

# Women Preachers

(The Public Preaching of Women)

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by Robert Lewis Dabney (1820-1898)

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In this day we find a rapid advancement of new ideas. The unbelievable suggestion of yesterday, entertained only by a few fanatics, and only mentioned by the conservatives to be ridiculed, is today the bold reform, and tomorrow will be the accepted practice. Novelties are so numerous and so wild and rash, that in even conservative minds the feeling of wonder is exhausted and the instinct of righteous resistance fatigued. A few years ago the preaching by women was universally condemned among all conservative denominations of Christians. Now the idea is being presented to the churches, and female preachers are knocking at our doors. We are already told that public opinion is being swayed because of the boldness and reasonableness of the claims of these woman preachers, that even our own ministers are hesitant to speak out against the movement. These remarks show that a discussion of woman's proper place in the Christian Church is greatly needed.

The arguments advanced by those who profess reverence for the Bible, yet are in favour of this unscriptural practice, are as follows:

**1. They profess to appeal to the sacred history of the prophetesses, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Anna, as proving that sex was not a sufficient barrier to the public preaching by women in the church.**

But the critical answer is, that these holy women were inspired. Their call to publicly proclaim God's Word was exceptional and supernatural. There can be no fair reasoning from the exception to the ordinary rule. Elijah, in his civic relationship to the northern kingdom of Israel, would have only been a private citizen without his prophetic calling and divine inspiration. By virtue of this we find him exercising the highest of the noble functions (1 Kings 18), administering capital punishment ordained by the law against false prophets and teachers, when he sentenced the priests of Baal and ordered their execution. But it would be a most dangerous inference to argue, therefore that any other private citizen, if moved by religious zeal, might usurp the punitive functions of the civil judge. It is equally bad logic to infer that because Deborah prophesied when the supernatural impulse of the Spirit moved her, therefore any other pious woman who feels only the impulses of ordinary grace may usurp the function of the public preacher. Besides, it must be remembered that all who claim a supernatural inspiration must stand prepared to prove it by supernatural works. If any of our preaching women will work a genuine miracle, then, and not until then, will she be entitled to stand on the ground of Deborah or Anna.

**2. A feeble attempt is made to find an implied recognition of the right of women to preach in 1 Corinthians 11:5, which say, Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered**

## **dishonors her head - it is just as though her head were shaved. [1 Corinthians 11:5]**

They desire to find here the implication that the woman who feels the call may prophesy or preach in public, as long as she does so with her head covered. But when we turn to the fourteenth chapter, verses 34 and 35, we find the same apostle strictly forbidding public preaching in the churches by women, and commanding silence. No honest reader of Scripture can infer that the Apostle meant by inference to allow the very thing, which, in the same epistle and in the same part of it, he expressly prohibits. It is a wicked thing to represent the Apostle Paul as one who contradicts himself. He did not mean, in chapter 11:5, to imply that a woman could ever preach in public, either with her hat on or off. The learned Dr. Gill, followed by many more recent expositors, believes that in this text the word prophesy only means praise, as it unquestionably does in some places (as in 1 Chronicles 25:2, the sons of Asaph and Jeduthun "prophesied with the harp"), and in many other places in the Old Testament. Thus, the worship service which the apostle is regulating here is not just public preaching, but also the sacred singing of psalms and hymns. And all that he is saying here is, that Christian women, whose privilege it is to join in this praise, must not do so with uncovered heads, in imitation of some pagan priestesses when conducting their sexual and lustful worship, but rather, Christian women must sing God's public praises with their heads covered.

We have no need to resort to this explanation, reasonable though it be. The apostle is about to prepare the way for his categorical exclusion of women from public preaching and teaching. He does so by alluding to the intrusion which had most likely begun, along with many other disorders in the Corinthian churches, and by pointing to its obvious absurdity. Thus he who stands up in public as the herald and representative of the King of Heaven must stand with an uncovered head; the honour of the Sovereign for whom he speaks demands this. But no woman can present herself in public with an uncovered head without sinning against nature and her sex. Therefore no woman can be a public herald of Christ. Thus this passage, instead of implying the authority of woman preachers, really argues the necessary exclusion of women from the pulpit.

