

# The Bible and the Ordination of Women Pastors

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## Introduction

This paper builds upon the hermeneutical principles generally accepted by Seventh-day Adventists, as set forth in the 1986 “Methods of Bible Study” statement voted by the Annual Council, and as synthesized in my chapter “Biblical Interpretation” in the *Handbook of SDA Theology*.<sup>1</sup> Insights for this summary position paper have been gleaned over the last 30 years, from my first paper dealing with the subject, “The Role of Women in the Old Testament” (BRICOM, 1982), 25 years later to the publication of *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (844 pages),<sup>2</sup> and to the present in my continued wrestling with how best to account for all the data in Scripture dealing with the relation between men and women and the place of women in ministry. This overview represents my current understanding. I first present a succinct summary of what I see as the biblical basis for ordaining women pastors, and then look at perceived impediments to such action.

## I. Biblical Rationale for Women’s Ordination as Pastors: A Preliminary Summary

### A. Biblical Data

1. **Equality of man and woman in Creation.** “And God said, ‘Let Us make humankind [*ha’adam*] in Our own image, according to Our likeness, and let them [male and female together as co-regents] have dominion. . . .’” (Gen 1:26). “I will make him [Adam] an ‘ezer *kenegdo*—‘equal partner’” (Gen 2:18); “they [two] shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

2. **Priesthood of all believers.** “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6); “you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:7); “To Him who loved us. . . and has made us kings and priests” (Rev 1:5-6).

3. **Old Testament promise:** God predicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh in the “last days” (Joel 2:28–30: “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; . . . sons and daughters, menservants . . . maidservants”).

4. **New Testament fulfillment:** This began to be fulfilled at Pentecost in 31 AD, when the 120 disciples (men and women) were “all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). Cf. vs. 16: “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel (citation of Joel 2:28–32).

5. **Pastor-teacher is one of the gifts/ministries of the Spirit.** Eph 4:11: “And He gave some to be apostles, . . . pastors and teachers”).

6. **The Spirit’s gifts/ministries are not gender-specific.** 1 Cor 12:11: “The one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”

7. **Women received these spiritual gifts/ministries in the early Christian church.** See, for example, Junia, who was a female apostle (Rom 16:7); Phoebe was a deacon (Rom 16:1); and many other female co-workers with Paul and leaders with authority in the church (see further discussion below).

8. **Ordination of pastor-teachers.** Ordination is the church’s official recognition of the spiritual gifts/ministries such as apostle and pastor/teacher (cf. Acts 6:6; 13:2–3; 1 Tim 5:22).

### B. Modern Application

9. **Women are receiving the spiritual gift/ministry of pastor/teacher today.** The fruits reveal the genuineness of the gift. I add my personal testimony to testimonies from around the world.

10. **Church mandate to ordain these women pastors.** The church has the responsibility and privilege to recognize, not spurn, the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit!

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<sup>1</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. Raoul Dederen; Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12; Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 58-104.

<sup>2</sup> Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007).

## II. The Major Perceived Impediment to Women’s Ordination as Pastors: Male Headship

The major impediment to women’s ordination is the conviction by some that male headship is a divinely ordained creation ordinance upheld throughout Scripture both in the home and in the church, and thus women cannot assume the role of headship in the church. This conviction is held with tenacity by those who oppose women’s ordination, and they consider this as founded on incontrovertible biblical evidence. Faced with evidence of the Spirit’s gifting of women as pastor/teacher, they claim to follow the biblical mandate to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1) and find such gifting not to be of God. But I suggest we all need to consider parallels with a similar situation in the NT church.

### A. Parallels with the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

1. **“Watertight” biblical argument.** The Jewish converts to Christianity believed they had an unassailable theological argument regarding circumcision and church membership. Circumcision was commanded in Gen 17, at the beginning of God’s calling out of a special people. Throughout the Old Testament circumcision constituted the necessary sign for becoming part of God’s covenant people. It was never rescinded in the OT or by Jesus. God does not change His laws! It seemed an incontrovertible conclusion: Gentiles need to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic laws to become Christians. The Jewish converts “felt that since God had once clearly outlined the Hebrew manner of worship, it was improbable that He would ever authorize a change in any of its specifications” (AA 189).

2. **The divine surprise settled the question.** God surprised them! He poured out His Spirit upon the Gentiles while they were still uncircumcised! “The various points involved in the settlement of the main question at issue seemed to present before the council insurmountable difficulties. But the Holy Spirit had, in reality, already settled the question . . . The Holy Spirit had decided the matter under dispute by descending with equal power upon the uncircumcised Gentiles and the circumcised Jews.” (AA 192–193)

3. **The Apostles Peter and Paul accepted the validity of the Spirit’s gift.** In light of what the Holy Spirit had done, Peter had earlier testified, “who was I, that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17 ESV). At the Council the apostles again testified as to the genuineness of the gift of the Spirit upon the Gentiles.

