

**“Issues Relating to the Ordination of Women with Special Emphasis on 1 Peter 2:9, 10
and Galatians 3:28”**

Theology of Ordination Study Committee

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Clarity of Scripture.....	4
Hermeneutics and the Sabbath.....	5
Tip of an Iceberg.....	6
Priesthood of all Believers.....	6
Peter’s Recipients.....	8
Continuity or Discontinuity?	8
All-Important Context.....	9
Priesthood but not Priests.....	10
Spiritual Leaders.....	11
Israel as Mediator.....	12
Cultic Cultural Argument.....	14
Visible and Invisible Head.....	15
Galatians 3:28.....	16
Distinction of Male and Female.....	16
First Option.....	17
Second Option.....	18
Third Option.....	19
Questions Regarding Galatians 3:28.....	20

Paul’s Central Argument.....	20
Backdrop of Acts.....	21
Paul’s Baptismal Theology.....	23
Put on Christ.....	25
Baptism and the Charismata.....	26
A Pivotal Question (does baptism qualify for church office).....	26
Husbands of One Wife.....	28
Four Lists of Charismata.....	29
Not Neophytes.....	31
Relational Use of ‘One’.....	32
The Godhead Model.....	32
The Ephesian Model.....	33
Ellen White on Male Headship.....	34
The Matter of Submission.....	34
Mutual Submission?	35
Meaning of Hypotasso.....	37
In Christ Jesus.....	38
The Seed of Abraham.....	39
Summary.....	39
The Fourth Possibility.....	41
The Cornelius Experience.....	41
Colossians 3.....	44
Chronology of Galatians.....	45
Ellen White and Galatians 3:28.....	46
Ellen White and Headship.....	48

Male Headship in the Church.....	48
Sweeping Generalizations.....	50
Reflections on Ellen White’s 1895 Statement.....	52
Phoebe.....	56
Were there Female Apostles?.....	59
Successor of Judas.....	63
What about Junias?.....	65
Deborah and Huldah.....	66
Moses, Joshua and the Elders.....	68
Period of the Judges.....	69
Deborah’s Role Unusual.....	70
Deborah’s Role.....	70
Who Led the Battle?.....	71
Barak’s Hesitation.....	71
Prophets as Helpers.....	72
The Jehoshaphat Example.....	72
Barak the Central Figure.....	73
The Testimony of Hebrews.....	74
Illogical Conclusion.....	74
Female Prophets.....	75
The Case of Huldah.....	75
Questions and More Questions.....	75
Huldah.....	75
Was Huldah the Leader?.....	76
The Adventist Advantage.....	77

Ellen White and Credentials.....	78
Biographical Information Sheet.....	79
W. C. White Confirmation.....	79
In Conclusion.....	79
Summarizing the Evidence.....	79

Introduction

I have been asked to write a paper about headship in the New Testament. This is an almost impossible task because the subject is broad and legions of books and articles have been written on the subject. Others on this committee have been asked to write specialized papers dealing with controverted texts on the matter, such as 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3-15 so I have decided to focus primarily (but not exclusively) on two specific texts that have been interpreted differently by egalitarians and complementarians.¹ These two texts are 1 Peter 2:9, 10 and Galatians 3:28.

In harmony with the *Sola Scriptura* principle, other texts will be brought to bear when they are related to the subject at hand. When appropriate, the writings of Ellen White will also be used. I have not included a section on hermeneutics because the subject has been well covered in the paper on 1 Corinthians 11:3-15 by Dr. Edwin Reynolds. So to speak, there is no need to ‘reinvent the wheel’. However, I think that a few words on hermeneutics would be in order.

Clarity of Scripture

In the discussion on women’s ordination virtually every biblical argument that has been used against women’s ordination to pastoral leadership² has been explained away or reinterpreted by an appeal to culture, by an appeal to other supposedly contradictory texts (for example pitting what Paul writes about women in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 against what he says in 1 Corinthians 11:5), by quoting what

¹ Egalitarians believe that men and women are ontologically equal and share equal and interchangeable roles in the home and in the church. While complementarians believe that men and women are ontologically equal they also believe that men and women have complementary and distinctive roles in the home and in the church. Unfortunately egalitarians sometimes erroneously portray complementarians as ones who do not believe that women are equal with men. This misconception is reflected, for example, in a document that was prepared by Scott A. LeMert, at the request of the Oregon Conference. LeMert, who is the Assistant to the President of the Oregon Conference, framed his remarks by asking the question “Did God create women with the intent that she be a lesser order of humanity?” The very title of the document is misleading because Seventh-day Adventist complementarians do not believe that women should be barred from the pulpit! Scott, A. LeMert, “Women in the Pulpit: Has God Called Them?” July 2010, p. 3.

² By pastoral leadership I mean elders/overseers on various church levels including local church elders, senior pastors of local churches and also Mission, Conference, Union, Division and General Conference presidents. This had been the long standing understanding of the church until recent times. I do not believe that the ordination of elders/overseers on any level is in harmony with the testimony of Scripture or the Spirit of Prophecy

the scholars have written and by a reinterpretation of the meaning of biblical words. I believe that what is simple and clear to the common reader of the Bible has been mystified and relativized.

Ellen White once wisely wrote:

"Numberless words need not be put upon paper to justify what speaks for itself and shines in its clearness. Truth is straight, plain, clear, and stands out boldly in its own defense; but it is not so with error. It is so winding and twisting that it needs a multitude of words to explain it in its crooked form." Early Writings, p. 96

Hermeneutics and the Sabbath

An illustration of Ellen White's comment can be seen in the way that non-Adventist pastors and scholars handle the Sabbath question. For every biblical argument that Adventists have brought forth to sustain the perpetuity of the Sabbath, a counterargument has been proposed to explain it away by those who oppose its observance.

When one says it is a creation institution they counter with the fact that Genesis 2 does not say that God commanded Adam and Eve to rest. It was God Himself who rested, it is said, not man.³ When one argues on the basis of the fourth commandment they say that while the observance of a specific day was ceremonial and time bound, **the principle** of rest one day in seven is moral and universal. "It is the principle of rest that counts not a specific twenty four hour period." And they sustain their view by quoting texts such as Colossians 2:16, 17 and Romans 14:5!

When one argues that Jesus and the apostles went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath, they agree, but they say that their attendance at the synagogue was **descriptive** rather than **prescriptive**.⁴ That is, they attended the synagogue on the Sabbath because they were Jews and that is where Jews went on the Sabbath. But their presence in the synagogue on the Sabbath, it is argued, does not mean that they were **prescribing** Sabbath observance for New Testament Christians!

When one shows that Paul and Peter attended the synagogue on the Sabbath day after Pentecost they say that it was merely because they wanted to reach their fellow Jews who worshiped there. And when

³ For the theological reason why God did not command Adam and Eve to rest on that first Sabbath see my book Hidden Sabbath Truths available at www.secretsunsealed.org

⁴ There is no direct command to keep the Sabbath in the New Testament and this has been taken to mean that its observance by Jesus and the apostles was *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. It should be noted also that there is no command that *forbids* the church from keeping Sunday in honor of the resurrection. Ellen White warned us about the danger of enjoining what the Bible does not forbid when she stated concerning the papacy: "The very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church. Rome began by enjoining what God had not forbidden, and she ended by forbidding what He had explicitly enjoined." GC 289, 290

Adventists say that Jesus kept the Sabbath, they counter with John 9:18 where the text says that Jesus broke it.⁵

But not only do anti-Sabbatarians have arguments against our position, they also have some in favor of theirs. Did not Christ resurrect on Sunday? (Matthew 28:1) Weren't the apostles gathered in the Upper Room on the first day of the week? (John 20:19) Wasn't the Holy Spirit poured out on a Sunday? (Acts 2:1-4) Didn't Jesus appear to the disciples once again a week later on a Sunday? (John 20:26) Didn't the apostle Paul gather with the church at Troas on Sunday? (Acts 20:7-9) Weren't offerings taken to church in Corinth on the first day of the week? (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2) Doesn't Revelation 1:10 affirm that Sunday was the Lord's Day at the end of the first century? With all this 'evidence', it is claimed, who could deny that Sunday observance is taught in Scripture?

Further, it is argued by some Protestant scholars that an earlier divine principle—Sabbath observance—which applied **exclusively to the Jews** has now been replaced and superseded by a later divine principle—the observance of Sunday in honor of the resurrection. Some scholars even go so far as to admit that the New Testament has no explicit command to discard the Sabbath and replace it with Sunday, but they affirm that the Sunday appearances by Jesus hinted that the **trajectory** was moving in that direction. According to these scholars, the church, apart from the direct testimony of Scripture, then completed the trajectory by clearly instituting what was only hinted at in the New Testament.⁶ And the list goes on!

The case for Sabbath observance which is clear and unambiguous in Scripture has been weakened by specious and sophisticated philosophical arguments based on human constructs, revisionist history and culture.⁷

⁵ Of course we know that Jesus did not break the Sabbath of Scripture, but rather the rabbinical Sabbath with all of its burdensome man made rules and regulations.

⁶ Willy Rordorf, in his book, Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church has argued that Jesus celebrated the Eucharist with His disciples on the Sunday evening of the resurrection thus implicitly teaching them that on every successive Sunday the Eucharist should be celebrated in commemoration of His passion and resurrection. After Jesus ascended to heaven, contends Rordorf, the church in the second and third centuries completed the trajectory that Jesus had implicitly begun on Easter Sunday.

⁷ In 1975, evangelical scholar Paul K. Jewett, one of the pioneers of the women's ordination movement, published the book Man as Male and Female where he unapologetically affirmed that Paul as a Jew believed that the woman is subordinate to the man while as a Christian he considered the woman equal to the man in all things. He states: "Because these two perspectives—the Jewish and the Christian—are incompatible, there is no satisfying way to harmonize the Pauline argument. . ." So how does Jewett resolve the problem? In typical historical-critical fashion he must question the reliability of Paul's testimony. In his own words: "To resolve this difficulty, one must recognize the human as well as the divine quality of Scripture." (p. 134).

Jewett also wrote the book The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship where he applies the identical hermeneutic to dispose of the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. His book is riddled with human reasoning, conjecture, assumptions, human constructs, reinterpretation, philosophical arguments, and historical revisionism. Not surprisingly Jewett affirmed: "God created the world in six days and rested the seventh, and that this is not a literal, empirical description of how the world came to be what we now see it to be. The sabbatical rhythm of time in the biblical view of creation is not to be understood scientifically, but theologically." (p. 121). To those who are unwilling to accept the *simple* and clear biblical testimony of Genesis 2 and Exodus 20, Jewett's case appears persuasive. Jewett's methodology of

Tip of an Iceberg

In his incisive book, Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth, evangelical scholar Wayne Grudem has warned that those who drift away from faithfulness to the authority and clarity of the Bible on the matter of women's ordination will drift further and further from the Bible in other areas as well:

"People in the middle of turning points in history do not always realize it. I believe that today we are right in the middle of a *turning point* in the history of the Church. Christian organizations right now are deciding these issues. They are making commitments and establishing those commitments in their policies. Some organizations are affirming biblical principles, as the Southern Baptists did. Others are establishing egalitarian principles as part of their policies, as Willow Creek Community Church has done. There is a *sifting, a sorting, a dividing* going on within the evangelical world, and I believe that institutions that adopt an egalitarian position will *drift further and further* from faithfulness to the Bible *on other issues* as well."⁸

In other words, at stake in this discussion is not only the role of women in the home and in the church. At stake is how the Bible is handled, what hermeneutical methods are used to interpret it and how much we can depend on its clarity and authority. As Wayne Grudem has persuasively shown in his book, other dangers lurk on the horizon. If women's ordination is approved, will the next step be to bless gay marriages and eventually gay pastors such as has happened in many mainline Protestant denominations?⁹ Will it lead to a reinterpretation of the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2? At stake also is the very unity of the Seventh-day Adventist church as a world church with a representative style of governance. As it has been aptly put by Dr. C. Raymond Holmes, the women's ordination issue is merely 'the tip of an iceberg!'

Priesthood of all Believers

explaining away the clear statements of Scripture is a dire warning to Seventh-day Adventist scholars who are attempting to explain away the clear teaching of the apostle Paul regarding the headship of man in the home and in the church. After all, is it so difficult to understand the phrase 'husband of one wife'?

⁸ Wayne Grudem, Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth, p. 52. Some Adventist scholars have objected to the use of Wayne Grudem's material because he believes in the eternal subordination of the Son to the will of the Father and has Calvinistic theological views concerning salvation. Yet the very same scholars do not object to using material from feminist scholars who openly oppose the traditional Adventist view of women in ministry. I believe that Grudem's work on the issue of women's ordination is valuable even though we do not agree with his Calvinistic soteriological views. Rather than throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater, should we not follow the Bible counsel to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21)? Ellen White presented a very favorable view of Calvin in The Great Controversy, pp. 211ff and yet her soteriological views are in many ways different from those of Calvin.

⁹It might be asked how homosexual relationships can be justified when the Bible speaks out so clearly against them and they are not part of the creation order. The answer is that the biblical testimony is neutered and explained away by the claim that the Bible merely forbids lascivious homosexual relationships and not committed marital ones. It is argued that as the Bible forbids sexual relations outside a committed heterosexual marital relationship, so the Bible forbids homosexuality only outside a committed marital relationship. And yet nowhere in the Bible do we find such specious reasoning! Others, using Galatians 3:28 affirm that the principle that there is neither male nor female supersedes all other Biblical texts regarding marriage. It should not go unnoticed that the same text that is used to erase gender distinctions when it comes to women's ordination is used also to support gay marriage!

I have found that Seventh-day Adventist scholars who favor the ordination of women as elders/overseers most frequently appeal to Galatians 3:28 for Biblical support. Along with this text, egalitarians also link 1 Peter 2:9, 10 and claim that the priesthood of all believers has broken down patriarchal gender role barriers in the home and in the church and therefore both men and women can legitimately serve as elders/overseers¹⁰ in the church. This claim we will examine in this paper. It bears noting that I have not been able to find the precise expression ‘priesthood of all believers’ either in Scripture or in the Spirit of Prophecy. However, I do believe that the *concept*, if properly understood, is present in both. Let’s begin our study by quoting 1 Peter 2:9, 10:

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, *that* you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were *not a people* but are *now the people of God*, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”¹¹

Peter’s Recipients

The two epistles of Peter have been referred to as Catholic Epistles because they were not written to specific church communities but rather to the universal church. The context of our verses indicates that the recipients of Peter’s first letter were most likely Jewish and Gentile Christians who through Christ had become part of the New Covenant community of believers—the Christian church.¹² Before coming to Christ Peter described them as ‘no people’ but after accepting Christ, he called them ‘the people of God’ because in Christ they had become full-fledged members of the New Covenant community.

Peter also described them as a ‘royal priesthood’ and a ‘holy nation.’ The text under review clearly indicates that when Peter described these believers as a ‘royal priesthood’ he was not referring to some specialized priestly caste of males but rather to *all* of God’s people. Undeniably, *all* the members of God’s New Covenant community were, in a certain sense, a royal priesthood.

Continuity or Discontinuity?

But at this point a very important question demands an answer. Is the concept of a New Testament royal priesthood of all believers totally *discontinuous* with the Old Testament? Stated another way, is the priesthood of all believers a radically *new concept* that kicks in for the first time under the New Covenant?

¹⁰ Lamentably the word ‘bishop’ has been loaded down with theological ‘baggage’ in the course of church history and for this reason I prefer to use the word ‘overseer’ to translate the word *episkopos*.

¹¹ All emphasis in this paper is supplied.

¹² It is to be noted that in the very next chapter (1 Peter 3:18-22) the apostle refers to baptism as the rite that incorporated the recipients into Christ and the New Covenant community.

That this is not the case is indicated by Peter's reference to the entirety of Christians in the New Covenant community as a 'royal priesthood', an expression that he borrows from Exodus 19:6. The fact that Peter bases his argument on this Old Testament text indicates that the New Testament royal priesthood is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. Thus, at least in *some sense* there is a *continuity* of the Old Testament royal priesthood in the New Testament Church. In short, the entirety of Old Testament Israel as well as the entirety of the New Testament Christians is described as a 'royal priesthood' and a 'holy nation'.

Our first question naturally leads to another. In *what sense* is there continuity between the Old and New Testament royal priesthoods? Does the priesthood of all believers in the New Testament mean that while the Old Testament required priests to be of the male gender, in the New a change has taken place so that God now calls elders/overseers to serve in the church without regard to gender? It must be noted that if this were the case then there would be discontinuity rather than continuity!

All-Important Context

How then is this royal priesthood to be understood? It is important to remember that Peter is drawing his language from the historical context of Israel's official incorporation as God's Old Testament church at Mt. Sinai. Shortly before arriving at the Mount, by Paul's own testimony, Israel had been baptized *into*¹³ Moses (I Corinthians 10:2) and at Sinai they were going to enter into a covenant relationship with God to be officially incorporated as His chosen church.¹⁴ That is, in type, Israel had been baptized *into* Moses (their personal leader)¹⁵ in the Red Sea and now they were about to be incorporated as members of God's *corporate* Old Testament Church. Similarly, in the New Testament individuals are baptized *into* Christ (Galatians 3:26, 27) and then they become members of the body of Christ, the New Testament Church (1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:47).

Ellen White described the occasion when the children of Israel officially became members of God's church at Mt. Sinai:

"Soon after the encampment at Sinai, Moses was called up into the mountain to meet with God. Alone he climbed the steep and rugged path, and drew near to the cloud that marked the place of Jehovah's

¹³ The preposition *eis* ('into') is the same that is used in Matthew 28:19 where Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize *into* the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and it is the same preposition that is used in Galatians 3:27 (cf. Romans 6:3-5) where those who have been baptized *into* Christ 'have put on Christ'. Not only is the name of the Christ *invoked* at baptism but candidates are actually engrafted into the name. This is the reason why believers who have been baptized into Christ have adopted his name and are called 'Christians'.

¹⁴ The context clearly indicates that this was a covenant transaction. In verses 4-6 we are told that God offered to enter into a covenant relationship with Israel. Moses then relayed God's desire to the people to which they responded by promising: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." (verses 7, 8) Moses then referred the promise of the people to God.

¹⁵ The Moses/Christ typology is further developed in Acts 3:22-26 and Hebrews 3:1-6.

presence. Israel was now to be taken into a close and peculiar relation to the Most High--to be *incorporated as a church* and a nation under the government of God.”¹⁶

It was when Israel was ‘incorporated as a church and a nation under the government of God’ at Mt. Sinai that God addressed the *entirety* of Israel with the words of Exodus 19:5, 6 and referred to the entire nation as a ‘kingdom of priests’.¹⁷

It cannot be emphasized enough that in these verses God is addressing the *entirety* of Israel and not just a selective cadre of individuals who would serve in the specialized office of ‘priest’. *Every person* in Israel—God’s Old Testament Church—was called to be a member of the kingdom of priests. The priesthood of all believers therefore is not a radically novel idea that first appears in the New Testament but is rather deeply rooted in God’s call to ancient Israel. The priesthood of all believers already existed in the Old Testament period and therefore it should not be understood as a revolutionary new concept.

But is this covenant that God made with ancient Israel still binding for God’s end time remnant Church? By strongly echoing the language of Exodus 19:5, 6, Peter is indicating that it indeed is, and the Spirit of Prophecy concurs:

“This covenant is of *just as much force today* as it was when the Lord made it with ancient Israel.”¹⁸

Notably, Ellen White links the language of Exodus 19:5, 6 with that of 1 Peter 2:9, 10 as she compares God’s call to ancient Israel with His call to His remnant people today:

“The Lord made a special covenant with his *ancient Israel* if they would prove faithful: ‘Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.’ He addresses his commandment-keeping people in *these last days*, “But ye are a chosen

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 303

¹⁷ Just because the entire nation of Israel was called a ‘kingdom’ does not mean that everyone was entitled to be king. Likewise, just because the entire nation was referred to as a ‘priesthood’ does not mean that each and every one was entitled to occupy the office of priest.