### **3. Another argument is the plea that some Christian women possess every gift claimed by males: zeal, education, holiness, power of speech, and therefore it is asked why these are not qualifications for the ministry in the case of the woman as well as for men.**

It is advocated that it is a damaging and a cruel policy, to deprive the church of the souls that could be won and the good that might be done, which these gifts and graces might procure when exercised in the pulpit by women. Some women claim that they have felt the impulse of both the Spirit and their conscience to proclaim the gospel, which they feel, confirms God's call to the ministry. They say, that they, must obey God rather than men, and they warn us against opposing their impulses, for they say, it is possible that we will only find ourselves fighting against God. They argue that the Apostle Paul himself has told us, in the new creation of grace that, there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, slave or free. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female [Colossians 3:11, Galatians 3:28]. Our answer: if the spiritual kingdom levels all social and earthly distinctions, then its official rights should be equally distributed without any regard to persons-but it is obvious that this is just not the case.

4. Next, it is claimed that God has decided the question by setting His seal of approval on the preaching of some blessed women.

For example, they cite women such as Miss Sarah Smiley, who is commonly referred to as Friend . If the successful results of her ministry are not of God's grace, then we can reasonably discredit all the fruits of the gospel that are displayed by those whose lives have been changed by her preaching. And

so they ask triumphantly, Would God use and honour an agency which he himself has declared to be unlawful? We reply, Yes. However, this confident argument is founded on a very obvious mistake.

Surely God does not honour, but he does use agents whom he disapproves of.

Surely God does not approve of a man who preaches Christ out of envy and rivalry (Philippians 1:15), yet the Apostle Paul rejoices in the fact that whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. There are two very simple truths, which no believer disputes, destroy the whole force of their argument that the ends justify the means. One is that a truly sincere Christian may go in the wrong direction in one particular area of their life, and our heavenly Father, who is very patient, may withhold his displeasure from the misguided efforts of his child, through Christ's intercession, because, though misguided, he is his still God's blessed child. The other is, that it is one of God's clearest and most blessed prerogatives to bring good out of evil. Thus who can doubt that it is wrong for a man dead in his sins to intrude into the sacred ministry? Yet God has often employed such sinners to convert souls; not sanctioning their profane intrusion, but glorifying his own grace by overruling it.

This plea for women preachers may be also refuted by another answer.

If the rightfulness of actions is to be determined by their results, then evidently it ought to be by their complete results.

But who is competent to say whether the complete results of one of these devout blunders will be beneficial or harmful? I will grant that a zealous female may convert or confirm several souls by her preaching. But isn't it also possible that she may, by this bad example, in the future introduce an amount of confusion, disturbance, strife, error and scandal which will greatly outweigh the initial limited good? This question cannot be answered until time is ended, and it will require an omniscient mind to judge it. Thus it becomes perfectly clear that present seemingly good results cannot ever be a sufficient justification of conduct, which violates the clear Word of God. This is our only sure guide. Bad results, following a course of action not commanded in the Word, may present a sufficient, even a commanding reason for stopping. Likewise, good results following such action may suggest some probability for continuance, however when the course of action transgresses the command of Scripture then such probability becomes worthless.

Now we will look at some of the arguments against women preachers.

1. When the apostle teaches the equality of everyone in the privilege of redemption, it is obvious he is speaking in general, and not of official positions in the visible church, but of access to Christ and participation in his blessings.

Paul's exclusion of women from the pulpit is as clear and emphatic as his assertion of the universal equality in Christ. Surely he does not intend to contradict himself. Our interpretation is also established by other instances of a similar kind. The apostle expressly excludes new converts from the office of preacher and minister. Yet no one dreams that he would have made the newness of their salvation a ground of discrimination against their equal privileges in Christ. Without a doubt the apostle would have been just as ready to assert that in Christ there is neither young nor old, just as in Christ there is neither male nor female. Equally, every rational man would exclude children from the office of pastor in the church, yet no one would belittle their equal standing in Christ. Likewise, the apostle denies Christians who were guilty of polygamy from being a pastor, however sincere their repentance. If, then, the equality of these classes in Christ did not imply their fitness for public office in the church, neither does the equality of females with males in Christ imply it. So we can see that the scope of the apostle in these

verses proves that he meant nothing more, for his purpose in referring to this blessed Christian equality is to reveal that all classes of Christians have a right to church membership and that Christian love and communion ought to embrace everyone.