4. **Renewed examination of Scripture in light of the Spirit’s gifting.** The leaders at the Council went back to search the Scriptures anew in light of what God had done. The ultimate authority was the Scripture, but the strong evidence of the Spirit’s outpouring on the uncircumcised Gentiles opened their mind to the need to return to Scripture for a new look at the evidence.

5. **What about today?** That is what I suggest we must do at this time, in light of overwhelming evidence of God’s Spirit being poured out on our sisters with the gift of pastor-teacher. If out-of-hand we reject their calling by claiming it is a false gift because it does not match our “watertight” theology, we run the risk of “standing in God’s way”! Has the Spirit already decided the issue for us today, as He did at the Jerusalem Council? Perhaps we need to go back and check our biblical arguments in light of His moving upon women pastors as upon Gentiles in the days of the early Church. Should we perhaps be ready to look again at what we thought were incontrovertible biblical arguments? Another important set of parallels gives a similar call for reassessment of evidence:

### B. Parallels between current arguments for male headship and 19<sup>th</sup> century arguments for slavery:

Male Headship Arguments	Pro-slavery Arguments
1. <b>Creation ordinance</b> (Gen 1–2; reaffirmed after the Fall in Gen 3).	1. <b>Creation ordinance.</b> After the Flood came a “new creation,” and the divine command for the sons of Ham to be slaves (Gen 9:24–27).
2. <b>Equality of persons (worth before God), but hierarchical function (“role”):</b> male headship and female submission	2. <b>Equality before God for salvation, but hierarchical function (“role”):</b> servitude to master.
3. <b>Biblical precedent in the Old Testament.</b> Male priesthood; other male leaders	3. <b>Biblical Precedent in the Old Testament.</b> Abraham and other patriarchs have slaves. Pentateuchal laws regulate and legitimize slavery.
4. <b>Biblical Precedent in Jesus and Gospels.</b> Male 12 apostles; no women ordained by Jesus.	4. <b>Biblical Precedent in Jesus and the Gospels.</b> Slavery was recognized and approved by Jesus in his teaching (Luke 17:7–10; 20:9–16). Jesus reversed polygamy and divorce, but not slavery. First Tim 6:1–6 bases slavery on Jesus’ own words.
5. <b>Biblical precedent in the Epistles.</b> Paul affirms male headship in the church (1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 11:3; 14:34–35), which does not allow women to be ordained pastors/elders with teaching authority over men.	5. <b>Biblical Precedent in the Epistles.</b> Paul and Peter recognize and affirm slavery. Eph 6:5: “Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh . . .” Cf. 1 Pet 2:18. Paul sends a slave back to his master (Philemon).

<b>6. Parallels with the roles of the Trinity.</b> Father’s headship and Son’s submission (1 Cor 11:3).	<b>6. Parallels with the roles of the Trinity.</b> The Father is called “Master” (Eph 6:9) and the Son is called “slave” (Phil. 2:7). Cf. the Messianic “Servant/slave of Yahweh” in Isaiah 41–53.
<b>7. Fidelity to Scripture:</b> High View of Scripture. If male headship is denied, then the authority of Scripture is rejected.	<b>7. Fidelity to Scripture.</b> High View of Scripture: If slavery is denied, then the authority of Scripture is rejected. Abolitionists have a perverse method of interpreting the Bible.
<b>8. Slippery Slope.</b> If one accepts women’s ordination, then next comes homosexual pastors.	<b>8. Slippery Slope.</b> If one accepts abolition, then next comes “anarchical opinions about human governments, civil and ecclesiastical, and on the rights of women . . .” (Albert Bledsoe, <i>Cotton is King</i> , 379–380).

Attempts have been made to distance modern arguments of pro-male headship from pro-slavery arguments, but the parallels remain.<sup>3</sup> Hopefully we all agree that the pro-slavery arguments were not valid. The abolitionists, under the leading of the Spirit, responded to these arguments by: (a) detailed, solid exegesis of crucial passages, and (b) recognition of overarching biblical principles, even though the Bible never explicitly rejects slavery. We need to do the same to avoid the mistakes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century pro-slavery advocates.

