**Misogyny Next Door**

***A Call to Protect the Full Personhood of Our Daughters***

***from Both Pornographic and Spiritual Patriarchy***

**by Emily Nielsen Jones**

*“I was denied as a person”*

*“I had no will of my own.”*

*“My identity was negated.”*

*“I always felt like a thing.”*

*“I was told to suppress my own desires and feelings.”*

*“I was only allowed to be the way others wanted me to be.”*

*“I have no say in matters.”*

*“I don’t ask any questions.”*

—Self-descriptions of girls and women who grew up in patriarchal Christian homes, from [*Christianity & Incest*](http://www.amazon.com/Christianity-Incest-Annie-Fransen-Imbens/dp/0800625412/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1411733086&sr=8-1&keywords=Christianity+%26+Incest+by+Annie+Fransen+Imbens+and+Ineke+De+Putter+Jonker) by Annie Fransen Imbens and Ineke De Putter Jonker

**To be a girl…**

Summer has come and gone. I spent a few weeks this past summer in the Adirondack Mountains, where I attended a Christian family camp during my childhood summers and where my 12-year-old daughter has a gang of girlfriends, all daughters of my own childhood friends. They are at this beautiful crossing point where you still see the playful, childlike way of moving in the world but where a face of womanhood is emerging. I have loved every stage of my children’s lives, but this one is fascinating! It is a time when the dependence of childhood takes a backseat and a child begins to really take possession of their own human agency (ie, self-governance), to sail their own little ship, and chart their own course in this world.



Watching this pack of girls frolic on the beach, roam around the camp, or make plans to do this or that, I marveled at their collective girl spirit. If you’ve had a chance to see healthy, carefree, preadolescent girls interacting, you know that they have their little acts together way more than boys at this age. They know how to relate and navigate interpersonal dynamics in a way that puts adults to shame. This particular pack of girls hasn’t degenerated into the mean-girl dynamic you often see in middle school. They are still girls. They each have a strong autonomous will, but not in a domineering way. They seem to enjoy taking time to work things out together. And gosh dang, are they funny—and sweet! But not *too* sweet. They have their fair share of sass to go around, and I can tell they are proud of the new little curves that are appearing on their bodies.

These girls are filled with raw potential. They seem to know from somewhere deep inside that they have a right to be here and to own their place in the world. They have yet to feel shame for their female bodies. They still believe that the world is fair and good and will treat them with dignity. They still have a natural *presumption of equality* (Sue Monk Kidd) and believe they can conquer the world. Still filled with trust, they are getting ready to launch, to spread their wings, and fly Sadly, however, they are at the juncture where a girl’s developing sense of personhood—her intrinsic “I am! I can!”—all too often meets another set of “rules” that puncture her dignity, her pride, and her natural sense of justice. And it happens not only in other parts of the world but also right here in our own country.

Watching these 10-13 year olds eating ice cream and Swedish Fish, taking turns tubing, burying each other in sand, I found myself wanting to bottle their playful and empowered female energy and somehow preserve and protect it from the dark, debasing forces in our world that seem so bent on female degradation.

Do you ever have these moments where the macro and the global seem right at your own doorstep? I work for a foundation that does gender-lens grantmaking in various places of the world to alleviate the conditions that make girls everywhere so vulnerable to sexual exploitation, human trafficking, overwork, and in myriad ways to being treated as second class humans meant for servitude. *Just who do I think I am to believe that I can somehow live in a little bubble and shield my daughter from the same misogynistic, debasing forces that surround girls around the world?*

**The face of misogyny**

Even on a sheltered lakeside vacation, misogyny knows no bounds and hovers next door. As you continue reading, keep in your mind this image of a life-sized sex doll waiting to serve and submit to a man, and let it symbolize what misogyny looks like in our world today. Let it represent for you the flattening out of the beautiful uniqueness and complexity of what it means to be a human with a will of one’s own into a plastic doll that exists to pleasure and serve another.

The word “misogyny” may scare some away and sound like inflammatory feminist jargon, but it is alive and well in our world and something we as parents need to guard against. I am chilled-to-the-bones distressed about the pervasive, addictive, and debasing influences of Internet pornography that invisibly unleashes into our culture a surge of very real, embodied misogyny. This misogyny is disfiguring our boys’ and our girls’ emerging sexual identities, putting girls at greater risk of being mistreated in myriad ways as submissive sex objects—not just by the pimps and johns and traffickers but right in the fabric of their everyday relationships.

As Gail Dines, professor of sociology at Wheelock College, Boston, Mass., and founder of [**Stop Porn Culture**](http://stoppornculture.org/) describes,

We are in the midst of a massive social experiment, one that is reshaping the lives of young people all over the globe. Never before have children and youth had easy access to hard core porn based on the degradation, debasement, and humiliation of women. What was considered hardcore twenty years ago, at the dawn of the Internet era, has now become mainstream. Most images on mainstream porn sites today depict sexually violent, body-punishing sex that dehumanizes women and men alike.

I’d rather turn my head and not think about such an unsavory topic, but as a mother of two adolescent boys and a 12-year-old girl, I cannot turn a blind eye and accept as “normal” this powered-up, dangerously preeminent form of masculinity that is warping our human relationships. This is not just a “feminist” concern; it is a humanitarian concern and a massive public health threat with both a pornographic and a spiritual face.

**But let’s get back to the Adirondacks...**

One beautiful night, under a glowing moon hovering over the lake, the grown-ups were chatting and roasting s'mores, and the kids were running loose around the yard next door playing hide-and-seek.  One of them decided to hide in a little cabin by the lake that the owner had happened to leave open.  In previous years, they had peered inside and seen Barbie dolls with strange chains around their ankles.  But the owner, a middle-aged divorcé, seems like a nice guy who takes good care of his house and loves boating and fishing.  Every year he has a guys’ weekend, so we’ve sort of chuckled and laughed off the Barbie doll tied to the back of his speedboat. You know, “Ha, ha, ha, silly male antics. Boys will be boys.”

This year, what the kids happened upon in that shack was more than any of us could have bargained for. All the disgusting images (both animal and human, including the life-sized sex dolls I refer to above) clearly conveyed the same message:  Females are inferior filth meant to be dominated like animals.  I am not sure which distresses my soul more—the burns on the dolls’ faces or the vulgar, debasing words on the wall (*whore, slut, bitch, f\*\*\*ing* this and that, and other vile instructions).

The image of those sickening plastic dolls lingers in my mind as a symbol of what misogyny and its alter-ego, patriarchy, do to female personhood: elevating the male as a preeminent master and obliterating the female’s human will, diminishing her to a role that exists to meet his needs. *Misogyny* means “disdain for females” and is a centuries-old, deeply rooted ideology/mindset that has been stamped into the human psyche. It takes the full, complex, multi-faceted, distinctive personhood of male and female human beings and debases it into a master/slave, superior/inferior way of relating. *Patriarchy* is a term that can be softened and moderated in tone, but whatever language, imagery, or ideology it comes wrapped in, at its core it sees the masculine as owner and the feminine as a resource to be controlled, transacted, and mastered. Whether in strip clubs on Route 1 in Boston, in the sex trade that takes place around sporting events worldwide, or in child brides married off to older men in places like Africa, the currency of patriarchy is the power imbalance created by economic, spiritual, and physical vulnerability and social norms that in myriad forms prop up male hegemony as “just the way things are.”

The word “patriarchy” comes from the Greek *patria* (father) and *arché* (*rule)*, and it literally means “male rule*.”* It refers to a society in which men hold all positions of power and the father rules the family as a microcosm of the king’s divine right to rule the social/political structure and God the Father’s rule of the “kingdom” of the world. It is a simple reality that for centuries females were not treated as full human beings but something along the continuum of perpetual minor to be governed, property to be owned, or slave to be mastered.

At least in the Western world, we have collectively moved away from this patriarchal social structure in our contemporary ideals of human rights and equality, yet this ancient code of male preeminence/female subjugation continues to lurk in our lived social norms and religious ideals, disfiguring the oneness and harmony we were created to enjoy as equally dignified, empowered human beings. As a mother, I want to shield my children from all that reduces them and their God-given sexuality to anything resembling this harmful duality, which substitutes the intimacy and connection they were created for with hierarchy and which is an affront to our collective human dignity and to our Creator, in whose image we are all—male and female alike—created.

Most of what I have learned about personhood I have learned from my best teachers—my kids. I love to marvel at the unique spark of personhood that each of my children came into the world with—a life force that cannot be contained or tamed, that seems to know its own innate dignity, and that knows it is here for a unique purpose in the world. Whether diving into a tennis match with his/her own distinctive competitive signature, carving a wooden bowl at camp, or singing in the shower and getting up the courage to sing a solo, their personhood is their own. It cannot be owned by anyone—not even by their parents. It was given to them by our Creator, a seed put here to grow into all of its complex facets. As a parent, I can do my part to give them a secure launching pad, but each of their souls came into the world with its own precious wings.

**To be a person. To be a female person.**

All I want for my daughter and her sisters around the world is a level playing field on which to live and define themselves from the inside out and to grow into the full persons they are meant to be. I want a world for our girls that presumes their equal footing in society and in human relationships. I want a human society that nurtures girls to grow and develop their own voice, agency, and gifts. I want a world where the 160,000 girls born each day can grow up strong and proud to be a female human being.

How is it that, in the 21st century, this is still a daring idea?

As I look at my three gendered “data points,” there is nothing intrinsic that I have seen in my daughter that has said “Because I am a girl, I am of an inferior class and am not meant to be as free as my brothers. Because I am a girl, I am meant to confine my personhood into a circumscribed, submissive role in the world and to be content deferring and subordinating my will to another.”

Each of my kids erupted into the world with a presumption of their own equality, and they really have no clue that beneath the surface there still lies a very real, very ancient social norm rooted in a master/slave paradigm that is very much alive and well in our world.

What does it mean to be a fullhuman person? What are the forces that continue, in our 21st century world, to make being a female so laden with diminishment and subjugation?

I love being female. I love having a daughter. One of the foundational principles of personhoodthat appears in the first verses of the Bible is that male and female share a Godlike dignity and shared humanity as image-bearers of God, both created to share in the “dominion” (rule) of creation:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Could there be anything more feminist than this? To be born female is to mirror God’s likeness in the world, to co-rule the earth, to be born with a royal crown as a daughter of the Most High. Yet to be female today—after centuries of human rights advancements—is still seen in social norms around the world as belonging to a class of humans that is meant to be under someone else’s *dominion*, governed like a subject in someone’s kingship, not expected to grow into self-governing adults and become full participants in society. As a society, we have shifted to a more level, more horizontal social and political construct, but the centuries-old view of husband as lord and master of the household still prevails in much of the world.

In too many places, young girls are treated not as children but as future wives and sex slaves who will soon be owned and governed by a husband. In many places around the world it is commonplace to hear “bride price” mentioned as an ordinary part of life. Daughters are still seen as a family resourceto be owned, managed, and transacted. In this patriarchal social structure, it is not an accident that 65 million girls across the world—approximately one in five girls of lower secondary school age—are [denied access to schooling](http://plan-international.org/girls/girl-facts-sources.php?lang=en).