2. Next, we see that when the claim is made that the church must concede the ministerial function to the Christian woman who sincerely believes she has been called to it, we have a dangerous perversion of the true doctrine of calling or being called to the ministry. True, this calling is spiritual, but it is also scriptural.

The same Spirit who truly calls the minister also dictated the Holy Scriptures. When even a godly man says that **he thinks** the Spirit has called him to preach, there may be room for doubt; but there can be no doubt whatever that the Spirit calls no person to do what the word dictated by the Spirit, forbids. The Spirit cannot contradict himself. No persons are entitled to claim a specific call of the Spirit for them individually to do or teach something contrary to or in violation of the Scriptures previously given to the church, unless they can sustain their claim by some miracle. Again, the true doctrine of calling is that the man whom God has intended and qualified to preach discovers his call through the word. The word is the instrument by which the Spirit teaches him, with prayer, that he is to preach. Therefore, when a person professes to have felt this call whom the word distinctly precludes from the work, like the new Christian, the child, the repentant polygamist, or the female, even though we may ascribe her mistake to a well-intentioned zeal, then we absolutely know that she is mistaken; she has confused a human impulse with the Spirit's calling.

3. Next, the scriptural calling comes not only through the heart of the candidate, but also from the Church itself, for the call is never complete until the Church has confirmed it.

But by what rule will the Church be guided in the matter of ordaining ministers? By the simple declaration of any one who assumes to be sincere? Truly not. The Church is expressly commanded not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. They have no other rule than Scripture. Who can believe that God's Spirit is the agent of such anarchy as this, where the Church holds in their hands the Word, teaching them that God does not call any woman, and yet a woman insists against them that God has called her? God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints. It is on this very subject of calling to public teaching and preaching that the apostle makes this declaration.

**4. Next, The argument from the seeming fitness of some women, by their gifts and graces, to edify the churches by preaching, is then useless and false.**

When God endows a woman with the ability to understand and teach His Word, it may be safely assumed that he has some wise end in view; he has some area or sphere in which her gifts will come into proper play. But surely it is far from reverent for the creature to decide, against God's Word, that this sphere is the pulpit. God's wisdom is better than man's. The sin involves the presumption of Uzzah. He was right in thinking that it would be a bad thing to have the sacred ark fall into the dirt, and in thinking that he had the physical strength to steady it, just like any Levite; but he was wrong in presuming to serve God in a way that God had not prescribed. So when men lament the unemployed spiritual power, which they suppose exists in many gifted females, as a great loss to the church, they are reasoning with Uzzah; they are presumptuously setting their human wisdom above God's wisdom.

**The argument, then, whether any woman may or may not be a preacher of the word should be primarily one of Scripture.**

## 1. Does the Bible really prohibit it? I assert that it does.

First, the Old Testament, which contained, in seed, all the principles of the New Testament, allowed no regular church office to any woman. When a few women were employed as mouthpieces of God, it was in a purely extraordinary office, and in which they could offer supernatural evidence of their commission. No woman ever ministered at the altar, as either a priest or a Levite. No female elder was ever seen in a Hebrew congregation. No woman ever sat on the throne of the theocracy, except the pagan usurper and murderess, Athaliah.

Now, this Old Testament principle of ministry is carried over to a degree in the New Testament where we find the Christian congregations, with elders, teachers, and deacons, and its women invariably keeping silent in the assembly.

2. Secondly, if human language can make anything plain, it is that the New Testament institutions do not allow the woman to rule or to have authority over a man. (See 1Ti 2:12; 1Co 11:3,7-10; Eph 5:22,23; 1Pe 3:1,5,6.)

As a minimum, in church affairs, the woman's position in the church is subordinate to the man's. And according to New Testament precedent and doctrine, the call to preaching and ruling in the church must go together. Every church elder is not a preacher, but every preacher of the church must be an elder of the church. It is clearly implied in 1 Timothy 5:17 that there were church elders who were not preachers, but never was there a preacher of the church who was not an elder. The scriptural qualifications for preaching, that is, the knowledge, holiness, experience, authority, dignity, purity, were even more exacting qualifications than those listed for elders. Truly, The greater includes the less. Therefore it is simply inconceivable that a person could experience a true call to the public preaching and teaching of the Word and not also called to be an elder. Therefore, if it is right for the woman to preach, she must also be a church elder. But God has expressly prohibited the latter, and assigned to woman a domestic and social place, in which her demand that she be an elder and a preacher would simply be anarchy.

