

The Bible and Spirit of Prophecy on The Special Ministry of Men and Women

“The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. **Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’** in its support.”—*Great Controversy*, 595. [All emphases in quotations are ours.]

— SECTION ONE — WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

The Bible has many passages dealing with the special work of women. We need only consider the work of Jochebed, the mother of Moses, and Hannah, the mother of Samuel—in order to realize the immense influence and value of the ministry of women. Many other noble and God-fearing women are mentioned in Scripture, because of the work they did, while large numbers of other outstanding women, such as the mothers of Enoch, Elijah, and Daniel are not mentioned. Several times, we are told in the Spirit of Prophecy, that the special work assigned to women is greater than the special work assigned to men. Men work with the present generation, but one of the several special ministries of women is to train the next one.

As there are certain things which men are not qualified to do, so it is with women. In no place in the Bible do we find a woman being ordained, serving as an elder, pastoring a church, or baptizing.

Later in this tract, we discuss the important work which women can do both outside the home and in the home. They have an important ministry in the church and community. They also have an important ministry to children. The very broad work they are able to do is far more influential than that which men can do.

Consider this: Children constitute at least one half of the world’s population. In addition to working with children, women are able to carry on a special ministry to women which men cannot do. That is another quarter of the world’s population. Men may imagine they are managing the adult world; yet, as far as ministry goes, they are only able to directly help the smaller part of the people in the world. They do not have as large a field of ministry as do women. Men and women are equal in the sight of God, but different in the duties

assigned to each.

At this juncture, let me say that we are here primarily discussing the role of women as church leaders. We are not saying they cannot start businesses and manage the men workers under them, or manage home operations as mothers generally do.

One might wonder why, in the Biblical pattern, women are not to be priests, pastors, or kings; yet they can be prophets. A prophet gives advice and counsel, but does not rule. He never gives orders—with the authority of civil or church government behind him. So it was with “Deborah the prophetess” (Judges 4:4; *cf.* all of chapters 4 and 5); so it was with Ellen White. Both were messengers sent from God, neither was a president or king. Neither ruled the denomination, nor even a single local congregation. A prophet does not have earthly authority to enforce his or her decisions. Deborah was the only judge in Israel who did not serve as a military leader. The Lord instructed her to call Barak to do that. She was only an adviser. Indeed, Barak was reproved for not being willing to go to battle without her accompanying him. The Biblical pattern is always consistent, and we find the same in the life and ministry of Ellen White.

Here are seven special passages in the New Testament which are sometimes referenced in the ongoing controversy over women’s ordination:

Ephesians 5:22-33
Colossians 3:18-19
1 Peter 3:1-7
1 Corinthians 11:3, 11-12
1 Corinthians 14:34-35
1 Timothy 2:11-14; 3:2
Titus 1:6

We do not have space in this brief study to provide more material from the Bible. But we have noted underlying principles.

— SECTION TWO — WHAT THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY SAYS

1 - THE SPECIAL MINISTRY OF MEN

IN THE EARLIEST TIMES—“**In the beginning the head of each family was considered ruler and priest of his own household.** Afterward, as the race multiplied upon the earth, **men of divine appointment per-**

formed this solemn worship of sacrifice for the people.”—*Story of Redemption*, 50.

“The dedication of the firstborn had its origin **in the earliest times**. God had promised to give the Firstborn of heaven to save the sinner. This gift was to be acknowledged in every household by **the consecration of the firstborn son. He was to be devoted to the priesthood, as a representative of Christ among men.**”—*Desire of Ages*, 51.

FROM MOSES TO CHRIST—“By divine direction the tribe of Levi was set apart for the service of the sanctuary. **In the earliest times every man was the priest of his own household.** In the days of Abraham the priesthood was regarded as the birthright of **the eldest son**. Now, instead of the firstborn of all Israel, the Lord accepted the tribe of Levi for the work of the sanctuary. . . The priesthood, however, was restricted to the family of Aaron. **Aaron and his sons alone** were permitted to minister before the Lord; the rest of the tribe were entrusted with the charge of the tabernacle and its furniture, and they were to attend upon the priests in their ministrations.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 350.