Even more disturbing, the status of females as lesser than human is manifest in gender-based violence around the world at such epic proportions that we are now using the word “gendercide” to describe it. As described on the website [Futures Without Violence](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Children_and_Families/International.pdf),

The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that at least one of every three women globally will be beaten, raped, or otherwise abused during her lifetime. In most cases, the abuser is a member of her own family. Sexual violence is a pervasive global health and human rights problem. In some countries, approximately one in four women and girls over age 15 may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner at some points in their lives, and rates of sexual abuse by non-partners range from one to 12 percent over the course of a woman’s lifetime.

The systemic continuum of violence and human rights violations against girls and women is so pervasive that it has become eerily normalized. Women have come a long way, but the humanitarian data shows that the bar is still low around the world for girls’ and women’s basic human security and dignity.

It simply is not okay in the 21st century that violence is such a normalized part of life for so many girls and women both around the world and right here in our “civilized” society. It is simply not okay that our lived social norms continue to treat females as a lesser than human whose personhood is so easily commodified, transacted, subjugated and circumscribed into a subservient role. Social norms are different from formal laws we have on the books. They do not live outside of us, but get encoded inside our hearts and minds and our daily functioning as “just the way things are.” Gender norms can be so deeply entrenched and invisible that at times we do not even know we are partaking in attitudes and beliefs which are contrary to our stated ideals.

Anyone who works in global development will tell you that a highly authoritarian family structure still exists around the world and that it is commonplace for a man to believe he has a right and even a “duty” to discipline his wife. I still remember the first time I heard of this notion. I was sitting in on a [World Vision Channels of Hope for Gender](http://strongwomenstrongworld.org/gender/) workshop that my foundation was helping; the goal was to scale up efforts around Africa to stem the pandemic of gender-based violence by getting at the underlying ideas that give males this latitude. The participants’ gender attitudes are measured before and after these workshops to gauge any attitude change. In many workshops, upwards of 70 percent in the intake survey agree that “violence is just a regular part of gender relationships” and that “a husband should disciplinehis wife.”

But what about right here in our own backyard?

**Misogyny x Two**

Just before leaving for our Adirondacks vacation, I had a double dose of misogyny that left me feeling vulnerable for our daughter and her friends. I had attended a rather grim yet informative conference hosted by the aforementioned sociologist Gail Dines, author of *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (<http://gaildines.com/pornland/pornland-about-the-book/>), on the public health threat of pornography. I left the conference under a dark cloud of despair and with a visceral understanding of what misogyny looks like. It’s not pretty, and it isn’t just about sex. The hardcore, violent fringe has become “mainstream” and just one click of a mouse away. The vile and dehumanizing images and words littering the Internet show an abject desire for the humiliation, torture, and degradation of females.

The focus of the conference was on how addictive and disfiguring this “pornified” and violent sexuality is to the developing brain. It hovers around our children, seeping into their precious, unfolding psyches via their tablets, computers, and smart phones.

Awareness is hard work. I could just go on my merry way and do my best to protect my own daughter, but I feel the degradation of female personhood, in both its subtle and egregious forms, on a visceral level. I wish I could just presume we are in a post-feminist world where things are on autopilot, marching forward for women’s equality. *But the facts on the ground say otherwise.*

However, there is reason for hope in the form of a global humanitarian movement centered on empowering the girl child. Yet the misogynistic forces in our world exert a perpetual undertow bent on undermining the progress so many are working so hard to achieve. Human rights are never “won” once and for all. They need to be continually safeguarded and struggled for, again and again. The human proclivity to consolidate one’s own power over others will always be with us. Particularly when it comes to gender equality, it seems to be a truism that if we are not moving forward toward a more level social structure, we will easily slide backwards. If we care about our girls’ futures, all of us have a role to play in creating a more gender-balanced world where they can presume a level footing in society. We have come a long way in breaking one glass ceiling after another, but everywhere in our world regressive forces are bent on taking us right back to the Old World master/slave, superior/inferior social structure.

My other dose of misogyny took place before the pornography conference, when I spent a few weeks doing research on theologians and church fathers whose misogyny has warped the trajectory of Christianity in our world more than most of us can even begin to realize*.*As I watched Dr. Dines’ presentation, I was struck by how similar in flavor and sentiment the vile pornographic images were to the words of utter debasement and disdain for females uttered by some of our church fathers. How could it be that pornographers and men of God speak such a similar language?

If we take off our rose-colored glasses, we can see that an underbelly of our society is still saturated with this debased, disempowered view of females.  The misogyny of our “pornified” culture, as Dr. Dines calls it, is so unnervingly normalized and so completely permeates the airwaves we all breathe that good humans absorb it and partake in it and become themselves debased by it. At their core, all forms of sexual abuse and diminishment are about power, and as we see in any form of political or social tyranny and very vividly in pornography and in sex shacks like this, unilateral power is not what we are made for and in fact debases the humanity of *both* the perpetrator and the victim.

As a mother, I know that my sons are not created for this kind of puffed-up, disfigured masculinity. I don’t want the lower angels of their nature—that fallen side we all share—to be seduced by messages they absorb from music or the Internet—or things they hear in church—into thinking that to be masculine means powering up and acting like a king. I have watched their masculine nature and know that their *truest*, best selves are created, like my daughter, for vulnerable human attachment, not the powered up, top-down way of relating that masquerades as “real” manhood.

The burns on the dolls’ faces up at the lake reveal a twisted extreme of male dominance that no good citizen would condone.  It is so extreme that it makes our stomachs turn.  Yet what both pornography and the facts of gendercide show is that male entitlement to power and mastery over females easily degenerates into violence—even benevolent, “holy”-sounding ideas of male rule. Whether in Nazi Germany, under apartheid in South Africa, under Jim Crow laws in the antebellum South, or in this neo-patriarchal *Husband/Father-is-Prophet/Priest/King-of-the-Home* “family-integrated” church/homeschool/start-up church movement right here in the US, when you diminish a group as inferior, as lower status, you render them vulnerable to abuse.

How it could be that in the 21st century—at a time when, by most accounts, we collectively affirm the full human equality of females in our legal codes, our constitutions, and our international treaties—girls and women are still so vulnerable to being treated as plastic human beings who exist to be owned, worked, mastered, exploited, transacted and/or reduced to a subservient “role”?

**Spiritual and Sexual Abuse: A Public Health Threat**

This gender-based public health threat talked about by Dr. Dines is not caused by some accident of nature or contagious disease but by ideas and attitudes that influence how we live and move in the world and how we exercise power and agency in our male/female relationships: Are they mutual and honoring of each other’s personal dignity, or is there something in the air that continues to make the gender “playing field” dangerously lopsided, giving men a presumption to power and control over the bodies and souls of the girls and women in their lives?

Internet pornography depicts women (and girls) being treated worse than animals and with language (“Whore, you like it”) that stunts the empathy of males and fuels the debased fantasy that this is the way females want to be treated. A 2010 study analyzing pornographic scenes found that “88.2% contained physical aggression, principally spanking, gagging, and slapping, while 48.7% of scenes contained verbal aggression, primarily name calling” (Ana J. Bridges, et al., “Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update,” Violence Against Women 16, no. 10 (2010): 1065–1085, <http://www.demandabolition.org/deconstructing-demand/>).

I must now refer back to the similarities my recent research revealed between pornography and the misogyny of some of our church fathers. This “Bow to me, I am king” masculine aggression is emerging not just from the ranks of pornographers but from “holier” places. With my ear to the ground, my philanthropic mind and heart engaged, I continue to be stunned by the resurgence of a very authoritarian, patriarchal gender role ideology in the evangelical Christian world all around me, which alarmingly mirrors Dr. Dines’ observations of the pornography industry, where the “hardcore” extreme has become mainstream. I have been in the evangelical world my whole life but have never before heard such enthusiastic calls for men to “step up” and be quasi-sovereigns in the family, in the church, and in society. My basic human empathy, social justice awareness, and religious-crap detector is running on high alert at all the exalted metaphors I encounter at every turn that are calling for consolidation of power into the hands of fathers/husbands in their families and men in the church and parachurch organizations.

Karen Campbell, a homeschooling mom who is debunking this dangerous biblical patriarchy movement on her website (ThatMom.com) says, “This means that it is also a family of dads who are in charge. These churches exclude women in decision-making, micromanage wives and children, and set up a “them against us” mentality against the rest of the church.” (<http://www.thatmom.com/2014/05/06/patriarchy-on-trial-part-three/>)

In this ideology that is gaining a foothold in many Christian circles, not just in homeschooling families, we see the growing use of the word “patriarch” and an emphasis on training girls to be girls (which means being submissive and pure and honoring her father as the family priest) and boys to be boys to “step up” throughout their childhood and progress into the role of becoming a patriarch. Study after study shows that highly patriarchal religious environments, where girls are conditioned little by little to subordinate their own wills to their father or pastor (who represents God), lead to such a loss of human agency, so that they have a hard time even knowing that abuse is wrong, never mind standing up to it.

I myself am more of an outside observer than an "expert" but seek here to amplify the voices of "insiders" who are speaking out. A great place to start if you are interested in learning about this prophet/priest/king preeminent masculinity movement is on Campbell’s ThatMom.com website. In her series"Patriarchy on Trial,” she describes from her personal experience how the patriarchy movement in homeschooling has influenced the evangelical body of Christ. She is not out to bash Christian organizations nor is she an “angry feminist” with an axe to grind. She is a no-nonsense Christian mom who feels morally and spiritually compelled to warn parents about these theologically off and dangerous ideas. Here are a few highlights that illuminate the parenting concern we all should have about how these religious ideas can reduce the personhood of both our girls and our boys into a role that is harmful to their child development and their unfolding into their true, unique selves:

[Biblical] Patriarchy has introduced new doctrines or ways of interpreting Scripture in order to prop up their views of women.  For example, in 1987, when the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) was founded, there was no mention of the doctrine of eternal subordination being central to gender roles. Some 26 years later, it is now taught as a traditional, conservative belief that, if not embraced, places you into the heretic camp. This is one of many teachings of patriarchy that are new in the man/woman discussion but have been determined to be historically founded. If so, why weren’t they mentioned by the CBMW at its founding?

Scripture is often taken out of context to prove patriarchy and make silly applications. The example of Voddie Baucham and others using Numbers 30 to prove unmarried daughters are not to leave home until marriage is just one example of this.

Patriarchy has been said to be central to the “grand sweep of revelation,” placing preferences and lesser doctrines into the category of essential doctrines, thus shutting down any possible discussion. For example, some conservatives believe women can have a teaching role in the church while others do not. By enacting the “grand sweep” theory, women who believe there are teaching roles for them are labeled as feminists or “white-washed feminists” and even Jezebels. (We have also been called “Titus 2 lesbian bloggers”!) Roles of women are, unfortunately, often placed into the same category with homosexuality. I remember being a church where one of the leaders repeatedly said, “We can’t do this or that because people would think we were one of those homosexual-women churches.”

Partriarchy interferes with healthy marriage and family life, impacting the whole church. My husband once worked with an older man named Delbert whose life motto was “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” I believe this can be applied in marriages as well. There are countless couples who never knew their marriages were bad until some patriarch began pointing out all the things they needed to do to fix them. Patriarchy has established certain non-optional character traits depending on gender that they insist apply to everyone. They ignore the fact that, for example, some men are naturally more passive and quiet while some women are naturally more assertive and articulate. Their definition of godly manhood is cultural rather than scriptural. Debi Pearl’s “three types of men’s teaching and John and Stasi Eldredge’s male and female stereotypes have played havoc on many marriages. Further, patriarchy causes counselors to miss real root problems by placing everything into some sort of formula based on these assumptions. In homeschooling circles, this can be interpreted as moms not being qualified to teach teenage sons. In church, it ends up with nonsense like John Piper’s belief that church must have a “masculine feel.”

