

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Email: Jrob1517@aol.com Website: www.trinityfoundation.org Telephone: 423.743.0199 Fax: 423.743.2005

The Bible and Women Teachers

W. Gary Crampton

B. B. Warfield once wrote:

It is very plain that he who modifies the teachings of the Word of God in the smallest particular at the dictation of any man-made opinion has already deserted the Christian ground, and is already, in principle, a heretic. The very essence of heresy is that the modes of thought and tenets originating elsewhere than in the Scriptures of God are given decisive weight when they clash with the teachings of God.¹

If Warfield is correct, and the present writer is convinced that he is, then there is a great heresy afoot within the church of Jesus Christ. The latter half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century have seen an influx of women preachers and teachers into the church. This is not merely the case with apostate, liberal denominations, but even professed orthodox churches have acquiesced to the pressure of feminism. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church allows for women elders. The Presbyterian Church in America and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church have churches wherein women are allowed to teach Bible classes where men are present. The Presbyterian Church in America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America all have churches where there are women song leaders in public worship (which, according to *Colossians* 3:16, is a teaching activity). Elisabeth Elliot, Joni Eareckson Tada, and Kay Arthur are (or have been) involved in speaking engagements in church meetings where men are present. Sadly, the teachings of the Word of God are being deserted to conform to the “politically correct” agenda of our day. What is at stake here is the authority of God’s Word.

1. Benjamin B. Warfield, as cited by John W. Robbins, *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries* (The Trinity Foundation, 1985), vii.

The liberal element in the church has little affinity for the Biblical principle of *sola Scriptura*. In this mindset, humanistic reasoning, cultural dictates, the traditions of men, and so forth, are all on a par with the Bible. Modernists do not concern themselves with a departure from the Word of God. Yet, the strange thing about the “women teachers” movement is that some advocates of this phenomenon within “orthodox” circles are claiming Biblical support for their view.

It is generally agreed that there are three major New Testament passages regarding women teachers in the church: *1 Corinthians* 11:2-16, *1 Corinthians* 14:33-38, and *1 Timothy* 2:11-15.² The latter two are more didactic than is the first. In *1 Corinthians* 14:34-35 the Apostle Paul writes: “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” Then in *1 Timothy* 2:12 he says: “I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” It is hard to imagine how Paul could have spoken more clearly than he does in these two passages. Women are forbidden “to speak,” that is, “to teach” in church.³ The teaching ministry of the church belongs to men (compare *1 Timothy* 3 and *Titus* 1). In *1 Corinthians* 11, on the other hand, the apostle neither prohibits women from praying and prophesying in church, nor permits them to do so. He merely commands

2. Michael P. V. Barrett, *The Beauty of Holiness: A Guide to Biblical Worship* (Greenville, South Carolina: Ambassador International, 2006), 199-204; Benjamin B. Warfield, “Paul on Women Speaking in Church,” *The Church Effeminate*, edited by John W. Robbins (The Trinity Foundation, 2001), 212-216.

3. Whereas Paul uses the infinitive “to speak” in *1 Corinthians* 14:34, and the infinitive “to teach” in *1 Timothy* 2:12, it is obvious (by comparing Scripture with Scripture) that what he is referring to by “speaking” in *1 Corinthians* 14 includes “teaching” in *1 Timothy* 2. What is being prohibited here is women preaching and / or teaching.

women to be submissive to the authority of their husbands (as in *Ephesians* 5:22-33).⁴

Noteworthy is the fact that in each of these three passages Paul takes his readers back to the creation account to show that his teaching is in accord with the Old Testament (see *1 Corinthians* 11:7-9; 14:34b; and *1 Timothy* 2:13). The apostle is saying that what he is teaching in these epistles has been the case from the beginning. God established this authority structure at the time of creation, and it is not to be altered. The Biblical position elucidated by Paul on this matter, in the words of Warfield, is "precise, absolute, and all inclusive."⁵ And as Gordon Clark commented, when the apostle says "that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (*1 Corinthians* 14:37), he deals "the crushing blow to those who reject any of Paul's instructions on the ground that they are culturally conditioned."⁶

