

"Women in the Church," by James White.

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WOMEN IN THE CHURCH.

"LET 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. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." 1 Cor. 14:34, 35.

The only safe and proper rule of Biblical interpretation is to take every passage of the Book of God as meaning what it says, word for word, excepting those cases where the text and context clearly show that a figure or parable is introduced for a more clear elucidation of the subject. In the foregoing text the apostle does not use a figure or a parable, therefore his words should be taken as meaning just what they say.

But there are many other passages from the epistles of Paul which speak as plainly of the position of woman in the house and work of God as this one does. And in order to arrive at the truth of God on this subject, a position must be found that will harmonize all the texts. The word of God is not "yea and nay," but yea and amen, to the glory of its divine Author.

Paul, in the fourteenth chapter of his epistle to the church at Corinth, is correcting existing errors and establishing order in the church of Christ. He goes even so far as to give rules for those who, under the power of the Holy Spirit, are endowed with the gift of prophecy and of tongues. There were those women, doubtless, in the apostle's day as well as in ours, who could prate about "Women's Rights" as glibly, if not as filthily, as the notorious Victoria Woodhull. Hear the noble Paul on the subject in the same epistle where the foregoing text is found: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." 1 Cor. 11:3. Paul continues in verses 4 and 5, and the reader will see that he places men and women side by side in the position and work of teaching and praying in the church of Christ, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. 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."

But what does Paul mean by saying, "Let

your women keep silence in the churches"? Certainly he does not mean that women should take no part in those religious services where he would have both men and women take part in prayer and in prophesying, or teaching the word of God to the people. The only view that will harmonize all that the apostle has said of the position and work of Christian women, is that he is giving directions relative to meetings of the church to consider the secular matters, which can be managed quite as well by the brethren as the sisters. We here give the following reasons:—

1. Both men and women attend the religious services of the church. Both hear all that is said. The woman understands quite as well as her husband, sometimes better, all that is said. They return home from church. Now apply Paul's statement to this case, "If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home." On the supposition that the husband has been out to a business meeting, may be to consult with his brethren in reference to building a meeting-house, or hiring the minister, matters in which she has deep interest, how consistent that the wife should inquire in reference to the decisions of that meeting which she did not attend.

2. But on the supposition that they had both been out to a religious meeting, where the wife had heard all, understood all, the great apostle is charged with the ridiculous farce of both sitting down and asking and answering questions relative to matters with which they were both perfectly familiar. Consistency, thou art a jewel!

In the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, holy women held positions of responsibility and honor. The first case we will here notice is that of Miriam, mentioned in Exodus 15:20, 21: "And Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Compare with Micah 6:3, 4, where the great God appeals to rebellious Israel in these words: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Here we find a woman occupying a position equal to that of Moses and Aaron, God's chosen servants to lead the millions of Israel from the house of bondage.

The next case is that of Deborah, mentioned in Judges 4:4-10: "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim; and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun.

"And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee, notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet; and Deborah went up with him." Notice the following particulars in the foregoing statements:—

1. Deborah was a prophetess. She received divine instruction from Heaven, and taught the people.

2. She was a judge in Israel. The people went up to her for judgment. A higher position no man has ever occupied.

The next cases of honorable mention are Ruth and Esther. The books of these two women hold places in the book of God with his holy prophets. Their position in the work of God was such as to give their history a place with the sacred writings translated into hundreds of languages and dialects, to be read by millions down to the close of probationary time.

The prophet Joel, as quoted by Peter, Acts 2:17, 18, describes the last days thus: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and

your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. And on my servants, and on my handmaidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Here, too, women receive the same inspiration from God as men.

And Paul speaks of the labors of Christian women in the highest terms of commendation and regard as follows: "I commend unto you Phebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." "Greet Mary who bestowed much labor on us." "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis which labored much in the Lord." Rom. 16:1-4, 6, 12.

The prophet Simeon, and Anna the prophetess waited for the consolation of Israel at the close of the Jewish age, and with joy embraced the infant Saviour.

The Christian age was ushered in with glory. Both men and women enjoyed the inspiration of the hallowed hour, and were teachers of the people. "Philip," the evangelist, "had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." Acts 21:8, 9. And the dispensation which was ushered in with glory, honored with the labors of holy women, will close with the same honors. Thus says God by his holy prophet: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Acts 2:17.

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