



## **The Feminist Mistake: The Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Culture**

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Feminism remains one of the most urgent issues the church is facing today, as shown by the increasing confusion over gender roles in marriages, families, and churches. With a growing number of theologians and denominations advocating radical gender egalitarianism, we must answer many questions about women in the church-and in the wider culture. In order to do this, first we need to understand the history and development of feminist thought.

In *The Feminist Gospel*, Mary Kassian provided a thought-provoking inquiry into the history of feminism. Now, in this thoroughly revised and updated book, she revisits the subject, adding to its history an examination of the effects of feminism. *The Feminist Mistake* is a reliable, biblical critique that will provide answers and inspire serious reflection on this issue.

## **The Feminist Mistake: The Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Culture** **Details**

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**Jim says**

Originally called *The Feminist Gospel* when published in the early 1990s, I think the author changed it to *The Feminist Mistake* after 2000, so that people might not purchase the book thinking it was actually pro-feminism.

## *History*

It's mostly a survey of the history of secular and Christian feminism. But it's really a straw man that she is building up to strike down later in the book. The author wants to make it look like this history is somewhat objective, but her history of feminism is obviously colored by the presuppositions of her faith. For example, in her discussion of "The Second Sex" by Simone deBeauvoir, she continually used language like, "according to deBeauvoir" in describing women's role as second-class citizen. She does the same thing with Betty Freidan and "The Feminist Mystique" which posits that there is a discrepancy between what a woman wants and the image society is forcing them to conform to. I would think that's a reasonable thought, but obviously Ms. Kassian doesn't.

I have issues with a lot of what she says. One of the things she consistently does is try to show that feminists want to be *just like men*. This is blatantly false. Feminism is the fight against sexism. The fight for equal rights - equal opportunities. Not a way to turn women into men. That's blatantly misogynist.

Also, sprinkling in words that are obviously considered "bad", like *liberal* and *leftist* also contribute to understanding what the author's presuppositions are. To further bolster her onslaught, she ties feminism to socialism and highlights negative points in the history of feminism under the guise of objective history. She goes on to try to intimate that feminists tried to force other women to become feminists against their will. Feminists lie to women to get them involved. In women's studies programs, "Teachers presented selective statistics and case studies to establish the presence of patriarchy as the prevailing world religion." Do you really need "selective" information to show the impact of the patriarchy?

She also tries to imply that feminists encourage magic over medicine and try to force all women (or at least all feminists) to be lesbians. Of course, by the time we get to Chapter 13, "Changing of the Gods", feminism is about lesbian witches dancing naked in church sanctuaries worshiping the Goddess. (I'm not kidding!)

It's interesting in all this that it's not presented with the incredulousness of a modern conservative pundit, but it's laid out almost objectively, as if this gives more credence to "scholarship". Instead there's a consistent disapproval of all the choices women have made about scripture when they oppose what Ms. Kassian believes. Of course, many of the things she describes seem outlandish to me, but it's hard to tell when she is being hyperbolic to get the reader to agree with her and where she is picking and choosing a specific feminist history that she will be able to more easily rebut.

## *Fallacy*

**Straw Man.** Of course, this is the popular straw man fallacy so many people love. Instead of arguing against something that's hard to argue against, they create something a different - that's easier to argue against, and strike that down. That's what this whole book is about.

**Slippery Slope.** The author also commits the logical fallacy of the slippery slope - going as far as titling one of her chapters "Slippery Slope". (At least she's honest about her problems with logic.) (With the slippery slope fallacy, instead of arguing against the specific issue, you paint a picture of where that issue could take you - realistic or not - and argue against that.)

*"Feminism is a slippery slope that leads toward a total alteration or rejection of the Bible."*

\*sigh\*

But this also shows how fundamentalists raise their interpretation of what the Bible says above their belief in God. Total agreement with all of their doctrine is more important than any attempt to follow God or Jesus (in fact, they would suggest you cannot follow God without completely agreeing with everything they say the Bible says).

**False Dichotomy.** She follows that with the false dichotomy that either you can be a feminist, or you can be a Christian, but not both. "No man can serve two masters."

She notes, "Feminism is but one of Satan's many lies..."

**Faulty Premise.** And finished the book with the ultimate fundamentalist fallacy - the faulty premise that she is presenting TRUTH™. She thinks that "This is what **I think** the Bible says" is exactly the same as "This is exactly what God wants". This is their problem - thinking that they are upholding the authority of scripture by forcing everyone to their own interpretation of it.

### ***Theology***

Of course, when she gets into theology, she spends multiple chapters accusing feminists of picking and choosing from the Bible only those things that agree with their agenda. Which is ironic, because that's the hallmark of fundamentalists like Kassian. Each group believes they have scripture understood perfectly, but no two fundamentalist groups agree on which parts of the Bible are important to follow. (Well, they each would say *all* of the Bible, but seeing as some disagree so much as to almost be polar opposite, they are all guilty of picking, choosing, and modifying to their heart's content.)

