

The Stained Glass Ceiling:
Searching for Congruency in Our Theology and Teaching Practices

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ABSTRACT

The term “glass ceiling” is met with a myriad of responses; some more passionate than others. It has become hackneyed to many, despised by some, and a cause for others. Granted, women have made great strides since antidiscrimination legislation was signed into law. However, women are still treated unfairly in the business world. A new website has been created to encourage anyone outraged at Wal-Mart’s treatment of their female employees to sign up and promise to buy their Mother’s Day gifts elsewhere.¹ Three issues facing Christian business professors are: 1) is there a contradiction between what is being taught in our business courses and what we model at home and in church regarding the role of women? 2) How do we maintain balance between our role in the spiritual and professional development of our students and our intent to treat the diverse student population with respect and Christian love? 3) Are there resources available to assist business professors with the issues without extensive study in theology? This paper will focus on various Christian views regarding gender inequities and encourage an on-going intellectual and theological dialogue within our association.

Introduction

Dr. Frank E. Johnson, a professor of History at MidAmerica Nazarene University, wrote a paper entitled, *Pedagogical Parochialism: Toward a More Ecumenical Integration of Faith and Learning*.² Dr. Johnson articulated some questions involving the Christian professor’s world view and its effect on an ever-increasing diverse set of students. In his attempt to minister to students both in the class and off campus he discovered the diversity of his students’ religious backgrounds and their current progress

in their spiritual development. Johnson discusses one incident in which he was attempting to help a student find a church she could attend regularly while in college. The student was looking for local churches affiliated with her denomination. Dr. Johnson and his family accompanied her (as they do with many of his students) to a worship service. Later at lunch the student revealed she was not comfortable with that particular church because it was “too liberal.” When asked for clarification she responded that “. . . women had no business ‘assuming airs of authority’ in the church.” She went on to say that she would be deeply offended and embarrassed if Dr. Johnson ever asked her to lead his class in prayer when there were men present.³

Awareness of this one student’s convictions prompted Johnson to ask, “. . . how does one teach in such a way that allows the greatest range of engagement by an increasingly diverse student population? Furthermore, is it possible to impede, if not injure, students’ intellectual and spiritual formation by teaching from a theological perspective contrary to their own?” Colleges and universities affiliated with a particular denomination are discovering, as Johnson did, that their student populations are more diverse today than ever before. As we teach in these diverse class settings we cannot totally avoid the expression of our own world view and theological beliefs. Eventually, and perhaps more often than we would like to admit, we will challenge a student’s world view or spiritual convictions. We cannot control human dynamics of which we are unaware. However, our response to the instances that come to our attention will test our mettle professionally and spiritually. A few years ago I learned a great lesson on diversity within the Body of Christ and the unperceived conflicts that so often occur.

As the president of a nonprofit, non-denominational Christian ministry I was provided free monthly air time on a local Christian radio station to provide information and solicit funds for our pro-life ministry. The station was a powerful voice in the Christian community and affiliated with a college and seminary. Out of respect (and a little obligation) I volunteered to assist the radio station during their annual phone-a-thon fund raiser. During the month of October the station would air special programming designed to raise money for expenses. My job was to assist the radio announcers in thanking donors for their pledges. Because October was Pastor Appreciation Month it was common for listeners to call in, make a financial pledge to the radio station, and dedicate their pledge to their local church pastor.

I was surprised when I was instructed to read the notes taken by the operators from the listeners' pledge dedications as long as the pastor was a male. If the pastor was a male it was acceptable for me to say, "Bill Smith of Dunbar Church pledges twenty dollars a month and dedicates his gift to Pastor Bill Waterman." If the pastor was a female we were to simply say, ". . .and he would like to dedicate his gift to his pastor."

When I asked about the reason for this policy the station management simply informed me that they did not believe women were to be ordained or in positions of leadership over men. "They" were apparently the college and seminary as well as the radio station. Since I did not agree with their interpretations of some scriptures regarding women I wondered at that moment what I had said in past radio broadcasts regarding my stand on abortion and discrimination of women within both the secular and sacred worlds.

Christian Business Faculty

The purpose of this paper is to encourage the members of the Christian Business Faculty Association to visit (or revisit) issues regarding the roles of women in our schools, our churches, and the marketplace. I believe we must respond to the issue of discrimination in the workplace against minorities - especially women - within the context of our own personal, denominational, or institutional views. This paper will ask some disturbing questions to which we need to respond in a Christian fashion.