“The government of Israel was characterized by the most thorough organization, wonderful alike for its completeness and its simplicity. The order so strikingly displayed in the perfection and arrangement of all God’s created works was manifest in the Hebrew economy. God was the center of authority and government, the sovereign of Israel. **Moses stood as their visible leader, by God’s appointment,** to administer the laws in His name. From the **elders** of the tribes a council of seventy was afterward chosen to assist Moses in the general affairs of the nation. Next came the **priests**, who consulted the Lord in the sanctuary. **Chiefs, or princes,** ruled over the tribes. Under these were ‘captains over thousands, and **captains** over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens,’ and, lastly, **officers** who might be employed for special duties. Deuteronomy 1:15.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 374.

IN THE TIME OF THE APOSTLES—“The church must flee to God’s Word and become established upon gospel order, which has been overlooked and neglected. This is indispensably necessary in order to bring the church into the unity of the faith. I saw that **in the apostles’ day** the church was in danger of being deceived and imposed upon by false teachers. Therefore **the brethren chose men who had given good evidence that they were capable of ruling well their own house and preserving order in their own families,** and who could enlighten those who were in darkness. Inquiry was made of God concerning these, and then, according to the mind of the church and the Holy Ghost, they were set apart by the laying on of hands. Having received their commission from God and having the approbation of the church, they went forth **baptizing** in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and **administering the ordinances** of the Lord’s house.”—*Early*

Writings, 100-101.

“The entire body of Christians was not called to vote upon the question. **The ‘apostles and elders,’ men of influence and judgment,** framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches.”—*Acts of the Apostles*, 196.

TODAY IN THE HOME—“**The father, who is the priest of his household,** should conduct the morning and evening worship.”—*Child Guidance*, 521.

“You have not zealously performed your duty to your children. You have not devoted sufficient time to family prayer, and you have not required the presence of the entire household. The meaning of ‘husband’ is house band. **All members of the family center in the father. He is the lawmaker,** illustrating in his own manly bearing the sterner virtues, energy, integrity, honesty, patience, courage, diligence, and practical usefulness. **The father is in one sense the priest of the household,** laying upon the altar of God the morning and evening sacrifice. The wife and children should be encouraged to unite in this offering and also to engage in the song of praise. Morning and evening the father, as priest of the household, should confess to God the sins committed by himself and his children through the day. . . This rule of action, zealously **carried out by the father when he is present, or by the mother when he is absent,** will result in blessings to the family.”—*2 Testimonies*, 701.

TODAY IN THE CHURCH—“The Lord God of heaven has chosen **experienced men** to bear responsibilities in His cause. **These men are to have special influence** . . . The Lord has not given men or women liberty to advance ideas that will bring commonness into His work, removing the sacredness that should ever surround it. God’s work is to become increasingly sacred to His people. In every way we are to magnify the exalted character of the truth. Those who have been set as guardians of the work of God in our institutions are ever to make the will and way of God prominent. The health of the general work depends upon the faithfulness of **the men appointed to carry out the will of God** in the churches.”—*9 Testimonies*, 264.

Another of many quotations which could be cited would be *5 Testimonies*, 617-618.

2 - THE SPECIAL MINISTRY OF WOMEN OUTSIDE THE HOME

“Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband’s side in her Eden home; but, **like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it.** A similar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God’s plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sac-

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rificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and **have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them.**”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 59.

“Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to **visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor.** They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church.”—“*The Duty of the Minister and the People*,” *Review*, July 9, 1895.

