

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – Women in the Ministry of Jesus – 2-8 May 2015

Christ calls women and men to labour for souls. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28). This week’s Lesson is more on involvement of women in the ministry of Jesus than it is on the salvation of women. One discussion question is: ‘How can we affirm the equality of men and women before God and yet, at the same time, affirm and acknowledge the differences?’ In view of women ordination crisis, we must be clear about the role of women in the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus had work for a woman in a two-days Samaritan city outreach (John 4), and He still “has a work for women, as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with the sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed” (RH August 26, 1902).

In His ministry, Jesus did indeed treat women as persons of equal value to men. He admitted them into His fellowship. He took time to teach them the truths of the Kingdom of God. A woman was first with the story of the resurrection, and at least one woman (Mary) received the Holy Spirit with the others at Pentecost. Yet, regarding leadership roles in His ministry, the fact remains that Christ called no woman to be part of the twelve apostles.

When Jesus chose the twelve apostles, He was not accommodating the cultures of the day when He chose only men (Luke 6:12-16). Those who teach that Jesus followed culture are preaching “another Jesus” not “preached” by the Apostles (2 Corinthians 11:4). Jesus was not following cultures. On the contrary, Jesus changed cultures that were repugnant to the gospel, such as rabbis not teaching women; Mary sat at Jesus’ feet to be taught (Luke 10:39). Not having women in leadership roles (such as priests or elders) was not a culture, it was Jesus’ own command in the Scriptures that testify of Christ (John 5:39) who inspired prophets to write all Scriptures (1 Peter 1:10-11), otherwise Jesus would have changed it.

If Jesus picked only male apostles because it was cultural, then everything else Jesus did was hypocritical. Christ died because He would not capitulate to the cultures, traditions and customs of the Jews. So for Him to say, ‘I do not want to ruffle the Pharisees’ feathers, so I am only going to pick men,’ would be a big stretch. Jesus was so blatantly clear about what the truth was. He would not compromise simply for culture or tradition in any area, because it would be dishonest. Those who seek to apply a cultural interpretation to what Jesus did are not only questioning the authority of Scripture, but also of Jesus Christ Himself.

Christ is not today calling women to leadership roles of elders or pastors; Christ is calling women to unite with men in the holy mission of saving souls. “If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth. The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth. The Lord of the vineyard is saying to many women who are now doing nothing, ‘why stand ye here all day idle?’ [Matthew 20:6] Zealous and continued diligence in our sisters toiling for the spread of the truth would be wholly successful, and would astonish us with its results” (RH January 2, 1879 Par 1).

Women can carry out gospel work; that is not the same as being elders or pastors. If they so labour, women should be entitled to conference pay as do men. The question of paying women who so labour “is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that they are essential to carrying the truth into families. Their work is just the work that must be done. In many respects a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot” (5MR 325.1). In this gospel work, women do not serve as elders or pastors. Further, women need not seek conference paid work; they can do canvassing as self-supporting workers. “Self supporting missionaries are often very successful. Beginning in a small, humble way, their work

enlarges under the guidance of the Spirit of God. Let two or more persons start out together in evangelistic work. They may not receive any particular encouragement from those at the head of the work that they will get financial support; nevertheless, let them go forward, praying, singing, teaching, and living the truth. They may take up the work of canvassing, and in this way introduce the truth into many families” (RH August 26, 1902 Par 12).

But the crisis in church with women in ministry seeking leadership roles of elder or pastor is not new. When Paul was faced with such leadership crisis, under the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ he spelt out how Christians “ought to conduct” themselves within the church (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul admonishes us not to permit a woman “to usurp authority” over a man (1 Timothy 2:13). Paul supports his admonition with two biblical events that took place at the very beginning of the human family. We do well to heed this inspired admonition.

First, Paul was inspired to write that the reason for male leadership in church is “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13). The order in which men and women were created is not without significance. After creating Adam, Christ taught him the importance of absolute obedience, forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil upon the penalty of death. In naming the animals Adam discovered that “there was not found an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:20). Now Adam became aware that he was created a “social being” and “without companionship” would not have “perfect happiness” (PP 46.1).

Christ, by whom God created Adam, made a “help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). We get a glimpse of the role of a woman. She served as Adam’s companion and provided support by assisting him in the execution of his responsibilities. In this role Eve did not function as an inferior but as an equal respected companion, yet submitting to Adam’s unique headship.

We see the special relationship between the sexes in the way Christ created the woman. She was formed from Adam’s rib (Genesis 2:21), indicating that she was “not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him” (PP 46.2). The difference in physical features between them accentuated Adam’s role as protector. We are told: “Eve was not quite as tall as Adam. Her head reached a little above his shoulders” (SR 20.2; see also PP 45.3).

Second, Paul was inspired to write that the reason for male leadership in church comes from the fall and is connected to the transgression order: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14). Notwithstanding that the woman was first to leave her sphere and leading the way into transgression, could again be saved by accepting to retake her original heaven-assigned supportive role (1 Timothy 2:15).

“Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband’s side in her Eden home; but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it. A similar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God’s plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them” (PP 59.1).

Whilst the Bible shows that every individual is accounted a priest, as in Old Testament (Exodus 19:6) and as in New Testament (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6), this is as individuals in our individual relationship to the Creator and not as ordained priests representing the community. The fact that men and women have equal rights to salvation does not mean there is no submission to leadership in the home or in church. The divine order is clearly laid out in Scripture: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Christ would have women learn the great truth of true equality that submits to divine order of headship. Christ is equal with God His Father because He “received all things” from His Father (John 13:3, 35; Matthew 11:27; 1 Corinthians 15:24, 27) – all things: His life (John 5:26; 6:57), His name (Hebrews 1:4; Philippians 2:9; Exodus 23:21-23), His glory (John 17:22), His throne (Revelation 3:21), His authority (John 10:18; Matthew 28:18); yet, Christ is and will always be subject to the headship of God (1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:27-28). In the blessed ministry of Jesus, women are equal with men, yet subject to the headship of men.