Patriarchy opens the door for all sorts of sexual perversion because its subtle message is that, as the one at the top of the hierarchy ladder, “I can do what I want to with whatever I own.” The relationship between the father and daughter is skewed and sets everyone up for failure. Should fathers and daughters share a close relationship? Absolutely! But there should always be an acknowledgement and awareness of those God-given boundaries. The goal should always be for a daughter to grow into the fullness of her salvation where she practices discernment herself rather than dependence on either her father or a husband to think for and make decisions for her. The obsession with a daughter’s sexual purity only further adds to the objectification of women, too. Again, purity is good. Talking about it all the time and measuring a daughter’s worth by it is weird and sinful. Patriarchy’s continual emphasis on roles for boys vs girls sets some young men up for moral failure, often causing them to believe they are homosexuals because they don’t enjoy hunting or shooting or whatever silly idea has become the patriarch’s current litmus test for manliness. (http://www.thatmom.com/2014/05/06/patriarchy-on-trial-part-three/)

The more you start digging into the interconnecting web of these very charismatic, mostly Reformed, male-rule church planters and “home education/family discipleship” leaders (who literally describe themselves to their flocks as “prophets, priests, and kings”) the more you see a growing totalitarian-like leadership ethos which is leading to charges of both spiritual and sexual abuse**.**

You also see scandal after scandal erupting within Christian ministries, highlighting vividly the connection between the patriarchy movement and a pattern of abuse of power not only in sexual relationships but also in church governance and other social relationships. One recent example is former leader of Vision Forum, Douglas Phillips, who is facing a lawsuit from a woman who claims he treated her as a “personal sex object” while she worked for his family. A second and even more disturbing example is former leader of Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP), Bill Gothard, who resigned earlier this year [after at least 34 women](http://www.thewire.com/national/2014/03/another-major-biblical-patriarchy-organization-crisis-because-sex-scandal-tk/358931/) accused him of making unwanted sexual advances. ([http://www.thewire.com/culture/2014/04/ christian- biblical- patriarchy-leader-sued-for-inappropriate-sexual-acts/360760/](http://www.thewire.com/culture/2014/04/christian-biblical-patriarchy-leader-sued-for-inappropriate-sexual-acts/360760/))

Many of these women are speaking out about the abuse both they and their daughters have experienced under Christian patriarchy, and they do not mince words. I am deeply troubled reading these accounts, knowing that Bill Gothard was very instrumental in the founding and leadership of a well-known campus ministry I attended in college, Campus Crusade for Christ (now called Cru), which has under its umbrella a ministry called Family Life Today (FLT). FLT has Gothard’s imprint all over it, with this strange and theologically “off” obsession with turning the husband into the family monarch to whom the wife owes total submission and who represents her before God.

Former Gothard disciple Fred Clark describes this ideology of “family priesthood” that falls heavily on both wives and daughters: “They believed that the relationship between husband and wife was basically the same as that between a king and his subject. Gothardism also placed daughters under the totalitarian reign of their fathers until the day they married someone else, at which point they traded one king for another.” He goes on to joke, “My dad had zero patience for those folks. He liked to repeat a joke about Bill Gothard teaming up with Bill Bright to rewrite Campus Crusade’s famous Four Spiritual Laws tract so now it says, “God loves you and has a horrible plan for your wife.” <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/slacktivist/2014/03/20/bill-gothards-sexual-coercion-is-a-feature-of-gothardism/#ixzz3BGSXsl24>

One of the women who spoke out about Gothard is Vykie Garrison. “It’s not an exaggeration to compare IBLP ideals to the Taliban,” she stated, “because, as far as women go, we are reduced to non-personhood status.” [http://talkingpointsmemo.com/ dc/ inside-the-institute-for-basic-life-principles-the-organization-that-inspired-taliban-dan-ad](http://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/inside-the-institute-for-basic-life-principles-the-organization-that-inspired-taliban-dan-ad)

Now 44, she became a part of Gothard’s IBLP in her mid-20s and followed its teachings until one of her daughters attempted suicide. She divorced her husband and left the Institute at the age of 41 and now writes about her experiences on the blog “[No Longer Quivering](http://nolongerquivering.com/2010/08/03/quiverfull-daughters-the-making-of-a-helpmeet/),” where countless women describe very similar stories about how their husband’s role as divine ruler of the family left them totally powerless in the face of abuse and with their confidence dwindling away.

Gothard has had abuse scandals surrounding him for decades, but he seems to have nine lives. In a *Time* magazine article written over 30 years ago, Gothard, then 39, was quoted as advising women victims of domestic violence to pray, "God, thank you for this beating." His influence on the evangelical world has been deep and wide for over 20 years. Many organizations have distanced themselves from him, but his dangerous and theologically skewed ideas of male preeminence and “priesthood” in the family remain.

Clark’s description of Gothard’s imprint on Cru is a window into how this world of extreme Christian patriarchy, centered around this growing highly Old Testament based “triperspectival” theology/ideology of leadership (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2010/04/07/triperspectival-leadership-prophets-priests-and-kings/>), is extending its reach out into the larger evangelical world. I know many great people who work in Cru and love much of what they do to support the spiritual growth of college students. The campus side of Cru has actually made great strides in gender balancing its organization and allows women to serve/lead at all levels of the organization. However, when it comes to teachings about marriage and family, it is steeped in this ideology of husband/father as the family prophet/priest/king and is laced with parenting advice about is so disempowering to girls and young women. Most of the college women they serve would be horrified to read the ideas the ministry espouses about raising sons to be patriarchs who rule and “disciple” their wives.

According to Garrison, IBLP “gets its hooks into evangelical parents” by offering them a program for homeschooling their children “to protect them from the evils of public schools,” and from there the patriarchal training gets woven into the whole family structure. "The next thing we heard,” says Garrison, “was to trust the Lord with our home planning. They pretty much pushed in IBLP … that you will not use birth control, that you will accept all the blessings the Lord sends your way … It was recommended to me after my third that I not have any more kids … but once I got into this whole teaching, I felt that I was going against Scripture by not allowing the Lord to bless me.”

So Garrison went on to have four more children. She and the children all wound up in a position of “complete subservience.” As she describes it, "There's a big emphasis on this authority structure. If you're submitting to him, that's how you obey God … You gain physical, spiritual, financial protection [by] being basically obedient to the spiritual head, which would be your husband, or if you're a child, your father. Being in submission, that's how you're going to keep the devil from ruining your life."

She goes on to describe the effects of the patriarchal ideology on her own family:

There’s such a focus on this patriarchal teaching that the husband is the head, he is the leader, the wife is to submit, the children are to obey. It turned my husband into a tyrant. He had the idea in his head that as our spiritual covering he had a responsibility for my spiritual life, our children's spiritual life. And if he feels like he's the one who's ultimately going to answer to God, he has the authority and the responsibility and the obligation to use so much control over all our actions, down to our thoughts and beliefs. <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/inside-the-institute-for-basic-life-principles-the-organization-that-inspired-taliban-dan-ad>

If you think of patriarchy in all its forms, both pornographic and religious, as a continuum of male entitlement to “rule,” there are many points along the spectrum where girls (and women) capitulate to demands that are not what they really want and that are not honoring of their full personhood. As partakers in a culture, we all want to “belong” and fit in. It can be hard for girls to tune out messages from both the “tribe” of pop-culture (which is becoming increasingly “pornified” as author Pamela Paul dubbed it) and the “tribe” of religion to sort through how to chart their course as a female human being in a world that is still steeped in patriarchal attitudes. On one end of the spectrum, there are girls with strong inner and outer supports who refuse to conform and become reduced to a “role,” either sexually or religiously. On the other end is total capitulation to sexual abuse in any of its myriad forms, which can literally become like slavery right in the confines of a home or within the web of sex trafficking that spans the globe.

In the Douglas Philips scandal at Vision Forum, we see vividly how a young girl who revered her pastor as her “spiritual father” might find herself unable to stand up to sexual pressure, particularly in an ethos where ideas of male dominion prevailed. As the allegations describe,

Douglas Phillips used Ms. Torres—against her wishes and over her objections—as a personal sex object. Douglas Phillips repeatedly groped, rubbed, and touched Ms. Torres’s crotch, breasts, and other areas of her body; rubbed his penis on her; masturbated on her; forced her to watch him masturbate on her; and ejaculated upon her. This perverse and offensive conduct repeatedly took place over the course of several years. … Despite Ms. Torres’s repeated requests for Phillips to stop masturbating and ejaculating on her, Phillips proceeded to return and repeat this perverse and offensive conduct. Each night that Phillips returned, Ms. Torres requested that he stop. Defendant blatantly disregarded her requests but continued to masturbate and ejaculate on her each night. **(**<http://www.christianpost.com/news/woman-files-lawsuit-accusing-vision-forum-founder-doug-phillips-of-treating-her-as-personal-sex-object-118005/>**)**

I apologize for such graphic content, but Torres’ account depicts clearly how the spiritual and the pornographic are two sides of the same coin. The descriptions of things he did to her suggest that this “family priest” was reading more thanthe Bible on his iPad.

Another patriarchal “gem” who has made the news of late is Mark Driscoll, the cool bad-boy megachurch founder known for his obsession with masculinized Christianity, his rants against “pussified” male worship leaders, and his crude jabs at gay people, liberals, and feminism. His coolness finally caught up with him, and he was recently asked to step down from leadership of Acts 29, the network of patriarchal reformed churches he started. From what I can tell, the accusations surrounding him are that he created a culture of fear and intimidation and bullied anyone, including elders, who disagreed with him. Is it any wonder that someone who advocates such a king-like chain of command in marriage would also institute this authoritarian structure in his own church?

In his book *Real Marriage,* Driscoll not only advocates a one-sided submission of the wife to the husband, he also lists what falls under “husband decisions” (when to have kids, how many children to have, where they live and go to church, to name a few) and spends an inordinate about of time focused on his wife’s role in sexually “pleasing” him (not much in the other direction). He also offers story after story about how he chided his wife for decisions (like getting a short haircut) that showed she wasn’t focused enough on pleasing him: “She had put a mom’s need for convenience before being a wife.” He reports how he expressed his disapproval and that “She wept.” Notice how his psychosexual spirituality––with its one-sided focus on wives pleasing their husbands and subordinating their own preferences and interests to look and act in a way that prioritizes his wants ––parallels the misogyny of porn culture. Ironically, Driscoll co-authored this book with his wife. <http://freemethodistfeminist.com/2012/05/23/mark-driscoll-and-grace-driscoll-real-marriage-or-real-oppression/>

**Cleaning Up Our Patriarchal Litter**

I wish I could be written off as a sensational extremist, but with my spiritual eyes and ears open, and I recognize that the flare-up of spiritual and pornographic patriarchy in the airwaves surrounding us and our children is one larger continuum: the “holy” and the not-so-holy literally and metaphorically in bed together. This is nothing particularly new. The spiritual ideal of the father/husband as lord and master of the household has characterized gender norms for centuries and has been directly and indirectly connected with both sanctioned (aka “discipline”) and unsanctioned domestic violence against women.