- Are Christian Business faculties creating arenas where open dialogue is encouraged regarding women's issues?
- In denouncing the secular world for treating women like second class citizens are we possibly causing an offence to those students who may be confused by what is taught in school with what is taught in church?
- How do those who believe that women are to be submissive to men's authority at home and at church interpret our denunciation of the glass ceiling?
- Have we allowed our own personal convictions and interpretations of scripture create a bias in our teaching?
- How are we increasing our awareness and sensitivity to students who are questioning their own views established at church and home prior to entering college?
- Do our students feel safe expressing their thoughts and feelings about the role of women in our classrooms?

My intention is not to advocate a new standard of political correctness. To borrow a phrase from Mount Vernon Nazarene University; we should be "Intentionally

Christian.”⁴ The lines are thinning between teaching content and using the class lectern as a soapbox to articulate personal opinions. My new heightened awareness of the diversity of my students has slowed my eagerness to express myself under the banner of academic freedom. At this point, I have come to believe expressing my opinions in class regarding any controversial topic these days is akin to walking three dogs through a mine field in the dark.

The inevitable event for which we should be prepared is when incongruence is perceived between the subject matter of our teaching (Business / Human Resources / Employment Law) and what students observe in the behaviors, policies, and procedures of professors, pastors, churches, and Christian colleges. Do we recall past critical incidents on Christian campuses when the pregnant coed was asked to leave and the father of the baby was allowed to stay in school? Do we remember the young women who, upon revealing to a trusted professor or member of the administration that she had lost her virginity, found herself facing discipline or expulsion from school? We have a truly holy responsibility in influencing the maturation process and spiritual formation of our students. Therefore, we must approach these questions with much prayerful deliberation. We need to pray for wisdom, discernment, and the willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to test our own convictions resulting in unity within the Body of Christ.⁵

Christian business faculties are challenged to teach business practices filtered through the light of Biblical truth. This sets a higher standard than mere secular approaches to ethics, social responsibility, and moral obligations under the law. At the same time, teaching that women in authority over men, ordaining women, or allowing females to pray publicly is forbidden on Sunday may seem contradictory to some

students when on Monday we teach in Human Resources, Employment Law, or Management courses that gender inequity, like any discrimination, is illegal, unfair, and immoral. Is it possible that we may be confusing some students when we explain a difference between the contexts of work, home, and church? Can students accuse us of compartmentalization or even hypocrisy? A new agenda item is on the floor for discussion regarding what we teach, believe, and practice regarding our views on women – in management and in ministry.

Background

The term “glass ceiling” was first published in the Wall Street Journal in the 1980s.⁶ The words were used to represent the ways organizational systems block the attempts of members of any protected class who aspire to achieve a higher salary or position. The meaning eventually evolved in the literature and media to represent in most people’s minds primarily organizational prejudice and inequalities toward women. The term “stained glass ceiling” was used in 2000⁷ to describe the various responses of particular denominations regarding the ordination of women to join the ranks of the clergy. These terms were borrowed and adapted to create a title and theme for this paper.

Gender discrimination is addressed in the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, since the mid 60s the inequities have continued to exist. In the fiscal year 2004 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received 24,249 charges of sex-based discrimination.⁸ Through the Civil Rights Act of 1991 The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1991-1996) was given a mission to “conduct a study and prepare recommendations concerning 1) eliminating artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities; and 2) increasing the

opportunities and development experiences of women and minorities to foster advancement of women and minorities to management and decision-making positions in business.”⁹ Robert B. Reich, Chair of the commission and Secretary of Labor at the time, wrote in *A Solid Investment: Making Full Use of the Nation’s Human Capital*, the commission’s final report, that “the glass ceiling is not only an egregious denial of social justice that affects two-thirds of the population, but a serious economic problem that takes a huge financial toll on American business. Equity demands that we destroy the glass ceiling. Smart business demands it as well.”¹⁰ The commission reported lower representation of women and minorities in occupations with high status, executive level positions, and board of directors. Catalyst, a nonprofit organization, found differential treatment was one of the most widely cited reasons why women fail to advance.¹¹

The current problem is not unique to America. World areas are reporting similar glass ceilings. Data are available from Germany, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Australia, Italy, France, Denmark, and the United Kingdom.¹² Recently, the seventh annual “Women in Business Conference” was held at Stanford University’s Business school. The conference, partially sponsored by The Committee of 200, an international organization of preeminent businesswomen, focused on the international glass ceilings and the role of women in management.¹³

Older women are experiencing their own brand of glass ceiling. A study sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found significant differences between men and women in amounts awarded for discrimination suits. “*Employment Discrimination Against Midlife and Older Women*” revealed the average award for the same type of complaint for women 40 years old and older was \$12,934.

