

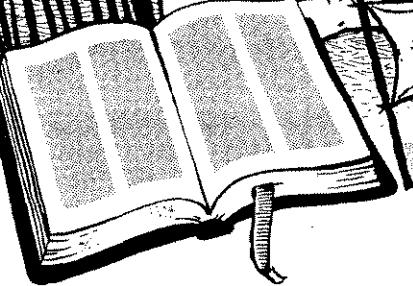
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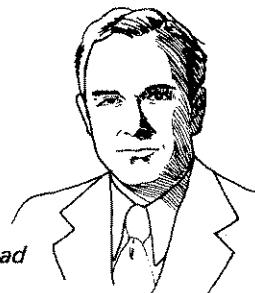
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CONFRONTATION ON WOMEN IN THE PULPIT



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Recently it was the privilege of this writer to participate on a Television program in Atlanta entitled CONFRONTATION. The program was just that — a personal confrontation with twenty-two (mostly women) members of the religious and educational community of Atlanta, all of whom favored women in the pulpit. The question asked was "Should Women Have Equal Rights in the Pulpit?"

In the beginning, we stated our conviction that women have no rights in the pulpit, this based on our belief that Jesus Christ is the head of the church and that He has not granted them such rights, but has rather forbidden the practice. From that point, the remainder of the time was spent in answering questions and comments from the invited guests.

The program raised the most common arguments that are now being made in defense of this practice. We feel that some good may come from sharing these with our readers together with our answers. The questions have been somewhat abbreviated and rearranged and the answers edited and expanded a bit to include additional material from our notes and some things said immediately following the telecast.

Question: "WHERE IN MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE OR JOHN DID JESUS FORBID A WOMAN'S PREACHING?"

Answer: No clear prohibition is to be found in the gospels. However, the gospels do not contain all of Jesus' teaching. As Jesus neared the end of His personal ministry, He Himself

said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:12-14).

In particular, Jesus said that those things pertaining to the church were to be revealed through the apostles. It was in Matthew 16:18 that Jesus promised His apostles that He would build His church. In the next verse He added: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19 N.A.S.)

It should not be surprising, then, that when the apostle Paul wrote concerning woman's role in the church he should say: "the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37). The commandment of the Lord through the apostle Paul was: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Tim. 2:12).

Question: MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN GIVE US WHAT JESUS SAID. PAUL'S WRITING IS ONLY HIS INTERPRETATION OF JESUS.

Answer: Remember that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John also wrote long after Jesus died. They, too, were dependent upon the

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Holy Spirit for their knowledge of Jesus' teaching. It is possible that Luke never saw the Lord and probable that Mark had little association with him.

Paul certified that the "gospel which is preached of me is not of man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11,12). As already noted, in a context involving the conduct of women in public assemblies, he claimed that what he wrote was the commandment of the Lord. To reject Paul's record of Christ's will is to reject Christ just as surely as rejecting the record of Mark or Luke, or even that of Matthew and John.

Question: WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S STATEMENT THAT "THERE IS NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE: FOR YE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS" (Gal. 3:28)?

Answer: This verse is not inconsistent with Paul's other writing. He is saying that there is no distinction in dignity, honor, or blessing. This does not, however, eliminate the possibility of different roles. The same verse says, "there is neither bond nor free." Yet a slave was converted and sent back to his master who was a Christian (Philemon). So bond and free still remained, but one had no advantage over the other in Christ.

Being one in Christ does not eliminate roles or functions. Husband and wife are one, yet the wife has a function (bearing children) that the husband cannot perform. Why then, can they not be one in Christ while the man fills a role (public preaching and authority) which is not allowed to the woman?

Question: ISN'T IT TRUE THAT JESUS AND PAUL LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, AND OF SEX DISCRIMINATION WHICH THE CHURCH IN THAT DAY WAS NOT IN A POSITION TO ACCEPT, BUT WHICH THROUGH THE YEARS THE SPIRIT HAS ENABLED THE CHURCH TO IMPLEMENT?

Answer: It is unthinkable that the Spirit would forbid in one passage (I Tim. 2:12) what He was laying the groundwork for in others. If the Spirit had somewhere demanded slavery, we would have to accept it as God's will and practice it regardless of our interpretation of such passages as Philemon. However, the Spirit nowhere demanded it and we are glad it is not now being practiced. But He did forbid exercise of authority by women in the church; and regardless of what we might feel that unity in Christ demands, we cannot practice what is so clearly forbidden.

Question: BY REFUSING THE TITLE REVEREND, DO YOU NOT ADMIT THAT PREACHING INVOLVES NO AUTHORITY AND THAT A WOMAN WOULD NOT, THEREFORE, BE OUT OF PLACE IN THE PULPIT?

Answer: By refusing the title *Reverend*, I am insisting that preaching carries no special honor. And in denying a woman the right to the pulpit, we are denying her no particular honor; we are simply denying her a function. Of course, the passage read in the beginning forbids her to *teach* or to usurp authority over the man and this is in the context of public services.

Question: DOES THIS NOT MEAN, THEN, THAT WOMEN ARE SECOND-CLASS CHRISTIANS?

Answer: It does not mean this at all. The pulpit and authority do not confer some degree of honor which is otherwise attainable. To suppose that this is the case is to make the mistake of the Gentiles of Jesus' day: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority over them" (Matt. 20:25).

But Jesus added, "It shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (vss. 26-27). A woman who serves in the roles God has assigned her may rise to be just as great, or even greater than the man who occupies the pulpit or even serves as an elder.

Question: DO WE NOT HAVE RECORD OF A WOMAN MINISTER BY THE NAME OF PHOEBE, IN ROMANS 16:2?