As Warfield pointed out nearly a century ago, whereas the feminist movement sees the woman as just another individual alongside of man, with no differences between the two, the Bible, while clearly recognizing the ontological equality of men and women, also identifies authority structures. The man has authority over the woman.⁷ Women are not permitted to teach men publicly, in the church; to do so would violate the authority structure which God has established in his church from the beginning of time. Calvin agreed. The role of teaching, wrote the Geneva Reformer, has to do with authority. Since the woman is under authority, "she is consequently, prohibited to teach in public."⁸

Bible scholars who oppose the teaching of Paul, Warfield, and Calvin assert that there are women prophets in both the Old and New Testaments. *Exodus* 15:20-21; *Judges* 4-5; and *2 Kings* 22:14 are cited as examples from the Old Testament; whereas *Luke* 2:36-38; *Acts* 2:18; 21:9; *Philippians* 4:2-3; and *1 Corinthians* 11:2-16 are cited as New Testament examples.

4. John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (Paris, Arkansas: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), VIII:684. Commenting on *1 Corinthians* 11:5, citing *1 Corinthians* 14:34-35 and *1 Timothy* 2:12, Gill wrote: "Not that a woman was allowed to pray publicly in the congregation, and much less to preach or explain the Word, for these things were not permitted to them [women]."

5. Warfield, "Paul on Women Speaking in Church," 215.

6. Gordon H. Clark, *First Corinthians* (The Trinity Foundation, 1991), 248.

7. Warfield, "Paul on Women Speaking in Church," 215.

8. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, Volumes 1-22 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 14:34. Calvin went on to say that women should never be in any position of governing authority. He wrote: "And unquestionably, wherever even natural propriety has been maintained, women have in all ages been excluded from the public management of affairs. It is the dictate of common sense, that female government is improper and unseemly."

Before studying these passages we should first understand the meaning of "prophecy" as the term is used in the Bible. According to Scripture, Biblical prophets had several functions: (1) Foretelling future events (for example, *Isaiah* 7:14; 9:6-7; 53:1-12; *Micah* 5:2; *Acts* 21:10-11); (2) Forth-telling, that is, preaching and teaching (for example, *Isaiah* 1:1-20; *Hosea* 6:1-3; *Joel* 2:12-27; *Luke* 4:16-27); (3) Edification, exhortation, and consolation (for example, *1 Corinthians* 14:3); (4) Giving thanks and praise (for example, *1 Samuel* 10:5; *1 Chronicles* 25:3).⁹ From these examples it is obvious that the Biblical concept of prophecy is rather broad. A review of various Greek-English lexicons shows that the "prophecy" word group can have several meanings: utter, predict, proclaim, declare, teach, refute, reprove, admonish, comfort.¹⁰

It is also important for us to understand the Biblical view of hermeneutics as taught in Chapter 1 ("Of the Holy Scripture") of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*,¹¹ which maintains that there is a harmony to all of Scripture. The Bible does not contradict itself; there is a "consent of all the parts." This means that "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself." The Reformers referred to this primary rule of Biblical interpretation as "the analogy of faith" (from Paul's statement in *Romans* 12:6). The fact that Scripture is logically consistent implies that "when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." The less clear passages, then, are to be interpreted by the more clear passages. And since the two passages cited above (*1 Corinthians* 14:34-35 and *1 Timothy* 2:12) are so very clear in prohibiting women from teaching or preaching in church, we must be very cautious when it comes to interpreting other less clear texts which may at first appear to teach the opposite.

With these things in mind, a study of the passages cited above follows:

Exodus 15:20-21: This passage informs us that Miriam was a prophetess, but it also tells us how she used her prophetic gifts. She, "with all the women" (not men), praised God by means of song and dance. This is very likely the type of prophecy we read of in *1 Chronicles* 25:3, which speaks about those "who prophesied with a

9. Wayne Jackson, *Shall We Have Women Preachers?* has been very helpful on these points.

10. See for example, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 722-724; Colin Brown, editor, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978, 1986), 3:74-92; and Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968, 1988), VI:828-861.

