

IN RESPONSE - THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

by Dennis Prutow
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"The famous Edward Irving speaks thus pointedly on this subject: 'Who am I that I should despise the gift of God, because it is in a woman, whom the Holy Ghost despiseth not?... That women have with men an equal distribution of spiritual gifts is not only manifest from the fact (Acts ii, xviii.26; xxi.9; 1 Cor. xi.3, etc), but from the very words of the prophecy of Joel itself, which may well rebuke those vain and thoughtless people who make light of the Lord's work, because it appeareth among women. I wish men would themselves be subject to the Word of God, before they lord it over women's equal rights in the great outpouring of the Spirit' (Works, v.555)."

This quotation, taken from an article by Adoniram Judson Gordon, 'The Ministry of Women', was originally printed in the *World Missionary Review* in 1894. The article was reprinted by Christians for Biblical Equality, an organization committed to proclaiming the a biblical basis for the ministry and equality of men and women in church, home, and society.

Christians for Biblical Equality appear to be enamored with Gordon's article because it seems to present a biblical rationale for women in the ministry. If God has given the gift of prophecy to women as well as men, we must not deny access to ministry to those who have this gift. Giftedness qualifies for ministry.

The thesis of the article is faulty. First, it is not the possession of gifts which qualifies for ministry. One must be called by God. The possession of certain gifts may confirm the calling. But one may have gifts to teach and never be called to teach the Word of God in the church.

In addition, a person may be gifted but hold views contrary to Scripture and for this reason not be called. For example, Edward Irving, who is freely quoted by A. J. Gordon, was dismissed from his church and deposed from the ministry. He maintained Christ "took upon Himself our sinful nature and possessed the tendencies to sin that all mankind possess." Our Lord Jesus Christ did not come into this world with original sin. Although Irving was a very gifted man, he was disqualified for ministry because of his heretical beliefs.

Second, it is not specific gifts which in themselves qualify an individual for ministry. A person may have special gifts. But the apostle Paul is clear in teaching a person may have the very gift in question, the gift of prophecy, and may not even be a Christian let alone be a qualified church leader. "And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). A person may have the gift of prophecy and yet be without the love which is the mark of the Christian life. The gift cannot qualify for ministry as long as the root of the matter, love, is absent.

Third, the argument of A. J. Gordon and those who follow him proceeds on the assumption the gift of prophecy is still extant. The assumption is faulty. The apostle Paul is clear on this count. "If there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:8).

When do, or as I maintain, when did, these special gifts cease? These gifts give way to the perfect Word of God. These extraordinary gifts died out as signs of the presence of the Spirit in the lives of believers when Scripture was complete. At that point we had a full orb'd exposition of the love, the primary fruit of the Spirit, by which true Christianity is known. And it is fruit, not giftedness, which is the primary indicator of the presence of the Spirit. "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16 & 20). If Christianity itself is to be identified by fruit rather than gifts, the qualifications for leadership in teaching and preaching must also center in fruit rather than in giftedness.

But the point here is more graphic. The gift which A. J. Gordon sets forth as the primary qualification for women in ministry no longer exists in the church.

Fourth, the gift of prophecy to which A. J. Gordon refers and modern preaching and teaching should not be equated. The gift to which A. J. Gordon refers was a supernatural gift of revelatory character with which early Christians were endowed. This is clear from Acts 2:17, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, and from the way Paul guides the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 14.

Specifically, Paul tells his readers,

And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. for you can all prophecy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted" (1 Corinthians 14:29-31). Since this prophecy is special revelation, it is improper to equate it with modern preaching and teaching. Modern preaching and teaching takes the special revelation recorded in the Bible and expounds that revelation. The preaching and teaching itself is not divine revelation.

The argument that possession of the gift of prophecy qualifies for ministry is therefore invalid with regard to both men and women.

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A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of Women*, reprinted by Christians for Biblical Equality, 7433 Borman Avenue East, Inner Grove Heights, MN 55076.

