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I.

JONATHAN EDWARDS.

THE 5th of October marked the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of this great and good man. In many parts of the country notice has been taken of this fact. Especially in New England, the region of his birth, and to which the labors of his life belonged, have fresh laurels been wreathed for his brow. But it is doubtful if any part of the country, or any section of the church, can pay him as sincere a tribute as the Southern Presbyterian Church. He thought as we still think on the great doctrines of grace, being a zealous Calvinist, and was in accord with the Presbyterian Church in his views of government, though he lived and wrought and died in the Congregational Church. If, therefore, any class of persons should honor the name and cherish the memory of Edwards, those should do so who hold Calvinistic views of doctrine, and Presbyterian principles of polity.

Moreover, while Edwards commands our admiration on many grounds, yet his chief title to our esteem is the almost unparalleled excellence of his Christian character. His life was radiant with the beauty of Christ, sweet and fragrant with all the tender and winsome graces of the Holy Spirit. To pass his life in review, and reflect on those qualities that marked him as the eminent Christian, must be a wholesome spiritual exercise.

The story of his life, quiet and uneventful for the most part, is quickly told. He did not figure as the hero in any great and thrilling conflict; there were few dramatic episodes to give variety to the usually smooth tenor of his career; but his days

VII.

THE WOMAN QUESTION.¹

AFTER a hearty supper I was sitting in the hammock enjoying a good smoke, and the parson was sitting by me reading a magazine. Hearing the front gate close, I looked up and saw a handsome young lady, perhaps eighteen, walking toward the house. After a short stay she departed, accompanied to the gate by the parson's wife. The latter approached the hammock, and told the object of the young lady's visit. It was to ask advice as to the propriety and expediency of her going to the city to attend a business college to study shorthand and typewriting. She did not like entering on such a work, but necessity was laid on her to do something for a living, and nothing else seemed open to her.

"And what advice did you give her?" said I.

"I told her I had always been opposed to girls engaging in that kind of work, but under the circumstances I could not advise her." She then asked what advice I would give.

I suggested that perhaps she might find a small-pox patient, go and nurse her, and if possible take the disease and die.

The parson raised his head from the magazine he was reading, and looking over his spectacles, said, "Did any one ever hear such nonsense?" Then, turning to his wife, said, "Advise her by all means to take a business course. Many girls are earning a good living in that way. I never knew a girl that was qualified to fail to secure a good position. Advise her to go at once. She can make arrangements with the college to pay for her tuition after she has secured a position. Tell her I will go on her bond."

To this the wife replied with some emphasis, "I shall do no such thing. I shall advise her to wait and see if she cannot escape such dangers."

¹ A chapter from *Truth Pushed Beyond the Perpendicular*. By James M. Chaney.

Then, turning to me, she said, "Please explain what you meant by that strange suggestion you made."

"I meant simply that it is a choice between two evils," said I. "It is not a question of moral right or wrong, but purely a question of expediency. To be closeted all day with a man as his employee is not a position suitable to any self-respecting young lady. Sometimes it seems to be necessary, but it is a necessity attended with great danger. The girl, who occupies such a position, takes her life in her hand. Before doing so she should carefully meditate on the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer."

"Now," said the parson, "I shall do some shooting at you with your own weapon, which you have placed in my hand. What you say is the abuse, not the use of an opportunity of making a good living. The work is light, remunerative, and specially suited for a young lady. I believe in giving a woman a chance in every department of work for which she has the necessary qualification."

"I knew you would say that," said the wife, "therefore, I did not ask your opinion. Mr. C—— seems to have settled views on all subjects, and I thought I should like to hear an expression on this subject."

To this I replied, "This is a subject on which I have meditated a great deal. It has come, and I suspect has come to stay, that girls shall fill such positions. It is difficult to form an opinion in any given case. I have very decided views on the question of the proper sphere of woman, but prevailing customs are all against me. Paul's advice is that the younger women marry. Such is my advice. Woman's sphere is in the family. But it takes two to make a bargain. It is not suitable that she marry one of her girl companions, but a young man will not think of marrying unless he has means for supporting a wife. But young ladies have monopolized many of the positions in which it is possible for him to make a living. If my theory of woman's sphere is correct, and I think both nature and Scripture teach it, then it does not belong to the sphere of girls to be found in telegraph offices, department stores, nor officiating as stenographers and typewriters for business men. My objections are,

(1) Such a position is not a woman's sphere. (2) The position is one of great hazard, too great for any Christian girl. (3) It tends greatly to lessen the possibility of girls marrying, because it robs young men of the opportunity of securing means of supporting a wife."