11. Citations from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* are from *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). The English has been modernized.

harp to give thanks and to praise the LORD.” Regarding the *Exodus* 15 text, Calvin appropriately commented that “although Moses honors his sister by the title ‘prophetess,’ he does not say that she assumed the office of public teaching, but only that she was the leader and directress of the others [women] in praising God.”¹²

Judges 4-5: Deborah was a prophetess and judge during the period of the Judges. Her gift of prophecy, however, is nowhere said to be the public ministry of the Word of God. On the contrary, these two chapters strongly indicate that her ministry was that of private counsel and judgment (4:5), and song (5:1-31). It can be argued, in accordance with *Isaiah* 3:12 (“As for My [God’s] people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths”), that the fact that a woman was sitting as judge at this time is indicative of the apostate condition of Israel (the song of *Judges* 5 witnesses to the weakness of national Israel in Deborah’s time). God raised up a godly woman as ruler to shame an apostate people. If this is the case, Deborah’s ruling status is to be viewed as a curse on the land, not a blessing.

2 Kings 22:14: Here we read that Huldah was an Old Testament prophetess. We also read that her ministry occurred in private counsel. Jackson commented: “Though Huldah was a prophetess, the solitary record of her prophesying involved some men going to her where they communed privately.... It is impossible to find public preaching here.”¹³

Luke 2:36-38: The text tells us that Anna was a prophetess who served in the Temple, but it also tells us what her service was: “fastings and prayers.” There is not the slightest hint that Anna had a public ministry of preaching or teaching. Furthermore, as Josephus wrote, in Herod’s Temple there was a specific partitioned area beyond which women were not allowed. It was called the women’s court, and it separated the men from the women.¹⁴ Thus, with Anna, any instruction must have been private in nature.

Acts 18:26: This verse says that Priscilla was involved in the instruction of Apollos. But it also asserts that her instruction took place along with and (most likely) under the direction of her husband Aquila (Aquila’s name is mentioned first), and that it was done privately.

Acts 2:17-18 and 21:9: In these verses we read that there were prophetesses in the first century church. But as Calvin pointed out, nothing is said about their prophesying in public. Utilizing the Reformation principle of the “analogy of faith” (that “the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself”), the

Genevan wrote: “And forasmuch as He [God] does not suffer women to bear any public office in the church, it is to be thought that they did prophesy at home, or in some private place, without the common assembly.”¹⁵

Philippians 4:2-3: In these verses Paul writes that Euodia and Syntyche “labored with me [Paul] in the Gospel.” But this in no way implies that these women had a teaching ministry. In *Luke* 8:1-3, for example, we read of several women who shared in Jesus’ ministry. But it was Christ who was doing the teaching, and it was the women who were helping to support him and his apostolic band.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16: Perhaps this passage is the one most often used to support the view that women should be permitted to pray and / or prophesy in public worship in the New Covenant community, so we will look at it in greater detail. We have already noted that this passage neither prohibits nor permits women to pray and / or prophesy (teach or preach) in the church. In *1 Corinthians* 11 Paul is silent on the issue. Three chapters later, however, he speaks very plainly: “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak...it is a shameful thing for women to speak in church” (14:34-35). *First Corinthians* 11, therefore, must not be used to govern or overturn the more clear passage in Paul’s later teaching in chapter 14. To do so would violate the hermeneutical principle of the analogy of faith as taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, that “the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture...it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”

Then too, whereas it is true that in this chapter Paul declares that it is improper for a woman to prophesy without a symbol of authority on her head; nevertheless, it is a logical fallacy (the fallacy of denying the antecedent) to assume that just because women are forbidden to prophesy without a head covering that they are permitted to do so with one.¹⁶ That is, just because a woman is forbidden to pray and / or prophesy with her head uncovered, this does not imply that she may pray and / or prophesy with her head covered. John Calvin, being the master commentator that he was, recognized these two points. Commenting on this passage, he wrote:

It may seem, however, superfluous for Paul to forbid women to prophesy with her head uncovered while elsewhere he wholly prohibits women from speaking in the church (*1 Timothy* 2:12). It would not, therefore, be allowable for them to prophesy even with a covering upon their head, and hence it follows

12. Calvin, *Commentary on Exodus* 15:20-21.

13. Jackson, *Shall We Have Women Preachers?* 4.

14. Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), translated by William Whiston, “The Wars of the Jews,” Book 5, Chapter 5.

15. Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* 21:9.

