

# Searching the Scriptures

Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity

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# Comments on Searching the Scriptures

In *Searching the Scriptures*, Samuel Koranteng-Pipim has done what every Seventh-day Adventist ought to do. In dealing with a controversial topic he has first searched the Scriptures to see what the Bible might have to say, finding not only passages that deal explicitly with the topic but others that establish underlying principles. Far from being negative, he develops a strong case for a wide range of feminine ministries. *Searching the Scriptures* is invaluable for anyone desiring to speak with authority on the ordination of women. Oh, yes! Please don't neglect to read the Foreword and Preface! --**C. Mervyn Maxwell**, Professor Emeritus of Church History, Andrews University

*Searching the Scriptures* presents a thorough Bible examination of the God-appointed ministry of women. It maintains that women do have a place in all areas of ministry to work "as colleagues in partnership with ordained men at the various levels of the church organization; to teach in our institutions and seminaries, and above all, to minister to their children at home." I highly recommend this careful and balanced study to all who may be interested in the ordination of women.--**Mercedes Dyer**, Professor Emerita of Education, Andrews University

*Searching the Scriptures* clearly sets forth biblical evidence which should be taken into account when the issue of ordaining women as elders or pastors is considered. Whether or not a reader agrees with all of the author's interpretations or conclusions, several characteristics of this work make it helpful for focusing discussion and for challenging thinking. These include: its isolation of central questions, its consistent reasoning regarding these questions, and its careful search for authoritative principles through investigating a broad base of biblical data.--**Roy Gane**, Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Languages, Andrews University

This is a penetrating yet readable analysis of the biblical evidence that relates to whether women should be ordained. *Searching the Scriptures* moves the discussion from personal opinion or cultural bias to its biblical roots, presenting a clear defense of the 2000-year-old Christian consensus on the nature of the ministry. Every Adventist should read this balanced, fair, and perceptive study before coming to a conclusion about women's ordination. --**George Reid**, Director, Biblical Research Institute

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*the U.S.A., Canada, and Europe. His articles have appeared in both scholarly and popular journals. He speaks and preaches extensively at camp meetings, churches, revival retreats, and schools.*

## Foreward

### **William Fagal**

The Seventh-day Adventist church faces a momentous, watershed decision regarding its ordained ministry at the coming General Conference session in July [1995, Utrecht, Netherlands]. The delegates will be asked to decide whether Divisions may choose for themselves to ordain women to the gospel ministry of their own territory, though that ordination would not be recognized in Divisions which do not ordain women.

Though historically Seventh-day Adventists did not have women elders, many women have served the church well in positions of leadership and outreach, from the local church to the General Conference level. They did so without ordination. However, for about twenty-five years a small but influential group of people has been working to move the church a little at a time toward the decision it now faces. In response to their efforts, the 1975 Spring Council voted a very cautious action to allow ordination of women as local elders. The Annual Council of 1984 reaffirmed the earlier action and suggested guidelines to be followed when churches wish to ordain women elders. Now those proceedings are being urged as reason to go the next step and ordain women as pastors.

Though the current proposal is careful to say that women so ordained would only be authorized within their own Divisions, passage of this action will put the Seventh-day Adventist church on record, through its General Conference in session, as seeing *no biblical obstacle* to ordaining women. Presumably, if the delegates perceived a biblical impediment, they would not approve the proposal. So with the biblical objection removed, and with the church moving step-by-step toward world-wide ordination, it would not be surprising soon to find churches, pastors, denominational employees, or church members who object conscientiously on Bible grounds being informed that they are out of harmony with the decision of the world church, with whatever consequences that may bring. How much better to examine the whole issue from the Bible and bring our practice into harmony with it!

Some Seventh-day Adventists claim that the church should feel free to decide for itself on whether to ordain women, since neither the Bible nor the Spirit of Prophecy writings address the issue directly. Others, however, note that the Bible is clear not only on "the relations and rights of men and women" ([\*Testimonies for the Church\*, 1:421](#)) but also on the qualifications for the leadership role in the church. They believe that we must not set aside the commands of Scripture on these issues to go "the way that seemeth right" to us. Believing that Seventh-day Adventists are called to manifest unswerving fidelity to the Word of God, they ask for a solid Scriptural basis for the proposed change.

In light of these concerns, the editorial board of Adventists Affirm asked Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, a doctoral candidate in Systematic Theology at Andrews University from the African country of Ghana, to prepare a document to address the central issues regarding ordination for women. With much input from both men and women representing both sides of the current debate, the original work has grown from the size of a substantial article to the book you are now reading. The local members of the editorial board have gone over the manuscript carefully and are pleased to commend *Searching the Scriptures* to you for your prayerful consideration.

This study distinguishes the non-issues from the real issues, putting to rest a number of concerns and arguments which often surface in the discussion of this matter. It finds much on which to agree with those who advocate ordination for women, especially in areas such as the call of God for women to minister and the importance of encouraging greater involvement of women in the work of the Lord. It demonstrates, I believe, that at the root level of their concerns, responsible advocates on both sides of this issue have many of the same interests. We are not as far apart as we may have thought. Our best chance of finding unity on this matter lies in *searching the Scriptures* together. Those who seek scriptural guidance on ordination for women will find the presentation in this book compelling.

The editorial board of Adventists Affirm believes that the Lord's blessing will come to our efforts when we work in harmony with the instructions in His Word. On the verge of the Promised Land, God told Joshua where his strength lay. "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go" (Josh 1:7). May God help us as a church to continue *searching the Scriptures* for His will and to have the courage to follow it. He has promised His blessing to those who do.

# Author's Preface

The Berean believers were "more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and *searched the scriptures* daily, whether those things were so." The result was that "many of them believed: also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few" (Acts 17:11, 12).

The example of the Berean Christians in *searching the Scriptures* is instructive for Seventh-day Adventists, who believe that "the Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His [God's] will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history" ("Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," No. 1). This cardinal belief demands that, on the issue of the ordination of women, no less than on other issues of faith and practice, Seventh-day Adventists must maintain fidelity to God's Word. The North American Division (NAD), therefore, should be commended for making biblical fidelity an important objective in its bid for women's ordination.

## The Current Situation

At the 1994 Annual Council, the North American Division made a request to the General Conference to vest each division with the right to "authorize the ordination of qualified individuals *without regard to gender*." This request was prompted by the inconsistent and "untenable" position of the church in allowing women to be ordained as local elders but not as pastors. Believing that to turn back would create "havoc" and result in the loss of "our credibility and sense of fairness," the NAD president pleaded, "We humbly ask that you give us a hearing and prayerfully seek ways to help us address a dilemma." He added, "Our objective must be fidelity to God's Word, providing unity in diversity, while recognizing and preserving the ability of each member or region of 'the body' to best function in its unique sphere."<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after the NAD made its request, an editorial titled "Speak Up Now, or Hold Your Peace" appeared in the December 1994 NAD edition of the *Adventist Review*. In it the editor urged readers "to voice your convictions on issues facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church at its world session in . . . Utrecht, Netherlands." It listed women's ordination as one of the "top agenda items" for the upcoming General Conference session and provided a full list of the North American Division delegates, with the explanation, "This gives you the opportunity to voice opinions ahead of time on the issues coming up--and then hope that the delegates will vote your way!"<sup>2</sup>

## Purpose

This book responds to the invitation in the *Adventist Review* to "Speak Up Now, or Hold Your Peace." It contains recommendations in response to the NAD president's earnest plea for "ways to help us address a dilemma"--the potential "havoc" and loss of "our

credibility and sense of fairness"--created by the inconsistent and "clearly untenable" position of the Seventh-day Adventist church on the issue of women's ordination.

***The Two Choices Facing Us.*** The NAD president highlighted the biblical inconsistency of the church's present position: "It appears to be ecclesiological hairsplitting to say that we will recognize ordination of women [as local elders] on one hand and refuse to recognize it [their ordination as pastors] on the other hand, while calling them both scriptural positions."<sup>3</sup> The implication should not be missed: If women can be ordained as local elders, it is equally valid for them to be ordained as pastors. But by the same token, if the practice of ordaining women as local elders is unbiblical, it is also unbiblical to ordain them as pastors. So the question really facing the church is this: Is ordaining women as *elders* biblical? If it is, we must continue the practice and extend it to include ordaining women as pastors. On the other hand, if ordaining women as local elders is not scriptural, we must *reconsider* previous church council actions in order to come into harmony with the Bible.

***Fidelity to God's Word.*** The NAD president rightly maintains that in resolving this dilemma, "Our objective must be fidelity to God's Word." This explains the title of this book--Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity. But though the NAD apparently does not consider the ordination issue as *theological*,<sup>4</sup> we hold that the question of women's ordination *is* a theological issue, and therefore it can only be resolved legitimately on the basis of the Bible.

So this small volume will provide a biblical--not pragmatic or socio-cultural--investigation to try to determine whether the practice of women's ordination is according to God's plan. We will examine the Bible's portrayal of the partnership of male and female in both the home and the church, to see whether God has established distinctive roles for men and women, and whether the relationship of male and female is one of equality or of superiority/inferiority. Gaining a clear understanding of the Bible's teachings on these and related matters and applying those teachings to our situation offers the best hope for "preserving the ability of each member or region of 'the body' to best function in its unique sphere"--one of the very things sought by the NAD.

***Church Unity and Empowerment for Mission.*** The NAD president correctly set the goal, in attempting to resolve this dilemma, that we not "embarrass," "divide" or "bring dishonor upon this church that we love." Rather, our objective must be to provide "unity in diversity" and to "empower people for *mission*."<sup>5</sup> But we hasten to add that on theological issues--such as the one confronting us with regard to the women's ordination question--unity, and not diversity, is the biblical obligation. Unity ensures harmony and peace in the church. The Bible urges believers to be "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of *one mind*" (Phil 2:2). Again we are told, "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom 14:19). But the unity which the Bible speaks about is not a conformity to popular opinions which compromise biblical truth. Instead, Scripture urges us to pursue a "unity of the *Spirit*" which leads us "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:3, 13). True unity and consequent harmony in the church always derive from agreement

in truth. This is why the Christian's armor in the battle for "the gospel of peace" begins with "the belt of truth" and ends with "the sword of the Spirit, *the Word of God*" (Eph 6:12-17). This truth alone, found in God's Word, can make us free (John 8:32). Any departure from biblical teaching results in "divisiveness and disunity"--the kinds of things that the NAD does not want to happen.

We believe that the church's mission--namely, the proclamation of the Three Angels' Messages (Rev 14:6-14)--will be greatly jeopardized and discredited whenever the church holds varied and contradictory beliefs and practices on theological issues. In other words, we cannot "empower people for *mission*" if we depart from biblical truth. The upper room experience of the 120 male and female disciples of Christ teaches us that before there can be a Spirit-empowered ministry, there must be at least three things: (1) *unity* (they were "with one accord" [Acts 1:14; 2:1]), (2) prayer (they "all continued . . . in prayer and supplication" [Acts 1:14, 24-25]), and (3) commitment to *Scriptural guidance* (they maintained that "Scripture had to be fulfilled . . . For it is written" [Acts 1:16-20]). These three requirements are also needed as the church pursues the question of women's ordination. Failure to seek the Scriptural basis for "empowering people for mission" will not only "embarrass" but also "bring dishonor upon this church that we love"--the very things that the NAD does not want to happen.

***Prayer.*** I firmly believe that Seventh-day Adventists' first loyalty is to Christ and His written word. This book, then, comes to you with a prayer that the biblical and theological issues surrounding women's ordination will cause us--men and women, church leaders and members, scholars and others of all professions--to earnestly pray and seek guidance from God's inspired Word, which alone is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16, 17).

## **Acknowledgments**

A work of this kind owes much to many individuals, some of whom differ from the author's conclusions. Yet, even in their disagreement, they have shaped the outcome of the biblical investigation. I want to express special appreciation to the following individuals:

To Raoul Dederen, who deserves special mention. In his classes and seminars on revelation and inspiration and on ecclesiology, I first became aware of some of the issues discussed in this book. Also, I am grateful that he has always challenged me to biblical fidelity on theological questions. This book is an honest effort in that direction.

To members of the editorial board of Adventists Affirm for their encouragement to address this question and for their permission freely to use their published resources.

To Paul Yeboah and Paul Nsiah, Jr., who have helped me to understand that true ministry, the empowering of people for mission, demands not only the willingness to

stand for Christ and His revealed truth, but also a spirit of total commitment and selflessness.

To dedicated Seventh-day Adventists on both sides of the issue of women's ordination--men and women, leaders and lay people, students and teachers--for their willingness to read the manuscript and for their input and helpful critiques of its different drafts. Among these, particular mention should be made of John Baldwin, Alexander and Iryna Bolotnikov, Richard and Jo Ann Davidson, Ganoune Diop, Roger Dudley, Leonard Gashugi, Martin Hanna, Jan Higgins, Hermann Kuma, Kenroy Malcolm, Keith Mattingly, Jerry Moon, Trust Ndlovu, James North, Constance C. Nwosu, Emmanuel Osei, Paulina Osei, Ron du Preez, Denton Rhone, Elwin St. Rose, Reinaldo Siqueira, Artur Stele, Alberto Timm, Peter and Cobie Van Bemmelen, Winfried Vogel, Oswald Williams, and Donna Worley. Their challenging questions and helpful suggestions alerted me to some aspects of the issue that deserved further clarification. While grateful to all the above, I take full responsibility for the contents and limitations of this study.

To William Fagal, for his encouragement in bringing what initially started out as a short article to its present form, for his conscientious and careful editorial help, and for contributing a foreword to the book.

Finally, a word of appreciation to my immediate family--my wife Becky and my daughter Jessica--for their patience with me through the intense time of writing, for being willing to read what I wrote, for offering their clear-headed questions and critiques, for their support of the conclusions this study expresses, and most importantly to me, for their loving acceptance of me in spite of the failings of which I am becoming increasingly aware (and which they probably saw all along). They have exemplified the godly graces of womanhood and enriched my life as no one else could.

## **Expectation**

Believing that it is better to discuss an issue without settling it than to settle an issue without discussing it, and believing also that to disagree with friends is not to dishonor them, this book is being sent forth with the hope that it will clarify some of the theological questions involved in the ongoing debate over women's ordination. It is expected that readers will evaluate this present study, no less than others which attempt to address the women's ordination issue, solely on the basis of the Scriptural data. In this way we shall avoid the perennial temptation to subordinate the Bible to our individual, cultural, or ideological prejudices and self-interests.

If *Searching the Scriptures* succeeds in steering the debate on women's ordination to where it rightly belongs--namely, the arena of serious biblical investigation--and if it facilitates the Seventh-day Adventist church's honest inquiry towards a fuller understanding of the Bible and its saving truths, then the purpose for which it was published will have been accomplished.



[Samuel Koranteng-Pipim](#)  
Berrien Springs, Michigan  
April 1995

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- <sup>1</sup> The full text of the speech given by the NAD president, Elder Alfred C. McClure, at the Annual Council is reproduced in the NAD edition of the *Adventist Review*, February 1995, pp. 14-15 ("NAD's President Speaks on Women's Ordination: Why Should Ordination be Gender Inclusive?"). For an expansion on the reasons for the NAD request, see Gary Patterson, "Let Divisions Decide When to Ordain Women," *Spectrum* 24/2 (April 1995), pp. 36-42.
- <sup>2</sup> Myron Widmer, "Speak Up Now, or Hold Your Peace," *Adventist Review*, December 1994, p. 4. The list of NAD delegates to the upcoming General Conference session appears on pages 26 and 27 of the same issue.
- <sup>3</sup> "NAD's President Speaks on Women's Ordination," p. 15.
- <sup>4</sup> The NAD president candidly admitted that he had been troubled for some time over the theological issues raised regarding women's ordination. But he voiced the opinion that "the church crossed the theological bridge when it voted to ordain women as local elders." In his view, refusing to ordain women as pastors "appears to be ecclesiological hairsplitting" (see "NAD's President Speaks on Women's Ordination," p. 15).
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

Basically, the ordained ministry is an oversight (leadership or headship) and teaching function within the church ("pastors and teachers," Eph 4:11). In governing the church (Heb 13:7, 17, 24), ordained ministers have special responsibilities to shepherd the flock by ensuring that the physical, social and spiritual needs of the church are well taken care of (Acts 20:28-35; 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3; Acts 6:8; 8:5-13, 26-40; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). They are also to "teach," "beseech," "exhort," "reprove," and "rebuke" (Titus 1:9; 2:15; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2). To the extent that the ordained ministers faithfully discharge their responsibility as "pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11), church members are to "obey" or "submit" to their authority (Heb 13:17; 1 Cor 16:16). Moreover, as models of the Christian faith, these elders or pastors are to be esteemed "very highly" and are to be "counted worthy of double honor" (1 Thess 5:13; 1 Tim 5:17).

In light of these things, [Ellen G. White](#) wrote that the ministry is "a sacred and exalted office," "the highest of all work." Those "who belittle the ministry are belittling Christ" (*Testimonies for the Church*, [2:615](#); [6:411](#)).

The issue of ordination of women raises the question whether women should exercise the leadership functions of the ministerial office by being ordained as elders or pastors.

## 1. Statement of the Problem.

The church faces a decision over ordination of women because, in the face of calls for it from some quarters today, (1) there is no biblical *precedent* for the practice, and (2) some explicit biblical prohibitions seem to militate against the practice.

**(a) Absence of Biblical Precedent.** The Bible teaches that, despite their significant role in ministry, women in Old Testament times were not ordained as priests. Also, though they made major contributions to the ministry of Christ, He did not appoint a single one of them as an apostle; further, when a replacement apostle was sought (Acts 1:15-26), even though women were present and surely met most of the requirements set (vv. 21-22), it was a male who was chosen. In addition, we have no record of any woman's being ordained as an elder or pastor in the New Testament church. Why was this so?

**(b) Biblical Prohibition of Women Elders/Pastors.** Despite the active involvement of women in ministry in the apostolic church, Paul's pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus (letters specifically written to pastors and laity) contain instruction that only men may aspire to the office of elder or pastor. "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men" (1 Tim 2:12 RSV); "a bishop [or elder] must be . . . the husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). These passages all use the same Greek word for "man" and "husband." It is not the generic term *anthropos*, from which the English word "anthropology" derives and which refers to human beings, male or female, without regard to gender. [1] Rather, Paul employed the specific word *aner*, a term that means a male person in distinction from a woman (cf. Acts 8:12; 1 Tim 2:12), one capable of being a

husband (see Matt 1:16; John 4:16; Rom 7:2; Titus 1:6). Why did Paul prohibit women from exercising the headship/leadership role of elder or pastor?

The lack of biblical precedent for ordaining women to the headship role in the church, combined with the Bible's prohibitions of the practice, raises some questions. Were the Old Testament writers, Jesus Christ, and Paul sexist? Should the male headship role be explained away as an accommodation to the Bible writers' culture and times? If so, how can we account for the fact that at the same time, the Bible also noted the significant role of women in ministry, including prophesying, praying, teaching, etc.? Could it be that women's exclusion from the Old Testament priesthood and from the New Testament roles of apostles and elders/pastors is not based on mere sociological or cultural factors but rather is rooted in God's divine arrangement established at creation? If so, does this divine arrangement mean that men and women are not equal?

Conflicting answers to these questions fuel the debate over the ordination of women as elders and pastors. [2] Ultimately, the issue of ordination of women raises questions about the Bible's authority and the appropriate method for biblical interpretation.

## **2. The Church's Response**

Thus far, the Seventh-day Adventist church has responded by: (1) granting women most of the functions of ordained ministers while refusing to ordain them as pastors; and (2) permitting ordination of women as elders but not as pastors. This biblically inconsistent position has generated debate, confusion, and divisiveness in many Adventist congregations, contributing in some cases toward eroding confidence in leadership. Many earnest Adventists wonder whether the church still considers itself obliged to follow Bible principles. The church's financial resources are squeezed from both directions: some groups have encouraged people to withhold their tithes until the church ordains women, while independent ministries have been receiving tithes from people who feel that in various matters the church has not been faithful to the Word but has conformed to culture.

Recently the North American Division requested that the upcoming General Conference session in Utrecht, Netherlands [July 1995], make ordination to the gospel ministry "gender-inclusive." The request asks that "where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender." Furthermore, "In divisions where the division executive committees take specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions." <>[3]

The significance of this request should not be missed. Beyond the immediate issue of women's ordination and the pragmatic basis for the proposal (i.e., "where circumstances do not render it inadvisable"), the request from the NAD, if approved, would represent a historic shift in our understanding of the role of ordination in Seventh-day Adventist church government. The current *Church Manual* (1990) recognizes "the equality of the ordination of the entire ministry" (p. 38). In other words, the ordination of a minister

automatically qualifies him to serve anywhere in the world field. [4] However, if the NAD's request is approved, for the first time in Seventh-day Adventist history the ordination of a minister will not be equal everywhere, but may only be recognized within certain territorial boundaries. This situation opens the door to independent national churches and to congregationalism.

### 3. The Challenge Facing the Church

The current turmoil in the churches and the threat of division and congregationalism within the worldwide church indicate that the Seventh-day Adventist church can no longer waffle on this issue. As the church takes up the matter it must speak clearly, unambiguously, and definitively at the next General Conference session in Utrecht, Netherlands. In order for the church to do so, however, it must understand what the *theological* issues are and what they are not. At issue are biblical authority and the nature of Seventh-day Adventist church government (ecclesiology). The ecclesiological concerns would require another entire treatment; the present document will deal specifically with biblical authority.

Before discussing the specific issue of women's ordination, it will first be necessary, by *searching the Scriptures*, to understand the nature of authority and ordination as they relate to the gospel ministry.

#### NOTES

[1] For examples using the generic term *anthropos*, see Matthew 4:4, 12:35, and John 2:25, where the word refers to human beings, male or female, irrespective of gender. *Anthropos* means a person--whether man or woman (Acts 19:16; Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16; Jas 1:19; 2:24; 3:8).

[2] The ordination question is not the only area affected by one's understanding of roles. Controversy over the Bible's presentation of role distinctions has led some to question the Bible's teaching about relationships within marriage, and a few even to question the validity of the marriage institution itself. Furthermore, minimizing the differences in gender roles may, in some extreme cases, contribute to confusion of sexual identity and the acceptance of unisex roles and clothing, and of homosexuality as a morally acceptable lifestyle. For a discussion of the underlying factors leading to the crisis over Christian lifestyle, see Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "Contemporary Culture and Christian Lifestyle: A Clash of World Views," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 4/1 (Spring 1993):129-150.

[3] The North American Division's request reads: "To request the Annual Council to refer the following action to the General Conference session for consideration: The General Conference vests in each division the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender. In divisions where the division executive committees take specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel

ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions." For the request's rationale, see Alfred C. McClure's article, "NAD's President Speaks on Women's Ordination," in the NAD edition of *Adventist Review*, February 1995, pp. 14-15.

[4] The *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual*, published by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association 1992), understands ordination to be a call "to serve as a minister of the gospel *in any part of the world*," and as the investment of the ministers with "full ecclesiastical authority to act in behalf of the church *anywhere in the world field where they may be employed by the church*" (pp. 75, 77). Again, "*Workers who are ordained to the gospel ministry are set apart to serve the world church*, primarily as pastors and preachers of the Word, and are subject to the direction of the church in regard to the type of ministry and their place of service. . . . Ordination to the ministry is the setting part of the employee to a sacred calling, not for one local field alone but for the world church and therefore needs to be done with wide counsel" (p. 79).

# Chapter 2 – Meaning of Church

## Authority and Ordination

The New Testament teaches that Christ Himself instituted the church and gave it its constitution and officers, thereby clothing them with divine authority to speak and act in His name (Matt 16:18-19; Luke 24:47; John 20:21-23; 14:13; 15:16; 16:23; Eph 4:11-12; Matt 10:1). Thus the church is a divine institution, unlike any other voluntary organization.

The authority invested in elders and pastors through ordination is not "power" to dominate, control, or subjugate people within or without the church. Neither does ordination confer upon a person some special (magical) powers of the Holy Spirit. What is the nature of ministerial authority, and what is the purpose of ordination?

### Ministerial Authority

The authority of elders and pastors is authority from Christ, delegated to them by the entire church--all the believers who "are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:4 NIV). Therefore, it must be exercised within the limits imposed by Christ, the church's Head, and by Scripture, the church's only rule of faith. Ministerial authority has at least four characteristics:

**1. Delegated Authority.** Jesus Christ is the Head of the church and the source of all the church's authority. He defines the purpose of the church's existence, and He provides the spiritual resources necessary for the church to perform its mission (Eph 4:7-13; 1 Cor 12; Rom 12:3-8). Through His Holy Spirit Christ remains present and active in the church, exercising His authority and rule over it (John 14:16ff.; 16:7ff.; Matt 28:17-20; 18:20; 23:8, 10; Eph 1:20-23; 5:23-24).

