

Taking Our Place - the Ministry of Women

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of women being in subjection to men in the church, while also highlighting the value and importance of women's ministry in God's economy.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:3-14, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 5:22, 1 Timothy 2:11-12, 1 Timothy 2:15, 1 Peter 3:4

Topics: "Obedience and Authority", "Role of Women in the Church"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes the biblical instructions regarding the role and ministry of women in the church, asserting that while women are equal to men in salvation, there are specific roles and responsibilities outlined for them. He explains that women should be in subjection to men, remain silent in church, and not usurp authority, while also highlighting the importance of their ministry in private and family settings. MacDonald argues that these instructions are rooted in God's design and creation order, and that obedience should stem from a loving heart rather than legalism. He concludes by encouraging women to embrace their God-given roles, which are vital to the church's health and function.

Transcript

Definite instructions are given in the New Testament concerning the position and service of women in the church. We shall now summarize these instructions.

1. The Primary Matter

With regard to such matters as salvation or acceptance before God, woman is on an equality with man. "There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This does not mean, however, that differences of sex are abolished in the church. When dealing with matters of everyday life, the Scriptures distinguish between male and female. For instance, in Ephesians 5 we have the admonitions: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands" (v. 22); "Husbands, love your wives" (v. 25). Therefore, we may say that as far as her standing before God is concerned, woman is treated exactly the same as man; but that as far as her position in the church is concerned, a distinction is made. The distinction, in brief, is that woman should be in subjection to the man (1 Corinthians 11:3).

2. Accentuating the Negative

Specifically, the following injunctions are laid down in the Word in order to define the various ways in which the subjection of the woman is to be manifested. She must remain silent in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35). What is meant by "remaining silent" is further explained. She is not permitted to teach (1 Timothy 2: 12). She should not ask questions publicly (1 Corinthians 14:35). She should learn in silence with all subjection (1 Timothy 2:11). She must not usurp authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:12). She must not pray or prophesy with her head uncovered (1 Corinthians 11:5). That this does not permit women praying publicly in the church, however, is strongly implied in 1 Timothy 2:8, "I will therefore that men pray every where." Here the word used for "men" means "males" in contrast to "females." The Greek word employed here excludes women.

If these instructions are forced on women in a harsh, legalistic spirit, the result is usually twofold. God is not pleased with an enforced obedience which does not spring from the heart (Psalm 51:17). The women themselves are apt to become bitter and resentful. If on the other hand, the reasons for such instructions are clearly understood, and there follows the obedience of a loving, submissive heart, then this is of great price in the sight of the Lord (1 Samuel 15:22).

3. Reasons Why

God has graciously condescended to state certain underlying principles in His Word in order to explain why Christian women should be in subjection to the men.

First of all, in the order of creation, man had priority over the woman. "Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2: 13). "The man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man" (1 Corinthians 11:8). The argument here is that the order instituted by God in creation is the order which He intends to be maintained in the church; namely, the head of the woman is the man (1 Corinthians 11: 3).

Secondly, the purpose of creation indicates the headship of the man over the woman. "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Corinthians 11: 9). Thirdly, sin entered into the world when Eve usurped authority over her husband, Adam. "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14). The Lord does not wish His new creation to be marred through this type of insubjection, and so He has instructed the women to be under obedience.

In the fourth place, Paul appeals to the consistent testimony of the old Testament Scriptures to show that women should be under obedience (1 Corinthians 14:34). "They are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. While no particular commandment states this clearly, yet it is the tenor of the Old Testament.

4. The Covered Head

With regard to the instruction that women should be covered (or veiled) when praying or prophesying, two additional reasons are presented. Angels are looking on. "For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels" (1 Corinthians 11:10, R.V.). This verse seems to picture the angelic hosts observing God's order on the earth, and it states that women should wear a covering on their head as a sign or badge of the authority of the man. Thus, the angels see that the transgression of Eve in the first creation is not perpetuated in the new creation.