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, volume 1, p. 1103. We must not dichotomize Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church as if they were radically different entities. It is certainly legitimate to *distinguish* Old Testament Israel from the New Testament Church but it is illegitimate to *dichotomize* them. Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church are to be understood as two stages of the same people of God. This is clearly indicated by the fact that a *single woman* represents the people of God both before Jesus was born (Revelation 12:1, 2, 5) and after (Revelation 12:6) and the twelve stars on the woman’s crown represent both the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles (Revelation 12:1; Genesis 37:24). As the founders of the Old Testament stage were twelve males, so the founders of the New Testament stage were twelve males as well. This is the reason why the woman’s crown has twelve stars. In the Old Testament the twelve stars are symbolic of the twelve male sons of Jacob and in the New Testament they represent the twelve male apostles. In continuity with the Old Testament, Jesus chose twelve males as founders of the New Testament Church. For those who are interested in pursuing the meaning and importance of the number 12 refer to my unpublished study, “A Providential Election”.

generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."¹⁹

Priesthood but not Priests

So it is clear from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy that in both dispensations all of God's people were called to be a royal priesthood. Does this mean, however, that all of God's people were called to serve as 'priests' or spiritual leaders in the narrow sense of the word? Is it warranted to take a leap of logic and say that because every Israelite is addressed, every Israelite was then entitled to serve in the ministerial office of 'priest'? Of course not! Although the entirety of Israel was in a broad sense a priesthood, not everyone was a 'priest' in the restricted sense of the word. By God's own instructions only males from the house of Aaron could serve in the ministerial office of 'priest'.

Spiritual Leaders

Priests, in the technical sense of the word, were the spiritual leaders of Israel and there was a clear distinction between the leaders and the people whom they served. In fact, immediately after God offered to make a covenant with the entirety of Israel as His church, God specified in Exodus 19:22-24 that there was a difference between all Israel as a royal priesthood and the males from the house of Aaron who served as priests.²⁰

It will become clearer as we continue our study that in the New Testament all of God's people are called to be members of a royal priesthood (as also they were in the Old Testament) but not all are called to be spiritual leaders or elders/overseers in the narrow sense of the word. In line with the Old Testament priests, the spiritual leaders of the New Testament Church must be the 'husbands of one wife' and must 'rule their own house well' and have their 'children in submission with all reverence' (1 Timothy 3:2, 3).

At this point we must ask a further question: In what sense was the entirety of Israel a royal priesthood when God invited them to enter a covenant relationship with Him at Mt. Sinai? Did each and every person now have direct access to God without a mediator? Of course not! As is well known only male priests from the house of Aaron could represent the people before God. Yet it must be understood that those priests only typified the priesthood of Christ. No mere human priest (and sinful at that!) could in reality truly mediate between man and God.²¹ The Old Testament priests served only as types

¹⁹ PH011, p. 16

²⁰ Some have claimed that God's original plan for Israel was that each and every Israelite, male and female, should be a priest and that a priesthood composed only of males was established by God as a 'plan B' after Israel sinned by building the golden calf at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34). But this view does not square with the evidence because already in Exodus 19:20-24 there was a clear distinction between the priests and the people.

²¹ Scripture is clear that the priest and the victim had to be without physical blemish (Leviticus 21:17-21; 22:20-22). The absence of an external physical blemish represented the absolute internal moral perfection of Jesus as our High Priest (see

of the one and only true Priest—Jesus Christ. Just as the blood of bulls and goats could not in reality remove sin (Hebrews 10:4) so a mere sinful human priest could not truly intercede for the sinner. The entire Old Testament ceremonial system was a shadow that pointed to Christ (Colossians 2:13-17; Hebrews 8:1, 2). In other words, Christ was the one and only true mediator even in the Old Testament period! In order to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, the Mediator was required to be God as well as man—and a sinless one at that!

So, even in the Old Testament period, Christ was the only true Mediator typified by the male priests. And today, as in the Old Testament period, we cannot approach the throne of God without the same Mediator. We can only come to the Father through Jesus who was symbolized by the priesthood of Aaron (John 14:6).

Priests as Instructors

It has been assumed that the central role of the Old Testament priests and Levites was to perform the sanctuary ritual that foreshadowed the Messiah's work. While this is no doubt true, there was another didactic function which was equally important. The Old Testament priests and Levites were called by God to perform the sanctuary ritual on behalf of the people but they were also called *to teach* them how the ritual pointed forward to the Messiah's salvific work. It was insufficient to merely offer lambs, burn incense, light lamps and bake bread. The priests were required to teach the people the meaning of each and every detail of the ritual service and how it foreshadowed Messiah's work.²²

But it was not even sufficient for the children of Israel to understand the profound meaning of the sanctuary ritual! God did not only love Israel; He loved the entire world! Once the people understood the meaning of the sanctuary ritual, God expected them to share the good news with the surrounding nations in order to prepare the world for the arrival of the Messiah.²³

Hebrews 4:15; 7:25, 26). Further, as illustrated by the ladder that Jacob saw in his dream, the gap between heaven and earth could only be bridged by one who is God (represented by the top of the ladder) and one who is man (represented by the bottom of the ladder). No mere human priest is morally blameless or God!

²²Leviticus 10:8-11; "After the settlement in Canaan the divine precepts were to be repeated daily in every home; they were to be written plainly upon the doorposts and gates, and spread upon memorial tablets. They were to be set to music and chanted by young and old. *Priests were to teach* these holy precepts in public assemblies, and the rulers of the land were to make them their daily study." Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 454, 455

"Every dying victim was a type of Christ, which lesson was impressed on mind and heart in the most solemn, sacred ceremony, and *explained definitely by the priests*. Sacrifices were explicitly planned by God Himself *to teach* this great and momentous truth, that through the *blood of Christ alone* there is forgiveness of sins." 1SM 107

²³This is the same mission Christ has called every member of the Church to fulfill: "The church of Christ is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. Its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. Jesus said to the representatives of his church, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' There is no limitation to this command. The good news of a Savior,—Christ dying as our sacrifice upon Calvary, Christ pleading as our high-priest and intercessor before God, Christ our king and deliverer, coming to redeem his children,—this is the message to be carried to all the world, to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. And the obligation rests upon all Christians." Ellen G. White, The Home Missionary, November 1, 1890

Israel as Mediator

So, in what sense was the Israel called by God to be the royal priesthood which is described in Exodus 19:5, 6? Was every person in Israel called to be a priest in the sense of performing the sanctuary ritual?²⁴ Of course not! Because every member of Israel was a member of the covenant community, each was expected to mediate the gospel *to the world* in order to draw it out of darkness into Christ's marvelous light. That is to say, every Israelite who became a member of God's church at Mt. Sinai was called by God to be a missionary with the specific purpose of preparing the world for the arrival of the Messiah. But the fact that all Israel was called to mediate Christ to the world did not mean that the teaching office of the male priesthood was unnecessary.

The role of Israel as God's mediator of the gospel light to the nations was beautifully portrayed by the Gospel Prophet Isaiah:

"It is *too small* a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a *light to the Gentiles*, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6)²⁵

As already noted, Peter picked up on this theme in 1 Peter 2:9, 10 by clearly alluding to the language of Exodus 19:6. Writing to the entire church membership of his day, as God had spoken to the entirety of Israel, Peter assured them that in the New Testament Church all Christians are a royal priesthood chosen with the *specific purpose* of declaring to the world the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.

²⁴ It might be argued that 1 Peter 2:4, 5 refers to all Christians regardless of gender as a holy priesthood and calls upon them to offer spiritual sacrifices. This cannot mean that all members of the church are now priests in the same sense as the Old Testament priests because the sacrificial functions of the Old Testament priesthood were fulfilled in Jesus Christ alone who offered a once for all sacrifice! The New Covenant has a better priest, better blood, a better sanctuary, a better covenant and a better hope. Yet even in the New Testament period church leaders are expected to teach the people how the didactic function of the Old Testament system pointed to Christ.

So what are the spiritual sacrifices that *all Christians* must now offer without regard to gender? David, who was *not a priest*, offered such sacrifices already in the Old Testament. In his penitential Psalm of repentance David prayed to God: "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise." In other texts sacrifices are identified with praise (Psalm 116:17; Hebrews 13:15, 16), joy (Psalm 27:6), thanksgiving (Psalm 107:22; Hebrews 13:15, 16) and mercy (Hosea 6:6)

Regarding the spiritual sacrifices of 1 Peter 2:5, the [Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary](#) states: "As priests, Christians are to offer to God the 'spiritual sacrifices' mentioned in 1 Peter 2:5; they also offer themselves as living sacrifices (see Rom. 12:1), a body of believers completely dedicated to God." [The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary](#), volume 7, p. 502

²⁵The mission here is not restricted to an elite class of priests; God's call is for each and every Israelite to share the gospel with the world. Notably, the apostle Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6 when He and Barnabas began their mission to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:45-47).

It bears noting that when the conjunction *hopos* ('that') is used with the subjunctive mood as it is in this text, it expresses goal, purpose or objective.²⁶ In other words, the objective of God's call to each and every member of Israel was to evangelize the world and the priests and Levites were called upon to teach the people how to do it! Likewise, every member of the church is called to announce to the world what Jesus has done but it is the role of the elders/overseers to teach the people how to do it.

The discussion in Exodus 19 and 1 Peter 2 does not center on who represents us before God or even on leadership roles in the church. Later on in his first epistle Peter does discuss the qualifications of church officers²⁷ and he makes it clear that only certain qualified *men* are called to be elders/overseers of the flock (1 Peter 5:1-4)!²⁸

Ellen White confirms Peter's point as she quotes a portion of 1 Peter 2:10:

"From the beginning it has been God's plan that *through His church* shall be reflected *to the world* His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory."²⁹

Although it is true that every believer now has direct access to God through the Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) Jesus Christ (and it has always been so!), this is not the point that Peter or Ellen White are stressing here. A priest is an intermediary between two parties. He mediates between God and man and man and God. The emphasis here is that every Christian should mediate the gospel of Christ to the world. As the moon mediates the light of the sun to the earth on a dark night, so God's people are to mediate God's light to the world in the midst of its moral darkness.

²⁶ A. Kretzer, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic edition, '*hopos*'

²⁷ Notably, Peter uses the words elder (*presbyteros*), overseer (*episkopos*) and shepherd (*poimen*) in this passage to describe the work of church elders: "The *elders* who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow *elder* and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: *Shepherd* the flock of God which is among you, serving as *overseers*, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." The apostle Paul uses the words *presbyteros* and *episkopos* to describe a church office and he underlines that those who occupy such an office must be the 'husbands of one wife'.

²⁸ Ellen White leaves no doubt that the elders that Peter refers to were of the male gender: "The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in *every other place* where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel. Those to whom was given the responsibility of the *general oversight* [the meaning of *episkopos*] of the church were not to lord it over God's heritage, but, as wise shepherds, were to 'feed the flock of God, . . . being ensamples to the flock' (1 Peter 5:2, 3); and the deacons were to be '*men* of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.' These *men* were to take their position unitedly on the side of right and to maintain it with firmness and decision. Thus they would have a uniting influence upon the entire flock." AA 91

²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5) but He also said "Ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). Jesus is the original light who shines on us and we are to reflect His light. This is the task of every Christian, male and female, bond and free, Jew and Greek, but it does not follow that because all should be involved in the task of evangelism, both male and female should be elders/overseers to lead out in the church. We should not take the text beyond where Peter wanted to go with it!

There is clearly no dichotomy between God's leadership arrangement in the Old Testament and in the New. In both dispensations the entire people as a royal priesthood was called to mediate God's truth to the nations but neither in the Old Testament or the New does this qualify all to officiate as priests or elders/overseers without regard to gender in the narrow sense of the word.

Under the Old Covenant God established that males should officiate as priests and under the New, He commands that elders/overseers should be the 'husbands of one wife'. According to the explicit specifications laid down by the Lord in the Old Testament, an all-male priesthood was chosen from the house of Aaron to serve the spiritual needs of the congregation of Israel (Numbers 18:1, 2) and in the New Testament God has established that elders/overseers should be monogamous males.

Paul's Appeal to the Priesthood

What I have proposed above seems to be suggested by Paul as well as Peter. One Seventh-day Adventist scholar recently supported Tyndale's contention that "The 'elder', the New Testament counterpart of a priest, is to be carefully distinguished from the Old Testament office. An elder is 'nothing but an officer to teach, and not to be a mediator between God and us.'"

It is true that there is a distinction between the Old Testament priests and the New Testament elders/overseers. This distinction, however, can be carried too far. Though it is true that the office of priest and the office of elder are not identical, and that the elder is not a mediator between man and God (but neither were the Old Testament priests who merely foreshadowed Christ's priesthood), the office of the *elder/overseer* is in another sense a continuation of the Old Testament priesthood. This is the argument of the apostle Paul 1 Corinthians 9:1-14.

It seems like some members of the Corinthian churches were critical of full time gospel workers who were taking their believing wives with them on missionary journeys at church expense. All of those whom Paul mentions as taking wives are of the male gender: Paul³⁰ and Barnabas, the other male apostles, the **brothers** of Jesus and Peter (verses 5, 6). Thus the issue was the proper remuneration of workers so that their wives could accompany them for team missionary outreach. This reminds us of

³⁰ It is uncertain whether the apostle Paul was married at one time or not.

Ellen White's recommendation that wives who teamed up with their husbands in gospel work should be fairly remunerated (see below)!

After presenting the problem, the apostle Paul argued that full time gospel workers and their wives have the right to be remunerated for their labors. The apostle uses several analogies to get his point across. Soldiers do not go to war at their own expense, vineyard husbandmen have a right to eat of the fruit of their labors and those who tend the flock should be able to drink its milk (verse 7).

After giving these examples from a military, agricultural and animal husbandry context, Paul provides two proofs from Scripture to bolster his point. The first is that according to the Mosaic legislation an ox must not be muzzled while he is treading the grain (verses 8-10). The second argument is taken from the ministry of the priests in the sanctuary service:

"Do you not know that those who *minister* the holy things *eat* of the things of the temple, and those who serve *at the altar* partake of the offerings of the altar? **Even so** the Lord has *commanded* that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:13, 14).

Paul clearly draws a parallel between the priests who were paid from the tithe for serving in the sanctuary and full time preachers who proclaim the gospel message. The context clearly indicates that as male priests were remunerated from the tithe for their labors in the sanctuary, so male gospel workers should be remunerated for theirs. By extension, wives who team up with their husbands, though not ordained, should be fairly remunerated as well.

Adam Clarke comments on I Corinthians 9:5:

"Clemens Alexandrinus has particularly remarked that the apostles carried their wives about with them, 'not as wives, but as sisters, that they might minister to those who were mistresses of families; that so the doctrine of the Lord might without reprehension or evil suspicion enter into the apartments of the women.'"

Ellen White concurred with Clement of Alexandria:

"There are **ministers' wives**--Sisters Starr, Haskell, Wilson, and Robinson--who have been devoted, earnest, whole-souled workers, giving Bible readings and praying with families, helping along by personal efforts just as successfully as their husbands. These women give their whole time, and are told that they receive nothing for their labors because their husbands receive wages. I tell them to go forward and all such decisions will be revised. The Word says, "The laborer is worthy of his hire." Luke 10:7. When any such decision as this is made, I will, in the name of the Lord, protest. I will feel it my duty to create a fund from my tithe money to pay these women who are **accomplishing just as essential work as the ministers are doing**, and this tithe I will reserve for work in the same line as that of the ministers, hunting for souls, fishing for souls" DG 106

“The ministers are paid for their work, and this is well. And if the Lord gives the wife, 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 naught, 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?” Sons and Daughters of God, pp. 110, 111

Cultic Cultural Argument

It has been suggested that a male only priesthood was chosen for cultic or cultural reasons yet the evidence for such a claim is conjectural at best. God’s choice of a totally male priesthood could actually be seen as counter-cultural because female priests were not unknown in the surrounding nations. The idea that only men were chosen because in the surrounding cultures women priestesses served as temple prostitutes is an unfounded assumption that does not have a shred of evidence in the Biblical text. In the pagan nations that surrounded Israel males also served as temple prostitutes which would have disqualified males from serving as priests as well! It would be far better to simply accept the Bible testimony rather than offer novel explanations about why God chose only men from the house of Aaron for the priestly office!³¹

And it must be underlined that God expected His specifications to be strictly followed. When Gideon (Judges 8:24ff; PP 555, 556), Korah (Numbers 16:3), Saul (1 Samuel 13:8-14), Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:31) and Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-21) subverted God’s requirements and assumed priestly duties contrary to God’s explicit instructions, the punishment was swift and drastic and the results disastrous.

No Longer Males

It has been argued that priests were all male in the Old Testament because they foreshadowed the ministry of Jesus who was to be male upon His incarnation. According to this view, after Jesus fulfilled what the Old Testament priesthood represented, individuals can now serve as elders/overseers in the church without regard to gender. This argument sounds plausible but the logic behind it is flawed for at least three reasons.

First, the sacrifice of female sheep (Leviticus 14:10; Numbers 6:14) symbolized the sacrifice of Christ. If the sacrifice of a ewe could represent the sacrifice of Christ, why couldn’t a woman priest represent the priesthood of Christ as well?

³¹ It is actually quite common for egalitarian scholars to argue their position based on the practices of the pagan cultures that surrounded God’s people in biblical times rather than on Scripture. Not only do they argue that women priests were not allowed because of temple prostitution in the surrounding cultures but they also argue without a shred of evidence that Paul’s admonitions against women teachers in 2 Timothy 2:11-13 were given because women in the church were teaching the heresies of the Ephesian temple cult of Artemis. One egalitarian scholar even told me privately that the entire idea of elders in Israel was imported from ancient Egyptian culture.

Second, both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy clearly affirm that Jesus had to be male because He came to recover what the first Adam, the male head and representative of the planet lost (Romans 5:12-21). Both Jesus and Adam serve as heads of humanity, Adam as the original head and Jesus as the new head. Thus the maleness of Jesus transcends the Old Testament sacrificial system.

Finally, Jesus did not cease to be male upon His ascension to heaven (First Timothy 2:5). If Jesus is still a male in the heavenly sanctuary, then why would His earthly spiritual leaders not be male as well? It would be incongruous to argue that it was imperative for all Old Testament priests be male because the Messiah who was to come would be male and then turn right around and argue that women can now serve as 'priests' even though Jesus is still a male!

Visible and Invisible Head

God's plan for male spiritual headship in the home and in the church has not changed. During the Old Testament period Jesus was the *invisible* head of the church and under His headship there were *visible male* spiritual leaders. After His ascension to heaven Jesus remains a male and the invisible head of His body (1 Timothy 2:5; Colossians 1:18) and therefore we would expect that under His headship there would be visible male leaders who oversee the operations in the church. In both dispensations Jesus is the invisible head of the church and under His headship there are visible male spiritual leaders.

Does the invisible male headship of Christ over His Church make visible male heads on earth unnecessary? Not at all! In the Old Testament, Christ was the invisible head and leader of Israel and Moses, the elders and the priests, all males, were his visible earthly representatives. Likewise, today Jesus, a male, is the invisible leader or head of the Church and He has visible male representatives to lead his church on earth. Ellen White clearly understood this when she stated:

"Since His ascension Christ has carried forward His work on the earth by chosen ambassadors, through whom He speaks to the children of men and ministers to their needs. The great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of *men* ordained by God to act as *His representatives*."³²

And again:

"The people should not regard their ministers as mere public speakers and orators, but as Christ's ambassadors, receiving their wisdom and power from the great Head of the church. To slight and disregard the word spoken by *Christ's representative* is showing disrespect, not only to *the man*, but

³² Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 360

also to the Master who has sent *him. He is in Christ's stead*; and the voice of the Savior should be heard in his *representative*.”³³

Galatians 3:28

Now we must turn our attention to Galatians 3:28 which is arguably the most used verse by egalitarians in favor of women's ordination to pastoral leadership:

“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.”

Distinction of Male and Female

This text brings to view three categories of persons classified along ethnic, social and gender lines: Jews and Greeks, bond and free and male and female. The distinction between Jew and Greek and bond and free was not established by God at the beginning.³⁴ But the case of male and female is different

³³ Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, p. 92

³⁴ Many evangelical egalitarians have attempted to frame the women's ordination issue along the lines of slavery. It is contended that the submission of wives to their husbands in the home and women to male leadership in the church is akin to slaves being subject to their masters. It is argued that as slaves have been emancipated from their masters so women must be emancipated from being subject to the husband in the home and to men in the church. But is the comparison valid?

It must be remembered that the distinction between male and female was part of God's original pre-fall plan at creation while slavery was a human institution established by sinful man. If read carefully the Bible provides the principles that would eventually lead to the eradication of slavery. But there is no evidence in Scripture that it is God's plan to eradicate the functional differences between male and female.

