

The Prophetess

The ministry or even the existence of such a ministry as prophetess in this age brings up questions that cannot be easily and quickly answered. However, a few observations from the scripture will assist us in making some sound conclusions about prophetesses, female preachers or women pastors.

There are five direct references to prophetesses in the Old Testament. On three of these occasions, true and profitable prophecy is received at their mouths. (Exodus 15:20, Judges 4:4, II Kings 22:14, and II Chronicles 34:22). On a fourth, the prophetess Noadiah, attempts to deceive and intimidate God's man and hinder God's work (Nehemiah 6:14).

Joel prophesies that daughters and handmaiden will prophesy in the final age as well as sons (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:17-18). The New Testament fulfillment of this is found in the spontaneous utterance of all the 120 at Pentecost, when the women as well as the men spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. Furthermore, we are told that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9).

However, it is not altogether certain that one who prophesies from time to time is necessarily the same as a prophet or a prophetess. One may witness of the word of God and yet not be a preacher, may pray and not be an intercessor, may give and not have the ministry of giving, or may exhort a brother and not be an exhorter.

In the Old Testament, the prophetess has almost, if not equal, standing with the prophet, having power to inform kings (II Kings 22:14) and to direct military commanders (Judges 4:4). They were, however, extremely rare. The Old Testament word *nabi* for prophet occurs 313, while the feminine word *nebiah* is found only six times, two of which are the same occasion recorded in two different books.

The prophetess is even more rare in the New Testament. The Greek word *prophetes* for prophet appears 149 times, its feminine equivalent only twice. Of these two, one, the prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36) properly belongs to the Old Testament order, being 84 years old when Christ was born.

The only other occurrence in the New Testament is the Jezebel who "calleth herself a prophetess" of Revelation 2:20. In the light of these facts, it seems there is serious doubt that the ministry of prophetess is carried over into the New Testament.

If one should object to this possibility on the basis of what is right in the Old Testament must be also right in the New Testament, then he must also answer these questions: Is it all right for a man to have more than one wife plus a number of concubines as men did in the Old Testament? May he put away his wife for any cause he chooses as men did in the Old Testament? Should the adulterous woman be stoned at the hands of sinners equally guilty? Should a man love his friends and hate his enemies? Should he take revenge, eye for eye, tooth for tooth as instructed in the Old Testament?

These things were permitted in the Old Testament, because of the hardness of men's hearts and their spiritual blindness. "But from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). Neither was it so from the beginning that woman should exercise authority over man (Genesis 3:16)

Jesus appeals to the beginning for the one man-one woman-for-life principle, and so sets aside the inferior principles practiced in the Old Testament. Paul does the same thing in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, going all the way back to the original principles for fallen men, setting aside the violations of those principles in the Old Testament.

That the woman is excluded from such an authoritative office as would be the equivalent of a prophet is further attested to by these facts:

1. Of the 66 books in the bible, not one was written by a woman, although the Holy Spirit is the Author of them all.
2. The five ministries given by Christ for the edification of the church are all masculine (Ephesians 4:11-14).
3. Jesus chose twelve, all men, to be apostles. He also had several women followers. A woman was first to see Him after His resurrection, and reported it to His apostles. But they are never referred to as anything beyond disciples.
4. Paul had numerous female assistants, but none of them are ever called prophetesses.
5. There is not the slightest hint of a woman exercising authority in any New Testament church or over any men except the Jezebel of Revelation 2:20, and the Spirit rebukes the messenger of that church for permitting it, threatening judgment to all her followers.

Some erroneously use Galatians 3:28 as intending to obliterate God's distinction between male and female at conversion to Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." To hold that there is no distinction between the sexes in Christ while the scriptures give explicit instructions based on that very difference between men and woman is foolishness. A slave converted to Christ is not thereby released from his physical servitude. He is simply a Christian slave. A man does not obtain his release from prison by becoming God's child. He becomes a Christian prisoner. A Greek converted to Christ does not lose his citizenship or ethnic heritage. In like manner, union with Christ does not obscure sexual differences. Indeed, it enhances and emphasizes them. No man is so masculine as the Christian man; and no woman so feminine as the blood-washed female. We are all alike justified. We have no higher or lower standing with God because of our blood lineage, financial or social standing or sex. Our relationship to Christ as the seed of Abraham is the same. But outside of that, nothing unique about our persons is changed.

It is unthinkable that in Christ the sexes should be nullified . . . that man and woman simply become nothing more than obscure "persons." Abolition of sexual identity and the idea of intermingling the roles of each does not rise from Christian thought at all.

