

WOMAN'S RIGHT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL.

S E R M O N.

A S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION OF THE

REV. MISS ANTOINETTE L. BROWN,

AT

SOUTH BUTLER, WAYNE COUNTY, N. Y., SEPT. 15, 1853.

BY REV. LUTHER LEE.

"Help those women which labored with me in the gospel."

--PAUL.

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"There is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."--GAL. III.28.

The thinking portion of the assembly have, by this time, reasoned within themselves, "that is a singular text from which to preach an Ordination sermon." This may render it *proper for me to remind my hearers, just at this point, that the text is no more unusual, as the basis of an Ordination sermon, than the occasion is unusual, upon which I am called to preach it.*

The ordination of a female, or the setting apart of a female to the work of the Christian ministry, is, to say the least, a novel transaction, in this land and age. It cannot fail to call forth many remarks, and will, no doubt, provoke many censures.

For myself, I regard it in the light of a great innovation upon the opinions, prejudices and practices of nearly the whole Christian world. There have been some Christian communities who have allowed females to preach the gospel, but so far as I know, they have not ordained their ministers, male or female, or by any solemn form or service, set them apart to the work of the ministry, as I suppose is intended to be done at the conclusion of this discourse.

It is to be presumed that the parties concerned in this transaction, believe their course to be right, and that they have their reasons for so believing; and I feel assured that there can be no time nor place more appropriate for an exhibition of such reasons, than the time and place of the transaction, which breaks in upon long established opinions and usages. And as I have been called upon to deliver the discourse on the occasion, I should deem it out of place, tame and cowardly, for me to deliver an ordinary sermon setting forth the duties and responsibilities of a Christian minister, without taking hold of the peculiarity of the occasion, and vindicating the innovation which we this hour make upon the usages of

the Christian world. //

It is with these views, and under these impressions that I have selected the text which I have read as the basis of my discourse. "There is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

What does this text mean? and what was the Apostle's design in uttering these words? Whatever the text means, or does not mean, its application is to be limited to what is clearly and specifically Christian. It is in Christ Jesus that there is no difference, and that the sex become one. There may be differences of rights and positions growing out of incidental relations, and conventional rules and usages, in matters which do not affect the fundamental rights of humanity, which I need not discuss; but when we come to consider those rights and privileges, which we claim as Christians, and which belong to us as believers in Christ, there is no difference, we are all one in Christ Jesus. Without even presuming to discuss, on this occasion, the questions of civil and political rights, the text amply sustains me in affirming that in a Christian community, united upon Christian principles, for Christian purposes; or, in other words, in the Church, of which Christ is the only head, males and females possess equal rights and privileges; here there is no difference, "there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." I cannot see how the text can be explained so as to exclude females from any right, office, work, privilege, or immunity which males enjoy, hold or perform. If the text means anything, it means that males and females are equal in rights, privileges and responsibilities upon the Christian platform. I am very frank to confess that I had never very thoroughly investigated the question, until called upon to preach on this occasion, though I have held an opinion loosely on the subject for many years. This call, in my own estimation laid me under obligation to do one of two things, either step forward and assist this church, or decline so to do, for good and satisfactory reasons. I might have evaded the question, by declining for want of time, or some other fictitious reason, but that would not only have been in bad keeping with my general character, but would have been false to Christianity and my brethren. If those inviting me here are right in proposing to ordain a female to the Gospel ministry, they needed my help, and were entitled to it; if they were wrong, they needed my reproof and reasons for it,

and it was due to my own fidelity, and to truth, that I should administer it. But to do either, required thought beyond what I had ever bestowed upon the subject. You may then suppose me to have asked myself, "If I decline, what reason can I give for so doing? So far as I know there is no want of moral, // or mental or educational qualification on the part of the candidate; if it be right to ordain any female, it is right to ordain this female." At this point, the text which I have selected for the occasion, presented itself to my mind and I reasoned thus:-- "I acknowledge the candidate to be in Christ, to be with me a sister in Christ; if I deny her the right to exercise her gifts as a Christian minister, I virtually affirm that there is male and female, and that we are not all one in Christ Jesus, by which I shall contradict St. Paul, and though he is not among us to reply to me, to know myself at variance with him, would give me more uneasiness than to differ from modern doctors of divinity, and divinity schools. I am then brought to this conclusion, which I will state in the form of a proposition as the sequence of the text.

FEMALES HAVE A GOD-GIVEN RIGHT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL.

