

*A learned Christian woman may expound the scriptures and urge obedience to them, to one hundred men and women at one time, as well as to one hundred, one at a time, ... and no more violate a scriptural command in one instance than the other.*

Silena Holman (1888)

Silena Moore Holman (1850-1915) was an elder's wife and mother of eight children. She frequently wrote to David Lipscomb (editor of the *Gospel Advocate*) regarding the traditional assumptions about the role of women in the church.

Holman rejected the distinction between private and public spheres that Lipscomb and most others sought to maintain. A woman could teach a man privately, they insisted, but not publicly, in her parlor but not in the assembly. Such a distinction, she argued, was much more cultural than scriptural. "Suppose a dozen men and women were in my parlor and I talked to them of the gospel and exhorted them to obey it? Exactly how many would have to be added to the number to make my talk and exhortation a public instead of a private one?"

She made her own answer to that question very clear. "I believe that a learned Christian woman may expound the scriptures and urge obedience to them to one hundred men and women at one time, as well as to one hundred, one at a time, and do much good, and no more violate a scriptural command in one instance than the other."

In numerous articles, Holman developed her views with considerable skill and verve. She dealt extensively with biblical passages and often affirmed her commitment to biblical authority. Lipscomb's responses were usually sharp, sometimes patronizing, and occasionally marked by exasperation. Her responses to him – and to other male critics – were firm, carefully reasoned, and respectful. One response from David Lipscomb regarding the articles of Silena Holman was: "It gives a body the blues to read Silena Holman's articles."

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