### III. Reassessing Male Headship over Women in the Church

Where to start? The opponents of women’s ordination have one key text which ultimately controls all others: 1 Tim 2:12. There they find evidence for male headship in the home and church as a creation ordinance. 1 Tim 2:12 becomes the key to interpret Genesis 1–3. I believe this is one of the major hermeneutical missteps of those who support male headship over women. 1 Tim 2:12–15 is NOT a “straightforward,” “clear” passage, as many opponents of women’s ordination claim. There are major controverted issues in almost every part of the exegetical process regarding this passage: historical background, literary genre and structure, grammar, syntax, word study, and theology.<sup>4</sup> It calls for a detailed exegetical examination, not simply a surface “proof-text” reading. We need to heed Ellen White’s counsel: “A mere superficial reading of the inspired word will be of little advantage; for every statement made in the sacred pages requires thoughtful contemplation. . . . Let every student who values the heavenly treasure put to the stretch his mental and spiritual powers, and sink the shaft deep into the mine of truth, that he may obtain the celestial gold,— that wisdom which will make him wise unto salvation” (FE 169-170).

As we will see below, striking and sustained parallels with 1 Pet 3 indicate that this may have been one of the passages that Peter referred to when he spoke of the things which Paul wrote which were “hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16) and could easily be misinterpreted. Peter probably wrote 1 Pet 3 shortly after Paul wrote 1 Tim 2, and it seems likely that Peter was simplifying and making clear what Paul was seeking to communicate. It is hermeneutically unsound to start with a difficult and disputed passage, and one that only makes passing reference to the creation account, as the key to interpret Gen 1–3. Both the Bible and Ellen White support the major hermeneutical principle that we must allow the clear, primary passages to explain the more obscure ones, and not the other way around.<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1–3 must be understood first through a carefully analysis of Gen 1–3 itself, followed by a comparison with later inspired sources which provide explicit and extended commentary on Gen 1–3 (especially Song of Solomon and *Patriarchs and Prophets*), and only then interpret the “hard to understand” passage in light of the clear ones and the whole thrust of Scripture.<sup>6</sup>

Just 40 years ago (1973) seminal papers dealing in detail with man and woman in Gen 1-3 and related biblical passages were presented at the historic Camp Mohaven Conference, the first time in Adventist history when

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion affirming these parallels, see especially Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1983), 31-64; Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 215-233. For a recent rejoinder, see Benjamin Reaoch, *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate: A Complementarian Response to the Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2012).

<sup>4</sup>This is illustrated in citing two widely-used modern translations of 1 Tim 2:12. First, the NKJV: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” Second, the 2011 Common English Bible: “I don’t allow a wife to teach or to control her husband. Instead, she should be a quiet listener.” Two very different meanings! Which is correct?

<sup>5</sup>E.g., 2 Pet 3:16; GC 321.

<sup>6</sup>In this overview I can only give the main contours of this exegesis; see the footnotes for more detailed research affirming these conclusions.

the place of women in ministry was studied in depth.<sup>7</sup> After some 30 years of personal study of these passages myself, I find that these groundbreaking studies grasped the essential elements of the relationship between man and woman in creation and after the Fall. To Gen 1–3 we now turn our attention, and then look at how the rest of the Bible relates to this foundational statement on gender relations.

A. **Genesis 1 teaches us that male and female participate equally in the image of God.** “So God *created* man [Heb. *ha’adam* ‘humankind’] in His own image, in the image of God created He him [humankind]; male and female created He them” (Gen 1:27). This foundational passage (and its surrounding context) gives no hint of a divine creation hierarchical order in the relation of man and woman. Both man and woman together were to “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. . . ; have dominion over . . . the earth”—not man have dominion over the woman (Gen 1:28)! Contrary to those who claim that “God’s naming of the human race ‘man’ whispers male headship,”<sup>8</sup> the word *’adam*, often translated “man,” is the generic term for humankind, and never means “man” in the sense of male gender in Scripture. Genesis 1 proclaims the fundamental equality of man and woman, in both value (in God’s image) and function or “role” (both together to procreate and subdue the earth).