This argument may be put in a most practical and specific shape, which will reveal its absolute absurdity. Let it be granted, for argument's sake, that here is a woman whose gifts and graces, spiritual wisdom and experience, are so superior to others, that her friends feel that it would be a great loss of power in the church to confine her to silence in the public assembly. Therefore, for that reason, she exercises her public gift and finds great success. She becomes the spiritual parent of many newborn souls. Is it not right then, that her spiritual offspring should look up to her for guidance? How can she, from her position, justify herself in refusing the needs of these newborn babes in Christ? She herself felt properly driven, by the deficiency in the quantity or quality of the male preaching in this church, to break through the restraints of sex and contribute her superior gifts to the winning of souls. Now, to carry this further, if it appears that a similar deficiency of male leadership, either in quantity or quality, exists in the same church, then the same impulse must, by the stronger reason, prompt her to assume the less public and prominent work of church leadership and rule. She ought to take over the responsibilities of a senior elder, and thus preserve the fruits she has planted. She ought to admonish, command, censure, and excommunicate her male converts, including, possibly, the husband she is to obey at home, if the real welfare of the souls she has won requires such action. All this would be absurd and very damaging to the church.

**Let us now look at the Word of God concerning the preaching and leadership of the church; we shall find them particularly, even surprisingly, explicit.**

First, we have 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, where the apostle discusses the relation and manner of the sexes in the public Christian assemblies; and he assures the Corinthians, verses 2 and 16, that the rules he announces here were universally accepted by all the churches. Two principles are laid down: first, verse 4, that the man should preach (or pray) in public with his head uncovered, because in that capacity he stands as God's herald and representative; and to assume at that time the emblem of subordination, a covered head, is a dishonour to the office and the God it represents; secondly, verses 5, and 13, that, on the contrary, for a woman to appear or to perform any public religious function in the Christian assembly, with her head uncovered, is a glaring impropriety, because it is contrary to the subordination of the position assigned her by her Creator, and to the modesty suitable to her sex; and even nature settles the point by giving her, her long hair as her natural veil. Even as good taste and a natural sense of propriety would protest against a woman going in public without that beautiful emblem and adornment of her sex-her long hair, cut off like a common soldier or a labourer, even so, clearly does nature herself sustain God's law in requiring the woman to appear always modestly covered in the church. The holy angels who are present, as invisible spectators, hovering over the Christian assemblies, would be shocked by seeing women professing godliness publicly display themselves without this appropriate emblem of their position (verse 10).

1. The woman, then, has a right to the privileges of public worship and the Lord's Supper; she may join audibly in the praises and prayers of the public assembly, but she must always do this with her head covered.

The apostle does not, in this chapter, stop to make the distinction, that if every public herald of God, must not have their heads covered, and the woman must never have her head uncovered in public, then she can never be a public herald of the Gospel. But let us wait. He is not done with these questions of order in public worship; he steadily continues the discussion of them through the fourteenth chapter, and he then in time reaches the conclusion he had been preparing, and in verses 34 and 35, expressly prohibits women from preaching, saying, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak (in that place), but must be in submission, as the Bible says. If they want to inquire about something, -about some doctrine which they hear discussed but do not comprehend, then they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. And in verse 37, he ends the whole discussion by declaring that if anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, so as to be entitled to challenge Paul's instructions, then let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command, and not his mere personal conclusions. So to challenge Paul's clear instructions on such pretensions of spiritual impulse is inevitably wrong and presumptuous. For the unchallengeable Lord does not issue commands in contradictory ways.

The next passage is 1 Timothy 2:11-15. In the eighth verse, the apostle, having taught what should be the tenor of the public prayers and why, says: I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer (referring to the practice which the two sexes publicly prayed together). He then commands, in keeping with the tenor of the passage in 1 Corinthians 11, for Christian women to come to church dressed in the most modest clothing, so as to express the humble modesty of their sex. He then continues: A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach (context is to teach in public) nor to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; (by Satan) it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner (first). But women will be saved through childbearing - if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

In 1 Timothy 5:9-15, a sphere of church ministry is clearly defined for older single women, and for them only, who are widows or have never been married and are without any near relatives. So specific is the apostle that he categorically fixes the limit to those sixty years old, below which the church may not

accept. What was this sphere of labour? It was evidently some form of deaconess type work, helping others, and clearly not preaching, because the age, qualifications and connections all point to these private benevolent tasks, and the uninspired history confirms it.