Arnold Dalimore, *Forerunner of the Charismatic Movement, The Life of Edward Irving* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), p. 167.

L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), p. 318.

For the complete argument regarding the cessation of the special gifts and their replacement by love as the normative sign of the presence of the Spirit in human lives, see my exposition of 1 Corinthians 13 available through the Sterling Pulpit.

IN RESPONSE - ENLIGHTENED SELF INTEREST, PART THREE OF THREE

by Dennis Prutow

We have said the Pharisees represent people with a form of godliness without inner power from the Spirit changing the disposition of the heart (2 Timothy 3:5). One of the ways this lack of inner change is manifested is in individuals being lovers of self (2 Timothy 3:2). In this connection, look at the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:17-20. Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Beyond doubt, the Pharisees were schooled in the Word of God. They knew the content of the Old Testament. And these men were scrupulous in their keeping of the Law. Christians are to be no less scrupulous in their morality. The highest ethical standards are to be maintained and the behavior of Christians is to be beyond reproach.

Jesus emphasizes this when He says in no uncertain terms "I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." The righteousness of Christians must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. How can this be?

Is Jesus talking about righteousness imputed to us by faith in Jesus Christ? No He is not. In the immediate context of these words Christ is speaking about conduct.

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. We then have the words under consideration. "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is definitely discussing behavior.

But we also know Jesus is not teaching salvation by works. The Pharisees had devolved to that position. They loved their works and loved themselves on account of their works. This was their problem.

Then how can Christ demand righteousness greater than that of the Scribes and the Pharisees? The only way this can be is when actions are properly motivated. In other words, we observe the commandments of Christ because we love Him. Jesus is blunt and to the point once again. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

The proper motive, the godly motive, for following Christ is a love for Christ. We see the Pharisees perverted this truth. They followed many precepts of the Word of God motivated by self love. They did what they did in order to be noticed by others. They did what they did in order to receive praise from others.

The same thing is quite possible within our own circles, within the pale of the visible church. For example, young people, to a great degree, may see the truth of the gospel. There may be conviction of sin in their hearts. There may also be a degree of illumination by the Spirit. But the disposition of their hearts is not changed. Their minds are affected by the information they have received. Their emotions are affected with feelings of guilt. But their wills remain unyielding. The bent of their hearts is against God. How is this situation noted?

When asked about making a public profession of faith in Christ, such individuals are quite willing to stand before the church to profess faith in Jesus Christ. But why are they willing? What is the chief motive behind the action they take?

In many circumstances young people will make a profession of faith in order to please their parents. Or they will assent to the procedure of taking vows before a congregation in order to please a boyfriend or girlfriend. The love of self demands it. And so the profession of faith is not made out of a sincere love for Jesus Christ. It is not made out of a love for God the Father.

But of what good is a profession of faith which proceeds out of self love? As Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). A profession of Christ born of a love for self would be a profession based on the flesh. It is of no eternal value. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63).

A profession motivated by a love for Christ is quite different. When we make our profession out of a love for Christ we are able to say, "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our profession is born of the Spirit. We are able to respond "because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

We must get this point. We may experience both the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and the illuminating work of the Spirit in our lives. Yet even with these profound works of the Spirit we may remain in a lost condition. Although our emotions are stirred by the Spirit, although our minds may be refreshed with light from above, our will may

remain inclined against Christ. We are disposed to act out of self love, self interest, and self centeredness. This is what must be seen and understood.

The same thing may be seen by comparing Psalm 119:103, "How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth." The person who is born of the Spirit savors the Word of God for what it is. This person observes God's Word out of love for God and a love for Christ. But the person illumined by the Spirit and not born again will observe the Word out of wrong motives. Self love and the desire to be noticed will dominate.

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IN RESPONSE - BAPTISM AND REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

by Dennis Prutow

Our discussions of baptism bring us to another argument against infant baptism and for so-called believer's baptism only. The argument involves the criterion for church membership. It is maintained by those of baptistic persuasion that the only legitimate standard for membership in the body of Christ is the new birth.

