Such a statement is an emotional red herring and not even germane to the discussion. The fact is that Eve was deceived, and Adam was not. God gave the prohibition concerning the forbidden fruit directly to Adam, while Eve received the information second-hand, i.e., through Adam, which could account for her vulnerability. Grady’s discussion of witches and of the inquisition seem out of place. Certainly, as a Baptist and part of the Radical Reformation, I would take issue with preferential treatment for women in the atrocities of the inquisition. Since I am not a church historian, I would certainly want some historical documentation before suggesting that women suffered more than men during this tragic persecution.]

TRUTH #8

Women find fulfillment in divinely appointed roles, but there is unique joy in marriage and motherhood (Ps. 127). Such does not suggest that contentment and joy are not available to every woman, whatever her family status, if she fears the Lord and obeys Him (Prov. 3:5-6).

[Lie #8: Women can’t be fulfilled or spiritually effective without a husband and children. I know of no complementarian or evangelical leader who holds this position. Having been reared in a Southern Baptist

home, I do know a bit about Lottie Moon. Grady would do well to check the earliest biographies and Moon's own writings before pontificating about how troubled she was about "sexism." One of the cardinal rules of a serious historian is not to read modern agendas and philosophies into past centuries. Moon did indeed break her engagement to Crawford Toy-more specifically because he did not share her position on the absolute reliability of Scripture. Of course, she did not limit her work to children. She was a fervent evangelist among the women of China, and she did not miss a chance of sharing her faith with any man who crossed her path. However, one would be hard put to come up with any documentation for Moon's having any aspirations for "preaching" to congregations, conducting public evangelistic campaigns, or seeking to exercise authority over the men in her mission team or in the churches.]

TRUTH #9

Women who choose to marry and bear children have priorities clearly defined in Scripture. Some do choose to be employed for reasons ranging from what they determine is financial necessity to personal fulfillment; but those who devote themselves to home and family choose a selfless and valuable role that should not be denigrated.

[Lie #9: Women shouldn't work outside the home. No one is any more committed to the role of homemaking than am I, but I have never made such a blanket statement. First, to phrase it in this way eliminates the employment of single women who have no other means of support and who may be single because God has some special task for them to do in the marketplace or in the kingdom. Second, I am a homemaker by personal choice. Since my marriage, I have given my foremost and freshest energies and creativity, according to the seasons of life, to the keeping of my home, helping my husband, and rearing my children. With the exception of a three-year period in seminary, I have not been gainfully employed; but I have worked hard every day of my life. I do faithfully plead with women who choose to marry to devote themselves to their homes (see my booklet *Where's Mom?*). However, I am just as faithful to say that this choice is one every wife/mother must make in tandem with her husband. I am accountable to God for no one but myself. Again, Grady's statement is not included in any church confessional I have seen. I must also caution Mr. Grady about eisegesis or reading into Scripture modern or personal views. For example, the Proverbs 31 woman, according to the text itself, did indeed center her activities in her home. The system of bartering that was a part of that historical era did prompt her to use her creativity and skills in various cottage industries, and she undoubtedly did leave her property to gather what was needed by her family. Nevertheless, she was committed to her home and family, and her praise from the Lord arose out of these duties, vv. 27-31.]

TRUTH #10

Wives are called upon to submit themselves to their own husbands in all things. Biblical submission is the yielding of humble and intelligent obedience to a person in authority over you. By nature, it is a choice. Scripture never suggests submitting yourself to abusive tyranny. A wife's submission is not so much to her husband as it is to God and to His plan for marriage. The only exception to this submission is when you are asked to submit to something in direct violation of God's Word (Acts 5:29). To obey only "reasonable requests," of course, could be more selfish license than good judgment.

[Lie #10: Women must obediently submit to their husbands in all situations. Obedience can be forced, but submission by definition in Scripture is a choice. Nevertheless, the Scripture is clear that wives are to submit to their own husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5). There is consistency and extended coverage for this biblical principle, and it comes from both Paul and Peter. Grady has included the discussion on *kephale* as "source" instead of "head" in this chapter. I will not even interact with it since

Wayne Grudem in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* and numerous journal articles, not to mention other New Testament scholars and even the editor of Liddell and Scott's Lexicon, has thoroughly dismantled any such improvisation! Grady also refers to Cathy Kroeger as a "theologian." Since her degree, as well as her teaching field, is in classical studies, Kroeger might prefer to be identified thus rather than as a theologian or a church historian. I would close this discussion on submission by saying from a personal perspective: I do have rights; and because they are my own personal rights, I can and do choose to give them up when asked to do so by the Lord who created me and the Savior who died for me!]

Conclusion

The Southern Baptist Churches with which I have been associated are committed to standing under Scripture. If Mr. Grady chooses to identify some of the positions in Scripture unpalatable to this age as "lies," he is free to do so. However, as a Southern Baptist woman committed to our evangelical faith, I am much more concerned with opening the truths of Scripture for myself and sharing them with other women. Biblical womanhood is a beautiful paradigm, and it is presented throughout the whole of Scripture without contradiction for any who would search for its principles with open heart and mind.

Southern Baptists as a people have honored their women. All our major mission offerings are named for godly women. Baptist women traditionally and to this day have been the custodians of our SBC missionary prayer calendar and the architects of our denomination-wide promotion of missions. Women have served as working members on the boards of every denominational agency and institution. Women have served on mission fields from the inception of the SBC missions program. Biographies of Baptist women have continued to surface. Countless female authors have published with our denominational press. Lifeway invests tremendous resources in marketing the products of women and in marketing to women. I am the product of SBC theological education. I have had the opportunity to develop a curriculum for equipping women on the graduate level in theological education. All six SBC seminaries have programs designed for preparing women for service in the Kingdom of Christ. All of this does not mean we must abandon biblical directives; rather it is those directives that guide us to the most effective use of our time and energies.

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