To all this Mrs. R—— heartily assented, and said, "Mr. R—— and myself have never been able to agree on this whole woman question. Not long ago, a young lady friend, soon to be married, came to see him to request that he leave off 'obey' in the marriage ceremony. Before Mr. R—— could answer, I tried to persuade her not to insist on such a request. But she persisted, and Mr. R—— promised that he would comply with her wishes. Don't you think that both were wrong?"

"I certainly do," said I, "and it is difficult to determine which committed the greater sin, she in asking such an omission, or he in granting it."

"It amuses me," said the parson, "to hear you call such an omission a sin when you refuse to admit that it is a sin to drink wine or use tobacco. Perhaps you can enlighten me as to the sin of such an omission?"

"No, not if your infatuation is as great on this subject as on those you mention; I think your case is hopeless. But I will say this: Marriage is a divine institution. It is one of our inheritances from paradise. As a minister of the gospel, in officiating at a marriage, you act in a representative character. You are an ambassador, representing the Great Head of the church. It is to be taken for granted that you will seek to unite the parties according to the revealed will of God. Unquestionably, the Bible enjoins obedience on the part of the wife. It is, then, very clear that it is your duty to include this promise of obedience. To agree not to do so is to prove false to your trust, and to repudiate the authority of your church, and of your Lord and Master. You committed a grievous sin in making such a promise. As to the young lady, she ought to tremble at the thought of making such a request. It can admit of no other interpretation than this, a deliberate repudiation of the authority of God. God says wives must obey their husbands, and she defies God in saying she will

not make any promise to obey. Think of entering wedlock with such a protest against God! A repudiation of his authority! Defying him to his face! It is horrible to contemplate."

"But," said the parson, "obedience is included in the promise to be faithful. She is willing to promise that she will be faithful."

"That is the merest subterfuge. The husband promises that, and you know very well that the Bible requires something more of the wife than is enjoined upon the husband. Besides, if you and she admit that obedience is included in the promise to be faithful, you thus admit that you have no objection to the promise to obey. Then why insist on its omission?"

"I wish I had not made the promise," said the parson.

Mrs. R——, looking down the street, said, "Yonder is Miss Mattie standing at Mrs. Wilson's gate, talking to Agnes." She proposed to go and bring her up, but seeing her turn her face in our direction, she motioned to her and she came. I was introduced to her, and at the earnest request of the parson's wife, I repeated my ideas on the omission of that word "obey" in the marriage ceremony. I explained the matter to her at great length, showing her how it was defying God, and repudiating his authority. She was a sensible girl, and a Christian. She said her attention had never been called to the matter before, and heartily thanked me for preventing her from the commission of a sin so great. Then turning to Mr. R——, she said, "I wish you to put in that word 'obey,' and I shall lay special emphasis on my answer."

"Now," said the wife, "I wish you would get Mr. R—— straight on the whole woman question. A short time ago, the paper announced that a Presbyterian preacher in K. C. was absent, or sick, and his wife preached in his stead. I was shocked to think that a woman, and a Presbyterian, would get so far outside her sphere. I do not believe that a woman has any business talking in public, where a man is present, even though she be a returned missionary. But Mr. R—— said he thought she did right to preach under such circumstances if she was qualified to perform that duty."

"I could not call it a duty," said I.

"I did not mean that; I meant a work."

"Well, I see I am in a strait betwixt two. Both of you, I think, have become imitators of the stupid Irishman, in wishing to push the pole a little further to make sure that it was perpendicular. Mr. R—— is pushing the pole beyond the perpendicular towards the east, and you are doing the same thing towards the south. The Bible has placed this pole, the woman question, perpendicular. Why not leave it just where the Bible has put it?"

"Do you not think that Mrs. C—— did a very naughty thing in going into the pulpit, and officiating as her husband was wont to do?" said Mrs. R——.

"In so doing, she ignored the law of her church, and defied the authority of God. On this there is no room for a difference of opinion among those who receive the plain teaching of the Word of God."

"I confess," said the parson, "this woman question has given me no little trouble. I have endeavored to examine it in all its bearings. I am sure the Bible cannot contradict itself. The four daughters of Philip prophesied. Paul speaks of women praying and prophesying with their heads covered. But prophesying means what we mean by preaching. Therefore, I conclude that in particular cases a woman is justified in performing that work. I confess that in some measure I am influenced by what you may call common sense. If a woman has the piety, knowledge and ability to preach, I see no reason why she should not thus glorify God."