Now, to all the younger women the apostle then assigns their specific sphere of ministry in these words (verse 14), So I counsel younger women to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander, either against Christians or Christianity in general. Here we find strong evidence that Paul assigned no public preaching function to women. In Titus 2:4,5, women who have not reached old age are to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, **to be busy at home**, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. And the only teaching function even hinted at for the older women is found in verse 4, which is that they teach these private domestic virtues to their younger sisters. We can clearly see that the apostle here assigns the **home** as the proper sphere of activity and ministry of the Christian woman. That is her kingdom, and clearly not the secular workplace nor the church. Her duties in her home will basically keep her away from the public functions. She is not to be in authority over men, but a loving subject to her husband.

The grounds on which the apostle rests the divine legislation against the preaching of women make it clear that we have construed it correctly. Bringing together 1 Corinthians 11 with 1 Timothy 2, we find the following: The male was the first creation of God, the female a subsequent one. The female was made from the substance of the male, being taken from his side. The purpose of the woman's creation and existence is to be a helpmate for man, and in a sense in which the man was not originally designed as a helpmate for the woman. Therefore God, from the beginning of man's existence as a sinner, put the wife under the kind and compassionate authority of the husband, making him the head and her the subordinate in domestic society. Then finally, the action of the woman in yielding first to Satanic temptation and aiding to seduce her husband into sin was punished by this subjection, as seen in the curse of Genesis 3:16, where it is declared that the husband will rule over the wife, and the sentence on the first woman has been extended, by imputation, to all her daughters. These are the grounds on which the apostle says the Lord enacted that in the church assemblies the woman shall be the student, and not the public teacher, ruled, and not ruler.

The reasons against the public preaching and teaching by women apply to all women, of all ages and civilizations alike. Such reasons are, indeed, in strong opposition to the radical theories of individual human rights and equality now in vogue with many today. Instead of allowing all human beings a specific equality and an absolute natural independence, these Scripture doctrines assume that there are orders of human beings naturally unequal in their inherited rights, as in their bodily and mental qualities; that God has not ordained any human being to this proud independence, but placed all in subordination under authority, the child under its mother, the mother under her husband, the husband under the church and civil authorities, and these under the law, whose guardian and avenger is God himself.

The inspired commands of Scripture are explicit to every honest listener, as explicit as human language can make it. Yet modern ingenuity has written much to try to explain it away. One is not surprised to find these expositions, even when advanced by those who profess to accept the Scriptures, coloured with a lot of error. For a true and honest reverence of the inspiration of Scripture would scarcely try so hopeless a task as the misrepresenting and diffusing of so clear a law. Thus, sometimes we hear these remarks uttered almost as a sneer, Oh, this is the opinion of Paul, a crusty old bachelor with his head stuffed with those ideas of woman which were current when society considered her an illiterate, a plaything, and a slave. Or, we are referred to the fable of the paintings of the man dominating the lion, in which the man was always the painter, and it is said, Paul was a man; he is jealous for the authority of his sex. The law would be different if it were uttered through a woman. What is all this except open

unbelief and resistance, when the apostle says expressly that this law was the enactment of the Christ who condescended to be born of woman.

Again, one would have us read the prohibition of 1 Corinthians 14:34, as women are not allowed to babble, rather than that they are not allowed to speak.

Therefore they try to show that the verb used here is in the negative sense only, and that the prohibition is that a woman is not allowed to talk nonsense in public, but does not exclude, but rather implies, her right to preach, provided she preaches well and only solid Biblical truth. No expositor will need to reply to such criticism so wretchedly absurd as this. But it may be good to simply point out in refuting such an argument that the opposite of this verb in Paul's own mind and statement is to be silent. The implied distinction, then, is not here between solid speech and babbling, but between speaking publicly and keeping silent. Again, in the parallel passage (1 Timothy 2:12), the apostle says I do not permit a woman to teach where he uses the Greek word *didasko* whose regular meaning means to teach in the general sense-any kind of teaching. And the apostle's whole logic in the contexts is directed, not against silly teachings by women, but against any public teaching by women.