So the authority of the church which ordained elders and pastors exercise on its behalf is a delegated authority from Jesus Christ. Elders and ministers can legitimately exercise their authority only "in His name" (Mark 16:17; 1 Cor 1:13; 2 Cor 4:5). Any exercise of church authority apart from Christ and His will constitutes a usurpation of Christ's delegated authority.

**2. Declarative Authority.** The authority of the church is *declarative*, not *enactive*; that is, the church cannot use its own wisdom and discretion to leg-

### Page 20

islate (enact) for itself doctrines, practices or policies that conflict with previously uttered words of Christ in Scripture. When Jesus commissioned the Twelve, the nucleus of the New Testament church, saying, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John

20:21 RSV), He was mandating them to communicate (declare) His teaching to the church accurately. Scriptural authority, consisting of the Old Testament writings and the writings of the commissioned apostles, was to be normative in the church through all ages (2 Thess 2:15; 3:4, 6, 14; 2 Cor 10:8; 11:4; 13:10; 1 Cor 2:13; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13; 5:27; Col 4:16; 2 Pet 3:15-16; 1 Tim 5:17-18; cf. Luke 10:7).

Since the Scriptures clearly express the authority and will of Christ, the church's Head, the authority which the ordained ministry exercises on the church's behalf must always stay within the bounds set by Christ Himself in His written Word. In every situation and on every issue, the church must always defer the final decision to Him who authorizes it and whom it must simply serve. This means that the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures must ever remain the only normative source of authority in the church. Whenever the church enacts doctrines and practices in conflict with the Scriptures, the exercise of such authority by elders or ministers constitutes a usurpation of the authority of Christ.

**3. *Spiritual Authority.*** The New Testament teaches that church authority is intended primarily for those within the church. The church is empowered to organize the members for Christian fellowship, worship, and exhortation, to administer divine ordinances, and to proclaim the gospel. This authority is to be exercised to ensure that the members of the church are built up into the image of Christ their Head. [1] Beyond its own members, the church has a responsibility to the world to witness for God by faithfully declaring the gospel of Christ (Matt 28:18-20).

Because the church exists to glorify God and save souls for His kingdom, and because the means to accomplish this mission is spiritual, the church's authority is *spiritual*, not civil or temporal. At His trial before Pilate, Christ proclaimed clearly that His kingdom was not of this world. It could not be upheld by the sword but only by the authority and force of truth (Jn 18:36-37). Consequently, He instructed His disciples not to exercise their authority in the same way as temporal authorities do (Matt 20:20-28).

From the above passages, we gather that the authority of the church, invested in elders and pastors through ordination, is a *spiritual* authority. It is grounded in the truth which Jesus came to reveal. Whenever elders or ministers become lords or slaves of any temporal authority (political, ideological, cultural, etc.), they have usurped Christ's authority.

**4. *Edifying Authority.*** Ministerial authority is to be exercised for the sole purpose of building up those within the church, the believers who "are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:4 NIV).

## ***Page 21***

In 2 Corinthians 10:8, and again in chapter 13:10, Paul stated that the authority which the Lord gave him in the church is "for building you up, not for tearing you down" (NIV). Ministerial authority is therefore *edifying*, intended to build up the church. Church

authority, at whatever level, is for the express purpose of accomplishing the redemptive work of Christ in the lives of church members. It is intended to promote the spiritual good of the people; its end is salvation. [2]

In addition to church authority's being for the "edification" of the church, Paul added that it is "*not* for tearing you down." This second expression is a most emphatic protest against the abuse of church authority. Whenever elders or ministers exercise authority in a domineering, despotic, coercive, or dictatorial manner so that they frustrate the saving ministry of Christ in His church, their actions constitute a usurpation of Christ's authority.

***The Issue At Hand.*** The issue which now confronts us regarding the ordination of women is this: Who is qualified to exercise the authority of the ministerial office? Specifically, may women be ordained as elders and pastors? Does the church have authority to authorize the ordination of women to the office of elder or pastor? These questions call for searching the Scriptures to understand the nature and purpose of ordination.

## **Ordination to the Gospel Ministry**

The New Testament teaches that the act of ordination, as such, does not confer any special grace or holiness upon the one ordained. Ordination does not bestow some special magical powers of the Holy Spirit; neither does it confer upon the elder or pastor some special character which sets the person apart as a "priest." Before Paul's ordination, he already possessed the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17; 13:3). The same can be said of the seven deacons (Acts 6:3-6; cf. 1 Tim 4:14). Though Christ is the true High Priest (Heb 4:15; 7:24-25; 8:1), all believers in Him constitute a "holy priesthood," a "royal priesthood," and are called to be "kings and priests unto God" (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6). Thus ordination, per se, does not make anyone spiritual, holy or Spirit-filled. Why then is ordination necessary?

***The Necessity of Ordination.*** The New Testament attaches special importance to ordination. Paul wrote that the reason he left Titus in Crete was that Titus might "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in *every city*" (Titus 1:5). Again in Asia Minor, Paul and Barnabas "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). Evidently elders were to be ordained in all the New Testament churches. Writing to the many churches that were "scattered abroad," the apostle James urged the sick to "call for the elders of the church" (James 1:1; 5:14). In his letter to "the strangers [converted Gentiles] scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," the apostle Peter wrote, "The elders which are among you I exhort" (1 Pet 1:1; 5:1).

### ***Page 22***

Apparently ordination of ministers was essential to the existence of the church. Though ministers were to be ordained in every church and city, their ordination was to be done with great caution and discretion. Paul counseled Timothy, himself an ordained minister, to "lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Tim 5:22).



***The Importance of Ordination.*** What is the purpose of ordination? Several Greek words in the New Testament are translated "ordain" (KJV); they convey such meanings as to "choose," "appoint," or "set apart." [3] Thus, ordination is the act of the church in choosing, appointing, and setting apart through the laying on of hands certain individuals to perform specific functions on behalf of the church.

By ordination, elders and ministers are authoritatively commissioned to declare the gospel of salvation. In Romans 10:14-15, having stated that faith comes through the hearing of the word proclaimed by the preacher, Paul asked rhetorically, "How shall they preach except they be *sent*?" The church has to send or commission someone to proclaim the message authoritatively. Again, writing to Timothy, Paul declared, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). A person possessing ability to teach, who is faithful to Christ, and who meets the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 may be commissioned authoritatively to perform the duties of elder or pastor.

This was the practice in the New Testament church. Apart from the twelve apostles who were chosen and ordained by Christ Himself, all others apparently were ordained by elders of the church. For a person to be an elder or minister, then, the church must express its approval by recognizing and commissioning that individual for the ministerial task. Even Paul had to be ordained by the church after he received his call from Christ (Acts 13:1-3). through ordination, setting one apart by the laying on of hands, the church authorizes elders or pastors to counteract false teaching and teachers (1 Tim 1:3; 4:1; Titus 1:9, 10) and to safeguard the sound doctrine that has been entrusted to the church's keeping. [4]

Thus, our *Minister's Manual* (1992) rightly recognizes that "Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that ordination is sacramental in the sense of conferring some indelible character or special powers or the ability to formulate right doctrine. It adds 'no new grace or virtual qualification'" (p. 77). "Ordination, an act of commission, acknowledges God's call, sets the individual apart, and appoints that person to serve the church in a special capacity. Ordination endorses the individuals thus set apart as authorized representatives of the church. By this act, the church delegates its authority to its ministers to proclaim the gospel publicly, to administer its ordinances, to organize new congregations, and, within the parameters established by God's Word, to give direction to the believers (Matt. 16:19; Heb. 13:17)" (pp. 76-77).

### ***Page 23***

[Ellen G. White](#) captured this meaning and importance of ordination: "Before being sent forth as missionaries to the heathen world, these apostles [Barnabas and Paul] were solemnly dedicated to God by fasting and prayer and the laying on of hands. Thus *they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, being invested with full ecclesiastical authority.*" "God foresaw the difficulties that His servants would be called to meet, and, in order that their work should be above challenge, He instructed the church by revelation to set them apart

publicly to the work of the ministry. Their ordination was a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of the gospel" ([The Acts of the Apostles](#), p. 161, emphasis added).

The understanding that ordination, setting one apart by the laying on of hands, is the church's *recognition* and authoritative *commissioning* of individuals to perform certain functions for the church suggests that, within the guidelines set by Scripture, both men and women may be set apart by the laying on of hands to perform certain functions. "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 the 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" ([Ellen G. White](#), [The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald](#), July 9, 1895, p. 434). [5] Though this statement has often been taken out of context and misused to claim [Ellen White's](#) support for ordaining women as elders or pastors of the church, [6] it does illustrate the legitimacy of the church recognizing and commissioning chosen individuals through an act of consecration/dedication ("laying on of hands") to perform designated functions. Within the guidelines of Scripture, the church may do this for both men and women.

***The Issue At Hand.*** Since both male and female, through an act of dedication ("the laying on of hands"), can be commissioned *to perform certain specific functions*, the debate over women's ordination is not whether women can or cannot be ordained in this sense; the Bible, confirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy, suggests that both men and women may be commissioned to do certain assigned tasks on behalf of the church. The key issue to be addressed is whether, among the varied ministries of the church, women may legitimately be commissioned through ordination to perform the leadership functions of elders or pastors. [7] Addressing this question will require searching the Scriptures to clarify (1) what the crucial issues are and what they are not, and (2) the basis upon which these issues are to be resolved.

## NOTES

[1] *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1988), pp. 144-145.

### ***Page 24***

[2] Thus, when Paul admonished the Corinthians to exercise their authority in disfellowshipping a member, his hope was that such an action might result in the individual's being "saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:5).

[3] For example, Jesus "ordained (*poieo*) twelve" (Mark 3:14); Paul himself was "ordained (*tithemi*) a preacher and an apostle" (1 Tim 2:7; cf., 4:14; 5:22); Titus was urged to "ordain (*kathistemi*) elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). Each of these three Greek words carries the sense of "appoint," "place," or "establish." Another word used in the New Testament for the act of ordination is *cheirotoneo*, which can mean "to stretch forth

the hand," or "elect" or "appoint." Thus Paul and Barnabas "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23); and when Titus was appointed by the churches to travel with Paul to Jerusalem, we are told that he was "*chosen* of the churches" (2 Cor 8:19). The compound form of the word, *procheirotoneo*, appears in Acts 10:41, where it describes God's prior appointment of the apostles.

[4] In his pastoral epistles, Paul frequently referred to the "sound words" (1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; cf. 2 Tim 2:15), or "the faith" (1 Tim 3:9; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10, 12, 21; 2 Tim 3:8; 4:7; Titus 1:13; 2:2), or "that which has been entrusted" (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12, 14), and "sound teaching/doctrine" (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1; cf. 1 Tim 4:6, 16; 6:1, 3; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 2:10).

[5] For a biblical, theological and historical inquiry into ordination and its relevance, see V. Norskov Olsen, "Called to be a Minister," *Ministry*, April 1995, pp. 11-17, 28. For an excellent discussion of the theology of ordination, see Raoul Dederen, "A Theology of Ordination," Supplement to *Ministry*, February 1978, pp. 24K-24P. While Dederen maintained that "there is no conclusive theological argument to deny the ordination of women to the gospel ministry," he added, "I wonder whether it is wise to pass over too quickly the question as to whether the time is ripe for such an action. Would such a change be desirable while the church, as a whole, sensitive as it is to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has not recognized God's leading in that direction?" (See his "The Ministry of Women," *ibid.*, p. 24O.)

[6] Evidence that this statement may not be applied to ordination of women as pastors or elders may be found within the passage itself. (1) This is a part-time ministry, not a calling to a lifework. "Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time . . ." (2) The work is not that of a minister or a church officer. "In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister." Evidently this work is not that of an elder or minister. (3) It was a ministry different from what we were already doing. The portion quoted here is followed immediately by, "This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor." (4) It appears in an article entitled, "[The Duty of the Minister and the People](#)," which called upon ministers to allow and encourage the church members to use their talents for the Lord. The last sentence of the quoted paragraph reflects this thrust: "Place the burdens upon men and women of the church, that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness."

This is the only statement from [Mrs. White](#) addressing laying on of hands for women. The statement and its context clearly indicate that these women were being dedicated to a specific lay ministry.

[7] The concluding paragraph of Dederen's article (n. 5 above) is worth pondering: "A closer look at our theology of ordination may mean hard work and reciprocal understanding, for beneath the scriptural data we are often dealing with prejudice and self-interest--from all sides--as well as established patterns and deep-rooted habits. Yet

the theology of ordination and its implications, summarily evoked in these pages, is without doubt one to which

***Page 25***

our church must address itself sooner or later. The task is indispensable. As a theologian, I would hope that a great many will participate in this study, making their individual contribution, so that God's people, as a whole, will find a sound solution to pressing problems of our time" (see Dederen, "A Theology of Ordination," p. 240). Since the Bible and the writings of [Ellen G. White](#) suggest that both men and women may be commissioned to perform certain specific functions, the real issue requiring a biblical response is whether women may legitimately be ordained to perform the headship functions of elder or pastor.

# Chapter 3 – Crucial Issues for Women's Ordination

What are the crucial issues in the decision the church faces regarding ordination for women? This chapter will outline seven major issues emerging from the central question. In each case it will first distinguish the real issue from the false issues which often cloud our perceptions and keep us from dealing with the core of the matter. It will then set forth the questions lying at the heart of the issue, questions which will be addressed in subsequent chapters of our *Searching the Scriptures*.

## 1. Equality of Women and Men

***What the Issue is Not: Equality of Being, Worth, or Status.*** The question of whether or not to ordain women as elders and pastors should not be confused with whether women and men are equal. Equality of being and worth (ontological equality) is a clear Biblical teaching, affirming that all human beings--male and female--have equal standing before God as created beings, as sinners in need of salvation through Christ, and as people called to the same destiny. The scriptural evidence for this equality is that (1) both "male and female" were created "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27; Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6); (2) both have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, so that "in Christ" there is neither "male nor female" (Gal 3:28); and (3) both are "joint heirs of the grace of life" (1 Pet 3:7 RSV).

Nowhere does the Bible relegate women to second-class status or make men superior and women inferior. To say otherwise is to misrepresent biblical teaching and affront the loving character of the God who created Eve to be Adam's "help meet for him," a partner "fitting" or "suitable" to him. [Ellen White](#) was unequivocal: "When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal" ( *Testimonies for the Church* , 3:484). Within this equality, just as gender differences between men and women indicate that they were created to complement one another, so also this complementary nature indicates a *functional* distinction between them.

The issue of women's ordination is, therefore, *not* a question of whether women and men are equal. The Bible, confirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy,

***Page 27***

has already settled that issue. Women and men are equal; neither is inferior to the other.

***What the Issue Is.*** The real issue in the debate is *whether the equality of male and female does away with functional differences*. While maintaining equality of being, has the Bible assigned a headship/leadership role to the man and a supportive role to the woman? If so, were these complementary roles established before or *after* the fall? Are these roles

applicable only to the home, or are they also valid in the church? What Bible principles govern the male-female relationship?

## 2. Women in Ministry

***What the Issue is Not: God's Call for Women in Ministry.*** The issue of whether or not to ordain women as elders and pastors should not be confused with whether women can be in ministry. The Bible clearly teaches that women have been called to the work of ministry as surely as have men. In the Old Testament, women participated in the study and teaching of the law (Neh 8:2; Prov 1:8; Deut 13:6-11), in offering prayers and vows to God (1 Sam 1:10; Num 30:9; Gen 25:22; 30:6, 22; 2 Kings 4:9-10, 20-37), in ministering "at the entrance to the tent of meeting" (1 Sam 2:22), in singing at the worship of the temple service (Ezra 2:65), and in engaging in the prophetic ministry of exhortation and guidance (Ex 15:20; 2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron 34:22-28; Judges 4:4-14). Of this latter group, especially prominent are Deborah, "a prophetess . . . [who] was judging [NIV "leading"] Israel at that time" (Judges 4:4), and Huldah, the prophetess to whom Josiah the king and Hilkiah the high priest looked for spiritual guidance (2 Kings 22). [1]

The New Testament portrays women fulfilling vital roles in ministry. Besides Mary and Martha, a number of other women, including Joanna and Susanna, supported Jesus with their own means (Luke 8:2-3). Tabitha ministered to the needy (Acts 9:36). Other women, including Lydia, Phoebe, Lois, and Eunice, distinguished themselves in fulfilling the mission of the church (Acts 16:14-15; 21:8-9; Rom 16:1-4, 12). Of these, many were Paul's co-workers in ministry. Priscilla apparently was well educated and an apt instructor in the new faith (Rom 16:3; Acts 18:26); Paul calls Phoebe "a servant of the church" and a "succourer of many, and of myself also" (Rom 16:1, 2); [2] Mary, Tryphena, Tryposa, and Persis all "worked very hard in the Lord" (Rom 16:6, 12); Euodia and Syntyche were women "who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel" (Phil 4:3 RSV); and Junia, who suffered imprisonment with Paul, received commendation as someone "of note among the apostles" (Rom 16:7). [3]

[Ellen White](#) strongly encouraged women in ministry. "There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God" ( [Evangelism](#) , p.

### ***Page 28***

472). "The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. . . . The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds 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" (ibid., pp. 464-465, emphasis added). Seventh-day Adventist history and current practice illustrate the biblical truth that indeed women have a role in ministry.

The issue of women's ordination is, therefore, *not* a question of whether women can labor in the ministry. The Bible, confirmed by the Spirit of prophecy, has already settled that issue: women may labor in the gospel ministry.

***What the Issue Is.*** The real issue in the debate is *whether Scripture permits women in ministry to perform the oversight/leadership roles which ordained elders and pastors are called upon to exercise.* Does the Bible teach that women in ministry may be ordained as elders and pastors?

### **3. Women as Elders *but Not Pastors?***

***What the Issue is Not: Difference of Office.*** The issue of women's ordination to the gospel ministry should not be confused with whether women may function as ordained elders but not as pastors. It is clear from the Bible that (1) those who are permitted to perform the oversight/leadership functions of the ministerial office are elders or pastors; and that (2) the New Testament makes no essential distinction between the two offices.

The Greek terms for elder/presbyter (*presbuteros*) and overseer/bishop (*episkopos*) are used interchangeably in the New Testament (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Pet 5:1-3). The same qualifications are required of both of these offices (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Both perform the same work of shepherding the flock (Acts 20: 17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-4; 1 Thess 5:12). Thus we may conclude with Lyman Coleman that "if presbyters [elders] and bishops [overseers] are known by the same names--if they are required to possess the same qualifications, and if they do actually discharge the same duties, then what higher evidence can we expect or desire of their equality and identity?" [4] Even though today we divide some of the responsibilities between elders and pastors (overseers), they are essentially the same office. [5]

***What the Issue Is.*** Since the Bible makes no distinction between the offices of elder and pastor, it is scripturally inconsistent to ordain women as elders but not as pastors. Ordaining women as elders and pastors is either biblical or unbiblical. The key issue, therefore, is *whether the Bible anywhere permits women to exercise the leadership or headship roles of elders and pastors.*

***Page 29***

### **4. The Holy Spirit's Leading**

***What the Issue Is Not: Spiritual Gifts.*** The question of women's ordination should not be confused with whether the Holy Spirit can call and empower women with gifts for ministry. The Old Testament predicted an outpouring of the Spirit on both "your sons and your daughters" (Joel 2:28). The New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit calls and empowers both men and women with various spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:3-8; Eph 4:7-13). While God Himself directly chose and commissioned prophets, He has instructed that the commissioning or ordination of elders and pastors is to be carried out by the church (Rom 10:14-15; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23). [6]

Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit, but they are also regulated by the Holy Scriptures. [7] The same Holy Spirit who calls and empowers men and women with gifts for ministry also apportions gifts to each "as he wills" (1 Cor 12:11; Heb 2:4). This same Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to give instructions regarding the qualifications for elders and pastors. In addition to the two criteria emphasized in 2 Timothy 2:2--*faithfulness* and *ability* to teach--the inspired Word also teaches that those aspiring to the leadership role of elder or pastor must possess the qualities listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-6 and Titus 1:5-9. One of these is that the elder or pastor should be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:6). The Greek word translated "husband" is *aner/andros*, a specific word always used for a human *male* as distinguished from a female. [8] If we believe that the apostle Paul was inspired when he *twice* wrote that an elder or pastor should be a male (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6), this particular qualification for the office raises some crucial questions.

***What the Issue Is.*** When the apostle Paul restricted the office of elder or pastor to males, was he influenced by his culture, or was he guided by the Spirit? Assuming the latter, one may ask, "Since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, [and since] it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word" ([The Great Controversy](#), p. vii), can the Spirit call a woman to the leadership role of elder or pastor which He has apparently instructed through His written Word can only be filled by males? In other words, *can the Holy Spirit contradict Himself by calling a female to an office from which she is excluded by the same Spirit's instruction in the written Word?* Furthermore, can the church legitimately commission women to perform tasks which the Holy Spirit does not authorize? *Should the church remain within the bounds set by the Holy Spirit in the written Word or should the church, according to its own wisdom and discretion, legislate for itself policies which contradict Scripture?*

## **5. Women's "Silence" and "Teaching"**

***What the Issue is Not: Muzzling Women.*** The issue of whether to ordain women as elders and pastors should not be confused with whether or not they

### ***Page 30***

are permitted to speak in church. When the Bible urges women to "keep silence" in church (1 Cor 14:34), it does not mean that women cannot pray, prophesy, preach, evangelize or teach in the church. In the *same letter* to the Corinthians in which Paul told women to keep silence in the church, he indicated that women may pray and prophesy, provided they are dressed appropriately (1 Cor 11:2-16). And he said that the one who prophesies speaks "edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (14:3). Also, just like the command in the *same chapter* that those who speak in tongues should "keep silence in the church" if no interpreter was present (1 Cor 14:28), the instruction that women should "keep silence in the churches" suggests that Paul wants women to exercise their gift to speak within certain appropriate guidelines. Further, the same Paul who urged women "to learn in silence" (1 Tim 2:11) and who did not permit women to "teach or to have authority over men" (1 Tim 2:12 RSV) apparently approved the "teaching" ministry of Priscilla and Aquila in their instruction of Apollos (Acts 18:26). Paul also *required*



women to do a certain kind of teaching: "Bid the older women . . . to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children" (Titus 2:3-5 RSV).

These texts should alert the Bible student that the prohibition of women "to teach or to have authority over men" does not forbid to women every form of teaching. Unlike other terms used in the New Testament to communicate the idea of teaching, the Greek word *didasko* used in this passage carries the force of authoritative teaching entrusted to a person--particularly someone in the leadership role in the church (cf. 1 Tim 3:2; 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2). [9] In light of the wider context of Paul's pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, as well as the immediate context which links this form of teaching with exercising "authority over men," we may conclude that Paul is here prohibiting women from the kind of teaching done in the capacity of a leader of the church. [10] In other words, the apostle Paul is not forbidding all teaching to women, but only the kind of "teaching" in the church which gives women a position of authority over men.

***What the Issue Is.*** Since the Bible indicates that women in ministry may engage in some forms of teaching, including teaching other women (Titus 2:3-5) and even men (Acts 18:26; cf. Col 3:16), the real issue is not whether women may speak or teach (e.g., preaching, public evangelism, teaching Sabbath school, etc.). The issue is, *May women legitimately carry out the kind of teaching in the church which places them in a position of authority over men--as is the case with the authoritative teaching entrusted to the elder/pastor (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9, 10)?*

## **6. Qualification or Capability of Women**

***What the Issue is Not: Ability, Education, or Skill.*** The question of whether to ordain women as elders and pastors should not be confused with whether women are professionally capable or qualified to teach or hold leadership/

### ***Page 31***

headship positions. The apostle Paul did not cite a lack of education, formal training, or teaching skills as the reason why women should not "teach or have authority over men" (1 Tim 2:12 RSV). The very fact that he prohibited women from a certain kind of teaching implies that some women already possessed the ability to teach. For example, Paul instructed older women to "teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women" (Titus 2:3, 4 NIV). He also commended the teaching that Eunice and Lois provided for Timothy (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14, 15). Evidently Priscilla was well-educated and a capable teacher, since she "expounded to" Apollos, an "eloquent man" who was already "instructed in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:24-26).