"As a preacher in the Presbyterian Church, your reasoning would be amusing if the subject were not so serious," said I. "But to say nothing of the plain prohibition of Paul, in your church it is understood that no one has a right to officiate in that capacity, be it man or woman, unless specially set apart to that work. But your church has decided that a woman cannot, under any circumstances, be ordained to the work of preaching the gospel."

"When Paul says that a woman must not pray or prophesy

with her head uncovered, does not that imply that she may do so if she does it with her head covered?"

"Such is a legitimate inference, and such, I am sure, is his meaning. With her head covered, in the sense in which the Apostle uses that expression, she may both pray and preach. A little attention to what the Apostle says about the woman's head being "covered" would make his language understood. The difficulty of understanding Paul's discussion of this woman question in the eleventh chapter of First Corinthians arises because of his reference to customs which then prevailed, but which have changed. There is no change in the truth taught, but in the manner of illustrating the truth. If we could completely dismiss all that Paul said to illustrate the truth, by customs then prevailing, and confine ourselves exclusively to the truth he was illustrating, then all difficulty would disappear. But since the illustrations are on record, it is well to explain them. The important truth to be illustrated is the official subordination of woman. Her position, according to the revealed will of God, is one of subjection, of subordination. Because of this, she must do nothing that implies headship, or leadership, over man. What tends to confuse us now is the method by which Paul illustrates this truth, as the illustrations used are no longer in vogue. At that time, long hair was regarded as the symbol or token of her subjection, or subordinated position. The 'covering' spoken of was her hair, as appears from the fifteenth verse, 'For her hair is given her for a covering.' He refers to this in all the preceding part of the chapter. While long hair was regarded as a symbol of woman's position, it was not only a shame, but a sin—a defiance of God's authority—for a woman to wear short hair in public. In the tenth verse Paul says she should wear the symbol of her position on her head out of regard or respect to the regularly ordained ministers or bishops of the church. In this verse they are called 'angels,' just as they are denominated in the first and second chapters of Revelation. Thus (i. 20), 'The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.' In ii. 1, 'Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus.' The same in verses 8, 12, etc. We should not be confused or led astray when a sacred writer

speaks of a sign, declaring of it something which is true only of the thing signified, as when he speaks of baptism washing away sin. In 1 Cor. xi. 3, he introduces his statements about 'head covering' in this manner, 'I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man.' Then he proceeds to discuss the impropriety of the woman acting in a manner to deny or repudiate this relation she sustains to man. But instead of speaking of the thing signified, he confines his speech to the sign, or the symbol, the head covering. In chapter xiv. 34, he drops the sign or symbol, and speaks of the thing itself. Thus he says, '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.' In the same manner he drops the symbol in his letter to Timothy; 1 Tim. ii. 11, 12, '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.'

"So far as the meaning is concerned, these two forms of expression are identical—

"(1) Let not a woman pray or preach with her head uncovered.

"(2) Let not a woman pray or preach under circumstances that implies that she is usurping authority over man.

"When one prays in public, he 'leads' in prayer—he assumes 'leadership' or headship. When one teaches, in a didactic manner, he does the same thing. He assumes headship, superiority. If a woman does either of these things in a miscellaneous congregation, she does the same thing, and thus usurps headship—leadership over the men present."

"It is difficult to understand the limitations here placed on woman. It is difficult to understand why she should be debarred from anything man may do, provided she has the necessary qualification," said the parson.

"Whether you can see it or not, yet every restriction of her sphere is a token of the kindness of her Creator. She was created

expressly to be a wife and mother, a helpmeet. When God instituted marriage, he instituted the family. In the family there could not be two official heads. It would be a greater monstrosity than a double-headed animal. Nature teaches that the headship belongs to the man, because of his superior physical power. One would be in a ridiculous predicament to have or claim the right to exercise authority, yet be destitute of the power to enforce the claim. Thus nature teaches that authority to rule was not committed to woman, but to man, because to him was given superior physical power. The Bible, in the most unmistakable manner, teaches the same fact. The 'head of the woman is the man,' is the Bible truth. To the same import is the statement that women are 'commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.' The church is patterned after the family. For the same reason that 'headship' is given to man in the family it is given to him in the church. The fact that headship, and duties growing out of it, are denied to woman, does not indicate any real inferiority on her part, but simply official inferiority. In all civil governments we find many things that would serve to illustrate this. It is a fact that there are hundreds and thousands of men more worthy and better qualified to perform the duties of judges, governors, and kings, and emperors than many of those who hold these honorable positions. But that does not give them the right to assume the authority, or to perform the duties of those who hold such official positions. In the matter of praying and teaching and preaching she is not debarred except when her doing so implies headship over man. All children, in their minority, occupy the same position of official inferiority, and are thus on a level with her, and she may teach them without violating the divine injunction, even though they be males."