As Harriet H. Robinson describes in her book *Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement,* religious gender norms in the 19th century saw violence as a normal part of a husband’s role:"By the English common law, her husband was her lord and master. He had the custody of her person, and of her minor children. He could 'punish her with a stick no bigger than his thumb,' and she could not complain against him." http://womenshistory.about.com/od/mythsofwomenshistory/a/ruleof thumb.htm

Not many today, even the most ardent “complementarians,”directly advocate violence as part of a husband’s “role,” but the enlarged authority that men are being encouraged to take over their wives is nothing short of a *human rights violation waiting to happen*. The more you look around at various gender attitudes within Christian ministries, it is hard to tell what is “extreme” and what is “mainstream”. Larry Crabb, a well-known Christian speaker, is also into this prophet-priest-king paradigm:

A prudent wife is a great blessing to both herself and her husband.  Knowing human nature, she accepts the differences between men and women.  She does not chafe at being his helper but, rather, finds purpose and pleasure in keeping him in motion.  Christ occupies the classic, threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.  In the same way, God has annointed every husband to lead his wife as her prophet, priest, and king.... A 'submissive wife' is one who takes all her resources and, understanding the unique opportunity of femininity, uses them to bless her husband (*Devotions for Couples:  For Busy Couples Who Want More Intimacy in Their Marriages*; Zondervan, 1998).

Some even go a step further and are reclaiming the title “lord and master.” From “What is a Christian Marriage?on the Rapture Ready website:

The woman must understand and agree with the biblical teaching that the man she is to marry will [be] the head of the household (Genesis 3.16; 1 Corinthians 11.3; 1 Peter 3.6), and that marriage is not a 50-50 proposition. She must be willing to submit to him in all things (Ephesians 5.22-24) gladly, joyfully and respectfully. She must be willing to behave in a chaste and respectful manner, She must be willing to express in her behavior a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3.1-6). She needs to fulfill her duty to her husband (1 Corinthians 7.3). She must also be willing to call her husband "lord" and "master" just as Sarah did with her husband, Abraham (1 Peter 3.6; Genesis 18.12). Virtually all wives throughout the world called their husbands "lord" and "master" until the feminist movement began toward the end of the 19th century.” <http://www.raptureready.com/faq/faq628.html>)

The author’s history is correct. The feminist movement did indeed change things, and most Christians today have shifted toward a more level view of society where all human beings, not just land-owning patriarchs, are now viewed as possessing equal rights and equality. The statement above makes no attempt to have its cake and eat it too, i.e., to hold together the contemporary ideal of equality with religious ideas of male authority/patriarchy. Like the images in hardcore pornography, it shamelessly demands total and abject submission from females. This is admittedly rather extreme in tone and could possibly be written off as the ideas of a fringe group, but I continue to find similar language in more “mainstream” Christian organizations that have been part of my own journey. And surprisingly, we find it even within churches and Christian organizations that are trying to combat modern-day slavery. Can we really rid our world of slavery if right in our own homes we are crushing the full humanity of women and elevating men as lord and master and king?

If you have a daughter or son or any girl or boy in your life you care about, please ask yourself these questions: Are there spiritual ideas being taught in our churches and parenting/marriage ministries that are subtly (and not so subtly) eroding girls’ sense of emerging agency and confidence and contributing to the dangerous male entitlement over females bodies and souls? And what about the hardcore pornography that is literally imprinting boys’ and men’s minds and being reenacted in both sex for hire and “normal” relationships?

The growing commercial sex trade hovers closer than most of us realize to our ordinary lives. In just one day, right in my own city of Boston, an estimated **3,802** individuals attempted to buy sex in Boston during a 24-hour period (<http://www.demandabolition.org/>). Pornography fuels the prostitution “business,” which is highly violent and all about power and utter humiliation. A buyer’s attitude is “I paid for you, so I own you. You are here to please me. I can do whatever I want with you.” In this “mainstreaming” of violent, hardcore pornography, you see vividly how the addiction to power oversomeone can begin mildly, even benevolently, but can so easily degenerate into a cruel, debasing humiliation that dehumanizes the other into a subhuman inferior (“slut”) that exists for you, the king, to hurt, ejaculate on, control, abuse. What is just one click of the mouse away is more shocking and vile than most of us can even begin to imagine.

The burns on those Barbie dolls’ faces… I can understand the sex part, but what in God’s name is it in grown men that want to debase, humiliate, violate, and turn girls and women into plastic, receptive dolls that they are entitled to do such vile things to? The answer, dare I assert, is not that God made men this way (as a mother of two beautiful boys, I know better); rather it is the corrupting influence of excessive, consolidated power on human nature.

How do our religious gender norms insidiously factor into this “pornified” sexuality that is creeping into our homes and our hearts and demanding that girls go along with, and submitto, treatment that is not honoring of their full God-given humanity? How do religious ideas of male rule—which from my lens are becoming more preeminent, almost king-like—weave into male’s emerging psychosexuality, and how do these same ideas give a girl or a woman little recourse if a boyfriend, a pastor, a father or stepfather, an uncle, a husband, or any other “daddy” wants to dominate and exploit her?

**The Problem: Pornography is Hijacking the Sexuality of Children and Youth**

We have a massive public health threat on our hands, and the invisible images and beliefs that are being stamped into young minds (from both “holy” and unholy sources) are factors we cannot ignore. http://stoppornculture.org/about/about-the-issue/facts-and-figures-2/

**The Statistics:**

* The sex industry is the largest and most profitable industry in the world. “It includes street prostitution, brothels, ‘massage parlors’, strip clubs, human trafficking for sexual purposes, phone sex, child and adult pornography, mail order brides and sex tourism—just to mention a few of the most common examples.” http://stoppornculture.org/about/about-the-issue/facts-and-figures-2/
* The first age of boys viewing pornography is 12-14.
* Porn sites have more visitors per month than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined.
* Google searches for teen porn more than tripled between 2005 and 2013.
* Eighty-eight percent of scenes from top-rented porn movies contain physical, sexual and/or verbal abuse against women.
* Pornhub, one of the web's largest porn sites, had roughly 1.68 million visits per hour in 2013.
* Porn makes up 30 percent of the total data transferred across the Internet.

**The Research:**

Over 40 years of research by psychologists and sociologists has consistently demonstrated that after viewing pornography, boys and men are more likely to:

internalize the pornographic message that women are disposable sex objects

act out problematic sexual behaviors

risk potential addiction

engage in risky sexual behaviors

find increased difficulty in developing intimate relationships with partners

develop a worldview that normalizes sexual violence and sexual harm

have increasingly aggressive behavioral tendencies

report believing that a woman who dresses provocatively deserves to be raped

report decreased sexual interest in their girlfriends or wives

report decreased empathy for rape victims

report increased interest in coercing partners into unwanted sex acts

**Stemming the Demand for Subservient “Plastic Dolls”…**

As Donna Gavin,sergeant detective and commander of the Boston Police Human Trafficking Unit, and member of the Greater Boston Human Trafficking Task Force, chillingly describes,

There is a seemingly endless “supply” of economically and emotionally vulnerable girls and young women in our city and across the country to meet the lucrative and growing demand of the commercial sex industry. We need shelters to help these girls and women, but we need to go at the problem at its root.

There are some pretty bad pornographers out there who are making loads of money off this addictive, violent sexual content that is literally wreaking havoc on the brains of our boys and the bodies of our girls. But can we blame all of our gender-based social ills on these psycho bad apples? What about the more sanctimonious ideas that lurk in our own churches and youth groups and parachurch organizations that in various ways feed into the psychology of male entitlement and fans the flames of a “boys will be boys” mindset that all too easily turns a blind eye to abuse and unhealthy sexual patterns?

If you have spent any time in Christian subcultures as I have, you know that there is a whole continuum of patriarchal ideas and gender norms in the church, from soft to hard “complementarianism” in all shades of gray and all sorts of theological wrappings. Blessedly, there are also many churches and Christian organizations that have altogether moved away from any hint of patriarchal ideas and practices, based on interpretations of the Bible that hold as universal and timeless the larger trajectory of justice and freedom in God’s unfolding plan.

As you read this article, hold in your mind the whole spectrum of gender-based religious ideas you have seen and ask yourself: How can we as Christians today, as people of all faiths, hold a mirror to ourselves and weed out what is not serving humanity well? What do we want for our sons and our daughters? How can we mine our traditions for a spiritual ideal of mutual, shared human flourishing within which we can raise our sons and our daughters to grow up into their highest and best selves?

One of our foundation’s priorities is to go “upstream” to curtail the demand for victims of the commercial sex trade and, more broadly, all forms of exploitation against girls and women. To this end, we have partnered with an initiative called Demand Abolition (<http://www.demandabolition.org/>) that is working to curb demand for prostitution in 10 to 12 pilot cities across the country. We have also partnered with Gail Dines’ organization, Stop Porn Culture ([http://stoppornculture. org/](http://stoppornculture.org/)), to create an online tool to help families, boys, men, and even some women, protect themselves and their children from the addictive nature of Internet pornography, which research and common sense tell is a gateway to prostitution and even trafficking. At the root of both of these initiatives, and others like them, is the effort to promote healthy masculinity, which honors the personhood of females as full partners and participants in society, and likewise to stem the tide of exploitative, preeminent masculinity that treats females as subjects to serve their needs and be dominated.

As we have engaged globally and locally, we have come to see that an essential part of this eradication effort has to focus on the spiritual side as well: *What are the invisible ideas, attitudes, and religious sanctions that continue to prop up male presumption to power?* To this end we have partnered with a host of organizations that are working to help churches better serve victims of domestic violence and a whole host of efforts working to transform the underlying ideas which contribute to female powerlessness around the world:

* World Vision’s Channels of Hope for Gender ([http://strongwomenstrongworld. rg/ gender/](http://strongwomenstrongworld.org/gender/))
* Christians for Biblical Equality (<http://www.cbeinternational.org/>)
* Hagar Sisters (<http://www.hagarssisters.org/>), a new domestic violence ministry in the Boston area
* Ekklesia Foundation for Gender Equality (<http://www.efogeinternational.org/> led by a male Kenyan minister on fire for gender equality

* Sojourners Women & Girls Initiative ([http://sojo.net/get-involved/campaigns/ women-girls](http://sojo.net/get-involved/campaigns/women-girls))
* and a host of others which are bravely trying to create a more level playing field for girls and women in highly patriarchal societies to not just survive abuse but thrive and flourish and see themselves as full participants in society: <http://www.imagodeifund.org/gendergrants.html>.

My motivation for writing about this grim topic is that I am seeing a massive upswing of patriarchal forces in our world, both religious and pornographic, which in different yet eerily similar ways are undermining the full personhood and dignity of our daughters. These forces are fueling a masculinity of power over females, which is fundamentally contrary to all of the humanitarian work that so many are doing to rid our world of slavery and stem the massive tide of violence against girls and women. There is so much positive change happening in the world to empower girls and women, and I do think the best way to effect change is to focus on the positive and be the change we want to see in the world. But as Gail Dines is doing to shine a light on the public health threats of hardcore pornography becoming “mainstream,” I feel morally and spiritually compelled to call out this same dynamic that I see in the religious sector.