That sort of mentality belongs to evolutionists, humanists and infidels. It is the logical conclusion of a philosophy that has man rising through blind chance from lifeless inorganic rock through lower life and beasts to become *homo sapiens*. In such a system the difference in sexes exists only because of the way the genes and chromosomes chance to fall together. There is no intelligent, deliberate design in it at all. Therefore, the idea of different roles for men and women is the product of ignorant prejudice and primitive thinking. Men can be made to function just as well in female roles, and women can take up activities that have been historically masculine. It is the insane, demonically inspired doctrine of this present evil world, and that which will wreck and ruin all who subscribe to it.

The idea that feminists and “progressive” sociologists would have us believe that women have always been down-trodden, abused, without rights and without power will not stand the test of history. We have already indicated that in the Old Testament women judged nations, advised kings and military commanders. We further note that queens sometimes ruled alone. At other times a king’s wife or wives so dominated him that they virtually ran the country. Proverbs 31:10-31 speaks of a virtuous woman who manages her household with grace and wisdom. She “consider a field and buys it,” she “makes fine linen and sells it, delivering girdles unto the merchant.” Her creative ability is not denied or suppressed.

The first convert in Philippi was a businesswoman named Lydia (Acts 16:14). When forbidding the man to put away the wife, Jesus also forbade the woman to put away her husband (Mark 10:12). Such a command would have been unnecessary if women did not in fact do that.

The ballyhoo that this generation is doing something evolutionary and progressive in “liberating” the woman and placing her in positions that are reserved for men only is a lie. Women have never lacked for power and influence simply because they were women.

But the Christian cannot indulge in the ignorant mentality of humanists and evolutionists. He is a creationist. He believes that man and woman were both made by a Wise and Intelligent Creator Who had deliberate design in mind: that the man was made to function best in some tasks and the woman for others. Had man no need for someone entirely different from himself, God would have simply made another man for a companion. Nor were the two made different for reproduction purposes alone. (God could have reproduced the species some other way.) “I will make an *help* meet for him. Woman is man’s complement, his helper, his assistant, companion. He needs her to perform with him in the capacity for which the Creator made her and for which he is totally unsuited.

If the world cannot accept these basic anthropological truths, then certainly the Christian community must, or abandon and disavow their confidence in the Holy Scriptures.

Now, some of my readers are going to take exception because they know of a certain situation or a certain woman who has violated these principles and God has apparently blessed it. They know of a woman who does a good job pastoring a church, teaching a class of men and women. They know of a woman preacher, an evangelist who has a great ministry. There is this certain female Bible professor in a Christian college. Then there is that famous aged spinster who goes across the country leading and directing Bible conferences, strutting about like a little Napoleon telling preachers where to get off and how to pastor churches.

What am I to do with these Biblical truths in the face of all this? Let God be true and every man a liar!! Who is to say that God has truly blessed these situation? This blind generation cannot distinguish between a blessing and a curse. The very thing that we might mistake for God’s blessing may be the thing which destroys us. Can that be really considered a blessing, which seems to prove God’s word unreliable and inconsistent? That is the very stuff of which agnostics, skeptics and infidels are made. Experience does not interpret truth. Rather, the reverse is true. Truth is never at the mercy of experience. We have no right to expect the true blessing of God when we embrace a violation of truth. What we call a blessing is a lie. We have been willingly misled by the deceived woman as was Adam in the garden.

It is true that God passes over our ignorance in some instances and condones our weaknesses in others. He condoned the Hebrew midwives’ lying to Pharaoh in Exodus 1 because they were unable to believe God to protect them in the truth. But that does not mean that it is right to lie sometimes. We must not mistake God’s passing over our errors and inability for His approval of them. We have no right to expect His express approval on other than sound scriptural principles.

What, then *is* the woman’s true and valid function in the church? The same as it is elsewhere. She was made a *helper*, suitable, appropriate, right, for man. Nor is she to remain totally mute in the assemblies as some would teach. If such were true, there would be no purpose of the instruction which is given for her praying or prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5. She is forbidden to engage in judging prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:34. In such a case she would be challenging men. She is forbidden to teach or to usurp authority over men in 1 Timothy 2:12. The only activity that is withheld from her is that in which capacity she must exercise authority over man. Otherwise, there is a vast area in which she can help the men in tasks and occupations for which men are not fitted, but she is.

The Lord Jesus, the Apostles, and all of God’s men in Christian history have found them to be precious laborers worthy of equal reward with the prophet.

May we continue to so honour the Christian woman, the handmaid of the Lord.

- C. M.