

Why International Women's Day is important

By [Julie Clawson](#)

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When Abby Kelley, a 19th-century abolitionist, expressed a desire to address the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society, this is how a local minister argued against her right to do so:

No woman will speak or vote where I am moderator. It is enough for a woman to rule at home... she has no business to come into this meeting and by speaking and voting lord it over men. Where woman's enticing eloquence is heard, men are incapable of right and efficient action. She beguiles and binds men by her smiles and her bland winning voice... I will not sit in a meeting where the sorcery of a woman's tongue is thrown around my heart. I will not submit to PETTICOAT GOVERNMENT. No woman shall ever lord it over me. I am Major-Domo in my own house.
[cited here](#)

When I read that quote recently, it at first of course angered me and made me grateful to not be living in those times. Then as I reflected on it, I began to think on the ways a similar message is conveyed today. The words may be different and the attitude less contemptuous and harsh (but not always), but the effect is often the same.

So, it bothers me when a passage like this is read and the first thing a guy does is make a "joke" about women needing to be taught their place. It bothers me when women desire to have a voice in conversations about social justice but are told that in advocating for women's voices they are drawing attention away from the really important issues. It bothers me when women get accused of slanderizing the body of Christ for simply sharing quotes like this. It bothers me that women are attacked and dismissed as too divisive for daring to ask men to refrain from or apologize for slanderizing women.

The irony is that this quote came from an abolitionist minister – one devoted to the work of freeing the captives and proclaiming the way of the Lord. And it is often those in the church today, even those committed to working for justice, making these responses. Such failure of the church to be the church is telling. It means hearts still need to be changed; there is still work to be done. That is why I celebrate and uphold International's Women's Day. Even the small reminders that women still need advocates, that women's voices must be heard, are helpful. There is much work left to do, but whatever can focus our attention on helping instead of ignoring or hurting is a blessing.

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