

We All Agree That Women May Preach.

Oh, you say that "y'all" are not in the "we all"? Do you emphatically deny that a woman is permitted to preach with Scriptural permission? You may say that, but that is not really what you believe! You see, I am smarter than you are and, like a psychiatrist, I know better than you what you think!

Okay, now that I have turned you off completely, you may lock me in the cage designed for the impudent, presumptuous, and arrogant and other Tasmanian devils while we think about this matter quietly. First, let me throw out another question. Jesus charged his disciples, "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mk 16:15). Does "go ye" mean "go me," as we have generally insisted, or does "go ye" mean "go men," as we have actually interpreted into practice?

The next question is crucial. What is preaching? It is delivering a Bible-related message publicly. Right? Wrong! That traditional and current concept of the word has confused and misdirected us. There are two main words generally translated as *preach*. The first, *euangelizo* (from *eu*-well and *angelia*-message; *angel*, *message*, and *messenger* come from the word), is almost always used of the good news concerning the Son of God and his kingdom as proclaimed in the gospel. It means to *evangelize*, to *bring*, or to *declare*, the good news. The thing preached is the gospel, the *euangelion* proclaimed by the *euangelistes*, the messenger, the evangelist.

The second word, *kerusso*, means to herald or to proclaim. To herald is to announce, to publicize. The message proclaimed is the good news, the gospel. Lessons about the epistle of James, the work of deacons, etc. are *taught*, not *heralded* as the good news of salvation.

The gospel is the good news of salvation through Christ to be received by faith on the basis of his expiatory death, his burial, resurrection, and ascension (See Vine). That proclaimed message produces the faith through which one is begotten and brought forth as a new creature in Christ. Since disciples have accepted and obeyed the gospel, there is no need for them to be evangelized again. They will need to be taught much more, but not evangelized. Evangelizing (preaching, proclaiming) is for making disciples. So there is no command to evangelize the assembly of disciples, no need for it, nor any precedent for it in the Scriptures. Neither men nor women preached to, or evangelized, the assembly. That makes questions about a woman's preaching in the assembly moot, deprived of practical significance. Although the word *preach* is used over a hundred times in the New Testament writings, it is not used in reference to a believing assembly. Indoctrination and edification of disciples by prophets, teachers, and pastors through teaching, instruction, reproof, rebuke, and exhortation are supported by both apostolic teaching and precedent. When a man stands before an assembly of believers and brings a Biblical lesson on some subject like the patriarchs, Job, David, Elijah, prayer, singing, giving, the works of the flesh, or elders, he is teaching, not preaching. In current usage it is called preaching, but that is not its Biblical meaning. The number present, whether in public or private, is irrelevant. Edification of the saints is the primary purpose of assemblies (1 Cor. 14).

When a person is preaching, the number of hearers is of no matter, whether it is one or thousands. When Philip got into the chariot with the eunuch, he preached to the one man.

Women, I know of no one who objects to your evangelizing another woman as you ride down the highway together. Most will concede that a mother may evangelize her sons of any age and that a wife may preach to her unbelieving husband.

But when we begin to expand the numbers in her audience, we traditionally begin to draw some imaginary, inconsistent lines. Like Philip, however, she may proclaim Christ to one person on the road to Gaza or to great numbers in Samaria. (The woman at the well preceded Philip in proclaiming Christ to the Samaritans (John 4:28-30; 39).

The confusion lies in our thinking of preaching as being a public discourse on any Biblical subject and of teaching being more private instruction. So that has led to our hair-splitting distinctions between what is private and what is public. We decided, for example, that a part of the assembly in a class-room is private but the undivided assembly is public even though the public is invited to both activities of the church. Earlier in the last century we fought a divisive battle defending the right of a woman to teach in church-sponsored classes. Admitting that she can speak/teach there, however, must she refrain from preaching the good news about Jesus to the students?

The Scriptures nowhere specifically forbid a woman to preach, regardless of the age, sex, or number of hearers or the place of the preaching. You may wish to apply Paul's corrective injunction against a woman speaking or teaching. Paul had already conceded generally that she could pray and prophesy/teach (1 Cor. 11, 14), and he also encouraged speaking and teaching in singing. In dealing with these points, more word study can bring surprising insights.

Our thinking has been clouded also by the concept that preaching is oral evangelism. But both women and men proclaim the good news through giving Bibles, study helps, correspondence courses, letters, tracts and books they write, and audio and visual recordings they make. I hear no objections to the use of such preaching methods by women.

Does a man have to gain permission from anyone in order to carry the gospel to the lost? No. Then why would women have to ask permission, and of whom would they have to ask? Yes, if she is to work through a church-sponsored program, she would have to gain permission from the congregation even as a man would. But she is commissioned by Christ to exercise her gifts in private ministry. Jesus is the one who entrusted the message to us, and He put no restrictions on gender.

Will men converted by a woman be lost? Will a woman who converts men lose her own soul because of it? God did not paint himself into such an arbitrary corner, and it is not becoming that we continue to portray him as having done so.

Although some of "y'all" may still limit the scope of her activity, we all agree that women may preach! She can tell another person the good news about salvation through Christ.

Now, if you will unlock the back door of my cage, I will slip out quietly and go meekly on my way. Or, if you wish, I will share a serving of humble pie with you before I go. []

(Cecil Hook; March 1996, FR 11, with some revisions. As the circle of our cyberspace community has widened, let us candidly and honestly review together some more points on this subject. So please remain seated! Your feedback is welcomed.)