It is so filled with irony that around the world in so many places, great progress is being made to empower girls and women and create a more level social standing for females where they are not so vulnerable to violence and human rights violations, yet right here in our own backyard there are these regressive religious voices—*The Christian Brotherhood?*—calling for a return to a highly authoritarian, stratified vision of society based on male rule which everywhere is so highly correlated with patterns of abuse and myriad forms of gender-based violence. Around the world, we see how religion is highly prone to gender regressions which can hit hit the rewind button on women’s progress toward equality by centuries as different groups and ideologies come to the fore.

The spiritual form of patriarchy is of course more benevolent in its intention and packaging and often sounds at first just like an encouragement to men to be responsible, engaged fathers and husbands. But as my husband said after reading some of the patriarchal platitudes I found on the Internet, “There is something appealing about a lot of what they are saying. Men do want to feel strong and needed, but it crosses a line that is just off.” The line that these voices are crossing is the same line the pornographers cross: “Your will is meant to be subordinate to mine, I am your king. I am your patriarch. I am your prophet. I am your priest. I am your master and lord. I am your discipler. Submit to me.” If you think I am exaggerating, just google the words “husband,” “prophet,” “priest,” “king,” “disciple,” and “patriarch” and see what you find.

Here is just a taste of this emerging patriarchal ideology hovering around our churches and parachurch ministries: In “The Husband as Prophet Priest and King,”a chapter of Dennis Rainey’s book, *Building Strong Families* (Crossway, 2002), Bob Lepine describes this patriarchal logic:

Today, Christ is the head of His church by serving as prophet, priest, and king. If the husband is to be the head of his wife in the same way that Christ is the head of the church, then as a husband he must understand the prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles he is to fulfill.

“It has been widely accepted that Christ's activity on behalf of the church can be summarized in these three functional titles: Prophet, Priest and King. A brief look at each will give us keen insight into our role as husbands…” See full article here which is representative of how many are describing what these three roles “should” look like in marriage: <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/husbands/what-did-jesus-do#.VAMPl1Z0Xx5>

Many are countering this theology as fundamentally contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and a misapplication of the metaphor of Christ as “head” which appears in Ephesians 5:

Does Ephesians 5 instruct husbands to act as prophet, priest or king for their families? Not directly. It uses a metaphor that describes the priestly and prophetic role of Christ. Metaphors are tricky because they are so successful… the purpose of a metaphor is transfer the meaning of one phrase to another. But metaphors are not meant to be literal.  To understand what it means, we start by asking what it doesn’t mean. I think we all agree that husbands do not literally become Christ. Husbands  do not literally atone for their wives’ sin. Husbands  are not the voice of God to their wives.  Husbands do not have absolute authority over their wives’ lives. How do we know this? Because of clear passages elsewhere. So, attributing the roles of prophet, priest and king to husband is not accurate.” <http://kbonikowsky.wordpress.com/2011/03/24/women-in-the-text-do-women-need-another-priest/>

As a response on the blog *Strive to the Center* describes, the use of this Old Testament titles/offices would be palatable if they went in both directions:

As priest he is the ‘spiritual leader’ of his wife for prayer and worship. As prophet the husband hears from God (presumably tells his wife what God said), establishes doctrine for his home (again apparently informing the wife of what she is to believe) and confronts her sin. Now, all of these things would be fine IF THIS WERE A TWO-WAY STREET between believers. But it isn’t. Information flows one way, putting the husband as spiritual mediator between God and the wife. Finally, as king, I will quote him again. “He is to lead his wife. He is her provider. He is her protector. He is to know and apply the law of God in the home. A husband is to represent his wife and his family in the culture.” There it is again: he is to lead her, something, as you say, that God never once commanded. He applies the law of God in the home. Does that mean he also punishes the wife for infractions of that law? He represents her in the culture. Do we take the vote away from women to fulfill this?”

<http://strivetoenter.com/wim/2009/08/14/ask-john-piper-do-some-complementarians-deny-women-opportunities/#comment-6938>

"Power corrupts, and **absolute power corrupts absolutely**” (Lord Acton)

Anything—even “holy” ideas—that gives anyone too large a sphere of power over another can contribute to making a person vulnerable to violence, abuse, dehumanization, and being treated like a commodity to be used. You see this graphically in prostitution and pornography where with the exchange of money a john feels entitled to do whatever he wants to a girl or woman who in the majority of cases is economically vulnerable and often has had sexual abuse in her childhood. There have been a whole host of stories in the news over the past few years of sexual abuse scandals, not just in the Catholic Church but also evangelical Christian organizations, churches, and colleges (<http://www.nyunews.com/2014/03/28/rawley-13/>, <http://prospect.org/article/next-christian-sex-abuse-scandal>).

While most good Christians condemn violence, there is evidence that highly patriarchal subcultures are in fact breeding grounds and magnets for men who are drawn to ideas that advocate corporal punishment and a domineering attitude toward women. **See this watch list** (<https://sites.google.com/site/christianpatriarchialwatchlist/the-watch-list>) **to get a glimpse into all of the spiritual/sexual abuse scandals in this movement.** The connection I am making between violence and patriarchy I know may be offensive to some, and I do not mean to suggest that everyone who holds these ideas will be violent. But for the sake of our daughters, please keep an open mind/heart and read on.

Calls for men to “step up” and resume their “rightful place” as patriarchs of the family, the church, and society are laced throughout parenting, marriage, men’s ministries, and church governance advice. If you are in the Christian subculture, keep your eye out for it in both parenting and marriage curricula. It is not surprising that these patriarchal resources advocate grooming girls from a young age to learn how to subordinate their wills to male authority by revering their father as a Godlike figure in the home.

I first stumbled upon this patriarchal, disempowering mindset of raising daughters (and sons) when I went onto the Family Life Today website to look for material for a mother/daughter weekend. I was shocked, to say the least, at what I found. There was literally nothingempowering on the whole site, and most of the articles—even under the “raising girls” heading—were about raising boys to “step up” to become men who will be the “patriarchs” one day of their families. As Rev. Voddie Baucham describes all over the pages of Family Life Today, a father’s job is to find and groom a future son-in-law who will be a “patriarch” who will lead her, a “prophet” who will instruct her, a “priest” who will represent her before God, a “king/patriarch,” and a “discipler” who will guide her spiritual life. ([http://familylifetoday.com/program/ understanding-the-four-p-s-2/](http://familylifetoday.com/program/understanding-the-four-p-s-2/))

How do these neo-patriarchal religious codes of male mastery and female submission impact a young person’s emerging human development, both spiritually and sexually, and how do they impact how they will come to relate to the opposite gender? Dare I say that, like pornography, religious patriarchy in its own way can be seen as a “public health threat” to our daughters and to our sons? I know that sounds extreme, but I have read too many stories of domestic violence and child abuse to know that even well-meaning, benevolent ideas can have a not-so-benevolent effect. According to Paulo Fuller, a minister and director of the Renew Foundation, a ministry working to help women and girls escape the sex trade in the Philippines, even well-intended patriarchal religious norms can erode a girl’s confidence and self-governance and groom her for sexual exploitation: "Many of the girls who wind up in the sex trade come from patriarchal homes " (*No Will of My Own: How Patriarchy Smothers Female Dignity & Personhood*, Ekklesia Press, 2011, p. 15).

What kind of gender norms do boys and girls absorb growing up in such authoritarian, patriarchal family structures? As shocking as this may sound to contemporary ears, brothers are also considered preeminent in the family, and girls are expected to subordinate their wills to their brothers and do the lion’s share of household work while their brothers play and go to school. This makes girls vulnerable in their own homes to being treated as domestic servants and targets of sexual advances by brothers, cousins, fathers, and uncles. You know—all those “patriarchs” and future “patriarchs” who come to think of themselves as having some God-ordained presumption of power/privilege/preeminence over females’ bodies to do to them what they please.

Unlike many places around the globe where “it’s a girl” is greeted with mourning, most of us here are thrilled at the birth of a daughter. It is a given that they will go to school and have some semblance of a future they can chart for themselves. But in many parts of the world, to be a girl is to be less wanted, less valued, and have less time to play than boys. And from an early age, girls are seen simply as future wives who will not grow up to be self-governing but will remain under the governorship of a father and then a husband.

Yet even here, even in our country where we value equality so highly, the standard of what it means to be human—to be a person—is still to be male. Half of the world will grow up to menstruate, for example, but as girls cross into adolescence, there is still a stigma—even a taboo—attached to everything related to the female reproductive anatomy. Every day, approximately 800 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth (World Health Organization Fact Sheet), and in many parts of the world there is a stigma associated with seeing a doctor for prenatal care.

This is simply not okay! In the year 2014, to be female is still to be a marginalized other. If you have watched the films *Girl Rising* or *Half the Sky,* you may have gotten a glimpse into the human rights violations and the startling lack of human agency that girls experience routinely around the world. When a group is devalued as “lesser than” or “other” or not conforming to the “norm”, they are made vulnerable to mistreatment and violence. This has been seen again and again throughout human history. The plain and simple reality is that, for centuries, to be born female was to enter into a low social “caste” where one was not seen as a full person but rather as a commodity to be owned, protected, worked, traded, and passed from one “patriarch” to another. If you watch the news today or if you have traveled around the world, it is not an overstatement to say that this ancient social norm is alive and well in our world to an extent that most of us cannot even begin to fathom.

What are the forces in our world that persist—after over 250 years of a women’s movement and a global shift to a framework of dignity and rights for all—to make it so treacherous for a baby to be born female?

I feel the divine presence emanating from my daughter. She came into the world with a divine light around her. I have seen this at every stage of her development. She has been created for dominion—shared power to use her gifts and talents to steward our planet. Me too, but I can see it more easily in her. Sadly, though, this basic spiritual and biological ontological fact has been cruelly obliterated by our world and by the very traditions of faith that hold this cherished spiritual truth. Somewhere along the way—dating back to the Hammurabi Code (c. 1772 BCE), which first structured females as legal property—the human culture absorbed the misogynist view of females as an inferior, subordinate lot meant to be ruled. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) captures the prevailing view of females as equivalent to slavery:

* "The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled."
* "A proper wife should be as obedient as a slave."

* "The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness."

Our collective social norms are still steeped in this debasing view of femaleness. In my travels and social justice work, I have seen and heard again and again how authoritarian family codes continue to be around the world and how this breeds violence within the home—Christian homes included. The misogynist beliefs of the great “fathers of the faith,” century after century, revealed their own cultural and personal biases that viewed femaleness as:

* **Shameful—**“Every woman should be filled with shame by the thought that she is a woman … the consciousness of their own nature must evoke feelings of shame” (Clement of Alexandria, theologian and Greek father, 2nd century).
* **Evil—**“Woman is the root of all evil” (Jerome, priest, theologian, doctor of the church and Latin father, 4th-5th century).
* **Inferior—**“God maintained the order of each sex by dividing the business of life into two parts, and assigned the more necessary and beneficial aspects to the man and the less important, inferior matter to the woman” (Clement of Alexandria, theologian and Greek father, 2nd century).
* **Weak, foolish, and immoral**—“[Women are] weake, fraile, impatient, feeble, and foolish” (John Knox, Scottish clergyman and Protestant reformer, 16th century); “… Yet it pleased the Lord, by means of those weak and contemptible vessels, to give display of his power” (John Calvin, French theologian, pastor, and Protestant reformer, 16th century).
* **Not herself made in the image of God—** “… the woman together with her husband is the image of God, so that that whole substance may be one image; but when she is referred separately to her quality of help-meet, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one” (Augustine, bishop of Hippo, doctor of the church and Latin father, 4th century).
* **Defined to a limited, subservient role—**“The word and works of God is quite clear, that women were made either to be wives or prostitutes” (Martin Luther, German Protestant reformer, 16th century).

