

## **The Public Preaching of Women** - R. L. Dabney

In this day innovations march with rapid strides. The fantastic suggestion of yesterday, entertained only by a few fanatics, and then only mentioned by the sober to be ridiculed, is to-day the audacious reform, and will be to-morrow the recognized usage. Novelties are so numerous and so wild and rash, that in even conservative minds the sensibility of wonder is exhausted and the instinct of righteous resistance fatigued. A few years ago the public preaching of women was universally condemned among all conservative denominations of Christians, and, indeed, within their bounds, was totally unknown. Now the innovation is brought face to face even with the Southern churches, and female preachers are knocking at our doors. We are told that already public opinion is so truckling before the boldness and plausibility of their claims that ministers of our own communion begin to hesitate, and men hardly know whether they have the moral courage to adhere to the right. These remarks show that a discussion of woman's proper place in Christian society is again timely.

The arguments advanced by those who profess reverence for the Bible, in favor of this unscriptural usage, must be of course chiefly rationalistic. They do indeed profess to appeal to the sacred history of the prophetesses, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Anna, as proving that sex was no sufficient barrier to public work in the church. But the fatal answer is, that these holy women were inspired. Their call was exceptional and supernatural. There can be no fair reasoning from the exception to the ordinary rule. Elijah, in his civic relation to the kingdom of the ten tribes, would have been but a private citizen without his prophetic afflatus. By virtue of this we find him exercising the highest of the regal functions (I Kings 18), administering the capital penalty ordained by the law against seducers into idolatry, when he sentenced the priests of Baal and ordered their execution. But it would be a most dangerous inference to argue hence, that any other private citizen, if moved by pious zeal, might usurp the punitive functions of the public magistrate. 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. It must be remembered, besides, 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.

A feeble attempt is made to find an implied recognition of the right of women to preach in I Cor. 11:5: "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered, dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven." They would fain find here the implication that the woman who feels the call may prophesy in public, if she does so with a bonnet on her head; and that the apostle provides for admitting so much. But when we turn to the fourteenth chapter, verses 34, 35, we find the same apostle strictly forbidding public preaching in the churches to women, and enjoining silence. No honest reader of Scripture can infer that he 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 criminal violence to represent him as thus contradicting himself. He did not mean, in chapter 11:5, to imply that any woman might ever preach in public, either with bonnet on

or off. The learned Dr. Gill, followed by many more recent expositors, supposes that in this place the word "prophesy" only means "praise," as it unquestionably does in some places (as in I Chron. 25:2, the sons of Asaph and Jeduthun "prophesied with the harp"), and as the Targums render it in many places in the Old Testament. Thus, the ordinance of worship which the apostle is regulating just here is not public preaching at all, but the sacred singing, of psalms. And all that is here settled is, that Christian females, whose privilege it is to join in this praise, must not do so with unveiled heads, in imitation of some pagan priestesses when conducting their unclean or lascivious worship, but must sing God's public praises with heads modestly veiled.

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 discourse. He does so by alluding to the intrusion which had probably begun, along with many other disorders in the Corinthian churches, and by pointing to its obvious unnaturalness. Thus he who stands up in public as the herald and representative of heaven's King must stand with uncovered head; the honor of the Sovereign for whom he speaks demands this. But no woman can present herself in public with uncovered head without sinning against nature and her sex. Hence no woman can be a public herald of Christ. Thus this passage, instead of implying the admission, really argues the necessary exclusion of women from the pulpit.

But the rationalistic arguments are more numerous and are urged with more confidence. First in natural order is the plea that some Christian women are admitted to possess every gift claimed by males, zeal, learning, piety, power of utterance, and it is asked why these are not qualifications for the ministry in the case of the woman as well as of the man. It is urged that there is a mischievous, and even a cruel impolicy, in depriving the church of the accessions and souls of the good which these gifts and graces might procure when exercised in the pulpit. Again, some profess that they have felt the spiritual and conscientious impulse to proclaim the gospel which crowns God's call to the ministry. They "must obey God rather than men," and they warn us against opposing their impulse, lest haply we be "found even to fight against God." They argue that the apostle himself has told us, in the new creation of grace "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free." In Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female" (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28). But if the spiritual kingdom thus levels all social and temporal distinctions, its official rights should equally be distributed in disregard of them all. And last, it is claimed that God has decided the question by setting the seal of his favor on the preaching of some blessed women, such as the "Friend," Miss Sarah Smiley. If the results of her ministry are not gracious, then all the fruits of the gospel may as reasonably be discredited. And they ask triumphantly, Would God employ and honor an agency which he himself makes unlawful?