Our first reaction to this stance is that it is not only plausible but mandatory. Upon further reflection however, this standard is not only found to be contrary to Scripture, the ultimate test, but it is also unworkable, a proximate test.

To be sure, Jesus Christ does tell us, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The new birth is absolutely essential for an individual to see and then enter the kingdom (John 3:5). But even though this is the case, is the new birth the explicit test for acceptance in the church? John 3:8 leads us in to the proper answer. "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from or where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

This text tells us we cannot see the Spirit. In fact we cannot taste, touch, smell, or hear the Spirit directly. He is not perceptible to human senses. In similar fashion we do not see the molecules of air dancing past our eyes. They are not perceptible to our natural senses. However, we do see the results of the wind. Here in Kansas it is a beautiful sight to see the wind blowing through the fields of wheat which are ready for harvest. We do see the amber waves of grain resulting from the wind. In similar fashion, we also see the results of the work of the Spirit. When an individual is born again of the Spirit, the results are plain. Such a person repents of sin, turns fully away from sinful habits and lifestyles and turns to Jesus Christ in faith. This conversion is very visible.

What we are saying is confirmed in the book of Acts. The action step of Peter's sermon at Pentecost is as follows.

And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.' And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation'" (Acts 2:38-40).

Peter called upon those listening to him to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus Christ. The outward manifestation of the inward cleansing was water baptism.

Now note who was baptized. "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Those who had received the words of Peter and who therefore manifested repentance and faith were baptized. These people were added to the visible body of the church. In other words, baptism was administered upon public confession of Christ. The criterion for baptism was not the new birth. Rather it was something which could be measured by the senses. It was the repentance and faith of the people responding to the message and coming for baptism.

This is in keeping with a firm biblical principle. "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). It is not possible for any human being to look into a human heart and determine if a person is born again. We are simply not capable of such activity. For this reason, the new birth is not the criterion for entrance into the visible church. Such a standard is impossible to utilize let alone maintain. Rather, in accord with the biblical example, repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ expressed by way of confession and lifestyle which can be seen and heard are the proper tests for admittance into the visible body of Christ.

At this point, whether we like it or not, mistakes can be and often are made. The result is that the visible church is a mixed multitude. There are regenerate and unregenerate people in the church. Jesus tells us this will be the case until the end of the age in the parable of the wheat and the tares.

We therefore do not hold to a pure church doctrine. Neither do we hold to what some have called regenerate church membership.

Another important New Testament concept makes regenerate church membership untenable. It is the idea of discipline. Because the church is a mixed multitude, grave sin can be expected within its membership. Discipline is therefore necessary. See particularly Matthew 18:15-17. The most severe censure in discipline is excommunication. In this unwelcome step, people are declared unbelievers. But how can born again people be declared unbelievers and be removed from the church? They can't. The doctrine of regenerate church membership is therefore contrary to Christ's teaching on discipline.

Only those who have been born again are eligible for baptism it is claimed. For this reason, infants are excluded from the sacrament. But because the argument proceeds on an erroneous assumption, it carries no weight. As just shown, the proper criterion for baptism is not regeneration but repentance and faith. And if regeneration or the new birth is not the test for the baptism of adults, it cannot be the standard for the baptism of infants either.

Neither adults nor infants are eligible for baptism on the basis of new birth. Adults present themselves for baptism on the basis of their profession of faith in Christ. And confessing adult parents are privileged to present their infant children for baptism on the basis of their inclusion in the covenant promises of God.

We have discussed this latter point under the headings of 'Circumcision and Baptism', and 'Baptism and the Covenant.'

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IN RESPONSE - THE ATONEMENT AND CHOICE

by Dennis Prutow

Without question, the most difficult article of the so-called Five Points of Calvinism is Limited Atonement. The Reformed theologian maintains both the Calvinist and the Arminian limit the atonement. The Calvinist limits the atonement in scope seeing it efficaciously applied to only the elect. The Arminian limits the atonement by indicating its power is simply made available to men and women. It then becomes efficacious upon their choice.