Significantly, Paul's epistle to Timothy (the very epistle which prohibits women to "teach or to have authority over men," and which restricts the pastoral role of overseer to men) was addressed to the church at Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3), the home church of Priscilla and Aquila. Prior to writing this epistle, Paul had already stayed at the home of Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth for eighteen months (Acts 18:2, 11). They later accompanied Paul to

Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21). When Paul stayed in Ephesus for another three years, "teaching the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, 31; cf. 1 Cor 16:19), likely Priscilla was among those who received instruction from him. The Bible also mentions the upscale businesswoman Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40), evidently someone whose abilities in commerce and administration selling costly goods put her in touch with nobility and royalty. Yet not even well-educated Priscilla, nor successful, professional Lydia, nor any other accomplished woman, was permitted to "teach or to have authority over men."

The reason why women were forbidden to "teach or to have authority over men" was not inadequate education or a lack of ability to teach. Paul instead pointed to the creation order, stating that "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Tim 2:13). Adam carried the special right and responsibility of leadership which belonged to the "firstborn" in a family (cf. Col 1:15-18). [11]

***What the Issue Is.*** The issue of women's ordination is not whether qualified, capable women can teach or be leaders, but *whether women in the church are willing to exercise their teaching and leadership gifts within the biblical structure, under the headship of men called upon to exercise the official teaching authority of elder or pastor.* Ultimately, the issue boils down to whether Christians will accept Paul's instruction and its theological foundation (the creation order) as worthy of trust.

## **7. Biblical Headship**

***What the Issue is Not: Male Supremacy/Power.*** The biblical *headship* role of the male elder or pastor should not be confused with "patriarchalism" or male supremacy, control, or domination. Neither should the submissive role of women be viewed as an imposition of "power over" women or as a "put-down" of women.

### ***Page 32***

The Bible teaches that within the partnership of male and female equality, male headship charges the man to exercise a Christlike spiritual leadership in both the home and church families, while female submission calls upon the woman to lovingly support/assist the man in his leadership function.

The Bible describes the nature of male headship not as domination, control, or the wielding of "power," but rather as leadership in self-giving love (Eph 5:25); leadership in sacrificial service (1 Pet 3:7; cf. Mark 10:42-44); leadership in sound management or governorship (1 Tim 3: 4, 5); leadership in ensuring the well-being of the home; leadership that provides for the family (1 Tim 5:8); and leadership in discipline and instruction (Deut 6:7; Eph 6:4)--that is, leadership as "lawmaker and priest" ( [\*The Adventist Home\*](#) , p. 212). [12] This kind of male headship, which is best exemplified by Christ (Eph 5), can only be demonstrated by those who are "in the Lord" (1 Cor 11:11).

The supporting role of the female does not mean that the woman must yield her individuality or conscience to the man, or that she is to maintain a blind devotion to him.

The woman is to understand that "there is One who stands higher than the husband to the wife; it is her Redeemer, and her submission to her husband is to be rendered as God directed--'as it is fit in the Lord'" ( [The Adventist Home](#) , p. 116). The woman practices true biblical submission by showing a loving respect (Eph 5:33; cf. Titus 2:4) and by lovingly accepting her divinely ordained role as helper corresponding to the husband (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-7). This role is not servile but is one requiring intelligent, willing cooperation toward the objective of a strong family--home or church--which glorifies God. Of this submission, Jesus provides a model for women, just as He does for men (Phil 2:5-11; Eph 5:23-25; 1 Cor 11:3). Only the converted, that is, those who are "in the Lord," can truly reflect this spirit of submission (1 Cor 11:11).

***What the Issue Is.*** Since biblical headship is the loving exercise of male leadership within the partnership of male and female equality in the family (home and church), the real issue in the women's ordination debate is *whether or not the Bible permits women to perform the biblical headship functions of the ordained elder or pastor*. In other words, does the "neither male nor female" principle (Gal 3:28) of equality before God nullify the headship principle, which affirms role distinctions between the sexes?

**Conclusion.** For each of the major issues confronting the church regarding ordination for women, we must seek the answers by *searching the Scriptures*. The next chapter will briefly discuss how to approach the Bible in a way that will resolve the issues and bring unity and harmony to the church.

## NOTES

[1] Under the Old Testament theocracy, Israel was a nation governed by God and His law. In this system, the chosen leaders were prophets, priests, and judges/kings. Unlike the

### ***Page 33***

New Testament office of elder/pastor, the Old Testament leadership role of *prophet* (likewise *judge*) was not an elected office. God Himself chose and commissioned prophets (and judges) as His most authoritative mouthpiece; they were not elected by the people. Thus, in the Old Testament, kings (and judges) and priests were all subject to the authority of prophets. The leadership roles of Deborah and Huldah as prophets should not be confused with that of elders or pastors, who occupy the elected leadership office in the church. While prophets in both the Old and New Testaments were chosen and ordained by God Himself, elders and pastors are chosen and ordained by church members within the guidelines set by Scripture and are subject to the leadership authority of God's chosen prophets.

In Seventh-day Adventist history, the closest parallel to the leadership of Deborah is [Ellen G. White](#). Though she never claimed to be a leader of the church ( [Testimonies for the Church](#) , 8:236-237) and was never ordained by the denomination, she did exercise leadership authority by virtue of her role as a messenger of the Lord. A number of women who worked for the church during the late 1800s and early 1900s were issued ministerial licenses. [Ellen White](#) was the only woman to be granted the credentials of an

ordained minister (sometimes with the word "ordained" neatly struck out), though she was never ordained and did not perform the functions of an ordained minister. (See William Fagal's discussion of the question, "Was Ellen White Ordained?" in his "Ellen White and the Role of Women in the Church," available from the [Ellen G. White Estate](#).)

[2] Paul commends Phoebe as "our sister, which is a servant [*diakonos*] of the church which is at Cenchrea," and he urges the church to "assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also." Although the term *diakonos* can refer to the office of a "deacon" (1 Tim 3:8-13), the description of Phoebe as a "servant" (KJV) or "deaconess" (RSV) of the church should not be confused with the office of "deacon." In the New Testament the term *diakonos*, like the related terms *diakonia* and *diakoneo*, has both a broad and a narrow meaning. In its broad sense it conveys the idea of "ministry" or "service" carried out on behalf of the church; in this usage, anything a person does to advance the work of the church is a ministry, and the one who labors in this manner is a "minister" or "servant" (*diakonos*) of the Lord (Matt 20:26; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 12:26; Rom 13:4; 15:8; 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Gal 2:17; Eph 3:7; 6:21; Col 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Tim 4:6). In its narrow usage, however, *diakonos* refers to the office of a "deacon," which among other things can only be occupied by one who is a "husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:8-13; Phil 1:1). Because Phoebe was a "sister" (Rom 16:1), she could not have served in the male office of a "deacon." Thus, when Paul described her as "a servant [*diakonos*] of the church," he was speaking of Phoebe's valuable ministry to members of the church as well as to himself.

[3] Paul described Andronicus and Junia as "my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, *who are of note among the apostles*, and who also were in Christ before me" (Rom 16:7). Although there is an ambiguity in the Greek construction "who are of note among the apostles" (KJV), or as the NIV has it, "They are outstanding among the apostles," no New Testament evidence supports the idea that the woman Junia mentioned here was an apostle, nor is there any New Testament evidence that the man Andronicus mentioned in the same text was an apostle. The most plausible and biblically consistent understanding is that both Andronicus and Junia were well known and appreciated by the apostles as Christian converts prior to Paul's own conversion. (See the answer to question #38 in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991], pp. 79-81).

[4] Lyman Coleman, *The Apostolic and Primitive Church* (Boston: Gould Kendall & Lincoln, 1844), p. 196.

### **Page 34**

[5] The New Testament uses the English term "pastor" only once, in Ephesians 4:11. The same Greek word is translated "shepherd" elsewhere in the New Testament. As a shepherd, the pastor has the care and oversight of the flock. For the convenience of using our contemporary terms, in this study we have frequently used "pastor" as a substitute for "bishop" or "overseer."

The book of 1 Peter brings all the terms together: pastor (shepherd), elder (presbyter), and bishop (overseer). "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd (*poimen*, = pastor) and Bishop (*episkopos*, overseer) of your souls" (1 Pet 2:25). "The elders (*presbuteros*) which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder . . . : Feed (*poimano*, to tend as a shepherd) the flock of God, taking the oversight (*episkopeo*) thereof. . . . And when the chief Shepherd (*archipoimen*) shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet 5:1-4). The elders are commissioned to stand as overseers, functioning as *pastors/shepherds* to the flock. Though we may divide some of the responsibilities today, these functions belong basically to one office.

[6] See note 1 above.

[7] For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:28-30, people with the gift of tongues were told not to use it in public when there was no one to interpret, and prophets were told to stop prophesying when others had a revelation. We conclude that if women have gifts of teaching, administration, or evangelism, God wants them to exercise these gifts within the guidelines given in Scripture.

[8] The Greek phrase, *mias gunaikos andra*, literally means a "man [male] of one woman," or "one-woman-man [male]." When used of the marriage relation it may be translated "husband of one wife" (KJV) or "husband of but one wife" (NIV). Thus, the phrase is calling for "monogamous fidelity." An elder must be "faithful to his one wife" (NEB). For a helpful grammatical analysis of this text, see Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 53.

[9] The New Testament uses different terms to communicate the idea of teaching: (1) *katecheo*, from which we get "catechize," means "to tell about something" (Acts 21:21, 24) or "to give instruction about the faith" (Gal 6:6; 1 Cor 14:19; Acts 18:25; cf. Luke 1:4); (2) *ektithemi* means to explain something to another (Acts 18:26; 28:23; 11:4); (3) *dianoigo* literally means to "open," used for the explanation or interpretation of Bible truth (Luke 24:32; Acts 17:3); and (4) *didasko*, used by Paul in 1 Tim 2:12 in his prohibition of women to "teach." Unlike the other terms, *didasko* is a special word used for authoritative teaching. For example, it refers to the kind of teaching carried out by Christ (Matt 7:28-29; Mark 1:22; 6:2), the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 1 John 2:27), John the Baptist (Luke 3:12), the apostles or prophets (2 Thess 2:15; Acts 5:25; 28:31; Eph 4:21; Col 2:7; Mark 6:3), elders/pastors (Eph 4:11), those who were called "teachers" (Luke 2:46; Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11; James 3:1; cf. Heb 5:12), and (negatively) those who carried out unauthorized teaching (Titus 1:11; Acts 15:1; Rom 2:21; cf. Acts 18:24-26). The meaning of *didasko* as authoritative teaching sheds some light on the nature of the "teaching" called forth in the gospel commission (Matt 28:20; cf. Col 3:16).

[10] For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Robert L. Saucy, "Women's Prohibition to each Men: An Investigation into Its Meaning and Contemporary Application," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37/1 (March 1994):79-97.

[11] Paul's description of Christ in Colossians 1:15-18 RSV as "the first-born of all creation," "the head of the body, the church" suggests His pre-eminent authority. His headship and authority are tied in with His being the "first-born." Paul's use of "first-born" language to express the headship and authority of Christ suggests that he attached the same meaning

***Page 35***

to Adam's being "first formed." If this is the case, it indicates that Paul saw in the priority of Adam's creation the establishment of his right and responsibility as the head of the first home, the first church. This may explain why Adam is presented as the one who brought death into the world, and Christ, the second Adam, as the One who brought life (Rom 5:12-21).

[12] See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1991), pp. 120-161.

# Chapter 4 – Biblical Authority and Interpretation

From the preceding analysis, it is clear that ordination of women as elders or pastors is not a cultural issue to be settled according to a person's prejudice or preference or the sociological structures existing in a particular region of the world, be they "democratic," "patriarchal," "authoritarian," or otherwise. Neither is it an equal rights issue to be resolved through such things as civil laws or lawsuits. The issue is not a financial matter to be decided on the basis of economic might or threat of economic blackmail. It is not even a political issue to be settled by petition drives, public opinion polls, referenda, or surveys. The issue is theological. It can only be resolved legitimately on the basis of Scripture.

But how can we resolve an issue from the Bible if we do not agree on how to interpret the Bible? *Searching the Scriptures* will provide some suggestions on how the Spirit guides believers--as individuals, as a church community, and as a worldwide body at a council meeting--when they seek to understand His will on an unresolved theological issue. The foundational principles discussed in this chapter are crucial to a proper understanding of the Bible. [1]

## **Scripture: The Sole Authority**

The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the clear, trustworthy revelation of God's will and His salvation. They constitute the standard on which all teachings and practices are to be grounded and by which they are to be tested (2 Tim 3:15-17; Ps 119:105; Prov 30:5, 6; Isa 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Thess 3:14; Heb 4:12). The first article of our Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs states: "The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His [God's] will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history." At least three implications emerge from this fundamental belief:

**1. *Scripture, the Authoritative Norm.*** Upholding *sola scriptura* (the sole authority of Scripture) means believing and obeying all that Scripture sets forth and letting Scripture judge and control every thought and practice. Christ's own example, repeatedly appealing to Scripture (e.g., "Have ye not read . . . ?";

### ***Page 37***

"It is written"), shows that Scripture is the final court of appeal (cf. Matt 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; Matt 4:4, 7, 10; 5:17-19). Against Scripture, there is no appeal, for "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

[Ellen G. White](#) explained why theological issues--matters of faith and practice, which includes the ordination of women to the gospel ministry--should be settled solely on the basis of the Bible: "The Word of God is the great detector of error; to it we believe everything must be brought. The Bible must be our standard for every doctrine and practice. We must study it reverentially. We are to receive no one's opinion without comparing it with the Scriptures. Here is divine authority which is supreme in matters of faith. It is the Word of the living God that is to decide all controversies" ( [The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials](#) , pp. 44, 45).

**2. Scripture, Above Human Reason and Experience.** The Bible's sole authority means that human reason and experience regarding beliefs and practices must be subject to the Bible's correction. Reason is to be employed to its fullest extent, but it must not operate as an independent authority apart from Scripture (1 Cor 2:1-10). Adam and Eve misused their reason when they accepted the invitation to pursue wisdom out of the resources of their own independent judgment (Gen 3:5-6). Intellectual self-sufficiency indicates unbelief, not faith. Therefore in approaching Scripture, the real question is not whether a Christian should think, but how he should think--that is, whether his thinking should be controlled by the Bible (Prov 3:5-6). To defer to God's Word is not only a faithful use of reason, but also an act of faith.

Similarly, experience is important in the Christian religion (1 John 1:1-3), but it should not have priority over Scripture. To avoid equating subjective religious experience with "the Holy Spirit's leading," believers need the corrective norm of the Holy Scriptures, which are "more sure" than any experience. The apostle Peter's manner of addressing this issue is significant. In 2 Peter 1:16-18 he rejects the charge that the Christian message is a myth with no objective basis in a factual historical event. For proof he appeals to the apostles' first-hand experience: "We were eyewitnesses . . . we heard . . . we were with Him." However, in verse 19 he appeals to something "more sure" than experience--namely, the prophetic word, the divinely-inspired, authoritative Scriptures (vv. 20-21; cf. Luke 24:25-27, 32). [2] Whereas people tend to accept the Bible because it confirms their experiences (personal, cultural, scientific, religious, etc.), Peter argues that experience (including his own sanctified experience) is trustworthy because it is confirmed by Scripture.

According to [Ellen G. White](#), "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain *the Bible, and the Bible only*, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. 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

### **Page 38**

religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, *we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support*" ( [The Great Controversy](#) , p. 595, emphasis added).



**3. *Scripture, Its Own Interpreter.*** In upholding the sole authority of Scripture, we acknowledge that it is both sufficient (i.e., it contains all that the church needs to know for guidance in the way of salvation and for the work of ministry) and clear (i.e., it can be understood from within itself, by comparing one passage of Scripture with another) (2 Tim 3:16-17). This means that Scripture does not need to be supplemented by any external source (e.g., human reason, experience, or tradition). Neither is it to be interpreted in the light of some outside sources (e.g., ecclesiastical tradition, philosophy, science, extrabiblical religion, psychology, etc.), as though the authority of these sources were equal to or above that of Scripture. Rather, the sufficiency and clarity of Scripture affirm the Protestant Reformation principle that Scripture must remain its own interpreter.

[Ellen White](#) repeatedly emphasized, "Make the Bible its own expositor, bringing together all that is said concerning a given subject at different times and under varied circumstances" ( [Child Guidance](#) , p. 511). "I saw that the Word of God, as a whole, is a perfect chain, one portion linking into and explaining another" ( [Early Writings](#) , p. 221). We must submit to "the Bible as the word of God, the only sufficient, infallible rule," which "must be its own interpreter" ( [The Great Controversy](#) , p. 173). "Scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages" ( [Evangelism](#) , p. 581). "The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture" ( [Education](#) , p. 190). Whatever information is needed to understand a given passage of the Bible can be found in the pages of Scripture itself.

This historic principle that Scripture is its own interpreter discredits the popular belief that every person or theologian is his own interpreter. If, instead of Scripture, every person is his own interpreter, a lack of consensus among theologians on issues such as women's ordination can easily be misinterpreted as a lack of agreement among the inspired writers themselves, as though the authority of theologians were on a level with the authority of the inspired Bible writers. On the other hand, upholding the principle that Scripture interprets itself suggests that when there is a lack of consensus among Bible students, they must prayerfully continue in their *searching the Scriptures* until God sheds further light on the issue.

Both the sufficiency and clarity of Scripture imply that the Spirit, as the infallible interpreter, can enable every sincere seeker of truth to know God's will (John 7:17). This does not mean that no difficulties will be found in the Bible, but only that because the Holy Spirit attends the Word, the substance of the Bible's message can be understood by every Christian--scholar and non-scholar--as Scripture is compared with Scripture.

***Page 39***

### **Harmonious Method of Interpretation**

Scripture should not be viewed merely as a library of books written by different writers and dealing with many unrelated subjects. On the contrary, inspired Scripture is a single book with a single author--God (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21)--and a single theme (God's plan of salvation through Christ [John 5:39; Luke 24:25-27]). Because of the Holy Spirit's

inspiration of the entire Bible, the correct meaning of every portion of Scripture will be consistent with the rest of the teaching of the Bible on that subject. Therefore, in approaching the Scriptures, we should not interpret them in such a way that one part of Scripture is made to appear to contradict another; instead we should seek the harmony among its various parts.

[Ellen White](#) wrote, "As several [biblical] writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony" ( [The Great Controversy](#) , p. vi). Consequently, "He who earnestly searches the Scriptures will see that harmony exists between the various parts of the Bible; he will discover the bearing of one passage upon another, and the reward of his toil will be exceedingly precious" ( [Signs of the Times, Feb. 6, 1893](#) , p. 214). Again, "The Bible is its own interpreter, one passage explaining another. By comparing scriptures referring to the same subjects, you will see beauty and harmony of which you have never dreamed" ( [Testimonies](#) , 4:499).

## **Attitude of Trust and Dependence on God**

As the church considers ordination for women, the apostle Peter's warning about Paul's writings is particularly significant: "Even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:15-16). If we are to avoid wresting Scripture or misinterpreting its message, we must adopt an attitude of trust and dependence on God as we approach His inspired Word, and we must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit individually and collectively.

**1. Humility and Teachability.** To overcome doubts and skepticism towards the teachings of God's Word, we must have the simplicity and faith of a little child, and we must be ready to learn, accept, and believe what Scripture teaches, however unpalatable it may seem to us. We must humble our pride and surrender our sin-loving hearts, which ever seek to usurp Scripture's authority. "Disguise it as they may, the real cause of doubt and skepticism, in most cases, is the love of sin. The teachings and restrictions of God's Word are not welcome

### ***Page 40***

to the proud, sin-loving heart, and those who are unwilling to obey its requirements are ready to doubt its authority. In order to arrive at truth, we must have a sincere desire to know the truth, and a willingness of heart to obey it. And all who come in this spirit to the study of the Bible, will find abundant evidence that it is God's Word, and they may gain an understanding of its truths that will make them wise unto salvation" ( [Steps to Christ](#) , p. 111).

Through prayer one acknowledges dependence on God in understanding His Word. Prayer is therefore an effective aid in interpreting Scripture, connecting the interpreter with the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writers of Scripture. Prayer acknowledges a sincere desire to discover God's will rather than supporting evidence to justify one's preconceived opinions. Consequently, as we approach Scriptures, we must pray, "O Lord: teach me thy statutes. . . . Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. . . . Give me understanding" (Ps 119:12, 18, 34; cf. vv. 27, 33). In answer to such prayer, God has promised to give knowledge--(1) through the Holy Spirit and (2) through the Christian community (Eph 3:16-19; Eph 1:17-19; Col 1:9).

**2. *The Spirit's Guidance of Individual Believers.*** Scripture cannot be understood correctly apart from the Spirit's guidance and illumination. "We can attain to an understanding of God's Word only through the illumination of that Spirit by which the Word was given." "But without the guidance of the Holy Spirit we shall be continually liable to wrest the Scriptures or to misinterpret them" ( [\*Steps to Christ\*](#) , pp. 109, 110).

Without belittling the valuable contributions of technical biblical experts, we need to remember that it is possible for everyone to study Scripture without a mass of technical theological expertise. One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to lead laypersons, no less than theologians, into "all truth" (John 14:26; 16:13-14; 1 Cor 2:10-14; 1 John 2:27). The assurance that "the testimony of the Lord is sure, *making wise the simple*" is still valid (Ps 19:7). Scripture is able to make even little children "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15). The Holy Spirit will lead everyone who approaches the Word of God with the humble, teachable, and God-fearing attitude of the child Samuel: "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam 3:9-10).

The truth that the Holy Spirit enables average church members to understand Scripture undercuts the tendency to ascribe biblical understanding to only a few "infallible" experts, be they "popes," "scholars" or "leaders." [Ellen White](#) warned of the danger: "Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of *searching the Scriptures* to learn their duty for themselves. Then, by controlling the minds of these leaders, he can influence the multitudes according to his will" ( [\*The Great Controversy\*](#) , p. 595, emphasis added). Scripture points not to fallible human beings, but to the Holy Spirit, Christ's appointed Teacher of the church

### ***Page 41***

(John 16:13ff.), as the only infallible Person to whom Bible believers must look for guidance in studying the Word of God.

**3. *The Spirit's Guidance Within the Church Community.*** But while the Spirit guides individual believers in their study of Scripture, Paul says that believers will come to a knowledge of God "with all the saints" (Eph 3:18), suggesting that God also gives spiritual understanding through the Christian community. This fact repudiates "Lone Ranger-ism" in interpreting Scripture--the spirit that says "I'll go my own way without

regard to what the community of believers thinks"--and it serves as a check on those who tend to believe that they alone are guided by the Holy Spirit.

"God has not passed His people by and chosen one solitary man here and another there as the only ones worthy to be entrusted with His truth. He does not give one man new light contrary to the established faith of the body. In every reform men have arisen making this claim. . . . Let none be self-confident, as though God had given them special light above their brethren. Christ is represented as dwelling in His people. Believers are represented as 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit' [Eph 2:20-22]" ( [\*Testimonies for the Church\*](#) , 5:291-292).

Studying the inspired Word "with all the saints" should not be understood as questioning the value of, and even the obligation for, personal Bible study, or as suggesting that individuals should surrender their judgment to others. Neither is it the same as taking an opinion poll regarding a theological position and then tallying the results. Nor is it the same as waiting until other individuals, churches, or Divisions "are ready" to adopt a "lockstep" theological position on an issue such as women's ordination. Studying Scripture "with all the saints" is none of these. Rather, it is a genuine, equal participation of church members toward a common understanding of Scripture. Evidently such a common understanding is possible, since on the basis of Scripture, Seventh-day Adventists have come to hold a body of beliefs--our fundamental beliefs--as reflecting a true understanding of Scripture.

By studying the Bible in partnership with other members of the church, the believer recognizes that in the church God has entrusted different gifts to different members for the edification of the entire body (1 Cor 12). In this context the spiritual gifts--notably, the gifts of teaching, knowledge, wisdom, and discernment of spirits--and the role of theologians, elders and pastors (those who are "apt to teach") become particularly significant. In a worldwide church such as ours, these gifts are essential to our corporate understanding of the Bible.

Furthermore, the Spirit's design that believers study His word "with all the saints" delivers us from the tyranny of being tied to our own thoughts

## ***Page 42***

and our naive cultural conceits. It enables us to recognize that the Holy Spirit is not active only in a few regions of the world, nor at the study of only a few scholars and church members, but that He is also leading other believers (experts and no-scholars, without regard to gender, race or social status) to a clear understanding of God's will in His written Word. It is as Christians study the Bible together and share the Word with each other, not as solitary individuals nor as groups of individuals from particular regions of the world, that they are given understanding most fully.

