

"Women's Relation to the Cause of Christ," by Tenney, G. C.

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WOMAN'S RELATION TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

The queries concerning woman's position in the church come by post and by word of mouth. Devout people, skeptics, believers, advocates of women's rights, advocates of men's rights, church people, non-church people, husbands of meek wives, husbands of garrulous women, wives of meek husbands, wives of lordly husbands, people that are neither husbands nor wives — all are interested in the solution of this question, What is woman's place in the church? and what would happen if she should get out of it into the man's place? People who slight judgment, mercy, and the weightier matters of the law, halt, hesitate, ahem, shake the head, and perhaps do worse, when they learn that some women do actually speak in church; because Paul said: "Let your women keep silence in the churches : for it is not permitted unto them to speak;" and, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

The difficulty with these texts is entirely chargeable to immature conclusions reached in regard to them. It is manifestly illogical and unfair to give to any passage of Scripture an unqualified radical meaning that is at variance with the main tenor of the Bible, and directly in conflict with its plain teachings. The Bible may be reconciled in all its parts without going outside the lines of consistent interpretation. But great difficulty is likely to be experienced by those who interpret isolated passages in an independent light, according to the ideas they happen to entertain upon them. Those who were brought up to believe it to be a shame for women to speak in meeting, look no farther than these texts, and give them a sweeping application. Critics of the Bible, critics of womankind, as well as women who are looking for an excuse for idleness, seize these passages in the same manner. By their misuse of these texts many conscientious people are led into a misconception of what Paul meant to teach.

Considering the question from a broader standing, it will be seen at a glance that while it has ever been the work of the powers of darkness to degrade woman, the work of the Bible has been to elevate her. The Bible and its religion is the great civilizing agent in this world, where the natural tendency is downward to destruction. Under Christianity, multitudes of women have been raised from the degradation of slavery to their rightful place by the side of him for whom she was created a help meet for him (not help-meet), that is, a fit companion. It was the work of the gospel to remove distinctions among men in race, nationality, sex, or condition. Paul declares that "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." Gal. 3:28. This text has a generic application; it is of universal force wherever the gospel reaches. In the light of such a statement, how can women be excluded from the privileges of the gospel?

But God has given to women an important part in connection with his work throughout its entire history. In the patriarchal age and in the later dispensation are many bright examples of piety and devotion among the wives and mothers of God's people. They wrought righteousness, exercised the omnipotent power of faith, braved dangers, and witnessed for the truth as effectually as those of the other sex, with evident Coke is of God's approbation resting upon them. Two books of the Old Testament receive their titles from young heroines of faith and piety. God moved upon their hearts and upon the hearts of Sarah, Rebecca, Miriam, Rahab, Hannah, Jael, and a host of faithful women, as well as upon the hearts of rulers and prophets.

While it is true that Christ did not choose women to the apostleship, still it would be a difficult matter to show that he was partial in his regard toward the men who followed him. Miracles, discourses, promises, exhortations, recognition everywhere, are bestowed upon womankind by our Saviour. Every step in his life's history, from the annunciation to the ascension, is intimately interwoven with the experience of women, and the pathway is cheered and brightened by their help, faith, and sympathy. In his famous painting of Christ before Pilate, Munkaczy represents the Saviour as surrounded by a hostile crowd of ruffians, priests, and Pharisees. There is but one friendly, sympathetic face in the throng; a woman looks upon her Master with all the pity that faith and love can depict.

Reverting to the teachings of Paul, whose writings are in question, we discover very clearly that he was the friend, not the adversary, of women in the work of the Christian church. It is true he insists upon God's order being preserved. He objects to that anomalous condition of things in which a woman rules over a household, or where obstreperous women run the church. And who would not? Such things did exist then; they do now, sad to say. But it is not God's plan. In the church at Corinth we may understand, if we read the letters to that church with care, that there were various disorders. In the context of the passage under consideration (1 Cor. 11:34), we read: "When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." Verse 26. And we gather that each one strove to deliver his message without regard to order or peace. While some were prophesying or exhorting, others were singing or praying, others were speaking in unknown tongues, others were arguing, and the meetings were disgraceful. Unruly women added their clatter to the general confusion; and along with the other disorders, Paul sought to rebuke this trouble. These women were out of place.

There are three Greek words from which "to speak" is translated, *ei-pon*, *le-go*, and *la-le-o* they may be used interchangeably, though to the latter is given by Donnegan the following definitions: "To talk; to speak; to prate; to prattle; to babble; to chatter;" etc.; and this is the word used in 1 Cor. 14:34, where it is said women are not permitted to speak in the churches. None of the undignified terms are used in defining the other words, a fact which shows that the apostle was rebuking garrulity rather than prohibiting Christians from witnessing for the cause of Christ.

Not only do the circumstances and language lead us to conclude that these restrictions were designed to apply to special cases of impropriety, but other considerations compel us thus to interpret them. In 1 Corinthians 11, we read: "But every woman that *prayeth* or *prophesieth* with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head." Verse 5. Why make this statement, if women were not to be allowed to pray or speak in public? It is then stated that woman was ordained to be subject to man in point of authority, but "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord." Verse 11. In various epistles Paul freely recognizes the aid rendered him by the women associated with him. For instance, in Phil. 1:3 "Help those women which labored with me in the gospel." Not simply as housekeepers, for the original language indicates a close sympathy. Greenfield defines the word for "labor" in this instance, "to exert one's power and energies in company with any one." According to the views of some people, he should have written: "Stop those women, for I don't allow a woman to labor in the gospel," — a very different thing from that which he did write. If anybody still remains in doubt about Paul's attitude, let him read Romans 16, especially noting verse 12: "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord."

No doubt the wise apostle had good reason for writing as he did to the Corinth church, and for instructing Timothy just as he did as he was about to visit the churches. But it would be a gross libel on this valiant servant of Christ to impute to him the purpose to silence the

testimony of the most devoted servants of the cross. A fundamental principle of the gospel is that " God is no respecter of persons," a principle which applies to men and to women.

It does not comport with reason that the apostle had such women as these in mind when he penned the words in 1 Cor. 14:34, and in 1 Tim. 2:11, 12. Women who labor acceptably in the gospel are included among those of whom the Saviour says, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." — G. C. T.