

## **Women Leaders? End Our Prejudice**

*by B. T Roberts condensed by Howard Snyder*

The year was 1891. B.T. Roberts, then 68 and near the end of his life, was heartbroken that the General Conference of the previous year had turned down the ordination of women. From a strong sense of duty he wrote a little book that is still remarkably relevant today. The following article is condensed from his book which he titled, *Ordaining Women*. All the words are those of Roberts, the first bishop of the Free Methodist Church.

The feeling against woman's being accorded equal rights with man, is old and deeply rooted. Generally, among mankind, the law of force has been the prevailing law. The stronger have tyrannized over the weaker. It is no wonder that our prejudices against the rights of woman, infused into us from early childhood, should be strong. But reason and grace serve to overcome prejudice.

Though Christianity has greatly ameliorated the condition of woman, it has not secured for her, even in the most enlightened nations, that equality which the Gospel inculcates.

We can-not ascertain the truth of an opinion by inquiring about its age. Let us decide that as the Church did, for ages, misinterpret the teachings of the Bible on the subject of slavery, so it may now fail to apprehend its teaching on woman's rights.

### **Women in the Bible**

The objections to the equality of man and woman in the Christian church, based upon the Bible rest upon a wrong translation of some passages and misinterpretation of others.

It is urged that the Bible represents the woman as inferior to the man, and subject to him; therefore she should not be permitted to occupy a position equal to his, either in church or in state. As proof of this, the fact that she was created last is presented.

But, if this proves anything, it proves her superiority. For the work of creation proceeded in regular gradation from - - to the higher -- woman was created, not as the servant of man, \_\_\_s companion,

The dominion ~od gave to man at the creation was a joint dominion. It was given to the woman equally as to the man. God created woman a female man nothing more - nothing less. She had all the rights and prerogatives of the man. The dominion given to him was given equally to her.

Man and woman were created equal, each possessing the same rights and privileges as the other. At the fall, woman, because she was first in the transgression, was, as a punishment, made subject to her husband.

Christ came to repair the ruin wrought by the fall. In Him, and in Him only, is Paradise restored. Christ reenacted the primitive law and restored the original relation of equality of the sexes.

In the New Testament church, woman, as well as man, filled the office of Apostle, Prophet Deacon or preacher, and Pastor. There is not the slightest evidence that the functions of any of these offices, when filled by a woman, were different from what they were when filled by a man.

In the primitive Christian Church, when the Ministers became proud and aspiring, and assumed priestly prerogatives, they assigned to woman a lower place in the Christian ministry; and finally, as they apostacized more fully, they dropped her from the ministry altogether. Women, it seems, could be ministers of the church at this early age, while it was poor and persecuted, but afterwards, when it became rich and popular, they were set aside.

Since, then, we find that, at the very beginning of the Christian church, a woman was an apostle, we should not, on account of her sex, exclude woman from any position in the church to which God may call her, and for which she possesses, in the judgment of those whose duty it is to decide in such matters, as ample qualifications as are required of men who aspire to the same position.

### **Women in the Church Today**

If woman, in using her voice, in praising God, or declaring His truth, in your churches, is a transgressor, then silence her at whatever cost, if she is doing right then remove all shackles and give her the liberty of the Gospel.

All restrictions to positions in the church based on race have been abolished; it is time then that those based on sex were also abolished. The church has no right to forbid the free exercise of abilities to do good which God has given. To do so is usurpation and tyranny. Men had better busy themselves in building up the temple of God, instead of employing their time in pushing from the scaffold their sisters, who are both able and willing to work with them side by side.

Why, then, we repeat, does not Christianity root out all false religions? And why does it not have a more marked effect upon the lives of those who acknowledge its truth? The reason is, that the vast majority of those who embrace the Gospel (that is, women) are not permitted to labor according to their ability, for the spread of the Gospel.

It is impossible to estimate the extent to which humanity has suffered by the unreasonable and unscriptural restrictions which have been put upon women in the churches of Jesus Christ. Had they been given, since the days of the first Apostles, the same rights as men, this would be quite another world. Not only would the Gospel have been more generally diffused among mankind, but its influence, where its truth is acknowledged, would have been inconceivably greater. Our so-called Christian nations would have been more in harmony with the teachings of Christ, in their laws, their institutions and their practices.

The greatest domestic happiness always exists where husband and wife live together on terms of equality. Two men, have individual interests, united only by business ties, daily associate as partners for

years, without either of them being in subjection to the other. They consider each other as equals. Then, cannot a man and a woman, having the same interests, live together in the same manner?

It is high time that the tyranny of sex was over thrown. And the Church of Jesus Christ should lead the way in treating all human beings with absolute impartiality.

It is not enough to say that the right will ultimately triumph. If we claim to be righteous we should help make the right triumph.

*The main lines of Roberts' arguments are clear in this excerpt. To understand the careful and detailed way in which Roberts deals with the relevant scriptural passages, however, one must consult the book itself. The above passages were excerpted from the following pages of **Ordaining Women**: 10, 13, 16, 21-37, 47, 49, 50, 51-52, 68, 84-85, 115-116, 117, 149, 157 and 158-159.*