Another way they try to dodge the truth of the text is to say that, Yes, the law is indeed explicit, but it was only temporary.

When woman were, what paganism and the eastern harem had made her, she was indeed unfit for ruling and public teaching; she was only a grown-up child, ignorant, impulsive and rash, like other children; and while she remained so the apostle's exclusion was wise and just. But the law was not meant to apply to the modern Christian woman, lifted up by better institutions into an intellectual, moral and literary equality with the man. No doubt if the apostle were alive today, he himself would have acknowledge it.

This is at least a more decent argument. But as for a proper interpretation of the text it is as unfair and untenable as the other. For, first, it is false to assume that the Apostle's conception of the Christian woman was that of an ignorant grown-up child from the harem. The harem was not a legitimate Hebrew institution. Polygamy was not the rule, but the exception, in reputable Hebrew families; nor were devout Jews, such as Paul had been, ignorant of the unlawfulness of such domestic abuses. Jewish manners and laws were not like the peoples around them, but a glorious exception to the surrounding nations, in the place they assigned woman; and God's Word of the Old Testament had doubtless done among the Jews the same ennobling work for woman which we now claim Christianity does. The competent archaeologist and historian know that it has always been the trait of Judaism to assign an honourable place to woman. Accordingly, we never find the apostle drawing a depreciated picture of woman; every allusion of his to the believing woman is full of reverent respect and honour. Among the Christian women who come into Paul's history there is not one who is portrayed after this imagined pattern of childish ignorance and weakness. The Lydia, the Lois, the Eunice, the Phoebe, the Priscilla, the Roman Mary, the Junia, the Tryphena, the Tryphosa, the beloved Persis of the Pauline history, and the elect lady who was honored with the friendship of the Apostle John, all appear in the narrative as bright examples of Christian intelligence, activity, dignity, and graciousness. It was not left for the pretentious Christianity of our century to begin the liberation of woman. As soon as Christianity conquered a household, it did its blessed work in lifting up the feebler and oppressed sex; and it is evident that Paul's habitual conception of female Christian character in the churches in which he ministered **was at least as favourable** as his estimate of the male members. Thus the state of facts on which this argument rests had no place in Paul's mind; he did not consider himself as legislating temporarily in view of the inferiority of the female Christian character of his day, for he did not think it was inferior. When this unfounded argument is inspected it unmask itself simply into an instance of quiet egotism. The women



of our day who feel they are called to preach are in effect saying, I am so elevated and enlightened that I am above the law, which was good enough for those old fogies, Priscilla, Persis, Eunice; and the elect lady. Indeed! This is modesty with a vengeance! Was Paul only temporarily legislating when he termed modesty one of the brightest jewels in the Christian woman's crown?

**A second answer is seen to this plea in the nature of the apostle's basis for the law.**

Not one of them is personal, cultural, or temporary. Nor does he say that woman must not preach because he regards her as less holy, less zealous, less eloquent, less educated, less courageous, or less intellectual, than man. Those who advocate woman's rights have a continual tendency to confuse the issue, claiming that the apostle, when he says that woman must not do what man does, meant to belittle her sex. This is a sheer mistake. You will search in vain for any belittling of the qualities and virtues of the female sex; and we may also at this point properly disclaim all such intention. Woman is excluded from this masculine task of public preaching by Paul, not because she is inferior to man, but simply because her Creator has ordained for her another work which is incompatible with the public preaching and teaching of the Word.

**Further, we can plainly see that the scriptural law was not meant to be temporary, and had no exclusive reference to the ignorant and childish woman of the Eastern harem, because every basis assigned for the exclusion of women preachers is of universal and perpetual application.**

They apply to the modern, educated woman in the exact same way as they applied to Phoebe, Priscilla, and Eunice. They do not lose a single grain of force by any change of social practice or feminine culture, rather they are grounded in the facts of woman's origin and nature and the intended role and purpose of her existence. Thus this second argument for women preachers is totally closed. And the argument finds its final deathblow in such passages as 1 Timothy 2:9 and 5:14. As I have mentioned earlier, a few older women of special circumstances are admitted as assistants in the work of the deacons. However, the apostle then clearly assigns the rest of the body of Christian women to the domestic sphere, indicating clearly that any attempts by them to go beyond their assigned role would give the enemy an opportunity for slander. Here, then, we have the clearest proof, in a negative form, that the Apostle Paul did not plan the assigned role of women to be temporary; for it is **for woman as elevated and enlightened by the gospel** that he preached, that he laid down the limits of their ministry.