This last quote says it all: the personhood of females is not intrinsic, not meant to be freely exercised and expressed, but rather is defined as conforming to this binary role. Needless to say, this “reformer’s” views on the nature of that role are not exactly honoring of the full range of human giftedness:

Men have broad and large chests, and small narrow hips, and more understanding than women, who have but small and narrow breasts, and broad hips, to the end they should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children (Martin Luther, *Table Talk*).

It is beyond the scope here to fully trace this, but in both common law and civil law throughout world history, husbands were seen as having the right—even the duty, like a master over a slave—to use physical force to impose their authority. For example, Commentaries on the Laws of England refers to an ancient law that permitted “domestic chastisement”:

The husband ... by the old law, might give his wife moderate correction. For, as he is to answer for her misbehaviour, the law thought it reasonable to entrust him with this power of restraining her, by domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his apprentices or children ... for whom the master or parent is also liable in some cases to answer. But this power of correction was confined within reasonable bounds and the husband was prohibited from using any violence to his wife [other than as lawfully and reasonably pertains to the husband for the rule and correction of his wife. ...

In addition to “common law,” which made its way into formal jurisprudence, gender proverbs exist within European lore. Do you notice any common themes?

* "A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more they are beaten, the better they'll be" (England).
* “To keep your wife on the rails, beat her­—and if she goes off the rails, beat her” (Puerto Rico, Spain).

* “Women, like gongs, should be beaten regularly” (United States, England).

* “For the man who beats his wife, God improves the food” (Russia).

“A bad woman and a good woman both need the rod” (Argentina, Spain).

* “Clubbing produces virtuous wives” (China).
* “The nails of a cart and the head of a woman: they work only when they are hit hard” (India).

See more at: <http://www.intrahealth.org/blog/power-proverbs#.U3n5Hyihgtw>

Ancient “wisdom” like this is shocking to our contemporary sensibilities but reminds us of the deeply embedded ideological and spiritual roots of our gender-based humanitarian ills. In the context of human history, it still is a rather recent notion that “domestic violence” (still not even a concept in many places) is in fact a crime and not just a normal part of a husband’s way of enforcing his “authority” over his wife—who for much of human history was treated as little more than a slave in her own household.

If you are engaged in the anti-trafficking movement, it doesn’t take much to see the gendered face of this problem: Of the 20-30 million estimated enslaved peoples around the world, over 80 percent are female, and roughly half of these are girls (https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-human-trafficking). Trafficking today, sometimes called “modern day slavery,” properly understood, is a whole constellation of human rights violations that, in various ways, obliterate the human agency and will of females. At one end of the continuum are girls in brothels transacted for profit and sexual exploitation. At the other end is a whole collection of less visible, socially sanctioned ideas/practices that treat girls as lower-status human beings, as resources to be exploited, owned, and transacted. It is no accident that of the roughly 150 million bonded child slaves ages 5-14 around the world, over 90 percent are girls. (http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\_child\_labour.html)

In my work in gender-lens philanthropy, I have come face to face with the grim gendered realities of our world and have ceased to be shocked by either the egregious or subtle ways in which the full personhood of female human beings is still so compromised in our world. Ancient proverbs like those cited above persist everywhere in our world and reveal a deeply entrenched ontological view of females as debased and inferior to males: (“Boys’ souls are like gold, girls are like cloth which decay in the ground” is a proverb that is still quoted in Cambodia.) Like many who are working to address the deeper spiritual roots of our world’s gender-based social ills, the more I engage in one place, in one problem, the more I see that it is linked to another problem, in another place, and functions as part of a global system, not as an isolated problem to be dealt with in a vacuum.

The simple reality is that patriarchal social and religious norms that prop up male preeminence/mastery and female shame/subjugation still govern our de facto gender norms and exist as a global phenomenon. Everything you see in that religion or culture “over there” exists right here. A “mythic cloud” of enslaving and diminishing ideas and practices surrounds the girl child, right from the womb, bit by bit, tradition by tradition, thought by thought, compromising her full human equality/agency, robbing her of her childhood, her innocence, her sexual confidence, and setting her on an uphill path of being less wanted, less nourished, less safe, less educated, less healthy, overworked in her own home, dehumanized as a sexual object, exploited, rented, sold, married off as a child, and—last but not least—less free. As abolitionist/suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) so timelessly spoke, “The prolonged slavery of [females] is the darkest page in human history.”

**The world that awaits the girl child**

Are you as appalled as I am by the shocking current events related to gender pervading the news? Legislative proposals to lower the legal age of marriage to 9, girls being forced to marry their rapists, young women gang-raped on public transportation and on college campuses, rape as a weapon of war, and sexual assault that is swept under the carpet of our churches, ministries, Christian colleges, even our own military, which is supposed to protect and enforce our laws. As I am writing this, IS (formerly ISIS) is wreaking terror in the Arab world—strong-arming girls and women into staying in their houses and beheading children. Story after story like this fills the media, making one wonder what century we live in.

Girls have it pretty good here. Girls attend school at the same rate as boys. Thanks to Title IX and our women's movement, girls have access to sports and medical care, and the door is wide open for them to pursue a range of careers. Most of us delight in having girls and try our hardest to enrich their lives and give them every opportunity we give to our boys.

Yet the world that awaits the girl child is still highly problematic, even here. In America, at least 20 percent of women have been sexually abused as children. Girls are sexually abused at three times the rate of boys. Most of their abusers are trusted adults in their lives. (In fact, in 60 percent of cases the abuser is the girl's father or a father figure.) Incest comprises one-third to one-half of all sexual abuse of girls. Pertinent to our topic here, studies show that higher levels of abuse of girls are found in highly patriarchal, strict religious families where a mindset of male rule persists: “I am the head of the house and my will is God's will.” There are many drivers of a man's proclivity to violence, but in the case of sexual abuse, what both victims and therapists describe again and again is a mindset of male entitlement to using vulnerable females—children or economically and emotionally vulnerable women—to meet their sex and power needs. Globally, roughly one in three of the 160,000 girls born into the world every day will go on to be victims of gender-based violence. As described by a website called “Crisis Connection: The Sexual Abuse of Girls, There is Never an Excuse,” the sexual abuse of girls knows no religious or cultural bounds:

The statistics concerning the sexual abuse of girls are horrifying, yet the statistics don’t even begin to tell the whole story. Girls are sexually abused at much higher rates than boys by family members, acquaintances, and strangers alike. There doesn’t appear to be any difference what cultural heritage, economic or religious group the girl child comes from, the rates of abuse are staggering. The theory of “male entitlement” is believed to be particularly harmful for girls. <http://www.crisisconnectioninc.org/sexualassault/sexual_abuse_of_girls.htm>

There are some clear villains we can go after—religious terrorists, pedophiles, heartless “masters” who exploit children for profit and prey on their vulnerability—but if we are honest, the villain is not a person or group, a religion or culture, but rather a global mindset that continues in various ways to encourage in males a greater latitude and presumption to power over females, which makes them/us vulnerable to a host of human rights violations. Yes, it may be more extreme in that place over there, but we live in a small, interconnected world where, for good or for ill, we all influence one another. We have more in common in our gender problems and our gender solutions than we know.

A woman I’ve gotten to know recently, Molly Melching, the founder/executive director of the human rights organization Tostan, describes how Muslims in her country of residence, Senegal, tend to judge Americans by the sexual mores they see in American movies and logically deduce that Americans are misogynists who don't respect women. Christians here likewise judge Muslims by the extremists we hear about on the news who force women to cover from head to toe and girls to undergo female genital cutting, and we logically deduce that Arabs are misogynists. We all can point fingers and say your patriarchy is worse than mine but from a neutral sociological viewpoint our collective gender norms exist as one larger continuum of ideas and social practices that erode the full personhood of females.

We’ve come a long way as females. Most of us affirm (at least in the abstract) the equality of males and females, yet our lived social norms behind closed doors—the humanitarian facts on the ground that are now being called “gendercide”— belie these ideals and reveal a different code of conduct. We are shocked by egregious forms of trading of females (for example, the Nigerian school girls kidnapped to be sold as child brides) and sex trafficking, where a family will rent or sell their daughter for household income. But these incidents do not spring out of thin air. They are rooted in sanctioned patriarchal social norms (often wrapped in religion) that lie right beneath the surface of these shocking events, and they involve conditioning girls to subordinate their wills to their brothers, their fathers, and other men who seek to take advantage of their subservience.

But you may be thinking, “That happens in Africa or Southeast Asia. Our girls here aren't so compliant and disempowered.” I have to admit, there is still some self-protective mechanism within me that tries to externalize the problem as something “over there,” not here where my daughter and her friends play happily by a lake in the Adirondacks. They are strong and will not be treated as sexual commodities or let their personhood be eroded in any way, I tell myself.

I wish I could put my rose-colored glasses back on and feel like our girls live in a world that has no need for feminism. Yet I know too much. The “facts on the ground” (see http://becauseiamagirl.ca/factsandfigures) show us that around the world girls too often eat least and last and have their childhood cut short by violence, overwork, pregnancy, and a subhuman, diminished view of their personhood. The challenges to girls are different everywhere, yet fundamentally the same. Everywhere, there are still external "rules" that continue to give men way too much sexual latitude and power to act with impunity while the stigma and shame attach to female victims. Everywhere, there continue to be cultural and religious mores that condition girls to subordinate their own wills and accept a lesser than submissive status in society as their lot.

Change is hard, but somehow with gender norms change is extra slow. Change is happening, but counterforces are flaring up everywhere. The call of fundamentalist voices around the world for a return to “traditional family values” sounds on one level like a defense against forces in our world that sexualize girls too early and turn them into sex objects such as we see in pornography. But all too often the breaking of the human willthat happens to girls in patriarchal cultures and religions contributes to their vulnerability to being led by an uncle into a room where he can have his way with her, to being led by an older boy who showers her with attention only to offer her sexual services to other men to line his own pockets, or to being ledby a family member to meet with a middleman (or woman) who will find her “employment” in another city or country to help send her brothers to school and put food on the table.

The grooming of girls to be submissive and not exercise their own human will is a massive force in our world which contributes to their sexual vulnerability. As Hillary McFarland, author of *Quivering Daughters: Hope and Healing for the Daughters of Patriarchy* (Darklight Press, 2010), describes: “In almost every religion around the world, the hearts, souls, and bodies of women [and girls] are sacrificed on the altar of fundamentalism.”

And yes, even here. Any of our girls could become one of these grim statistics. No one sets out to raise a daughter who will fall prey to a pimp in a mall or give blowjobs to boys at bar mitzvahs to be cool. No mother would ever imagine that leaving her daughter alone with her father is as risky as statistics suggest. Why is it so hard to change these harmful social norms that continue to reenact the enslaving, objectifying gender patterns of the ancient world?

