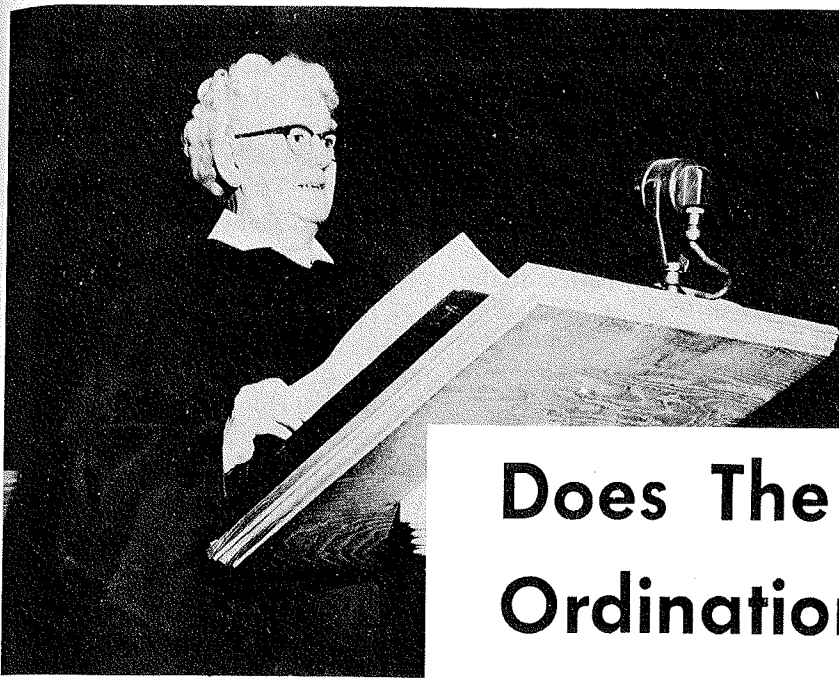


by GORDON H. CLARK

Department of Philosophy,
Butler University, Indianapolis



Does The Bible Forbid Ordination Of Women?

WHEN JESUS said to Pilate, "He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin," he implied that not all sins are equal. Presumably everybody believes that murder is worse than theft.

There are also some trivial, or at least minor, sins. Tithing the mint and cummin emphasized the Pharisees' hypocrisy, but Jesus did not relieve them of this minor duty. Its omission would have been a sin; and while the sin may be called minor, we can hardly call any sin trivial. How could deliberate disobedience of God ever be trivial?

While the present writer does not believe the ordination of women is the greatest danger facing our church, neither does he believe it is so minor as failing to tithe the mint and the cummin. In fact, since it touches upon the conduct of divine worship, it may be more serious than it at first appears. But, major or minor, no commandment of God may be disobeyed with impunity.

Forbidden By Spirit

The point in mind is the fact that the ordination of women is explicitly forbidden by the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. Nor is this prohibition a single, obscure reference. It is several times repeated.

The inspired apostle in I Timothy 3:2 says that "a bishop must be the husband of one wife." The chapter, with the additional mention of deacons, continues to distinguish between these officers and their wives. Obviously the officers are men. In Titus 1:5, 6, the same requirement is repeated: "Ordain elders . . . if any be blameless, the husband of one wife."

Forbidden By Paul

Then too there is the passage in I Cor. 14:34ff. After saying that God is not the author of confusion, Paul adds, "Let your women keep silence in the churches." This prohibition is no merely local affair, for the preceding verse states definitely that it applies to all the churches and not just to the Corinthian church. The reason given for the prohibition also shows that it is universal: "For it is not permitted unto them to speak, but to be under obedience, as also saith the law." Notice the word *also*. Paul here asserts that this is both a New Testament principle and an Old Testament requirement also. Obviously this is not something local.

Paul stresses the universality and the divine origin of the command as he upbraids the Corinthians. "What? came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you

only?" What? can some church today claim that a new word from God has come out of it? Or have not our churches received the word? "If any man (presbyter, board secretary, professor, moderator) think himself a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are the commandments of the Lord."

Note this last verse well. Paul explicitly claims that what he has said is the commandment of the Lord. Has anyone today the authority to disobey the Lord's commands?

The article in THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN of October 14 claims that the verb *to speak* refers only to chattering during the service and hence has nothing to do with ordination and the teaching ministry. If this were so, it would be strange to lay so much stress on it. An appeal to the Lord's command, an appeal to Old Testament principles, would be pretty heavy pressure for whispering in church. But when any passage seems doubtful, light usually comes by studying other passages on the same subject. This is what the author of this supposition failed to do. He passed over Timothy and Titus in silence. This is not good practice. The verses in Timothy and Titus make it clear that a woman is not to be a teaching or ruling elder.

It has also been objected that the Scriptures say that in Christ there is neither male nor female. This attempt to justify the ordination of women is beside the point for two good reasons.

Scriptures Wrested

First, the objection could be pertinent only on the assumption that the New Testament is self-contradictory; for the prescriptions for elders are quite clear, and unless this

verse contradicts these prescriptions, it has no bearing on the matter at all. But if the New Testament is self-contradictory, should we accept one verse and discard a dozen? Should we not follow what is said more often and more emphatically? And the prohibition against ordaining women is by far the more emphatic of the two. Or, better, if the New Testament is self-contradictory, should we not rather conclude that it is essentially irrational and can-

not at all be a safe guide for faith and life?

If, on the other hand, the Scripture is the infallible rule of faith and practice, then the following reason effectively disposes of this contention.

No Contradictions

There is no contradiction here. In this Galatian passage the Apostle is talking about an altogether different subject—God's plan of salvation. All who believe in Christ, says he, are children of God, whether they are Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female; they are one (or united) in Christ. God's plan is the same for all.

Hence, there is neither male nor female in Christ. But it as little follows that there is neither male nor female in the Church as that there is neither male nor female in the home. The man is the head of the house by divine appointment as Christ is the head of the Church. "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man" (I Cor. 11:3). If we accept Scripture as our norm, it is forbidden to seize one verse and misinterpret it to the detriment of other explicit passages. The more obscure must always be understood in the light of what is clear and indisputable. Therefore, the phrase "neither male nor female" provides no justification whatever for ordaining women.

Without Biblical Precedent

Reference has also been made to women prophets. This indeed shows that God has bestowed singular gifts on women. But it has nothing whatever to do with the regularly appointed officers of the Church. The prophets were exceptional. They received direct revelations from God. But women were not ordained to the priesthood. Christian ministers are not prophets. They do not add to divine revelation. Hence any appeal to prophets and prophetesses is entirely beside the point. In the New Testament there is no authority for or example of a woman elder or minister. And we are bound by the Scriptures, the infallible and the only rule of church government. We dare not add, subtract, nor alter.

"Do You Think There Really Is An America?"