We reply, Yes. This confident argument is founded on a very transparent mistake. God does not indeed honor, but he does employ, agents whom he disapproves. Surely God does not approve a man who "preaches Christ for envy and strife" (Phil. 1:15), yet the apostle rejoices in it, and "knows that it shall result in salvation through his prayers and

the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Two very simple truths, which no believer disputes, explode the whole force of this appeal to results. One is that a truly good person may go wrong in one particular, and our heavenly Father, who is exceedingly forbearing, may withhold his displeasure from the misguided efforts of his child, through Christ's intercession, because, though misguided, he is his 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 but it is wrong for a man dead in 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 experimental plea may be also refuted by another answer. If the rightfulness of actions is to be determined by their results, then it ought evidently to be by their whole results. But who is competent to say whether the whole results of one of these pious disorders will be beneficial or mischievous? A zealous female converts or confirms several souls by her preaching. Grant it. But may she not, by this example, in the future introduce an amount of confusion, intrusion, strife, error and scandal which will greatly overweigh the first partial 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 seeming good results cannot ever be a sufficient justification of conduct which violates the rule of the word. This is our only sure guide. Bad results, following a course of action not commanded in the word, may present a sufficient, even an imperative, reason for stopping, and good results following such action may suggest some probability in its favor. This is all a finite mind is authorized to argue in these matters of God's service, and when the course of action transgresses the commandment such probability becomes worthless.

Pursuing the arguments of the opposite party in the reverse order, we remark next, that when the apostle teaches the equality of all in the privilege of redemption, it is obvious he is speaking in general, not of official positions in the visible church, but of access to Christ and participation in his blessings. The expository ground of this construction is, that thus alone can we save him from self-contradiction. For his exclusion of women from the pulpit is as clear and emphatic as his assertion of the universal equality in Christ. Surely he does not mean to contradict himself. Our construction is established also by other instances of a similar kind. The apostle expressly excludes "neophytes" from office. Yet no one dreams that he would have made the recency of their engrafting a ground of discrimination against their equal privileges in Christ. Doubtless the apostle would have been as ready to assert that in Christ there is neither young nor old, as that in him there is neither male nor female. So every sane man would exclude children from office in the church, yet no one would disparage their equal interest in Christ. So the apostle inhibited Christians who were implicated in polygamy from office, however sincere their repentance. So the canons of the early church forbade slaves to be ordained until they had legally procured emancipation; and doubtless they were right in this rule. But in Christ there is "neither bond nor free." 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. Last, the scope of the apostle in these places proves that he meant no more, for his object in referring to this blessed Christian equality is there seen to be to infer that all classes have a right to church membership, if believers, and that Christian love and communion ought to embrace all.

When the claim is made that the church must concede the ministerial function to the Christian woman who sincerely supposes she feels the call to it, we have a perilous perversion of the true doctrine of vocation. True, this vocation is spiritual, but it is also scriptural. The same Spirit who really calls the true minister also dictated the Holy Scriptures. When even a good man says that he thinks the Spirit calls 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 him, forbids. The Spirit cannot contradict himself. No human being is entitled to advance a specific call of the Spirit for him individually to do or teach something contrary to or beside the Scriptures previously given to the church, unless he can sustain his claim by miracle. Again, the true doctrine of vocation is that the man whom God has designed and qualified to preach learns his call through the word. The word is the instrument by which the Spirit teaches him, with prayer, that he is to preach. Hence, when a person professes to have felt this call whom the word distinctly precludes from the work, as the neophyte, the child, the penitent polygamist, the female, although we may ascribe her mistake to an amiable zeal, yet we absolutely know she is mistaken; she has confounded a human impulse with the Spirit's vocation. Last, the scriptural vocation comes not only through the heart of the candidate, but of the brotherhood, and the call is never complete until the believing choice of the brethren has confirmed it. But by what shall they be guided? By the "say so" of any one who assumes to be sincere? Nay, verily. The brethren are expressly commanded "not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they are of 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 brotherhood hold in their hands the word, teaching them that God does not call any woman, and yet a woman insists against them that God calls her? He "is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." It is on this very subject of vocation to public teaching that the apostle makes this declaration.