We can try to protect our girls and our boys from the warping effects of misogyny, but its presence is so deeply rooted in our collective social norms that it can feel like a never-ending whack-a-mole game: You quash it here, and it pops up over there. As Mimi Haddad of Christians for Biblical Equality says, “Patriarchy is like a massive global mold with invisible roots growing under the ground and with tentacles which pop up in unlikely places.”

Voice after voice is declaring the humanitarian effects of patriarchy to be our generation’s chief moral and spiritual struggle:

“The world’s discrimination and violence against women and girls is the most serious, pervasive, and ignored violation of basic human rights” (Former President Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power).*

“More girls were killed in the last 50 years, precisely because they were girls, than men killed in all the wars in the 20th century. More girls are killed in this routine gendercide in any one decade than people were slaughtered in all the genocides of the 20th century. …” ([Nicholas D. Kristof](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/60441.nicholas_d_kristof) & Sheryl WuDunn, [Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/6444203)*).*

“In the nineteenth century, the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world” (Ibid).

This humanitarian pandemic is not caused by a natural disaster outside of our control. Like our environmental crisis, it has been simmering in our collective pot for centuries and is caused by us and the ideas and attitudes that lurk in our minds and hearts. As Gail Dines states: “Misogyny is not something created out of thin air, to be caught much like a cold, that drives those infected to commit horrendous acts of violence. It is an ideology produced and disseminated by social and cultural institutions that work seamlessly together to create a social reality that normalizes, legitimizes, and glorifies violence against women.”

Ideas can change and have changed. Our minds are elastic, as are our social norms. As people of faith, we have been part of perpetuating a view of gender as a master/slave, superior/inferior construct. Thus we have a big role to play today in addressing the spiritual roots of our gender-based humanitarian crisis. In her book *The Cross and Gendercide: A Theological Response to Global Violence against Women and Girls,* Elizabeth Gerhardt highlights the spiritual nature of the problem this way:

Statistics reveal only a small part of the story of women and girls. Each survivor of violence has her own story of how acts of violation shattered her life and the life of her family. Pain and shame have ripped apart both the bodies and psyches of these women and girls along with their families and communities. However, the numbers are also part of this story for they reveal the underlying causes of violence, including domination, misogyny and objectification of females. They also point to the grave sin of gendercide, which needs to be addressed by the *whole* of the church as a confessional issue rather than as a moral and legal issue, which only marginalizes the problem.

Social norms are hard to change. We all want to belong. We all want to fit in. None of us really wants to be a “radical” who exists at the margins of society. If the "tribe" you are born into tells you “Be a good woman; you must sit in the back of the church; you must walk behind your husband with a bowed head; you must sit on the floor,” it can be hard to listen in to one’s soul and say “This is not the way things should be.”If the “tribe” you are born into says “All good girls get married before they are 12; all girls undergo female genital cutting,” it is very hard for a girl and her mother to defy these social norms. If the "tribe" you are in tells you that all the girls in school listen to songs with lyrics that describe females as whores and other vile, servile words, it requires great fortitude to say "No, this is not acceptable.”

**Masculine as sovereign?**

This has not exactly been lighthearted summer reading. The disturbing dots I have connected paint a picture of a highly tenuous world that continues to undermine the full God-given personhood of females. The link I am suggesting between the spiritual and the pornographic is one that most Christians cannot easily stomach but is one that survivors of prostitution and incest knew very well. Anything that erodes a girl’s confidence and props up a man or a boy as sovereign—whether it be a pastor, her father, an uncle, a brother, a boyfriend, a pimp, or a john—makes her vulnerable to being “led” into the hands of one form of exploitation after another.

It is an unsavory notion to contemplate, but the messages of submission that girls and women are inculcated with in our churches and religious institutions are part of the dangerous web that hovers around girls all over the world and makes them vulnerable to being wooed and degraded as a sexual object to be owned and trafficked by a less-than-benevolent "patriarch." My daughter and her friends on the beach are at the same age that many girls are asked to “submit” to the sexual advances of their fathers/father-figures. This is the same age at which kids nowadays have their first encounter with pornography online. And, as we discussed earlier, the very first images they will see are not “soft porn” but are the equivalent of what one used to have to walk way into the back of the sex shop to get: hardcore, violent pornography that graphically depicts the sexual and spiritual submission/enslavement of females that our church fathers and “great” philosophers throughout history have spoken of as “God’s design.”

The day after the plastic doll incident, my father encouraged me to go hear the speaker at the Christian camp across the lake who happened to be a popular African American speaker on the board of the campus ministry that my sister and I, lots of our friends, and my husband were part of (Cru, formerly Campus Crusade). As I tend to do, I went online to survey his gender posture. Sure enough, article after article he has written appeared on Cru’s Family Life Today website, extolling the virtues of male “headship”/female “submission.” Not surprisingly, he is a member of The Gospel Coalition Council (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/council>), which is one of the chief proponents of this leadership model that is calling men in their families and churches to “step up” and become fear-inspiring, powerful Old Testament-like patriarchs. Honestly, I thought to myself, which is worse? A middle-aged pervert burning dolls’ faces in his sex shack or charismatic “men of God” speaking with such self-appointed authority and sanctimoniously giving themselves such consolidated power over their wives and the women and girls in their churches? Why are these men so obsessed with this preeminent masculinity and so lacking in imagination to consider reading the Bible and gender relations through anything but a lord, master, king construct? We are not talking about an army here. We are talking about an intimate relationship. And look at the exemplar of our faith we are supposed to be following and emulating: the humble Jesus who in both word and deed eschewed cultural power-based stratifications and simply related human-to-human with those on both the top and the bottom of the social ladders of his day.

And in this level way of relating, he showed us our highest and best human selves. And he showed us the face of God. Social hierarchies of master/slave, king/subject, husband-as-ruler /wife-as-subordinate have crept into human society over the centuries, and they appear throughout the Biblical text, but is this what we want to hold as our gender ideal today? Is this Old Covenant way of relating really what we want to be promoting in this New World we live in that has shifted to a shared view of human rights/equality (which most of us regard as a positive development) and also in this New Covenant of freedom and justice and living by the Spirit that we as Christians believe Christ ushered in?

I don’t want to be guilty of cherry-picking verses, but do we really want to go back to the “yoke of slavery” of Biblical times where men ruled and where women were, very literally, little more than serfs in their own homes? Do we as Christians really want to be forever fighting yesterday’s gender battles? All these ideas of male preeminence are in fact the ideas which have been used in every culture around the world, our own included, to deny women basic civil rights, ie, the right to vote, own/inherit property, have legal custody of children, etc., etc. As Christians do we really want to set ourselves against the current of change that is moving toward a more level relational and social structure where girls and boys grow up to presume equal footing in society? Not that they are exactly the same, but simply that the world will not treat those differences as a reason to limit or circumscribe one and elevate the other.

Do we not want this spirit of freedom that Jesus ushered in which transcended and began to transform the social norms of his day to infuse our own gender relationships? Do we want our girls to presume that this freedom Christ offers also applies to them and their human journey?

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free… There is no longer Jew or Gentile, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus…” (Gal. 3:28)

Would this Jesus who inspired this ethic of *the first shall be last, the last shall be first, the mountains bowed down, the valleys lifted up* be out there with this gang of church-planters and “family discipleship” advocates calling men to “step up and resume their rightful place” as patriarchs, prophets, priests, kings, and disciplersof docile flocks and submissive wives? Would this Jesus want our girls to be raised to start sublimating their own human wills and learning to be submissive to patriarchy? As a mother, I cannot help but bring the macro of our world down to the micro: What kind of world do I want for my daughter?

As I began perusing the Family Life Today website while preparing for a mother/daughter weekend, I was stunned to find article after article laced with all these highly authoritarian metaphors of masculinity and all these very archaic references to raising girls to be “princesses”. Really, really, really? This was my introduction to the prophet/priest/king “triperspectival” ideology which I have come to discover is not just popular in “fringe” groups but is infiltrating hip new church plants and family/marriage ministries across the country. I have been in the evangelical world for a long time and I have to say that I have never, until recently, heard such an enthusiastically patriarchal tone. If you are concerned about the degree to which hardcore porn has become “mainstream” and the effects this is having on gender relationships, you should be equally concerned about the proliferation of patriarchy. Anything that flattens femaleness and gender dynamics to a king/subject grid is harmful to all of our personhoods. In a world where violence against girls and women is so prevalent and so normalized, these ideas—just the ideas themselves—are a human rights violation in the making!

I admit, I have become something of an evangelical gender “watchdog”, and if you examine this website and others like it you see this quasi-deification of men and husbands hovering very close to the notion that the wife relates to God through her husband/priest. Last I checked, my soul relates directly to God, and Christ is my only priest. What saddens me is that the campus ministry behind Family Life Today has moved over the years to eliminate all of its gender ceilings, with men and women exercising their gifts at all levels of the organization, but when it comes to our most intimate relationships, the organization—which is global—decidedly promotes a top-down, king-like place of preeminence for men. I know people who work for this organization in Kazakhstan, where my friend says women have it really rough, and my heart breaks to think of women who have been beaten down in their marriage coming to a marriage conference where they hear teachings from the Bible that portray the husband as so Godlike.

In some organizations—such as Christian Union, an organization my husband and I helped to fund at our alma mater—this view of male rule/kingship in the family also extends to the personnel structure where, in order to honor “male headship,” only men are allowed to occupy senior-level staff positions. In a day and age when most women college students presume that the doors of life are open to them, this is nothing short of shocking. Of course most of the organizations do not overtly advertise these patriarchal rules of governance; you have to peer inside and dig around like a sleuth. Even free of physical violence, the notion of a husband being the presumed wise spiritual “discipler” and a woman not being eligible for spiritual leadership does create soul bruisesin a young woman’s human development and makes her vulnerable to a dangerous power imbalance in her most intimate relationships.

Only one or two websites I have visited suggest that “corporal punishment” is part of a husband’s “disciplining” of his wife, but they all seem to want the wife to look up to the husband from a lower position with great respect, as would a subject to a preeminentking or master. From what I have gleaned from pornography/ prostitution experts, johns demand such a posture of “honor” and preeminence from their “providers,” who are made to call them “master” and “sir” while they, in turn, call them by the debased words we saw all over that sex shack on the lake: *bitch, slut, stupid whore* (and other grim words I won’t mention here. Here is a brief excerpt from “Daring to Discipline,” an interview that appeared on the series *Anchoring Your Family* with Steve Farrar. ). Notice that what they are advocating is a return to the good old days when a man walked into the house with a sense of “omniscience,” and people quaked in fear. ([http://wwwfamilylife.com/audio/topics/ parenting/foundations/spiritual-development/anchoring-your-family-in-christ/20120 726-deciding-to-discipline#.U6BX6iiUItw](http://www.familylife.com/audio/topics/parenting/foundations/spiritual-development/anchoring-your-family-in-christ/20120726-deciding-to-discipline#.U6BX6iiUItw))

**Bob:** I think you’re dead on to this, Steve. Mary Ann and I were walking—I’ll never forget—walking down the street together in San Antonio a few years back. I said to her, “I’m not sure our children fear me, and I think that’s probably not right. I think they probably should.” She looked at me like, “What are you talking about?” We had this discussion; but here’s where it turned. I said, “Our children will learn to fear and respect me when they see you, as my wife, showing them how to do that.”