Some have sought to make the struggle for women's ordination a matter comparable to the civil rights struggle for racial equality in the decade of the 60's. They argue that the subjection of women to male headship in the home and in the church is a deprivation of their equal rights with men and thus is tantamount to discrimination. But upon careful scrutiny this comparison falls on its face.

Ordination to pastoral leadership is *not an inalienable right* but rather a *calling* that is *not* given by God to all His creatures. It is true that racial and gender equality were established by God and are inalienable rights that the Creator has given to all His creatures. But ordination to pastoral leadership is not one of those inalienable 'rights' that have been granted to women by the Creator. To the contrary, ordination to positions of leadership in the Bible has been consistently reserved by God for men. Basic human rights are different than role distinctions in the church because rights belong to all human beings by nature but roles in the church are according to God's calling and guidelines and do not belong to all. An analogy might be useful here: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by their nature, *own equal rights* but this does not mean that their *roles are identical* in the administration of the universe! After all, the Son does the bidding of the Father and the Holy Spirit does the bidding of the Son.

because we are explicitly told in Genesis 1:27 that *God created* the distinction between male and female before the inception of sin:

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; *male and female* He created them.” (Genesis 1:27; cf. Genesis 5:2; Matthew 19:4)

The literal root meaning of the word ‘female’ (*thelys*) is ‘breast feeding’³⁵ and the word ‘male’ (*arsen*) literally means ‘that which discharges sperm’.³⁶ These words are intended to clearly distinguish between the male and female gender.³⁷ God did not create androgynous beings. The Genesis account unambiguously affirms that God created sexual differentiation between male and female for a specific purpose—so that the race could be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Thus homosexual marriages defeat God’s original plan for the human race and are explicitly forbidden in Scripture (Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).

The question that begs to be asked is this: If male and female were part of God’s original plan for the human race, how then are we to understand Paul’s declaration that in Christ there is no longer male and female? Did the death of Christ reverse the creation order? Is God’s pre-fall plan of differentiation of the sexes abolished when a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior? Even further, is Paul hinting that the distinctive roles of males and females in the home and in the church come to an end when a person puts on Christ?

First Option

There are at least four different ways to understand what Paul meant by the expression ‘there is neither male *and* female’.³⁸

The first option is that sexual differentiation between males and females no longer exists when a person comes to Christ. In other words, those who put on Christ suddenly and miraculously become genderless beings. This preposterous idea can be quickly discarded simply by looking at the

³⁵ J. B. Bauer, Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, electronic edition, “*Thelys*”

³⁶ J. B. Bauer, Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, electronic edition, “*Arsen*”

³⁷ That Paul was alluding to Genesis 1:27 is suggested by the fact that the LXX uses the very words *thelys* and *arsen* to describe male and female.

³⁸ Gerhard Hasel has suggested, along with other scholars, that the phrase that is translated in most versions ‘male *nor* female’ should actually be translated ‘male *and* female’ (as in the AS and NRSV). In distinction to the phrases ‘Jew *nor* Greek’ and ‘bond *nor* free’ the proposition *kai* is added to the equation in the expression ‘male *and* female’ suggesting that Paul is affirming ontological equality on the one side but gender distinction on the other. See Gerhard Hasel, “Hermeneutical Issues Relating to the Ordination of Women: Methodological Reflections on Key Passages,” Paper presented to the General Conference Commission on Roles of Women in the Church, May 23, 1994. Notably, as we shall see later in this paper, every single time that Ellen White alludes to Galatians 3:28 she omits the phrase ‘male *nor* female’ thus suggesting that she understood the phrase to be in a category all by itself.

physiological makeup of men and women. The cross did not eliminate gender distinctions. In Christ males are still males and females are still females!

Second Option

The second conclusion that could presumably be reached from this expression is that the gender distinctions that God established between males and females in marriage at the beginning no longer apply, that is, that God's original plan for heterosexual marriage has come to an end. According to this view though physiological differences remain, the marital gender roles of the male being the father and the female being the mother that God established at creation are no longer binding. It has been argued that if there is no longer male or female in this sense, then a man can marry a man and a woman can marry a woman. Some liberal Christian scholars understand Galatians 3:28 in this fashion and use this argument to support gay marriage!

For those who accept full biblical authority, this second view is untenable because Jesus affirmed that marriage between a male and a female is God's standard from the beginning and is still binding today (Matthew 19:4-6). It can also be rejected because Paul underlined that marriage is between a man and a woman (Ephesians 5:25) and homosexuality is unacceptable behavior (I Corinthians 6:9; Romans 1:26, 27). In God's original plan man was to beget and woman was to conceive. The male was to be father and the female mother. It would be unlike God's arrangement at the beginning to say that a man can marry a man and a woman a woman.

Tragically, one of the consequences of sin is the tendency to confuse the gender roles that God created at the beginning. In contemporary society gender roles are commonly blurred and even reversed. The strong emphasis on unisex clothing is but one example of the blurring of the male and female genders. From the beginning God clearly established that males should be males and females should be females without confusing or blurring their gender. We can certainly say: "What God has cast asunder let no man join together!" Regarding unisex clothing Ellen White has stated:

"God designed there should be a *plain distinction* between male and female dress, and has considered the matter of sufficient importance to give explicit directions in regard to it; for the same dress worn by both sexes would cause confusion, and great increase of crime."³⁹

Some evangelical and a handful of Adventist scholars who support women's ordination to pastoral leadership are also presently leaning toward accepting the legitimacy of gay marriage.⁴⁰ Yet in this they

³⁹ Ellen G. White, The Review and Herald, February 6, 1900

⁴⁰ For example, on July 1, 2010 the top leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church amended the Church Manual adding the clarifying phrase that marriage is between 'one male and one female.' According to the official Adventist News Network report, the 'approval [of the added wording] did not come simply or swiftly' The debate lasted for over an hour and a half and 'delegates faced a pileup of motions, amendments, amendments to previous amendments, and even one amendment to reconsider.' One wonders why adding such wording would be so controversial when the Bible is crystal clear that

perhaps unwittingly contradict themselves. If these scholars were consistent with their own principles they could never favor gay marriage and this is the reason why:

Egalitarians claim that before sin entered the world male and female had totally interchangeable roles with no submission of the wife to the authority of the husband. They believe that female submission came in only after the fall and was removed as a less than ideal arrangement when Jesus died on the cross. Therefore they argue that after the cross we should return to the *original plan* of no male and female role distinctions in the home or in the church and no submission of the wife to the husband.

But if the beginning is the standard to be followed then egalitarians would be inconsistent with their own principles if they endorsed gay marriage because gay marriage was not established by God at the beginning. It would be disingenuous to apply the standard of the beginning to the roles of men and women in the home and in the church and not apply the same standard to marriage between a man and a woman. That is to say, it would be contradictory to appeal to the creation order for role interchangeability and not for heterosexual marriage! And yet some egalitarian scholars both inside and outside our church argue in favor of going back to the beginning for absolute gender role interchangeability but not for marriage between a man and a woman!

Third Option

The third way of understanding Galatians 3:28 is that while sexual differentiation remains and heterosexual marriage continues to be God's plan, post-fall *role distinctions* between males and females in the home and in the church have been abolished. That is to say, in this view males and females now have absolute role interchangeability in the home⁴¹ and in the church with no submission of the woman to the man presumably such as existed in the beginning before the inception of sin.

This option must now be examined carefully because it is the central issue in the present discussion about the viability of ordaining women as elders/overseers. In order to discover if this option is correct we must consider Galatians 3:28 within its immediate and broader contexts as well as the terminology that is used in the text. In other words, we must apply the time honored principle of *Sola Scriptura*. Let's first formulate some questions that will guide us in our study.

marriage is between one male and one female. Even though the overwhelming majority of delegates favored the added wording, a few feared alienating gays and lesbians from the church. Jeroen Tuinstra a representative from the Trans-European region made the first amendment suggesting that the wording should say: 'Marriage is a monogamous, loving relationship between two mutually consenting adults.' And why was this politically correct wording suggested? Tuinstra explained that adding the words 'between one male and one female' 'would further estrange gays and lesbians from the church.' Thankfully the suggested amendment was not met with favor on the floor and was soundly defeated. (Elizabeth Lechleitner, Adventist News Network, www.AdventistReview.org, July 2, 2010)

⁴¹ It bears noting that some egalitarians believe that role distinctions remain in the home after the cross but no longer apply in a church setting.

Questions

What is Paul's central argument in the immediately preceding and succeeding contexts of Galatians 3:28? Is Paul discussing leadership roles in the church or is he rather describing how a person is saved and how saved people should treat other saved people within the covenant community regardless of their ethnic, social and gender differences?

At what moment in our Christian lives do we become sons of God and does becoming sons of God entitle us to serve as elders/overseers in the church regardless of gender?

What does it mean to be baptized 'into Christ' and at what moment can it be said that a person is 'in Christ'?

Is the baptismal ceremony gender inclusive or exclusive?

What is meant by the expression 'have put on Christ' and at what point in the Christian life does a person put Him on?

What is meant by the expression '*one* in Christ Jesus' and at what point in our Christian experience do we become '*one* in Christ Jesus'?

What does it mean to be Abraham's seed and at what moment in the Christian life does a person become a member of Abraham's seed?

Paul's Central Argument

Even a cursory look at Galatians 3 indicates that Paul is contrasting righteousness by faith and righteousness by works. The Galatians had previously been evangelized by Paul and upon their acceptance of Christ they had been justified by faith and had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. But now, under the influence of the Judaizers, they were backtracking in their religious experience to a works oriented concept of salvation.

To make his point, Paul begins by asking the Galatians: "Having *begun* in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" Using the 'Father of Faith' as his prime example, he argues that Abraham was justified by faith in Christ apart from works and for this reason he is father of all those who are justified such as he was, be they Jews or Gentiles.

The entire context of Galatians 3 clearly indicates that Paul was addressing the issue of justification and the reception of the Spirit at the *beginning* of the Christian life, not offices or leadership positions in the church which come *later*. In fact, there is absolutely nothing in the entire book of Galatians to suggest that Paul was discussing church offices. His is a theological discussion about how people are saved and how saved people should live after they are saved, pure and simple! If we wish to know

what Paul had to say about qualifications for church leadership offices we must go to the places where he addresses these specific issues in the Pastoral Epistles of First Timothy and Titus.

We must now examine several expressions in Galatians 3:26-29 to find answers to our questions. A study of these expressions will clearly reveal that in Galatians 3:28 Paul was not discussing qualifications for church office, not even in principle, but rather salvation and full *ontological equality* among the members of the body of Christ when they *began* their Christian life at baptism.

Backdrop of Acts

In order to ascertain whether the apostle Paul was discussing leadership positions in the church it would be helpful to return to Acts 2:38 for some valuable background information. In his Pentecostal sermon Peter presented a clear sequence of events that are experienced by those who choose to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord:

“Then Peter said to them, “*Repent*, and let every one of you be *baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the *remission* of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the *Holy Spirit*.”

In this text there are four consecutive things that occur when a person truly receives Jesus as Savior and Lord:

- Repentance
- Baptism
- Remission or forgiveness of sins
- Reception of the Holy Spirit

In the Great Commission to His disciples immediately before His ascension, Jesus added that a person must *believe*⁴² and be baptized. This means that, along with repentance, a person must have faith in Jesus in order to be baptized and saved:

“He who *believes* and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”(Mark 16:16)

Jesus also stated that those who believe and are baptized receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and along with it, the *charismata* or *gifts* of the Spirit among which are exorcisms, tongues and healings (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-31):

⁴² Unfortunately the word ‘believe’ is too often identified with mere mental assent to a belief system. But the words *pistis* and *pisteuo* would be better translated ‘trust’ or ‘have faith’. To believe means to have implicit trust that Jesus will impute his life and death to the account of the repentant sinner.

“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:17-18)⁴³

Thus, putting the concepts of Peter and Jesus together we have the following order:⁴⁴

- Repentance
- Belief or faith
- Baptism
- Remission or forgiveness of sins
- Reception of the *gift* of the Holy Spirit
- Bestowal of the *Charismata* or *gifts* of the Spirit
- Incorporation into the body of Christ—the Church

It is rather obvious that all of this takes place in the genuine believer’s life at the *beginning* of their Christian walk. *Everyone*, be they male or female, is required to go through this same process.⁴⁵ Baptism is the *inauguration* or initiation ceremony that first *links* a person with Christ and then with the church.⁴⁶ One who is baptized is a newborn babe in the faith, a new addition to the family of God. This is the reason Jesus compared baptism to birth (John 3:3-8), and Paul assures us in the succeeding context of Galatians 3:28 that at the moment of baptism believers are adopted as children into God’s family (Galatians 4:4-7).

Paul’s Baptismal Theology

⁴³ To these gifts imparted to the believers by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the apostle Paul referred when he quoted Psalm 68:18: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.” (Ephesians 4:8). Ellen White explains that the *charismata* were given to the disciples when they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:

“But not until after the ascension was the *gift* received in its fullness. Not until through faith and prayer the disciples had surrendered themselves fully for His working was the outpouring of the Spirit received. Then in a special sense the *goods* of heaven were committed to the followers of Christ. “When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” Ephesians 4:8. “Unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ,” the Spirit “dividing to every man severally as He will.” Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:11. The *gifts* are already ours in Christ, but their actual possession depends upon our reception of the Spirit of God.” COL 327

⁴⁴ We can link what Jesus said with what Peter said because they were both referring to what occurred on the Day of Pentecost.

⁴⁵ Obviously there are exceptional cases like the thief on the cross who trusted in Jesus but could not be baptized because of extenuating circumstances. Also included are those who never heard the name of Jesus and yet embraced His principles in their lives: “Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God. Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 638

⁴⁶ On the day of Pentecost those who repented, believed in Jesus and were baptized into Christ were then added to the church (Acts 2:41, 44) and Paul affirms that all those who have accepted Christ were baptized into *one body* (1 Corinthians 12:13)

We must now examine Galatians 3:26-4:5 to ascertain if Paul's theology of baptism agrees with that of Peter and Jesus. These verses must be understood in the light of the foundational record that we have examined in the book of Acts because the baptismal theology of the apostle to the Gentiles is the same as that of Peter. So let's first take a look at Galatians 3:26, 27:

"For you are all *sons* of God through *faith* in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were *baptized* into Christ have *put on* Christ."

This verse brings to view four elements that we found in the book of Acts:

- Repentance⁴⁷
- Faith in Jesus
- Baptism
- Justification or forgiveness (putting on Christ)

But two additional elements must be added to Paul's baptismal theology. In both the preceding and succeeding context of Galatians 3:26, 27 the apostle informs us that the Galatians received the Holy Spirit when they believed (Galatians 3:3; 4:5) and in 1 Corinthians 12:1-13 he affirms that those who are baptized and receive the *gift* of the Spirit also receive the *charismata* or *gifts* of the Spirit.⁴⁸ So in the writings of Paul we have the same elements as in the book of Acts:

- Repentance
- Faith in Jesus
- Baptism
- Justification or forgiveness
- *Gift* of the Holy Spirit
- *Charismata* or *gifts* of the Holy Spirit
- Incorporation into the body of Christ—the Church

It is true that Paul does not mention the *charismata* in Galatians 3⁴⁹ nor the incorporation into God's church, but applying the *Sola Scriptura* principle we know by what he wrote to the Corinthians that at baptism the Galatians not only received the *gift* of the Spirit but the *gifts* as well (see 1 Corinthians 12:1-13). 1 Corinthians 12:13 also underlines the fact that at baptism the Corinthians were incorporated as full-fledged members *into* the body of Christ.

⁴⁷ Although Paul did not explicitly mention repentance as a prerequisite for baptism in Galatians 3:26, 27 he did so in other places such as Acts 19:1-6; Acts 20:21 and Romans 2:4.

⁴⁸ In almost all cases the gift of the Spirit is expressed by the word *doma* while the gifts of the Spirit are described as *charismata*.

⁴⁹ Paul does describe the *karpos* or fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5 but the fruit of the Spirit is not to be confused with the *charismata* of the Spirit.

Scripture is clear that baptism into Christ and *incorporation* into his body is without regard to gender because the book of Acts explicitly informs us that both men and women who believed in Jesus were baptized (cf. Acts 8:12; Acts 16:15). However, there is no evidence in the New Testament to the effect that both men and women were called to serve as elders/overseers in the church when they were baptized. To the contrary, the book of Acts uniformly refers to the leaders of the church as males. The twelve apostles, the seven deacons, Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Titus and the elders at Ephesus were all of the male gender. And Paul emphasized in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 that the elder/overseer must be a monogamous *male*.

The New Testament is crystal clear in its teaching that baptism at the *beginning* of the Christian life can take place without regard to gender but it is equally clear that the position of elder/overseer which is conferred *later on* in the Christian life is very gender specific.

Ellen White confirmed that repentance, faith and baptism are merely the *first steps* in the new birth:

“True *repentance* of sin, *faith* in the merits of Jesus Christ, and *baptism* into his death, to be raised out of the water to live a *new life*, are the *first steps* in the *new birth* which Christ told Nicodemus he must experience in order to be saved.”⁵⁰

It certainly would make no sense to affirm that a newborn baby is qualified to be the head or leader of the family. After a child is born, it grows up and matures and then it is qualified to be a leader. Baptism does not anymore qualify a new member to be a leader of God’s spiritual family—the Church—than a newborn baby is qualified to be a leader of a literal family. Ellen White, in full harmony with Scripture, has clearly stated that baptism is the *entrance* ceremony into God’s spiritual family:

“The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, powers infinite and omniscient, receive those who *truly* enter into covenant relation with God. They are present at every *baptism*, to receive the candidates who have renounced the world and have received Christ into the soul temple. These candidates have *entered* into the family of God, and their names are inscribed in the Lamb’s book of life.”⁵¹

Again Ellen White explains that baptism is the entrance ceremony into the church:

“Christ made baptism the *entrance* to His spiritual kingdom . . . Those who receive the ordinance of baptism thereby make a public declaration that they have renounced the world, and have become members of the royal family, *children* of the heavenly King.”⁵²

Put on Christ

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, February 1, 1874

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 143

⁵² Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, volume 6, p. 1075

That baptism is the *inaugural* step in the Christian life is supported by Paul's expression, 'put on Christ.' The word *enduo* ('put on') is used in the New Testament to describe the putting on of a garment.⁵³

The question is: According to Paul, at what moment is the garment of Christ's righteousness 'put on' the believer? Is it put on at the beginning of the Christian life or later on? The answer is indisputable: The robe of Christ's imputed righteousness is put on the true believer at the moment of baptism:

"Those who have pledged themselves *by baptism* to follow Christ, who have professed to *put on the robe* of Christ's righteousness, are to consider the words of the apostle Paul, 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.'"⁵⁴

The terminology of 'putting on' and 'putting off' must be understood in the context of the typology of the two Adams. The antithetical typology of Romans 5:12-21 describes everyone who is born into this world as being 'in Adam'. That is to say, upon physical birth we are members of the family of the first Adam, the family of the lost! But *at baptism* when we are born again, the old Adam is 'put off' and the new Adam is 'put on' and we become members of the family of the new Adam—Christ (see also Colossians 3:7-10; Romans 13:11-14).

The apostle Paul clearly indicates that baptism is the ceremony that moves us out of the family of the first Adam and into the family of the second. This is the reason why immediately after presenting the antithetical typology of the two Adams in Romans 5:12-21 the apostle explains that it is at baptism that we dispose of the first Adam and are reckoned dead, buried and resurrected 'in Christ' (Romans 6:1-14). But moving out of the family of the first Adam and into the family of the second does not suddenly entitle us to serve as elders/overseers in the church, an office to which a person is called later in the Christian experience.

Baptism and the Charismata

It will be noticed that in the early verses of Galatians 3 the apostle affirmed that the Galatians received the Spirit when they *believed* in Christ at the *beginning* of their Christian experience (Galatians 3:1-4),⁵⁵ and in the immediately succeeding context of Galatians 3:26-29 Paul affirms that those who are adopted as sons into the family of God at baptism have received the Holy Spirit in their hearts (Galatians 4:6).

No doubt, everyone who truly repents, believes and is baptized into Christ at the *beginning* of the Christian life receives the Holy Spirit. The apostle affirmed as much when he wrote that a person who

⁵³ Matthew 6:25; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 in the light of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. The NIV for example translates Galatians 3:26, 27: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have *clothed* yourselves with Christ."