Men in the same category received an average of \$17,135. In the time period studied (1990-1995) women of this age bracket filed nearly 90,000 complaints while the men filed over 115,000.¹⁴

The current upheaval regarding Wal-Mart female employees has spawned a web page dedicated to recruiting shoppers to go anywhere but Wal-Mart for their Mother's Day gifts in May.¹⁵ The following is only one example of the current issue with the store chain's personnel policies and practices.

After thirty years of retail experience, Deborah Gunter began working at a Riverside, California, Wal-Mart in 1996 as a photo lab clerk. She says she applied for management positions and was passed over for less experienced men. She requested further training and never got it. When she was transferred to the Tire Lube Express department, she did the work of a support manager but never got the title or the pay. Her supervisor sexually harassed her, and when she complained, her hours were reduced, she says. After she trained a man to fill the support manager job, he got the title and salary, and her hours were reduced. When she complained about her reduced hours and requested a meeting with the district manager to protest the discriminatory treatment, she was fired.¹⁶

My experiences and observations mentioned in the introduction have produced incongruence within my heart and mind. Is this perceived dichotomy of thought a matter of compartmentalized living, scriptural interpretation, or lack of insight? The reason Business professors are invited to the discussion is rather simple. In this world of injustice and prejudice we are (and should be) involved in speaking God's Truth in love. Our business practices and human resource policies should reflect the grace, mercy, and love of Christ. In the same proximity of the Christian university classroom there is most likely a church where, upon entering its domain; apparent contradictions await our students. These students, who are in the midst of questioning the values and beliefs they acquired at home and formulating their own as young adults, are attempting to make sense of being taught women should be given opportunity for leadership positions at the office but not necessarily in the church.

Scriptural Interpretation

A review of the scriptures that provide the impetus for this on-going discussion is appropriate at this point. While many Biblical passages are used to explore the role of women, the most often quoted in the ongoing discussions/debates are:

- 1 Corinthians 14 – Women forbidden to speak in church
- 1 Corinthians 11 – Chain of command/authority (God, Man, Woman)
- 1 Timothy 2 – No women in authority over men
 - Women not permitted to teach
 - Woman (Eve) was responsible for the fall

The great Yogi Berra once said, “When you come to a fork in the road – take it.” The fork in the road here is represented by two mindsets. The first believes that the New Covenant made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection creates an egalitarian approach to gender issues.¹⁷ In addition, specific scriptural passages should not be taken literally and permanently. Through sufficient Greek and Hebrew word studies and consideration of the historical and cultural context, it is clear in this mindset that not all scripture exhortations of the Apostle Paul are meant to be applied to contemporary society (e.g. short hair, head coverings, etc.).

The second mindset believes in interpreting the words in scripture literally and is faithfully confident with what the Bible instructs regarding gender roles. The inspired and inerrant Word of God can be trusted to instruct us on how to live our lives (e.g. woman submits to Christ through submission to her husband, it is not permissible for women to “Lord over” men, etc.).

It is comforting for some and disturbing to others that both perspectives use Greek and Hebrew texts (word studies) to support their particular views. Let’s take a brief look at comments and interpretations to clarify the two positions.

The second mindset believes God ordained man as the head of the union between male and female.¹⁸ C. S. Lewis wrote these words in Mere Christianity. “In marriage, two people constitute a single unit, and yet in that one body there are two personalities. These two, if they are going to be united, must have a headship, and that one is the man according to God’s creation and ordinance.”¹⁹ As Lewis observed, “. . . in a council of

two there can be no majority. . . If marriage is permanent, one or other party must, in the last resort, have the power of deciding the family policy. You cannot have a permanent association without a constitution.”²⁰

Lewis brought up the headship issue he continues to appeal to our common sense. “There must be something unnatural about the rule of wives over husbands, because the wives themselves are half ashamed of it and despise the husbands whom they rule.”²¹ Lewis asks his readers to imagine what would happen if their dog bit the child next door.

Would you rather deal with the man of the house or the woman? He assumes most of us would choose the “head” – the man. He explains his rationale.