The lesson is taught by nature itself. "Doth not even nature itself teach you ...", (1 Corinthians 11: 14). In the original creation, God gave women a distinctive covering--that of long hair. Paul argues from this that a

divine principle is illustrated thereby; namely, that woman should wear a veil or covering over her head when praying or prophesying.

5. Accentuating the Positive

The fact that woman is in subjection to the man might seem to indicate to some that she has no place or ministry in God's economy. However, the Scriptures contradict this by showing that woman's ministry, though not a public one, is nonetheless real and important. Her position is saved by childbearing (1 Timothy 2: 15). This difficult verse might mean that a godly mother, though restrained from ministering publicly, is not thereby relegated to a place of uselessness. Her position is to rear her family in the fear and admonition of the Lord. If she and her husband continue in the faith, she may one day have sons to preach and teach the Word. Thus the expression, "she shall be saved," might refer, not to the soul's salvation, or even to being saved from physical death in the act of childbearing, but rather to the salvation of woman's place and privilege. She will not become a nonentity, but will have this glorious ministry of rearing children to live for God's glory.

Other examples of women's ministry are found in the New Testament, such as ministering of their substance (Luke 8:3), showing hospitality (Romans 16:1), and teaching the younger women (Titus 2:4).

6. Some Common Objections

Numerous objections and questions arise in connection with the subject of women's ministry. Does not Paul's teaching on this subject, it is argued, represent the views of an unmarried man with a prejudice against women? No! They are teachings of the Holy Spirit of God, or, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:37, "the commandments of the Lord."

Then it is asked if Paul was merely teaching what was a local custom in his day without any idea that this state of things should be applicable to us today. The answer is that his first epistle to the Corinthians was written not only to the church of God in Corinth, but to "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Therefore the instructions are of universal application. But, we are asked, does not Paul indicate in 1 Corinthians 11:16 that the things that he had been teaching were not binding, and that such customs were not practiced among the churches of God? ("But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.") Such an interpretation undermines the inspiration and authority of the Bible. What the verse really says is that contention about these commandments of the Lord was not a custom in the churches. The churches accepted them and obeyed them, without arguing or explaining them away. Since woman's hair is given to her for a covering' it is argued, is not that the only covering that is required? There are two coverings in 1 Corinthians 11. A woman's hair is mentioned as a covering in verse 15, but a veil is necessarily in view in verse 5. Otherwise verse 6 would be saying in effect, "For if a woman does not have her hair on, let her also be shorn, but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her put her hair on." Obviously such a meaning is impossible. It must mean that a covering, other than her hair, is necessary.

Does not the instruction for women to keep silence in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34), merely prohibit their chattering or gossiping while the service is in progress? No! The passage says, "It is not permitted unto them to speak." The word translated "speak" here never has the meaning of "chatter" or "babble" in the New Testament. The same word is used of God in verse 21, "With men of other tongues ... will I speak."

Many additional questions arise, such as whether it is all right for women to give a testimony in public, to give an account of their missionary work, to sing a solo. Where individual cases are not specifically dealt with in the Bible, then the general principles of the Word must be allowed to decide. Thus, in any doubtful situation, we should ask: Does this constitute a usurping of authority over the man? Is woman taking a place of leadership? Is she teaching the Word? Since these things are prohibited, we should avoid anything that might constitute an infringement of the spirit of these teachings of the Word.

7. God's Wisdom is Manifest

God's design in setting forth these instructions was His people's good as well as His own glory. Where His Word has been ignored or wilfully violated, strife and disorder have ensued. The positive evil of women usurping authority and teaching publicly is seen in the rise of many cults--notably Seventh Day Adventism, Theosophy, Christian Science--in which women had a prominent role.

On the other hand, nothing is more comely and pleasant than to see Christian women occupying their God-appointed place and exhibiting "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4).

LET US GO FORTH UNTO HIM!

In the previous pages, we have discussed the church, both from its universal aspect and its local aspect. we have sought to discover the principles of the church as taught in the New Testament, and to catch the simplicity, zeal, and spirituality of the assembly as it existed in the days of the apostles. Now the question remains, "What is the application of all this to believers in the twentieth century?"