**4. *The Spirit's Guidance at a Church Council.*** Just as there is safety and certainty "in the multitude of counselors" (Prov 11:14; 15:22), so also in the collective decision of the worldwide church at a council meeting there is safety. The Spirit's guidance at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) may be instructive for the Seventh-day Adventist church as it seeks a solution regarding women's ordination. [3]

First, the problem confronting the apostolic church was *not* merely a sociological issue, shaped by culture or geography, to be resolved pragmatically by compromises and concessions. Rather, it was a *theological* issue--one which concerned doctrine and practice ("Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved. . . . The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses," vv. 1, 5 NIV). Because it was a theological issue it became a *church-wide* issue. Consequently, it could not be settled by each different region of the church according to the cultural "readiness" of the various churches, nor according to the sociological structures (be they "democratic" or "non-democratic") in the respective regions where the church had a presence.

Second, to resolve the "sharp dispute and debate" occasioned by the theological issue (v. 2) a council was convened, attended by delegates from the different regions of the church (vv. 2-6). Before a final decision was made, they had a free and open discussion of the issue, with theological input from both Gentile and Jewish Christians (vv. 7-12). Could this suggest that theological issues confronting the church must be given impartial hearing in the various publications of the church today?

Third, the decision was not based on pragmatic considerations; instead, after Peter, Paul, and Barnabas called attention to God's work among Jews and Gentiles, James appealed to *Scripture* as the basis for the theological solution (vv. 15-21). [4] We should note that he adopted a harmonistic approach toward interpreting Scripture ("The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written" [v. 15]). In other words, the solution was based on a sound exegesis (interpretation) of the available scriptural passages that had a bearing on the issue. The apostolic church appears to have recognized an underlying harmony in the inspired writings of the Old Testament.

Fourth, the scriptural solution to the theological problem not only resulted in unity and harmony between the Jewish and Gentile Christians (vv. 22-35,

### ***Page 43***

they were "with one accord" [v. 25 KJV]), but it also met the approval of the Holy Spirit ("It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . ." [v. 28 NIV]). Their decision was approved by the Holy Spirit because it was in harmony with His expressed will as revealed and recorded in inspired Scripture.

Finally, the theological decision they made at that council was not to be accepted or rejected according to the needs or circumstances of the different churches. The council's prohibitions were binding on all the churches: they are said to be "necessary," not

optional (v. 28). Though the letter was addressed to the Christians in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (vv. 23-29), it was binding on all the other Christian churches (Acts 16:4; 21:25; Rev 2:14, 20). [5] Because the various churches submitted to the council decision, the mission of the church was greatly helped, resulting in a growing church membership: "As they [Paul, Silas, Timothy] traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (Acts 16:4-5 NIV). The mission of the church is enhanced whenever there is theological unity, not just a "unity in diversity,"--a phrase which has become a codeword for theological pluralism. [6]

**Conclusion.** Whenever the worldwide church faces a theological problem, it must always insist on scriptural--not pragmatic or socio-cultural--solutions. Those scriptural solutions must recognize the Bible as the product of one divine mind, with an underlying harmony in its various parts. Thus the interpreter must not relativize the Bible or ascribe mistakes or contradictions to its message. When believers from the different regions of the world adopt a trusting attitude to accept, believe, and obey whatever God's Word teaches, the Holy Spirit will attend their efforts by shedding light on their theological problem, thereby restoring unity in their midst and empowering them for mission.

In the pages that follow, we shall begin our attempt to apply the principles of interpretation discussed in this chapter to the crucial theological issues of women's ordination identified in the previous chapter. Our prayer is that as we seek guidance by *searching the Scriptures*, the Holy Spirit will clear most of the confusion we have on this subject.

## NOTES

[1] These foundational principles are summarized in the "Methods of Bible Study Committee Report," *Adventist Review*, January 22, 1987, pp. 18-20. The principles are opposed to the historical-critical method of interpretation--a method established on the assumption that the Bible is not fully inspired, and that not all biblical accounts (miracles, supernatural events, chronology, history, geography, etc.) are reliable. For a further discussion of how the historical-critical method is being used in the women's ordination question, see C. Raymond Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, pp. 31-48. A detailed treatment on methods of Biblical interpretation may be found in David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Mathews, and Robert B. Sloan, *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Holman Pub., 1994); and Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994).

### **Page 44**

[2] For more on this, see Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "Inspired Book or Inspiring Booklet? Biblical Authority in an Age of Theological Pluralism," in the Spring 1995 issue of *Adventists Affirm*.

[3] Perceptive readers will observe from what follows that we do not subscribe to the interpretation of Acts 15 offered by Andrew Bates (pseudonym), "The Jerusalem Council: A Model for Utrecht?" *Ministry*, April 1995, pp. 18-23.

[4] The four categories of requirement the apostle cites correspond to the instructions Moses gave in Leviticus 17 and 18, which include reference not only to the Israelites but to the "strangers which sojourn among you" (17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26). In the letter that went out to the churches, these items are even listed in the same order as they appear in Leviticus (see Acts 15:29). That the council did not require circumcision of the Gentiles seems to indicate a recognition that this sign was given to the Israelites but not to the "strangers which sojourn among you," unless they should choose to become Jews. The Jerusalem Council ruled, in effect, that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to be Christians and experience Jesus' salvation. As with matters of the ceremonial law, circumcision was not to be expected of the Gentile Christians. Paul himself made the Christian perspective explicit: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts" (1 Cor 7:19 NIV).

[5] Those who argue against "lockstep unity" on theological issues often suggest that Paul's "flexibility" or "freedom" towards (meaning alleged violation of) the Jerusalem council's prohibition of foods offered to idols, as indicated in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 8-10), is a model for "unity in diversity" in a worldwide church. By this they mean that the different regions of a worldwide church such as ours should be given the permission to adopt different positions in their theological practices. However, a careful study of chapters 8-10 of 1 Corinthians will reveal that Paul did not violate the council's decision. Paul addressed three issues with regard to food offered to idols: (a) Could Christians accept invitations from their friends and relatives to eat these foods *in pagan temples*? (b) Could they buy such food if it was sold *in the market*? and (c) If the food was brought home, was it all right to eat it? Paul answered that: (i) Christians could not go to pagan temples and eat these foods (1 Cor 8:10; cf. 10:19-21); (ii) they *could* buy these foods in the market-- unless it violated the consciences of those who called attention to that fact (1 Cor 10:27-33); (iii) they could eat the foods in their homes, since idols were really nothing (1 Cor 10:25-26; cf. 8:1ff.). Eating the foods at the temple was incompatible with Christianity, since it implied worship of those gods. This seems to be the thrust of the Jerusalem Council's decree (cf. Rev 2:14, 20; see also Lev 17:7; 18:24-30). Likewise, where others might construe that homage was being offered to the gods, the Christian should not buy the foods in the market. At home, where worship was not implied, eating the foods would compromise neither conscience nor witness. Thus, Paul did not contravene the prohibitions of the Jerusalem council decision, but rather established a theological explanation of the spirit behind the decision (1 Cor 8-10) and how Christians should implement it, balancing freedom and responsibility (1 Cor 8:9, and following through ch. 9).

[6] See note 2 above.

# Chapter 5 – Theological Obstacles to Women's Ordination

The issue facing the church is whether, through ordination, the church may legitimately commission women to perform the oversight functions of elders or pastors. The key issues raised in the preceding chapters are these: (1) Does the equality of male and female do away with functional differentiation? (2) Does Scripture permit women in ministry to perform the headship/leadership roles that ordained elders and pastors are called upon to exercise? and if not, (3) Can the Holy Spirit contradict Himself by calling a woman to the office of elder or pastor from which she is excluded by the same Spirit's instruction?

By *searching the Scriptures*, this chapter will explore whether the principle of male headship/leadership in the family--be it in home or church--is rooted in biblical theology, namely, God's divine arrangement established at creation prior to the fall and reiterated after the fall. What is the most adequate, scripturally-consistent explanation of the biblical practice and teaching both in Old Testament times, when women were not ordained as priests, and in the New Testament period, when Christ chose not to appoint a female apostle and Paul prohibited women from the position of elder or overseer? [1]

## Headship Principle

Those who favor women's ordination have suggested that the principle of male headship in both the home and the church is either (a) time-bound, culturally conditioned, male-centered (androcentric), rabbinic in origin, anti-female in nature, and conditioned by patriarchal mentality or prejudice; or (b) applicable (if relevant at all) only (i) to the home family, and not the church family, or (ii) to the local situation in particular churches of the New Testament times, and not in the general Christian church.

In evaluating these claims, it will be helpful to note from the Bible just when the headship principle was established and what its subsequent history has been. To whom did it apply, and during what periods? What does the evidence suggest about the continued validity of the principle?

In exploring these issues we will discover whether there are biblical and theological obstacles which must be surmounted if the church is to ordain women as elders or pastors.

## *Page 46*

***Instituted at Creation.*** The Bible teaches that the male headship/leadership role and the female supporting/cooperative role were instituted at creation. As part of God's arrangement *before* the fall of Adam and Eve, this creation ordinance describes the



relationship for which men and women were fitted by nature. Male headship/leadership, in contrast to male domination, suggests that in the relationship of the man and woman, two spiritually-equal human beings, it is the man who exercises primary responsibility for leading the family in a God-glorifying direction (cf. 1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:21-33). This divine arrangement resulted in complete harmony between our first parents before the entrance of sin.

Four biblical evidences establish this headship principle at creation.

First, God expressed His intended arrangement for the family relationship by creating Adam first, then Eve. Therefore, Paul writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. *For Adam was formed first, then Eve*" (1 Tim 2:12-13 NIV). As the wider context of the book of Genesis suggests, the divine priority of having Adam "formed first, then Eve" had an important theological significance. The sequence established Adam as the "firstborn" in the human family, a position that gave him the special responsibility of leadership in the family--whether home or church. [2]

Second, God gave to Adam the directions for the first pair regarding custody of the garden and the dangers of the forbidden tree (Gen 2:16-17). This charge to Adam called him to spiritual leadership. When Satan addressed Eve rather than Adam regarding the forbidden tree, the tempter's object was to undermine the divine arrangement by deceiving Eve into assuming primary headship responsibility (see 1 Tim 2:14). Had Eve been created first and then Adam, and had she been charged with the responsibility of leadership, Satan might well have attacked the headship principle by approaching Adam.

Third, God instructed that in marriage it is the man who must act, leaving dependence on father and mother to be united with his wife (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4, 5), and that in the marriage relationship the woman's role is to complement the man in his duties (Gen 2:18, 23-24). In this instruction, God charged the man with the responsibility of lovingly providing for and protecting the woman (cf. Eph 5:25, 28-31; 1 Pet 3:7; 1 Tim 3:4; Titus 1:6).

Fourth, events after the fall (but before God pronounced judgment) confirm that Adam's headship was already in place. Although Eve first disobeyed, it was only after Adam had joined in the rebellion that the eyes of *both* of them were opened (Gen 3:4-7). More significantly, after the fall God first addressed *Adam*, holding him accountable for eating the forbidden fruit: "Where art thou? . . . Hast thou eaten of the tree . . . ?" (Gen 3:9-12; cf. 3:17: "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree. . ."). It appears inexplicable for God, who in His omniscience already knew what had happened, to act in this way if Adam had not been given headship in the Eden relationship. Consequently, despite the fact that the woman initiated the rebel-

lion, it is *Adam* (not Eve, nor even both of them) who is blamed for our fall (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22), which suggests that as the spiritual head in the partnership of their equal relationship, Adam was the representative of the family.

These facts indicate that even *before* the fall, God had established the principle of male headship/leadership. He instituted this principle not as an indication of superiority of Adam over Eve, nor was it for dominance or oppression, but for God-glorifying responsibility. [3] Thus when Paul writes that "the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3 RSV), and that women should not "have authority over men" because "Adam was formed first" (1 Tim 2:12ff. RSV), he is not concocting an arbitrary "proof text" to justify his alleged concession to Hellenistic or Jewish cultural prejudices against women. As an inspired writer, the apostle Paul fully understood the theological truth of the headship principle as a divine arrangement instituted before the fall and which remains permanently valid for the Christian.

***Reiterated after the Fall.*** Within the partnership of the two equal human beings in Eden prior to the fall, Adam was called upon to exercise spiritual leadership for the family. This divine arrangement or "law" resulted in complete harmony until sin brought discord. [4] In other words, the male headship role and the female supporting role which were formed at creation, and for which our first parents were fitted by nature, were deformed by the fall. Sin unfitted the first pair to maintain the original harmony in their relationship. "In the creation God had made her [Eve] the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God--in harmony with His great law of love--they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other" ( [\*Patriarchs and Prophets\*](#) , p. 58).

By directing his temptation to Eve instead of Adam, who had been charged with the leadership responsibility concerning the dangers of the forbidden tree (Gen 2:16-17), Satan struck at the headship principle governing the functional relationships between men and women, and he succeeded in disrupting the harmony our first parents enjoyed while they lived out the principles enshrined in God's arrangement. Both of our parents were responsible for the fall--Eve usurping Adam's headship, and Adam failing to exercise his responsibility to protect his wife and guide her to obey God. The fall soon brought dissonance into the home as Adam and Eve started blaming one another (Gen 3:12ff.). Since then, in place of providing caring, sacrificial male leadership, many men attempt either to dominate their wives or to escape responsibility; and in place of a noble cooperation, many women attempt to usurp men's leadership or they adopt a servile submission. In so doing, both lose blessings God intended for them.

When Satan tempted our first parents, his ultimate goal was to lead them into thinking that they could be "like God" (Gen 3:5). To do so, he approached

Eve with the suggestion that she could attain a higher role than that which God had assigned her at creation. Thus, Eve took the first step in her desire to be like God when she usurped the man's headship role. "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 sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them" ([Patriarchs and Prophets](#) , p. 59).

Male and female roles were reversed as Adam and Eve entered into sin, the woman having assumed the leadership function of *spokesman*. Consequently, after the fall the necessity of the woman's submission to the man, her head, was further underscored in the so-called curse: "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen 3:16). "Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her husband" ( [Patriarchs and Prophets](#) , p. 58).

While, in a sense, God's statement to Eve ("he shall rule over you") reiterated His original arrangement, it was a "curse" because the exercise of true female submission (and also true male headship) does not come naturally to unregenerate women (and men). [5] It is only through the transforming grace of Christ that God's original prescription can be fulfilled in this sinful world.

***Realized "in the Lord."*** The harmonious relationship that existed at creation between male and female, and which was deformed by the fall, can only be re-formed (i.e., transformed for its original purpose) by the gospel. Through transforming conversion and a living experience with Christ, male and female can discover the true harmony of God's ideal: complementarity in male-female relationships in both the home and the church families. Thus, when the man and the woman are "in the Lord," they are able to view the male headship and the corresponding female cooperation as a complementary relationship, in which both depend on the other: "In the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman" (1 Cor 11:11 RSV). In other words, the harmonious relationship for which men and women were fitted by nature, but unfitted by sin, can only be refitted by grace.

Christ's work of redemption, however, does not abolish gender-based roles, contrary to what advocates of women's ordination often suggest. When Paul stated in Galatians 3:28 that "there is . . . neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," this statement on equality of being did not do away

with gender as a basis for role distinctions in the home or church family. The context of Galatians 3:28 itself clearly explains the sense in which male and female are equal: they are equally justified by faith (v. 25), equally children of God (v. 26), equally clothed in Christ by virtue of their baptism (v. 27), equally Christ's possession (v. 29), and equally heirs to the promise (v. 29). Peter shows that this equality between male and female does not invalidate the headship principle; he links the last blessing--joint heirs to the covenant promise--with the submission of women to their husbands: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands . . . Likewise, ye husbands, . . . giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being *heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Pet 3:1, 7).

[Ellen White](#) recognized that even after the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross, the headship principle was still valid: "We women must remember that God has placed us subject to the husband. He is the head, and our judgment and views and reasoning must agree with his, if possible. If not, the preference in God's Word is given to the husband where it is not a matter of conscience. We must yield to the head" ( [Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce](#) , p. 28). "The husband is the head of the family, as Christ is the head of the church; and any course which the wife may pursue to lessen his influence and lead him to come down from that dignified, responsible position is displeasing to God" ( [Testimonies for the Church](#) , 1:307).

Just as the "neither male nor female" statement (Gal 3:28) cannot be used to endorse homosexuality (cf. Rom 1:24-32), so it cannot be employed to abolish the divine arrangement of role distinctions. There is therefore no conflict between Paul's "neither male nor female" principle, which addresses our present standing before God and our future inheritance, and his headship principle that "women should not have authority over men," which teaches that in the partnership of equality between male and female, the man bears primary responsibility of leadership in the family--both home and church. Because of Christ's redemptive work, even in this sinful world men and women can realize "in the Lord" the true harmony that results from living in accordance with God's ideal of complementarity (1 Cor 11:11).

**Conclusion.** The biblical teaching on headship establishes role distinctions between males and females. God Himself instituted this pattern of relationship at creation. Bible-believing Christians cannot, therefore, accept the liberal or "radical" suggestion that the principle of man's headship is time-bound, culturally conditioned, male-centered (androcentric), rabbinic in origin, anti-female in nature, and hopelessly rooted in a patriarchal mentality. Neither can they accept "moderate" or "progressive" reinterpretations which view the texts on headship as setting forth a kind of 50-50 arrangement--a partnership in which the male should not necessarily fill the leadership role.

The headship principle was instituted by God at creation, re-iterated after the fall, and upheld as a model of male-female Christian relationships in the

home and church. In other words, the male headship role and the female supporting role describe the relationship for which men and women were fitted by nature, unfitted by sin, and refitted by grace. This relationship was formed at creation, deformed by the fall, and re-formed (i.e., transformed for its original purpose) by the gospel. The headship principle, then, is the theological basis for the Bible's prohibition of women from the headship role of elder or pastor (1 Tim 2:11ff. and 3:2; Titus 1:6).

In order for the church to ordain women as elders or pastors, those who favor this ordination must show from Scripture: (1) that this *pre-fall* creation arrangement regarding role differentiation (which was reiterated *after the fall*) is not applicable to Christians; (2) that it is impossible for Christ to enable Christian believers to live out this biblical requirement in both their homes and their churches; (3) that the headship principle, supported in numerous Bible passages (e.g., Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Pet 3:1-7; 1 Tim 2:11-15; 1 Cor 11:3, 9-12), has been annulled by Christ; (4) that Christ's redemptive work removed the "curse" on the woman to respect the leadership of the man, but not the "curse" on the man to labor with "sweat" for his daily bread; and (5) why Adam (not Eve) is repeatedly referred to as the representative of the human family if he had not been given a headship role in the Eden relationship prior to the fall (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22). Until this is done, Christians need to take seriously Paul's assertion that the headship arrangement originated at creation and was reiterated after the fall: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman . . ." (1 Tim 2:13-14).

### **Pattern of Authority: Home and Church**

Those who favor women's ordination sometimes argue that while the headship principle established at creation may be relevant today, the principle is only valid for the *home* situation and not for the *church* family. They interpret texts which prohibit women from exercising authority over men (e.g., 1 Tim 2:11-14; 1 Cor 14:33-36) as applicable only to the home setting.

Will *searching the Scriptures* for Bible evidence support this interpretation? What relationship, if any, does the Bible establish between the home and the church?

***The Family: Home and Church.*** The church is not just another social institution; it is a worshiping community--a group of people who relate to God through a faith relationship in Christ. Thus the church, in both the Old and the New Testaments, exists whenever and wherever "two or three have gathered in my [Christ's] name" (Matt 18:20). Rightly understood, the worshiping household is a miniature model of the church. In this "home church" the man, assisted by his wife, exercises the primary function of spiritual leader.

Even before Jesus Christ established the New Testament church (Matt 16:18-19), the church was already in existence in Old Testament times. Israel,

with its priests and ceremonial system of worship, was "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). But long before the Exodus brought Israel the opportunity to be "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex 19:6), the church existed in the homes, wherever "two or three . . . gathered in my name" (Matt 18:20). "God had a church when Adam and Eve and Abel accepted and hailed with joy the good news that Jesus was their Redeemer. These realized as fully then as we realize now the promise of the presence of God in their midst. Wherever Enoch found one or two who were willing to hear the message he had for them, Jesus joined with them in their worship of God. In Enoch's day there were some among the wicked inhabitants of earth who believed. The Lord never yet has left His faithful few without His presence nor the world without a witness" ([Ellen G. White, \*The Upward Look\*](#), p. 228).

The Bible teaches that in the "home church" both mothers and fathers are to exercise leadership in nurturing, training, disciplining and teaching their children (Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 6:6-9; 21:18-21; 27:16; Prov 1:8; 6:20; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20; 2 Tim 1:5; cf. Luke 2:51). As Ellen G. White put it, "In ordinary life the family was both a school and a church, the parents being the instructors in secular and in religious lines" ([Education](#), p. 41). But while "every family is a church, over which the parents preside . . . as priest and teacher of the family" ([Child Guidance](#), p. 549), it is the man who, assisted by the woman, assumes the leadership role in worship.[6] We see this illustrated in Ephesians 6:1-4, where after discussing the shared responsibility of parents in training their children, Paul shifts the focus to fathers and charges them regarding the training of the children: "Children, obey your parents. . . . And, ye *fathers*, . . . bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Note the same shift from parents to fathers in Col 3:20-21.) [7]

The numerous Bible references to the church as the family of God [8] suggest that the relationship of male and female in the church--"the household of God" (1 Tim 3:15 RSV)--is to be modeled after the home family, of which the Eden home was the prototype (Eph 5:22-23; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-7; 1 Cor 11:3, 7-9; 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-3:1-5). The frequent correspondence between home and church found in Scripture (e.g., Acts 2:46; 5:42; 1 Cor 14:34-35; cf. Phil 4:22) confirms John Chrysostom's (A.D. 347-407) statement that "a household is a little church" and "a church is a large household." [9] And the pastoral epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus, the very books which describe the qualities of an elder/pastor, view the church as the family of God, thus establishing the family structure as the model for church structure: "If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church?" (1 Tim 3:4, 5 RSV; cf. Titus 1:6).

[Ellen White](#) also understood the home as the pattern for the church, with a distinct role assigned to each of the parents. "Some households have a little church in their home. . . . As parents faithfully do their duty in the family, restraining, correcting, advising, counseling, guiding, the father as a priest of the household, the mother as a home missionary, *they are filling the sphere God would have*

*them fill.* By faithfully doing their duty in the home, they are multiplying agencies for doing good outside the home. They are becoming better fitted to labor in the church. By training their little flock discreetly, binding their children to themselves and to God, fathers and mothers become laborers together with God" ([Ellen G. White, \*Lift Him Up\*](#) , p. 253, emphasis added).

The description of the church as "the household of God" (1 Tim 3:15; Eph 2:19) and the patterning of church authority after the headship arrangement in the home reveal the high estimation God places on the home family. "In the home the foundation is laid for the prosperity of the church. The influences that rule in the home life are carried into the church life; therefore, church duties should first begin in the home" ([Ellen G. White, \*My Life Today\*](#) , p. 284). "Every family in the home life should be a church, a beautiful symbol of the church of God in heaven" ( [Child Guidance](#) , p. 480).

Not only is the pattern of authority in the church patterned after the home, but the home government is patterned after the church. [Ellen G. White](#) wrote, "The rules and regulations of the home life must be in strict accordance with a 'Thus saith the Lord.' The rules God has given for the government of His church are the rules parents are to follow in the church in the home. It is God's design that there shall be perfect order in the families on earth, preparatory to their union with the family in heaven. Upon the discipline and training received in the home depends the usefulness of men and women in the church and in the world" ( [The Signs of the Times, Sept. 25, 1901](#) ).

Is it possible that those who attempt to drive a wedge between the patterns of authority in the church and in the home are betraying a contempt for or disillusionment with the family institution? Or is it rather a failure to have a biblical understanding of the true nature of male headship and the complementary female supportive role?

***The Nature of Headship Authority.*** Paul's statement that "the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3) is probably the clearest statement presenting Jesus Christ as the model for the headship principle. The Bible teaches that whereas Jesus was equal with God (i.e., He was truly God even when He became Man, and therefore had the same mind or purpose as the Father [Jn 1:1; 5:18]), in Their different roles in the salvation of humanity the Son subordinated Himself to the Father (Phil 2:5-8; Jn 5:19; 6:57; 14:28, 31). Thus, when the apostle links his statement that "the head of the woman is the man" with "the head of Christ is God," Paul wants us to understand that although man and woman are equal in essence and being, they have different roles in relation to each other, the man exercising a headship function, and the woman a supporting role. The roles are different but complementary. "In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman" (1 Cor 11:11).

