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WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE CHURCH

By E. C. FUQUA

Years ago, I wrote a tract on this subject, which has been out of print for several years; and as a number of calls for this tract have been received, from such outstanding men as N. B. Harde- man, W. H. Price, and other Bible students, I have decided to a- gain discuss the subject, feeling that there is a general need for it. I shall confine this study to women in the New Testament church. We are little concerned in matters outside that church.

Women In Public Life

Christian woman are to be essentially modest. Women pos- sessing the truly Christian spirit will want to be modest. That they "adorn themselves with modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety;" pursuing "faith and love and sanctification with sobriety" (1 Tim. 2: 9, 15); is not only the law of God, but it is the outcropping of true feminine modesty and inward beauty in all walks of female life—in the church and out of it. What God de- mands of woman in the church, would be a grace and ornament to her out of the church. Her constitution—her nature—is appealed to; the delicacy of her construction, physically and mentally, is largely made the background for the merciful prohibitions and re- strictions laid upon her in her religious life. She might by her ex- periences with life learn of her physical limitations, but only her Creator can tell her the limitations brought upon her religious na- ture by her transgression in Eden. This is why she needs the Bi- ble to outline her life and regulate her ambitions.

Her Edenic experience is made the ground of the positive re- ligious restriction laid upon her in the church. This restriction is stated in these few words: "Let a woman [in the church assem- bly] learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to [publicly] teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression: but she shall be saved through her child-bear- ing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with so- briety." (1 Tim. 2: 11-15.)

That passage gives us the reason for the divine restriction of woman's religious ambitions. Originally, in all religious matters the woman was the equal of the man, but the woman so abused her privilege that she led the man into sin and made it necessary, for the spiritual welfare of the race, that she be deprived of the right of equality with man in religious leadership. But this restriction applies only to public leadership, her work in the public assembly or in any public work of promiscuous teaching. Therefore she is prohibited from all public preaching of the Gospel, but is given the right to teach the Gospel privately. Thus we find the Corinthian Sister, Priscilla, with her husband Aquila, taking the evangelist Apollos to one side—privately—and teaching him more accurately the word of God. (Acts 18: 26.) A Christian woman is not prohibited from teaching the word of God EXCEPT where that teaching assumes LEADERSHIP in religious matters over the God-appointed male leaders. That prohibits all evangelistic work (in which LEADERSHIP is an essential element), and all public speaking (teaching) in the church assembly.

Three incentives are appealed to to lead Christian women into a place of quietness in religious life: (1) They are taught to remember the sin of Mother Eve; (2) They are taught to consider themselves, in the light of Eve's example, as incompetent to lead; and (3) They are shown that God's estimate of feminine modesty tends to shame the woman who would overlook the two former facts. Hence the climax—"It is shameful for a woman to speak in the church." (1 Cor. 14: 35.)

The entire restriction thrown about woman's religious activities concerns her work as a REPRESENTATIVE of the church. Speaking in the church REPRESENTATIVELY is forbidden, and so is evangelistic work or public preaching, because that is REPRESENTATIVE in its very nature. Hence a woman can SPEAK in singing, which is "in the church," while commanded to NOT "speak in the church." Speaking "in the church," then, always means as a representative of the church—speaking as a LEADER of the church—doing a work assigned to the men alone.

Asking Questions

"Then," some one may say, "she may publicly ask questions, for that cannot be called authoritative or representative teaching." Indeed she could, IF she were not under another restriction, one which involves her MODESTY. Her modesty is also representative of the church. An immodest woman does NOT represent the church, but MISrepresents it as concerns all her sex. Hear Paul:

“As in all the churches of the saints, let your women keep silence in the churches : for it is not permitted unto them to speak ; but let them learn in all subjection, as also saith the law. And if they would learn anything [by asking], let them ask their own husbands at home : for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church.” (1 Cor. 14: 33-36.) Aside from the LAW we have just discussed, which places all leadership in the hands of the men, it is also a SHAME for a woman to publicly ask a question in the church assembly. Thus a double restraint is placed upon woman : the LAW she must not violate, and her own HONOR which she cannot afford to disregard. All Christian women will endeavor to live true to both the law and the honor involved—and keep silence in the church assembly. No matter what point is raised in the assembly, or how vitally it may effect her interest ; let her keep silence about it until she is alone with her husband. You will note that this is required “in all the churches of the saints.” Where this law is disregarded, the church which does so is NOT a church of God’s saints, but is a band of lawless men and shameful women who are a burning disgrace to Christianity.

Public Prayer

The prohibition against woman’s teaching in the public assembly extends also to the public prayer in that assembly. Hear it : “I desire therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing.” (1 Tim. 2: 8.) “Every place” means in every place of PUBLIC prayer ; otherwise, it would prohibit the women praying in ANY place. No woman is permitted to offer public prayer in the assembly of the church.