B. **Genesis 2 reinforces Genesis 1.** Those who argue for a creation headship of man over woman use five main arguments to build their case: (1) the order of creation (man first and then woman); (2) the derived nature of woman’s creation (from Adam’s rib); (3) God’s speaking to the man and not to the woman; (4) woman created for the sake of man, to be his “helper”; and (5) the naming of the woman by the man, indicating his authority over her. None of these points prove a creation hierarchy of man over woman, contrary to what is claimed. (1) In the narrative flow of Gen 2, woman is created last as the climax, the crowning work of creation. Adam, like the animals, was “formed” (Heb. *yatsar*), using the language of a potter shaping a clay pot, while only Eve of all creation is “built, architecturally designed” (*banah*). At the same time, Moses uses the exact number of words to describe the creation of Adam as of Eve, thereby showing their equality. (2) Her creation from Adam’s “rib” (literally “side”), not from his head or foot, does not indicate her derived and thus subordinate role, but rather that she is “to stand by his side as an equal” (Gen 2:21-22; *PP* 46).<sup>9</sup> (3) God speaks to Adam as the one-time “head of the human family” (6T 236), “the father and representative of the whole human family” (*PP* 48); Adam’s name, never again held by another in Scripture, is the same word as “humankind.” This one-time *representative* (not *hierarchical*)<sup>10</sup> headship of the “first Adam” (1 Cor 15:54) was usurped by Satan (John 12:31) and was restored by the second (“last”) Adam (1 Cor 15:54). (4) The woman was created as man’s *’ezer kenegdo* (“helper comparable to him,” Gen 2:18 NKJV), which in the original does *not* denote a subordinate helper or assistant; elsewhere in Scripture it is most often *God Himself* who is called *’ezer* (“helper”): Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26; Ps 33:20; 70:5; 115:9, 10, 11. The word *kenegdo* in Gen 2:18 means no less than an equal counterpart, a “partner” (Gen 2:18, 22 NRSV). (5) Finally, contrary to common assumption, Adam does not name the woman (and thereby exercise authority over her) before the Fall in Gen 2:23. The narrator mentions the word “woman” even before Adam saw her (Gen 2:22), and the “divine passives” in verse 23 confirm in Hebrew thought that the designation “woman” comes from God, not from man.<sup>11</sup> Adam does not name Eve till after the Fall (Gen 3:20), and even this “naming” does not exercise headship, but predicts the role of Eve as the mother of all living climaxing ultimately in her Messianic seed.

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<sup>7</sup>The Camp Mohaven documents of the 1973 Role of Women in the Church Committee, are available on line at <http://adventistarchives.org/1973-5-mohaven>.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond C. Ortland, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), 97-98.

<sup>9</sup> Some have taken Ellen White’s statement that the Eve was “to be loved and protected by him [Adam]” (*PP* 46) as indicating male hierarchical headship, but protection here implies greater physical strength, not hierarchy! A government leader’s body guards are protectors, but that does not make the leader subordinate to them.

<sup>10</sup> Representative headship may be illustrated by US politics, where congressmen in the House of Representatives serve to represent their constituency, but by no means are in authority over them.

<sup>11</sup> See Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1978), 46-47.

In short, Gen 2 contains no creation order subordinating woman to man or restricting her from entering into full and equal participation with man in any ministry to which God may call her.<sup>12</sup>

C. **Subjection or submission of wife to husband comes about only after the Fall.** A subjection of Eve to Adam is mentioned in Gen 3. God says to Eve: “Your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). But it is crucial to recognize that the subjection of Eve to Adam comes *after the Fall*. Furthermore, it is limited to the *husband-wife relationship*, and therefore does not involve a general subordination of women to men.

This interpretation of Gen 1-3 is precisely confirmed by Ellen White. In her explicit commentary on Gen 3:16 in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, she writes: “In the creation God had made her 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*. 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*” (PP 58). Elsewhere Ellen White elaborates: “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*. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting. But after Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. *She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse*. In many cases the curse has made the lot of woman very grievous and her life a burden. The superiority which God has given man he has abused in many respects by exercising arbitrary power. *Infinite wisdom devised the plan of redemption, which places the race on a second probation by giving them another trial*” (3T 484).

Note well the following points that emerge from the biblical text and Ellen White comments: (a) before the Fall Adam and Eve were equal “in all things,” including function (“role”) as well as person (worth); the hierarchical relationship with “submission on the part of the one” (i.e. Eve) came only *after* the Fall. Note that this is in direct contradiction to the traditional interpretation of 1 Tim 2:12, which sees Gen 3:16 merely reaffirming the hierarchical headship of Gen 1–2. (b) The hierarchical relationship was a remedial provision, given by God in order that “their union could be maintained and their harmony preserved.” (c) This remedial arrangement was limited to the marriage relation: Eve “was placed in subjection *to her husband*.” The servant leadership of the husband set forth in this passage can no more be broadened to men-women relationships in general than can the sexual desire of the wife for her husband be broadened to mean the sexual desire of all women for all men. (d) The subjection of the wife to her husband “was part of the curse;” and the “plan of redemption” gave the race an opportunity to reverse the curse and return to the original egalitarian plan for marriages whenever possible.<sup>13</sup>

D. **In the Old Testament we see numerous women in ministry, including leadership roles over men, thus confirming Genesis 1.** Witness the powerful matriarchs of Genesis, depicted on an equal footing with the patriarchs.<sup>14</sup> Witness Deborah (Judges 4 and 5), one of the judges over the people of Israel—women and men, who was also presented as a prophet, a military leader, and one of Israel’s elders.<sup>15</sup> She was the modern-day equivalent of president of the USA, Supreme Court justice, a five-star general, and the Roman Catholic pope! That is authoritative “headship”! Witness the leadership roles of Miriam (Exod 15:20-21), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:13-14; 2 Chr 34:22–28), Esther, and others (e.g., Exod 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22; 2 Sam 14:2-20; 20:14–22). Witness the psalmist’s depiction of a host of women preachers (Psalm 68:11, ESV, NASB)! Witness the Song of Solomon, an inspired commentary on Gen 1-3, where husband and wife have “returned to Eden” and experienced a “reversal of the curse” in a marriage of equality without hierarchy even after the Fall, giving further evidence that hierarchical headship was not a creation ordinance.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For further detailed analysis, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 24-35; idem, “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture,” in *Women in Ministry* (ed. Nancy Vyhmeister; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998), 260-264.