The argument from the seeming fitness of some women, by their gifts and graces, to edify the churches by preaching, is then merely utilitarian and unbelieving. When God endows a woman as he did Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, it may be safely assumed that he has some wise end in view; he has some sphere in earth or heaven 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. His 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 tumbled into the dust, and in thinking that he had as much physical power to steady it and as much accidental proximity as any Levite of them all; but he was wrong in presuming to serve God in a way he had said he did not choose to be served. So when men lament the "unemployed spiritual power," which they suppose exists in many gifted females, as a dead loss to the church, they are reasoning with Uzzah; they are presumptuously setting the human wisdom above God's wisdom.

The argument, then, whether any woman may be a public preacher of the word should be prevalently one of Scripture. Does the bible really prohibit it? We assert that it does. And first, the Old Testament, which contained, in germ, all the principles of the New, allowed no regular church office to any woman. When a few of that sex were employed as mouth-

pieces of God, it was in an office purely extraordinary, and in which they could adduce a supernatural attestation of their commission. No woman ever ministered at the altar, as either priest or 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, Presbyterians at least believe that the church order of the Old Testament church was imported into the New, with less modification than any other part of the old religion. The ritual of types was greatly modified; new sacramental symbols replaced the old; the temple of sacrifice was superseded, leaving no sanctuary beneath the heavenly one, save the synagogue, the house of prayer. But the primeval presbyterial order continued unchanged. The Christianized synagogue became the Christian congregation, with its eldership, teachers, and deacons, and its women invariably keeping silence in the assembly. The probability thus raised is strong.

Secondly, If human language can make anything plain, it is that the New Testament institutions do not suffer the woman to rule or "to usurp authority over the man." (See 1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 11:3, 7-10; Eph. 5:22, 23; 1 Peter 3:1, 5, 6.) In ecclesiastical affairs, at least, the woman's position in the church is subordinate to the man's. But, according to New Testament precedent and doctrine, the call to public teaching and ruling in the church must go together. Every elder is not a public teacher, but every regular public teacher must be a ruling elder. It is clearly implied in 1 Tim. 5:17 that there were ruling elders who were not preachers, but never was the regular preacher heard of who was not *ex officio* a ruling elder. The scriptural qualifications for public teaching, the knowledge, piety, experience, authority, dignity, purity, moral weight, were a *fortiori* qualifications for ruling. "The greater includes the less." Hence it is simply inconceivable that the qualified person could experience a true call to public teaching and not also be called to spiritual rule. Hence, if it is right for the woman to preach, she must also be a ruling elder. But God has expressly prohibited the latter, and assigned to woman a domestic and social place, in which her ecclesiastical rule would be anarchy.

This argument may be put in a most practical and *ad hominem* (or *ad foeminan*) shape. Let it be granted, for argument's sake, that here is a woman whose gifts and graces, spiritual wisdom and experience, are so superior her friends feel with her that it is a blamable loss of power in the church to confine her to silence in the public assembly. She accordingly exercises her public gift rightfully and successfully. She becomes the spiritual parent of new-born souls. Is it not right that her spiritual progeny should look up to her for guidance? How can she, from her position, justify herself in refusing this second service? She felt herself properly impelled, by the deficiency in the quantity or quality of the male preaching at this place, to break over the restraints of sex and contribute her superior gifts to the winning of souls. Now, if it appear that a similar deficiency of male supervision, either in quantity or quality, exists at the same place, the same impulse must, by the stronger reason, prompt her to assume the less public and obtrusive work of supervision. There is no sense in her straining out the gnat after she has swallowed the camel; she ought to act the ruling elder, and thus conserve 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.

The attempt may be made to escape this crushing demonstration by saying that these women consider themselves as preaching, not as presbyters, but as lay persons, that theirs is but a specimen of legitimate lay preaching. The answers are, that stated, public lay preaching is not legitimate, either for women or men, who remain without ordination (as was proved in this Review, April, 1876); and that the terms of the inspired prohibition against the public preaching of women are such as to exclude this plea.