1. The Church Today

In order to answer this question, we should first take a brief look at conditions in the professing church today. We find widespread departure, failure, and ruin. We find vast ecclesiastical organizations combining material wealth and political influence but largely devoid of spiritual power. we find denominationalism and sectarianism claiming the loyalty and support of their adherents, yet presenting an unscriptural view of the church. we frequently find the meetings of the church occupied with a lifeless liturgy and a soul-deadening ritualism, offering the people shadows instead of Christ. We find churches with membership rolls including both saved and unsaved, both true believers and those with no vital union with the living Savior. Finally, we find churches that have been corrupted with the leaven of modernism, that have substituted a social gospel for the message of redeeming grace.

2. The Need for Separation

If it be asked what a Christian should do who finds himself in such a situation, there can only be one answer. Separate from it! The Word of God is mercilessly uncompromising in its insistence that believers should withdraw themselves from every form of evil - whether ecclesiastical, doctrinal, or moral. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

It is vain to argue that a Christian should remain within a corrupt church in order to be a voice for God in it. "There is not a single hero or saint, whose name sparkles on the inspired pages, who moved his times from within: all, without exception, have raised the cry, "Let us go forth without the camp;"... The man who goes into the world to level it up will soon find himself levelled down.... The safest and strongest position is outside the camp. Archimedes said he could move the world, if only he had a point of rest given him outside it. Thus, too, can a handful of God's servants influence their times, if only they resemble Elijah, whose life was spent altogether outside the pale of the court and the world of his time." "To all who argue for a continuance in a church position which they know to be wrong, Samuel furnishes a pointed and powerful reply--'To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.'"

3. What Next?

But the question still remains, "What should a person do after he has obeyed the scriptural injunction to 'come out'?" In answer to this, we would suggest the following scriptural plan.

Gather together in Christian simplicity with a group of likeminded believers.

Gather to Christ alone; make Him the sole attraction. Though such a policy will not result in large crowds, it will at least provide a nucleus of faithful believers who will not be easily moved by trials or discouragements.

As far as a meeting place is concerned, a home is entirely satisfactory, and has a great deal of scriptural precedent (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). Those who require a splendid edifice with religious hardware have never really discovered the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus as the Person to whom His people gather.

Adopt no name or policy that would exclude any true believer from the fellowship.

Adopt no denominational affiliation, and steadfastly refuse any outside control or interference that would infringe on the sovereignty of the local church.

Resist the constant tendency to allow the ministry to drift into the hands of one man. Rather allow the Holy Spirit to use the various gifts which Christ has given to the Church, and provide for the active manifestation of the priesthood of all believers.

Gather together regularly for prayer, study of the Word, breaking of bread, and fellowship. Then engage in an active gospel effort, both individually and collectively.

In short, seek to meet as a New Testament church in the truest sense of the word by giving a faithful representation of the body of Christ and by obeying the commandments of the Lord.

4. Those Who Have Come Out

Interestingly enough, this is being done by Christians all over the world today. With no guidebook but the Bible, they have found these principles to be divine, and have followed them in spite of reproach and slander. They own no head but Christ, no fellowship but His Body, no headquarters but His throne. They seek in true humility to witness to the unity of the body of Christ. In their fellowship, they seek to provide a sanctuary for true believers who are oppressed by modernism and related evils. There is no directory on earth that lists these churches, nothing of an earthly nature to bind them together. Their only unity is that

which is formed and maintained by the Holy Spirit, and they are content that it should be so.

There is no reason why similar fellowships should not continue to be formed by the Great Head of the Church through the sacrificial and prayerful exercise of His people. Where Christians have caught the vision, and are willing to suffer for it, the Lord will reward their exercise and endeavors, and fulfill their longings for His glory.

Is it possible that on the very eve of the Lord's return, we are about to see a great revolt led by the Holy Spirit against apostate Christendom, and a fresh, new movement of His grace, forming small, independent fellowships of Bible-loving Christians? May He who loved the church, and gave Himself for it, bring it to pass, for His own glory!

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