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *A Place Called Oakwood*, p. 53

is baptized into the body of Christ receives the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Jesus in John 3:5 had already spoken of the new birth as baptism of the water *and* the Spirit. Peter on the Day of Pentecost linked baptism with the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38) and when Cornelius and his friends believed in Jesus, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47, 48). Clearly *all* candidates without regard to gender receive the gift of the Spirit upon embracing Christ at baptism.

A Pivotal Question

At this point we must ask a question that will set the stage for what comes next: Did the reception of the Spirit *at baptism* when the Christian life *began*, suddenly qualify believers to be set apart as elders/overseers of the church? The answer to this question is clearly no. Baptism and the reception of the Spirit at the beginning of the Christian life do not qualify anyone for church office. Baptism simply links a person with Christ and with His body, the church.⁵⁶

There is abundant evidence in Scripture, however, to indicate that at the moment of baptism believers receive not only the *gift* of the Spirit but also the *charismata* or *gifts* of the Spirit. That is to say, a believer who is baptized receives the *gift* of the Holy Spirit who then imparts *gifts*. In order for the body of Christ—the church—to function properly, believers, as individual diverse members of the body, must fulfill certain functions for the good of the entire body. But in order to carry out these functions believers must receive gifts from the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus told His disciples that ‘he who believes and is baptized will be saved’ He described the *charismata* that would be exercised by believers:

“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:16-18)

Like Jesus, Paul also made it abundantly clear that at baptism when a person *joins* the body of Christ they receive the Holy Spirit who then imparts certain *charismata* (1 Corinthians 12:13). But these *charismata* that are given at the *beginning* of the Christian life must not be confused with the gender specific leadership roles which are given after the person has a *proven track record* in the home and in the church.

The spiritual *gifts* or *charismata* that members receive at the moment of baptism and the fruit of the Spirit which comes as a result of union with Christ (Galatians 5:22-24) are imparted without regard to gender but this does not mean that at the moment of baptism everyone, male or female, is suddenly qualified to occupy a leadership position in the church as elder/overseer.

Other than repentance, faith in Christ and baptism, there is no list of personal qualifications which a person must possess in order to receive and exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the church, but there are clear prerequisites for those who serve in the leadership position of elders/overseers. The same apostle who wrote about the gender inclusive *charismata* also explicitly specified that an elder/overseer must be 'the *husband* of one wife' and one who rules his house wisely and has his children in subjection. The apostle Paul was not speaking out of both sides of his mouth!⁵⁷

We must not confuse the gifts of the Spirit that are given to each and every believer at their baptism regardless of gender and the role of governance and leadership that is given only to males after they have a proven track record. The apostle Paul does not contradict himself when he states that at baptism the Spirit gives gifts to *all* as he sees fit and later says that the leaders of the home and the church should be 'husbands of one wife'.

Husbands of One Wife

Some scholars who favor the ordination of women to positions of pastoral leadership have pointed out that the expression 'husband of one wife' really should be translated a 'one woman man.' Though it is true that the literal translation of the phrase is 'one woman man,' it also must be noted that the Greek has the words *gune* (woman) and *aner* (man) which, when they are used in the context of marriage, are gender specific.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Some women's ordination advocates have argued in this manner: If the Spirit has called a woman to serve as an elder/overseer, who are we as mere mortals to deny her the right to serve in that capacity? But the real question is this: Would the Spirit call a woman to be an elder/overseer when the same Spirit instructed Paul that the elder/overseer must be the husband of one wife? Ellen White argues in favor of the supremacy of Scripture over feelings and impressions:

"The Spirit was not given--nor can it ever be bestowed--to *supersede the Bible*; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which *all teaching and experience* must be tested. Says the apostle John, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1. And Isaiah declares, 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Isaiah 8:20.

Great reproach has been cast upon the work of the Holy Spirit by the errors of a class that, claiming its enlightenment, profess to have no further need of guidance from the word of God. They are *governed by impressions* which they regard as the voice of God in the soul. But the spirit that controls them is not the Spirit of God. This following of *impressions*, to the *neglect of the Scriptures*, can lead only to confusion, to deception and ruin. It serves only to further the designs of the evil one. Since the ministry of the Holy Spirit is of vital importance to the church of Christ, it is one of the devices of Satan, through the errors of extremists and fanatics, to cast contempt upon the work of the Spirit and cause the people of God to neglect this source of strength which our Lord Himself has provided." GC vii

⁵⁸ Some have argued that the word *aner* can refer to human beings in general without regard to gender. This is true but is it also true that the context must dictate whether the word is gender specific or not. It is clear that in Titus and Timothy the word should be translated 'husband' because it is placed in juxtaposition with 'wife'. Yet the question still remains: Why

I wonder if those who translate literally ‘one woman man’ in First Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 would be willing to do the same with Ephesians 5:25 where the apostle Paul states that husbands (*aner*) should love their wives (*gune*). Would it make sense to translate ‘men, love your women’ as Christ loved the church? Further, would it make sense to say, ‘women, submit to your men as to the Lord’? (Ephesians 5:22). Clearly, the Greek words in a marriage context refer to a husband and wife relationship.

Lamentably some versions eliminate the gender specificity altogether by stating that *officers* (gender neutral) must be ‘faithful in marriage’ (CEV) or bishops (gender neutral) must be ‘married only once’ (NRSV). The fact is that the Greek is gender specific. Even those who literally translate ‘one woman man’ must admit that according to the text itself the elder/overseer must be of the male gender because the text does not read ‘a one man *woman*’.

Some who favor women’s ordination have argued that Paul’s mandate that the elder/overseer must be the husband of one wife simply means that they must be monogamous. This is no doubt true but the text clearly states that they must be monogamous *men*. The apostle Paul does not say that the elder/overseer must be the wife of one husband. Paul’s mandate is for monogamous *male* elders/overseers.

It is important to realize that Paul is not simply *suggesting* that the elder/overseer *should be* a monogamous male—it is an imperative *requirement*. In First Timothy 3 the apostle twice uses the verb *dei*. This verb, according to the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament “designates an unconditional necessity; sentences with this vb. have fundamentally an absolute, unquestioned, and often anonymous and deterministic character.”⁵⁹

Four Lists of *Charismata*

The apostle Paul never includes the church office of elder/overseer in any of his four lists of spiritual gifts.⁶⁰ By the time that Paul wrote the epistles to the Corinthians, elders/overseers were already in existence. Why then didn’t Paul mention them in any of his four lists of spiritual gifts?⁶¹

didn’t Paul use the gender specific word *arsen* which always refers to a male rather than *aner* which can sometimes refer to human beings in general? The reason is not hard to find. The word *arsen* does not mean ‘husband’. It simply underlines maleness. But Paul wanted to get across two ideas: Maleness and also marriedness. The word which can include both ideas is *aner*.

⁵⁹ W. Popkes, The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Electronic edition, “*dei*”

⁶⁰ It is true that in Ephesians 4:11 Paul includes apostles among the spiritual gifts. However, a study of the New Testament evidence indicates that the spiritual gift of apostleship here is used in the general sense of ‘one who is sent’, what today we would call a missionary. It was imperative that the original apostles number twelve, a number that could not be increased or decreased. This is clearly indicated by the fact that the verb *dei* (‘must’) in Acts 1:21 is placed in an emphatic position. And the successor of Judas had to be an eyewitness of the Christ event from the days of John the Baptist till the ascension. This means that Barnabas, Apollos, Titus, Epaphroditus and Silvanus could not have been apostles in the same sense as the twelve because they were not eyewitnesses of the Christ event (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Corinthians 4:6, 9; 2 Corinthians 8:23;

Philippians 2:25; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6). Furthermore, Ellen White clearly distinguished between the *apostolic office* that was given to the twelve and the *spiritual gift* that was given later on in the history of the early church:

“Later in the history of the early church, when in various parts of the world many groups of believers *had been formed into churches*, the organization of the church was *further perfected*, so that order and harmonious action might be maintained. Every member was exhorted to act well his part. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to him. Some were endowed by the Holy Spirit with *special gifts*—‘first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.’ 1 Corinthians 12:28. But all these classes of workers were to labor in harmony.” AA 91, 92

The apostle Paul also lists ‘pastors’ as one of the spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:11). Some have argued, therefore, that the word ‘pastor’, as we understand it today, is one of the *charismata* and because the *charismata* are given to all without regard to gender, women can serve in the church office of pastor.

In the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church before the death of Ellen G. White, those whom we now call pastors were most frequently and more correctly referred to as elders or ministers. But in the process of time the terminology changed and those who used to be called elders or ministers came to be called pastors. In the strict sense of the word the role of pastor is not a church office but rather a spiritual gift which is received at baptism. The spiritual gift of shepherding (which is the meaning of the word ‘pastor’) the flock is open to whomever the Holy Spirit chooses regardless of gender. Women with their motherly instinct are especially gifted to pastor or shepherd the little ones and the young women in the church. In my own church I have many women who serve as excellent counselors and role models and shepherd or ‘pastor’ the children and youth but they are not pastors in the technical sense of a leadership church office.

Though there might be an exception somewhere, I have not been able to find a single instance where Ellen White referred to a specific woman with the title of ‘pastor’ or ‘elder’. The designation ‘pastor’ or ‘elder’ was always reserved for men. I have not been able to find a case where Ellen White referred to women as ‘ministers’ as a noun.

It must be noted that according to the apostle Peter all elders should fulfill the function of pastors or shepherding. This can be clearly seen by his insistence that elders must shepherd and oversee the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-4). But the flip side is that not all who have the spiritual gift of pastoring are qualified to serve in the church office of elder/overseer. The gift of pastoring or shepherding is one of the *charismata* received at baptism but the church office of elder/overseer is received later upon demonstration of the qualities that the apostle outlines in 1 Timothy and Titus.

It is in this context that we must understand Ellen White’s statement that the Holy Spirit qualifies both men and women to serve as ‘pastors of the flock of God’ (RH, January 15, 1901). If Ellen White by the word ‘pastor’ had actually meant that women could serve in pastoral leadership positions as we understand them today, why didn’t she ever refer to a specific female person with the designations ‘pastor’ or ‘elder’? In her published writings Ellen White used the word ‘elder’ over three thousand times, the word ‘pastor’ one hundred and twenty times and the plural ‘pastors’ two hundred and two times and yet as far as I know she never referred to a specific woman with the prefix of ‘elder’ or ‘pastor’. For instance, she never referred to Elder Stephen Haskell’s wife as ‘Elder Haskell’ or ‘Pastor Haskell’. The specific title of ‘pastor’ and ‘elder’ was always reserved for men. Further, when Ellen White wrote to an ordained pastor husband and his wife she referred to them as ‘Elder and Sister Haskell’ or ‘Elder Haskell and his wife’ or ‘Elder and Mrs. J. J. Van Horn.’ When she used the word ‘elder’ as a church office with a proper name it was always with the male gender.

Seventh-day Adventists have always followed the time honored principle that singular texts must be read in the light of the preponderance of evidence. If we don’t do this we will end up believing that at death believers will end up in the bosom of Abraham and unbelievers will be committed to the fires of hell!

It will be noticed that in Ephesians 4:11 the apostle Paul also mentions ‘prophets’ as one of the spiritual gifts. This has led some to claim that because Ellen White was a woman prophet, women should be allowed to serve as elders/overseers in the church. I have responded to this argument later on in this paper.

⁶¹ The four lists are in Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-31.

I believe that there is a clear reason for the omission. Spiritual gifts are received at the *beginning* of the Christian life at *baptism* and they are apportioned by the Holy Spirit without regard to gender. But being set aside as an elder/overseer is an office that is given when a person has a *proven track record* and meets the list of qualifications that the apostle Paul describes in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Not Neophytes

Galatians 3:28 is clearly dealing with the status of a person at the *beginning* of the Christian life at *baptism* and not with the call to the ecclesiastical office of elder/overseer which occurs later in the Christian experience. This is undoubtedly the reason why Ellen White, in agreement with Scripture, underlined that even *male* neophytes are not qualified to be elders of the church:

“Said the inspired apostle: ‘Lay hands suddenly on no man.’⁶² In some of our churches the work of organizing and of ordaining elders has been *premature*; the *Bible rule* has been disregarded, and consequently grievous trouble has been brought upon the church. There should not be so *great haste* in electing leaders as to ordain *men* who are in no way fitted for the responsible work--*men* who need to be converted, elevated, ennobled, and refined *before* they can serve the cause of God in *any capacity*.”⁶³

It cannot be overemphasized that baptism is the *induction* ceremony into Christ, which in turn incorporates a person as a member of the body of Christ, the Christian church. Everyone without regard to gender is commanded to participate in this *initiation* rite, and everyone who does so receives the *gift* of the Spirit and the *gifts* or *charismata* of the Spirit to be able to fulfill their particular function within the body.

Though it is clearly understood that one who occupies the leadership position of elder/overseer must be a baptized member of the church, this is not mentioned on the list as one of the qualifications. The reason is that elders/overseers were elected by the church a period of time after they had been baptized because they had to be experienced and give proof that they were called of God. For this reason Paul explained that the elder must not be a *neophytos* or neophyte (First Timothy 3:6). The word means ‘a new convert’ or one who has been ‘newly planted in the church’.⁶⁴ Is a newborn babe qualified to lead?

⁶² Ellen White is here quoting First Timothy 5:22 as the basis for her remarks.

⁶³ Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 5, pp. 617, 618

⁶⁴ The KJV well translates the word *neophytos* with ‘novice’. Perhaps the word ‘beginner’ captures the meaning well. The electronic edition of Thayer’s Greek Lexicon defines the word as a ‘new convert’ and the electronic edition of The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament explains that the word refers to one who is ‘newly converted’ or has been “newly planted in the Christian Church.’

If Paul had written about the rite of ordination of elders/overseers in verses 26, 27 and then stated in verse 28 that there is neither male nor female one would have to inevitably conclude that gender roles have been eliminated and males as well as females can serve as elders/overseers. But the context will not allow for this. The context is clearly referring to baptism at the *beginning* of the Christian life when a person has just been joined to Christ and the church, and not to the maturity that is required to be an elder/overseer. In contrast to the rite of baptism, ordination to the leadership position of elder/overseer takes place later in the Christian experience when the believer has exhibited the list of qualifications that Paul specified in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, one of which is ‘a one woman *man*’ or ‘husband of one wife’.

Relational Use of the Word One

Now we must ask the question: Does the fact that male and female become one in Christ at the moment of baptism mean that there are no longer any gender specific roles in the home and in the church and that the wife must no longer be submissive to the authority of her husband?

The relational use of the word ‘one’ reminds us of the creation story where Adam and Eve, as male and female, became one on the very day of their creation (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). Clearly, Adam and Eve were created ontologically equal but this did not mean that they had equal and indistinguishable *roles*. When God married them on the very day of their creation, the two became one and yet each had their distinct and complementary role. As evidenced from the New Testament, ontological oneness does not mean functional sameness.

The Godhead Model

The relationship of Adam and Eve as husband and wife was similar to that of the Father and the Son in the Godhead. The Scriptural evidence clearly indicates that though the Father and Son are ontologically equal they have distinct and complementary roles with the Son being submissive to the will of His Father as His head. And Adam and Eve, created in the image of both the Father and the Son⁶⁵, were to mirror a similar relationship, with Adam being the head and Eve being submissive to his authority (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ It is important to remember that Adam and Eve were created in the image of *both* the Father and the Son. This is clearly indicated by the plural pronouns ‘let *us* make man in *our* image, according to *our* likeness.’ Thus the *relationship* between husband and wife was to reflect the relationship between the Father and the Son. Is it just possible that God the Father wanted the angels to understand His relationship with His Son by looking at the relationship between Adam and Eve?

⁶⁶ I have written a supporting document titled ‘Subordinate but Equal’ where I provide significant evidence from Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy that Jesus is ontologically equal with His father and yet has been subject to His headship before, during and after sin. The document is available for those who are interested in pursuing this line of reasoning at www.secretsunsealed.org.

Jesus once said: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30) but does that oneness eliminate functional roles? There is significant evidence in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy that Jesus has been, is now and will ever be equal to His Father. And yet there is also persuasive evidence that Jesus has been, is now, and will be subject to His Father’s authority (I Corinthians 11:3; 1 Corinthians 15:28). If the Father and the Son are one and ontologically equal and yet have different roles, with the Son being subject to His Father’s authority, then why can’t the same be said about the relationship between husband and wife as well, especially in light of the fact that Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of both the Father and the Son?⁶⁷

The Ephesian Model

That oneness and submission are not alien concepts can also be discerned in Paul’s theology of marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33. In verses 22-24 the apostle instructed wives to be submissive to their husbands as the church is submissive to Christ:

“Wives, *submit* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is *head* of the wife, as also Christ is *head* of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is *subject* to Christ, so let the wives be [subject] to their own husbands in everything.”

After instructing wives to be submissive to their husbands’ authority ‘in the Lord’⁶⁸, the apostle goes on to admonish husbands to practice self-giving love for their wives just as Christ did for the church. They are to love their wives as they love their own bodies because at marriage they became one flesh. Clearly in the mind of Paul, oneness in marriage does not eliminate the submission of the wife to the husband as her head, just like oneness between Christ and the church does not eliminate the submission of the church to the headship of Christ. The argument of Paul is crystal clear: As Christ loves the church and the church willingly submits to His authority as its head, so husbands are to love their wives and wives should willingly submit to the loving authority of their husbands as their head.

Was this some post-fall plan ‘B’ that was discarded at the cross? Not so, because the apostle is basing his argument on the creation story as he quotes Genesis 2:24.⁶⁹ The entire context of this passage

⁶⁷Who was speaking to whom when God said: ‘let us make man in our image according to our likeness?’ Ellen White affirms that it was God the Father who was speaking to His Son (EW 145). The New Testament confirms that the Father and the Son were co-partners in creation. The Father was the architect and Jesus was the master builder (see Hebrews 11:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 8:6; John 1:1-3). Is it just possible that God intended the headship of the Father and the submission of the Son in the Godhead to serve as a model for the relationship between Adam and Eve with Adam being the head and Eve being submissive to his loving authority?

⁶⁸ The apostle did not expect wives to be blindly submissive to the will of their husbands. Wives were to submit to their husbands only when the will of the husband is in harmony with the Lord’s Will. See 1 Corinthians 7:39; 11:11; Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:18. As children have the duty to disobey their parents’ authority if the will of the parents conflicts with God’s will so the wife has the right and duty to disobey her husband if his will conflicts with the Lord’s Will.

⁶⁹ Paul consistently argues for male headship and female submission on the basis of the creation story (Cf. 1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 11:3-15)

indicates that oneness and submission are both a part of God's creation order. Ontological oneness does not mean functional sameness. The question is: If oneness at creation does not eliminate the distinctive male and female roles in marriage, then why should oneness of male and female in Galatians 3:28 destroy their distinctive roles today?

Ellen White on Male Headship

Ellen White agreed fully with Paul when she wrote nineteen centuries later that the husband is *still* the head of the wife. Neither she nor Paul believed that male headship in the home and in the church ceased at the cross:

"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 Savior 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."⁷⁰

From this statement we can reach at least two inevitable conclusions. First, if it were true that the husband is no longer the head of the wife then Christ would no longer be the head of the church because the headship of Christ over the church is predicated upon the headship of Adam over his wife!

Second, in her statement Ellen White is clearly alluding to Ephesians 5:31-33. As noted earlier, in these verses Paul is not arguing from a plan 'B' post-fall perspective but rather from God's original pre-creation plan as can be seen by his reference to Genesis 2:24. Clearly the relationship between Christ and His church is illustrated by the relationship between Adam and Eve *at creation* and not after the fall. As Paul states it:

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning *Christ and the church*. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects⁷¹ her husband." (Ephesians 5:33)

Is the headship of Christ over the church a negative thing? Of course not! If the church does not feel oppressed by the loving headship of Christ, then why should the wife feel oppressed by the loving headship of her husband?

Paul explicitly states that the relationship between Adam and Eve *at creation* is illustrative of the relationship between Christ and His church. In the analogy, Jesus is depicted as the husband and the church as His wife. Although Christ and the church are one, there is a functional difference: Jesus is the head and the church is under His loving authority. Oneness between Christ and His church does not mean that they have an egalitarian relationship.

