

DOES THE BIBLE SUPPORT THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AS PASTORS?

The trend among the Churches today is to ordain women as pastors. The practice has become so widespread that in several Churches, including the orthodox ones, female ordination is now largely regarded as a non-issue. But since prevalence of a practice does not give validity to it, (Luke 16:15) there is critical need for an objective assessment of the issue in the light of the Scriptures

In regard to the spread of women ordination, a study by the Hartford Seminary in the United States shows that the number of clergywomen in 15 large denominations has skyrocketed within two decades. Between 1977 and 1997, the number of women in the American Baptist Church has increased from 157 to 712; in the Episcopal Churches in USA from 94 to 1394; in the United Methodist Church from 319 to 3003. (*The Guardian* October 28, 2001, page 31) Here in Nigeria the number of female pastors is daily on the rise. One of the female pastors in Nigeria founded a ministry named *Singles and Married* which “focuses on marriage and relationships.” (*The Comet*, Sunday July 23, 2000 page 13) Are all these women acting according to the will of God?

First let us examine the position of the man and the woman in God's order of things. God Almighty being a God of order (1 Corinthians 14: 33,40), made man in his own image and likeness and placed the man in a pre-eminent position among His creatures on earth. But man sinned by disobeying God. In passing His sentence, God told Eve: “...and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Genesis 3:16) And in line with this St. Paul declared: “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.” -1Corinthians 11:3.

Now let us look into the cases of women who were called prophetesses in the Bible. Miriam was called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20. But what did she do? She only led the women of Israel with timbrels and dances after the crossing of the Red Sea. When she claimed to be God's mouthpiece, God made it clear that she was being presumptuous as it is written: “And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses ...And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it. And he (the Lord) said Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.” (Numbers 12:1-6). Miriam was punished for her presumptuousness while Aaron, who later became an High Priest of God was spared because he was indeed called by God. – Numbers 12:9-16.

There is also the case of the woman Deborah As it is written: “And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead. And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.” Deborah was never ordained by God as a prophet and she never said so. It should be noted that Deborah did not call even herself a prophetess but a “mother in Israel” who uttered a song. It was Barak that led the assault on the enemy and led “captivity captive”. – Judges 5:7,12

The woman Huldah, who was wrongly referred to as a “prophetess” is another example. She only came into play at the time the Jews had sold themselves to false religion. The degeneration was such that the law book of God, through which the people should know their left from their right, was not found until about the 18th year of King Josiah's reign! It was because of spiritual decline that the Jews had to go to Huldah for advice. (2 Kings 22:13; 2 Chronicles 34:8-25) Huldah, after referring to the pronouncements of woe on Judah recorded in the Scripture, then

went to make a prophecy of her own – which turned out to be false, thus exposing her true colour. “And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,.. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again” (2 Kings 22: 15,20; 2 Chronicles 34: 22-29). But this was not the case as Josiah died violently in the hands of Pharaoh Nechoh King of Egypt, having obviously been emboldened by the false prophecy of Huldah. (2 Kings 23: 28-30; 2 Chronicles 35: 20—24) The Bible says: “The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him.” – Jeremiah 28:9.

Some cite the case in Acts 21:9 where it is written that Phillip the evangelist “had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.” The word “prophesy” is old English for preaching the word of God. It is derived from the Greek verb *propheteuo* and is used with the primary meaning of “telling forth the divine counsels” or “foretelling the future” (*VINES COMPLETE EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT WORDS*) The Hebrew word for prophesy is *naba* and according to *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* of the Holy Bible the word means to “speak (or sing) by inspiration in prediction or simple discourse. (page 89) This was what the woman Anna did. And just because of that she was referred to as a prophetess by the translators! (Luke 2: 36-38) What a blunder! It goes without saying that the understanding of Acts 21:9 about the four daughters of Phillip the evangelist who “prophesied” is that they preached or discoursed the word of God, in this case to fellow women.

That one is the wife of a prophet, like the case of Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3), or sings the praises of God does not make her a prophetess. According to *Vines Concordance* the word “prophetess”, derived from the Hebrew word *nabi* is related to the meaning “a companion and/or follower of a prophet.” (page 89) One does not require advanced knowledge of the Scriptures to know that merely being a companion or follower of a prophet or engaged in singing or discoursing the word of God does not qualify one to be called a prophet.

