

June 7, 2016

Question: Why can't women be preachers and pastors?

Answer: The Declaration of Independence contains the following statement: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..." But, did the drafters of that document fully understand the import of what they had written? Are men (and women) created equal? The answer to that question is as varied as the sources consulted.

From the "wisdom literature" of the Neo-Babylonian period (ca. 700 BC) we read: "A woman is a hole, a ditch, a woman is a sharp iron dagger that cuts a man's throat" (**Civilization**, pg. 62).

Aristotle seems to have shared a similar disdain for women. Writing regarding the qualities required of a character in a tragedy, he said: "Good is possible in every class of persons; for even a woman and a slave are good; yet a woman is perhaps an inferior thing while a slave is wholly inconsequential" (**The Poetics**, pg. 29). Further, he wrote: "It is not fitting that a woman be manly or clever."

Shakespeare must also have shared the low view of women when he wrote: "Women will all turn monsters" (*King Lear*, Act III, Scene VII).

Some might even argue that the church shares a similar "low view" of women, and further style the church "an all-boys club" because only men are placed in leadership roles and serve in public ways.

I am quick to point out that the Bible does not share this low view of women. Women like Sarah, Miriam, Rahab, Deborah, Hannah, and Ruth are remembered with fondness for the significant roles they played in Old Testament history. The New Testament certainly has its share of heroines. Women like Mary the mother of Jesus, Elizabeth, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus, Dorcas, Phebe, and Lois and Eunice come to mind. The "price of such women is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10).

A Higher View of Women

In the beginning God looked at His creation and said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18). It was only at the close of day six when woman had been made that He could again survey His handiwork, and this time He said, "it is very good" (Gen. 1:31). Creation without woman was incomplete!

The Bible presents women neither as man's inferior or superior. There are tragic stories associated with women like Eve, Potiphar's wife, Jezebel, and Athaliah, but there are far more accounts of great women of faith, devotion, and service to God and man. The Savior came into the world through a woman (Matt. 1:18-25). The first to see Jesus following His resurrection was a woman (John 20:11-16). One of the greatest workers in the early church at Joppa was Tabitha (Dorcas), a woman whose life was full "of good works and alms deeds which she did" (Acts 9:36). At her death Peter was summoned to Joppa where he was greeted by "all the widows" who stood by "weeping, and showing the coats and garments" which she had made (Acts 9:36).

Where would the church be without those like Dorcas? So much of the work of the church is done by women. That is true in every congregation, and has been true from the beginning.

Equal Status - Different Roles

The Bible does not say, nor does it imply that women are inferior to men. The reference to the "weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7) has nothing to do with man's superiority or woman's inferiority. It

merely acknowledges the fact that on average men are physically stronger than women!

The New Testament is clear in acknowledging that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). The Apostle Paul made it clear that there are no ethnic, social, or gender barriers between us and God (Galatians 3:28). Men and women are equally loved by God. However, equal worth does not mean identical roles. A couple of illustrations may help us understand this distinction.

Suppose a farmer had a \$30,000.00 sports car, a \$30,000.00 pickup truck, and a \$30,000.00 tractor. Since they are of equal value, would the farmer be wise to plow with the pickup, haul hay in the sports car, and drive the tractor to the mall? Why not? Aren't they all worth the same money? Yes, but they have different roles!

Or, suppose a student bought a \$10.00 dictionary, a \$10.00 atlas, and a \$10.00 text book on logic. Would he reason that since they were of equal value that they had identical roles? Would he use the dictionary when he was lost, the text book to find the meaning of a word, and the atlas to prepare for his logic exam? Why not? Equal value does not mean identical roles!

The New Testament limits the role of women in the public assembly:

1 Cor. 14:34-37 ³⁴Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law. ³⁵And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. ³⁶What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? ³⁷If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

1 Tim. 2:11, 12 ¹¹Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. ¹²But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

Women did not serve in leadership roles in the New Testament church. No woman was an elder (pastor), deacon, evangelist, or preacher. And, no woman taught or took any other public leadership role in any mixed assembly of the church. Women, were not restricted in teaching other women or children. In fact, just the opposite, they are commanded to engage in such teaching (Titus 2:4, 5). And, in a private setting a husband and wife team (Pricilla and Aquilla) took a man (Apollos) aside and explained the way of God more accurately to him (Acts 18:26).

God ordained male leadership in the home (Eph. 5:21-33) and in the church (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Jesus did not change that organizational and leadership structure!

False Arguments to Set Aside Clear Biblical Teaching

Some argue that the prohibitions on a woman's role in the church come from the pen of Paul. They then assert that Paul was a **misogynist**. There is absolutely no biblical support for this assertion, and to argue such is to deny that Paul was inspired and that what he wrote was to be received as the "commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37).

Others assert that Paul only expressed his **personal opinion**. Again, this is a denial of Paul's inspiration. He commended the church at Thessalonica because they received the word from him (Paul), "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13).

In an effort to get around the clear statements of Scripture, there are those who argue that these were **cultural** prohibitions and relevant then, but not now. Culture may change, but God's word does not (Psalm 119:89)!

Finally, it is argued that Jesus **changed the role** of women, and **Gal. 3:28** overrules other

prohibitions. But, if Jesus **changed the role of women**, why was there not an apostle called Mary, Joanna, or some other female, and where exactly in the gospels does Jesus change the public role of women? It is not there. Further, Galatians 3:28 is addressing the subject of equality of worth or value, and not of roles. All people, regardless of gender, social standing, or ethnicity are equally loved by God and find salvation in Christ through baptism.

HER GREATEST ROLE

The most important work a woman does is done in her capacity as a wife and mother (1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:4, 5). I would also argue that a man's greatest work is to be a godly husband and father.

Society has tried to minimize the importance of a mother's role. Women are told that they must look beyond the home and their role as a wife and mother to find true meaning and happiness in life.

Mrs. Gale Oler, writing in the *Christian Woman* on the subject of women in the business and professional world, had this to say: **"Women are in the working world to stay. Reasons are varied. Some are bread winners, some think they need a larger loaf, and some work to keep from baking bread at home"** (*The Christian Woman*, March, 1955). That is not to say that women cannot function, and function at a high level in the nine to five world outside the home. But, it is not necessary to look beyond the home to discover true meaning and purpose in life. It is shameful that so many have been taught that a choice to be a godly wife and mother is somehow less fulfilling than the life of a professional woman. When life is nearing its end and we look back, it will not be the promotions, awards, or financial gains that will bring the greatest comfort and joy, but rather the relationship and bonds formed in the home as a godly wife and mother.

CONCLUSION

To put it plainly, women cannot serve as preachers or pastors because God limited their role in the public assembly.