The Matter of Submission

⁷⁰ Ellen G. White, Counsels to the Church, pp. 145, 146

⁷¹ According to the online edition of Thayer's Lexicon the verb *phobeo* in this instance means 'to reverence, venerate, to treat with deference or reverential obedience'

It is important to note that in Ephesians 5:22-24 the apostle Paul links the word *kephale* (head) with *hypotasso* (submit):

“Wives, *submit* [*hypotasso*] to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is *head* of the wife, as also Christ is *head* of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is *subject* [*hypotasso*] to Christ, so let the wives be [subject] to their own husbands in everything” (see also Colossians 3:18; I Corinthians 14:33-35; Titus 2:4, 5).

According to Greek lexicons the word *hypotasso* means ‘to be subject, subordinate, place under.’ In the light of this meaning, would anyone dare say that wives are not instructed by God to be subject to their husbands ‘in the Lord’ after the cross? (Cf. 1 Peter 3:1, 5). If wives are not required to be subject to their husbands, then the church would not be expected to be subject to Christ either because the willing submission of the church to Christ is predicated upon the willing submission of the wife to the husband. If Jesus does not find the headship of His Father demeaning and if the church does not consider the headship of Jesus demeaning, then wives should not find the headship of their husbands demeaning either! (Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3)

The fundamental problem is that in this sinful rebellious world we consider submission to be a negative thing. We assume that those who submit or subject themselves to the authority of another are inferior to the one to whom they subject themselves. If this were the case, then the subjection of Jesus to His Father both before and after sin is eradicated from the universe would be a bad thing (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28) and subjection of the church to the headship of Christ would be bad as well.

Mutual Submission?

It is common for egalitarians to argue, based on Ephesians 5:21, that submission is a two way street with the husband submitting to his wife and the wife to the husband. There are several reasons why this argument is faulty.

First, the idea would not be practical in daily life and therefore does not make any sense. What is the meaning of mutual submission? Can there really be any authority structure when two individuals mutually submit to the authority of one another?

Second, the idea of mutual submission is a *novel interpretation* of the text that was totally unknown in Christian interpretation until the feminist movement in recent times. One looks in vain for such an interpretation of the text before the rise of the feminist movement in the decades of the 60’ and 70’s.

Third, Ephesians 5:21 cannot be understood without reading the succeeding context. In Ephesians 5:21-6:9 Paul is not only addressing the submission of wives to their husbands. He also writes about the submission of children to their parents and bondservants to their masters.

Are we to understand that Paul was teaching that submission is a two-way street between parents and children in which parents should mutually submit to the authority of their children in an egalitarian relationship? Are we to think that Paul believed that masters and bondservants should be mutually submissive to one another? Would it make logical sense to think that a sergeant must be mutually submissive with the soldiers under his command? Are the commanding angels in heaven mutually submissive to the angels that they command? Is there any evidence in Scripture that God the Father and God the Son are mutually submissive to one another in an egalitarian relationship?

Fourth, the idea of mutual submission does not agree with the clear words of the text. Verses 22, 24 explicitly state that it is *the wife* who should submit to the authority of her husband and not the other way around.

Fifth, in other places of his own writings the apostle makes it absolutely clear that it is *wives* who should be submissive to the authority of their husbands:

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.” (Colossians 3:18, 19; cf. Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1-6)

Never, not even once, do we find any text in the New Testament that indicates that husbands are to be subject to the authority of their wives.

Sixth, verse 21 serves as the introductory statement to the entire *succeeding context*. When Paul writes ‘Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God’ he is not merely addressing the relationship between husbands and wives in the next verse but rather all relationships in the church—wives to husbands, children to parents and bondservants to masters. In Verses 22-33 the apostle addresses the submission of wives to their husbands, in 6:1-4 the submission of children to their parents and in 6:5-9 the submission of bondservants to their masters.

But what then is meant by the expression ‘one to another’? Doesn’t it clearly mean mutual submission? Not according to the succeeding context which explains what the expression means:

The wife (one) should submit to the husband (another) (Ephesians 5:22, 24)

The children (one) should submit to their parents (another) (Ephesians 6:1-3)

The servant (one) should submit to his master (another) (Ephesians 6:5-8)

But submission does not mean to be trampled upon. Along with the idea of submission the apostle provides mitigating factors to regulate the authority of husbands, parents and masters. Husbands are

to love their wives and thus they are not at liberty to mistreat them (Ephesians 5:25-33). Parents are not to provoke their children to wrath by abusing their parental authority (Ephesians 6: 4) and masters are not to use their authority to threaten their servants because they too are servants of Christ (Ephesians 6:9)

Seventh, as indicated previously the submission of the church to Christ is predicated upon the submission of the wife to the husband (Ephesians 5:24). Are we to understand that Christ and the church are to be mutually submissive to one another? The idea is preposterous. The church is under the authority of Christ and receives orders from Him as its head. Christ is not in subjection to the authority of the church, a concept that is taught by Roman Catholics but not by Protestants!

The Meaning of Hypotasso

Finally, the meaning of the Greek word *hypotasso* must be taken into account. Some egalitarians redefine this word in this *one verse* giving it a different definition than where it is found elsewhere in the New Testament. Whereas according to the lexicons the word means 'to submit, to be subject' to someone's authority⁷² some egalitarians have redefined the word in Ephesians 5:21 to mean 'to be considerate and thoughtful of someone' or 'to put someone else's interests first'. Needless to say, no lexicon gives such definitions of the word. The word is used 38 times in the New Testament and always refers to one party being in subjection to another. Notice the following examples:

- Jesus was *subject* to the authority of His father and mother (Luke 2:51)
- Demons were *subject* to the authority of the apostles (Luke 10:17)
- Citizens are *subject* to the ruling authorities (Romans 13:1-5)
- When the great controversy is over, Jesus will *subject* Himself to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28)
- Church members are called upon to be *subject* to the authority of the elders (1 Peter 5:5)
- The church must be *subject* to Christ (Ephesians 5:24)
- Servants should be *subject* to the authority of their masters (Titus 2:9)
- God has placed everything in *subjection* to Christ (Hebrews 2:8)
- Angels, authorities and powers are in *subjection* to Christ upon His ascension to heaven (1 Peter 3:22)
- As we submit to our earthly father, so we should *submit* to our heavenly Father (Hebrews 12:9)
- Christians should *submit* themselves to God (Hebrews 12:9)

⁷² Many and various lexicons such as [Thayer's Lexicon](#), [The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament](#), [Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament](#) and [Arndt and Gingrich's New Testament Lexicon](#) all define *hypotasso* as "obey, arrange under, subordinate oneself to, to be subject to, to put in subjection, to place under, to submit to, to yield to."

And with regards to the word *kephale*, Evangelical scholar Wayne Grudem has done an exhaustive study of the word in the LXX, Plato, the New Testament, Josephus, Philo, Plutarch and the church fathers and he has found that the word does indeed mean 'head'.⁷³

Several texts from the writings of both Paul and Peter clearly reveal that the word *kephale* denotes authority/headship (see Ephesians 1:22; 5:23, 24; Colossians 1:18; 2:10; I Peter 2:7). Bible words should not be treated like play dough that can be molded to take the shape that the interpreter wishes them to have.

In Christ Jesus

As we look at the experience of Jesus in the Gospels we see that he *ceased to breathe* when He died on the cross (John 19:30), He was then *buried* in the tomb, after which He *breathed again* when He resurrected from the dead. This experience of Jesus is actually replicated in miniature and symbolically when a believer is baptized and *begins* the Christian life.

As happened with Christ, the believer ceases to breathe before going under the water, does not breathe while he is buried under the water and breathes again when he comes forth from the water. In this way the believer is symbolically included in the experience of Christ. The believer is reckoned by God dead, buried and resurrected *with* Christ and seated *with* Him and in Him at the right hand of God (Ephesians 2:6). Thus at the moment of baptism the true believer is reckoned 'in Christ'.

That Galatians 3:28 is referring to the *initiation* ceremony into the Christian faith at the beginning of the Christian life is further confirmed by the prepositions 'into' and 'in' that appear in verses 27 and 28. The first preposition is found in the phrase 'were baptized *into* Christ' (verse 27) and the second is in the phrase 'one *in* Christ Jesus' (verse 28). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament explains the meaning of these two prepositions:

"Originally *eis* [into] denoted the same spatial dimensions as *en* [in], but as an indicator of direction *toward a goal*, not as an indicator of *location without direction*. Its use in the NT corresponds largely to classical usage, from which the specifically NT phrasing is commonly derived."

The preposition *en* thus refers to a believer's *position* in Christ while *eis* describes the believer's initial *movement* into that position. In practical terms this means that when the Galatians were baptized into Christ they *moved into* their *position 'in Christ'*.⁷⁴

⁷³ Wayne Grudem, Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth, pp. 552-559.

⁷⁴ The preposition 'into' is used in several key baptismal texts. The preposition is used three times in Romans 6:3, 4 to describe the initial incorporation of believers into Christ: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized *into* Christ Jesus were baptized *into* His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism *into* death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." The baptismal formula uses the same preposition: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them *in* [into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19) and 1 Corinthians 10:2 describes the baptism of Israel into Moses. In Romans 16:7 the apostle Paul explained that Junias and Andronicus were in Christ before he was. This means

This is the reason why believers 'in Christ Jesus' are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and no longer face any condemnation (Romans 8:1) because they are seated in and with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).⁷⁵

The Seed of Abraham

Galatians 3:29 adds valuable information to our analysis. In verse 16 the apostle has argued that the Seed of Abraham is a singular person, Jesus Christ. Yet in verse 29 the apostle adds that when believers are *baptized* into Christ they become Abraham's seed in and through Christ.

In the days of Abraham circumcision at the *beginning* of physical life incorporated a person as a member of the covenant community. In the days of Paul, baptism (which replaces circumcision according to Colossians 2:11-13), takes place at the *beginning* of spiritual life and incorporates a person as a member of the New covenant community. Jews and Greeks, masters and bondservants, males and females become one in Christ at baptism and are children of Abraham because they all have the same faith that Abraham had. Once again, there is no reference to church office here but rather to membership in the covenant community.

Summary

The emphasis of Galatians 3:26-29 then has to do with equality in Christ within the covenant community. When persons of different gender, social status and ethnic background are *baptized* they are all 'in Christ' and therefore are legitimate and equal members of the church. There can be no sense of superiority because of ethnic, social or gender distinctions. There can be no sense of rivalry between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female.

It is important to underline that Paul does not write that in Christ 'man is no longer the head of the woman' or that 'males and females can now serve as elders/overseers in the church.' Such statements would conflict with his own testimony in in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:22-33, First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.⁷⁶ Clearly the cross did not erase the role distinctions that God established before sin.

that there was a specific point at which Paul, Junias and Andronicus were incorporated into Christ and that moment was baptism (see, Acts 22:16 for the specific moment when Paul was officially incorporated into Christ).

⁷⁵ Therefore, those who died, were buried and were resurrected with Jesus spiritually at baptism need not fear physical death because those who died in Christ will resurrect (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:18).

⁷⁶ One Adventist scholar who favors women's ordination has suggested that the gender specific requirement that elders must be the 'husbands of one wife' does not anymore disqualify women from being elders than the tenth commandment excludes women from obedience because God commanded men not to covet and not women. But such an argument is flawed. Does the fact that the tenth commandment only forbids a man to covet his neighbor's wife mean that it is allowable for the wife to covet another woman's husband? Perish the thought!

Man is still to fulfill the role of the father and ‘house-band’ and woman the role of the mother. The wife must still submit to the loving headship of her husband ‘in the Lord’ and husbands must still love their wives. There is not even the faintest hint in Galatians 3:28 or its context to indicate that Paul was addressing roles in the home or in the church. As expressed by Gordon Wenham:

“The context of vs. 28 shows that Paul is dealing with eligibility for baptism, not ministry. . . Paul is not talking about the roles of the sexes here therefore this passage is quite irrelevant to our discussion, and in no way contradicts what he has to say in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy.”⁷⁷

The Fourth Possibility

It has taken us quite a while to get to the fourth possible meaning of the phrase ‘there is neither male nor female.’ The fourth possibility—and the one I believe to be correct—is that the *man-made* post-fall divisions and strife between Jews and Greeks, slaves and free and males and females will cease to exist in the minds of church members when they realize that when they *began* their Christian life as

In Biblical thought, when God gives a command to the husband, he is expected to teach his wife and his entire family to obey the command because he is the head of the family. For example, God said about Abraham:

“For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.”

Someone might think that this was simply a patriarchal arrangement that kicked in after sin and was replaced at the cross. But is this the case? Let’s answer this question by looking at how God expected the Sabbath to be passed on from one generation to another.

Before Adam and Eve sinned we are told that “The Sabbath was committed to *Adam*, the *father* and *representative* of the whole human family” Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 48 (cf. DA 281) Notice that God did not commit the Sabbath to Adam *and* Eve, the father and mother of the human family! He committed it to Adam. Does the fact that the Sabbath was committed to Adam mean that God did not expect Eve to keep it? To the contrary! Ellen White states that it was given to and for both:

“God saw that a Sabbath was essential for *Adam and Eve*, even in Paradise. In giving *them* the Sabbath, God considered their spiritual and physical health.” Christ Triumphant, p. 18

How are we to understand that the Sabbath was given to Adam, the father and representative of the human race and yet it was also given to Eve? Is Ellen White talking out of both sides of her mouth? Clearly the Sabbath was given to Adam as the father and representative of the whole human family and he was expected to teach his wife and children as well as successive generations the meaning of the Sabbath and the importance of its observance. Regarding this responsibility Ellen White explains:

“*Adam* carefully treasured what God had revealed to *him*, and *handed it down* by word of mouth to *his* children and children’s children.” Spirit of Prophecy, volume 1, p. 59

And so it is that when God commanded the man not to commit adultery, he was to teach his wife and the rest of his family that the same commandment applied to them as well.

⁷⁷ Gordon Wenham, “The Ordination of Women: Why is it so Diverse?” Churchman 92 (1978), p. 312

newborn babes they became members of the same family and therefore all are ontologically equal. Christ died to save all people regardless of their ethnicity, social status or gender and therefore in Christ they all belong to one and the same covenant community. Let not man cast asunder what Jesus has joined together!

The Cornelius Experience

The story of the conversion of Cornelius and his two friends in Acts 10 and 11 is illustrative of the meaning of Galatians 3:28. There are several things that Scripture says about Cornelius and his two companions. We know for a fact that:

- They *repented* (Acts 11:18)
- They *believed* (Acts 10:43)
- They received the *gift* of the Holy Spirit (10:44, 45)
- The Holy Spirit then immediately imparted the *charisma* or *gift of tongues* (Acts 10:46; 11:17)
- They were *baptized in water* as a seal of their union with Christ and with the Church (Acts 10:47, 48)

Several Adventist scholars have suggested that the inclusion of the Gentiles as *bona fide* members of the covenant community along with the Jews suggests that women should now be allowed to serve as elders/overseers in the church along with men. But can such a leap of logic be legitimately taken? There is not the slightest hint in this story to indicate that functional roles in the home and in the church are being addressed. The text clearly indicates that when Cornelius and his two friends were baptized into Christ they were *saved* and became, so to speak, ‘card carrying’ members of the covenant community. The gift of the Holy Spirit that they received was one and the same as that which all newly baptized Jewish members received when they believed in Jesus! Peter later explained to the leadership in Jerusalem:

“If therefore God gave them [the Gentiles] the *same gift* as He gave us [the Jews] *when we believed* on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying: “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles *repentance to life.*”

Up to this point Peter had cherished the misconception⁷⁸ that Gentiles could not be saved and become members of the New Covenant community. But the Cornelius experience taught Peter that Gentiles

⁷⁸ That the problem was Peter’s own misguided perception and not an arrangement established by God is clearly indicated by Peter’s remark: “In truth I *perceive* that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.” Acts 10:34, 35

were not beyond the pale of salvation, nor were they second class citizens of Christ's kingdom but rather full-fledged members of the church with full rights and privileges.⁷⁹

There is nothing about qualifications for church office in this story. It is hermeneutically unfeasible to argue that equality of status in the sight of God and one another means equality of office in the church. This story cannot be used to determine who is qualified to occupy certain church offices. In order to ascertain the qualifications for church office it is necessary to go to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 where Paul clearly lays out those qualifications.

Commenting on the result of the Cornelius experience Ellen White perceptibly wrote:

"Thus, without controversy, *prejudice* was broken down, the *exclusiveness* established by the custom of ages was abandoned, and the way was opened for the gospel to be proclaimed to the Gentiles."⁸⁰

One Adventist pastor has used this quotation to sustain the view that women should be ordained to positions of pastoral leadership as elders/overseers along with men. He argues that as the Jews were prejudiced against the Gentiles and barred them from full fellowship in the covenant community, so men in the church have been prejudiced against women and have barred them from positions of pastoral leadership. But isn't this like comparing apples with watermelons? Ontological equality in the church is one thing and qualification for church office quite another. The pastor's central argument seems to be: Because God is no respecter of persons individuals can now serve as elders/overseers in the church without regard to gender. If they could not, then God would be a respecter of persons. But this line of reasoning has serious problems and implications.

Was the male only priesthood which God established in the Old Testament an exclusive and prejudicial system? Was the male only priesthood a mere 'custom of the ages' or was it established by God? Was God a respecter of persons because he allowed only males to serve as priests? These are serious questions that require serious reflection. If our answer to these questions is yes then we have to conclude that in the Old Testament God was prejudiced and a respecter of persons! But Peter himself stated that God is no respecter of persons.

In actual fact it was Peter who was prejudiced and a respecter of persons because of his own preconceived notions! In distinction to the priesthood of Aaron, the custom of excluding Gentiles from the covenant community was based, not on an arrangement established by God but upon the sinful

⁷⁹ If they had full rights and privileges, were they not then entitled to serve as elders/overseers of the church? The answer is yes as long as they were called by God and met the qualifications that Paul established in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and one of those qualifications is that they must be a 'one woman man'.

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 142

prejudice of man.⁸¹ The fact is that God is no respecter of persons when it comes to a person's status, dignity and value but He is a respecter of persons when it comes to church office or function.

In all honesty, is the issue being addressed in Acts 10 and 11 a matter of *role distinctions* in the church? Is it a matter of gender? Does it really have anything to do with the ordination of individuals as elders/overseers? The context clearly indicates that the issue revolved around equal access to salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the bestowal of the *charismata* at the *beginning* of their Christian experience. Does the following syllogism make logical sense?

- The Jews were prejudiced against the Gentiles and believed that they could not be saved and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit
- God removed the man-made barrier between Jews and Gentiles by giving the Gentiles salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the *charismata* that He had given to the Jews
- Therefore God has removed all role distinctions between men and women in the church and both can serve as elders/overseers

At the risk of redundancy it bears repeating that baptism is the *initiation* rite that links us first with Christ and then with His church. At baptism Jews and Greeks, bond and free and males and females are one in Christ and become members of the one covenant community or family of faith. All are now brothers and sisters in Christ! What was previously a cause of strife and division no longer exists because all now belong to the same family.

In a real sense, however, Jews continue to be Jews and Greeks continue to be Greeks, masters continue to be masters and bondservants continue to be bondservants and males continue to be male and females continue to be female. Yet one group cannot consider itself superior to another because of their ethnicity, social status or gender. They all have God as Father and Christ as brother and God is no respecter of persons. Jews and Greeks, bond and free, males and females have always been considered ontologically equal in the sight of God but unfortunately it has not always been so in the sight of men!

Colossians 3

Other Pauline passages confirm that Galatians 3:28 is dealing with equal status in the sight of God and fellow believers rather than with gender roles in the home and in the church. We will examine one of them.

⁸¹ In the sight of God, believing Gentiles could be included as members of the covenant community. Among others, we have the examples of Rahab and Ruth. Rahab and her family were spared because she believed that the Lord was the only true God (Joshua 2:8-11). Ruth's words to Naomi: "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16) clearly indicate that she was repudiating her Moabite heritage and becoming an Israelite—and Ruth the Gentile became the progenitor of the Messiah!

In Colossians 3 the apostle Paul includes several clear allusions to the *initiation* rite of *baptism*. First he wrote that the members of Colossae had died and been raised with Christ (verses 1-3). Next he affirmed that those who had embraced Christ had *put off* the old man and *put on* the new. The use of the perfect tense indicates that Paul was discussing an experience that took place in their past experience, namely at baptism. Paul then concluded his argument by stating that because the Colossians had been incorporated into Christ and the covenant community by baptism, they became full-fledged members of that community and in consequence there is 'neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.' (Colossians 3:11)

Paul's point here is that Jews and Greeks, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian and slave and free have equal status, value and dignity in the sight of God and should therefore be considered in the same way in the minds of fellow believers. Where in the passage did Paul even faintly hint that he was discussing roles in the church?

