

Lifting the Veil on Global Issues and Gender Diversity

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I recently had a conversation with a mission leader and his wife who oversee about 600 churches in an African region where wife-beating is a common, legal practice. When I asked about how they train pastors to address this problem, he responded: (1) their churches didn't have that problem, and (2) they defer issues about how men and women relate to the local culture. This is a good man who loves God and his wife. He honestly didn't see the problem. In that same conversation, his wife added that this practice did indeed go on in their area (to his surprise). This is a good woman who loves God and her husband, who never explored this rampant issue of abuse with him or the pastor. Good men and women like these don't intentionally ignore such things; they're usually horrified by them.

What do we say to these mission leaders? Part of the solution involves focused discipleship. Both Christian leaders and laypersons need a more robust understanding of human dignity, especially that of women. Many cultures see women as property, large children, or domestic servants rather than divine image bearers, full partners in God's mission, and co-heirs with Christ. Jesus and Paul, as men, countered male power structures of the day. They included women as ministry partners in stunning, counter-cultural

ways (see Luke 10:38-42; Matt. 28:5-7; Rom. 16). Redeeming our use of authority is a powerful way of expressing the Gospel and demonstrating redemption. Church leaders can address both women's dignity and culturally and biblically appropriate ways to help those local communities create solutions to those issues.

In every society, men and women both suffer from the wicked abuses of power (e.g., bullying, domestic violence, slavery). Women in particular suffer because of their gender. Men have misused God-given physical strength at the expense of women, but the Gospel reorients this strength (Phil. 2). God gives us strength to bless and empower others. He wants churches to be local expressions of counter-cultural kingdom relationships.

God's people have an opportunity to demonstrate a different way of being a human family, where both men and women use their talents and strengths to serve the vulnerable. Mission agencies and churches would be wise to foster gender diversity in leadership structures and strategic decision-making. Doing so will expand our collective vision and effectiveness in spreading Good News of Christ so that lives and communities are transformed. ❏