Answer: Some translations do refer to Phoebe as a minister, some as a servant, and some as a deaconess. The last mentioned is not a translation but a transliteration of the Greek word itself — *DIAKONISSA*. Regardless of how it is translated, the word is intended to suggest servitude rather than authority. It is sometimes used to designate purely unofficial service as in John 2 when *servants* handled the waterpots. Sometimes it refers to official servants of the church (Phil. 1:1) but when qualifications for these official servants are given they are masculine (I Tim. 3:8-13).

If it were granted that Phoebe was an officially appointed deaconess, there would be nothing in the word to suggest either public preaching or the exercise of authority.

Another word describing Phoebe is *succourer*. This word may be worthy of more study than has been generally given to it. Thayer says the word designates "a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources." W. E. Vine says it is used metaphorically. The masculine form was used to designate a citizen in Athens who had the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of resident aliens who were without civic rights. This description of Phoebe clearly suggests a considerable service rendered by this good woman and a role of considerable significance. Since she is commended by Paul, however, we may be sure that she had not exceeded the bounds so clearly set in his other teaching.

Question: WHAT OF JOEL'S PROPHECY THAT

YOUNG WOMEN SHALL PROPHESY?

Answer: This is quoted in Acts 2 as being fulfilled. And in New Testament times they did prophesy. But there is nothing here to say that they did it before the church. The same prophecy predicts that "young men shall see visions and old men shall dream dreams." This was not to be done in the church; why assume that the young woman's prophesying would be done in the church? In fact, it would seem that this is the thing forbidden in I Cor. 14:34.

Question: ARE YOU NOT PLACING A RESTRICTION ON THE HOLY SPIRIT TO SAY THAT HE CANNOT CALL A WOMAN TO PREACH?

Answer: We are simply recognizing the limitations which the Holy Spirit has Himself placed upon woman. And while we do not believe the Spirit is inspiring women (or men) to prophesy today as He did in New Testament times, it would still be true today that "the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet" (I Cor. 14:32).

God has designed the church for all time. It does not change with the changing moods and fads of succeeding generations.

Question: DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AND YOUR CHURCH AS REPRESENTATIVE OF JESUS CHRIST RESPONDING TO THE CHANGING NEEDS OF WOMEN AS DEFINED BY THE VARIOUS WOMEN'S GROUPS?

Answer: I believe the needs of men and women remain ever the same. God's word supplies the answers to all truly significant questions and the solution to all really significant problems. By preaching the Bible as it was given us by Christ and His apostles, we are responding to the needs of all.

Question: DID NOT JESUS APPROVE A POSITION OF AUTHORITY FOR A WOMAN WHEN HE SAID "THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH SHALL RISE UP IN JUDGMENT AND CONDEMN THEIR GENERATION"?

Answer: The thought in this passage is that her action in seeking out the wisdom of Solomon would by contrast judge the generation that had rejected Jesus, as greater than Solomon. This does not refer to personal judgment. But if it did, the verdict was not one of her making but one already set. And this involves judgment — not the church.

Question: JESUS OFTEN USED WOMEN TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS: THE SAMARITAN WOMAN WHO WENT TO TELL HER PEOPLE THAT SHE HAD FOUND THE CHRIST, THE WOMEN WHO WENT TO PROCLAIM THE RESURRECTION FIRST. HOW CAN YOU IGNORE THESE POSITIVE ACTIONS OF JESUS TO ACCEPT THE NEGATIVE NOTIONS OF PAUL?

Answer: Jesus and Paul were not in opposition to each other. There must be harmony and there is. Paul doubtless approved the action of Priscilla and Aquila when they took an eloquent preacher, Apollos, into

their home to expound "unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). In the better manuscripts Priscilla's name appears first. He stated that the faith of Timothy "dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice" (II Tim. 1:5). Here Paul was approving the action of this grandmother and mother in passing on their faith to young Timothy. Paul taught that older women should teach younger women (Titus 2:4). So Paul saw a place for women to teach which did not constitute the teaching and exercise of authority forbidden in I Tim. 2.

Each of us recognizes the difference in an informal telling of news and making a speech. Many who excel in the former would be frightened beyond measure by prospects of the second. Jesus did not choose a woman among his apostles. There is no indication that he sent out one among the seventy. What he encouraged was the informal sharing of knowledge, an action in which women often excel.

Question: PRISCILLA AND AQUILA HAD A CHURCH IN THEIR HOUSE. IF PRISCILLA COULD PREACH TO APPOLOS IN THE CHURCH IN HER HOUSE, CAN WOMEN PREACH TODAY IN A HOUSE-CHURCH?

Answer: The building is not the church. The church is people. The Bible tells us that a church met in the house of Priscilla and Aquila when they lived in Rome (Rom. 16:3-5). That may or may not have been the case in Corinth where Apollos was corrected. But even if a church did meet in their house, the church was not assembled when they corrected Apollos. They took him home from the synagogue and the implication is that there were only the three of them present. This was not the church. The church was in their house only when the people were assembled there. Their house was not the church.

When churches met in houses they were subject to the same rules as those meeting elsewhere and those rules included I Cor. 14:34 and I Tim. 2:12 as well as the rule that elders of the church should be men (Titus 1:5-6). The fact that a church met in a woman's house did not give her authority over it.

Question: YOU AND PAUL BOTH ARE JUST PREJUDICED AGAINST WOMEN!!

Answer: You place me in good company, but I deny for both of us that this is so. Paul showed great affection and high regard for a number of great women. It was he himself who wrote that "there is neither male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus." You count him prejudiced simply because he contradicts your belief that women should preach.

Could it be that some have gone to the scriptures with a prejudice that women *should* preach? Is this not evident when, to sustain their position, they reject the apostle Paul as a spokesman for Jesus and insist that they will have women preaching where there is authorization from Jesus or not?