The headship role to which men are called is not "domination" or "control." This follows from the fact that God, in being "the head of Christ" (1 Cor

11:3), does not dominate Christ; neither does Christ, as "the head of the church" (Eph 5:23), dominate the church. "The Lord has constituted the husband the head of the wife to be her protector; he is the house-band of the family, binding the members together, even as Christ is the head of the church and the Saviour of the mystical body. Let every husband who claims to love God carefully study the requirements of God in his position. Christ's authority is exercised in wisdom, in all kindness and gentleness; so let the husband exercise his power and imitate the great Head of the church" ( [The Adventist Home](#) , p. 215).

True headship leadership, to which men have been called (as husbands in the home and as elders and pastors in the church) is not a self-aggrandizing domination but a servant-leadership *which protects the church and empowers its members for service* (Luke 9:1; 1 Cor 4:19-21; 2 Cor 10:8; 13:10; Philemon 8-10). This is what elders and pastors are called upon to do when they are described as they who "rule well" (1 Tim 5:17; 3:5); the same is expected of husbands as heads of their wives (Eph 5:25-26).

**Conclusion.** The headship principle that was established at creation is valid today for the government of both the home family and the church family. Every Christian family is not only a little church but is also a "model of the heavenly family" ( [Child Guidance](#) , p. 549) which will soon be united with the church on earth (Eph 1:9, 10). To ascribe the headship principle to the marriage setting but not to the church situation, as some proponents of women's ordination do, is arbitrary and not supported by Scripture.

In order for the church to ordain women as elders or pastors, it will have to provide a biblical justification for limiting the application of texts that prohibit women from exercising authority over men (1 Tim 2:11-14; 1 Cor 14:33-36) to only the home setting and not to the church as well. We will explore this concern by *searching the Scriptures* in more detail in the next chapter.

## NOTES

[1] Those desiring to pursue this subject in greater exegetical and theological detail will greatly benefit from John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991). Detailed in scope but written for the informed church member, this volume by 22 scholars of different professional backgrounds deals with all the main passages of Scripture used by "evangelical feminists" (those feminists who, unlike "liberal" or "radical" feminists, believe in the Bible and the essential doctrines of the Christian faith). Its exposition of some of the strengths and major weaknesses in the arguments for ordaining women has enriched the study presented here.

[2] Some people try to dismiss the "creation order" principle by claiming that such reasoning would place animals in headship over both men and women, since the animals were created first. Their dispute, clearly, is against the Bible, because Paul cited the creation order as the basis for his counsel (1 Tim 2:13). But the argument also fails to recognize the "firstborn" element in the issue. "When the Hebrews gave a special responsibility to the



## Page 54

'firstborn,' it never entered their minds that this responsibility would be nullified if the father happened to own cattle before he had sons. In other words, when Moses wrote Genesis, he knew that the first readers would not lump animals and humans together as equal candidates for the responsibilities of the 'firstborn.'" See Question #39 of John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 81.

[3] Over the centuries, some scholars have justified the headship principle with arguments which mistakenly assign superiority to the man and inferiority to the woman. Richard Davidson summarized these arguments: "(a) man is created first and woman last ([Gen] 2:7, 22), *and the first is superior and the last is subordinate or inferior*; (b) woman is formed *for the sake of man*--to be his 'helpmate' or assistant to cure man's loneliness (vss. 18-20); (c) woman comes out of man (vss. 21-22), *which implies a derivative and subordinate position*; (d) woman is created from man's rib (vss. 21-22), *which indicates her dependence upon him for life*; and (e) the man names the woman (v. 23), *which indicates his power and authority over her*" (Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26/1 [1988]:14, emphasis added).

From our earlier discussion in chapter III (under the subheadings "Equality of Women and Men" and "Biblical Headship"), perceptive readers will recognize that our position on the headship principle is *not* the same as these summarized views. Against these mistaken scholarly views, and in agreement with Davidson, we maintain that Genesis 1-2 teaches an ontological equality between the sexes; consequently, no inferiority or superiority exists within the complementary relationship of man and woman. However, we differ with the assertion that the headship principle is *post-fall* rather than *pre-fall* (see part II of his article, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26/2 [1988]:121-131). The four evidences given above trace headship to the time before the fall.

[4] The perfect harmony that existed in Eden before the fall may perhaps be likened to the harmony in heaven before the fall of Satan, when "So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. . . . And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies" ( [\*Patriarchs and Prophets\*](#) , p. 35). Though God's law governed everyone, "When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of" ( [\*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing\*](#) , p. 109). The angels responded freely and spontaneously to God. They seem to have been almost unconscious of a "law" to obey God or to worship Christ. These things were their delight. (See [\*Patriarchs and Prophets\*](#) , pp. 35-37.)

[5] It is instructive to note that the "curse" on Adam was no different from the "curse" on Eve, as far as role assignments were concerned. Before the fall, God "took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen 2:15 NIV), a headship

assignment that was, no doubt, a joy. After the fall, however, the exercise of Adam's headship role as provider and protector of the family was to be carried out with toil, pain and sweat (Gen 3:17-19). The divine judgment on our first parents (the so-called "curses") recognized that it was not going to be easy to fulfil the original headship arrangement which assigned different roles to man and woman for their mutual blessing. Christ's redemptive work did not remove these gender-based roles. Yet through a faith relationship with Him, Christians can experience the joy and harmony that results when regenerate men and women seek to live in harmony with God's creation ordinance.

### ***Page 55***

[6] In the Bible, although the father assumed ultimate responsibility for teaching in the household family, the mother also played a significant role in teaching, instructing and exhorting the family (see Prov 1:8; 6:20; 31:26). Thus, while the man filled the headship role, the ministry of both the man and woman were necessary in the home. This illustrates the biblical understanding of man and woman as complementary to one another.

The analogy of the home may help us understand how to deal with unusual church situations, such as when there are no qualified men to provide leadership. A widowed or divorced woman may have to earn the living, discipline the children, and get the lawn mower fixed--responsibilities her husband had largely carried. But in doing these things she does not become a man or start to call herself a husband. Furthermore, her singleness may be only temporary until she has another husband to fulfill some of those roles. Likewise, women in unusual church situations may have to provide leadership for a time, but this does not require that they be ordained as elders or pastors (cf. [note 7](#) below).

[7] Despite the fact that women have a major part to act (see [note 6](#) above, and also 2 Tim 1:5), these texts illustrate the responsibility God has placed on fathers for the rearing of their children, a responsibility too widely ignored in today's world, even within the church. The example of Barak in the Old Testament shows how men in leadership often default in their leadership responsibility (Judges 4). When such situations arise, there is a need for God-fearing Deborahs (see chapter 3, note 1).

The unique leadership of Deborah as prophet and judge in Israel is probably the best model of how women can exercise their leadership gifts in the absence of capable men (Judges 4:4ff.). But note that whereas other judges led Israel into victory in battle, God told Deborah that Barak was to do this (vv. 6-7). Apparently, she was the only judge in the book of Judges who had no military function. She does not assert leadership for herself, but she gives priority to a man--even though the man was reluctant to go to battle without her (v. 8). The failure of Barak to exercise his leadership is rebuked when he is told that the glory that day would go to a woman--not Deborah, but Jael (vv. 9, 17-25.). Thomas R. Schreiner therefore concludes that Deborah's "attitude and demeanor were such that she was not asserting her leadership. Instead, she handed over the leadership, contrary to the pattern of all the judges, to a man" (Schreiner, "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament

Examples and Teaching," in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 216).

[8] See V. . Poythress, "The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pp. 233-236, for the various expressions used in the Bible to refer to the church as God's family.

[9] Chrysostom, *Homily XX on Ephesians*, cited by Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1980), p. 134.

# Chapter 6 – Biblical Obstacles to Women's Ordination

Our discussion thus far leads us to the conclusion that the Bible's teaching on headship is still valid today--even as it has always been since creation. This understanding adequately explains the absence of biblical *precedent* for ordaining women, not only as priests in the Old Testament but also as apostles and elders/pastors in the New Testament. To show that the headship principle, not an accommodation to culture, is also the basis for the specific *prohibitions* against women having "authority over men" (1 Tim 2:11ff.; 3:2; Titus 1:6; 1 Cor 14:34-35) calls for further *searching the Scriptures*. In this chapter, we will examine certain issues which raise biblical obstacles to women's ordination. Does the Bible include gender among the qualifications for the leader of the worshipping community? What are the key Bible texts which bear on this question, and what do they mean? When these issues are clear, two other questions which are often asked will need addressing: Was the Bible's instruction on this theme shaped by the culture of those times (and therefore not applicable outside of that culture)? and Is the Bible silent on the question of ordination for women?

## Qualification for the Office of Apostle or Elder/Pastor

The New Testament teaches that the offices of both apostle and elder/pastor should be filled not just by human beings of either gender but by *males*. In discussing the qualities for apostles and elders/pastors, the New Testament writers made clear that such an office holder should be a man, not a woman. If they had believed that any person could qualify, irrespective of gender, they would have used the generic term *anthropos*, a word which refers to human beings, male or female, without regard to gender. Instead, they employed the specific term *aner/andros*, a word that means a male person in distinction from a woman (see Acts 8:12; 1 Tim 2:12), a person capable of being called a husband (see Matt 1:16; John 4:16; Rom 7:2; Titus 1:6).

***Replacement of One of the Twelve.*** The book of Acts records that shortly before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the 120 male and female disciples who were gathered in the upper room sought guidance to find a replacement

### ***Page 57***

for Judas. Significantly, they first sought biblical guidance on whether to fill the vacancy (Acts 1:14-20). Both the 120 and Luke, the writer of Acts, understood the apostleship as an oversight office; the Greek term used in Acts 1:20, translated "bishoprick" (KJV), "office" (RSV) and "leader" (NIV), is *episkopos*, the very word Paul used to describe the office of elder/pastor (1 Tim 3:1, 2; Acts 20:28; cf. Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Pet 5:1-3

for the corresponding term *presbuteros*). Notice the qualifications in choosing Matthias as an apostle in place of Judas:

"Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." . . . [After proposing Barsabbas and Matthias, the 120 prayed,] "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs" (Acts 1:21-25 NIV).

Why did the 120 men and women in the upper room appoint two men, and no women, as candidates from which to select an apostle to be added to the eleven? Were there no qualified women "who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us"? Was there no woman with a "heart" acceptable enough to God "to take over this apostolic ministry"? This is not likely. Obviously, there were capable women among the 120 disciples, since all of them--male and female--were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The absence of a woman candidate is not happenstance, either, according to the text. The reason why women were excluded as candidates for the apostleship, even though some of them undoubtedly met most of the requirements set forth in verses 21-22, is clearly given in verse 21: "It is necessary to choose one of the *men* [*andron*, from *aner*] who have been with us." On the basis of Scripture, the 120 male and female disciples of Christ (including Mary, the mother of Jesus) understood that the oversight (*episkopos*, v. 20) function of apostleship may only be exercised by a male (*aner*), not a female. This decision by the 120 conformed to the pre-fall headship principle, which ascribed the leadership role to men. It was also in harmony with the example of Jesus Christ who, after a long night of prayer, chose twelve male apostles (Luke 6:12-16). The disciples in the upper room were "with one accord" (Acts 1:14; 2:1) in their choice of a *male* replacement, and the risen Christ rewarded their unity and faithfulness to Scripture by pouring out His Spirit upon them at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

***Choosing an Elder/Pastor.*** In the action of the 120 disciples in choosing a replacement apostle, we find a prescription for Spirit-empowered ministry: unity,

### ***Page 58***

prayer, and fidelity to Scriptural guidelines. This last point was reiterated when the apostle Paul instructed that an elder must fulfill certain qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-6; Titus 1:5-9). Among these, an elder/bishop "must be . . . the husband (*aner/andros*) of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). [1] In other words, the elder or pastor should be a man, not a woman. An additional point underscores this: the elder should be able to exercise spiritual leadership in his home. He is one who "must manage his own family well" (1 Tim 3:4, 5 NIV; Titus 1:6). [2]

When this qualification for the office of elder or pastor is understood in light of the pre-fall headship principle, and when we take into account the examples of Jesus Himself in ordaining the twelve apostles as well as that of the 120 in commissioning Matthias as an apostle in place of Judas, it is clear that Paul's prescription that an elder be a male (*aner*) is not arbitrary. Until it can be shown that the qualification for an elder to be the "husband of one wife" is no longer valid, women should not be ordained as elders or pastors of the church. Showing that this qualification is no longer valid will not be easy for advocates of women's ordination in light of two additional statements by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11ff. and 1 Corinthians 14:34. To these crucial Bible texts, we now turn our attention.

### **Crucial Bible Texts: 1 Tim 2:11-14; 1 Cor 14:34-35**

The key texts linking the headship principle with the teaching authority of elders and pastors are 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Are these texts culturally conditioned to Paul's time and place (the local situation in Ephesus and Corinth), as some proponents of women's ordination suggest?

*1 Timothy 2:11-14.* Central to the debate on women's ordination is 1 Timothy 2:11-14:

[3]

As we have shown in chapter 3, the issue here is not muzzling women into silence. Still, because Paul does place some restriction on women in this passage, radical proponents of women's ordination argue that Paul could not have written such a text because it allegedly contradicts his statement in Galatians 3:28, [4] or that if he did write the text it was his own private opinion. Bible-believing Adventists reject these liberal interpretations, asserting that Paul's statement "I suffer not . . ." does not express mere private opinion but rather a divinely inspired judgment (cf. Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 7:25).

Our concern, however, will be whether 1 Timothy 2:11-14 has permanent validity for the leadership of the Christian church. "Moderate" or "progres-

### ***Page 59***

sive" proponents of women's ordination suggest either (1) that Paul's statement is culturally conditioned to his time and place, or (2) that if it is still valid today, it only applies to the relationship between husband and wife, not to the male-female relationship in the church. Both of these objections fail to account for what the text actually says.

First, Paul did not give cultural or sociological factors in Ephesus or in the New Testament times as the reason he prohibited women from exercising the role of authoritative teaching. Scholars have ventured myriads of contradictory guesses of "the real reason" behind Paul's statement. [5] Interesting though some of them are, these guesses reflect the reluctance of scholars to accept the explicit reason Paul himself gave in the text. Whatever the cultural or sociological situation may have been in Ephesus--

Gnosticism, witchcraft, worship of the mother-goddess Diana (Artemis), mysticism, feminism, etc. [6]--the apostle Paul employed a *theological* reason to address the specific problem that occasioned his statement. His stated reason was, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." Paul pointed back to the pre-fall creation ordinance of headship, reiterated after the fall. By appealing to the divine arrangement from creation as the reason why the woman is not to have authority over the man, the apostle dispelled any suggestion that his instruction in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 was culturally conditioned or time-bound. (See "The Headship Principle" in chapter 5 above.)

The second argument favored by "moderate" proponents of women's ordination, that the prohibition applies only to marriage and not to the church setting, overlooks the passage's context which deals not only with the relationship of men and women in the home but also includes *the church*. Paul stated his purpose in writing the epistle: "I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim 3:14-15 NIV, emphasis added; cf. 1 Cor 11:3-16). Significantly, the context of 1 Timothy 2:11-14 is *not* a discussion about husbands and wives but about men (Greek *aner*) and women (Greek *gune*), whether married or not. [7] The immediate context for the passage is found in verses 8-10, which give instructions on Christian dress and adornment. In order to deny that verses 11-15 apply to church life, one must limit the instructions on dress and adornment to apply only to the home setting, a view no Bible-believing Seventh-day Adventist will support. Moreover, the passage immediately following verses 11-15 (1 Timothy 3:1-7, describing the qualities of an elder/pastor) clearly shows that Paul was addressing the church context. Thus, the larger context not only establishes the headship principle but also applies it to the church setting (3:14, 15)--not just to the local church at Ephesus, but to the Christian church at large. [8]

Paul grounds his restriction on women in Scripture itself, showing by example that theological issues must be settled by the written Word of God, the Christian's ultimate source of authority. It is also significant that Paul gave

### ***Page 60***

this command in the context of church matters, indicating that his prohibition of women to "teach and have authority over men" goes beyond the home.

In order for the church to endorse women's ordination to the gospel ministry, proponents will need to show *from Scripture* that Paul was mistaken in his teaching that male headship/leadership was established at creation and reiterated after the fall (1 Tim 2:11ff.). They will also have to justify *from the Bible* the basis for limiting the headship principle only to the home or marriage setting when the context does not do so.

***1 Corinthians 14:34-35.*** Another key text in the debate over women's ordination is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35:

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 any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. [9]

As noted earlier, Paul's command that women "keep silence" in the church does not mean that women cannot pray, prophesy, preach, evangelize or teach in the church. For in the *same letter* to the Corinthians in which Paul tells women to keep silence, he also indicates that women may pray and prophesy, provided they are dressed appropriately (1 Cor 11:2-16). Also, the instruction that women should "keep silence in the churches," just like the command in the *same chapter* that tongue speakers with no interpreter present should "keep silence in the church" (1 Cor 14:28), suggests that Paul wanted women to exercise their gift to "speak," but within certain appropriate guidelines.

Our concern in this passage is, therefore, whether 1 Corinthians 14:34 has permanent validity for the leadership of the Christian church. Just as they do 1 Timothy 2:11-14, "moderate" or "progressive" proponents of women's ordination want to consign 1 Corinthians 14:34 to the culture and times of Paul. They interpret "the law" in this passage as a reference to "a Jewish custom."

Two brief responses will be given. First, if "the law" refers to "a Jewish custom," how could such a custom apply to the *Corinthian* church, which no doubt had Gentile converts? How could such a "Jewish" command be binding "in the churches," including the non-Jewish churches? Similar questions will still be raised if one argues that "the law" is a "Corinthian civil law," for how could a civil law in Corinth be binding on non-Corinthian Christians "in all the churches"? [10] Would it not be more consistent biblically to understand "the law" as a reference to the divine arrangement of role differentiation established at creation (see 1 Cor 11:3, 8-9; 1 Tim 2:13)? In fact, in an earlier verse (1 Cor 14:21) Paul uses "the law" to mean the Old Testament Scriptures, suggesting that when he sees "the law" in verse 34, he has in mind the pre-fall headship principle recorded in the Old Testament (Gen 2:20b-24). This principle or "law" the apostle now applies to women (including married women [v. 35]) "in the churches."

## ***Page 61***

Second, in Paul's prohibiting women to speak, the key phrase "but they are commanded to be under obedience" indicates that the kind of speaking Paul ruled out is one which involved not being "under obedience," that is, one which constituted an exercise of authority inappropriate to them as women or wives. Thus, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, like 1 Timothy 2:11-14, prohibits women from exercising the authoritative teaching function entrusted to leaders of the worshipping community. This explains why Paul restricts the teaching and leadership role of elder or pastor to males (*aner*, 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6).

Significantly, Paul supports his restriction on women on the basis of Scripture ("the law," 1 Cor 14:34; cf. 14:21) and not on socio-cultural barriers; this is in harmony with the view that the Bible must always remain the ultimate authority on issues of faith and



practice. It is also worth noting that the command was given to govern the conduct of women, whether at church or at home (1 Cor 14:33-37). Paul saw a connection between the pattern of authority in the church and in the home.

In order for the church to approve ordaining women as elders or pastors, proponents must show that Paul's prohibition (in 1 Cor 14:34-35) of women exercising the authoritative teaching function is not grounded theologically on God's divine arrangement, but rather on a socio-cultural basis.

**Conclusion.** As we have seen, these two texts have permanent validity because the headship principle which they teach is established on the creation arrangement. Consequently, the principle is valid today for both the home and church families.

This discussion of the key scriptural passages governing the male-female relationship has pointed out some major biblical and theological obstacles to ordaining women as elders and pastors. Besides the absence of biblical *precedent* for women in headship roles such as priest, apostle, elder, and pastor in the worshiping community of God, specific texts of Scripture seem clearly to *forbid* women "to teach or to have authority over men" (1 Tim 2:11, 12; cf. 1 Cor 14:34) and restrict the offices of elder and pastor to males (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). These prohibitions are not addressed to the specific cultural situations in Ephesus and Corinth, but to the Christian church at large; they should not be explained as "God's adaptation to sinful human conditions," but rather as God's pre-fall creation ordinance for all humanity. [11]

Until it can be shown otherwise, our deliberation on the crucial biblical texts on the relationship of man and woman in both the home and the church settings leads us to conclude with the British evangelical scholar John Stott that "all attempts to get rid of Paul's teaching on headship (on grounds that it is mistaken, confusing, culture-bound or culture specific) must be pronounced unsuccessful. It remains stubbornly there. It is rooted in divine revelation, not human opinion, and in divine creation, not human culture. In essence, therefore, it must be preserved as having permanent and universal authority." [12]

**Page 62**

### **Cultural Accommodation or Biblical Principle?**

Advocates for women's ordination do not accept the permanent validity of the headship principle as the most biblically consistent explanation for the lack of scriptural precedent for ordaining women to certain leadership roles in the church, such as priests in the Old Testament and apostles and elders/pastors in the New Testament. They argue that this lack of biblical precedent should be understood as cultural accommodation to oppressive structures (race, gender, religion, etc.) in existence during the Bible times. Thus, they claim, the failure of Jesus to ordain women as apostles, the New Testament church's failure to ordain women as elders and pastors, and the statements of Paul prohibiting women from "having authority over men" were concessions they had to make to

accommodate the (supposedly) insensitive, male-chauvinistic or anti-women cultural practices of their times so as not to jeopardize their ministries prematurely.

One cannot deny that in New Testament times (just as in our day) there were oppressive structures that often treated women and some races as inferior. For this reason, some try to compare the headship issue to slavery, which was also current in Bible times. But the headship principle is different from slavery in two major ways: (1) the headship principle was a creation ordinance, while slavery was never instituted by God; and (2) as a pre-fall creation ordinance, the headship principle is morally right and therefore morally binding on all God's people, irrespective of the place and time in which they live; but slavery, as a post-fall distortion of God's will for humanity, is morally offensive and cannot be justified under biblical Christianity. [13] (The book of Philemon shows this.)

Despite any existence of oppressive structures in Bible times, the real question is, Can we place the headship principle on a par with racial or gender insensitivity? Did the New Testament writers and Jesus, who accepted this biblical principle of headship, give in to the racial and gender injustice of their day in order not to jeopardize the spread of the gospel?

To argue that in Old Testament times women could not be priests because their culture would not have allowed it fails to recognize that most of Israel's neighbors had both men and women serving as priests in their religions. [14] Thus the culture of Old Testament times would have welcomed women priests in Israel. The reason women in Israel were not ordained as priests was not because of their culture, but rather because Israel understood the pre-fall headship principle that permitted only men to be spiritual leaders within the worshiping community.

Similarly, to argue that women were not ordained as elders and pastors in the New Testament churches because their culture could not have permitted the apostles to do so overlooks the fact that women were active in gospel ministry in the New Testament church--in spite of the "patriarchal culture." We have already noted the significant roles of women such as Mary, Martha,

### ***Page 63***

Joanna, Susanna (Luke 8:2-3; Acts 1:14), Tabitha (Acts 9:36), Lydia, Phoebe, Lois, Eunice, Priscilla, Tryphena, Tryposa, Persis, Euodia, Syntyche, and Junia (Acts 16:14-15; 18:26; 21:8-9; Rom 16:1-4, 6, 7, 12; Phil 4:3). There is no evidence that the religion of the Bible adopted the views of some rabbis who looked down upon women as physically weak, intellectually feeble, and emotionally unstable, as some have claimed. Rather, the New Testament writers express abundant appreciation for the labors and contributions of women such as those named above. Yet these women were not ordained to the roles of apostle, elder or pastor because the New Testament church understood the headship principle that precluded women from exercising the leadership function in the worshiping community. [15]

Furthermore, to suggest that Paul's statements prohibiting women from having "authority over men" (1 Tim 2:12; cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35) were concessions he had to make to accommodate the (supposedly) anti-women cultural practices of his times is to ignore Paul's own clear explanation of his reasons and to charge him with theological inconsistency, if not religious hypocrisy. Since in 1 Tim 2:11ff., the apostle himself gave a *theological* reason as the basis for his prohibition ("For Adam was formed first, then Eve. . ."), those who attempt to explain Paul's statement on the basis of cultural accommodation are in effect saying that Paul misconstrued or misapplied the Old Testament in order to justify his lack of moral courage to stand against unjust cultural norms. How can the apostle Paul, the champion of the "neither male nor female" principle (Gal 3:28), be so characterized by proponents of women's ordination? Only a few verses before the one in question, the apostle himself protests, "For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle (*I am telling the truth, I am not lying*), a teacher of the Gentiles in *faith and truth*" (1 Tim 2:7, emphasis added). Paul's reason for prohibiting headship authority to women was not culture; rather, he understood clearly the permanent validity of the Old Testament principle of headship.