The relations of the family to the outer world – what might be called its foreign policy – must depend, in the last resort, upon the man, because he always ought to be, and usually is, much more just to the outsiders. A woman is primarily fighting for her own children and husband against the rest of the world. . . She is the special trustee of their interests. The function of the husband is to see that this natural preference of hers is not given its head. He has the last word in order to protect other people from the intense family patriotism of the wife.²²

Of course, both perspectives have their own brand of zealots regarding the treatment of women. For example, the egalitarian side has fostered a new brand of Christian Feminism.

“Feminist theologians are wise to call upon this doctrine to denounce the structures of domination and injustice that human beings perpetrate against one another. The doctrine of sin enables feminists to denounce gender oppression as more than a social phenomenon; it is a violation of God’s eschatological promise of the full flourishing of all human beings.”²³

The other perspective answers the directive above with a response that emphasizes the Woman-submits-to-Man-as-Man-submits-to-God principle in Paul’s writings.

A wife's job in submitting to her husband is far more than simply acquiescing when his will happens to cross hers, or in allowing him to make decisions without objecting. No, a wife is to bring "all things together under one head," her husband. In other words, in the sphere of her home, where her husband is head, she is to gather, collect and submit all

those things that are under her supervision (including her children!) to her husband's control, as a means of submitting them to Christ's control.²⁴

One more exchange regarding 1 Timothy 2:12ff (“I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man.”). The first perspective demonstrates the apparent contradiction with other passages in Paul’s writings. It also notes that Eve’s deception and partaking of the fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil is how sin came into the world; however, through her God’s faithful promise will come through Mary (the mother of Jesus) and her child (Jesus) will ultimately “crush the serpent’s head” (the devil).

Strange that he (Paul) would make this kind of rule in the church where Priscilla had engaged in such an effective ministry of instructing Apollos concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 18:2-3, 18, 24-28), especially since he also sends them his greetings (2 Timothy 4:19). The rationale given for silencing women is to cite the order of creation (v.13) by which Jewish males defended female subordination; that is, since man was created first, he has preeminence over women. We have already seen, in our study of 1 Corinthians 11:8-12, that Paul rejects this argument out of hand. First, it does not reflect the believing woman’s standing ‘in the Lord.’ Second, it ignores the fact that, after Adam, God himself reversed the order of creation.²⁵

Now the second mindset approaches this same passage with Greek word studies to clarify what the Apostle Paul really meant.

Verse 12 is again poorly translated in the K. J. V. It should not be ‘But I suffer not a woman to teach,’ but ‘I suffer not a wife. . .’ As Paul continues the discussion, the word *gune* is here used in contrast to *aner*, ‘husband,’ and not ‘man’ as the A.V. has it. *Gune* in this verse must also be translated as ‘a wife’ as in v.11. Paul says, ‘I do not permit a wife to teach.’ The word for ‘teach’ in Greek is the infinitive *didaskein* in the present tense which means to teach continuously. The situation presented is that of a common presence of a wife and husband in the home or the assembly or anywhere else. Paul says, ‘I do not want a wife to constantly teach.’ If she did, she would undermine her husband’s position, giving the impression that she is the head of her husband, which is contrary to God’s ordained order between husband and wife.²⁶

As with any debated issue there are extreme views on both ends of the continuum.

Within the one view (a mutual partnership between a man and a woman should reflect

the God – Man – Woman order of submission) there are those who abuse the scripture by abusing their wives. “She is not fulfilling my every wish; therefore she is not submitting.”

This brings a counter from the egalitarian view.

Regarding authority in family life, that has never been a problem when both husband and wife are mature Christians: They establish a division of authority that works beautifully. It is interesting to note, however, that among the immature, ignorant, uncouth and ungodly it is not uncommon to see husbands who dominate, even brutalize their wives. As of this date, there is no crying need in America for an increased number of men who dominate their wives.²⁷

Conclusion

Is there a contradiction between what is being taught in our business courses and what we model at home and in church regarding the role of women? An assessment of our own convictions is necessary. As students progress through a deconstruction of their inherited parental views and begin to reconstruct their own spiritual values, how do we as professors and the curricula from which we teach work together for good?

Further study is needed to explore the relationship between the students’ developmental path, the course content, and the influence of a Christian professor vested with a personal history and spiritual journey.