Let us now look at these laws themselves; we shall find them peculiarly, even surprisingly, explicit. First, we have I Cor. 11:3-16, where the apostle discusses the relation and deportment of the sexes in the public Christian assemblages; and he assures the Corinthians, verses 2 and 16, that the rules he here announces were universally accepted by all the churches. The reader will not be wearied by details of exposition; a careful reading of the passage will give to him the best evidence for our interpretation, in its complete coherence and consistency. Two principles, then, are laid down: first, verse 4, that the man should preach (or pray) in public with head uncovered, because he then stands forth as God's herald and representative; and to assume at that time the emblem of subordination, a covered head, is a dishonor to the office and the God it represents; secondly, verses 5, 13, that, on the contrary, for a woman to appear or to perform any public religious function in the Christian assembly, unveiled, is a glaring impropriety, because it is contrary to the subordination of the position assigned her by her Maker, and to the modesty and reserve 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's going in public shorn of that beautiful badge and adornment of her sex, like a rough soldier or a laborer, even so clearly does nature herself sustain God's law in requiring the woman to appear always modestly covered in the sanctuary. The holy angels who are present as invisible spectators, hovering over the Christian assemblies, would be shocked by seeing women professing godliness publicly throw off this appropriate badge of their position (verse 10). The woman, then, has a right to the privileges of public worship and the sacraments; she may join audibly in the praises and prayers of the public assembly, where the usages of the body encourage responsive prayer; but she must always do this veiled or covered. The apostle does not in this chapter pause to draw the deduction, that if every public herald of God must be unveiled, and the woman must never be unveiled in public, then she can never be a public herald. But let us wait. He has not done with these questions of order in public worship; he steadily continues the discussion of them through the fourteenth chapter, and he there at length reaches the conclusion he had been preparing, and in verses 34, 35, expressly prohibits women to preach publicly. "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted to them to speak" (in that public place), "but to be in subordination, as also the law saith. And if they wish to learn something" - about some doctrine which they there hear discussed but do not comprehend - "let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for women to speak in church." And in verse 37 he shuts up the whole discussion by declaring that if anybody pretends to have the Spirit, or the inspiration of prophecy, so as to be entitled to contest Paul's rules, the rules are the commandments of the Lord (Christ), not Paul's mere personal conclusions, so that to contest them on such pretensions of spiritual impulse is inevitably wrong and presumptuous. For the immutable

Lord does not legislate in contradictory ways.

The next passage is 1 Tim. 2:11-15. In the eighth verse the apostle, having taught what should be the tenor of the public prayers and why, says: "I ordain therefore that the males pray in every place" (in which the two sexes prayed publicly together). He then, according to the tenor of the passage in 1 Cor. 11, commands Christian women to frequent the Christian assemblies in raiment at once removed from untidiness and luxury, and so fashioned as to express the retiring modesty of their sex. He then adds: "Let the woman learn in quiet in all subordination. But I do not permit woman to teach" (in public) "nor to play the ruler over man, but to be in quietude. For Adam was first fashioned; then Eve. Again, Adam was not deceived" (by Satan), "but the woman, having been deceived, came to be in transgression" (first). "However, she shall be saved by the child-bearing, if they abide, with modest discretion, in faith and love and sanctity." In 1 Tim. 5:9-15, a sphere of church labor is evidently defined for aged single women, and for them only, who are widows or celibates without near kindred. So specific is the apostle that he categorically fixes the limit below which the church may not go in accepting even such laborers at sixty years. What was this sphere of labor? It was evidently some form of diaconal work, and not preaching, because the age, qualifications and connections all point to these private charitable tasks, and the uninspired history confirms it. To all younger women the apostle then assigns their express sphere in these words (verse 14), "I ordain accordingly that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give no start to the adversary to revile" (Christians and Christianity). Here is at least strong negative evidence that Paul assigned no public preaching function to women. In Titus 2:4, 5, women who have not reached old age are to be "affectionate to their husbands, fond of their children, prudent, pure, keepers at home, benevolent, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled." And the only teaching function hinted even for the aged women is, verse 4, that they should teach these private domestic virtues to their younger sisters. Does not the apostle here assign the home as the proper sphere of the Christian woman? That is her kingdom, and neither the secular nor the ecclesiastical commonwealth. Her duties in her home are to detain her away from the public functions. She is not to be a ruler of 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 aright. Collating 1 Cor. 11 with 1 Tim. 2, we find them to be the following: The male was the first creation of God, the female a subsequent one. Then, the female was made from the substance of the male, being taken from his side. The end of the woman's creation and existence is to be a helpmeet for man, in a sense in which the man was not originally designed as a helpmeet for the woman. Hence God, from the beginning of man's existence as a sinner, put the wife under the kindly authority of the husband, making him the head and her the subordinate in domestic society. The Lord said (Gen. 3:16), "Thy desire shall be unto thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." Then last, the agency of the woman in yielding first to Satanic temptation and aiding to seduce her husband into sin was punished by this subjection, 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 pupil, and not public teacher, ruled, and not ruler. The reasons bear

