

Preaching of God's Word by Christian Women

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It is the clear teaching of Holy Scripture that Christian women should also teach God's Word. According to Titus 2,3,4 the aged women should teach the young women. St. Paul declares of Timothy that he knew the Holy Scriptures from childhood because his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois had faithfully instructed him, 2 Tim. 1,5. For this reason Luther demanded that Christian schools be taught not only by men, but also by women (St. L. Ed., X,477.459.).

However, while all this is very true, Holy Scripture excludes Christian women from all public teaching in the presence of men. Paul's injunction is expressed in two passages. In 1 Tim. 2,11-14 he says: "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp the authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression." [In] 1 Cor. 14,34,35 his mandate reads: "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."

Against these passages the objection has been raised that St. Paul here was simply defending an Oriental custom which is no longer binding in the New Testament, especially not in the United States, thousands of miles from the Orient. To this we reply: These texts do not show in any way that the command must be limited to a certain locality (*viz.*, the Orient) or to a certain age. Rather, they indicate that the prohibition is to be in force in all places and at all times until Judgment Day. Of particular importance is the argument upon which the apostle bases his interdict; for he says: "Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression." This argumentation proves that the prohibition of St. Paul is obligatory upon the Church regardless of where it may exist or how long it may endure. From the passages quoted we therefore draw the conclusion that all Christian women are to be good teachers in their own specific sphere, but never publicly, in the presence of men.

Even in our own circles the question has often been raised as to whether women and girls may teach in our Christian day-schools. Our answer is that they certainly may do so, provided they are to teach children; for woman dare not in any case be barred from instructing children. But if religious instruction is to be given to grown men or even to adolescents, she cannot be permitted to teach. Now, I know that the objection has been raised against this stand of ours that the Old Testament records a number of instances in which women did serve as teachers, and not of their own accord, at that, but because they were moved by the Holy Ghost to appear before the congregation of the Lord and to instruct them in God's Word. We have such an example in Miriam, the sister of Moses, as recorded [in] Ex. 15,20,21. Our explanation of this passage is that Miriam in this case acted as the musical director of Israelitish women, not of the men.

However, even the case of Deborah, who was both judge and prophetess, and who by divine command acted as a teacher of men (cf. Judg. 4 and 5), does not prove the contention that women may serve as teachers of men. God Himself most certainly may grant exceptions to the rules which He has laid down for us; but it is not for us to do so. We are forever bound to observe His rules. To make exceptions is His business, never ours.

Luther has this fact in mind when he declares: "God hangs the Law downward, but He never draws it up to Himself again." He means that God acts as He pleases; but we mortals are always bound to His Law.

For this reason, too, we cannot countenance the objection that in many cases women are much more eloquent and more fluent talkers than men. We concede this; God, too, of course knows it; and yet He gave the unmistakable command: "Let your women keep silence in the churches," 1 Cor. 14,34, and again: "But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve," 1 Tim. 2,12,13.

(From "The Laymen's Movement in the Light of God's Word," *What Is Christianity? And Other Essays* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1933], pp. 154-57.)