From the passages cited it is plain that all prohibitions effecting Christian women in the exercise of religious devotions are restricted to the public assemblies of the church and to all representative teaching ; as evangelizing, or appearing before a mixed assembly in any way. I am quite certain that all her restrictions in public life are limited to places and exercises where MEN are present. Note the setting : “But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over A MAN, but to be in quietness. For Adam [the MAN] was first formed, then Eve [the WOMAN].” (1 Tim. 2: 12, 13.) THE MAN is thus made the ground of God’s peculiar restrictions over women in their religious life. But she can teach even a man in a private way, exercising all modesty in the effort, as we have seen. (Acts 18: 26.)

Prophetesses

Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21: 9),

but there is no evidence that they ever used their gift in public. In fact, to have done so would have been a flagrant violation of the positive law we have just examined. No female voice was ever publicly lifted in any of the "churches of the saints" in New Testament times. The same is true to-day—and ever shall be.

Women As Class Teachers

I use the word "class" as the direct antithesis of "public." A class is defined as "a group of students under one teacher, or pursuing a study together." Each class, then, is a private gathering, as contrasted with the public gathering of the church. It has its own private teacher, lesson, class-room, etc., distinguishing it from the public or general meeting. A business man has his private office, and yet it is open to all who have special or private business with him. A physician has his private consulting room, yet any person, male or female, has right to enter it, who seeks the physician's advice. The moment a party enters, however, the room that the public had access to, becomes a private room. So with a class of students under one teacher. While the class is open to all who wish to attend it, it is private to those who do attend it, because only those qualified for that particular study do attend it. For instance, a class for children under ten years of age, while open to all such children, is not open to the public—the whole church, but is limited or confined to children of ten years or younger. This makes it a private class. A class for young men, while open to all young men, is private because not open to all the church. The same is true of every class. Too, a private class is conducted in private quarters—cut off from other classes. Hence all class teaching is private work. Any teaching that involves a certain part only, and not all the students, is private teaching.

To what extent may a Christian woman engage in class teaching? I see no reason why she may not teach any class of young people, so far as authority is concerned, when that teaching is done in private quarters. However, from the standpoint of feminine modesty, a woman might very appropriately prefer to leave the teaching of young men to male teachers. In all such matters the woman must act from her own feelings: she cannot be forbidden by law, so long as her teaching is not done before the public assembly. In this latter she is positively prohibited.

In the teaching or training of the young women especially, the work is particularly laid upon the Christian women: "That aged women likewise be reverent in demeanor, not slanderers nor enslaved to much wine, teachers of that which is good; that they

may train [by teaching] the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sober-minded, chaste, workers at home, kind, being in subjection to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." (Titus 2: 3-7.) I may be reminded that nothing is here said about teaching them in classes. I reply: Neither does it forbid teaching them in classes. To-day too much is left to the men, in a fanatical fear that women will transcend their bounds in teaching, and as a consequence, young women grow up without the teaching the older women are commanded to give them. When a woman has a class of young ladies she surely should teach them the very things Paul above specified. This, to my mind, makes it more appropriate for women teachers to teach women, when the latter are properly called "young women." No MAN can prudently teach young women the things Paul laid upon the older women. While a woman can teach any private class of YOUNG people, it would be wiser if she would confine her class teaching to "young WOMEN."

The Teacher Must Be OVER The Taught

As to teaching CHILDREN, no restriction is placed upon the woman: the God of nature eminently adapted her for that work.

But in teaching young women, no YOUNG woman should be selected. A young woman cannot qualify under Paul's requirement—manifestly. A teacher must be OVER the taught; not one of the number, especially in age and qualification. Girls over girls, or boys over boys (except in rare cases), cannot be TEACHERS. Usually, such an arrangement is merely a giddy affair.

Women's Bible Class Work

The question is sometimes raised, "When a number of women form a class for studying the Bible—no men being present—is it proper for one of the Christian women to offer a prayer?" Why not? seeing there is no man present. In such an act she would certainly not be exercising "dominion over a man," and as that is the only ground upon which her activities have been restricted, it could not effect her in a private class with her sex exclusively. I see no reason, therefore, for considering her out of order in such an act. If it were out of order in such a place, it would be equally out of order in any other place; so that under no circumstance, could a number of Christian women worship God. The prayer of "the men" referred to by Paul (1 Tim. 2: 8) is the public prayer offered in the church assembly, and a class of women convened as such are not a public assembly but a private group. All that is

done in such a meeting is of a private and modest nature, violating no restriction imposed by God upon Christian woman.