The question might be asked: Could Jews, Greeks, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free *later* serve as pastors and elders of the church? Of course they could as long as they met all the biblical criteria, one of which was that they must be 'husbands of one wife'. But Paul is not addressing that particular point in this passage.

Notably, in the immediately succeeding context of Colossians 3:11, the apostle admonishes wives to submit to their husbands, husbands to love their wives, children to obey their parents and bondservants to obey their masters (Colossians 3:18-22). In the context there is no evidence whatever that Paul is advocating an elimination of gender roles in the home and in the church. Equality of status does not mean equality of roles and submission does not necessarily imply inferiority.

In none of the passages that we have examined does the emphasis fall upon functional roles or offices in the home and in the church. In all the passages the issue is equality of salvation, equality of standing before God and equality among the members of the covenant community at the beginning of the Christian life when a person receives Christ and is baptized.

Everyone in the church is equal in the sight of God. Everyone in the church has equal access to salvation. Every member has equal standing in the church. One group of church members should not consider themselves superior to others because of their race, gender, or social status. However, when Paul addresses the issue of elders/overseers in the church he is gender specific in stating that they must be husbands of one wife and rule their house and children wisely. Paul is not speaking out of both sides of his mouth!

Chronology of Galatians

It is important to realize that according to virtually all reputable New Testament scholars, Galatians was one of the earliest epistles written by the apostle, most likely sometime between AD 49 and 57. The same scholars date First Timothy and Titus to a period later in Paul's ministry, most likely at some point between the years 61-67 AD. Though the precise date of Galatians and First Timothy is uncertain, one thing is quite certain: Galatians was written *before* 1 Timothy and Titus.

This leads to a very important question related to the meaning of Galatians 3:28. The question is this: Would Paul write earlier in his ministry that because in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28), women can serve in the roles of elder/overseer and then do an about face toward the end of his ministry and write to Timothy and Titus that elders and bishops must be husbands of one wife? To put it simply, was Paul in favor of women as elders/overseers early in his ministry when he wrote Galatians 3:28 and against it later on when he wrote First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9? Did Paul change his mind about women's ordination and become a complementarian toward the end of his ministry after being an egalitarian at the beginning?

Unless one is willing to concede that the apostle Paul contradicted himself (as P. K. Jewett does), the opposite is true. Some egalitarian scholars use trajectory hermeneutics to argue that Paul evolved from being a complementarian at the beginning of his ministry to an egalitarian position later on—that is, Paul outgrew his early rabbinical bias against women and toward the end of his life became totally gender inclusive. Yet this view simply does not square with the evidence because Galatians was written before 1 Timothy and Titus! If anything, Paul grew out of an egalitarian position (Galatians 3:28) and later became a complementarian (First Timothy 3 and Titus 1)!

Ellen White and Galatians 3:28

Some egalitarians have used the following quotation from the pen of Ellen White to bolster their case in favor of ordinations to pastoral leadership without regard to gender:

“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of *one family* by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan's circle the poor souls who have been deluded by his deceptions. It places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise.

In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are *brought nigh* by His precious blood. (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:13)”⁸²

⁸² Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 386

Are those who use this quotation in this manner respecting its legitimate context?

First of all, it is important to underline that although Ellen White is clearly alluding to Galatians 3:28 she did not include the phrase 'male or female' in this quotation. Not only did she stop short of quoting the last phrase of the verse, but at the beginning of the quotation she refers only to a distinction of nationality, race and caste. Gender is totally absent from the quotation!

Second, even a cursory reading of this quotation even apart from its context indicates that Ellen White is underlining the fact that everyone, regardless of national origin or social status, is ontologically equal and has free access to God and to salvation because all are one by creation and by redemption. There is not even the slightest hint in the statement that Ellen White was discussing the ministerial roles of men and women in the church. In fact, as I pointed out before, she does not even mention male and female in her quotation. She is clearly discussing how God sees people and how we should treat them in the light of this fact.

The misuse of this quotation is even more troubling when we take into consideration the context in which it appears. Does the quotation, within its immediate context, really have anything to do with the roles of men and women who minister to others? The answer is clearly no.

In the chapter where this statement is found, Ellen White is expounding upon the story of the Good Samaritan. She explains that the Good Samaritan represents Christ who came to minister to and save the lost irrespective of *their* nationality, race, rank, birth, attainments or caste. Ellen White then extends the meaning of the parable to us by emphasizing that we should be like the Good Samaritan. That is, we should follow the example of Christ and work for the salvation of the lost no matter what *their* caste, social class, rank, color, race, birth or attainments.

Ellen White's point is not that there should be no male or female role distinctions among those *who minister*. After all, she does not even mention male and female! Rather she is insisting that we should *minister to* individuals without regard to *their* caste or social status!! She is not saying that the roles of those *who minister* are the same without regard to gender but rather that those *who minister* should show no prejudice or partiality toward those to *whom they minister* be they bond or free, Jew or Greek. Thus this quotation has been taken out of its legitimate context and applied to those who minister rather than to those who are *ministered to*.

Though it is true that men and women who minister to others are ontologically equal (though they have different roles) it is illegitimate to use this quotation to prove such a point because Ellen White is not addressing those who minister but rather those who are ministered to. It would be correct to state that Jesus ministered to both males and females without regard to gender but He did not teach by precept or example that those who serve as elders/overseers should serve in all ministerial capacities without regard to gender—after all He did choose twelve male apostles!

Another statement that is frequently misused is found in The Review and Herald, December 22, 1891:

“Then as the children of God are *one* in Christ, how does Jesus look upon caste, upon society distinctions, upon the *division* of man from his fellow-man, because of color, race, position, wealth, birth, or attainments? The secret of *unity* is found in the *equality* of believers in Christ. The reason of all division, discord, and difference is found in separation from Christ. Christ is the center to which all should be attracted; for the nearer we approach the center, the closer we shall come together in feeling, in sympathy, in love, growing into the character and image of Jesus. With God there is *no respect of persons*.”⁸³

It bears noting that Ellen White in this article does not even allude to Galatians 3:28. She states that believers are not to be divided by national distinctions, sectarian differences, honor of rank, pride of caste, man-made separations between class and race, color, position, wealth, birth, and attainments. Once again, Ellen White does not even include women in the equation neither does she discuss church offices.

Even a casual glance at this quotation indicates that the potential reason for strife is due to the fact that one group or person might consider themselves superior to others because of their differences in nationality, sects, honor of rank, pride of caste, man-made separations between class and race, color, position, wealth, birth, and attainments. In other words, Ellen White’s emphasis is upon church unity because we are all one under God. Nothing in the statement or its context even faintly indicates that Ellen White is discussing ministerial roles in the church. If God was no respecter of persons when He chose males only to serve as Old Testament priests, why would He be a respecter of persons by choosing only males to serve as elders/overseers?

The emphasis of this Ellen White quotation is crystal clear: There should be no strife among believers because of nationality, caste or race. All are equal in dignity, value and standing in the sight of God. But does this mean that in the family the woman ceases to fulfill the role of mother and the man no longer fulfills the function as father? Does it mean that motherly and fatherly roles are interchangeable? Does this mean that men and women have identical roles in the church and that if women submit to the spiritual headship of men they are inferior? A reading of this quotation in its original context indicates that Ellen White is not discussing roles in ministry at all and she never even mentions the matter of gender. She is simply saying that there should be no strife in the church over the status of people. All are equal in the sight of God and should be in the sight of their fellow believers.

Ellen White and Headship

⁸³ Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, December 22, 1891

Ellen White, in full harmony with Paul, unambiguously affirms that the husband is still the head of the wife and that wise male headship in the home qualifies a man to exercise wise male headship in the church.

As I pointed out earlier, Ellen White has repeatedly confirmed that male headship in the home did not cease at the cross. It is *still* God's plan that the husband be the head of the wife in the family relationship. Here is but one example:

"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 Savior 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."⁸⁴

Male Headship in the Church

But does male headship in the home 'spill over' to male headship in the church? That is, does male leadership in the home qualify a man to be a leader in the church? The answer to this question is clearly found in both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

The apostle Paul explicitly stated, when he wrote to Timothy, that the elder/overseer who is a one woman *man* should be "one who rules his own house well, having *his children* in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule *his own house*, how will he take care of *the church of God?*)." (First Timothy 3:4, 5)

And when Paul wrote to Titus he affirmed that the elder/overseer who is the husband of one wife is required to have "faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination." (Titus 1:6)

In words that are impossible to be misunderstood Ellen White agreed with Paul:

"The family of the one suggested for office should be considered. Are they in subjection? Can the *man* rule *his* own house with honor? What character have *his* children? Will they do honor to the *father's* influence? If *he* has no tact, wisdom, or power of godliness at home in managing *his* own family, it is safe to conclude that the same defects will be carried into the church, and the same unsanctified management will be seen there. It will be far better to criticize *the man* before *he* is put into office than afterward, better to pray and counsel before taking the decisive step than to labor to correct the consequences of a wrong move."⁸⁵

And again:

"He who is engaged in the work of the gospel ministry must be faithful in *his* family life. It is as essential that as a *father* *he* should improve the talents God has given *him* for the purpose of making the *home* a symbol of the heavenly family, as that in the work of the ministry, *he* should make use of *his* God given powers to win souls for the *church*. As the *priest* in the *home*, and as the ambassador of Christ in the

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, Counsels to the Church, p. 145, 146

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 5, p. 618

church, he should exemplify in his life the character of Christ. He must be faithful in watching for souls as one that must give an account. In his service there must be seen no carelessness and inattentive work. God will not serve with the sins of men who have not a clear sense of the sacred responsibility involved in accepting a position as pastor of a church. He who fails to be a faithful, discerning shepherd in the home, will surely fail of being a faithful shepherd of the flock of God in the church."⁸⁶

Ellen White wrote the following words to a man who had failed to exercise wise leadership in his home:

"You have not ruled well your *own house*, and while you lack so much at home, you cannot be entrusted to dictate important and responsible matters in the *church*. This scripture was presented before me; "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?"⁸⁷

Ellen White underlined that God's plan for *male* leadership in the church is the same as existed in the Old Testament:

"The same principles of piety and justice that were to guide the *rulers* among God's people in the time of Moses and of David were also to be followed by those given the oversight of the newly organized church of God in the gospel dispensation. In the work of setting things in order in all the churches, and ordaining suitable *men* to act as *officers*, the apostles held to the high standards of leadership outlined in the *Old Testament Scriptures*."⁸⁸

Sweeping Generalizations

I have found that frequently, sweeping generalizations are made among Adventist egalitarians to impress the reader with the idea that women's ordination to pastoral leadership was a common occurrence in New Testament times. Usually only Scripture references are given and the impression is left that it was common for women to serve in *every* leadership position conceivable in the New Testament Church.

For example, after providing the usual New Testament references (but no quotations) in favor of women in positions of leadership, the North Pacific Union Women in Leadership Ad Hoc Committee released the following statement: "We see no teaching that prohibits the church from appointing women to any position of ministry or leadership and much that suggests such actions to be entirely appropriate."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 42, 1903, pp. 1, 2 ("The Training of Children," typed May 4, 1903) 6MR 49

⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, Supplement, August 19, 1862

⁸⁸ Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 95

⁸⁹ John McVay, Al Reimche and Sue Smith, "Reflections on the Theology and Practice of Ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," draft dated 10/3/2012, p. 6

Notably, the seven page document does not make reference to First Timothy 3:1-7 or Titus 1:5-9, because if the redactors had done so, their central thesis would have been overthrown.

In order to prove that we should ordain women to pastoral leadership, another notable Adventist scholar provided a list of leadership positions which were occupied by women in the New Testament Church:

“. . . women did not immediately receive *full and equal* participation with men in the ministry of the church. However, Phoebe is mentioned as a ‘deacon’ (Rom. 16:1); Junia was a female apostle (Rom. 16:7), and leaders of the church at Philippi were women (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.*”⁹⁰

It is no doubt true that Phoebe ministered to the church of Cenchrea but there is no proof that she was ever ordained or that she was a deacon in the technical sense of the word; it is inconclusive whether Junias was a female or an apostle as our scholar so confidently states; Philippians 4:2, 3 nowhere says that the women at the church of Philippi were *leaders* but rather that they were fellow-laborers with Paul. My wife is a fellow-laborer with me in ministry but this does not mean that she is an elder/overseer! Nowhere are we told in Acts 18 that Priscilla assumed an *authoritative* teaching role *over* men. Rather the text clearly explains that Priscilla and Aquila *both* taught Apollos the word of God more accurately (Acts 18:26) and this was done on a one to one basis *in private*, not in congregational worship! There is nothing in Scripture that would forbid a woman from serving as a Bible worker!

And finally there is no hint in the text to indicate that the Elect Lady of 2 John was an apostle, an elder or an overseer. Nor is there any evidence that she was ordained to be the leader of a specific local church. Ellen White identifies this woman as “a *helper* in the gospel work, a woman of good repute and wide influence.”⁹¹ There were many women that could be described this way who were never ordained or served as leaders of churches, women such as Lydia, Dorcas and Priscilla.

Some Adventist egalitarian scholars have documented that in our denominational history from 1872 to 1915 women were licensed to preach, several served as very successful evangelists, many were Conference treasurers and many others served as conference departmental directors. What is most frequently left unsaid is that none of these women were ever ordained, received a ministerial *credential* or served in leadership positions such as senior pastors or elders of churches or as Conference, Union or General Conference presidents.⁹²

⁹⁰ Richard Davidson, Pacific Union Recorder “Yes: The Bible Supports the Ordination/Commissioning of Women Pastors,” Special Constituency Edition (August 2012), pp. 45, 47

⁹¹ Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 554

⁹² Some have suggested that there was at least one woman besides Ellen White who received a ministerial credential. Ellen White wrote about Dr. Caro, a prominent dentist in New Zealand: “Sister Caro is a superior dentist. She has all the work she

Complementarians are not opposed to women serving in various capacities in the church. In fact, we encourage women to use their God-given gifts within the parameters that He has established. For example, as I was writing this paper a woman was elected treasurer of the conference where I serve as a pastor. Did I object to this appointment? Far from it! When I heard that she was elected, I had no doubt in my mind that she was the best qualified for the job and I warmly congratulated her and wished her the best in her new post. But the president of the conference (which would be equivalent to regional elders such as Timothy and Titus in the apostolic church) in harmony with the Bible and denominational policy is the ‘husband of one wife’.

For many years my wife managed the finances of our household. Our salaries were deposited in the bank and she made sure that the bills were paid on time. This was a great relief to me. I felt somewhat like Potiphar who delegated the administrative responsibility to Joseph and therefore did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate (Genesis 39:9). Did this make Joseph the head of Potiphar’s household? Of course not! I am sure that when important administrative issues surfaced which were beyond Joseph’s realm of authority to resolve, he consulted with Potiphar. Likewise my wife did not act independently of my counsel. When a decision requiring a large and unusual expenditure was needed, my wife always consulted with me to ask for guidance on what she should do. Was my wife the head of the household because she was the treasurer? Of course not!

can do. She is a tall stately woman, but sociable and companionable. You would love her if you should see her. She does not hoard her means, she puts it into bags which wax not old. She handles an immense amount of money, and she uses the money to *educate young men* to become laborers for the Master. I am greatly attached to her. She holds her diploma as dentist and her *credentials as minister*. She speaks to the church *when there is no minister*, so you see that she is a very capable woman. Her husband is a physician and surgeon.” Letter 33, 1893 quoted in 9MR 25

What some fail to reveal is that according to The Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook for 1894 Dr. Caro received a *ministerial license*, not a Ministerial Credential. Ellen White affirmed as much when she stated: "She [Sister Caro] is a queenly woman, tall, and every way proportioned. Sister Caro not only does her business, but she has a *ministerial license* and bears many burdens in their church at Napier [New Zealand]. She speaks to the people, is intelligent and every way capable. She supports her three sons--two in Battle Creek, and one in England who is studying law. . . . Dr. Caro supports the home. Sister Caro takes in a great deal of money, but nothing is expended in luxuries. She is supporting *young men* in the Bible school at Melbourne, besides some in America. The Lord blesses this noble, unselfish woman. Her work is about double when compared with the patronage of the other dentists in Napier.” Manuscript 22, 1893

There is a difference between a ministerial license and a ministerial credential. As far as I have been able to determine the only woman in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church from 1860 till 1915 to receive a ministerial credential was Ellen G. White. On March 5, 1899 Pastor D. W. Reavis asked the following question of the chair of the General Conference Ministerial Credentials and Licenses Committee: “I have wanted to know for some time what is the difference between ministerial credentials and ministerial license.” Here is the Chair’s answer: “Ministerial credentials are granted to ordained ministers in good standing, and engaged in active labor. Ministerial licenses are granted to licentiates—those who are engaged in preaching, but who have *not yet been ordained* to the gospel ministry.” Minutes of the March 5, 1899 General Conference Daily Bulletin, 147.50

Reflections on Ellen White's 1895 Statement

In an attempt to prove that women should be ordained as elders/overseers, some women's ordination advocates have misused the following statement by Ellen White:

"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. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work. 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."⁹³

A careful reading of this statement clearly indicates that Ellen White was not describing the work of an elder/overseer but rather the basic duties of what today we call a deaconess.

In his penetrating book which is based on his doctoral dissertation, The Twenty-First Century Deacon and Deaconess: Reflecting on the Biblical Model, Vincent E. White Jr. rebukes those who misuse this Ellen White quotation:

"And to add insult to injury, proponents for the ordination of female elders and female pastors are *misusing* Ellen G. White's statement, made in 1895 in favor of the ordination of deaconesses, to support their position."⁹⁴

The White Estate adds its testimony:

"There is no documentary evidence that EGW was calling for the ordination of women to gospel ministry in the RH article. The immediate internal context ('visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor') may suggest she had in mind the work of a *deaconess*. The opinion of EGW's personal secretary, Clarence C. Crisler, writing within one year of Mrs. White's death, was to the effect that EGW was referring to *ordination of deaconesses* rather than gospel ministers."⁹⁵

Setting deaconesses apart by the laying on of hands no more qualifies them to be ordained as elders/overseers than the laying on of hands upon the Levites qualified them to be priests. Ellen White also advocated laying hands on physicians.⁹⁶ Does this mean that they were entitled to serve as

⁹³ Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, July 9, 1895

⁹⁴ Vincent E. White Jr. The Twenty-First Century Deacon and Deaconess: Reflecting on the Biblical Model, p. 31

⁹⁵ Quoted in, Vincent E. White Jr. The Twenty-First Century Deacon and Deaconess: Reflecting on the Biblical Model, p. 33

⁹⁶ Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health, p. 540

elders/overseers in the church? Though the act of laying on of hands in these cases is the same, the office to which they are set apart is different.

I could find only one statement on the Ellen White CD Rom where she used the word 'deaconess'. Ellen White did not understand the roles of deacons and deaconesses to be identical and interchangeable. Though it is true that in some ways the roles of deacons and deaconesses overlap yet in other ways their roles are different. There are clearly some roles for deaconesses that cannot be filled by male deacons or even elders and vice-versa.⁹⁷

An example of this distinction between an ordained minister and a deaconess can be seen in an episode that involved one of our pioneers. It seems like A. T. Jones was for some time counseling women in the church that came to him with their problems. This led Ellen White to write him the following rebuke:

"You are not to set such an example that women will feel at liberty to tell you the grievances of their home life, and to draw upon your sympathies. When a woman comes to you with her troubles, tell her plainly to go to her sisters, to tell her troubles to the *deaconesses of the church*. Tell her that she is out of place in opening her troubles to any man, for men are easily beguiled and tempted. Tell the one who has thrown her case upon you that God has not placed this burden upon any man. You are not wise to take these burdens upon yourself. It is not your appointed work."⁹⁸

The noted Bible commentator, Adam Clarke, described the distinction between the roles of male deacons and female deaconesses in the early church in similar terms to Ellen White:

"There were deaconesses in the primitive church, whose business it was to attend the *female* converts at baptism; to instruct the catechumens, or persons who were candidates for baptism: to visit the sick, and those who were in prison; and, in short, perform those religious offices, for the *female part* of the church, which could *not with propriety be performed by men*. They were chosen in general out of the most experienced of the church; and were ordinarily widows, who had borne children. Some ancient constitutions required them to be forty, others fifty, and others sixty years of age. It is evident that they were ordained to their office, by the imposition of the hands of the bishop; and the form of prayer used on the occasion is extant in the Apostolical Constitution."⁹⁹

What shall we say then about the 1895 statement? The simple answer is that it has nothing to do with women being set apart as elders/overseers. Several facts emerge from a careful reading of the statement:

⁹⁷ It should be noted that there is evidence in Adventist history that women were ordained to the office of 'deaconess'. Ellen White's 1895 statement, along with the precedents in Adventist history is no doubt what led the 59th General Conference Session to approve the ordination of deaconesses.

⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, volume 21, pp. 97, 98

⁹⁹ Adam Clarke's Electronic Database Commentary, Romans 16:1

- The title of the original article is *'The Duty of the Minister and the People'* thus clearly establishing a distinction between the pastor and the laity in the church.
- Every individual in the church, whether male or female, should be involved *in ministry*. All should be involved in enlightening those who sit in darkness.
- The women referenced by Ellen White worked *part time* and their ministry was *not one of leadership* in the church. The job description of visiting the sick, looking after the young, and ministering to the necessities of the poor is what we today call a 'deaconess'.
- Ellen White did affirm that women who were engaged in this part time work should be set apart by the laying on of hands for *this particular work*. This is in line with the vote of the 59th General Conference session which approved the ordination of deaconesses. But it would be a gigantic leap of logic to state that because a woman is set apart by the laying on of hands to be a deaconess, she can serve as an elder which is an entirely different function!
- It is clear that these women were *not ministers or officers* of the church because we are told that they might need to *counsel with* the church officers or the minister.

The very same year that Ellen White's 1895 statement appeared in The Review and Herald, another article appeared in Signs of the Times where the editor stated categorically that women should *not* be ordained as elders. A reader asked the following question of the editor:

"Should women be elected to offices in the church when there are enough brethren?"

Here is the editor's response:

"If by this is meant the office of *elder*, we should say at once, *No*. But there are offices in the church which women can fill acceptably, and oftentimes there are found sisters in the church who are better qualified for this than brethren, such offices, for instance as church clerk, treasurer, librarian of the tract society, etc., as well as the office of deaconess, assisting the deacons in looking after the poor, and in doing such other duties as would naturally fall to their lot. The qualifications for church elder are set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:7-9. *We do not believe that it is in God's plan* to give to women the *ordained offices* of the church. By this we do not mean to depreciate their labors, service, or devotion. The sphere of woman is *equal* [italics in the original] to that of man. She was made a help meet, or fit, for man, but that does *not* [italics in original] mean that her sphere [or role] is *identical* [italics in original] to that of man's. The interests of the church and the world generally would be better served if the *distinctions given in God's word* were regarded."¹⁰⁰

Several things stand out in this answer:

- There are some positions in the church for which women are *better qualified* than men
- Those positions do *not include* the office of ordained elders

¹⁰⁰ Signs of the Times, "Question Corner # 176: Who Should Be Church Officers?" January, 1895

- Women are disqualified to be elders because they fail to meet the *Scripture qualifications* in 1 Timothy and Titus
- The editors openly admitted that although women and men are *equal* in the sight of God their roles in the church are *different*. This is precisely what Seventh-day Adventist complementarians have believed all along.

There was no outcry for the editor to resign because of his ‘sexist’ remarks. There is no evidence that there was any negative reaction on the part of the readers. Furthermore, if Ellen White believed that women should be ordained as elders/overseers, why didn’t she take the opportunity to correct the editor’s remarks when she wrote her article just a few months later?¹⁰¹

Phoebe

In an attempt to prove that women should be ordained to pastoral leadership, the women’s ordination advocates frequently bring up the case of Phoebe. The apostle Paul highly commended the ministry of this saintly woman and recommended her to the congregations in Rome:

“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a *servant* [*diakonon*] of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a *helper* of many and of myself also.” (Romans 16:1, 2)

What does this text actually say about Phoebe and what does it not say? Does it say that she was an apostle or elder/overseer of the church of Cenchrea? Does the text tell us that she was *ordained* to her post in the church? No. The text simply tells us that she was a *diakonon* in the church of Cenchrea and that she was a helper of Paul and many others.

The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament explains that the original meaning of the word ‘helper’ (which is used only here in the New Testament) is one "who looks after the legal protection of strangers and freedmen".¹⁰²

The word *diakonon* is descriptive of one who serves or ministers. The apostle Paul leaves no doubt that Phoebe had an important ministry in the church of Cenchrea. The critical question is this: Was Phoebe a *diakonon* in the narrow sense of the word (as a church office) as we use it today or are we to understand that she served or ministered to the church in a broader sense such as did Dorcas, Priscilla or Lydia?

¹⁰¹ In a Signs of the Times editorial for December 19, 1878, J. H. Waggoner had already stated: “The divine arrangement, even from the beginning, is this, that the man is the head of the woman. Every relation is disregarded or abused in this lawless age. But the Scriptures always maintain this order in the family relation. ‘For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.’ Eph. 5:23. Man is entitled to certain privileges which are not given to woman; and he is subjected to some duties and burdens from which the woman is exempt. A woman may pray, prophesy, exhort, and comfort the church, but she cannot occupy the position of a pastor or ruling elder. This would be looked upon as usurping authority over the man, which is here [1 Timothy 2:12] prohibited.”

¹⁰² “*Prostates* was the title of a citizen in Athens, who had the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of resident aliens who were without civic rights. Among the Jews it signified a wealthy patron of the community.”
Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, ‘*prostatis*’ 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers

During His ministry, Jesus admonished *each and every one* of His followers to be a *diakonon* or servant in the general sense of service or ministering, but this does not mean that all have been called to be elders/overseers. Jesus said:

“But he who is greatest among you shall be your *servant* [*diakonos*]” (Matthew 23:11)

“And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and *servant* [*diakonos*] of all.’” (Mark 9:35)

“If anyone *serves* [*diakonee*] Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My *servant* [*diakonos*] will be also. If anyone *serves* [*diakonee*] Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:26)

It is clear that in each of these verses the word *diakonos* could have been translated with the word ‘ministers’. As stated before, every follower of Jesus should be a ‘servant’ or ‘minister’. But does this mean that every member of the church is a deacon or a minister in the technical sense of a church office? Can a leap of logic be taken that because Phoebe was a *diakonon* she was ordained and served as an apostle or an elder/overseer? The answer is obvious: Every believer is to be a minister in the general sense of the word but this does not mean that every believer should be an elder/overseer as a church office!

Ellen White clearly explained that Phoebe had the spiritual gift of *hospitality* and was foremost in providing lodging and food to those who visited the church of Cenchrea. In this sense she ministered to the needs of the saints and encouraged the church today to do the same:

“Phoebe *entertained* the apostle, and she was in a marked manner an *entertainer* of strangers who *needed care*. Her example should be followed by the churches of today.”¹⁰³

Dennis Fortin, the Dean of the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, has argued that the various translations of Romans 16:1 have been biased in favor of men and against women in ministry:

“The KJV, NKJV, NASB and ESV consistently translate *diakonos* as “minister” when the word is used in connection to a male person, but not so when it comes to Phoebe. I think this shows a strange bias against women in ministry. Since through the centuries the King James Version has had such an important impact on our understanding of the doctrine of the church, could it be that our modern attitudes toward women in ministry have been shaped by biased translators?”

I agree with the Dean that the word *diakonos* should have been consistently translated ‘minister’ or ‘servant’ in all cases where it appears. Though it is just *an assumption* on his part with no proof, it might even be that this variance in translation ‘shows a strange bias against women in ministry.’ However, the Dean misses the point. The word ‘minister’ is not used in Scripture to describe a church

¹⁰³ Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 6, p. 343

office such as the words elder/overseer. The word describes a *function* that should characterize all of Christ's followers.¹⁰⁴

As I have pointed out in my book, Reflections on Women's Ordination, there is a place for ministering women! One would have to be blind not to see that women were strongly involved in ministry in the New Testament. But women's involvement in ministry does not mean that they were set apart by ordination to serve as apostles or elders/overseers. There is a vast difference between women who minister and women 'ministers', as we use the word today!

Those who support the ordination of women to pastoral leadership have done a masterful job spreading the idea that if one does not believe in women's ordination to pastoral leadership then one does not believe in women in ministry. But this is a straw man argument. I do not know a single complementarian who is opposed to women who minister or serve in the church by using the spiritual gifts that God has imparted to them.

Perhaps an analogy will help us understand how women can minister without being 'ministers' in the sense that we use the word today. In ancient Israel both Levites and priests ministered to the needs of the congregation, but this did not mean that the Levites were priests. It is the duty of all elders/overseers as well as each and every church member, to minister to the congregation but this does not mean that all church members are elders/overseers. That is to say, the priests and the Levites were both ministers (Numbers 1:50; 3:6 31; chapter 4) but this did not make the Levites priests!

On the basis of my research I personally believe that there is a slim amount of evidence in Scripture (possibly 1 Timothy 3:11; Romans 16:1, 2) and significant evidence in early church history to indicate that women served in the office of deaconess. There is also some evidence that women were ordained as deaconesses in Adventist history.

Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that Phoebe was ordained to the office of deaconess. Does this mean that Phoebe served as an ordained apostle or elder/overseer in the church of Cenchrea? Such a leap of logic is unwarranted. Being a deaconess of the church is one function and being an apostle and elder/overseer is quite another.

Look at the following syllogism and ask yourself if it makes logical sense:

- **Major Premise:** In the New Testament women were called so serve as deaconesses in the church
- **Minor Premise:** Phoebe was a woman
- **Conclusion:** Therefore Phoebe could serve as an apostle or elder/overseer of the church

¹⁰⁴ In similar fashion, the word 'pastor' in the New Testament is descriptive of a function rather than a church office as it is used in today's nomenclature.

Clearly the major and minor premises in this syllogism are true but the conclusion does not logically follow. The only logical conclusion would be that Phoebe could serve as a deaconess.

The reason for the election of deacons is clearly explained in Acts chapter 6. We are explicitly told that the seven males were elected to be a *support group* for the twelve *male* apostles who were the *leaders* or officers of the church. It is possible that deaconesses were named sometime after to aid the deacons but there is no clear New Testament evidence for this.

What we do know for certain is that later, when elders were appointed in every church they joined the apostles as the leaders of the church but nowhere are we clearly told that the deacons had the identical leadership function as the apostles and the elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6; 15:22, 23; 16:24; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14). If Phoebe was a deaconess her role was to help the apostles and elders as leaders of the church. The text in Romans clearly states that Phoebe was Paul's helper; Paul was not her helper.

Were there Female Apostles?

A question which frequently comes up in the women's ordination debate is this: Were there women apostles in the New Testament Church? While egalitarians answer in the affirmative, complementarians answer in the negative. The truth of the matter must be discovered in the inspired writings of the New Testament.

The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy clearly explain that twelve *male apostles* were chosen by Jesus. Ellen White adds that the twelve were ordained by the laying on of hands. Egalitarians have argued that Jesus did not choose a female apostle because He did not want to 'upset the fabric of Jewish culture. (Mark 3:14). But this is mere conjecture and has no foundation in the Bible text. A careful study of Scripture clearly indicates that twelve *males* were chosen *intentionally* by Jesus because they were to continue the legacy of the *twelve male founders* of Old Testament Israel. Ellen White makes this point clear when she states:

"As in the Old Testament the twelve patriarchs stood as representatives of Israel, so the twelve apostles stand as representatives of the gospel church."¹⁰⁵

Jesus did not choose twelve in number haphazardly. He purposely chose twelve to indicate that the New Testament Church is a continuation of the Old Testament Church. For this reason no digit could be added or subtracted from the number twelve. The twelve were to play a *foundational* role in the church after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22).

If Jesus had wanted us to understand that under the 'new system' inclusiveness required that the founding leaders of the church should be male and female He could have chosen six men and six women as apostles—or at least one woman! But He did not! Jesus did not hesitate to question the

¹⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 19

culture of His day and on some occasions he turned it upside down. Jesus was clearly counter-cultural in many regards. Could we perhaps even call Him revolutionary?

After stating that Jesus was a revolutionary in the way that He treated women, one scholar speculates that by doing this Jesus 'pointed the way forward to women's ordination.' But are such trajectory hermeneutics so? Was the selection of twelve male apostles simply a relic passed along as a custom from a prejudiced patriarchal past to be replaced in due time? Did Jesus really point the way forward to women's ordination by the revolutionary way in which He treated women contrary to the conventions of His day? In short, did Jesus simply wish to avoid upsetting the Jewish culture of His day and thus ordained twelve *male* apostles?

The simple fact is that Jesus opposed the conventions of His day in the way that he treated *all* the marginalized of society—children, Samaritans, Gentiles, publicans, sinners, harlots, lepers, blind, lame, etc. Did the revolutionary treatment of these people by Jesus mean that He was pointing the way forward to their ordination? To answer yes to this question would be ludicrous! The fact is that Jesus was revolutionary in the way that He treated *people*, period. It is rather doubtful that Jesus was pointing forward to gender inclusiveness in ordination practices when He treated women with the dignity and respect that they deserved!

But were there no other apostles besides the twelve? Yes there were. The book of Acts mentions apostles other than the twelve but these were not members of the *founding group* and besides, they were all *males* (see Romans 1:1; Acts 14:14; 1 Corinthians 12:28, etc.; for the case of Junias see below)

The stones on the breastplate of Aaron represented the twelve sons of Israel and through them the entirety of Israel (Exodus 28:21; Genesis 49:28) and the twelve stones on the breastplate of Jesus represent the entirety of the gospel church. As noted previously, it is certainly legitimate to *distinguish* Old Testament Israel from the New Testament Church but it is illegitimate to *dichotomize* them.

Revelation 12 clearly indicates that God has *only one church* that spans both the Old and New Testament periods. A single woman is used to represent the church before Jesus was born (Revelation 12:1, 2, 5) and after (Revelation 12:6) and the twelve stars on the woman's crown represent both the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles (Revelation 12:1; Genesis 37:24). We might say that God has one church composed of two stages and in both stages *twelve men* were chosen to be the founders.

Can there be any doubt that Jesus purposely chose twelve *male* apostles to continue the legacy of the Old Testament Church? The choice of six women and six men, or of any women for that matter, would have been incongruous and discontinuous with the Old Testament record.

Some scholars, even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, question whether the apostles were actually ordained by Jesus by the laying on of hands. The Bible record does not explicitly say so although the Greek word *didomi* may hint in that direction. The [Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament](#) explains

that the word *didomi* 'is the most common expression for the procedure whereby a subject deliberately *transfers something* to someone or something so that it becomes available to the recipient."¹⁰⁶ The context of Luke 9:1 makes clear that Jesus was transferring His own authority to the apostles so ordination is not out of the question in the text.

Ellen White does not leave us in doubt regarding the ordination of the twelve:

"When Jesus had ended His instruction to the disciples, He gathered the little band close about Him, and kneeling in the midst of them, and laying His hands upon their heads, He offered a prayer dedicating them to His sacred work. Thus the Lord's disciples were *ordained* to the gospel ministry."¹⁰⁷

As mentioned before, some, even in our very midst, question whether we can trust what Ellen White says here because in the Greek we are simply told that Jesus *appointed* or *gave* power and authority to the twelve. Here is the record as it is found in the gospel of Matthew:

"And He went up on the mountain and *called to Him those He Himself wanted*. And they *came to Him*. Then He *appointed* twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might *send them out to preach*, and to *have power* to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, 'Sons of Thunder'; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him."

The parallel story in Luke tells us that after Jesus prayed all night, He *called* and *chose* the twelve founders, *gave (didomi)* them power and authority and *named* them apostles (Luke 6:13). The twelve are mentioned *by name* and the *character qualities* of several of them are given in the record (Simon the pebble, James and John the sons of thunder, Simon the Zealot, Matthew the publican, Thomas the doubter, Judas the betrayer). Ellen White then adds that Jesus said a *prayer* and *laid hands* on them and the text of Mark 3:14, 15 explains that by this act Jesus indicated that they were *set apart* and authorized them to preach and empowered them to heal diseases.

The setting-apart and ordination of the twelve by Jesus is similar in many ways to Jacob naming and blessing his twelve sons on his dying bed.

In Genesis 49 we find the record that Jacob *called* the twelve to his side, then mentioned them *by name* and described *their character* and their *foundational role* for the future of the twelve tribes. He then *blessed each* of them individually. We are not explicitly told in Genesis 49 that Jacob laid his hands on them but the record does state that he *laid his hands* on the sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) and according to Moses these two later became part of the twelve tribes of Israel (see

¹⁰⁶ W. Popkes, The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Electronic Database Edition, '*didomi*'

¹⁰⁷ Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 296

Numbers 1). So it would not be too much of a stretch to believe that Jacob laid hands on his twelve sons as well.

In similar fashion to Jacob, Jesus *gathered the twelve* whom He had chosen, they are *mentioned by name* and the *characteristics* of several are given and then *Jesus prayed* and *laid hands* on them in ordination to be the founders of the New Testament church. Jesus fully understood the significance and importance of the Bible stories. He had inspired Jacob as Jacob gave his sons his blessing. It is certainly possible that the story of Jacob formed the backdrop for Christ's ordination and blessing of the twelve.

As the twelve sons of Jacob then multiplied and formed the twelve tribes of Israel—the Old Testament Church—the twelve founders of New Testament Israel also multiplied through their preaching and became a great nation—the New Testament Church (I Peter 2:9 and 10; Matthew 21:43; James 1:1). The role of the founders of the Christian Church and their growth can be seen in John 17:20 where we are told that Jesus not only prayed for the twelve but also for all who would believe *through their preaching*.

The women's ordination advocates argue that if the male gender of the apostles requires that the rulers of the church be male, then the fact that they were Jewish must mean that the rulers of the church must also be Jewish. This argument appears logical until one realizes that the ministry of Jesus *to the Jews* did not end until the stoning of Stephen (at the conclusion of the 70 week prophecy) three and a half years after Pentecost and even then the first Gentiles were not gathered in until several years later when Peter was given the vision of the unclean creatures (Acts 10, 11)!

How then could Jesus have chosen a Gentile apostle? He could not have because He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and probation had not yet closed for them (Matthew 15:24; 10:5, 6). Bottom line: Jesus could not have chosen Gentiles at this point because there were none to choose from. Even at Pentecost all of the believers who were present were Jews from the Diaspora (Acts 2:5).

But there were plenty of Jewish women who could have been chosen as apostles but they were not. Why not choose His mother or Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, or Salome or one of the other prominent women who ministered to Him? Jesus did not have to wait for the apostles to be male but he did have to wait until the door of the Jewish theocracy closed before He could include Gentiles. Simply put, there were no Gentile men available when Jesus chose the twelve but there were plenty of women available.

Successor of Judas

When Judas betrayed Christ and committed suicide, Peter suggested that a successor be named from among the 120 who were gathered in the upper room. Peter addressed them in Acts 1:16 with the

gender specific 'men' (*aner*) and 'brethren' (*adelfos*) and in verse 21 he once again used the gender specific 'men' (*aner*).

"Therefore, of these men (*aner*) who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection." (Acts 1:21, 22)

The gender specific nouns in verses 16, 21, 22 leave no doubt that the two finalists were chosen from a larger *pool of men* who were present in the Upper Room.

This occasion would have provided a golden opportunity for the apostles to be inclusive and choose a woman as a member of the council of the twelve. After all, Mary the mother of Jesus was present there along with other influential women:

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and *Mary* the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." (Acts 1:14)

Wouldn't Mary the mother of Jesus have been the logical choice? After all, she brought Jesus into the world, was instrumental in the formation of his character and was an eye witness of the Christ event from the days of John the Baptist till His resurrection and ascension, which was one of the requirements!

