

Women Speaking in Public.

W W Fereday

From the Bible Treasury Vol. 20, page 378.

As to women speaking in any way in the assembly, scripture is clear it is not to be. 1 Cor. 14: 34-45 cannot be misunderstood by those who only desire to do the Lord's will. The whole chapter gives the fullest liberty to the saints when gathered together, the only rule being that all must be done to edifying, which I need not say calls for the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit, without Whom nothing can be to profit, or to the Lord's glory. Then we get the exception: "Let your women keep silence in the assemblies: for it is not permitted unto them to speak," etc.

Substantially the same thing is found in 1 Tim. 2 Verse 8 says that "the men (for the definite article should be there) are to pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." Then the women's word comes: "In like manner also that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel," &c., followed by "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." I doubt not these words refer to the assembly, as 1 Cor. 14, for the great object of the first Epistle to Timothy is to show how one ought to behave (for so the verse should read, it not being merely, personal direction for Timothy as the A. V. would infer) in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. There are two reasons assigned why women should not lead: (1) the place God gave her at her first creation; (2) her part in the fall. (1) God formed Adam first, then Eve, and as 1 Cor. 11: 8, puts it "the head of the woman is the man," never *vice versa*. God having given her the second place, it becomes her never to seek the first. (2) "Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." Satan introduced sin by means of the weaker vessel (Adam's case being worse rather than better or excusable, for, not being deceived, he sinned with eyes open): God therefore sets her aside from leadership.

A further reason for her subjection or silence seems to be given in 1 Cor. 14: 36. "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you?" Now, weigh this word well and see what it involves. The word of God comes to the church (the woman), not out from it, as Romanists would teach us; the Christian woman is to learn and act upon the great principle, and learn from the man, and not assume to be the man's teacher.

It is noticeable that scripture nowhere forbids a woman to preach; but it is easily accounted for. An Eastern woman (and we must remember that the Bible was first placed in the hands of Easterns) had too secluded a place given to her to permit her ever dreaming of such a thing. But in the assembly of God, where all present are members of one body and saints of God, she might suppose a measure of freedom; hence the injunctions we have been considering.

But this is scarcely the point that is exercising some souls at the present moment; to it I now come. Is it permissible for sisters to take part at a Prayer meeting or a Bible reading? I admit freely that such meetings are not meetings of the assembly as such, unless specially so called at any time from the Lord's table, but may sisters take a part? My conviction is that, being a meeting with the doors opened to the public generally, it is out of order. I know no scripture which sanctions a woman acting in public. Though such gatherings are not strictly of the assembly, I feel the principles apply; and in a day such as the present, when women in the world and to some extent in the church are changing entirely in their deportment (even in their attire), those who through God's mercy, stand for God's order in the

assembly, at no small cost in many cases to themselves, should of all men stand firm in such a matter as this. Surely Christian sisters wish to do the will of the Lord and not to follow the spirit of the age, though it is the easiest thing possible to get infected by it.

The instructions of 1 Cor. 11 I take to be of a different character. There, beyond dispute women are allowed to pray and prophesy, provided they do it with covered head, "because of the angels." Now this is clearly not in the public assembly, for the same epistle, as we have seen, expressly forbids it (and no reverent reader of scripture believes that scripture contradicts itself); it must therefore be in meetings of a private nature. In the early days more than now, saints often got together in an informal way, in private houses and elsewhere, for prayer and edification. To such gatherings, not meetings of the assembly as such, and not of a public character, I conceive the exhortations of 1 Cor. 11 to apply. This was resisted, I may remark, by some lately.

I trust I have written clearly and given the mind of Lord as revealed. I believe so, but if in any wise there be error, I shall be thankful to be corrected, by whomsoever the Lord may choose. W. W. F.

ANSWER TO H.'s QUERY

on the paper in Dec. last, pp. 388, 9.

From the Bible Treasury Vol. N1, page 16.

It is a question with some as to whether a Christian wife should cover her head when in prayer with her husband at home. If she audibly engages, I think so; for women must not act in the presence of men (whether few or many, husbands or servants) without the sign of authority on her head. God's order must be maintained, that angels may observe and learn. The woman is the glory of man, and must therefore be covered before God; the man, on the contrary, is the image and glory of God, which must not be covered up. The fact of nature having given her long hair, in contrast with the man, tells the woman that she needs a covering; though the hair itself does not suffice, for God would have her place something on her head, implying her action as acceptance and confession of the place He has assigned to her.

If in the home (at family prayers for instance) the wife is silent, the husband only expressing himself audibly to God, I do not see that the passage in 1 Cor. 11, applies; though if in any individual case there is the least feeling as to it, the woman should comply. It is important to preserve a good conscience at all cost, and we should remember that it is written, "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth" (Rom. 14: 22). It is better to be over-scrupulous than indifferent in the things of God; especially in an evil day of departure from the truth as the present, when on all hands God's order is despised and His word ignored. W. W. F.