As a fundamentalist, what Kassian does not understand is that many Christian belief systems encourage the use of tradition and reason along with scripture. Fundamentalists would like to suggest that their only authority of Scripture, all the while still using their own traditions and reason to determine how to interpret scripture.

What this book ends up doing is redefining feminism (from the simple idea of anti-sexism and equality) in favor of some agenda-filled, anti-Christian rhetoric that seeks to raise women up to be gods. Supposedly, Christian feminists (or feminist Christians) use apocryphal writings to replace current canonical books and merge traditional Christian practices with pagan practices. That's because the whole point of this book is to discredit Christian feminists as wanting to do away with Christianity and replace it with something that they've made up.

She even says that much of what she had presented is on the radical edge of feminism, but that even non-radical feminism is bad. She states boldly, "Traditionally, Christians have believed that the Bible presents an absolute standard of right and wrong." Here's part of her problem - the idea of taking all of the Bible as literal and being able to break it down into a system of rules isn't as "traditional" as she would have you believe.

But fundamentalists like to bandy that idea around - that the way they believe has been around for 2,000 years. It hasn't. She suggests that her own fundamentalist hermeneutic (her approach to interpreting the Bible) is the one that has been used since Jesus came, and that everyone who uses something different goes against thousands of years of tradition. In fact, though, her evangelical point of view is a fairly new one. She denies that there are inconsistencies in scripture and that there are unclear passages. I don't know how someone can read the Bible and not see this as obvious. (The same way, I guess, I don't know how someone can take the basic idea of feminism and think that being against sexism is bad.)

In the end she suggests that any form of feminism is incompatible with following Jesus and the Bible.

Even after reading this book, though, I still hold to the idea that, not only is feminism in keeping with the Bible, but that the teachings of Jesus demand it. I'm sure Ms. Kassian would accuse me of picking and choosing (and may suggest that I am a lesbian that likes to dance naked in the church sanctuary).

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### **Woowott says**

Ah, me. Named-dropped in 'Quiverfull,' this lady is at the forefront of female thinkers in the patriarchy movement. Ironically, some of these women write books and seem to spend much time out of their homes propounding this antiquated, anti-female view of patriarchy--although, they expect other woman to sit at their husbands feet and bend over backward to do everything to please him.

This book starts out interesting enough, talking about the history and 'theory' of feminism--as conservative evangelicals view it--and then devolving into tenuous theories of how it has caused the downfall of American society. This book does not really get into the idea that woman are at fault if their menfolk misbehave at all, but it does equate feminists and New Agers and Wiccans basically with the Beast of Revelation (not literally, of course, I speak hyperbolically). Never mind that the views propounded in this book are often reasons why things in American society 'go wrong.' Ahem.

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### **Becky Pliego says**

Excellent.

My full review:

<http://www.beckypiego.com/2012/10/th...>

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### **Kipi says**

A good reference book that compares the feminist and Christian feminist movements to traditional Christianity and biblical teaching. The book is painstakingly researched, and some readers might find the detailed history of the feminist movement difficult to get through, but the research lends credibility.

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## Deborah says

Mary Kassian is a woman with a considerable amount of education and theological training. She studied at the University of Alberta, in Canada, and received her Doctorate of Theology from the University of South Africa. She is a wife, mother, and an internationally renowned teacher –being a distinguished professor at Southern Baptist Seminary. Kassian is most popularly known for her teachings on the history of feminism, women’s studies, and Biblical womanhood, as she is a member herself of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Her knowledge and understanding of feminism and proper Biblical womanhood is stated very clearly in her book, *The Feminist Mistake*.

In a lot of ways this book is a response to many groups' false understanding of feminism, especially within the church. The philosophy of feminism “has been integrated into mainstream society so thoroughly that it is virtually indistinguishable from mainstream” (281). The effects and thinking behind the movement of feminism has so strongly influenced our culture, than in time, we may never even think twice about its impression. Christians have often misunderstood the agenda and thinking of feminism to many extremes. Yet most Christians “view feminism as an ideology that merely promotes the genuine dignity and worth of women...[which] would definitely be compatible with Christianity” (261). This is another false understanding, because feminism actually “asserts that woman’s worth is of such a nature that it gives her the right to discern, judge, and govern that truth herself” (281). This sort of outlook has a very slippery slope because this gives women the right to begin defining truth based on their agenda. Christian feminists moved quickly from believing that women have intrinsic value, which then gave them “the right to name themselves to claiming the right to name God” (247).