To all this the wife assented and expressed her gratification at the explanations given. Then she added, "I am in great doubt as to the propriety of women talking in public when all those present are of her own sex. Also, I question the propriety of her leading in prayer in prayer meetings when all present are ladies."

"Now," said I, "you are pushing the pole as much beyond the perpendicular in one way as your husband is the other. The duty

to pray in secret and in public is as binding on women as on men. The only limitation is that she shall do so within the sphere laid down for her in the Bible."

Then she said, "In your opinion may a returned missionary, a woman, I mean, address a mixed congregation?"

"Most undoubtedly," I replied, "so long as she confines herself to a recital of her missionary work among the heathen, in her mission field, and abstains from all attempts to teach men what they ought to do in the cause of missions."

"Here is a case," she said. "Rev. Mr. T—— and his wife were missionaries in China. On their return to this country they were invited by many churches to visit them and give a talk on their missionary work. They visited the Presbyterian Church, in C——, and on Sabbath morning Mrs. T—— went into the pulpit, read a chapter, then said, 'Let us pray,' and led in prayer. Then she took a text referring to mission work, and preached an excellent missionary sermon, by which the missionary spirit was aroused in all present. It was a mixed congregation, and many preachers were in the audience, and some in the pulpit. Was it proper for her to do so?"

To this I replied: "The fact that she preached an excellent sermon, and that she did much good by so doing has a blinding effect in reaching a conclusion as to the propriety of her thus officiating. The good accomplished is not a factor in determining the right or wrong of her acts. The cart might have upset, and the ark might thus have been injured or destroyed, if Uzzah had not, in his zeal, put forth his hand to steady it. But God smote Uzzah for his error. Paul says the damnation of those is just who say that we may do evil that good may come. Anything is evil if it is done in violation of divine law. So far as we can see, a vast amount of good might be accomplished by ordaining many women to the full work of the gospel ministry. But what saith the Word of God, our only guide?"

"In two particulars Mrs. T—— got outside her sphere, and transgressed the divine law—

"(1) In leading the prayers of that mixed congregation. In that she showed her short hair, or uncovered head, or usurped

authority over the men, in that she assumed headship, leadership, the very thing from which she is debarred.

“(2) In publicly expounding the Word of God she did the same thing in an aggravated form.

“In both these things she defied the authority of God, and repudiated that subjection and subordination of which the Apostle speaks.”

“But,” said Mrs. R——, “if she had confined herself to a recital of the work in which she had been engaged, would not that, in such a congregation, have been in violation of the rule laid down by Paul?”

“Not at all,” said I. “In that case it could not be said that she assumed any superiority, or, as Paul puts it, she would not have been speaking with her head uncovered, that is, usurping authority over the men present. Her recital of her missionary work would not have been inappropriate if the whole congregation had been preachers, or if the address had been in the presence of the General Assembly of our church.”

Here the parson had a word to say. It was this, “Would she not, under such circumstances, have been communicating information, thus giving them knowledge, and is not that a form of teaching, and does not Paul say, ‘I suffer not a woman to teach’?”

“Teaching,” said I, “as used by the Apostle, has a well understood, technical meaning. It relates to abstract truth, or truth imparted in a scientific or didactic manner. It is quibbling. By such a perversion of truth as you suggest, a woman would be forbidden to answer a civil question propounded by a man, or even her husband, because such answer would communicate information or knowledge. By that kind of perversion, as she is commanded to keep silence in the church, she would not be permitted to sing. Thus, too, you can prove that it is a sin to kill a beast or fowl, for the law says, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’”

Mrs. R—— then asked, “Is the law as laid down by Paul an iron rule, like the laws of the Medes and Persians? How can we locate the line up to which women may go, and beyond which is forbidden ground?”

To this I replied: “The law we are now considering belongs

to that class of laws known as positive, because based on the will of God, and not on his nature. Such were the ceremonial laws of the Jews, and such is the law of the Sabbath. Two peculiarities of such laws are—

“(1) They may be, and sometimes are, changed by the proper authority. Thus, the Jewish ceremonial law ceased, and thus the Sabbath was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week.