How do we maintain balance between our role in the spiritual and professional development of our students and our intent to treat their diverse population with respect and Christian love? We must learn how to increase our awareness of those moments when developing students, course content, and our own beliefs arrive at the intersection at the same time. Who has the right away? Which will yield? Our student demographics are changing rapidly from year to year. This diverse student population presents a challenge for us both academically and spiritually.

Are there resources available to assist business professors with the issues without extensive study in theology? There are resources available among the members of the Body of Christ. There are associations, women’s studies programs, and scholars among us who would be willing and able to assist us in a variety of ways. Further study is

needed to explore ways to create a climate of respect and dignity where diverse interpretations are encouraged to be expressed.

As we research and teach in the areas of employment law, human resource policies, and human rights; we must approach the issue of discrimination against women. Now is the time to start the discussions, to search the scriptures, to pray for wisdom and discernment. Now is the time for each of us as academic and business professionals to discover some common ground where we may all stand together on women's issues. We must find our voice in the business community when women are not treated fairly.

Above all, as we follow Christ Jesus let us prayerfully search our hearts and the scriptures so that we might be known as the people and professionals in academia and the market place who "no longer treat anyone from a worldly point of view."²⁸

End Notes

¹ <http://www.walmartversuswomen.com/>

² Johnson, Frank E. (2005). *Pedagogical Parochialism: Toward A More Ecumenical Integration of Faith and Learning*. (http://www.nazarene.org/ed_didache/vol3_2johnson.html) Found on **Didache: Faithful Teaching** (http://www.nazarene.org/ed_didache/index.html), Dean G. Blevins, Sr. Editor, Web version ISSN: 15360156.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mount Vernon Nazarene University, Mount Vernon, Ohio

⁵ John 17:21, Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 4:3-6

⁶ Hymowitz, C., & Schellhardt, T. D. (1986, March 24). The glass ceiling. *The Wall Street Journal*. Special Report on the Corporate Woman.

⁷ Sullins, Paul. (2000). The stained glass ceiling: Career attainment for women clergy. *Sociology of Religion*, Fall

⁸ Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). <http://www.eeoc.gov/stats/sex.html>. Last modified January 27, 2005. n page.

⁹ Public Law 102-166, November 21, 1991. Civil Rights Act of 1991. Section 203.

¹⁰ Glass Ceiling Commission. (1995). *A Solid Investment: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital*. Page 7.
http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1117&context=key_workplace

¹¹ Catalyst, (1998). *Census of women corporate officers and top earners*. New York: Author. Clawson, I. G., & Kram, K. E. (1984 May-June). Managing cross-gender mentoring. *Business Horizons*, 27(3), 22-32.

¹² See Coppieters, Piet. (1995). "The Biblical Curse." *ECONOMIA* (Summer). Pages 5-12. NOTE: This journal is no longer published. A copy of the article was obtained from the author and used by permission. Piet Coppieters, Professor of Applied Economics, University of Antwerp, Belgium.

¹³ News release (2001). Author. Helen Chang. www.gsb.stanford.edu/news/2001womensconf.html.

¹⁴ Anonymous. (1997). "Job Discrimination Awards Lower For Women", *HR Focus*. New York: December, Vol. 74, Issue 12, page S5.

¹⁵ See <http://www.walmartversuswomen.com/>

¹⁶ Featherstone, Liza. (2002). "Wal-Mart Values". *The Nation*, December 16.
<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20021216/featherstone> n page.

¹⁷ Galatians 3:28

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 2:9-15, See also Zodhiates, Spiros. (1988). The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible. Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, Inc. p. 1474.

¹⁹ Zodhiates, Spiros. (1988). The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible. Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, Inc. p. 1474.

²⁰ Lewis, C. C. (1952). Mere Christianity. New York: NY: The Macmillan Company. P.102-103.

²¹ Ibid. p. 103

²² Ibid.

²³ McDougall, Joy Ann. (2005). *Women's work: Feminist theology for a new generation*, The Christian Century, July 26, Vol. 122, No. 15, pp. 20-21.

²⁴ Jones, Rebecca. (1998). "Submission: A Lot More Than Giving In." The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Winter, Vol 3. No. 4. pages 10-11.

²⁵ Cowles, C. S. (1993). A Woman's Place? Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press. Pages 137-138.

²⁶ Zodhiates, Spiros. (1988). The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible. Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, Inc. p. 1474-1475.

²⁷ Wolber, Vester. (2002). "Theological Inventions of Fundamentalism", Baptist Standard. June. http://www.baptiststandard.com/2002/6_10/pages/wolber.html n page.

²⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:16(NIV).