

NOTICE: COMPUTER TECHNICIANS with spare time and a willing heart. Would you like to help us? See the note at the end of this essay.

FR 329

"They Won't Let Me Preach!"

"I would like to be a preacher," Sarah laments, "but in the Church of Christ, they won't let me preach because I am a woman." "Even though I am a man, they won't let me preach," Mark states sadly. "I tried preaching for a while, but I always got into trouble because I did not adhere to the traditional exclusive teachings. After word got around that I was preaching something different, the churches would not let me preach. So I gave up."

My sympathy goes to persons like Sarah and Mark and I know something firsthand about what Mark is talking about, but both of these persons need to do some rethinking. Their limited understanding is a part of their problem. They have let a congregational system prevent their preaching when no congregation or association of churches has control over whether they can or cannot preach. Whether you are male or female, no one can forbid that you preach.

A great part of our problem in this matter has been our expectation that the church supply us a pulpit or class with a semi-captive audience and permit us to expound our views which may be unacceptable to the majority in the group. While there is a wide world out there to be evangelized and taught, we have chained ourselves to the ready-made pulpit. You are commissioned by Christ to preach and you have no need to ask elders or anyone else for permission to do it. You need not ask a church to sponsor you or pay you to do it. If God gave you the gift, use it! The spread of the message has always depended more upon dedicated disciples than on church sponsored programs. So don't complain that you are not permitted to speak for there are many places besides the church pulpit and classroom where you can speak.

Our concept of preaching has been limited to the pulpit in our assemblies without which most of us would not know where to start. It is only reasonable to expect to have to gain permission from the elders or the group itself in order to use their forum. We must expect elders and groups to oppose presentations which vary from their accepted beliefs. They forbid women to address their groups because of convictions, whether their convictions are founded on truth or not. How can we expect groups of disciples to hire us to be their "official spokespersons" when we violate their convictions? You do not even retain a person to mow your lawn who does it contrary to your liking.

Any congregation and its elders, if it has elders, has both the right and responsibility to judge the appropriateness of what is being sponsored and taught from the pulpit and classroom. While granting this, many of us devoutly wish that there were more openness for challenge of traditional orthodoxy. I, like many others, have met with much frustration and rejection while trying to bring reformation through the pulpit. Being realistic, however, I cannot hope for people to hire me to teach what they think is error.

Ladies, no one can stop you from preaching! In fact, no one objects to your preaching. Preaching is evangelizing. When Philip got into the chariot with the Ethiopian, he preached (evangelized) to him Jesus. You can preach (evangelize) Jesus to your friend as you ride along the highway or in other situations. No one objects to that. You have a

divine commission to do it. If your friend happens to be a man, you can evangelize him. The number of men makes no difference. We have labored under a false notion that teaching is private instruction and preaching is public teaching; however, preaching is evangelizing, whether to one person or a thousand, and teaching is giving instruction regardless of the circumstance in which it is done. There is no example of a person preaching to (evangelizing) the assembly of disciples; however, there were teaching, instruction, and prophecy in the assemblies of the saints. Preaching (evangelizing) involves teaching or heralding the facts concerning the gospel (good news, the "evangel") and it is directed to the unconverted instead of to those saints already converted. Saints need further indoctrination, but not evangelism.

Paul restricted women from teaching in the Corinthian assemblies, but he did not mention their preaching. Perhaps, that would be included in his prohibition of her speaking; yet, he had already indicated that she could properly pray and prophesy if her head was covered. Our women have always been evangelists, not in the sense of professional, hired, public evangelists, but in the private, but powerful, ministries that God has given them.

As to ladies teaching in our congregations, in the last century we fought a battle which divided our churches in order to provide that opportunity to them. They teach in church sponsored, ready-made pulpits in our classrooms. In them they can evangelize children and women. Surely, we have set some inconsistent limitations but at least we have recognized women as being qualified teachers as well as evangelists. So, ladies, you are approved for both teaching and evangelism by our own admission.

Paul made an issue of the activity of women in the Corinthian assemblies. Strangely overlooked in most discussions of the matter is that Paul raised no question about the appropriateness of women praying and prophesying. That was taken for granted. The issue raised was about their demeanor while doing it.

Paul explained to them, *“Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head – it is the same as if she were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil.”* (1 Cor. 11:4-6).