Now, I wasn’t trying to whip her into some submissive state, but I really do think this principle is profound. I think that moms—I think that wives need to understand that what they model for their children, by talking honorably about their father, “You need to be careful around your dad and be respectful of your dad. Don’t talk that way to your father.” Then, modeling it in the way they relate, in front of the children, to Dad. If they are contradictory, if they are provoking their father, in front of them, they are setting their kids up to not have any fear of Dad.

**Steve:** You’re talking about an attitude of respect that a wife conveys and that kids pick up on.

**Bob:** I was thinking back to the old movies. You remember the old movie where there would be a family of eight kids, and Dad was this patriarch. Mom would say, “Shhh! Dad’s coming home. Shhh!” She’d be there, trying to get everything right for Dad. You remember—in *Mary Poppins*—when the dad gets home from the bank, and they are getting the house all cleaned up because, “Dad’s coming home, and he likes things—he wants the paper there. He wants it just …

I know these men in the above interview mean well, but in the violent world we live in, where in many places and subcultures “domestic violence” is still not seen as a crime (see [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/11/international/africa/11women.html ?page wanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/11/international/africa/11women.html?pagewanted=all) for a window into what this looks like in Africa) but as “domestic discipline,” these ideas are nothing short of toxic. It is hard to fathom this, but in many places, like the Solomon Islands, which is almost exclusively Christian, a majority of men and even women consider being beaten by the husband as a normal and acceptable part of his role as “head of the family.” A recent World Bank study found that 64 percent of women report being victims of marital violence and—shockingly—roughly 70 percent of women expressed “under certain circumstances that husbands beating their wives is acceptable” (Andrew Mason, report lead author, World Bank, http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/pacific/radio/onairhighlights/solomon-islands-worst-country-for-sexual-violence-against-women-world-bank). A similar study conducted by UNICEF found that a staggering 90 percent of wives in Afghanistan and Jordan, 87 percent in Mali, 86 percent in Guinea and Timor Leste, 81 percent in Laos, and 80 percent in the Central African Republic believe that a husband “is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances (Ch. 13, Spouse Abuse, A Call to Action, p. 143).

What studies like these show is how patriarchal gender norms can get so deeply entrenched that even women become complicit in our own disempowerment and accept harmful and debasing social practices as normal. Whether we are looking at domestic “discipline,” female genital cutting, or debasing “pornified” songs and images that depict girls and women as enjoying violence and utter debasement, we can see the lingering impact of centuries-old patriarchal social norms that viewed femaleness as a shameful and inferior subhuman category.

The fact is that much of the physical abuse of girls and women around the world is rooted in some sort of tradition or idea, often laced in religion. The sanction of male power/authority over females is an unsavory topic but one we need to shine a light on if we truly want to rid our world of slavery (which is 80 percent-plus female) and stem the violence against girls and women.

The spiritual and the pornographic do go hand in hand. One is more benevolent (“Wife, submit to your prophet/priest/king/discipler”), the other shamelessly exploitative and humiliating (“Bow down, bitches”), but each in its own language erodes the full dominion andpersonhood of females as image-bearers of God meant to share in dignity and live in mutuality rather than subjugation. The male preeminent language in our churches and parachurch organizations—and, similarly, on the walls of that sex shack on the lake and strewn across the Internet—is eerily similar in tone and equally toxic to human development.

Sexuality and spirituality unfold in tandem in a child's development.  Just as hardcore pornography disfigures our daughters' and our sons' emerging human sexuality, so too does hardcore Christian patriarchy disfigure their emerging spirituality.  The spiritual and the sexual are flip sides of the same coin of personhood.  As parents, we need to keep vigilant on both these fronts to preserve and protect the divine image of God, which dwells so beautifully and powerfully in both our daughters and our sons. We need to be courageous in challenging the idea that this is just the way things are, and to confront social norms that turn the beauty and mystery of spirituality/sexuality into anything that smacks of a power hierarchy contrary to the heart of God.

**Shared dominion as image-bearers of God**

Most Christians who espouse “complementarian”/patriarchal gender roles, still assert that males and females are “equal” in value and worth but that they have different “roles,” with men having a role of “dominion” and women a role of “submission.” There is a whole continuum of how these ideas are expressed in our churches and parachurch ministries, but at their core they all send the messages to our daughters that to be a female, to grow up to be a “good woman” who is abides by the Bible, means that you will in some form or fashion accept some variant of “male rule” in your personal relationships.

**Fathers of daughters**, what do you want for your girl children? Do you want them to grow up waiting to be “led” by a man? Do you want your daughter to end up marrying (or being in a physical relationship with) a man who will expect her to treat him as a lord and king? Or do you want your daughter to grow up to ownher own body and soul?

**Mothers of sons**, what do you want for your boy children? Do you want your son to grow up to presume that to be male is to be sovereign? Or do you want your boys to grow up to treat their future wife or girlfriend as a partner in a reciprocal, mutual relationship?

Do we want our girls and our boys to grow up to share “dominion” in society—which is the vision of contemporary society based on shared human rights and full participation in society for males and females—or one based on the patriarchal social structure of the past?

Ask these questions, looking to the inner “knowing” inside your own soul: What is the gender ideal hidden within creation, hidden within our own hearts? What is God’s highest and best for “Adam” and Eve”? To be king/queen of creation—with shared dignity, Godlikeness, and co-dominion (both stewardship and authority)—or to be ruler/ruled, king/subject as you see so graphically in the debasing words and images of pornographic and spiritual patriarchy?

What do we want for our world’s children as they grow into adulthood and develop relationships with the opposite gender?

I want for girls around the world what I want for my daughter: a gender-balanced world that does not treat the feminine person as something shameful, something that is owned or exists for someone else to rule over, but rather as a full human being with intrinsic, God-given human agency, dignity and power to boldly own her place in the world. In religious terms, what I want for my daughter and our world’s daughters—what anyone who has a girl they love wants—is for the world to greet them with honor and dignity as full image-bearers of God. Each little girl’s soul comes into the world with this radiant God-given dignity that knows not any social distinction that says you are lesser than another, you are not meant to spread your wings and fly and flourish as a full human being but rather are to be governed by another. No girl comes into the world with her head bowed in submission.

I end where we began, with the very simple question: How it could be that in the 21st century our world is still enslaving and debasing to the full personhood of females? Very simply, it is because of the ideas of male power and preeminence over females that continue to lurk in our minds and hearts and, most dangerously, in our religious traditions and in our sexual mores, which are becoming increasingly violent and debasing. We have fought one revolution after another to rid our world of oppressive imperial masters. We have lofty constitutions and international treaties that establish a framework of equal human rights for all. We have had a women's movement that has helped change laws to establish civil equality for women. Yet in thought, word, and deed, the fundamental equality and personhood of females is still very much up for grabs in our world.

Our ideals have changed, but our collective subconscious—our de facto common law practices—are still very much stuck in an Old World mindset. And no, this is not just in the developing world or in that “other religion” that covers its women in black cloth and makes them walk behind men. My journey on behalf of the girl child began in Cambodia, meandered around to Africa, to Haiti, and Latin America, but it has brought me full circle to my own backyard, my own Christian community, the plethora of parachurch organizations and ministries that have shaped my own female psyche.

So much good is happening in our world to empower girls and women around the world. I am proud to be part of a worldwide humanitarian movement to place the empowerment of girls and women at the center of global development. We are all part of a new phase of the women’s movement where men are helping to “mainstream” women’s human equality into all sectors of society, knowing that gender balance is good for organizational health, marital health, psychological health, and the alleviation of poverty. It is even good for the “bottom line” of corporations. But despite so much progress, there are still discouraging forces afoot in our world that continue to threaten to put girls and women “back in their place.” As mothers of humanity, and male allies, we need to stand up unswervingly for the full personhood of our daughters.

It takes courage to say “no”to a social norm that governs how we relate as male and female. It is hard for a girl growing up in a patriarchal setting to stand up and say, *No!, the God I love and believe in, and my own soul, do not tell me that I am meant for this subordinate “place” in the world.* Likewise, it can be hard for a girl who grows up learning to be submissive to patriarchy to say *No! I will not let you do that to me*. *No! I will not wait around for a man to “lead” me or represent me before God*. No thank you, I own my own life path. My Creator gave me my own soul and I, like you, am created not to be governed or have anyone mediate my relationship with God, but to live in healthy mutuality with God, self, and others. My soul, like yours, was created to be free, created to sail its own little ship, to do its own unique work in the world. I will chart my course bravely in the world and walk humbly with my Creator and with others, but with my head held high.

Let’s stand up as adults for our sons and daughters and try to clean up any patriarchal litter that crosses our path, whether in our churches and parachurch organizations or in the unsavory images which are just one click away from our kids’ hearts and minds. The work of creating a more gender-balanced world is not a “women’s issue.” It is a human issue, and it is the job of all of us as co-image bearers of God sharing this planet created to partake in the beautiful duet of masculine and feminine in our world: Adam and Eve, side-by-side, as partners. walking through the Garden that is Life, humbly with one another and with our Creator, who knows our gender struggles and understands but wants more for the human family. We are brothers and sisters in God’s family. We are not from separate planets, as some suggest. We are different, yet the same, are we not? As parents, we see the beautiful capabilities and range of qualities that both our sons and our daughters possess.

Anything that flattens out this God-given uniqueness and variety into either a plastic boy or girl doll is not God’s highest and best for the human family. Misogyny does lurk next door, in both its holy and pornographic guise. Let us not be like little sheep who accept either face as “Gospel” or as “just the way things are” but who bravely listen to our highest and best inner wisdom, our God-given human empathy, and *the larger trajectory of justice and freedom* that is the timeless Story of the Bible. Let us get back to the basics of the humble yet daring example of Christ, who modeled for us a way of being human that transcends the cultural and religious stratifications.

Let’s end on a high note with a benediction from Scripture that reminds us of our shared, fallen human proclivity, again and again, to elevate ourselves as preeminent over others. Likewise, let us abandon our penchant for trading our own freedom and reverting backward to the yoke of slavery,which is not our true nature as daughters and sons of our Creator, all “priests” in God’s economy, where all hierarchies are level. Hear these words now as a prayer for our girls and ourselves to roll up our sleeves and enlist the *highest and the best of faith* to help our world clean up its gender messes and create the gender-balanced world that we all deserve as people set free.

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

May it be so.

*Emily Nielsen Jones is a donor activist working to create a more free, more just, gender-balanced world for all human beings to thrive and flourish as human beings made in God’s image. She is presently working on a book on the role of faith in our world’s gender-based humanitarian crisis called* The Girl Child and Her Long Walk to Freedom: Faithfully Gender Balancing Our World.

*Other articles include:*

<http://sojo.net/blogs/2013/10/11/holy-angst-holding-mirror-ourselves>*,* <http://sojo.net/blogs/2012/12/18/gender-balancing-our-world-what-can-you-do>*,* <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/2011-10-20-glimpsing-eve-arise-e-newsletter>

<http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/glimpsing-adam-faith-based-family-values-and-social-change>, http://prismmagazine.org/holy-disruptions/

See Christian Patriarchal Watch List for Parents (<https://sites.google.com/site/christianpatriarchialwatchlist/raising-boys-to-be-patriarchs>) for more information about the neo-patriarchal movement referred to throughout this article that is becoming “mainstreamed” in many start-up churches and family ministries.