The justification is not found in any belittling of woman as man's natural inferior, but in the ancient fact: he created them as male and female. In order to establish human society God saw that it was necessary to create for man's mate, not his exact image, but his counterpart. An identical creature to man would have utterly marred their companionship, and would have been an equal curse to both. Although there is an obvious similarity in the man and woman, yet there are unique differences which clearly reveal that each is fitted for works and duties unsuitable for the other. And it is no more a degradation to the woman, that the man can do some things better than she can, than the fact that the woman has natural superiority in other things.

But it is also stated: Your Bible doctrine makes man the ruler, and woman the one ruled."

True. It was absolutely necessary, especially after sin had entered the human race, necessary that a foundation for social order would be laid down in a family government. This family government could not be made consistent, peaceful or orderly by having two heads, because basic human weakness, and especially sin, would ensure collision, at least some times, between any two human wills. It was essential for the welfare of both husband and wife and for the offspring that there must be an ultimate head of the family. Now let reason decide, was it necessary that the man be head over the woman, or

the woman over the man? Was it right that he for whom woman was created should be subjected to her who was created for him; that he who was stronger physically should be subjected to the weaker; that the natural protector should be the servant of the dependent; that the divinely ordained bread-winner should be controlled by the bread-dispenser? Every honest woman admits that this would have been unnatural and unjust. Therefore God, acting, so to speak, under an unavoidable moral necessity, assigned to the male the domestic government of the home, regulated and tempered, indeed, by the strict laws of God, by self-interest and by the most tender affection; and to the female the obedience of love. On this order all other social order depends. It was not the plan of Christianity to subvert it, but only to perfect and refine it. No doubt that spirit of wilfulness, which is a feature of our native carnality in both man and woman, tempts us to feel that any subordination to another is a hardship. Self-will resents this natural subordination as a natural injustice. But self-will forgets that order is heaven's first law; that subordination is the unalterable condition of peace and happiness, and this is true just as much in heaven as on earth; that this subjection was not imposed on woman only as a penalty, but also for her and her children's good; and that to be governed under the wise conditions of nature is often a more privileged state than to govern. God has conformed his works of creation and providence to these principles. In creating man God has provided him with the natural attributes, which qualify him to work outside the home, to subdue dangers, to protect, and to govern. He has given these same qualities in a lesser degree to woman, and in their place has adorned her with the less hardy, but equally admirable, attributes of body, mind and heart which qualify her to yield, to be protected, and to guide the home. This order is founded, then, in the unchangeable laws of nature. Therefore all attempts to reverse it must fail, and will always result in confusion.

Now, a wise God designs no conflicts between his domestic and his church institutions. He has ordained that the man shall be the head in the family, thus it would cause great confusion to make the woman the leader in the church. We have stated this morning that the right of public teaching and preaching must involve the right of spiritual rule. The woman, who claims she has a right to preach, ought also claim the right to be a ruling elder. But how would it work to have husband and wife, ruler and subject, change places as often as they passed from their home to the church? One could only imagine that this amount of switching roles would result in something close to absolute anarchy.

**Again, the duties which natural affection, natural disposition, and considerations of convenience distribute between the man and the woman make it practicable for him and impracticable for her to pursue the additional tasks of the preacher and evangelist, without their neglect of other assigned duties.**

An example would come from the raising and nurturing of children. The elder in the church, the pastor, must be the husband of one wife. Both the parents have responsibilities to their children; but the appropriate duties of the mother, especially towards little children, are such that she could not leave them, as a pastor must, for his public tasks without criminal neglect and their probable ruin. It may then be argued that this line of reasoning has no application to unmarried women. The answer is, that God contemplates marriage as the normal condition of woman, yet he does not make singleness a crime, but the sphere he assigns to the unmarried woman is also private and domestic.