Paul had no problem with the fact that they were praying and prophesying (speaking the message of God). But they were performing pious acts while showing impiety by their casting aside customs of decency. Cult prostitutes in their local temple enticed men by their lack of veils and by hairstyles which identified those of loose morals. Imitating those styles would be shameful for a believing woman whether in public or in an assembly. It would be doubly shameful for her while claiming to be speaking for God with approval of the congregation. Today, even those who wear hip-huggers exposing a pelvic tattoo and jeweled navel to arouse men would consider it inappropriate for such dress by one performing in a church assembly. Such dress in the assembly would be a shameful embarrassment to both the husband and the congregation.

By the time he had gotten to writing Chapter 14, we cannot believe he had forgotten the approval he had given in Chapter 11. Neither can we believe that he had changed his mind about the appropriateness of women praying and prophesying in the assemblies. Evidently, some of the gifted men in the church were becoming disrespectful and

disruptive by inconsiderate use of their gifts. In concluding his corrective instruction toward them, he briefly (v. 33-36) addresses women with corrective instructions also. Although the wording seems to be universal in its application, it is unwise to make Paul contradict what he had already approved in Chapter 11. Wisdom would lead us to apply the general instructions he gave to apply to men and women alike but they would apply with special force among the Greeks only because of their abuse of the privilege and due to the culture shock that it brought.

Some have argued that if Jesus had been giving equal status to women, he would have chosen some as apostles. Using that sort of logic (illogic), we would have to conclude that Gentiles and Black persons do not have equal status because he chose none of them as apostles.

The point of this essay, rather than trying to solve all of the problems, is to cause you to see that neither women nor men need to gain permission from any person or group in order to teach and preach. Forget about the assembly for a moment. There is a wide world for you to reach. As God has given you the gift, use it. Go to it!

Our concepts about teaching and preaching have been so assembly-centered and church-sponsored that much of the dynamic of the message through individual initiative has been lost. While we would hope for the pulpit and classroom to sponsor reform, we recognize that spokespersons for reform have always had to do much of their work outside of the systems and then let their messages gradually trickle down through the cracks in the established systems. And though people respond to the gospel during the singing of the "invitation song" in our assemblies, I would venture to say that most of the converts were taught previously by a woman.

Those who lead in the public assemblies get the notice by filling what we would term generally as honorary capacities. We do not choose the most godly and the most efficient to carry on our public services, but we pass around the honor of being in the spotlight. Is that what you want, ladies? That can be a very shallow understanding of what it means to be "working for the Lord." Whether you are a woman or a man, you can develop your own ministry of teaching and evangelizing which can be both effective and rewarding though it may not bring you stardom.

The pulpit is not nearly as important today as it has been in history. In the early church people had to depend heavily upon the public proclamation and teaching of Spirit-filled persons. Even after the scriptures were completed, they were not readily available to all individuals. Because of illiteracy throughout the centuries, the common man still had to depend mostly upon the pulpit and the system it represented for instruction. That situation gradually changed with the availability of the printed Bible and the improvement of literacy. Now, in our congregations, most everyone can read and has various versions of the scriptures to help in understanding. Also, there are periodicals, books, all sorts of study helps, correspondence courses, radio, television, tapes, video lessons, and private tutors readily available for teaching. Because of this change, the pulpit of today has lost much of its importance. In fact, the monologue is probably the poorest form of teaching!

Any disciple today has the freedom to use these methods without having to ask for my opinion or permission or for that of a congregation. Neither Sarah nor Mark can

rightfully complain, "The church won't let me preach in its pulpit; therefore, I am forbidden to preach." []

(Cecil Hook; August 2006. This is a revision of Chapter 18 of *Free To Change*.)

HOW YOU MAY HELP: Several improvements need to be made to our web site. Vic Phares, who started it and has maintained it faithfully, has a time-consuming job which limits his work on the site. He is willing to work with you if you are capable and willing to take one or more of the tasks listed below:

1. Making the archived articles more easily accessed by putting the titles by the numbers.
2. Keeping the INDEX up to date.
3. Making hyperlinks from each topic in the index to the topic itself.
4. Designing ways of making the site more user friendly.

In such work you can become a vital partner in this ministry. Your reward will be the satisfaction that you are serving interested readers. In the month of July our web site received a DAILY average of 3,327 hits. In the last twelve months the site received 2,096,164 hits! Would you like to be an enabling partner in this exciting and growing outreach? You may email me or call at 1-512-716-3048. Thanks.