<sup>13</sup> For further detailed analysis of Gen 2, see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 55-80.

<sup>14</sup> See Jo Ann Davidson, “Genesis Matriarchs Engage Feminism,” *AUSS* 40, no. 2 (2002): 169-178.

<sup>15</sup> For support of Deborah being an elder, see Gordon P. Hugenberger, “Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis? A Survey of Approaches to 1 Tim 2:8-15,” *JETS* 35 (1992): 360 (footnote 78).

<sup>16</sup> See discussion and evidence in Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 569-587

Although in OT Israel there did exist social inequalities for women, reflecting a distortion of the divine ideal set forth in Gen 1, yet nonetheless there are no legal restrictions barring women from positions of influence, leadership, and “headship authority” over men.

With regard to the priesthood, it is important to recognize that Moses presents the Garden of Eden as the first sanctuary,<sup>17</sup> and uses technical terms for the work of the priesthood (*‘avad + shamar*) to describe the work of both Adam and Eve; they were appointed officiating priests in the Garden of Eden before the Fall (compare Gen 2:15 with Num 18:3-7). Further explicit technical terms for priesthood (*labash + ketonet*) in Gen 3:21 (compare Lev 8:7, 13) show that this priesthood of both Adam and Eve was reconfirmed as such after the Fall.<sup>18</sup> God’s original plan was that *all* Israel be a “kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6). This was not just a corporate function of offering salvation to the surrounding nations, but the priesthood involved the call for all Israel—men and women—to come up on the mountain, to the place on the mountain which was equivalent to the Holy Place in the sanctuary, where only the priests could enter.<sup>19</sup> Because of Israel’s failure to follow God’s invitation (Deut 5:5), and their sin in the worship of the golden calf (Exod 32), an alternate plan was given in which even most men were also excluded—except for one family in one tribe in Israel. Yet in the New Testament the Gospel restores God’s original plan. Not a few male priests, but once more the “priesthood of *all* believers” (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

Joel 2:28-30 predicts a time in the last days when both men and women will have equal access to the gifts of the Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

**E. Jesus called His people back to the original plan regarding the role of women.** In the NT Jesus Himself set the tone for the Gospel restoration by pointing His hearers to God’s original plan “from the beginning” (Matt 19:8). He did not move precipitously, upsetting the very fabric of Jewish culture; He did not ordain women as His immediate apostles, just as He did not ordain Gentiles. “In a society where women were not allowed to bear public testimony, it would not have been prudent to have chosen women for such a mission.”<sup>21</sup> But He pointed the way back toward the Edenic ideal in His revolutionary treatment and exaltation of women (see John 4:7-30; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:1-3; Matt 15:21-28; John 20:1-18, etc.).<sup>22</sup>

**F. The NT epistles maintain the Eden model.** Paul and Peter give much instruction regarding the relationship between *husbands and wives*. Seven NT occurrences of *hypotassō* (“submit”)—all in the middle voice—occur in the context of *anēr* (“man/husband”)- *gynē* (“woman/wife”) relationships: 1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:21, 24; Col 3:18; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5. There is ambiguity in the Greek language because the same words *anēr/gynē* can mean either “man/woman” or “husband/wife,” but a close look at each of these passages reveals that the context is consistently one of husband and wife relationships, and not of men and women in general.<sup>23</sup> Counsel for *husbands and wives* cannot be extended to the relationship of men and women in general. The apostle Paul himself shows how the marriage relationship applies to the church. *Husband headship* in the home is not equated with *male headship* in the church. Rather, the Husband/Head of the church is *Christ*, and *all* the church—including males—are His “bride,” equally submissive to Him (Eph 5:21-23).

**1 Cor 14:34–35.** Regarding 1 Cor 14:34–35, Paul clearly refers to Gen 3:16 (“as the law also says”), and this relates to the husband-wife relationship; only in Gen 3:16 do we find a divine remedial, provisional arrangement regarding the submission of women/wives to their men/husbands. The husband-wife context is also

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<sup>17</sup> For 17 lines of biblical evidence supporting this conclusion, see Richard M. Davidson, “Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium,” *JATS* 11 (2000): 108-111.

<sup>18</sup> See discussion and evidence in Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 47-48, 57-58.