“(2) Another peculiarity of such laws is that we are required to keep them, not so much in their letter as in their spirit. From this it follows that if one is honestly desirous of keeping such a law, yet, through ignorance or inability, does not keep it in its letter, his desire meets the spirit of the requirement. The fourth commandment serves perfectly to illustrate the law relating to women. Works of necessity and mercy are not a violation of the fourth commandment. A stickler or a quibbler might ask how are we to draw the line between those works which are, and those which are not works of necessity or mercy? Such a difficulty is purely imaginary. Any one, in any case, can solve the problem. What is required is that we have an honest desire to keep the commandment. Then our decision, as to the work being one of necessity or mercy, will be acceptable to God. Of course, it is assumed that one has an enlightened conscience, and has carefully and prayerfully informed himself as to what the Bible requires. Such an interpretation of the fourth commandment would not open the way for a man to go on with his usual avocation Sabbath after Sabbath on the plea of its being a work of necessity. That would show wilful ignorance or utter disregard of the commandment. This serves to illustrate the case of Mrs. T——, of which you spoke. There was no necessity for her to lead in prayer, or thus publicly to expound the Word of God. Either she was wilfully ignorant of the divine injunction, or she contemptuously disregarded it. Her honesty of purpose in such a case could be no palliation of her offence. Her leading the congregation in prayer and preaching a sermon on missions constituted a flagrant violation of the divine injunction. If a woman of ordinary intelligence will carefully study what Paul says on this subject,

and if she is conscientiously desirous of complying with the injunction, there is no possible danger of her getting outside her sphere. The chief danger is that she will fall short of her duty, and fail to do those things which she ought to do, especially because of the widespread perversions of the law relating to the sphere of her activities. A most excellent means of testing any case that may arise is to apply the principles governing the observance of the Sabbath. The law relating to the sphere of woman is no more and no less binding than the law relating to the Sabbath."

"I cannot imagine any case of necessity arising when it would be proper for a woman to violate the letter of the law as laid down by the Apostle," said Mrs. R——.

"Yes," said I, "such a case might arise. Here is a case that actually occurred. A minister and his wife went as missionaries to Alaska. They were far removed from other workers. After some years of faithful service, they were rejoiced in the conversion of some of the heathen to whom they had gone. A church was organized consisting of a few members. Many who had not confessed Christ were deeply interested. At that juncture the minister was stricken with a fatal malady and died. It was the purpose of the wife to return to her distant home. Those in the little church, and others interested, implored her to remain with them and carry on the good work begun. She felt that it was her duty to comply with their request. After a while some who accepted Jesus desired to be baptized. After prayerfully considering the matter, she baptized them. Again, they desired to celebrate the Lord's Supper. She administered it to them as her husband would have done. This is analogous to the case I mentioned of the preacher leaving his pulpit on a Sabbath morning, and travelling all that day to reach the bedside of his dying boy, in answer to a telegram from his wife who was with her boy. No one but a hypocritical Pharisee could say that he did wrong. In doing what she did in administering the sacraments of the church, while violating the letter of Paul's injunction, yet she kept it in its spirit. It is very certain that it met the approval of her Lord."

“And yet you condemn Mrs. T—— for preaching an excellent missionary sermon?” said Mr. R——.

To this I replied: “The cases are in no measure parallel. In the case of Mrs. T—— there was no necessity. The matter might be illustrated by what is known as Lynch Law. In mining districts, hundreds of miles from any court of justice, it might be proper to execute even the death penalty on a criminal after being well satisfied of his guilt, and giving him, as best they could, a fair trial. But in a civilized community, where the courts are in session, it matters not how great is the man’s crime, nor how well established his guilt, Lynch Law is itself a crime. Your apology for Mrs. T—— and an apology for Lynch Law in a civilized community would be parallel.”

“How would it be in a case like this,” said Mr. R——; “At a prayer-meeting in a small church it often happens that all present are women. Do you think it would be a violation of Paul’s injunction if the minister should call on some lady to lead in prayer?”

“To my mind, that is precisely analogous to Christ’s supposition of an ox fallen into a ditch on the Sabbath day. Most assuredly, any woman would be justified in complying with such a request, under such circumstances. The act of the preacher in making the request relieves her from doing that which otherwise could be interpreted as usurping authority over the man.

“In all such matters we are to remember that the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. It was sticking to the letter of the law, while ignoring its spirit, that led God to say to the Jews that their compliance with the letter of the law was an abomination to him. Scylla is as dangerous as Charybdis. The pole is as far from the perpendicular when pushed too far as when not pushed far enough.”

JAMES M. CHANEY.