The goal of *The Feminist Mistake* is to allow its readers to understand the roots and history of feminism, its theological views, its impact on the church, and its impact on the lives of Christians. Kassian separates the book into two main sections, the philosophical quake and shock waves. The first main section on the philosophical quake breaks down into three different movements. The first movement states that women have the right to name themselves because “neither secular nor religious feminists liked the traditional role that [was] assigned to women” (80). Hester Eisenstein further explained this by stating, “[people] began to view the condition of being female as defining characteristic, cutting across differences of class and race” (80). Women simply felt the desire and the need to define for themselves what they are and can be. The second movement states that women have the right to name the world for themselves. This new form of analysis told women that they should view their “differences as a source of pride, confidence, and ultimately as the source of truth,” which caused them to examine and redefine “every area of human existence” through this lens (105). This new “woman-centered analysis was both a systematic analysis of the past and an attack on the values that shaped that past” (105). The third movement states that women have the right to name who God is –this allowed them to “dictate the shape of religion based on their own experience” (181). With the power to name whom God is, “[feminists became] deictic in essence” (195). With this freedom to define their own religious experiences, feminists learned that this movement “was not worship of an external deity, [but] worship of oneself” (185). They then looked to the Bible in order to “establish a ‘usable future’ for the liberation of women within the boundaries of the Christian faith” and could not do so solely through the Word of God (200). They began to rely on “sources outside of the Bible” and on “their personal authority” (200-201).

Religious feminist theology and secular feminist theory began to merge through “godding” or the use of “their knowledge of their connectedness with God to act for the equality and liberation of others” (226).

These theories and theologies began to blend with New Age and Wiccan practices, which only led to seemingly “pagan feminism” (234). This new “woman-centered theology” placed large restraints on the usage of the Bible. Ruether further explained this by stating, “only the biblical texts that spoke to women’s contemporary quest for liberation were valid” (108). This completely reshaped one’s understanding of the Bible, because feminist theology entirely changed whom God is, what the necessity for Jesus’ coming was, what sin is, and what salvation is. Feminists teach, “God’s purpose was to assist humans to realize liberation, wholeness, and utopia for themselves” (114). According to Russell, “Jesus was not to be viewed as the one who saves, but rather as the primary example of God’s salvation, which is liberation” (115); He represented a “foretaste of freedom” for humanity (114). Sin was then redefined as “the opposite of liberation –oppression...the dehumanization of others by means of excluding their perspectives from the meaning of human reality and wholeness” (115). “Feminist theologians defined salvation as a journey toward freedom from sex class oppression and as a process of self-liberation in community with others” (115). It seems as if the whole meaning and original message of the Bible has completely changed throughout this feministic lens, yet feminists “[do] not see themselves as deviating from Biblical truth, [but] as a furtherance of truth” (117).

The second part of the book is about the shock waves from feminism that hit the church and culture. Biblical feminists were those who “believed in the Bible, but they also ‘believed in feminism’” (248). Christians began to allow feminist theology to seep its way into the church and “[felt] societal pressure to update the church’s stance on the role of women [and to reinterpret] the Bible to align with the definition of equality that had gained widespread acceptance in the secular world” (248). This led to defining, and oftentimes accepting, an egalitarian position within the church, for those “who [believed] in the equality of all people” (249). This position does not only reject “stereotypical male/female roles, but they also totally reject the possibility of a ‘different-yet-equal’ framework” (249). Kassian believes that feminism is just another one of Satan’s “lies leading to compromise of the Word of God,” for “no woman can serve two authorities, a master called Scripture and a mistress called feminism” (278). As Kassian makes it explicating clear, there seems to be no middle ground within Biblical feminism.

I believe that Kassian does a great job of communicating the main idea of the book, which was that feminism is not what many Christians have assumed it to be and that it is a growing, powerful influence. She repeats this idea throughout the book by emphasizing the legitimacy of women’s feelings that have led us to reexamine the way that women were being treated and expected to live. Women were facing a major dilemma throughout the 1960’s, yet never had a term for this issue and similarly had no voice. I like that she did not make women feel as if they were wrong for strongly feeling this way and that something needed to change after all. Women were being mistreated in their homes, relationships, work and social environments, and within the church; I value the sensitive approach that she took to this touchy topic. Women were not receiving equal rights in many ways that they did deserve, but feminists continued to push this envelope to the point of defining equality as deserving the same roles as men. I agree with Kassian that this is where the church runs into its issues theologically because the Bible states in multiple places that we are all equal, yet with different roles. I wish that she had addressed more of what Biblical manhood and womanhood looks like. She spent the majority of the text explaining why feminism is wrong and seeping into our subconscious minds and convictions, but never took the time to explain how to combat it with Biblical truth. Questions came to my mind, such as, “How would Jesus handle a feminist? How can the church be welcoming to feminists? How can Christians be sensitive to those who hold to feministic beliefs without settling in ours? What is the best way to show love to a feminist?”

