

Group demands apology for religious teaching that denigrates women

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ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) — A group of women and men calling themselves the Freedom for Christian Women Coalition has demanded an apology for religious teaching they say is harmful to women. Shirley Taylor, founder of [Baptist Women for Equality](#), presented the Demand for an Apology from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood at a July 24 meeting in Orlando, Fla.

"At a time in our church history that the main focus should be on winning lost souls and spreading the gospel to a hurting world, we fear for the future because the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood has placed a greater priority on women's submissive role rather than on the gospel of Jesus Christ," the [statement](#) read in part.

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The [Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#) is an organization with offices on the campus of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. It was formed in 1987 to oppose "the growing movement of feminist egalitarianism" in churches. The council countered with a "complementarian" interpretation the Bible that affirms that men and women are equally in the image of God but assigns them "complementary differences" in role and function.

The view became enshrined as the official position of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1998, when an article on the family was added to the [Baptist Faith and Message](#). The statement assigns husbands the responsibility

"provide for, to protect and to lead the family," while the "wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ."

The Freedom for Christian Women Coalition claimed that wifely submission "is more about power and control than about love or obeying the Word of God." It called on the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood to denounce the "[Danvers Statement](#)"- the group's statement of core beliefs — acknowledge the harm it has done to churches and to "confess it as sin."

The coalition said the theology behind the Danvers Statement assigns a "god-like" status to males, while relegating women to a lower class that opens the door to abuse.

"We are concerned about wife abuse, girlfriend abuse and abuse to female children that takes place in many homes where evangelical men are taught that they have earthly and spiritual authority over women," the statement said.

Complementarians deny their views on gender roles promote abuse, but Cindy Kunsman, a [blogger](#) who writes about spiritual abuse and one of the speakers at Saturday's conference, said that is naïve.

"Many women suffer as a result of the 'evil woman theology' perpetuated by CBMW because their sub-Christian view of the nature of women scapegoats women as the root cause of all problems within both marriage and the family," Kunsman said. "Therefore, daughters raised within such systems suffer as well, because they are seen as merely objects of use to men of all ages."



Shirley
Taylor

"I believe that young men who have been raised to believe that women are objects — beings who are lesser than men — and who are also taught to blame women as the ultimate cause of sinfulness have been given tacit permission to resort to mistreatment of women," Kunsman added.

Another speaker, Jocelyn Andersen, said no one is claiming that all complementarian men are physically abusive, but studies abound connecting rigid gender roles with abuse and physical violence. Andersen described her own experience as a former battered wife in a 2007 [book](#) titled *Woman Submit! Christians and Domestic Violence*.

Randy Stinson, the [president](#) of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The coalition's statement also condemned "mistranslation of the scriptures by complementarian translation committees."

Andersen said she dedicates an entire chapter in her new [book](#), *Woman this is WAR! Gender, Slavery and the Evangelical Caste System*, to what she called "mistakes" in the English Standard Version Bible translation due to "androcentricity" when she wrote the book. She said she now believes there was "deliberate mistranslation" in the *ESV Study Bible* released in 2008, [hailed](#) by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood as "unapologetically complementarian."

Andersen said one example of "misogynistic influence" in the ESV is Genesis 5:2, which reads, "Male and female he created them, and he

blessed them and named them Man when they were created."

Wayne Grudem, a member of the translation committee, used the verse in a [book](#) to make the point that "God named the human race 'man'" and not some gender-neutral term, suggesting a leadership role belonged to man before the Fall.

Andersen, however, said God did not name the couple ish, the Hebrew word for man — ishshah is Hebrew for woman — but rather Adam, the name given to the first man but also applied to the whole human race.

Along with calling on the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood to denounce the Danvers Statement, the Freedom for Christian Women Coalition demanded that "denominational leaders and all churches and seminaries" that have endorsed the statement to do the same.

Trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, [voted](#) last fall to add the Danvers Statement to the seminary's policy manual [under](#) "Guiding Documents and Statements."

The Freedom for Christian Women Coalition promoted the Orlando meeting as Seneca Falls 2. The name is borrowed from the [Seneca Falls Convention](#) of 1848, the first women's rights meeting in American history. Organizers of Seneca Falls 2 pointed out that four of the five organizers of the original Seneca Falls Conference were Christians and it was held at a Methodist Church.

That is significant, coalition leaders said, because people who promote an "egalitarian" view that males and females are equally gifted for all roles in the church and home are often accused of being influenced by secular feminism.

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.