“Those women **who labor to teach souls** to seek for the new birth in Christ Jesus, are doing a precious work. They consecrate themselves to God, and they are just as verily laborers for God as are their husbands. **They can enter families to which ministers could find no access. They can listen** to the sorrows of the depressed and oppressed. **They can shed rays of light** into the discouraged souls. **They can pray with them. They can open the Scriptures, and enlighten them** from a ‘Thus saith the Lord.’”—*Manuscript Release #330, in 5 Manuscript Releases*, 327.

“You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that **they are essential to carrying the truth into families.** Their work is just the work that must be done, and should be encouraged. In many respects **a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot.** The cause would suffer great loss without this kind of labor by women. Again and again the Lord has shown me that **women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which He has appointed them as are men.**”—*Manuscript 142, 1903; Evangelism*, 493.

“In the various branches of the work of God’s cause, there is a wide field in which our sisters may do good service for the Master. Many lines of missionary work are neglected. In the different churches, much work which is often left undone or done imperfectly, could be well accomplished by the help that our sisters, if properly instructed, can give. Through **various lines of home missionary effort** they can reach a class that is not reached by our ministers. Among the noble women who have had the moral courage to decide in favor of the truth for this time are many who have tact, perception, and good ability, and who may make successful workers. The labors of such Christian women are needed.”—*Review and Herald*, Dec. 10, 1914; *Evangelism*, 466.

“In the **various lines of home missionary work**, the modest, intelligent woman may use her powers to the very highest account. Who can have so deep a love for the souls of men and women for whom Christ has died as those who are partakers of His grace? Who can represent the truth and the example of Christ better than Christian women who themselves are practicing the truth?”—*Review and Herald*, Dec. 10, 1914; *Evangelism*, 466-467.

“Woman, if she wisely improves her time and her faculties, relying upon God for wisdom and strength, may stand on an equality with her husband as adviser, counselor, companion, and co-worker, and yet lose none of her womanly grace or modesty. She may elevate her own character, and just as she does this she is elevating and ennobling the characters of her family, and exerting a powerful though unconscious influence upon others around her. Why should not women cultivate the intellect? Why should they not answer the purpose of God in their existence? Why may they not understand their own powers, and realizing that these powers are given of God, strive to make use of them to the fullest extent **in doing good to others, in advancing the work of reform, of truth and real goodness in the world?** Satan knows that women have a power of influence for good or for evil; therefore he seeks to enlist them in his cause.”—*Good Health*, June, 1880; *Evangelism*, 467.

“Wonderful is the mission of the wives and mothers and the younger women workers. If they will, they can exert an influence for good to all around them. By modesty in dress and circumspect deportment, they may bear witness to the truth in its simplicity. They may let their light so shine before all, that others will see their good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven. **A truly converted woman will exert a powerful transforming influence for good.** Connected with her husband, she may aid him in his work, and become the means of encouragement and blessing to him. When the will and way are brought into subjection to the Spirit of God, there is no limit to the good that can be accomplished.”—*Manuscript 91, 1908; Evangelism*, 467-468.

“Our sisters, the youth, the middle-aged, and those of advanced years, **may act a part in the closing work for this time;** and in doing this as they have opportunity, they will obtain an experience of the highest value to themselves. In forgetfulness of self, they will grow in grace. By training the mind in this direction, they will learn how to bear burdens for Jesus.”—*Review and Herald*, January 2, 1879; *Evangelism*, 468.

“If women do the work that is not the most agreeable to many of those who labor in word and doctrine, and if their works testify that **they are accomplishing a work that has been manifestly neglected, should not such labor be looked upon as being as rich in results as the work of the ordained ministers?** Should it not command the hire of the laborer? . . .

“This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that **they are essential to carrying the truth into families.** Their work is just the work that must be done, and should be encouraged. In many respects **a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot.** The cause would suffer great loss without this kind of labor by women. Again and again the Lord has shown me that women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which He has appointed them as are men.”—*Manuscript 142, 1903; Evangelism*, 493.