There was a clear lack at the end of the book after she finished explaining the effects of feminism in the church. I feel like *The Feminist Mistake* would have been more complete by more thoroughly explaining the egalitarian and complementarian standpoints as well. The argument for complementarian beliefs should have been explained more in efforts to combat egalitarianism.

I loved her usage of logical arguments and building upon the history of feminism, but I wish there would have been more Scripture and Biblical evidence to support her argument. It seemed as if this book was geared more towards a Christian or evangelical audience, so she may have assumed that her readers did not need the Biblical evidences, but I would have appreciated seeing more of that. A question that I felt lingering after finishing the last chapter was, "Where does this leave us now? How is feminism currently molding our church and culture?" In a lot of ways, I believe that we are presently in a post-feministic culture. It seems like all the evidence to support feminism is out on the table and that they have made major leaps and bounds within our society. I would love to see what our culture is tending to hold to and reject nowadays, since feminists have now "found their voices."

This book was very eye opening for me and challenged numerous feministic beliefs that I didn't even realize that I had. It brought voice to a lot of the concerns that I as a woman have for other women when I see them being mistreated. I had a "misunderstood regard" for feminists because they were fighting for our rights in a bold and unapologetic way that seemed "attractive." Like any Christian should, I believe in the equality and intrinsic rights of all people, because we were created in the image of God. I had respect for those fighting to provide equal rights and opportunities for all people, but through this book, I can see how warped my original view and understanding of feminism was. The second that a belief tells someone that they must define themselves, their world, or God from a basis other than the complete Bible, that belief is leading that person into a danger zone. This rose awareness in my heart for the need of godly woman to teach and lead other ladies what it means to be a woman by Biblical standards. In efforts to seek out what it means to be a woman in today's culture, it often leads to a dark and confusing place. "Instead of promoting a healthy self-identity for women or contributing to a greater harmony between the sexes, it has resulted in increased gender confusion, increased conflict, and a profound destruction of morality and family...people of this culture no longer know what it means to be a man or woman or how to make life work" (299).

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### **Christine Bransdon says**

2 words: yasss kween.

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### **Jill says**

Oh my goodness! I could not agree more.

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### **Kit says**

I really liked it. Though I've come to the completely opposite conclusion. If women's equality is incompatible with the Bible, then it's the Bible that has to go.

It's very well written. Amazing number of references. It's a great book.



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### **Mary says**

This is an extremely well documented and revealing history of the morphing women's movement. I lived through and was shaped by the mid-century emergence of this movement, and apart from the liberation of Christ would still be an angry activist. Kassian has her thesis organized under 3 philosophical aspects (from the task given to Adam and Eve) which I find fascinating: 1. Naming self, 2. Naming the world, 3. Naming God, all of which have been progressively undermined by feminism. Kassian explains why "being feminine" has come back as simply a means of sexual power, and why the movement has now turned to godless worship--a true expose that leaves me stunned.

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### **Madeline says**

This book could have fallen straight from the 'Quiverfull' movement itself. It is a testament to the dangers of internalized misogyny in women. When I began reading it, I went in with an open mind wanting to see life through the writer's eyes. I even re-read it several years later to see if perhaps I had rashly reacted to its rhetoric. This was a mistake. This book is overtly anti-woman and anti-feminism. To describe it as anything but would be a lie.

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### **Viviana Priss says**

One of the worst books I have ever read. Found it for \$2 at a used bookstore. If your a feminist this book might offend you. The author is very mean lady writes the book in a harsh tone to criticize feminist movement. The book left me very unhappy. This book makes me sick to my stomach!

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### **Jessica says**

The book that made me go back to college

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### **Becky says**

I actually didn't finish this one. It just went into a lot more historical details about feminism than I was interested in. If anyone knows of a similarly-themed book that is a bit lighter, I'd love to hear about it :)

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### **Salome says**

A great study.

This book traces the roots of feminist influence in the church and it does it with excellence. I'd say about two thirds of the book are a mostly academic study on what feminism is, how it was birthed out of existentialist philosophy, and how it has evolved. The last section addresses why this is even relevant to your average evangelical churchgoer... and it is relevant.

I believe this first came out in the 90s and was reissued in 2005. But it's amazing how the author's predictions were eerily prescient. The natural progression from the foundational ideas of feminism to the current transgender movement are hard to miss.

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## **Hank says**

This book provides a decent historical overview of feminism, but reserves its critiques for the last chapter. It seems to presume that Feminism on its own is self-evidently wrong, but I do not think this is true unless you already think as such heading into the text. Her own response is that Feminism is unbiblical and not a true source of happiness for women. While it raises interesting questions and suggests that there is more to solving the "woman's dilemma" than equality, I do not think it in anyway presents a earth-shaking critique of feminism.

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