I take it upon myself, as my portion of the effort on this occasion, to defend and substantiate the above proposition. To make any distinction in the church of Jesus Christ, between males and females, purely on the ground of sex is virtually to strike this text from the sacred volume, for it affirms that in Christ there is no difference between males and females, that they are all one in regard to the gospel of the grace of God. If males may belong to a Christian church, so may females; if male members may vote in the church, so may females; if males may preach the gospel, so may females; and if males may receive ordination by the imposition of hands, or otherwise, so may females, the reason of which is found in my text; "there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

But it will be asked, why this sense of the text has not been discovered before, why has it lain hid until this hour? I answer, it has been discovered and understood, but not practically applied, as has been the case with a great many other truths. Dr. Clarke concludes his comment upon the text in these words. "Under the blessed spirit of Christianity, they have equal rights, equal privileges,

and equal blessings; and let me add, they are equally useful."

This goes as far as I have gone. But Dr. Clarke was a Methodist, and may be suspected of having been influenced by the usages of his sect or denomination by which females have been allowed to exercise their gifts in social meetings, composed of both sexes. Well, then, hear what a Scotch Presbyterian Divine says on the text. Dr. McKnight gives the following comment:

"In Christ Jesus there is no distinction of persons, as under the // law: under the gospel no Jew is superior to a Greek, neither are slaves inferior to free men, nor are males preferred to females, for ye are all one, in respect to dignity and privileges under the gospel dispensation." "Under the law males had greater privileges than females. For males alone bore in their bodies the sign of God's covenant; they alone were capable of the priesthood."

Whether Dr. McKnight designed it or not, he has affirmed, by the most clear and certain implication, that females may be priests or ministers under the gospel. And remember that I am not responsible for his inconsistency in having advocated the opposite opinion in other places, which he has done. Just let me read the two clauses, reversing the order, and see by what logical necessity the mind will be carried to the conclusion that females have an equal right to the Christian ministry with males. The Dr. says, "Under the law males had greater privileges than females. For males alone were capable of the priesthood. In Christ Jesus there is no distinction of persons as under the law, males are not preferred before females, for ye are all one, in respect to dignity and privileges under the gospel dispensation." It is clear then that I have the authority of Dr. McKnight for my construction of the text. And any construction which will make it mean less than I suppose it means, must make it mean nothing.

The general design and scope of the apostle's reasoning, greatly strengthens the view I have taken of the text. The design was to counteract certain Judaizing teachers, and show that Christians were not bound to observe the law of Moses, that the Gentiles need not be circumcised and observe other Jewish rites. To accomplish this he shows that the law is abrogated. Now the law made distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, and between males and females, excluding females from the priesthood, and laid them under other disabilities, and the apostle comes to the

conclusion that under the gospel, there is neither nor Greek, that is Gentile, neither male nor female, but that all are one in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle clearly designs to say that females are exempt, under the gospel, from the disabilities imposed by the law, and that they enjoy equal rights with men. There is clearly an extension of their rights and privileges under the gospel, and if so, how far does such extension reach? The text fixes no limits, prescribes no bounds, names no places, occasions, subjects or duties, but affirms in general and unqualified terms, that there is neither male nor female, but that all are one in Christ Jesus, and this is done by way of proclaiming the abrogation of the Mosaic law, and it of necessity places males and females upon an equal platform of rights under the gospel.

The declaration concerning males and females, is just as full and unqualified as it is concerning Jews and Gentiles, and if it does not place males and females upon an equality, it may be argued with equal force that it does not place Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing. Having said what I judge to be necessary by way of explaining my text, and bringing out its meaning and force, I will proceed further to confirm the doctrine arrived at by other considerations.

1. There were female prophets under the Old Dispensation. "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 dance. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." Exo. xv. 20, 21.

"And Deborah a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time." Judges iv. 4.

Thus have we an account of two female prophets, and one of them judged Israel; yes, a female was both prophet and judge.

I will now call your attention to a more remarkable case. During the reign of King Josiah, the book of the law was found, which appears to have been lost, and it was read before the king, and on hearing the law, the king became alarmed, and commanded his principal officers to go and inquire of the Lord for him, and for all the people, concerning the words of the book that was found. Now to whom did they go to inquire of God? We have the rest of the history as follows:

"So Hikhiah the priest, and Ahikam and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her. And she said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burnt incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; there fore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest // what I spake against this place and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and has rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold, therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again." 2 Kings xxii. 14-20. See also 2 Chron. xxxiv.

This woman, Huldah, was undeniably a public religious teacher, according to the usages of the times in which she lived. She spake for God, in his name, and by his authority, and her words are recorded in the book. "And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Azer." Luke ii. 36.

Of this woman and her public labors we have no account, only that she preached publicly in the temple concerning Christ, when he was brought there, an infant in his mother's arms, to be presented to the Lord. The fact that she recognized the Saviour, and spake of him as she did, proves that she was endowed with the extraordinary gifts of a prophet.

This case, though recorded in the New Testament, occurred under the Old Dispensation, where I have classed it. There were other cases of less note, as Nehemiah mentions a prophetess that discouraged him in his work. vi. 14.