upon all women, of all ages and civilizations alike. Hence the honest expositor must conclude that the enactments are of universal force. Such reasons are, indeed, in strong opposition to the radical theories of individual human rights and equality now in vogue with many. Instead of allowing to 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 ecclesiastical and civil magistrates, and these under the law, whose guardian and avenger is God himself. And so far from flouting the doctrine of imputation as an antiquated barbarism, these Scriptures represent it as a living and just ruling principle, this very day determining, by the guilt of a woman who sinned six thousand years ago, when combining with the natural qualities of sex propagated in her race, a subordinate social state and a rigid disqualification for certain actions, for half the human race. Between the popular theories of individual human right and this sort of political philosophy there is indeed an irreconcilable opposition. But this is inspired. The only solution is that the other, despite all its confidence and arrogance, is false and hollow. "He that replieth against God, let him answer it."

The inspired legislation is explicit to every candid reader as human language can well make it. Yet modern ingenuity has essayed to explain it away. One is not surprised to find these expositions, even when advanced by those who profess to accept the Scriptures, tinctured with no small savor of infidelity. For a true and honest reverence for the inspiration of Scripture would scarcely try so hopeless a task as the sophisticating of so plain a law. Thus, sometimes we hear these remarks uttered almost as a sneer, "Oh, this is the opinion of Paul, a crusty old bachelor, an oriental, with his head stuffed with those ideas of woman which were current when society made her an ignoramus, 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 usurped dominion of his sex. The law would be different if it were uttered through woman." What is all this except open unbelief and resistance, when the apostle says expressly that this legislation was the enactment of that Christ who condescended to be born of woman?

Again, one would have us read the prohibition of 1 Cor. 14:34, "it is not permitted to females to babble." Some pretended usage is cited to show that the verb is here used in a bad sense only, and that the prohibition to a woman to talk nonsense in public address does not exclude, but rather implies, her right to preach, provided she preaches well and solidly. No expositor will need a reply to criticism so wretchedly absurd as this. But it may not be amiss to point out in refutation 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 at all and keeping silence. Again, in the parallel declaration (1 Tim. 2:12), the apostle says [Greek translation] "but a women to teach I do not allow" where he uses the word for "to teach" concerning whose regular meaning no such cavil can be invented. And the apostle's whole logic in the contexts is directed, not against silly teachings by women, but against women's teaching,

in public at all.

Another evasion is to say that the law is indeed explicit, but it was temporary. When woman was what paganism and the oriental harem had made her, she was indeed unfit for ruling and public teaching; she was but a grown-up child, ignorant, capricious 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 by better institutions into an intellectual, moral and literary equality with the man. Doubtless were the apostle here, he would himself avow it.

This is at least more decent. But as an excess it is as unfair and untenable as the other. For, first, it is false that the conception of female character Christianized, which was before the apostle's mind when enacting this exclusion from the pulpit, was the conception 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 oriental, but a glorious exception to orientalism, 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. To the competent archæologist it is known that it has ever been the trait of Judaism to assign an honorable place to woman; and the Jewish race has ever been as rare an exception as Tacitus says the German race was to the pagan depression of the sex common in ancient days. 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 honor. 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 Damaris, 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 aged John, all appear in the narrative as bright examples of Christian intelligence, activity, dignity, and nobleness. It was not left for the pretentious Christianity of the nineteenth century to begin the emancipation of woman. As soon as the primitive doctrine 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 favorable as his estimate of the male members. Thus the state of facts on which this gloss rests had no existence for 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 inferior. When this invasion is inspected it unmasks itself simply into an instance of quiet egotism. Says the Christian "woman of the period" virtually, "I am so elevated and enlightened that I am above the law, which was well enough for those old fogies, Priscilla, Persis, Eunice; and the elect lady." Indeed! This is modesty with a vengeance! Was Paul only legislating temporarily 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 grounds for the law. Not

one of them is personal, local, or temporary. Nor does he say that woman must not preach in public because he regards her as less pious, less zealous, less eloquent, less learned, less brave, or less intellectual, than man. In the advocates of woman's right to this function there is a continual tendency to a confusion of thought, as though the apostle, when he says that woman must not do what man does, meant to disparage her sex. This is a sheer mistake. His reasoning will be searched in vain for any disparagement of the qualities and virtues of that sex; and we may at this place properly disclaim all such intention also. Woman is excluded from this masculine task of public preaching by Paul, not because she is inferior to man, but simply because her Maker has ordained for her another work which is incompatible with this. So he might have pronounced, as nature does, that she shall not sing bass, not because he thought the bass chords the more beautiful- perhaps he thought the pure alto of the feminine throat far the sweeter- but because her very constitution fits her for the latter part in the concert of human existence, and therefore unfits her for the other, the coarser and less melodious part.