**No doubt some minds imagine a degree of force in the argument, that God has bestowed on some women gifts and graces eminently qualifying them to edify his churches, and since what he does is always perfect and without waste he thereby shows that he plans for such women to preach.**

Enough has been already said to show how utterly dangerous such bogus arguments are. God is not accountable to any man. Doesn't he often give the most splendid gift for usefulness to young men

whom he then removes by what we call a premature death from the threshold of the pastoral career? Yet God always does everything perfectly and without waste. It is not for us to surmise how he will utilize those seemingly unproductive gifts. He knows how and where to do it. We must bow to his perfect plan, whether we understand it or not. It is the same situation with respect to his command restricting the most gifted woman from the public preaching of the Word. But there is a more obvious answer. God has assigned to her a private sphere sufficiently important and honourable to justify the whole expenditure of these heavenly gifts—the formation of the character of children. This is the noblest and most important work done on earth. Add to it the efforts of friendship, the duties of the wife, daughter, sister, helper of the poor, and the work of teaching other woman, and we see a field wide enough for the greatest talents and the most holy ambition.

**Now the person making the argument for women preachers returns with the complaint that, while the faithful mother rears six, or possibly twelve, children for God, the gifted evangelist may convert thousands?**

But that man would not have been the gifted evangelist had he not enjoyed the blessing of the training from a humble Christian mother? Had he been reared in the disorderly environment of a mother who worked outside the home, instead of being the spiritual father of thousands, he possibly would have been an ignorant unbeliever or a disgusting Pharisee. So the worthiness of his public success fully belongs as much to the humble mother as to himself. Again, the instrumentality of the mother's training in the salvation of her children is mighty and decisive; the influence of the minister over his hundreds is slight and non-essential. If he contributes a few grains, in numerous cases, to turn the scales for heaven, the mother contributes tons on the right scales in her few cases. The one works more widely on the surface, the other more deeply; so that the real amount of soil moved by the two workmen is not usually in favor of the preacher. The woman of sanctified ambition has nothing to regret as to the dignity of her sphere. She does the noblest work that is done on earth. However, its **public** recognition is usually more through the children and others who benefit than through her own person, and that is precisely the aspect of her work which makes it most Christlike. It is also precisely the aspect at which a sinful and selfish ambition takes offence.

Lastly, let me say, that the movement towards women preachers does not necessarily spring from the current secular woman's rights movement. The preaching of women marked the early Wesleyan movement to some extent, and the Quaker assemblies. But the real answer to those who might claim it is a woman's right to preach is found in the correct statement of human rights we have given in the Bible. The woman is not designed by God, nor entitled to all the positions in society to which the male is entitled. God has disqualified her for any such exercise of them by the endowments of body, mind, and heart he has given her, and the duties he has assigned her in her daily life. And since she has no right to assume the masculine positions, so she will find in the attempt to do so only ruin to her own character and to society. For instance, the very traits of emotion and character which make the woman man's cherished and invaluable helpmate, the traits which she must have in order to fulfil the purpose of her existence would ensure her unfitness to meet the distinctive temptations of publicity and power. The attempt to do so would corrupt all these lovelier traits, while it would still leave her, as man's rival, the weaker partner. She would lose everything and gain nothing.

This common movement for women's rights, and women's preaching, must be regarded, then, as simply pagan. It cannot be honestly upheld without attacking the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. We are convinced that there is only one safe attitude for Christians and churches to have towards it. This is to utterly disapprove it, as they do any other assault of infidelity on God's truth and kingdom. The church leader who becomes an accomplice of this intrusion certainly renders himself detestable and open to discipline by the church and the Lord.

We close with one suggestion to such women that may be inclined to this new freedom. If they read history, they will find that the condition of woman in Christendom, and especially in America, is most enviable as compared with her state in all other ages and nations. Let them honestly consider how much they possess here, which their sisters have never enjoyed in any other age. What bestowed those special privileges on the Christian women of America? The Bible. Let them beware, then, when they do anything to undermine the reverence of mankind for the authority of the Bible. It is undermining their own protection. If they understand how universally, in all non-Christian lands, the weaker partner has been made the slave of man's strength and selfishness, they will gladly leave well enough alone, lest in grabbing at some impossible prize, they lose the privileges they now have, and fall back into the gulf of oppression from which these doctrines of Christ and Paul have lifted them. Amen.

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