Isaiah appears to have had a prophetess for his wife. Chap. viii. 3.

So common a thing was it to have female prophets, that the propagaters of error judged it an object to counterfeit the usage, and hence there were false female prophets, as well as false male prophets. God said to his true prophet, Ezekiel, "Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own hearts, and prophesy thou against them." xiii. 16.

This proves beyond a doubt, that it must have been common for females to have the true spirit of prophesy, or there would not have been false pretenders. There is never a counterfeit, without a genuine; and had it not been believed and understood that God did call females to the office and work of prophets, the fact of a female pretending to prophesy in the name of God, would have proved her false. The fact therefore, that there were false female prophets, furnishes strong evidence, not only that there were genuine female prophets, but that they must have been common; sufficiently so, at least, as not to create suspicion upon its face when one appeared.

2. There were prophetesses or female prophets in the Primitive Church // under the gospel. The fact that there would be, was foretold by the Prophet Joel. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Joel. ii. 28.

This text most clearly began to be fulfilled at the day of Pentecost, as we learn from Acts ii. 17; where Peter declares the development of that day, to be what was foretold by the prophet. But how was the prediction, that daughters should prophesy fulfilled on the day of Pentecost? The history of the subject answers this question. It is as follows:

In the first chapter, we are told who constituted the assembled Christians. "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath-day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alpheus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his

brethren." Verses 12-14.

Here we have named the eleven apostles, then "the women," then Mary the mother of Jesus in particular, and lastly "his brethren." By his brethren is probably meant his near relatives. It is probable that there were a number of women in the company, as they are mentioned as forming one portion of the assembly. In the 15th verse we are told that the whole number present was about one hundred and twenty persons. In the fourth verse of chapter two, we are told that they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues.

Who were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues? Most clearly the hundred and twenty persons, consisting of the apostles, the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethren. To deny this would be to falsify the plainest portion of the record. The record declares that there were about one hundred and twenty persons assembled together, that this number embraced the women, and that they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues. Thus did the Holy Ghost, in his first descent, crown females as well as males, with tongues of fire, to speak the wonderful works of God.

But the remarkable prophesy of Joel did not receive its entire fulfillment on the day of Pentecost, for about twenty-seven years afterwards // we read, Acts xxi. 9, that Phillip of Cesarea, "had four daughters which did prophesy." As this fact is mentioned only incidentally and not as a new or strange thing, it appears probable that female prophets were not unusual in the Primitive Church.

This is the proper place to remark that prophesying is not to be understood in the restricted sense of foretelling. A prophet is not exclusively one who foretels, but who explains prophecies, and teaches; and to prophesy is to explain prophecies and to teach. In this sense every gospel minister is a prophet, and every prophet under the new dispensation is a gospel minister. Here then were four female gospel ministers, daughters of one man. When it is said, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," the meaning is, your sons and your daughters shall become teachers, or gospel ministers.

The Greek word which we translate prophet, is *prophetuo*, and signifies "to foretell, to predict, to explain and apply prophecies." To explain and apply prophecies, was

the peculiar work of the first ministers. The Greek word which we translate prophet, is *prophetees*, and signifies "a declarer, a foreteller, a priest, a teacher, and instructor." It was always the work of prophets to labor as religious teachers, and to explain and apply the predictions which had been previously uttered by others, and when we consider that there were whole schools of prophets, we may conclude that but few of the whole number were employed to foretell, and that their principal calling was to labor as religious teachers. That prophets were preachers or religious teachers, is perfectly clear from the use of the words, prophet and prophesy, by the apostles.

The church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem for the settlement of the great question, whether Gentile converts were bound to keep the law of Moses concerning circumcision and other rites. The apostles and the church at Jerusalem, having considered the case, sent back a written answer, and sent also two messengers of their own company, Judas and Silas. "And Judas and Silas being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them." This proves beyond a doubt, that they exhorted, or preached in the common acceptation, by virtue of their prophetic office, and the conclusion is that to be a prophet, is to be a preacher, or public religious teacher. We read again, 1 Cor. xix. 3: "He that prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation and comfort." Here the entire pulpit work of a gospel preacher is described as the act of prophesying, which renders it certain that prophets were preachers. // Again, we read Rev. ii. 20, "Nevertheless, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jazabel, which calleth herself a prophetess to teach, and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things offered to idols." This proves two points; first, that the doctrine must have prevailed that women might rightfully be prophets; and secondly, that being prophets, they taught the people. The complaint is not that she was a woman, but that she was a bad woman; not that she was a prophetess, but that she called herself one when she was not; not that she taught, but that she taught false and corrupting doctrine. It is clear that there would have been no false female teachers, had there been no true ones, and that a false female teacher could not have been sustained in the church, had the doctrine prevailed that