But 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 is plain from this, that every ground assigned for the exclusion is of universal and perpetual application. They apply to the modern, educated woman exactly as they applied to Phoebe, Priscilla, Damaris and Eunice. They lose not a grain of force by any change of social usages or feminine culture, being found in the facts of woman's origin and nature and the designed end of her existence. Thus this second evasion is totally closed. And the argument finds its final completion in such passages as 2 Tim. 2:9 and 5:14. A few aged women of peculiar circumstances are admitted as assistants in the diaconal labors. The rest of the body of Christian women the apostle then assigns to the domestic sphere, intimating clearly that their attempts to go beyond it would minister to adversaries a pretext to revile. Here, then, we have the clearest proof, in a negative form, that he did not design women in future to break over; for it is for woman as elevated and enlightened by the gospel he preached that he laid down the limit.

Every true believer should regard the scriptural argument as first, as sufficient, and as conclusive by itself. But as the apostle said in one place, that his task was "to commend himself to every man's conscience in God's sight," so it is proper to gather the teachings of sound human prudence and experience which support God's wise law. The justification is not found in any disparagement of woman as man's natural inferior, but in the primeval fact: "Male and female made he them." In order to ground human society God saw it necessary to fashion for man's mate, not his exact image, but his counterpart. Identity would have utterly marred their companionship, and would have been an equal curse to both. But out of this unlikeness in resemblance it must obviously follow 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 best do some things which she cannot do so well, than to the man that woman has her natural superiority in other things. But it will be cried: "Your Bible doctrine makes man the ruler, woman the ruled." True. It was absolutely necessary, especially after sin had entered the race, that a foundation for social order should be laid in a family government. This government could not be made consistent, peaceful or orderly by being made double-headed, for human finitude, and especially sin, would

ensure collision, at least at some times, between any two human wills. It was essential to the welfare of both husband and wife and of the offspring that there must be an ultimate human head somewhere. Now let reason decide, was it meet 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 protégée; that the divinely ordained bread-winner should be controlled by the bread-dispenser? Every candid woman admits that this would have been unnatural and unjust. Hence God, acting, so to speak, under an unavoidable moral necessity, assigned to the male the domestic government, regulated and tempered, indeed, by the strict laws of God, by self-interest and by the tenderest affection; and to the female the obedience of love. On this order all other social order depends. It was not the design of Christianity to subvert it, but only to perfect and re-fine it. Doubtless that spirit of wilfulness, which is a feature of our native carnality in both man and woman, tempts us to feel that any subordination is a hardship, so that it is felt while God has been a Father to the man, he has been but a stepfather to the woman. 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 inexorable condition of peace and happiness, and this as much in heaven as on earth; that this subjection was not imposed on woman only as a penalty, but as for her and her offspring'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 he has endued him with the natural attributes which qualify him to labor abroad, to subdue dangers, to protect, to govern. He has given these qualities in less 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. Hence all attempts to reverse it must fail, and must result only in confusion.

Now, a wise God designs no clashing between his domestic and political and his ecclesiastical arrangements. He has ordained that the man shall be head in the family and the commonwealth; it would be a confusion full of mischief to make the woman head in the ecclesiastical sphere. But we have seen that the right of public teaching must involve the right of spiritual rule. The woman who has a right to preach, if there be any such, ought also claim to be a ruling elder. How would it work to have husband and wife, ruler and subject, change places as often as they passed from the dwelling or the court-room and senate chamber to the church? When we remember how universally the religious principles, which it is the prerogative of the presbyter to enforce, interpenetrate and regulate man's secular duties, we see that this amount of overturning would result in little short of absolute anarchy.

Again, the duties which natural affection, natural constitution, and imperious considerations of convenience distribute between the man and the woman make it practicable for him and impracticable for her to pursue, without their neglect, the additional tasks of the public preacher and evangelist. Let an instance be taken from the nurture of children. The bishop must be "husband of one wife." Both the parents owe

duties to their children; but the appropriate duties of the mother, especially towards little children, are such that she could not leave them as the pastor must for his public tasks without criminal neglect and their probable ruin. It may be said that this argument has no application to unmarried women. The answers are, that God contemplates marriage as the proper condition of woman, while he does not make celibacy a crime, and that the sphere he assigns to the unmarried woman is also private and domestic.