<sup>19</sup> See discussion and evidence in *ibid.*, 251-253; and Angel Rodríguez, “Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus,” *AUSS* 24, no. 2 (1986): 131-137.

<sup>20</sup> See also the radical new covenant promise regarding women’s eschatological roles in connection with men, in Jer 31:22: “a woman shall encompass a man” (cf. vs. 31-34)!

<sup>21</sup> Walter F. Specht, “Jesus and Women,” in *Symposium on the Role of Women in the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1984), 76. An additional reason why women were not a part of the “Twelve” is that Jesus was symbolically gathering the “Twelve Tribes” to Himself as the representative Israel (see Matthew 1-5 where Jesus is presented as the representative Israel; discussed in Richard M. Davidson, “The New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” *JATS* 5, no. 1 [Spring 1994]: 19-21).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-77.

<sup>23</sup> See Davidson, “Headship, Submission, and Equality,” 273–295.

evident from the clause in v. 35: “let them ask their own husbands at home.” The instructions of Paul that it is “shameful/disgraceful/improper” (*aischron*) for a wife to speak in church must be understood against the shame-honor culture of the contemporary Greco-Roman society, where a wife who spoke in public in a casual setting to males who were not her husband was considered as seeking to seduce them. In his letters “Paul vigorously opposes the markers of sexual immorality that were then current in the culture of his day.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in the setting of the “new feminism” of Corinth and Ephesus, wives were probably disgracing their husbands by asserting their authority over them in public.<sup>25</sup>

**1 Tim 2:9-14.** The most disputed passage in the women’s ordination debate is undoubtedly 1 Tim 2:9–14. This passage is a “land-mine” where exegetical missteps have been exceedingly costly to the experience of women. It reminds me of the cartoon where a monk is shown discovering a lost manuscript in the Vatican library, and after examining it closely, exclaims with horror: “Oh no! It says ‘celebrate!’ not ‘celibate!’” It has often been claimed that the term *authentēin* in 1 Tim 2:12 refers to official teaching authority, but detailed examination of the evidence by numerous scholars shows that “there is no first-century warrant for translating *authentēin* as ‘to exercise authority’ and for understanding Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 to be speaking of the carrying out of one’s official duties. Rather the sense is the Koine [NT Greek] ‘to dominate, to get one’s way.’”<sup>26</sup> This meaning was recognized in the earliest translations, such as the Old Latin and the Vulgate (*dominari*), but somehow “got lost in the Vatican library.” Numerous modern versions now recognize the validity of this translation.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, contrary to the traditional understanding, various scholars have argued cogently that *anēr* and *gynē* in vss. 11–12 should be translated as “husband” and “wife” respectively, and not simply “man” and “woman.”<sup>28</sup> Numerous lines of evidence within the passage strongly support this conclusion, and the most determinative evidence is found in the extensive parallels between this passage and the household code of 1 Pet 3.<sup>29</sup> In addition to detailed verbal correspondences of rare NT terms, both passages have the same structural flow of logic and thought, moving from a discussion of wifely submission, to the specific counsel on her proper adornment, and then to an OT paradigm for proper marital relationships (Adam-Eve, Abraham-Sarah). Inasmuch as 1 Pet 3 is a “household code” unambiguously dealing primarily with inter-relationships of husband and wives, it is difficult to escape the same conclusion for the corresponding Pauline passage in 1 Tim 2. It would be in harmony with this conclusion to see the “submission” (*hypotagē*) called for on the part of the wife (v. 11) as submission to her husband, as in all the other *hypotassō* passages dealing with husband-wife relations, although it is also possible that *hypotagē* refers to the submission of the wives to the teaching.

Thus in 1 Tim 2:12 Paul “do[es] not permit a wife (*gynaiki*) to teach—that is, to boss her husband (*andros*); she must be quiet (*hesychia*). . . . Paul’s concern is to prohibit only the sort of teaching that would constitute a failure

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<sup>24</sup>Eliezer Gonzalez, “Gender and Shame in Paul’s Churches: The Intersection of Theology and Culture,” *JATS* 22 (2011): 63. See *ibid.*, 50-65, for evidence from first-century Greco-Roman documents for these conclusions.

<sup>25</sup> See E. Earle Ellis, “The Silenced Wives of Corinth (1 Cor. 14:34–35),” in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis* (ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 218. For a careful, detailed analysis of this passage, and a similar conclusion as that of Ellis, see Carroll D. Osburn, “The Interpretation of 1 Cor. 14: 34–35,” in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (ed. Carroll D. Osburn; 2 vols.; Joplin, Mo.: College Press Publishing Co., 1993), 1:219–242.

<sup>26</sup>Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca M. Groothuis; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 216.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Goodspeed (1923), NEB (1961), JBCerf (1974), REB (1989), New Translation (1990), CEV (1991), *The Message* (1995), and the CEB (2012, see translation below).