It was not even the custom of God's true worshippers for women to lead them. When at certain times in the history of the Jews they were led by women, the Bible did not fail to point out that this was a period of degeneration or decline in their devotion to God. Hence Isaiah the prophet recorded this lamentation in Isaiah 3:12: “As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.’ In fact St Paul makes it clear that an effeminate (womanish man) will not enter the kingdom of God. Why? Because he is unable to exercise his authority as head of the woman. The law in Genesis 3:16 is clear, “...And he shall rule over thee.”

The prophets of God by virtue of the anointing are able to see and understand spiritual things and are thus competent to testify to the truth of His word. By the standard laid down in Numbers 12:6, any prophet of God MUST see the vision of God Almighty, hear his voice so that as St Peter said, he will testify of the things he has seen and heard. (Acts 4:20). God has not revealed himself to any woman. He has never ordained any woman to be His mouthpiece as He did to Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, St. Paul etc. Concerning the ordination of Jeremiah God declared, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. ” (Jeremiah 1:5) Where in the Scriptures has God spoken to a woman in this wise? – Ezekiel 3:17.

Early Church

During the time of Christ he sent only men to preach to the people. First he chose the 12 apostles. Here is Mark's account: "And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: And Simon he surnamed Peter; And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he named them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder ..." (Mark 3:13-19. See also Luke 6:12,13) Later he chose seventy disciples, all men, "and sent them out two by two to preach.." – Luke 10:1

The same precedent was also followed at the replacement of Judas Iscariot when the apostles declared: "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts 1:21) . On the day of Pentecost, only the 12 apostles received the anointing of the holy spirit. Hence these statements: "These men are full of new wine ..." and "St. Peter, standing up with the eleven..." Acts 2:13,14.

Role of women

There are many things women can do in support of the work of God. Women can preach to fellow women. St. Paul charged thus: "The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands that the word of God be not blasphemed..." (Titus 2:3-5) Women can give material and moral support to the progress of the work of God. That was the case in the time of Jesus. The woman Mary Magdalene took a pound of very precious ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. Jesus Christ commended her for the work she did saying she did it for his burial and added: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." (Matthew 26: 6-13) The Bible also shows that such women as "Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, ministered unto Christ of their substance. (Luke 8:3) Of course the women could not have been preaching to Jesus Christ. Rather, they supported the work with material things. It was in this sense that St. Paul charged the Church in Philippi to "help those women which labored with me in the gospel" – Philippians 4:3.

We cannot wish away the following express commands of God from the Holy Bible. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." St. Paul concluded that we should "acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 14:34-35,37) The law being referred to by St. Paul is the law of God in Genesis 3:16: "And he shall rule over thee..." Commenting on 1 Corinthians 14: 34,35 Barnes states as follows: "The rule is positive, explicit and universal. ...on every consideration it was improper, and to be expressly prohibited, for women to conduct the devotions of the church. . No rule in the New Testament is more positive than this, and however plausible may be the reasons for disregarding it, and for suffering women to take part in conducting public worship, yet the authority of the apostle Paul is positive, and his meaning

cannot be mistaken”

Contrary to the argument of certain people, this law by St. Paul was not for a time but for all time. If God wanted it only for a short time, he would have caused such to be recorded in the Holy Bible..

St. Paul further declares “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” -1 Timothy 2: 11-15

From the preceding text it is evident that the Bible does not support the ordination of women as priests. Therefore those women who claim to see visions are seeing nothing but visions from Satan the devil and are in danger of God’s judgment. Said God Almighty, “The prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.” – Deuteronomy 18: 20.

These female Bishops and pastors now parading themselves as “anointed women pastors”, should repent of their sins and stop their presumptuous acts and practices through which they work against God’s purpose and bring reproach to His Holy name. One cannot fail to highlight the following warning to the Church at Thyatira for allowing a certain woman called Jezebel to preach in the Church. “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children (in this context her companions and followers) with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.” – Revelation 2:20-22