Some argue that Jesus could not ordain women as apostles because the culture of His time would not have permitted Him to do so without prematurely jeopardizing His ministry. Are they, in effect, charging our Lord Jesus Christ with insensitivity or accommodation to the "injustice" women suffered in His day? How could this be, when Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus never yielded to sin (Heb 4:15)? "Sin" surely includes the sin of gender injustice.

While Jesus attempted no political reforms to correct the corrupt and oppressive structures of His day, He was not "indifferent to the woes of men." He understood that the remedy for any form of injustice (race, gender, religious, etc.) "did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men [and women] individually, and must regenerate the heart" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 509). He established the church as a counter society in which freedom and justice would truly reign. If Jesus had considered the restriction of the apostleship to males to be an issue of injustice, He would not have chosen only men. Christ attempted no civil reforms, but He surely did attempt to establish his own church on clearly different principles.

## ***Page 64***

To suggest, as proponents of women's ordination do, that Jesus' choice of male apostles was a mere concession to the "male-dominated" social structure of His time is to misunderstand who Jesus really was and what He stood for. The gospels clearly reveal that Jesus' teaching and actions rebuked the pride that leads men and women to belittle each other because of race, gender, religion, social status, and any other type of class bigotry. Christ was not afraid to break social customs when they conflicted with Scripture. Against custom, he ministered to Gentiles, spoke to a Samaritan woman, and ate with tax collectors and sinners. He condemned the social injustices of His day when He spoke out against divorce and remarriage (Matt 19:8); when He drove from the temple those who were profaning it and exploiting others (John 2:14-17; Matt 21:27); and when

He criticized religious leaders to their faces for their hypocrisy (Matt 23:13ff.). Christ's own life, as well as the thrust of His Sermon on the Mount, reveals that our Lord would not bow to any cultural pressure when moral issues were at stake. He denounced the scribes and Pharisees and all those who accommodate biblical principle to their cultural norms when He demanded, "Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matt 15:3 NIV).

Christ could easily have chosen and ordained six men and their wives as apostles, since the wives of apostles frequently accompanied them (1 Cor 9:5). But He did not. Christ could have chosen and ordained at least one of the women who were actively involved in His ministry, traveling to the places He was teaching and supporting Him and His disciples with their own money (see Luke 8:1-3). But He did not. He could have ordained His own mother, since she already had heaven's certification as "highly favored" (Luke 1:28, 30). But He did not. He could have chosen and ordained Mary, just as He commissioned her to bear witness to His resurrection (Mark 16:9ff.; John 20:11ff.). But He did not. Christ could have ordained the Samaritan woman as an apostle, since she defied several "cultural" stigmas (a woman five times divorced, living unlawfully with a man, and a Samaritan) to become a powerful and successful evangelist (John 4). But He did not. Instead, after spending all night in prayer (Luke 6:12), Christ appointed twelve men as His apostles (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19). Why? Not because He lacked the courage to stand against gender injustice in His culture, and not because women were not capable or qualified, but because Jesus understood the headship principle of Scripture and submitted to its authority.

**Conclusion.** The "cultural argument" is a futile attempt to explain the lack of biblical precedent for ordaining women to headship roles in both the Old and New Testament worshipping communities. [16] The Holy Spirit's role in the inspiration of Scripture ensured that the Bible writers were not prisoners of the oppressive structures of their day (race, gender, religion, etc.). "No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were

### ***Page 65***

carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:20-21 NIV). The Holy Spirit's inspiration was more powerful than cultural force in the writing of the Scriptures. Led by the Spirit, the prophets and apostles as well as Jesus did what was right on this issue. The headship principle is the most biblically consistent explanation for the absence of Bible precedent for ordaining women to leadership roles in the church--as priests in the Old Testament, and as apostles and elders or pastors in the New Testament. And this principle has permanent validity.

### **The Alleged "Silence" of the Bible**

Our discussion in chapters V and VI, highlighting biblical and theological obstacles to women's ordination, should put to rest the argument that the Bible is silent on the question of ordaining women as elders and pastors. As we have shown in this document,

*the Bible is not silent on the issue of women's ordination* to the leadership role of the worshipping community. The lack of Bible precedent, as well as the presence of clear prohibitions in Scripture against the practice, speaks loudly against the so-called argument of silence. The only silence in Scripture on this issue is the same kind of silence awaiting those who search the Bible fruitlessly for a justification for Sunday keeping. Thus, with respect to the attempt to ordain women, just as with the bid to change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, we respond that the testimonies of Scripture indicate that God the Father did not do it; the Old Testament is clear that the patriarchs, prophets and kings never did do it; the gospels reveal that Jesus, the Desire of Ages, would not do it; the epistles and the acts of the apostles declare that the commissioned apostles could not do it; [Ellen White](#), with a prophetic vision of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, dared not do it. [17] Should we who live at the turn of another millennium do it?

The Bible is not silent on the issue of women's ordination. It teaches clearly that men and women have equal standing before God as created beings, as sinners in need of salvation through Christ, and as people called to the same destiny. The Bible is equally emphatic in upholding role differentiations between male and female. Within the complementary relationship of male and female equality, male headship charges the man to be the Christ-like spiritual leader/overseer in both the home and church families, while the corresponding female role calls upon the woman to support/assist him willingly and nobly in his leadership function. This arrangement is *not* an indication of superiority of one over the other. "When God created Eve, he designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal" ([Testimonies for the Church](#) , 3:484).

Any attempt to ignore or even reverse this divine arrangement will ultimately lead to a fate similar to that of our first parents when they yielded to Satan on this same kind of temptation. "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

### ***Page 66***

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 sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them" ([Patriarchs and Prophets](#) , p. 59). This statement does not condemn women's aspirations for self-improvement or a better life. Rather, it calls for all to seek to live according to *God's plan*.

***Conclusion.*** In this chapter and the previous one we have found that the headship principle was not a result of sin, but was instituted at creation, reiterated at the fall, and

can only be truly realized "in the Lord." As a part of the creation order, it is still valid today. The example of Jesus and the apostles and the instruction of Paul show that the principle applies to the church and not just the home. The New Testament consistently indicates that the ones chosen for the leadership role in the church are to be males. The Bible texts from Paul's writings which speak most directly to this issue give a *theological* reason for the restriction, tracing it to Creation and to "the law." The culture of both Old and New Testament times would have accepted female leadership in the church. Neither Paul nor Jesus lacked the courage to stand for the right in this matter; their actions were not cowardly accommodation, but fearless fidelity to God's established order. In light of these things, though the Bible nowhere uses the expression "women's ordination," it is far from silent on the issue, giving clear instructions regarding the leadership of the church.

So wherein does our problem lie? What obstacles do we still have in our way that would prevent us from finding solutions that honor both women in ministry and the instruction of Scripture? Since all problems trace their origin back to when the man and the woman first took the forbidden fruit, perhaps we will find some answers in a "forbidden issue" that involves them both. This will shed some light on *how* some are *searching the Scriptures*.

## NOTES

[1] The word *aner* (translated "man" in the English translations) means a *male* of the human race. Therefore, the Greek phrase, *mias* [of one] *gunaikos* [woman] *andra* [man], literally translates as a "man of one woman," or "one-woman-man," meaning "a male of one woman." When used of the marriage relation it may be translated "husband of one wife" (KJV) or "husband of but one wife" (NIV). Because in this passage the words for "man" and "woman" do not have the definite article, the construction in the Greek emphasizes character or nature. Thus, "one can translate, 'one-wife sort of a husband,' or 'a one-woman sort of a man.' . . . Since character is emphasized by the Greek construction, the bishop should be a man who loves only one woman as his wife." (See Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1952], p. 53.) Also, because the word "one" (*mias*) is positioned at the

### *Page 67*

beginning of the phrase in the Greek, it appears to emphasize this *monogamous* relationship. Thus, the phrase "hsband of one wife," is calling for *monogamous fidelity*--that is to say, an elder must be "faithful to his one wife" (NEB). For an excellent summary of the various interpretations of this text, see Ronald A. G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible with Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Missiology* (D.Min. project dissertation, Andrews University, 1993), pp. 266-277. Some have questioned whether Paul's instruction requires that the elder or pastor be married. While most likely the congregational leaders were married, two lines of scriptural evidence suggest that marriage was not an inflexible requirement. First, the apostle Paul himself seems not to have been married during his ministry (see 1 Cor 7:7-8). Second, he recommends the unmarried state to those who can accept it, so that they may be "anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord" (v. 32; see vv. 25-35). These considerations lend

support to the idea that we may understand 1 Timothy 3:2 as referring to a "one-woman kind of man," one who, if married, is faithful to his one wife.

[2] The effort by some to see the "aged women" (*presbutidas*) of Titus 2:3 as referring to women elders is misdirected for two reasons. First, the usual word for elder is *presbuteros* (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22ff.; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1, 5); the word refers to older men but also to those holding the office of elder. If Paul had intended to speak of "women elders" he could easily have used the corresponding feminine form, *presbutera*, though no office of "woman elder" is attested. Second, the context of Titus 2 makes it clear that Paul is not addressing those holding the office of elder but rather the different groups of people in the church: "aged men" (v. 2, *presbutas*, plural from *presbutes*, not from *presbuteros*), "aged women" (v. 3), "young women" (v. 4-5), "young men" (v. 6) and "servants" (v. 9). Having addressed "aged men" in verse 2 (cf. Luke 1:18; Philemon 9), Paul employs a related word, *presbutidas*, in verse 3 for "aged women," making it clear that he was speaking about older women and not "women elders." Hence the reinterpretation is invalid. The only kind of elder the apostle Paul recognized is the person who, among other things, is the "husband of one wife" (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:2). The idea of a "woman elder" is thus an oxymoron.

[3] On the different methods of interpretation applied to this passage and their implications for Seventh-day Adventists, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "Biblical Authority and Feminist Interpretation," *Adventists Affirm* 3/2 (Fall 1989): 12-23.

[4] See the discussion of Galatians 3:28 in chapter V under the heading "Realized 'in the Lord'" (p. 48).

[5] Even though the epistle to Timothy informs us of false teaching in the church of Ephesus, Paul did not give much detail regarding the specific nature of the false teaching. Some were engaged in speculative theologies based on "myths and interminable genealogies" and were creating confusion (1 Tim 1:3-7; 6:3-5; cf. 2 Tim 2:14, 16-17, 23-24; Titus 1:10; 3:9-11); other false teachers were stressing asceticism--e.g., abstinence from certain foods, marriage, etc. (1 Tim 4:1-3, 8); some convinced women to follow them in their false doctrines (1 Tim 5:15; 2 Tim 3:6-7), including usurping the role of men (1 Tim 2:11ff.). Beyond this general picture of the false doctrines being spread in the church, scholars have attempted to reconstruct what they think occasioned Paul's writing. Christians should be cautious about accepting any of these hypotheses, however enlightening they may appear to be. In the text under consideration, the apostle Paul stated clearly his reason for prohibiting women from having authority over men (see 1 Tim 2:13, 14).

[6] For a recent attempt to establish the setting of 1 Timothy 2:11ff., see Sharon Marie Hodgkin Gritz, *A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986).

**Page 68**

[7] The Greek words used, *aner* and *gune*, refer to men and women respectively. When used of the marriage relation, they may be translated as "husband" and "wife" (cf. 1 Pet 3:5, 6 and Eph 5:22-24). The context of 1 Timothy 2:11ff. is the church, suggesting that Paul was not just speaking to husbands and wives within the marriage institution but to men and women in the church, whether married or not (see a parallel instance in 1 Cor 14:34-35).

[8] Clearly the instructions given in 1 Timothy are not meant merely for the local church in Ephesus but for the whole Christian church. The nature of subjects discussed in the book demonstrates this. From the first chapter to the last, Paul covers themes such as the proper use of the law in character development, the work of Christ (chapter 1), prayers for rulers and worship procedures for men and women (chapter 2), qualifications of church leaders and practical suggestions for ministry (chapters 3 and 4), and how Timothy, and hence all leaders, should relate to old and young members, widows, elected elders, false teachers, and worldly riches (chapters 5 and 6). In light of these things, it is illegitimate to confine 1 Timothy to the local situation of Ephesus, and hence, to argue that the prohibition in 2:11ff. is of temporary or local application.

[9] For a critique of the many interpretations of this text, see D. A. Carson, "'Silent in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pp. 140-153.

[10] See 1 Corinthians 14:33b, which most translations connect to v. 34.

[11] We therefore reject the suggestion that in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, God was adapting to sinful human conditions, specifically the cultural situation at Corinth and Ephesus (e.g., see Andrew Bates [pseudonym], "The Jerusalem Council: A Model for Utrecht?" *Ministry*, April 1995, p. 22).

[12] John Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Revell, 1990), pp. 269-270.

[13] For more on this, see Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "Saved by Grace and Living by Race: The Religion Called Racism," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/2 (Autumn 1994):37-78.

[14] Some have also argued that the reason why Israelite women were prohibited from serving as priests was that God did not want them to engage in the kind of immorality that the pagan priestesses engaged in. Besides lacking any basis in Scripture, such an argument implies that women are more prone to sexual immorality than men--a sexist argument that is yet to be proven.

[15] In an effort to show that women may exercise headship/leadership in the church, some who favor women's ordination have suggested that when Paul commends Phoebe in Romans 16:2 as "a servant of the church" and as "a succourer [*prostatis*] of many, and of



myself also," the Greek term *prostatis* (translated "succourer" [KJV], "help" or "helper" [RSV, NASB, NIV]) should be rendered "leader." Translated in this way, Paul is made to say that Phoebe was "a leader [*prostatis*] of many, and of myself also" (Rom 16:2b). Two brief responses should be made. First, while the related masculine noun *prostates* may mean "leader" in some later Christian literature, the feminine noun used here (*prostatis*) is never attested with the meaning "leader" but is defined as "protectress, patroness, helper" (see Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], p. 718. But a more important consideration is the context. Translating *prostatis* as "leader" makes Paul say that Phoebe was "a leader. . . of myself also." The suggestion that Phoebe held a position of authority over Paul is highly unlikely, given Paul's insistence that with the exception of Christ, no other person (not even the Jerusalem apostles) had authority over him (Gal 1:6-

### ***Page 69***

9, 11; 2 Thess 3:14; 1 Cor 14:37-38). Also, this same Paul prohibits a woman to have "authority over men" (1 Tim 2:11ff.). Thus, *prostatis* can only be translated legitimately as "helper" (not "leader") in Romans 16:2. The reason why Paul urges the church to "help [*paristemi*] Phoebe" was because, as "a servant [*diakonos*] of the church," she has been such a help [*prostatis*] to others and to me" (Rom 16:1, 2, NIV). See chapter 3, note 2 above for a discussion of the term *diakonos*.

[16] Some have also claimed that the headship principle is no different from God's alleged accommodation or concession, in Old Testament times, to sinful human conditions such as polygamy, and divorce and remarriage. Two brief responses are in order. First, the pre-fall creation ordinance of headship that was instituted to govern the male-female relationship should not be equated with a post-fall distortion of the marriage institution (polygamy, and divorce and remarriage); the former is morally right, the latter are not. Second, the fact that God gave people freedom to choose and live in sin should not be interpreted as God's toleration of these sinful practices. Bible students will benefit from the following two works which challenge these "accommodation" hypotheses: Ronald A. G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible with Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Missiology* (D. Min. project dissertation, Andrews University, 1993); J. Carl Laney, "Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and the Issue of Divorce," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (Jan-Mar 1992):3-15. Both works offer biblical evidence showing that God at no time tolerated polygamy, divorce and remarriage.

[17] For a detailed discussion of what [Ellen G. White](#) taught regarding the ministry of women in the church, see William Fagal, "Ellen White and the Role of Women in the Church," a document that also discusses the statements of [Ellen White](#) regarding the ordination of women. Copies are available from the [Ellen G. White Estate](#) at a cost of \$1.20 [US Dollars], which includes postage in the U.S.A.

# Chapter 7 – A Forbidden Issue: Restless Eves or Reckless Adams?

We cannot conclude our investigation of *searching the Scriptures* without dealing briefly with a touchy issue which often makes any discussion on women's ordination an explosive encounter. I will refer to it as the "forbidden" subject of "restless Eves" and "reckless Adams." Some would call it female- and male-chauvinism. Both of these attitudes permeate much of contemporary society, and both tend to muffle Scripture's testimony of the complementary relationship between women and men.

How has the spirit of "restless modern Eves" influenced attitudes toward Scripture? To what extent is this restlessness a response to reckless modern *Adams*? In this setting, how has "culture" set up barriers to prevent women from giving full expression to their ministry? How can we recapture the "true womanly dignity and nobility of character" that has been sacrificed as restless Eves have "left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them" ( [Patriarchs and Prophets](#) , p. 59)?

## **The Spirit of Restless Eves**

Ellen White was well aware of the feminist movement of her day when she wrote concerning the attempt to ignore or even reverse God's divine arrangement on headship: "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" ( [Patriarchs and Prophets](#) , p. 59).

Restless modern Eves reason that the role differentiation God established to govern the complementary relationship of male and female equality makes men superior and women inferior. Believing themselves deprived of their true womanly dignity, some modern Eves seek "self-fulfillment," "equality," and "human justice" by trying to be like men or by aspiring for roles that are assigned to men. In order to be free from the supposed "second-class" status resulting from gender

## ***Page 71***

role differentiation, some radical feminists have fought against the marriage institution and child-rearing, which they believe confine them to certain roles. Others have taken issue with organized religion, notably Islam and Judeo-Christian religions, whose teachings of male headship they interpret to mean that women are slaves to men through submission and obedience. Regrettably, these worrisome aspects feminism are slowly migrating into Christianity.

Feminists within Christianity who may not go this far in their war against marriage and organized religion still do make the effort to re-define God along gender-neutral lines. They want to get rid of the alleged offensive (i.e., "sexist," "male-oriented" or "patriarchal") language in the Bible and replace it with a gender-inclusive terms which blur the male-female distinction. Accordingly, "Son of God" becomes "Child of God;" "Son of Man" becomes "Human One;" "heavenly Father" becomes "heavenly Parent;" and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is transformed into a goddess named Sophia. [1] To declare gender distinctions as obsolete, restless Eves adopt an attitude which denies the full inspiration of the Bible and which utilizes higher critical methods of its interpretation. [2]

To them, the Bible is the product of a patriarchal, male-dominated (androcentric) culture. Maintaining that some parts of the inspired Scriptures are prejudiced against women's rights and aspirations, they hold that Paul's prohibition of a woman "to have authority over a man" (1 Tim 2:12; cf. 1 Cor 11:3, 8, 11; 14:34) and his statement that an overseer/elder be "husband [*aner*] of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) are "culturally conditioned." By pitting Paul's "neither male nor female" principle (Gal 3:28) against his headship principle, they seem to suggest that there are degrees of inspiration in the Bible--the less inspired parts being tainted with human errors and contradictions. Thus they consider any passage of Scripture that does not uphold the principle of "equality"--redefined to mean the absence of role differentiation within the complementary partnership of male and female relationship--as sexist and biased, and therefore not inspired.

[Ellen White](#) warned against this spirit: "There are some that may think they are fully capable with their finite judgment to take the Word of God, and to state what are the words of inspiration, and what are not the words of inspiration. I want to warn you off that ground, my brethren in the ministry. 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' There is no finite man that lives, I care not who he is or whatever is his position, that God has authorized to pick and choose in His Word. . . . I would have both my arms taken off at my shoulders before I would ever make the statement or set my judgment upon the Word of God as to what is inspired and what is not inspired" ([Ellen G. White comments, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary](#) , 7:919).

Regrettably, in their effort to "deculturize" the Bible, Christians influenced by the "restless modern" spirit approach the Bible with suspicion and skepticism rather than with an attitude of trust and submission to Scripture's

## ***Page 72***

claims. To such, "The Bible is as a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that bring misunderstanding and confusion. The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's Word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives" ( [The Acts of the Apostles](#) , p. 474). Recognizing the dangers

involved, [Ellen White](#) urged believers, "Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost" ( [Selected Messages](#) , 1:18).

Since the Bible in its entirety is the inspired Word of God, we cannot pick and choose--cafeteria style--from Scripture the teachings we find palatable to our tastes. "Do not let any living man come to you and begin to dissect God's Word, telling what is revelation, what is inspiration and what is not, without a rebuke. . . . We call on you to take your Bible, but do not put a sacrilegious hand upon it, and say, 'That is not inspired,' simply because somebody else has said so. Not a jot or tittle is ever to be taken from that Word. Hands off, brethren! Do not touch the ark. . . . When men begin to meddle with God's Word, I want to tell them to take their hands off, for they do not know what they are doing" ( [Ellen G. White comments, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary](#) ,7:919-920).

God speaks to all students of the Bible when He says: "This is the one I esteem: *he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word*" (Isa 66:2 NIV). As we approach Scripture, we must not come with the spirit that possesses restless Eves, that is, the attitude that seeks to correct the alleged mistakes or biases of the Bible writers. Rather, we must be willing to learn from the Spirit of Christ, the One who inspired the Scriptures: "In the presence of such a Teacher [Jesus], of such opportunity for divine education, what worse than folly is it to seek an education apart from Him--to seek to be wise apart from Wisdom; to be true while rejecting Truth; to seek illumination apart from the Light, and existence without the Life; to turn from the Fountain of living waters, and hew out broken cisterns, that can hold no water" ( [Education](#) , p. 83).

## **The Attitude of Reckless Adams**

To a large extent the restlessness of modern Eves results from modern Adams's *recklessness*--a term denoting one who is careless, heedless, irresponsible, rash, foolhardy, imprudent, thoughtless. We cannot therefore discuss how women have aspired to roles for which they have not been fitted without calling attention to how men have been reluctant, if not renegade, in the judicious exercise of their true headship roles.

***Abuse of Headship.*** Reckless Adams have misunderstood the true biblical concept of headship, which is leadership in self-giving service (Mark 10:42-

### ***Page 73***

45; Luke 22:24-27; Jn 13:13-16), [3] misinterpreting it as dominance or control of women. What God originally instituted to be a blessing to humanity has sometimes been transformed into an oppressive structure of abuse and exploitation of women.

[Ellen G. White](#) spoke out strongly against such abuse. "The Lord Jesus has not been correctly represented in His relation to the church by many husbands in their relation to their wives, for they do not keep the way of the Lord. They declare that their wives must

be subject to them in everything. But it was not the design of God that the husband should have control, as head of the house, when he himself does not submit to Christ. He must be under the rule of Christ that he may represent the relation of Christ to the church. If he is a coarse, rough, boisterous, egotistical, harsh, and overbearing man, let him never utter the word that the husband is the head of the wife, and that she must submit to him in everything; for he is not the Lord, he is not the husband in the true significance of the term" ( [The Adventist Home](#) , p. 117).

She prescribed the cure for the attitude of reckless Adams. "Husbands should study the pattern and seek to know what is meant by the symbol presented in Ephesians, the relation Christ sustains to the church. The husband is to be as a Saviour in his family. Will he stand in his noble, God-given manhood, ever seeking to uplift his wife and children? Will he breathe about him a pure, sweet atmosphere?" ( [ibid.](#) )

Unfortunately, history documents how women have often been treated as second-class citizens in a male-dominated world. The Christian church rarely did better in its negative view of women. Some misinterpreted Paul's prohibition of a woman "to have authority over a man . . . For . . . Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Tim 2:12, 14 NIV) as an indication that women are temptresses and seductresses of incantious men. Thus, they have argued, women should be veiled and silenced, performing their God-given roles only in the home. This distorted view of woman's "place" in society fails to recognize that, outside the ordained roles of priest, apostle, elder and minister, women have always had a legitimate place in society and ministry. [4]

***Failure to Measure Up.*** In addition to the abuse of the headship principle, the restlessness of modern Eves may, in some cases, also be traced to the incompetent and mediocre ministries of some who have exercised authority as elders and pastors. How well do reckless modern Adams measure up to their calling? Bible-believing Christians who rightly insist that an elder or pastor should be the "husband [*aner*] of one wife" must also take seriously the other qualifications: "Here is a trustworthy saying: If any one sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and

## ***Page 74***

see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (1 Tim 3:1-7, NIV; cf. Titus 1:5-9).

