

Why John MacArthur Should Apologize to Women Preachers

Fundamentalist preacher John MacArthur, known for his “Grace to You” radio broadcast, didn’t show any grace last weekend when he was asked what he thought about popular Bible teacher Beth Moore. During a pastor’s conference in Sun Valley, California, held Oct. 16-18, MacArthur said he thought Moore should “go home” when he was asked on a panel what he thought of her.

To make his words even less gracious, the audience laughed and cheered.

“I think the church is caving in to women preachers,” said MacArthur, a Reformed Baptist who has preached for 50 years that women have no biblical right to stand behind a pulpit or serve in church leadership.

I respect some of MacArthur’s theological contributions. He has written some excellent books. But his dismissive attitude toward women who are called to ministry is rude, crude and incredibly unhelpful in a day when we need every available minister—male or female—on the front lines.

MacArthur sincerely believes he’s upholding Scripture when he demands an all-male clergy. Like so many fundamentalists before him, he builds his narrow doctrinal interpretation on one verse in 1 Timothy while ignoring women leaders in the Bible including Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, Priscilla, Nympha, Chloe, Euodia, Syntyche and others who served with the apostle Paul.

Would MacArthur tell the prophet Deborah to “go home” rather than organize an army to defend ancient Israel? Would he tell Priscilla to “go home” rather than travel and teach in New Testament churches?

I wonder if MacArthur and other fundamentalists realize what they are saying when they demand that the Beth Moores of our day sit down and be quiet. Do they seriously want the spiritual contributions of women to go away?

Where would we be if the powerful women God used in past generations never had a place in ministry? To think our sisters have no role to play in the spreading of the gospel reveals the highest level of male arrogance.

Thankfully, women throughout the centuries who had the fire of God burning in their hearts did not listen to the religious naysayers who told them they should go home and be quiet.

What would have happened if the great missionary Amy Carmichael had been content to stay in her comfortable house in England because of the misguided belief that women are never to speak for God? Because Amy obeyed and preached with fervor, thousands in India found salvation through her Dohnavur Fellowship, and scores of young Indian girls were pulled out of the evil system of Hindu temple prostitution.

What if Jarena Lee, a poor black woman living in the early 1800s in America, had ignored the voice of the Holy Spirit that told her, "Preach the gospel! I will put My words in your mouth." A Methodist who had a powerful experience of personal sanctification, she traveled thousands of miles on foot preaching and winning converts.

What would have happened if Southern Baptist missionary Bertha Smith had adhered to her own denomination's policies about women in ministry? Because this brave pioneer knew she couldn't keep silent about her faith, she took her message to China and sparked a revival that is still felt there 70 years later.

What if healing evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson had embraced the lie that says women cannot speak in church? She never would have blazed a trail across the United States with her

Pentecostal message, and she would have never started the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel—a denomination that has grown to millions of members around the world.

What if the great Bible teacher Henrietta Mears of Hollywood Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles had assumed that the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 forbade her from teaching men? She would have never hosted the large discipleship conferences she sponsored in the 1940s and 1950s. And she would have never had the opportunity to mentor both Bill Bright and Billy Graham when they were young. Those men, by their own admission, led millions to Jesus because of Mears' influence on their spiritual growth.

And what would the world be like if Salvation Army co-founder Catherine Booth, healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman or Bible teacher Corrie ten Boom had kept their mouths shut when the Holy Spirit called them to shout their message from the housetops?

And while we are on the subject of Beth Moore, let's remember that this remarkable woman has published more than 25 books and Bible studies and has indirectly disciplined countless women and men through her writings, broadcasts and conferences. I don't even want to imagine a world without her contributions.

What a shame that our brother John MacArthur would devalue Moore's spiritual gifts and then suggest that her ministry is illegitimate. I believe he owes Moore, and all women preachers, a swift apology. {eo}