The matter of woman's restriction in religious matters can be carried too far—and often is. The fact is, there is no restriction placed over Christian women, except in the presence of men or where their leadership over men is attempted in matters of teaching. A possible exception to this is in the matter of her hair (1 Cor. 11: 2-17), and even in that she is restricted only when she approaches God in her acts of worship—as “praying or prophesying.” (Verse 5.) And that is based upon her subjugation to man. So long as a Christian woman recognizes her divine subjugation to man in her religious life, lives a sober, sanctified and chaste life, teaching especially the younger women, she has no other duty imposed upon her, save her natural proclivity to motherhood. In these “she shall be saved” (1 Tim. 2: 15), and what more could she ask? Only idolatrous covetousness could lead a woman to reach out beyond this God-given sphere, rich in the hope of salvation.

The Question Of Woman's Hair

There is nothing in the New Testament that tells how a woman must WEAR her hair—in the home, on the streets, in other people's homes, or in business. She may wear it as she pleases in all such places. It is only when a Christian woman approaches God in any act of religious worship or service, that her hair becomes a matter of divine legislation. The law is plainly stated in these words: “Every woman PRAYING or PROPHECYING with her head unveiled dishonoreth her head.” (1 Cor. 11: 5.) I have emphasized the modifying clause, “praying or prophesying,” to call attention to the fact that only in those religious acts does God rise up to interfere with a woman's hair arrangement. Her hair, we are told in verse 15, is “given her for a covering”—WHEN she approaches God in any form of worship. He positively will not accept of her worship, UNLESS her hair is arranged in a WOMANLY manner, or else her head is veiled in lieu of the natural covering. If for any reason her hair is cut after the manner of a man's (as we often witness), when she approaches God in any act of worship, public or private, let her veil her head; and if she desire, when the worship is over she may lay aside the veil. God tells her how her head must appear, only when “praying or prophesying”—appearing before him in any act of worship. He nowhere interferes with the way she WEARS her hair. If he did, there would have been no reason for the qualifying clause, “praying or prophesying.” Overlooking those qualifying terms is re-

would it apply in public worship?

sponsible for all the foolish wrangling to-day over "the length of woman's hair," "bobbed hair," etc.—a matter God has never legislated upon. Let a Christian woman WEAR her hair as she pleases (restricted only by 1 Tim. 2: 9, 10), but if it be so short as to rob her head of its FEMININITY or "glory," let her place a veil or other covering upon her head WHEN she worships God.

This law is clearly designed to teach the woman that in all her religious life she can approach her Maker only through recognizing MAN as her superior—as standing between her and her God. If this humbles her, that is one design of the law. "The head of the woman is the man." (1 Cor. 11: 3.) That is the reason she is prohibited from teaching or exercising "dominion over a man." Her failure to recognize the HEADSHIP of MAN in all her approaches to God is tantamount to her disbelief of the Genesis account of the Fall. Since the Fall was the direct result of the WOMAN'S transgression, the woman who wants to be saved must bear the embarrassing humility of the Genesis account and take a position in religious life that keeps her conscious of her original shame. It was a prodigious mercy that provided salvation for her by any means, and her salvation absolutely depends upon her accepting the humble place assigned her. This is the cause behind every divine restriction peculiar to her sex. Happy is the woman who can accept her humble station before God. He will love and honor her with all his gracious benefits. "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3: 16), was a part of the inflexible curse upon the woman. It can no more be ignored by the woman, than the curse of the soil can be ignored by the man. The man who will not WORK is "disorderly" and is to be withdrawn from (2 Thess. 3: 6, 11) because he thus attempts to evade the curse of Gen. 3: 17-20. Likewise the woman is condemned if she attempts to worship or serve God on equality with the man UNDER whom the original curse placed her. Women, therefore, in defying the law of the curse are most assuredly rejecting the only hope of salvation offered them.

The Work of Deaconess

"I commend unto you Phœbe our sister, who is a servant [or deaconess] of the church that is at Cenchræ: that ye receive her in the Lord, worthily of the saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need of you: for she herself also hath been a helper of many, and of mine own self." (Rom. 16: 1, 2.)

Phœbe was not a deaconess in any official sense, nor was she a "delegate" to any sort of "convention" in Rome. The term

“deacon” means a servant only. The well known male deacons (Phil. 1: 1), because of their sex, had, like the elders, a work that only MEN could do in the church. There was likewise a delicate work among her sex that only a WOMAN could prudently do. But this service was always a voluntary work and was in no wise representative or authoritative, but in perfect keeping with the modesty and submissiveness of true Christian women. Such women are needed in the churches to-day. In Rom. 16 Paul names a number of such godly women ; and Tabitha (or Dorcas) of Joppa, whom Peter raised from the dead (Acts 9: 36-43), is a splendid example of the noble work that modest Christian women may do as members and servants of the church. These examples show the fallacy of the modern plea, that if a woman can't preach and pray in public, there is nothing she can do. There IS. When women become willing to work in the place divinely assigned them they will find themselves as busy as the men.

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