“The Lord has a work for women as well as men to do . . . Women may take their places in the work at this crisis, and the Lord will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Spirit of God, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and this will give them a power which will exceed that of men. **They can do in families a work that men cannot do**, a work that reaches the inner life. **They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach.** Their labor is needed.

“A direct necessity is being met by the work of women who have given themselves to the Lord and are reaching out to help a needy, sin-stricken people. Personal evangelistic work is to be done. The women who take up this work carry the gospel to the homes of the people in the highways and the byways. They read and explain the Word to families, praying with them, caring for the sick, relieving their temporal necessities. They present before families and individuals the purifying, transforming influence of the truth. They show that the way to find peace and joy is to follow Jesus.”—*6 Testimonies*, 117-118.

3 - THE SPECIAL MINISTRY OF WOMEN INSIDE THE HOME

“Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband’s equal. The world needs mothers who are mothers not merely in name but in every sense of the word. We may safely say that **the distinctive duties of woman are more sacred, more holy, than those of man.** Let woman realize the sacredness of her work and in the strength and fear of God take up her life mission. Let her educate her children for usefulness in this world and for a home in the better world.

“The wife and mother should not sacrifice her strength and allow her powers to lie dormant, leaning wholly upon her husband. Her individuality cannot be merged in his. **She should feel that she is her husband’s equal—to stand by his side**, she faithful at her post of duty and he at his. Her work in the education of her children is in every respect as elevating and ennobling as any post of duty he may be called to fill, even if it is to be the chief magistrate of the nation.”—*Adventist Home*, 231.

“**The king upon his throne has no higher work than has the mother.** The mother is queen of her household. **She has in her power the molding of her children’s characters, that they may be fitted for the higher, immortal life. An angel could not ask for a higher mission;** for in doing this work she is doing service for God. Let her only realize the high character of her task, and it will inspire her with courage. Let her realize the

worth of her work and put on the whole armor of God, that she may resist the temptation to conform to the world’s standard. Her work is for time and for eternity.”—*Adventist Home*, 231-232.

“The mother is the queen of the home, and the children are her subjects. She is to rule her household wisely, in the dignity of her motherhood. Her influence in the home is to be paramount; her word, law. If she is a Christian, under God’s control, she will command the respect of her children.”—*Adventist Home*, 232.

“**Mothers, to a great degree the destiny of your children rests in your hands.** If you fail in duty, you may place them in the ranks of the enemy and make them his agents to ruin souls; but by a godly example and faithful discipline you may lead them to Christ and make them the instruments in His hands of saving many souls.”—*Adventist Home*, 238.

“**Her work** [the Christian mother’s], **if done faithfully in God, will be immortalized.** The votaries of fashion will never see or understand the immortal beauty of that Christian mother’s work, and will sneer at her old-fashioned notions and her plain, unadorned dress; while the Majesty of heaven will write the name of that faithful mother in the book of immortal fame.”—*Adventist Home*, 238.

“**The whole future life of Moses, the great mission which he fulfilled as the leader of Israel, testifies to the importance of the work of the Christian mother. There is no other work that can equal this.** . . . Parents should direct the instruction and training of their children while very young, to the end that they may be Christians. They are placed in our care to be trained, not as heirs to the throne of an earthly empire, but as kings unto God, to reign through unending ages.”—*Adventist Home*, 238.

“**Let every mother feel that her moments are priceless;** her work will be tested in the solemn day of accounts . . . Then it will be found that many who have blessed the world with the light of genius and truth and holiness owe the principles that were the mainspring of their influence and success to a praying, Christian mother.”—*Adventist Home*, 239.

“The sphere of the mother may be humble; but her influence, united with the father’s, is as abiding as eternity. **Next to God, the mother’s power for good is the strongest known on earth.**”—*Adventist Home*, 240.

“The mother’s influence is an unceasing influence; and if it is always on the side of right, her children’s characters will testify to her moral earnestness and worth.”—*Adventist Home*, 240.

“**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.**”—*Psalms 119:105.*