Some minds doubtless imagine a degree of force in this statement, that God has bestowed on some women gifts and graces eminently qualifying them to edify his churches, and as he commits no waste he thereby shows that he designs such women at least to preach. Enough has been already said to show how utterly unsafe such pretended reasonings are. "God giveth no account of his matters to any man." Does he not often give most splendid endowments 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 commits no waste." It is not for us to surmise how he will utilize those seemingly abortive endowments. He knows how and where to do it. We must bow to his dispensation, whether explicable or not. The case is the same in this respect with his ordinance restraining the most gifted woman from publicity. But there is a more obvious answer. God has assigned to her a private sphere sufficiently important and honorable to justify the whole expenditure of angelic endowments- the formation of the character of children. This is the noblest and most momentous work done on earth. Add to it the efforts of friendship, the duties of the daughter, sister, wife and charitable almoner, and the labors of authorship suitable for woman, and we see a field wide enough for the highest talents and the most sanctified ambition. Does self-will feel that somehow the sphere of the pulpit orator is more splendid still? Wherein? Only in that it has features which gratify carnal ambition and the lust for carnal applause of men. But let it be noted that Christians are forbidden to have these desires! Let, then, the Christian comply with God's law requiring him to crucify ambition, and the only features which made any difference between the private and the public spheres of soul-culture are gone. The Christian who, in the performance of the public work of rearing souls for heaven, fosters the ambitious motive, has deformed his worthiness in the task with a defilement which sinks it far below that of the humblest peasant mother who is training her child for God. Does the objector return to the charge with the cavil that, while the faithful mother rears six, or possibly twice six, 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 modest Christian mother's training. Had he been reared in the disorderly home of the clerical Mrs. Jellyby, instead of being the spiritual father of thousands, he would have been an ignorant rowdy or a disgusting pharisee. So that the worthiness of his public success belongs fully as much to the modest 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 to 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. Its public recognition is usually more through the

children and beneficiaries she ennobles than through her own person. True; and that is precisely the feature of her work which makes it most Christ-like. It is precisely the feature at which a sinful and selfish ambition takes offence.

The movement towards the preaching of women does not necessarily spring from a secular "woman's rights" movement. The preaching of women marked the early Wesleyan movement to some extent, and the Quaker assemblies. But neither of these had political aspirations for their women. At the present time, however, the preaching of women and the demand of all masculine political rights are so synchronous, and are so often seen in the same persons, that their affinity cannot be disguised. They are two parts of one common impulse. If we understand the claim of rights made by these agitators, it includes in substance two things: that the legislation at least of society shall disregard all distinctions of sex and award all the same specific rights and franchises to women and men in every respect; and that women, while in the married state, shall be released from every form of conjugal subordination and retain independent control of their property. These pretensions are indeed the proper logical consequences of that radical theory of human right which is now dominant in the country. According to that doctrine, every human being is naturally independent, owes no duties to civil or ecclesiastical society save those freely conceded in the "social contract"; is the natural equal of every other human except as he or she has forfeited liberty by crime. Legislation and taxation are unjust unless based on representation, which means the privilege of each man under government to vote for his governors. If these propositions were true, then, indeed, their application to women would be indisputable. And it would be hard for the radical politician to explain why it was right to apply them in favor of ignorant negroes and deny their application to intelligent ladies. We here see the great danger attending the present misguided woman's movement. Neither the politicians nor the American masses cherish the purpose of being logically consistent; and both are in the well-known habit of proclaiming doctrines for which they care nothing, and which they do not mean to hold honestly, as "stalking horses" for a temporary end. But their demagogism has given a currency and hold to these political heresies whose extent and tenacity make them perilous. God has made man a logical animal; the laws of his reason compel him to think connectedly to some degree. Hence false principles once firmly fixed are very apt to bring after them their appropriate corollaries in the course of time, however distasteful to the promulgators of the parent errors. To the radical mind, possessed with these false politics, the perpetual demand of these obvious corollaries by pertinacious women must apply a stress which is like the "continual dropping that weareth away a stone." They can quote the Declaration of Independence in the sense these radicals hold it: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are by nature equal and inalienably entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." "All just government is founded in the consent of the governed," etc., etc. It is true that this document, rationally interpreted, teaches something wholly different from the absurd equality of the radical, which demands for every member of society all the specific franchises which any member has. The wise men of 1776 knew that men are not naturally equal, in strength, talent, virtue, or ability; and that different orders of human beings naturally inherit very different sets of rights and franchises, according as they are qualified to enjoy and employ them for their own good and the good of the whole. But they meant to teach that in one very important respect all