<sup>28</sup>The most comprehensive presentation of evidence for this view (and critique of alternate positions) is by Hugenberger, “1 Timothy 2:8–15,” 341–360. See also Ed Christian, “Women, Teaching, Authority, Silence: 1 Timothy 2:8–15 Explained by 1 Peter 3:1–6,” *JATS* 10, nos. 1 & 2 (Spring–Autumn 1999): 285–29; Sharon Hodgkin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9–15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991), 125, 130-135.

<sup>29</sup> Hugenberger, “1 Timothy 2:8–15,” 355–358. Cf. Christian, “1 Timothy 2:8–15 Explained by 1 Peter 3:1–6,” 285–290.

of the requisite wifely ‘submission’ to her husband.”<sup>30</sup> The new scholarly translation of the Bible, the 2011 Common English Bible, captures well the meaning of vv. 11-12: “A wife should learn quietly with complete submission. I don’t allow a wife to teach or to control her husband. Instead, she should be a quiet listener.”

Why were wives in Ephesus acting inappropriately? In addition to recognizing the “new feminism” of the first century AD in Ephesus and Corinth (see above), it is important to notice that some 60% of Paul’s first epistle to Timothy is concerned with false teachers and women. This theme of “false teachers” is the overriding concern of the epistle, not “church order.” Key words in the epistle itself give us the clues to the nature of this false teaching. For example, he speaks of “myths and endless genealogies” (1:4); according to the Amazon myth of ancient Ephesus, the city was founded by women without the help of men, and citizens can trace their genealogy to these founding women. Again, Paul speaks of some women “who have turned aside after Satan” (5:15). When one recalls the prevalence of the Artemis fertility cult worship at Ephesus (Acts 19:28–37), it is natural to assume that many of the Gentile converts in Ephesus were former devotees of the Mother Goddess cult. The contours of the false teaching as described in 1 Timothy comports well with the Artemis cult (among other heresies Timothy was facing in Ephesus), in which the female principle was created first and considered superior to men.<sup>31</sup>

Thus in 1 Tim 2:13 Paul is *not* arguing for a creation headship of man over woman as has often been assumed. Paul here is setting forth a polemic against and correction of a false syncretistic theology in Ephesus which claimed that *woman* was created first and *man* fell first, and therefore women are superior to men. Because of this false theology, wives were domineering over their husbands both at home and in public church meetings. Paul argues, in effect, that the theology of women’s supremacy is not biblical: “the true story was just the opposite. For Adam was formed, then Eve (1 Tim 2:13). And Eve, not Adam, was deceived to boot (1 Tim 2:14)—hardly a basis on which to claim superiority.”<sup>32</sup>

The word *gar* “for” at the beginning of 1 Tim 2:13 does not introduce a creation order in which women must not teach men *because* God created men to lead. “[T]he conjunction *gar* (“for”) typically introduces an *explanation* for what precedes, not a *cause*”<sup>33</sup>, as seen in the clear explanatory use of *gar* a few verses earlier (v. 5). Paul there counteracts the false theology of the Artemis cult which had various heavenly mediators, when he writes “For (*gar*) there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” Similarly, in v. 12, Paul does not permit wives to domineer over their husbands, and in v. 13 he provides the *explanation*: Eve was created to be Adam’s equal partner, not his boss. Paul is arguing against the superiority of women over men without establishing the contrary—the superiority or headship of men over women. He says, in effect, “Your theology of women’s priority and superiority is wrong, for don’t you know? It was Adam, not Eve, who was created first. It was Eve, not Adam who was deceived.” Paul corrects wrong theology, he does not argue for a creation male headship.

**1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9.** Paul’s list of qualifications for elders framed in the masculine gender with the phrase “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:6) does not exclude women from serving as elders any more than the masculine gender throughout the Ten Commandments (Exod 20; see esp. vs. 17) exempts women from obedience. The literal translation of this expression is “a one-wife husband,” and is used by Paul to uphold the Edenic ideal of monogamy (Gen 2:24). The same term “one-wife husband” is used to characterize deacons in 1 Tim 3:12, and as noted below, the woman Phoebe is mentioned as a deacon (*diakonos*, in the masculine gender, Rom 16:1), thus demonstrating the gender-inclusive intention of this expression. Furthermore, the reference to “the elders who rule [*proistēmi*] well” (1 Tim 5:17) finds exact parallel in the *proistēmi* (“ruling”) work of the deacon Phoebe in Rom 16:2. Finally, Paul introduces the list of qualifications for bishop/overseer (*episkopos*) by the statement “If *anyone* [*tis*] desires the office of bishop” (1 Tim 3:1), not “If any *man*. . .” as in many modern translations; it is a gender-inclusive invitation to desire the office!