Measured by these standards, can it be denied that too often modern Adams have been reckless? Is the restlessness of modern Eves an echo to some degree of a crisis of male

leadership? a protest, perhaps, against the abuse and distortion of the headship principle? Is it a commentary on the ineptitude, incompetence, arrogance, laziness, greed, and mediocrity that has plagued some of the ministry? Or might it be an indictment of the poor preaching and teaching of elders and pastors, and perhaps their lack of courage, dedication and spirituality? If so, is there any better time than now to repent, confess, and remedy the abuses, inequities, and failures of men that have given credibility and power to the call for women's ordination?

***Injustice.*** Much of the agitation for women's ordination will be quieted if the men who have been called to leadership roles make a genuine effort to rectify the years of denial of fair wages and other financial security to women who have labored faithfully in ministry. If "the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching," and if "the worker deserves his wages" (1 Tim 5:17, 18 NIV; cf. 1 Cor 9:7-12), what about the faithful women laboring in ministry? [Ellen White](#) used several strong terms to describe the denial of just wages for the labor of women in ministry. She called this "making a difference" (discrimination), "selfishly withholding . . . their due," "exaction," "partiality," "selfishness," and "injustice." She said, "the tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women" ( [Evangelism](#) , pp. 491-493).

Fairness and equity should not depend on ordination. [Ellen White](#) protested the injustice of denying women workers their full due. "Some matters have been presented to me . . . . If the Lord gives the wife [of the minister], as well as the husband, the burden of labor, and if she devotes her time and her strength to visiting from family to family, opening the Scriptures to them, *although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon her*, she is accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry. Should her labors be counted as nought, and her husband's salary be no more than that of the servant of God whose wife does not give herself to the work, but remains at home to care for her family? . . . As the devoted minister and his wife engage in the work, they should be paid wages proportionate to the wages of two distinct workers, that they may have means to use as they shall see fit in the cause of God. The Lord has put His spirit upon them both" ( [Ms. 43a, 1893, published as Manuscript Release #330 in Manuscript Releases](#) 5:323,324, emphasis added).

## ***Page 75***

Discrimination against women has much the same effect as racism, a sinful practice that has "created in its victims a sense of inferiority, defeatism, resentment, and a determination to get even. It has despoiled, beaten, wounded, robbed, bruised and left unconscious people of other races, while those who are in a position to show compassion and bind up the wounds of the victims of racism, like the priest and Levite in Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan, have passed by on the other side. Worse still, racism has murdered many innocent people just because of the shape of their noses, the color of their skins or some other physical features." [5] Practicing oppression based on gender is no less offensive to God than doing so based on skin color or nationality. Taking moral

responsibility for the restlessness of some modern Eves means that we--reckless modern Adams--have to repent and correct the wrong practices that have led to this.

A call to biblical fidelity summons us not only to reject the unbiblical practice of ordaining women as elders or pastors, but also to reaffirm women's legitimate role in ministry within the framework of biblical guidelines. We still have work to do to remove any obstacle that is "liable to discourage our sisters from qualifying themselves for the work they should engage in." Their ministry is important. "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" ( [Evangelism](#) , 492, 493).

## **"Cultural" Barriers to Women's Ministry**

In addition to the abuse of headship and the failure of men to live up to the demands of their calling, certain cultures have also contributed to the restlessness of modern Eves. In speaking of "culture" in this context I do not have in mind a sociological definition, such as a group's identification with certain political structures, be they "patriarchal," "democratic," or "non-democratic" systems. Instead, I am referring to culture in the *theological* sense--understood as a community's fidelity to the truths revealed in Scripture. Thus defined, it is not altogether difficult to explain why some cultures relate to the women's ordination issue in particular ways. [6]

There are "cultures" (churches, conferences, unions, divisions) in which the biblical meaning of "ministry" as any service rendered by a person to advance the work of God [7] is restricted largely to the *pastoral* ministry. Where such a view of ministry prevails it is not uncommon to find another deviation from the biblical understanding of ministry: rather than perceiving ministry as a servant-leadership role that empowers and nurtures church members (1 Cor 4:1; 1 Thess 2:7), these cultures will tend to view ministry in terms of power, status and privileges to be enjoyed (1 Pet 5:1-3). Accordingly, church members are led to believe that the only way a person can do the work of ministry is to be an elder or pastor. Besides, any biblical restriction regarding who can

### ***Page 76***

fulfill these roles (e.g., the headship principle) is interpreted to mean a limitation or control of a person's desire to work in the ministry, if not a denial of the person's "rights" "privileges" or "status" as a Christian.

Therefore, in the "cultures" (churches, conferences, unions, divisions) where "ministry" carries the narrow meaning of "*pastoral* ministry," those who seek "empowerment for ministry" believe it can only be found when one is ordained as an elder or pastor. As a consequence, there is confusion about what "lay ministry" and "women ministry" are all about--a fact that may account for both a diminishing participation of lay persons in the work of ministry and a restlessness of modern Eves in those cultures.

By contrast, in areas where the true meaning of ministry (i.e., any service that is carried out by any church member in a God-glorifying manner) is upheld, the ordained elder/pastor is not viewed as the only "minister" with the gift of preaching, evangelizing, counseling or administration, etc. (Rom 12:4ff.; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4:7-13). Though he serves as leader of the church, he understands his place as the first among spiritual equals; he is one "minister" who has been called upon by the church, through the act of ordination, to provide a servant-leadership of protecting the church and empowering all of its members for their respective work of "ministry" (Luke 9:1; 1 Cor 4:19-21; 2 Cor 10:8; 13:10; Philemon 8-10). Wherever this true meaning of "ministry" is captured, the tendency for the elder/pastor to think of himself as the "senior" pastor, or even to talk about "my church" or "my pulpit," is greatly minimized. When the ordained elder or pastor does his work well--not as a reckless modern Adam--no restriction, other than that found in Scripture itself (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6), is placed on what women can do in ministry. This might explain why, in these "cultures," there is explosion in church membership as well as a decrease in the spirit of restless Eves.

The above analysis suggests that overcoming the "cultural barriers" to women's role in ministry must begin with a recovery of the true meaning of ministry. The emphasis on *pastoral* ministry (not lay ministry) as the essence of ministry will have to be corrected. First, those holding headship positions as elders/pastors need to be reminded of the biblical doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers." This doctrine recognizes that since the church is a worshiping community (a priestly people called to offer "spiritual sacrifices" of praise and prayer) and also a witnessing community (a missionary people called to declare the "praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"), every church member--whether man or woman--has been called to a ministry that is of no less importance than the pastoral ministry (1 Pet 2:5, 9-10 NIV; cf. Rev 1:6).

Second, while there exist "varieties of service [*diakonia* = ministry]" in the church, so that every believer has a "ministry," church members (i.e., those who are not part of the pastoral ministry) must also be reminded that elders and pastors have been given a special oversight responsibility in the church (Heb 13:7, 17, 24; Acts 20:28-35; 1 Thess 5:12-13). They "rule well" (1 Tim 5:17; 3:5) if, in their capacity as "pastor-teachers," they are able to channel all

### ***Page 77***

the gifts of the church members toward the work of ministry. [8] The "priesthood of all believers" is not, therefore, a justification to diminish the importance of the pastoral ministry; nor is it a reason to show contempt or disrespect to the pastoral ministry. To do so is to display the spirit of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Num 16; 26:9-11). [9] As Ellen White explains, the pastoral ministry is "a sacred and exalted office," "the highest of all work." Those "who belittle the ministry are belittling Christ" (*Testimonies for the Church*, [2:615](#); [6:411](#)).

Once these "cultural barriers" to ministry are removed by recapturing the biblical understanding of ministry, it will be clear that the restriction of the headship role of elder



or pastor is not a limitation upon women's role in ministry. On the contrary, converted women--whether married or single--will come to realize that there are *unlimited ministries* in which they can be involved in advancing the cause of Christ: "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" ( [Evangelism](#) , pp. 467-468, *emphasis added*). [10]

Capturing this broad meaning of the gospel ministry, [Ellen White](#) wrote, "There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God" ( [Evangelism](#) , p. 472). "The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. . . . The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds 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" ( [ibid.](#) , pp. 464-465, *emphasis added*). Where such ministry develops into regular, full-time labor, these women will be greatly encouraged if adequate financial provision is made for them ([ibid.](#), pp. 491-493).

The question is, within the complementarity of the gifts within the church, are women willing to perform their unlimited ministries under the appropriate headship of men? Will reckless Adams repent of their recklessness so that they may encourage restless Eves to perform their ministries in the true spirit of "mothers in Israel"?

### **The Ministry of True "Mothers in Israel"**

As we have seen, the real issue in the debate over women's ordination is not whether women can be in ministry, preaching, teaching, counseling, nur-

#### ***Page 78***

turing, helping, or exercising their gifts of administration (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:7-13). The crucial issue is whether, within the partnership of an equal relationship between male and female, women are willing to exercise their gifts in a manner consistent with the teaching of Scripture. Will they labor in ministry without aspiring for the headship role of ordained elders or pastors? Will the women who are seeking to labor in ministry follow the example of the godly women recorded in the Bible (a challenge for which men find a parallel in the lives of godly men recorded in Scripture)? These women of old were not actuated by the principle of self-advocacy that is prevalent in the spirit of our restless modern Eves. Instead, they exhibited a spirit of self-denial in utilizing their God-given gifts within the framework of biblical guidelines.

Some of these women braved the hazards of missionary outreach work by accompanying Jesus and the apostles as they taught in various places (Luke 8:1-3, 1 Cor 9:5). While Mary, Joanna, Susanna and others "ministered" (*diakoneo*) by contributing from their own means to support the work (Luke 8:3), Peter's mother-in-law and Martha "ministered" by preparing meals (Luke 4:39; John 12:2). Others like Jochebed and Hannah labored quietly in their homes, believing that rearing a future Moses or Samuel was as much ministry as the work of evangelists, preachers, and church administrators.

In the Bible record, when the men defaulted in their headship responsibilities, some women also ministered by exercising *temporary* leadership in a way that was consistent with the biblical guidelines. Over against the foolhardiness of Nabal (1 Sam 25), Abigail "lost no time" in averting a crisis (1 Sam 25:18ff. NIV); against Barak's vacillation and spineless leadership, Deborah the prophet emerged as a "mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7) who not only performed the function of judge but accompanied Barak to battle (Judges 4); [11] against the prejudice of the disciples, the Samaritan woman was raised to preach the gospel to an entire village, preparing the ground for a bountiful harvest of souls (John 4); against the greed of Judas who betrayed his Master for thirty pieces of silver, Mary expended her savings of a typical year's worth of income on a perfume to anoint her Lord for His burial (John 12:1-8); against the cowardice of the disciples locked behind doors for "fear of the Jews," Jesus commissioned Mary with the good news of His resurrection (John 20; cf. Luke 24:9, 10, 22); against Demas' worldliness and betrayal of Paul (2 Tim 4:10), Junia chose imprisonment with the apostle (Rom 16:7; cf. Acts 8:3); [12] and against the behavior of some elders greedy for money, not eager to serve and lording it over the church members (1 Pet 5:1-4), Phoebe served admirably as "a servant of the church. . . [and] a great help to many people, including me [Paul]" (Rom 16:1, 2 NIV). [13]

These godly women exercised their leadership within the framework of biblical guidelines. Consequently, they did not aspire to ordination as priests, apostles or elders, even though the recklessness of the Adams of their day could have been cited as justification for them to display the restless spirit of modern Eves.

### ***Page 79***

History will indicate that the faith and prayers of women have helped to make Pentecost happen in every generation (Acts 1:14). In our own Seventh-day Adventist church, [Ellen White](#) is another example of a woman who was not actuated by the self-advocacy spirit of modern Eves. "No one has ever heard me claim the position of leader of the denomination. I have a work of great responsibility to do--to impart by pen and voice the instruction given me, not alone to Seventh-day Adventists, but to the world. I have published many books, large and small, and some of these have been translated into several languages. This is my work--to open the Scriptures to others as God has opened them to me. . . . I thank the Lord that He gave us the privilege of acting a part in the work from the beginning. But neither then nor since the work has grown to large proportions, during which time responsibilities have been widely distributed, has anyone heard me claiming the leadership of this people" ( [Testimonies for the Church](#) , 8:236, 237). [14]

These noble examples of unique leadership by women are warnings to reckless modern Adams that if they are reluctant or renegade in exercising their God-assigned roles as leaders in their homes and churches, God can raise some temporary Deborahs to do the work. Similarly, the beautiful examples of these godly women speak to restless modern Eves the truth that even in this sinful world, Christ's transforming power is able to help women fulfill their Heaven-appointed roles "in accordance with God's plan." Because these women in Bible times did not succumb to the flattery "of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned," they did not sacrifice their "true womanly dignity and nobility of character" ( *Patriarchs and Prophets* , p. 59). Are we reckless Adams and restless Eves ready to respond to the heart-searching questions posed by God?

### **"Where Are You," Adam?**

### **"What Is This You Have Done," Eve?**

As we discussed in chapter 5, when Satan tempted our first parents, he wanted to lead them into thinking that they could be "like God" (Gen 3:5). To do so, he suggested to Eve that she could attain a higher role than that which God had assigned her at creation. Thus, Eve took the first step in her quest to be like God when she usurped the man's headship role. By directing his temptation to Eve instead of Adam, who had been given the leadership responsibility concerning the dangers of the forbidden tree (Gen 2:16-17), Satan struck at the headship principle governing the relationships between men and women, and he succeeded in disrupting the harmony our first parents enjoyed under in God's arrangement.

Both of our parents were responsible for the fall--Adam by failing to exercise his responsibility to protect his wife and guide her to obey God, and Eve by usurping Adam's headship. Adam was reckless, and Eve was restless. Since that time men who are expected to exercise the headship function in both the home

### ***Page 80***

and the church have been reckless. In place of providing caring, sacrificial male leadership, many men attempt either to dominate women or to escape responsibility. Also, instead of women assisting or supporting the men, modern Eves have been restless. In place of a loving submission or a noble cooperation, they have sought to usurp men's leadership or they adopt a servile submission.

The result is that today, gender roles have become a cage from which both men and women want freedom. Some men believe that they need to be nurtured and consoled, while some women want to be tough and "strong." Men are piercing their ears and dressing in more feminine ways. Some are even claiming to be women and attempting to marry their fellow men. Not wanting to be outdone, women are now dressing like men, aspiring to roles reserved for men and even seeking "marriages" with other women. [15]

Could it be that at the root of the ongoing push for women's ordination in various Christian churches lies the forbidden issue of the recklessness of modern Adams and the restlessness of modern Eves? If so, we may find a solution in responding to the heart-

searching questions God posed after the fall of Adam and Eve. To Adam, God said, "Where are you?" and to Eve, He said, "What is this you have done?" (Gen 3:9, 13). In these two questions God calls to reckless Adams and restless Eves.

The attitude of reckless modern Adams does not help women in ministry. Its failure to live up to the demands of Christlike leadership has distorted, if not abused, the biblical headship principle--resulting in some instances in discouraging women from laboring in ministry, a mission that Christ Himself has extended to both men and women (Matt 28:18-20). Therefore when the Lord calls out, "Adam, where are you?", He is calling upon men to give account of their stewardship as leaders in both the home and the church. They have been mesmerized by the spirit of restless Eves that permeates much of society, so that they have reneged on their responsibility as spiritual leaders and have failed to uphold Biblical fidelity.

In the same way, the spirit of restless modern Eves will not empower women in ministry. Its self-advocating stance is contrary to Scripture's emphasis on self-denial. Its war against role distinctions in marriage as well as in the church does not accord with God's plan. Its recipe of picking and choosing from the Bible, rejecting "unpalatable" portions of Scripture, undermines the foundation of the Christian's faith. Therefore, when the Lord also calls out, "Eve, what is this you have done?", He is calling Eves to consider seriously what they are doing to homes and churches by their restless spirit. They have allowed the recklessness of modern Adams to lead them into disobeying God's arrangement so that they aspire to roles that God has not assigned to them.

Ultimately, God's two questions--"Where are you," Adam?, and "What is this you have done" Eve?--probe whether we are willing to do God's will. Are we willing seriously to answer these heart-searching questions? Specifically, in the light of *searching the Scriptures*, is the church going to address the issue of women's ordination in a manner consistent with biblical teaching?

## ***Page 81***

Our next chapter will suggest what faithfulness to Scripture in this matter will mean in practical terms.

## **NOTES**

[1] See Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Why God Is Not Mother: A Response to Feminist God-talk in the Church," *Christianity Today* (August 16, 1993):16-23. For a shocking account of how this feminist "re-imagining" of God is being actively promoted in Christian churches, see James R. Edwards, "Earthquake in the Mainline," *Christianity Today* (November 14, 1994):38-43.

[2] While C. Raymond Holmes has provided a useful analysis and critique of feminist ideology (see *The Tip of an Iceberg*, pp. 87-132), it is of no less importance that the method feminist interpreters bring to Scripture, like that of other liberation theologians, is an aspect of the historical-critical method (ibid., pp. 31-48). For more on this method, see

Richard M. Davidson, "The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1/1 (1990):39-56; Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, eds., *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992).

[3] See the section on "Biblical Headship" in chapter 3.

[4] One of the best summaries of the role of women in biblical history is provided by Dwight Pratt. Contrary to modern revisionist interpretations which claim that women in Bible times were reduced to little more than goods and chattel, he shows that the position of women among God's people in both the Old and New Testaments contrasted markedly with their status in the surrounding heathen nations. Whatever distorted view currently exists regarding women's place in society and ministry is a departure from the religion of the Bible. See Dwight M. Pratt, "Woman," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, reprint 1986) 4:3100-3104. See also our discussion in chapter 3 on women in ministry.

[5] Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "Saved by Grace and Living by Race: The Religion Called Racism," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 5/2 (1994):64.

[6] It can hardly be disputed that there are some "cultures" where the churches, conferences, unions, and divisions are "not ready" to go ahead with the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. The question is not whether culture plays a part in the discussion of women's ordination, but rather how "culture" is to be defined in the context of "ministry." Should Christians adopt a sociological definition (e.g., "patriarchal," "democratic/non-democratic") or should it be defined theologically in terms of one's attitude to Scripture (view of inspiration, method of interpretation)? While some may adopt the former, Bible-believing Christians will prefer the latter approach. Thus, in the context of our discussion of women's ordination, these Christians may point to "cultural" attitudes that are formed when one has a particular view of "minister." One theological culture will develop if the word is taken simply as a noun--a station of life for a few people, namely, the ordained clergy; another will develop if "minister" is seen as a verb, an activity to be carried out by all members of the church--elders and pastors as well as church members.

[7] Thus, services like preparation of a meal (Luke 10:40), serving a meal (Luke 22:27), taking care of the needy (Acts 6:1-4), the employment of any of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:5; 1 Pet 4:10), and any other thing done to advance the course of the gospel (Luke 8:1-3) are termed ministry (*diakonia*). See also our discussion of the term diakonos, in chapter 3, note 2.

[8] The relationship between the pastoral ministry and all other ministries is set forth in Ephesians 4:11-12: "And these were his gifts: some to be apostles, some prophets, some

evangelists, some pastors and teachers, *to equip God's people for work in his service* [ministry], to the building up of the body of Christ" (NEB). Paul refers to the pastoral ministry to which elders or pastors are called as the office of "pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11). In the Greek, the structure of the phrase "pastors and teachers" suggests that this is one office with two essential functions--(1) pastoring or shepherding (cf. John 21:16; Acts 20:28, 29; 1 Pet 5:2, 3) and (2) teaching (cf. 1 Tim 3:2; Rom 12:7, Titus 1:9). In other words, those in the pastoral ministry are "teaching-shepherds" (or "pastor-teachers") and in this role they are to equip "God's people" for ministry (Eph 4:12).

[9] See S. Lawrence Maxwell's article, "One Chilling Word," in the Spring 1995 *Adventists Affirm*.

[10] With women comprising a large percentage of the church membership, with a sizable group of the world's population unreached by the traditional evangelistic methods, and with the needs in our world ever growing due to the problem of sin, why should we think that the single biblical restriction of the headship role of elder/pastor to men places a limitation on what women can do in ministry? When ministry is understood not just as *pastoral* ministry, it would be impossible to list all the ministries women can engage in. Of these we can point to personal ministries, such as the ministries of prayer, letter writing, counseling, helping, giving Bible studies, teaching cooking and literacy, not to mention ministries to the sick, children, needy, etc. *Public* ministries may include teaching Sabbath school, preaching, singing, missionary work, social ministries, health evangelism, chaplaincy work, prison ministry, etc. The designation our church recently developed, "associates in pastoral care," was intended, I believe, to express and encompass especially these public ministries along with such personal ministries as counseling and giving Bible studies.

[11] For a discussion of the leadership of Deborah the prophet in comparison to the leadership of elders/pastors, see chapter 3, endnote 1 above. The unique leadership of Deborah as prophet and judge in Israel is probably the best model of how women can exercise their leadership gifts in the absence of capable men (Judges 4:4ff.). However, whereas other judges led Israel into victory in battles, God told Deborah that Barak was to do this (vv. 6-7). Apparently she was the only judge in the book of Judges who had no military function. Also, Deborah does not assert leadership for herself, but she gives priority to a man--even though the man was reluctant to go to battle without her (v. 8). Deborah rebuked Barak's failure to exercise his God-appointed leadership; he is told that the glory that day would go to a woman--not Deborah, but Jael (vv. 9, 17-25.). Thomas R. Schreiner therefore concludes that Deborah's "attitude and demeanor were such that she was not asserting her leadership. Instead, she handed over the leadership, contrary to the pattern of all the judges, to a man" (see Schreiner, "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching," in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 216).

[12] Regarding the claim that Junia was an apostle, see note 3 in chapter 3.

[13] For a discussion of the phrase "a servant [*diakonos*] of the church," see chapter 3, note 2.

[14] Wherever this spirit of [Ellen White](#) is cherished, the ministry of women has had powerful impact. Thus in early Seventh-day Adventist history women played major roles in the publishing and editorial work, home missionary work, the work of Sabbath schools, church finances and administration, frontier missions and evangelism, and medical and educational work (see Kit Watts, "Ellen White's Contemporaries: Significant Women in the Early Church," in *A Woman's Place: Seventh-day Adventist Women in Church and Society*, ed. Rosa T. Banks [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1992], pp. 41-74). None of these roles, however, led women to aspire to ordination as elders or pastors

### ***Page 83***

(see William Fagal, "Ellen White and the Role of Women in the Church," available from the [Ellen G. White Estate](#)). The spirit of [Ellen White](#) is also reflected in the ministries of women in Africa and many other parts of the world. See J. J. Nortey, "The Bible, Our Surest Guide," in the Spring 1995 issue of *Adventists Affirm*.

[15] Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Recovering Harmonious Gender Distinctions," in the Spring 1995 issue of *Adventists Affirm*.

# Chapter 8 – Implications for the Church

The issue of women's ordination is one of the theological issues that many Christians would rather not discuss. It is so explosive that anyone on either side who dares to raise the subject is likely to be misunderstood. Several reasons for this are evident.

First, church members, pastors, leaders, theologians, authors, and editors have adopted postures which might be termed arrogant, saying in effect, "No turning back on my position"--either for or against--even if Scripture teaches contrary. This unyielding attitude has contributed to the lack of free and open discussion of the subject. It sometimes appears that there is an unspoken moratorium on a biblical investigation of the issue. In the few instances that the subject has been raised, it is not uncommon to discover that only one view is presented. This observation has led some to question whose interest is being served by the apparent muffling of opposing views. Is not the church better served when believers search the Scriptures "with all readiness of mind" to discover truth (Acts 17:11; Jn 8:32; Phil 4:8)?

Without any justification, some have closed discussion on the subject, claiming the issue is "cultural," not theological; some even suggest that the issue is not theological, but "ecclesiological," as if ecclesiological issues are not theological. This implies that anyone holding a contrary view on the subject is merely echoing his or her individual, cultural, or ideological biases and self-interests.

Also, because the issue of women's ordination has become so political, Christians have labeled one another unfairly, contributing to a very superficial discussion of the subject. For example, because this cause is chiefly championed by advocates of feminist, liberation, and liberal theologies (groups which generally question the full inspiration and trustworthiness of Scripture), many have wrongly assumed that any one in favor of women's ordination is a feminist, a liberal or a liberation theologian. In the same way, because those who oppose women's ordination tend to be "traditionalist" and theologically conservative, some have claimed that those who reject women's ordination are "power-hungry," "anti-women" or ethically "insensitive" to the concerns of women and minorities.