are naturally equal. This is the equality which Job recognized (ch. 31:15) as existing between him and his slave; the equality of a common origin, a common humanity and immortality. It is the equality of the golden rule. By this right, that human being whom the laws endow with the smallest franchises in society has the same kind of moral right to have that small franchise respected by his fellows, as the man who justly possesses the largest franchise. It is the equality, embodied in the great maxim of the British Constitution, "that before the law all are equal." This is true, although Britain is an aristocratic monarchy, and rights are distributed to the different orders very differently. Earl Derby has sundry franchises which the British peasant can no more possess than he can grasp the moon. Yet in the constitutional sense, the peasant and the earl are "equal before the law." If indicted for crime, each has the inalienable right to be tried by his peers. The same law which shields the earl's entailed estates, equally protects the peasant's collage. As the men of 1776 were struggling to retain for America the rights of British freemen, which the king was unconstitutionally invading, their declaration must be construed as teaching this equality of the free British Constitution. So when they said that "taxation without representation" was intrinsically unjust, they never dreamed of teaching this maxim as to individual tax-payers. The free British Constitution, for which they were contending, had never done so. They asserted the maxim of the commonwealth. Some representation of the commonwealth taxed, through such order of the citizens as properly constitute the representative populus, is necessary to prevent taxation from becoming unjust.

But this, the true, historical and rational meaning of these maxims, is now unpopular with radicalism; it cannot away with the true doctrine. And for this reason it has no sufficient answer for the plea of "women's rights." The true answer is found in the correct statement of human right we have given. The woman is not designed by God, nor entitled to all the franchises in society to which the male is entitled. God has disqualified her for any such exercise of them as would benefit herself or society, by the endowments of body, mind, and heart he has given her, and the share he has assigned her in the tasks of social existence. And as she has no right to assume the masculine franchises, 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 woman man's cherished and invaluable "helpmeet," the traits which she must have in order to fulfil the purpose of her being would ensure her unfitness to meet the peculiar temptations of publicity and power. The attempt would debauch all these lovelier traits, while it would leave her still, as the rival of man, "the weaker vessel." She would lose all and gain nothing.

One consequence of this revolution would be so certain and so terrible, that it cannot be passed over. It must result in the abolition of all permanent marriage ties. Indeed, the bolder advocates do not scruple to avow it. The destruction of marriage would follow by this cause, if no other, that the unsexed politicating woman, the importunate manikin-rival, would never inspire in men that true affection on which marriage should be founded. The mutual attraction of the two complementary halves would be forever gone. The abolition of marriage would follow again by another cause. The rival interests and desires of two equal wills are inconsistent with domestic union, government, or peace. Shall the children of this unnatural connection be held responsible to both of two sinful

but coordinate and equally supreme wills? Heaven pity the children. Again, who ever heard of a perpetual copartnership in which the parties had no power to enforce the performance of the mutual duties nor to dissolve the tie made intolerable by violation? It would be as iniquitous as impossible. Such a copartnership of equals, with coordinate wills and independent interests, must be separable at will, as all other such copartnerships are.

This common movement for "women's rights," and women's preaching, must be regarded, then, as simply infidel. It cannot be candidly upheld without attacking the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. We are convinced that there is only one safe attitude for Christians, presbyters, and church courts to assume towards it. This is utterly to discountenance it, as they do any other assault of infidelity on God's truth and kingdom. The church officer who becomes an accomplice of this intrusion certainly renders himself obnoxious to discipline, just as he would by assisting to celebrate an idolatrous mass.

We close with one suggestion to such women as may be inclined to this new claim. If they read history, they 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 ponder candidly how much they possess here, which their sisters have enjoyed in no other age. What bestowed those peculiar privileges on the Christian women of America? The Bible. Let them beware, then, how they do anything to undermine the reverence of mankind for the authority of the Bible. It is undermining their own bulwark. If they understand how universally in all but Bible lands the "weaker vessel" has been made the slave of man's strength and selfishness, they will gladly "let well enough alone," lest in grasping at some impossible prize beyond, they lose the privileges they now have, and fall back to the gulf of oppression from which these doctrines of Christ and Paul have lifted them.

#### **Endnotes**

**1 Appeared in The Southern Presbyterian Review for October, 1879.**