Both positions insist the atonement is effectual for those who believe, trust, in Christ. The question is that of the design of the atonement. Did Christ die for all human beings indiscriminately as argued by the Arminians. Or did Christ die specifically for the elect?

A strong argument against the latter position revolves around the concept of choice. No one will deny we make choices continually each day from the time we roll out of bed in the morning. And we cannot deny the Bible charges us, "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). This choice is to be manifested in repentance, a turning from sin, and faith, a turning to Jesus Christ in reliance and trust. Repentance and faith are acts of the will founded upon good reasons considered in the mind and provoked by the emotions. Choices are made.

But the Arminian maintains that from the Calvinistic standpoint there is no real offer of Christ to the non-elect. Christ did not die for them. Therefore, the words of invitation given by Jesus cannot be sincere. Jesus does say, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). If this is a universal call given by Christ, the call is at best a deception and at worst a lie. Christ is not really available to all in the Calvinistic scheme.

What is our response? There are those who contend Matthew 11:28 is not a universal gospel call. I've hear it explained this way. Suppose you are at a basketball game. An announcement comes over the public address system. "There is a white Chevrolet Caprice in the parking lot, licence number 123-XYZ, blocking an emergency exit. Would the owner please report to the concession stand." Now everyone at the ball game hears the announcement. But it is not meant for everyone. It is meant for only one person. In the same way, although multitudes hear the call of Christ, it is meant for the elect who realize the heavy burden of sin they are under. Dr. John H. Gerstner would be a representative of this approach.

But the nagging question persists. If individuals hear the invitation to come to Christ, they assume the offer is for them and that it is sincere. Furthermore, suppose, for the sake of argument, that a non-elect person does turn to the cross of Christ. We realize this is an impossibility but we grant the point for the sake of the argument and the questioner. Such a person would find, based upon Calvinistic thinking, Christ is not for him. In other words, based upon objective reality, there is no real choice for the non-elect person. This person is then unjustly condemned because there was no objective choice for this person to make. The response is twofold.

First, human beings are condemned for their sins. We are all sinners. And we all sin in a multitude of ways day-in and day-out. One of those sins may be the rejection of Christ. But in order for a person to be consigned to hell, rejection of Christ is not necessary. The sins of a lifetime without Christ, the sins of a lifetime although quite short and without the privilege of hearing the message of Christ, are quite adequate to bring final and just condemnation. Although it seems strange at first glance, human beings are never condemned to hell simply on the basis of a rejection of Christ.

The only reason people will suffer inconceivable anguish in the pits of hell is for their sins. From this standpoint, the existence of hell clarifies the extraordinary affront to God of any single sin.

Second, individuals are not unjustly cast into the lake of fire simply because they had no opportunity to hear the gospel and choose Christ. People in this category actually do choose death. And eternal death is their lot because of conscious decisions on their part to live in sin.

The apostle Paul makes this abundantly clear in Romans 1:18-21. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks....

Paul argues, and this is the argument of the Holy Spirit, that men and women who have never heard about Christ are without excuse before God. Why? They know the Creator. But they have rejected Him. They have refused to give Him the honor He is due.

It is true, taking the Arminian argument just advanced against limited atonement, no clear choice is given to many pagan people to either accept or reject Christ. In fact, the possibility of the acceptance of Christ has not existed, does not exist, and will not exist for certain people. Is there just ground for condemnation? Yes there is. "They are without excuse," (Romans 1:20). Why? "Even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God" (Romans 1:21). Was there a clear objective choice before them to accept or reject Christ? No! Was or is God unjust in his condemnation? No! "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Must a clear objective choice to bow before Christ or reject Christ be present for there to be a just condemnation of sinners? No! The witness of Scripture does not support such a claim. Therefore, the argument against limited atonement based on the need for such a clear choice is invalid.

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