16. The logical fallacy of denying the antecedent is expressed symbolically as “If P, then Q; not P, therefore not Q.” See John Robbins (editor) in Warfield, “Paul on Women Speaking in Church,” 214.

that it is to no purpose that he argues here as to a covering. It may be replied that the apostle, by here condemning the one, does not commend the other. For when he reproves them for prophesying with their head uncovered, he at the same time does not give them permission to prophesy in some other way, but rather delays his condemnation of that vice to another passage, namely in chapter 14. In this reply there is nothing amiss, though at the same time it might suit sufficiently well to say, that the apostle requires women to show their modesty – not merely in a place in which the whole church is assembled, but also in any more dignified assembly, either of matrons or of men, such as are sometimes convened in private houses.¹⁷

Herein Calvin applied the two principles mentioned above: (1) that the more clear texts of Scripture (in this case *1 Corinthians* 14:34-35 and *1 Timothy* 2:12), are to be used to help explain the less clear texts (in this case *1 Corinthians* 11:2-16); and (2) he also recognized the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent.

Conclusion

The Biblical evidence is quite clear. The more didactic passages restrict the teaching ministry of the church to men. Further, even the texts which are purported to allow women teachers in the church in fact do not do so. It is true that God used women in the prophetic ministry prior to the close of the canon of Scripture. But we are never told that they performed a public teaching ministry. And even here, as Calvin so aptly stated, “if women at one time held the office of prophets and teachers, and that too when they were supernaturally called to it by the Spirit of God, he who is above the law might do this; but, being a peculiar case, this is not opposed to the constant and ordinary system of government.”¹⁸

Women do have an important function to perform in the work of God’s kingdom. They are to be “helpers” to their husbands (*Genesis* 2:18, 20), godly homemakers (*1 Timothy* 5:14; *Titus* 2:5), teaching children and other women how to serve the Lord (*Titus* 2:3-5). But they are not to be teachers within the church of Christ. The public teaching role is reserved for men.

In the words of Robert Reymond:

First, Paul expressly forbids women to teach or to exercise authority over men; rather, they are to be quiet in the churches (*1 Timothy* 2:12; *1 Corinthians* 14:33b-36). Since elders are to carry out these very functions, women necessarily are prohibited from holding this office [elder]. Second, the lists of qualifications for the elder in both *1 Timothy* 3:2-7 and *Titus* 1:6-9 assume that elders are going to be men: an elder must be a “one-woman kind of man” and

“must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.” Third, with only rare exceptions (for example, Deborah and Huldah; see *Judges* 4-5 and *2 Kings* 22:14-20), there is a consistent pattern of male leadership among God’s people throughout the entire Bible. Jesus himself appointed only men as his apostles. A church that would ordain a woman to the eldership is flying in the face of the consistent testimony of Scripture opposing such an action, as well as thirty-five hundred years of Biblical and church history.¹⁹

Twenty-first century feminists might see the Biblical model for women as demeaning, railing against God and calling for the shattering of the “glass ceiling” over Christ’s church. Here they are right in one respect only, that is, in recognizing that there is a “glass ceiling” over Christ’s church. What must be understood here, however, is that God is the one who has built this “glass ceiling.” Those who would attempt to shatter this ceiling will do so to their own peril. “Do not be deceived,” writes Paul, “God is not mocked; for whatever a man [or woman] sows, that he [or she] will also reap” (*Galatians* 6:7).

Soli Deo Gloria

Christian Worldview Essay Contest

The 2008 Christian Worldview Essay Contest is well underway. Already scores of people have indicated their intent to enter the Contest by purchasing the topic book, *Freedom and Capitalism*.

The Contest is open only to those ages 17-23. All contestants must write an essay about this year’s topic book, *Freedom and Capitalism: Essays on Christian Politics and Economics*, by Dr. John W. Robbins. The book usually sells for \$29.95, but anyone who purchases it for the purpose of entering the Contest pays only \$15, which includes shipping to any U. S. address. Three prizes are awarded, and they total \$6,000. The deadline for entry is September 1, 2008, which allows students most of the summer to write their essays. Complete rules for the Contest, and entry forms, as well as information about the winners of last year’s Contest, are available at The Foundation’s website, www.trinityfoundation.org.

Buy the book and enter the Contest today.

17. Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 11:5.

18. Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Timothy* 2:12.

19. Robert L. Reymond. *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 1998, 900-901.