**G. The Gospel Ideal is the Return to the Eden Model.** Paul emphatically declared: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). This is not merely a statement on equal access to salvation among various groups (cf. Gal 2:11–15; Eph 2:14–15). Rather, it specifically singles out those three relationships in which the Jews had perverted God’s original plan of Gen 1 by making one group subordinate to another: (1) Jew-Gentile, (2) slave-master, and (3) male-female. Every male Jew prayed daily: “Blessed are you, Hashem, King of the Universe, for not having made me a

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<sup>30</sup> Hugenberger, “1 Timothy 2:8–15,” 356, 358. The word *hesychia* “quiet” does not imply total silence, but rather to a state of quiet or tranquility; the adjectival form of this term *hesychios* is used in this same chapter in v. 2: “that we may lead a quiet and tranquil [*hesychios*] life”.

<sup>31</sup> For a careful analysis of the evidence for the conclusions in this section, see especially Hugenberger, “1 Tim 2:8-15,” 341-360; and Gritz, *Paul, Woman Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus, passim*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* Belleville points out that “[t]he principal Greek causal conjunction is *hoti* (or *dioti*).”

Gentile. . . for not having made me a slave. . . for not having made me a woman.” Note the exact same order in this prayer and in Paul’s statement. By using the rare NT terms “male-female” (*arsen-thēly*) instead of “husband-wife” (*anēr-gynē*) Paul establishes a link with Gen 1:27 and thus shows how the Gospel calls us back to the divine ideal, which has no place for subordination of females to male headship in the church. Thus, Paul’s choice of terminology upholds the equality of men and women in the church, in roles as well as worth.

**Women leaders in the NT church.** Within the cultural restraints of his day, Paul and the early church (like Jesus) did not act precipitously. “It was not the apostle’s work to overturn arbitrarily or suddenly the established order of society. To attempt this would be to prevent the success of the gospel” (AA 459). The subordination of Gentiles was difficult to root out (even in Peter [Gal 2:11–14]!). Slavery was not abolished in the early church (see Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22; Phlm 12; 1 Tim 6:1). Likewise, women did not immediately receive full and equal participation with men in the ministry of the church. However, there is enough evidence to show the Gospel ideal. Paul’s reference to his female co-workers gives no indication the women who worked alongside him were of a subordinate character to the male co-workers. Of the 26 persons addressed in Rom 16, ten are women. Phoebe is specifically mentioned as a “deacon” (Rom 16:1); Junia was a female apostle (Rom 16:7). Leaders of the church at Philippi were women (Acts 16:12–15, 40; Phil 4:2–3). Priscilla assumed an authoritative teaching role over men (Acts 18), and the “Elect Lady” (2 John) may well have been a prominent church leader with a congregation under her care.<sup>34</sup> The NT is not without witness of women in leadership (“headship”) roles in the church, and there is every reason to believe that these women were ordained on the same basis as men in the same positions, without regard to gender (cf. Acts 6:6; 13:2–3; 1 Tim 5:22).

### Conclusion

God does not speak directly to the question of the ordination of women in the NT, just as He does not deal directly with the abolition of slavery, with vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol, and many other issues based on principles set forth “from the beginning.” With slavery, God through Paul “taught principles which struck at the very foundation of slavery, and which, if carried into effect, would surely undermine the whole system” (AA 459–460). Likewise with regard to women in pastoral ministry, God has given clear Biblical principles to guide our decision-making. The alleged “male headship” impediment to women’s ordination has been shown to be unfounded in Scripture. No inspired writer—not Moses, Jesus, Paul, or Ellen White—teaches the creation headship of man over woman. Nor has this position ever been accepted in the history of Adventism.<sup>35</sup>

In these last days, when the fullness of the everlasting Gospel is to be preached, God has called His church to return to His original blueprint for every area of our lives: our diet, our day of worship—and the three human relationships mentioned in Gal 3:28 (and grounded in Gen 1–2). Our church has already taken courageous stands against slavery and racial prejudice. God also calls us to return to the Edenic ideal for male-female relationships that allows women equal access to the gifts of the Spirit (Joel 2:28–30; Eph 4:11–13). Exactly forty years ago a clarion cry denying the creation male headship and affirming the ordaining of women in pastoral ministry was sounded to spiritual Israel at the Camp Mohaven conference (see discussion above). Now, 40 years later, it is time for spiritual Israel to stop wandering in the wilderness and enter Canaan! As the Spirit gifts women for ministry, “distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor 12:11), may the church follow the Spirit’s leading!

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<sup>34</sup> See discussion of these persons, with bibliography, in Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 649–650.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Denis Fortin, “What Did Early Adventist Pioneers Think about Women in Ministry?” (available at <http://www.memorymeaningfaith.org/blog/2010/04/adventist-pioneers-women-ministry.html> ).