Furthermore, in subtle ways, it has also been wrongly suggested that those outside "democratic" cultures are "not ready" to go along with women's ordi-

*Page 85*

nation either because their "cultures" do not have a high view of women, or because their cultures make it difficult for them to understand the Bible correctly or even to discern the



Holy Spirit's leading of women who are aspiring to the roles of elder or pastor. The unfortunate implication is that theological knowledge and spiritual insight belong only to some cultures; unless one belongs to those cultures, one cannot legitimately address the issue.

Moreover, emotions are very much involved. We all have close friends, relatives, or other persons who influence our lives and who relate to the issue in a certain way. We do not want to hurt them by taking an opposing view. Besides, many God-fearing and capable women are serving admirably as elders. Hence, questioning whether the ordination of women as elders is biblically proper is misconstrued as an affront to their effectiveness or character.

Finally, in our pluralistic world--a world that prizes theological uncertainty, ambiguity and vagueness as marks of spiritual maturity and scholarly enlightenment--anyone who attempts to speak forthrightly is perceived as dogmatic or intolerant.

Against this hostile background we have been *searching the Scriptures*. As explained in the preface, we embarked upon this investigation believing that it is better to discuss an issue without settling it than to settle an issue without discussing it, and believing also that to disagree with friends is not to dishonor them. This is an honest effort to address a forbidden issue. We have also undertaken this study because there are times when silence is a betrayal of Christ and His cause. Thus the apostle Peter wrote, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience" (1 Pet 3:15-16 NIV).

In *Searching the Scriptures* we have presented our understanding of Scripture on the subject, hoping that it will clarify some of the theological questions involved in the ongoing debate over women's ordination. Readers should evaluate this study and others on the same issue solely on the basis of the Scriptural data. In this way we shall avoid the perennial temptation to subordinate the Bible to our individual, cultural, or ideological, prejudices and self-interests.

In this concluding chapter, we shall briefly summarize the results of our investigation and suggest some implications they may have for the Seventh-day Adventist church, which currently stands at a crossroads on the issue.

### **Moment to Decide**

Our study has shown that the question is not whether the church may consecrate women to a specific work by prayer and laying on of hands. Women as well as men may commit their talents fully to the Lord and His service, and the church may recognize and honor that commitment through such a special dedication service. The real question is whether, in light of the Bible's instruc-

tions, women may serve in the headship role of the elder or pastor. By *searching the Scriptures*, we have found that the Bible portrays women in a wide variety of significant ministries, commending many of these women for their faithful service. But on theological grounds that reach back to the order established in the Garden of Eden, it does not allow for women to serve in the headship role of the elder or pastor in the church.

Once we see what the Bible teaches, can we lightly set it aside? Though most Christian groups acknowledge that God instituted the Sabbath as the seventh day, they do not keep it holy. They have found what they consider good reasons to keep the first day. But Seventh-day Adventists keep the Sabbath, not because Sunday is inferior, but solely because God said to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." The principle applies to more than the Ten Commandments: we wash feet because Jesus said we should; we abstain from unclean foods because the Bible says not to eat them; we tithe as well as give offerings because the Bible tells us that *all* we have belongs to God, not to us. In these and other issues we are different from many other Christians, not in order to be *different*, but in order to be *faithful* and *obedient*.

Faithfulness to Scripture has been our strength. It has given power to our preaching and weight to our witness. On this matter of ordaining women to the headship roles of elder and pastor, can we demonstrate that we are faithful to all of what Scripture says on the subject (not just to some of the passages or to the "general principles" of Scripture)? If not, what shall we say to those we are trying to win when they challenge us on how well we follow the Bible? Can we give a clear, "Thus saith the Lord"? Will our reasons for setting aside the Bible's instruction on this matter sound convincing to those who challenge us? Will our reasons sound convincing to us?

Most importantly, will our reasons sound convincing to God?

The ultimate issue in this life is whether, as followers of Jesus, we will trust our heavenly Father enough to do what He asks out of love for Him. Will our actions show that we really believe His Word? Will we demonstrate our trust that He knows best, and that His will is better than ours?

So we stand at a crossroads. The choices we make will set our course from this point on. We must follow Scripture; we must "turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7 RSV).

## **Affirmations**

By *searching the Scriptures* we have established that within the partnership of equals in the home and in the church, it is the man who is to fulfill the primary role of headship/leadership. This principle of headship is still valid today, as it has been since creation. This position best explains the absence of biblical precedent for ordaining women, evident not only in the male priesthood of the Old Testament but also in the failure of Jesus to appoint a single

female as an apostle. It explains why, when a replacement was sought for an apostle (Acts 1:15-26), even though women were present and undoubtedly met most of the requirements set (vv. 21-22), a male was chosen--because "it is necessary to choose one of the men [andron, from aner] who have been with us" (Acts 1:21). The headship principle also explains why the New Testament has no record of any woman being ordained as an elder or pastor. Finally, the headship principle alone can adequately explain the explicit prohibitions of women from exercising the leadership functions of elder or pastor (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 2:11-14; 1 Cor 14:34).

This understanding of the crucial issues at stake regarding women's ordination, therefore, leads to the following affirmations.

1. While maintaining the fundamental equality of male and female, the Scriptures assign a leadership role to men and a supportive role to women. These role differences--in both the home and the church--were established at creation *before* the fall and reiterated *after* the fall.
2. While Scripture calls women to labor in gospel ministry, it does not call them to fulfill the oversight/leadership roles which ordained elders and pastors are called upon to exercise.
3. While the Holy Spirit calls and empowers women with spiritual gifts for the work of ministry, the Spirit does not contradict Himself by calling women to the office of ordained elder or pastor from which they are excluded by the same Spirit's instruction in the written Word.
4. While the church is entrusted with the responsibility of recognizing and commissioning qualified women to perform certain unctons of ministry, the church does not have the authority to authorize the ordination of women to the headship/leadership role of elder or pastor, since Scripture teaches that those holding this office must be males.

### **Basis of Affirmations**

These affirmations are based on the belief that on every issue of faith and practice, Scripture alone should be the norm. Because Scripture is the inspired and trustworthy revelation of God's will, and because all the books of the Bible ultimately are the product of one divine mind, its teachings in one part do not contradict those of other parts. Finally, these affirmations are based on the assumption that Bible-believing Christians must always be willing to learn, accept, believe, and do whatever the Bible teaches, however unpopular it may appear in their contemporary culture.

[Ellen G. White](#) wrote: "Men in this age of the world act as if they were at liberty to question the words of the Infinite, to review his decisions and statutes,

endorsing, revising, reshaping, and annulling, at their pleasure. If they cannot misconstrue, misinterpret, or alter God's plain decision, or bend it to please the multitude and themselves, they break it. We are never safe while we are guided by human opinions; but we are safe when we are guided by a 'Thus saith the Lord.' We can not trust the salvation of our souls to any lower standard than the decision of an infallible Judge. Those who make God their guide, and his word their counselor, follow the lamp of life. God's living oracles guide their feet in straight paths. Those who are thus led do not dare judge the word of God, but ever hold that his word judges them. They get their faith and religion from his word" ( [The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, February 21, 1899](#) , p. 113).

Therefore, on this question of women's ordination as on other matters, we must remember that "The Bible is its own interpreter, one passage explaining another. By comparing scriptures referring to the same subjects, you will see beauty and harmony of which you have never dreamed" ( [Testimonies for the Church](#) , 4:499).

### **Appeal to the Church**

If the Seventh-day Adventist church prayerfully seeks Bible guidance rather than pragmatic or socio-cultural considerations, the church will be led to adopt a biblically consistent position on the issue of women's ordination. Many dedicated and God-fearing church members, unaware of the biblical evidence, have supported ordination of women and in some cases have been ordained as women elders. We believe that if our church seeks to be bound to "the Bible and the Bible only" on this question, many of these will willingly and courageously reverse their position to come into line with the Bible (Acts 17:30). If the church seeks to be led by the Holy Spirit through His written Word, that Word will pierce through our confusion (1 Thess 2:13; Ps 19:7-9; John 8:32), avert the threat of national churches and congregationalism in our worldwide church, and bring us together "in the unity of the *Spirit*" in "the unity of the *faith*, and of the *knowledge of the Son of God*" (Eph 4:3, 13).

These affirmations and convictions have important implications for how the Seventh-day Adventist church should respond to women in ministry:

**Reaffirm the Role of Women in Ministry.** Notwithstanding male leadership of the church, (i) the fact that men and women are equal, having a complementary relationship between them, and (ii) the fact that Scripture calls women to labor in ministry suggest that:

The Seventh-day Adventist church should make provision that will encourage a greater participation of women in ministry. [1] This may include stronger support for their training at the Seminary, adequate and fair remuneration of women for their labor and, in some cases (such as in team ministries), their being authoritatively commissioned for roles and duties that are not in violation of biblical teaching. [2]

Of the many lines of ministry, women could be encouraged to participate in the study, teaching and preaching of the gospel in personal and public evangelism; to be involved in ministries of prayer, visitation, counseling, writing, and singing; to labor as literature evangelists, health evangelists, to raise new churches, and to minister to the needy; to serve in positions of responsibility that do not require ordination as pastors or elders, serving as colleagues in partnership with ordained men at the various levels of the church organization; to teach in our institutions and seminaries; and above all, to minister to their children at home.

***Reconsider the Practice of Ordaining Women as Elders.*** In view of the biblical teaching that only men may legitimately perform the headship role of elders and overseers in the church,

The Seventh-day Adventist church should prayerfully and courageously *reconsider* previous church council actions which have brought us to the "dilemma" identified by the NAD, which results from the inconsistent and "clearly untenable" position the church presently holds. When the teaching of Scripture is clearly perceived, turning away from a wrong practice evidences genuine repentance. [3]

***Reject Gender-Inclusive Ordination.*** In view of the biblical teaching that the Bible makes no distinction between the office of elder and pastor, and in view of the fact that in both cases only a man may exercise headship,

The Seventh-day Adventist church should reject the proposal by the North American Division to grant each division of the world church the right to "authorize the ordination of qualified individuals *without regard to gender*," [4] a request designed to commence the unbiblical practice of ordaining women as pastors. A willingness to do what is right, however unpopular and unpalatable, is a sign of spiritual growth or sanctification.

***Resist the Lure of Congregationalism.*** In view of the fact that our unique system of world-wide church organization recognizes "the equality of the ordination of the entire ministry" (*Church Manual* [1990], p. 38), and the fact that restricting the validity of a minister's ordination to certain geographical or divisional boundaries will open the door towards national churches and ultimately to congregationalism in the church,

The Seventh-day Adventist church should reject the request by the NAD that, "In divisions where the division executive committees take specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained *to serve in those divisions.*" [5] If approved, the request will disrupt the worldwide unity that presently operates in the church.

***Reaffirm Fidelity to Scripture.*** The Seventh-day Adventist church has always found its commission, direction, and mandate in Scripture--a principle ex-

pressed in the first article of our fundamental beliefs, which states, "The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His [God's] will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history." Therefore,

The Seventh-day Adventist church should use this issue of women's ordination to reaffirm its commitment to biblical authority, to a sound method of interpreting Scripture, and to an attitude of trust and respect for the teachings of the Bible. [6]

Because the Christian church's authority is *delegated* to it from Jesus Christ, its authority must be exercised within the limits He has imposed in Scripture. The church cannot, out of its own wisdom and discretion, legislate for itself doctrines, practices or policies which conflict with the Word of God in Scripture. It has authority only to *declare* the Word of God, not to *enact* its own choices out of harmony with that Word. For this reason the Seventh-day Adventist church has always sought to remain within the bounds set by the Holy Spirit in His written Word. This historic position, this priceless legacy, we must ever cherish and uphold, at whatever cost. This is why we must maintain biblical fidelity on the issue of women's ordination.

### **A Test of Loyalty**

The church should not accept these appeals, or any other, uncritically. Rather, like the Bereans of old, the church should search the Scriptures "with all readiness of mind" and determine whether the conclusions arrived at in *Searching the Scriptures* are in harmony with the teachings of the Bible (Acts 17:11). If they are not, our investigation should be corrected by the Word of God. On the other hand, if what we have discovered in this study passes the test of biblical scrutiny, the appeal should be taken seriously. For Scripture urges us, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess 5:21).

Holding fast to that which is good should be the ultimate goal of any serious study of the Bible. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, *and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim 3:16, 17).

There are always two choices that face us any time we encounter biblical truth. Are we going to accept it? Or will we reject it? Thus, just as with any other unresolved theological question (such as baptizing practicing polygamists, embracing homosexual lifestyle, divorce and remarriage, abortion, racism, fighting in the wars of one's tribe or nation, etc.) the critical question for us today regarding women's ordination is: What should be our attitudes toward the conclusions arrived at in our *searching the Scriptures*?

Those who are seeking to know and to do God's will greet the discovery of any Bible truth with joy and repentance. Whereas they once lived in darkness, they now rejoice because the Holy Spirit has not only led them into all

truth but also because He has called them out of darkness into God's marvelous light. The truths of God's word are like living water that quenches their burning thirst, or like living bread from heaven to satisfy their hungering souls. Their only regret is that they remained in error for so long without knowing the Bible's precious truths.

In genuine humility and repentance, those seeking to know and to do God's will commit themselves to a greater study of God's word for answers to every problem they face. Through their own experience, they have come to appreciate the truth in the words of [Ellen White](#): "We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves. If we allow others to do our thinking, we shall have crippled energies and contracted abilities. The noble powers of the mind may be so dwarfed by lack of exercise on themes worthy of their concentration as to lose their ability to grasp the deep meaning of the Word of God. The mind will enlarge if it is employed in tracing out the relation of the subjects of the Bible, comparing scripture with scripture, and spiritual things with spiritual" ( [Steps to Christ](#) , pp. 89-90).

But another group of Christians responds differently to the discovery of biblical truth. Set in their own ways, and not eager to do what the Bible teaches, they find the emergence of biblical truth discomfiting and unsettling. "The teachings and restrictions of God's Word are not welcome to the proud, sin-loving heart, and those who are unwilling to obey its requirements are ready to doubt its authority" ( [Steps to Christ](#) , p. 111). Thus, even if the conclusions of one's searching the Scriptures should prove to be biblically sound, this second group of Christians will look for ways to fight against the truth; they find it too humiliating to acknowledge that they may have been wrong.

Instead of being faithful to the inspired writings of Moses, David, Isaiah, Matthew, Peter or Paul, they would rather cling to the opinions of their self-appointed experts--be they popes, pastors, professors, parents, or personal acquaintances. In so doing they forget the warning by [Ellen G. White](#): "Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves. Then, by controlling the minds of these leaders, he can influence the multitudes according to his will" ( [The Great Controversy](#) , p. 595).

What then should be our individual and collective responses to the teaching of Scriptures regarding the ordination of women to the headship office of elder or pastor? Our response to this truth, like any other truths in the Bible, determines whether we really believe that every Bible truth is a revelation of Christ, who is the Truth. He Himself said, "*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me*" (John 5:39). Our response to the above question also determines whether or not we believe that Jesus knows what is best for us and has revealed it to us in Scripture.

## Personal Testimony

I know that what I have said about the joy of obedience is true, for I have experienced it, even as I have seen the power of God working through both men and women. A number of years ago in my country of Ghana, West Africa, I became a Christian after years of search for the truth. I became a Seventh-day Adventist because of the church's uncompromising insistence on a "thus saith the Lord" for every doctrine and practice. At that time, fidelity to Scripture was not scornfully labeled "narrow-mindedness," "obscurantism," or even "fundamentalism." [7] It was simply being faithful to Christ and His written Word.

In those days my faith was established by the television and radio programs of the church that filtered down to us. These organs of the church repeatedly asserted, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20). "It Is Written" maintained that man should not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. "Faith For Today" inspired wavering believers to have faith in God. When the pulse of courage was low, "Breath Of Life" assured us of God's power which is able to revive us again. When we were tempted to sing the popular tunes of the world, losing a clear sense of our distinctiveness, "The Voice of Prophecy" proclaimed, "Lift up the trumpet, and loud let it ring! Jesus is coming again!", reminding us that we are "a voicecrying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord."

The courage of biblical convictions was not seen as "fanaticism," "rigid authoritarianism," or even "intolerance." Neither was the assertion that the Seventh-day Adventist church *is* (not will be, or may be) "the remnant church" viewed as being "triumphalistic" or "exclusivistic," or even as fostering spiritual pride or arrogance. I understood then, just as now, that our church was uniquely raised to proclaim a distinctive message for the end time. The mission of the church demanded that we not follow the Christian crowd in setting aside Bible truth. The knowledge that the doctrines and practices of my new-found faith were scriptural gave me a determination to stand for biblical truths, no matter the cost (cf. Rev 2:10; 12:11).

The members of the Adventist church there--men and women, lay people and pastors, educated and illiterate--believed that ministry was, and still remains, the calling of every Christian. They all united in doing the work of soul-winning. In order to share our faith, groups of us traveled to unentered villages and towns, slept on dirt floors in mosquito-infested areas, got up early at dawn, and after prayer and Bible-study, proclaimed our message on the street corners. During the day, we visited the people in the village, praying for them, helping them where needed, and then opening the Word of God to them. In the evenings we held lay evangelistic meetings. While these were going on students on the various campuses--mostly non-Adventist institutions--were also active in evangelizing their schools; literature evangelists, the "Dorcas Society" (welfare ministry), the Sabbath School department, etc., were all united in doing the work of ministry.



Worship was exciting. Lay speakers and pastors preached Bible-based sermons. Prayer meetings were packed. Testimonies confirmed what God was doing in the lives of ordinary people. The church was like a school, where the elders and pastors equipped us for ministry. Worship was so vibrant that we had no need to import marketing techniques from commerce or some experiments from mega-churches "to attract young people." In fact, the reason why our church was about 70% young people was that they were excited about *searching the Scriptures*.

During Bible study, we (scholars and non-scholars, laypeople and pastors, men and women) wrestled with difficulties as we sought *biblical* answers to problems we faced. We believed that "We cannot obtain wisdom without earnest attention and prayerful study. Some portions of Scripture are indeed too plain to be misunderstood; but there are others whose meaning does not lie on the surface, to be seen at a glance. Scripture must be compared with scripture. There must be careful research and prayerful reflection. And such study will be richly repaid. As the miner discovers veins of precious metal concealed beneath the surface of the earth, so will he who perseveringly searches the Word of God as for hid treasure, find truths of the greatest value, which are concealed from the view of the careless seeker. The words of inspiration, pondered in the heart, will be as streams flowing from the fountain of life" ( [\*Steps to Christ\*](#) , 90-91).

My experience with *searching the Scriptures* was the major reason why I became a Seventh-day Adventist. Since then, the words of the song "Go and Inquire" by W. A. Ogden have expressed the desire of my heart:

Searching the Scriptures, the blessed Scriptures,  
Seeking the Saviour day by day,  
Striving to learn the wondrous story,--  
What does the blessed Bible say?

Go and inquire, the King commandeth. . . .

Searching the Scriptures, the blessed Scriptures,  
Seeking to know the heav'nly way,  
Trying to reach the golden city,--  
What does the blessed Bible say?

Go and inquire, the King commandeth. . . .

In part, on this issue of women's ordination as elders or pastors, just as on all other theological issues, this is why I plead that we must *search the Scriptures*. And having searched the Scriptures, and discovered "what the Bible say," we must make a decision of faith by doing what is right, even if it seems unpopular and unpalatable to us. Faithfulness to God always involves a cost (Matt 16:24-26). But what is more costly than what t cost Jesus to save us? Loyalty to Christ

may cost us our pride, but it will surely give us a free conscience. "God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the well-being of His children in view. Would that all who have not chosen Christ might realize that he has something vastly better to offer them than they are seeking for themselves. Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best, and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression is the path of misery and destruction" ( [\*Steps to Christ\*](#) , p. 46).

So we must ask ourselves: On this question of women's ordination, should we risk the displeasure of God in doing what seemeth right in our own eyes? Should we not seek a Scriptural basis for empowering women for ministry and avert the potential "divisiveness and disunity," "embarrassment," and "dishonor upon this church that we love"? [8] The experience of the Berean Christians teaches us that whenever we establish our faith and practice by searching the Scriptures, many new believers--both men and women--will be added to the church: "Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men" (Acts 17:12 RSV; note also v. 11, and Acts 1 and 2).

### **Worthy Examples**

In some cases a loving obedience to Christ and His written Word may cause pain. But Jesus Christ, the church's Head and the true "Shepherd and Bishop of our souls," has set us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:21, 25). In the face of death He could say, "Not my will, but thine, be done," a decision that was immediately rewarded with help from heaven (Luke 22:42-43). His own mother, Mary, also leaves us an example of complete submission to will of God. In becoming the Messiah's mother before she was married, she faced circumstances that would bring her abuse and derision; yet she said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38 NIV). Later, though she was highly "favored of the Lord" and a faithful disciple of Christ (Luke 1:28, 30; Acts 1:14), in the upper room she submitted to the biblical guidelines for the choice of a male apostle to be added to the eleven (Acts 1:20-26). Mary speaks to all of us--women and men--on this issue of women's ordination, as well as on every other issue, when she says, "Whatsoever he [Christ] saith unto you, do it" (John 2:5).

Finally, the apostle Paul leaves us an example of total surrender of our aims and ambitions to the cross of Christ. If, like him, we all--men and women, church leaders and members, scholars and people of other professions--also reckon ourselves as "crucified with Christ" and seek to live by the principle, "Not I but Christ" (Gal 2:20), our spirit will be like his. When we are called upon to make decisions of costly discipleship, the kind suggested when we seek to do God's will on the issue now facing our church, this spirit of Paul, aptly described by Leonard Ravenhill, must always be ours: The apostle Paul "had no ambitions [for

himself]--and so had nothing to be jealous about. He had no reputation--and so had nothing to fight about. He had no possessions--and therefore had nothing to worry about. He had no 'rights'--so therefore he could not suffer wrong. He was already broken--so no one could break him. He was 'dead'--so none could kill him. He was less than the least--so who could humble him? He had suffered the loss of all things--so none could defraud him." [9]

As we continue *searching the Scriptures*, may this spirit of faithful, obedient surrender to Christ and His Word fill us, marking us as a people, so that together we can proclaim His name with power to a world that needs to see Jesus' life and love lived out in human beings today.

## NOTES

[1] See the article by Laurel Damsteegt, "Should Women Minister?" in the Spring 1995 issue of *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM*.

[2] See [Ellen G. White, \*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, July 9, 1895\*](#), p. 434. See also C. Raymond Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, pp. 79-85; cf. William Fagal, "Ellen White and the Role of Women in the Church," available from the [Ellen G. White Estate](#).

[3] In 1994, the Christian Reformed Church had the courage to do so. See C. Raymond Holmes, "Women's Ordination in the Christian Reformed Church Resolved: A Momentous Decision," in the Spring 1995 issue of *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM*. (See also Dr. Holmes's book, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, pp. 160-175.)

[4] See the petition of the North American Division (NAD), as discussed by the NAD president in his published address to the 1994 Annual Council ("NAD's President Speaks on Women's Ordination," *Adventist Review*, February 1995, pp. 14, 15). See also the article by C. Mervyn Maxwell, "A Response to Elder Alfred C. McClure's Address to the Annual Council," in the Spring 1995 issue of *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM*.

[5] "NAD's President Speaks on Women's Ordination," pp. 14, 15.

[6] See Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "Inspired Book or Inspiring Booklet? Biblical Authority in an Age of Theological Pluralism," in the Spring 1995 issue of *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM*.

[7] In some scholarly circles today, the term "fundamentalist" is hurled at anyone who refuses to accept all the latest unbiblical fads in theology. In a lecture given in Wycliffe Hall at Oxford University, the English scholar Gordon J. Wenham aptly describes the situation: "I suspect that if either you [a student] or your lecturers discover during your study that you are a Sabellian montanist or semipelagian gnostic [these were christological heresies in the early church], it will not cause over-much excitement. Such deviants are common place today and in this pluralistic society are usually accepted without much fuss. However, should you be diagnosed as a fundamentalist, your fate may

be very different. In the modern theology faculty fundamentalism is the great heresy. It is regarded as nearly as dangerous as the HIV virus and is treated with similar fervour but with rather less tact and sympathy" (Gordon J. Wenham, "The Place of Biblical Criticism in Theological Study," *Themelios* 14/3 [1989]:84). Bible-believing Christians should not be intimidated by any pejorative labels calculated to induce Christians to accept some "progressive" ideas (often a theological codeword for deviations from Scripture).

[8] See the preface of this book for my response to the major points of the address of the NAD president regarding women's ordination.

[9] Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1959), p. 173, cited by Stephen F. Alford, *Not I, But Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1995), pp. 55-56.