

THE REASON WHY

Miss Smilie, preaching in Dr. Cuyler's pulpit, seems to have shaken ecclesiastical authority, as the nailing of Luther's theses on the church door shook the Papal throne. As the contest between learned doctors waxes warm, it is amusing as well as instructive to observe upon what general principle the objection to woman preaching is based. There is one point made alike by all the opposers of this so-called innovation – one underlying principle upon which, as a foundation, the whole superstructure of their arguments is based. And what is this principle? No more nor less bold a one than this: -- The absolute and utter subjection of woman as woman to man as man.

The reason that woman must not preach is – not that it renders her less feminine and lovely, not that it is incompatible with her other duties, not that she is incapable of speaking to edification, not that she lacks any intellectual or spiritual qualification – simply and only that this would be coming out from a subject position and asserting equality.

Dr. Joseph T. Duryea, in the Independent of Feb. 22d, says: "As Christ rules the church the man is to rule the woman. Whatever involves authority pertains to the man." He then goes on to remark that "public teaching," with which he classes preaching, "is an exercise of authority," therefore women should not preach. The arguments of Henry J. Van Dyke, in the same paper, and of Prof. S.C. Bartlett, D.D., in the Chicago Advance of March 7th, are also based upon this same principle. Rev. Mr. Johnson, at the meeting of the Presbytery, expressed the idea more forcibly though scarcely more frankly, in saying, "I never allow a woman to dictate to me!" "Usurping authority" is the anguished cry of the panic stricken clergy. And "usurping authority" means, in plain English, merely asserting equality. Were women to forbid men to preach, telling them their sphere of duty lay in their workshops, or on their farms, and that "as Christ rules the church, the woman is to rule the man," this would be a "usurpation" of "authority." Not disputing their title, but simply claiming an equal one to preach when called, is only claiming equality. This, however, is the very thing to which our divines object. Not only do they not "allow a woman to dictate" to them, but they refuse to allow her not to be dictated by them.

As Christ rules the church, the man is to rule the woman. Why then each man is a Pope, and infallible, and unhappy woman the church which is to receive his rule, and drink in his doctrine unquestioningly! It is considered by Protestants a most arrogant usurpation of the Bishop of Rome that he claims to stand in the place of Christ to his fellow mortals. And yet here, in free America, in the last half of the nineteenth century, we are gravely told by learned Doctors of Divinity, that all men stand in the place of Christ to all women! That "the woman" is to yield prompt, cheerful, unquestioning obedience to "the man," and accept his teachings and doctrines precisely as all Christians (male Christians, I suppose) obey the commands and receive the teachings of Christ. Each husband is Pope, and infallible to his wife! Who is to be the infallible Pope of unmarried women we are not told. Perhaps it is man in the aggregate. And here a grave question presents itself. Is it man in the aggregate who is to be the "head" of woman in the aggregate? Or is each single and separate individual woman to obey some single, separate and individual man? It might make considerable difference! Man in the aggregate might decree one thing, and man in the concrete quite another. In which case what is poor distracted woman to do?

We will suppose it is man in the aggregate of whom woman is to receive precept and doctrine. Then she has a big sum in arithmetic to do. What is the religious faith of man in the aggregate? Probably it will be found to be Paganism. Then must woman renounce Christianity and become Pagan? But as this conclusion would doubtless prove unsatisfactory to the divines from whom we are learning, we will renounce the above supposition and adopt the theory that each individual man is to stand in the place of Christ to some one particular woman. Here we meet another difficulty. Suppose a woman marries, for instance, a Unitarian. Of course before marriage her mind is a perfect blank, and she has no opinions whatever – having had no Pope to dictate to her in matters of faith. Upon marriage she embraces Unitarianism. In time her husband dies. Ought she to continue a Unitarian, or become blank again? She marries a second time, a Trinitarian. Now she becomes a firm believer in the Trinity. Or she marries a skeptic, in which case it becomes her duty to be an unbeliever.

Is her husband a drunkard? She must believe the intoxicating bowl is good. Is he a blasphemer? His words must be unexceptionable to her. He stands to her in the place of Christ! “Last of all the woman” dies “also.” With which husband shall she go?

This is no satire, no exaggeration. Those who take Paul literally, universally and for all time, and construe him as strictly as possible against liberty, must take the consequences.

If “the man” is literally to rule “the woman as Christ rules the church,” it is impossible for a woman to be a Christian. A Christian is a follower of Christ; but the woman must follow the man – not Christ. Christ says, “ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.” No woman, then, can be the friend of Christ, for she must do not what he commands, but what “the man” commands – which may be a very different thing!

Christ says: “The truth shall make you free.” This doctrine makes us slaves. Therefore it cannot be the truth. “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you.” O, grave and reverend doctors, “more than unto God, judge ye.”

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