Was it the bias of the disciples against women that led them to select the successor of Judas from a pool of men? No. The simple fact is that the apostles did not choose the successor of Judas, the Holy Spirit did:

"Two men were selected, who, in the careful judgment of the believers, were best qualified for the place. But the disciples, distrusting their ability to decide the question farther, referred it to One that knew all hearts. They sought the Lord in prayer to ascertain which of the two men was more suitable for the important position of trust, as an apostle of Christ. The *Spirit of God selected* Matthias for the office." Spirit of Prophecy, volume 3, p. 264

Concerning the process that was followed in the selection of Matthias and the lessons we can learn for today, Ellen White explained:

"From these scriptures we learn that the Lord has certain *men* to fill *certain positions*. God will teach His people to move carefully and to make wise choice of *men* who will not betray sacred trusts. If in Christ's day the believers needed to be guarded in their choice of *men* for positions of responsibility, we who are living in this time certainly need to move with great discretion. We are to present every case before God and in earnest prayer ask Him to choose for us. The Lord God of heaven *has chosen*

experienced men to bear responsibilities in His cause. *These men* are to have special influence. If all are accorded the power given to these *chosen men*, a halt will have to be called.”¹⁰⁸

Were hands laid on Matthias by the other apostles? The text does not say, but are we to interpret this silence to mean that it did not happen? Didn't the apostles remember that they had been set apart by the laying on of hands? Would they not have followed the same practice with Matthias?

Even today when a minister is ordained, he does not necessarily have to inform people that he was set apart by the laying on of hands. It is understood that hands are laid upon an ordinand and therefore it is not necessary to even mention it. When I tell people about my ordination in 1980 I don't tell them: "I was set apart by the laying on of hands in October of 1980." I simply say: "I was set apart or ordained to the gospel ministry in October 1980." The practice of laying on hands was an accepted practice in the world of the New Testament.

Although Matthias was elected to the office of apostle (verse 25), two other words are used to describe his functions: *Minister* (verse 25), and *overseer* (verse 20).¹⁰⁹ In other words, he was an apostle who was to minister and oversee. Later on in the book of Acts deacons were elected to aid the apostles in the work of ministry and elders were set apart to oversee the work in local churches and in regions.

What about Junias?

Those who believe that women have been called by God to pastoral leadership frequently argue that there were female apostles in the earliest church, and as the lone piece of Scriptural evidence they bring up the name of *Iounian*,¹¹⁰ who is mentioned only once **in the New Testament** in the middle of a long list of salutations by the apostle Paul:

"Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." (Romans 16:7, NKJV)

Doesn't this text clearly indicate that *Iounian* was a notable female apostle on an equal footing with the twelve males? Doesn't the mention of *Iounian* by Paul prove that the governing council of the apostles in Jerusalem was composed of women as well as men? Those who presently favor the ordination of women to pastoral leadership answer in the affirmative, but their claim must be examined carefully **in the light of the totality of Scripture** to ascertain if it is so.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, p. 264

¹⁰⁹ In verse 25 the word 'ministry' is *diakonia* and in verse 21 the word for office is *episkopeen*

¹¹⁰ I have purposely transliterated the Greek name into English without any accent.

¹¹¹ For a helpful discussion of the two opposing views of *Iounian* see P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Prove all Things*, "Shapes of Ministry in the New Testament," pp. 132-135; Samuel Koranteng Pipim, *Prove all Things*, "Are These Things So?" Part 1, pp. 90, 91; Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, pp. 224-227; Nancy Vyhmeister, "Junia the Apostle," *Ministry Magazine*, July, 2013, pp. 6-9.

From the start we need to ask the question: What do we know for certain about Andronicus and *Iouian*? Let's separate fact from conjecture. The text assures us that they were both well-known and respected members in the Church of Rome. We know that they shared a common Jewish ancestry with the apostle Paul. We can be certain that they were baptized and became Christians before the conversion of the apostle Paul. It is also clear that they spent time in prison with the apostle and that their names are coupled together in the same verse because they shared something in common with one another.

But it must be noted that there are some things about *Iouian* that pro-ordination advocates take for granted which are not quite as certain.

First, although it is true that the weight of the *post-apostolic extra-biblical* evidence seems to indicate that *Iouian* was the name of a woman, the female gender of the name is by no means an absolute certainty within the New Testament text itself.

Second, the meaning of the phrase 'of note among the apostles,' is an open question. The expression could be interpreted as *exclusive* to the effect that Andronicus and *Iouian* were well known *by* the apostles or it could be seen as *inclusive* to the effect that they were *themselves* well known apostles.

Third, if we assume that Andronicus and *Iouian* were apostles, (which is far from certain) it is not possible to know from the text in what sense they were apostles. Were they called to the apostolic *office* such as the twelve or did they receive the *spiritual gift* of apostleship at the moment of their baptism?

Finally, it is uncertain why Paul linked *Iouian* and Andronicus in the same verse. Were they linked together because they were husband and wife or because they were brother and sister, fellow-prisoners or fellow-compatriots of Paul? The answers to these questions are elusive.

Some contemporary exegetes assume that Andronicus and *Iouian* were a husband and wife team in ministry. But the question must be asked: Is this a certainty or is it an unsubstantiated guess? Those who believe that Andronicus and *Iouian* were husband and wife are perhaps following the lead of some ancient patristic exegetes, but it must be noted that these exegetes wrote centuries after Andronicus and *Iouian* lived so their testimony is too late to be of much value.

Those who believe that Andronicus and *Iouian* were a husband and wife team argue that their names are linked by the conjunction *kai* ('and') in the same way as Priscilla and Aquila in verse 3. But such an argument cannot be determinative because in verse 12 the names of two women, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, are also joined by the conjunction *kai*. It is possible that the names of Andronicus and *Iouian* were linked together because they were brother and sister or fellow-prisoners or simply fellow-compatriots of Paul.

Much has been written about the gender of the name *Iouian*. Is the name masculine or feminine? Theologians and Bible versions disagree as do the early church fathers. The difficulty is found in the fact that in the Greek text the name *Iouian* can be understood as the accusative masculine name Junias or the accusative female name Junia. The only thing that distinguishes the masculine from the

feminine is the type of accent that is used at the end of the name. If the accent is acute (´) the name is feminine and if it is circumflex (˘) it is masculine.

So, what type of accent did Paul use in Romans 16:7? The answer is that we cannot be certain because, first of all, we do not have the autographs and second, the original Greek New Testament manuscripts had no accents. In fact, accents were not added until centuries after the New Testament was written so the problem of *lounian's* gender cannot be resolved with absolute certainty by a mere morphological study of the name.¹¹²

The most common modern versions assume that *lounian* was a male referring to him as Junias. But several more recent versions understand *lounian* as a female called Junia. The Revised Standard Version translators, however, believed that both Andronicus and *lounian* were males¹¹³:

“Greet Androni'cus and Ju'nias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are *men* of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.”

What does ancient Greek literature tell us about the name? Egalitarians have underlined that there are no unambiguous references to a man named Junias in the Greek literature in the first three centuries of the Christian era while the female name Junia is well attested. However, the absence of the masculine name Junias does not necessarily mean that it did not exist. Arguments from silence can be meaningful but not necessarily foolproof.¹¹⁴

What does the patristic evidence reveal? Not many of the church fathers even mention the name but among those who do, the evidence is divided.¹¹⁵ Some indicate that *lounian* was a man and others that she was a woman.¹¹⁶

¹¹² It bears noting that miniscule Greek manuscripts began having accents in the ninth century and every single one of these manuscripts places the accent to indicate that *lounian* was a male. See J. A. Fitzmyer, Romans. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1993, p. 738.

¹¹³ However, it must be noted that the translators of the New Revised Standard Version believed that the name is feminine.

¹¹⁴ I am reminded of an experience I had when I worked as the Pathfinder director of a certain conference in North America. I had always known the name ‘Flor’ to be feminine but, believe it or not, the director of one of my clubs was a male named ‘Flor’! Neither before nor after that time have I ever known a man bearing that name!

¹¹⁵ Jerome and Chrysostom understood *lounian* to be a woman. On the other hand, Epiphanius and Origen understood the name as masculine. Egalitarians have made much of the fact that Epiphanius mistakenly identified Prisca (Priscilla) as a male. The insinuation is that if Epiphanius got Prisca’s gender wrong then he was also wrong about *lounian's* gender. But what applies to Epiphanius applies also to Jerome and Chrysostom. Could not Jerome and Chrysostom have been wrong about *lounian's* gender just as well as Epiphanius was wrong about Prisca’s? In the Latin text of Origen’s *Epistolam ad Romanos Commentariorum* 10.26, 39 the nominative masculine singular of the name is used thus indicating that Origen believed that *lounian* was a male. Further complicating matters, the Latin Vulgate has manuscripts that support both readings. Thus the patristic evidence is divided on the gender of this person.

¹¹⁶ We must be extremely cautious when we use the writings of the early church fathers. For example, we have only a small fraction of what Origen actually wrote and most of it has been handed down to us in translations whose accuracy is seriously open to question and it is well known that the writings of the fathers are full of interpolations. Even if the writings of the early church fathers had been handed down to in their pristine condition, we must recognize that even before the

Although most scholars who have studied the patristic evidence believe that *Iouinian* was a woman, there remains an element of doubt.¹¹⁷ Contrary to what the majority of scholars have concluded, there are hints in the text itself and its context (see below) that Andronicus and *Iouinian* were both men. Among the hints in the text itself is the fact that the words ‘compatriots’ and ‘fellow prisoners’ are in the masculine gender as well as the relative pronoun ‘who’ in the expression ‘*who* are of note among the apostles’.

But does it really even matter whether the name *Iouinian* refers to a woman? Even more significant than the gender of the name is the fact that there is disagreement among scholars about how to properly translate the ambiguous phrase: “who are of note among the apostles” (KJV). Some Bible versions take it to be inclusive and others see it as exclusive.

The expression would be exclusive if *Iouinian* and Andronicus were held in high regard *by* the apostles such as in the English Standard Version: “They are well known *to* the apostles,” or it would be inclusive if Andronicus and *Iouinian* were themselves highly regarded apostles such as in the New Century Version: “They are very important apostles.”

Many modern versions don’t clearly commit to either option preferring to leave the expression perhaps purposely ambiguous such as the NKJV which states that they were ‘of note among the apostles’. We are left with the question: Is this expression inclusive or exclusive? The answer will depend on how the reader interprets the expression. Perhaps an analogy will help us understand the complexity of the problem involved.

Is the following affirmation inclusive or exclusive?

“Bill and Hillary are of note among the Hollywood actors.”

To most people it is clear that this affirmation is *exclusive* because Bill and Hillary are not Hollywood actors, but they are certainly well known *among* those who are Hollywood actors because they have hung out with them frequently.

Now take this affirmation:

“Bill and Hillary are of note among the politicians.”

This affirmation is clearly *inclusive* because *we know* that Bill and Hillary Clinton are not only of note *among* those styled politicians but they are also themselves notable *politicians*.

end of the first century heresy had begun to infiltrate the church. As is well known, it took less than a century for the fathers to begin the process of discarding the Sabbath and adopting Sunday as the new day of worship.

¹¹⁷It bears noting that in Romans 16:7 Paul uses the word ‘apostles’ in the third person with the definite article ‘the’, strongly suggesting in this way that he was not himself a member of this select group. Paul did not say that Andronicus and *Iouinian* were ‘of note among *those of us* who are apostles.’ It is hardly believable that the notable apostle Paul was not himself a member of this group while Andronicus and *Iouinian* were! In the first half of the book of Acts which describes the history of the early church from AD 31 till AD 49 (chapters 1-15) the word ‘apostles’ with the definite article ‘the’ always refers to the group of the twelve. The New Century Version translation, “*They are very important apostles*” is incorrect and misleading because it fails to translate the definite article ‘the’ which is in the original text.

So how do we know the difference between these two affirmations? The answer is that we can be certain that the first affirmation is exclusive and the second inclusive because Bill and Hillary live in our time and most people know who they are. We know from multiple sources that though they are not Hollywood actors, they are noteworthy politicians.

But let's suppose that two thousand years from now someone finds the expression 'Bill and Hillary are of note among the politicians,' tucked away in only one passing reference with no further information available. How would the reader understand the expression 'of note among the politicians?' Admittedly, it would be difficult to determine if Bill and Hillary were politicians or well known to the politicians.

In that case, the gender issue would also come into play. It would be clear to the reader that Bill is a man. But the gender of 'Hillary' would be harder to determine. In modern American culture the name Hilary (with one 'l') generally applies to a man and the name 'Hillary' (with two l's) applies to a woman. But it must be noted that there are many cases (as can be seen by looking up the name 'Hillary' in Wikipedia) where the names are used interchangeably for both men and women.

The point is that we know nothing in Scripture about Andronicus and *Iouinian* outside of Romans 16:7. We could only know for certain that the declaration 'of note among the apostles' is inclusive or exclusive if we had more information than the text provides. And the same applies to gender.

So, were Andronicus and *Iouinian* well-known apostles or well known to the apostles? We cannot know for sure simply by reading the expression 'of note among the apostles.' If we had additional external information about them we would be able to know for certain but we have no other information in the Bible to go on and we are two thousand years removed from their existence. Because we cannot be absolutely certain whether they were well-known to the apostles or well-known apostles we must look elsewhere in Scripture to see if we can find clues for a correct interpretation.

Dr. Nancy Vyhmeister noted in a recent article that the grammatical construction *en* (among) + definite article (the) + dative case (apostles) is usually inclusive. This may well be true but there are exceptions both in Biblical and extra-biblical literature and when there are exceptions, absolute certainty is elusive. Notice the following four texts, two from the New Testament and two from extra-biblical literature:

1 Peter 2:12: The apostle Peter admonishes Christians to have their 'conduct honorable **among** (*en*) **the** (definite article) **Gentiles** (dative case).' Obviously the Christians were a distinct group from the Gentiles even though they lived among them **so the meaning here is clearly exclusive**.

Galatians 2:2: Paul preached the gospel **among** (*en*) **the** (definite article) **Gentiles** (dative case) but Paul was not one of the Gentiles to whom he preached (cf. Galatians 1:16; Romans 15:9). **Once again, the meaning is exclusive**.

In **Psalms of Solomon 2:6** we are told that 'the Jews were famous **among** (*en*) **the** (definite article) **Gentiles**' (dative case). It is clear that the Jews were not Gentiles although they lived among them.

Euripides, Hippolytus 103: “Yet she [Aphrodite] is revered and famous **among** (*en*) **the** (definite article) **mortals** (dative case).” The meaning here is clearly exclusive because we know from other sources that Aphrodite was not considered a mortal.

If there are cases where the preposition *en* + definite article + dative case are exclusive, then why couldn't the expression 'among the apostles' in Romans 16:7 be considered exclusive as well?

Other factors must also be taken into account in determining whether the expression is inclusive or exclusive. If Andronicus and *lounian* were notorious apostles and were converted before the apostle Paul as the text states, why are they not mentioned in the early chapters of the book of Acts or in the entire book for that matter? Their invisibility is indeed surprising!

We know that Paul was converted and baptized (Acts 22:16) shortly after the stoning of Stephen in the year 34 AD (Acts 7). This means that *lounian* and Andronicus were converted to Christ and baptized sometime between Pentecost and Saul's conversion. So if *lounian* and Andronicus were prominent apostles after Pentecost and before 34 AD, why are they not mentioned even once in the early chapters of the book of Acts as belonging to the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem? In fact, why are they absent in later chapters as well?¹¹⁸

Dr. Nancy Vyhmeister has attempted to solve this problem by suggesting, along with Richard Bauckham, that Junia of Romans 16:7 is **perhaps** the same person as Ioanna of Luke 8:3 and 24:10. Vyhmeister suggests that her Roman name would be easier to pronounce, and that her relationship with Jesus would certainly put her as a Christian before Paul.¹¹⁹ Vyhmeister further speculates that Andronicus might have been either a second husband or a Roman name taken by Chuza.”

But is there a vestige of evidence that Ioanna is the same person as *lounian*? Is there any hard evidence that her name was changed to *lounian* so that it could be more easily pronounced? Is there any evidence whatsoever that Andronicus was her second husband and that he took the Roman name

¹¹⁸ It is noteworthy that no apostle other than the twelve is mentioned in the book of Acts. The expression 'the apostles' that is used 29 times in the book always applies to the twelve. This is not to deny that Paul refers to himself as *an* apostle in his epistles but he did not consider himself a member of 'the' apostles.

¹¹⁹ A person is incorporated into Christ at the moment of baptism. This is denoted by the preposition 'into' (*eis*) which is used in several key baptismal texts. It is used three times in Romans 6:3, 4 to describe the initial incorporation of believers into Christ: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized *into* Christ Jesus were baptized *into* His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism *into* death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." The baptismal formula uses the same preposition: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them *in* [into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19) and 1 Corinthians 10:2 describes the baptism of Israel *into* Moses. It is when the name of Jesus Christ is invoked at baptism that the candidate is reckoned 'in Christ'. This means that the mere *association* of Ioanna with Christ in the gospels does not mean that she was 'in Christ' at that time. The first incorporation of people into Christ was at Pentecost when three thousand believers were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38, 41). Previous to this, individuals were baptized by John into the baptism of repentance (Acts 19:1-6). Thus when Paul affirms in Romans 16:7 that *lounian* and Andronicus were 'in Christ' before he was, their incorporation into Christ could not have happened until the day of Pentecost.

Andronicus instead of Chuza? The answer to all of these questions is no! There is just no evidence for such assertions which are based on pure conjecture and speculation.¹²⁰

The book of Acts describes the history of the early church from the Day of Pentecost until well into the first century. Yet there is not a single instance in the book where the word 'apostle' is applied to a woman. If apostleship was a feminine function in the early church why do we not have even one example in the church history of the book of Acts?¹²¹ Luke mentions several notable women in the book who were not apostles among which are Dorcas, Lydia and Priscilla. The question is, if Junia was really a notable female apostle would Luke have neglected to mention her, especially in light of the fact that of all the gospel writers, he presents women in the most positive light? And why is Andronicus absent from the book as well? If he was a notable apostle along with Junia, why isn't he mentioned even once in the book of Acts either?

Ellen G. White explicitly assures us that the leadership at the Jerusalem Council in AD 49 was all male so if *Ioulian* (and Andronicus for that matter) was a notable female apostle, why wasn't she mentioned among the apostolic leadership? It can hardly be believed that she was excluded simply because she was a woman when the central theme of the Council was all about inclusiveness! It is believed that Paul wrote Romans somewhere between AD 55 and 58 (certainly not before AD 49!) which would mean that *Ioulian* and Andronicus were still alive when the Jerusalem Council transpired and yet they are never mentioned as being there. The silence is deafening!¹²²

It bears noting that not even the great apostle Paul was a member of the apostolic leadership in Jerusalem when the Council took place. We are told that Paul and Barnabas were sent by the church to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and after the Council rendered its decision the apostles and elders sent Paul and Barnabas along with Silas and Judas to the churches with the written report. Thus Paul and Barnabas took and followed orders from the apostolic leadership in Jerusalem! If *Ioulian* was an outstanding female apostle, where was she during the Jerusalem Council?¹²³

In his review of Eldon Epp's book, John Hunwicke brings out an important point. The apostle Paul loved to use words with the prepositional prefix *sun*. So here he associated Andronicus and *Ioulian* with

¹²⁰ Vyhmeister, "Junia: The Apostle," *Ministry* (July 2013), p. 7. Vyhmeister also hints that Andronicus and his wife *Ioulian* might have been among the seventy-two (was it not 70?) that Jesus sent out. Ellen White does not allow for such speculation. She makes it abundantly clear that the seventy were all males: "Calling *the twelve* about Him, Jesus bade them go out two and two through the towns and villages. None [of the twelve] were sent forth alone, but *brother* was associated with *brother*, friend with friend. Thus they could help and encourage each other, counseling and praying together, each one's strength supplementing the other's weakness. In the *same manner* He afterward sent forth the seventy." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 350

¹²² "The 'apostles and elders,' *men* of influence and judgment, framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches. Not all, however, were pleased with the decision; there was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren who disagreed with it. These men assumed to engage in the work on their own responsibility. They indulged in much murmuring and faultfinding, proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the *men* whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message." *AA* 196

¹²³ The apostle Paul himself makes it clear that three of the twelve were recognized as pillars among the apostles, Peter, James and John (Galatians 2:9). These three were truly of note among the apostles!

himself as fellow-kinsmen (*suggeneis*) and fellow-prisoners (*sunai khmalotous*). If Paul believed that Andronicus and *lounian* were noted apostles why didn't he continue his argument by saying that they were also notable fellow-apostles (*sunapostolous*) along with him?¹²⁴

But let's suppose, for the sake of argument—and just for the sake of argument—that *lounian* was a notable female apostle. This would still not prove as much as egalitarians wish to prove. We still would have to determine what kind of apostle she was. Was she in the same category as the twelve? Was she in the same class as the apostle Paul to whom Jesus appeared in person on the Road to Damascus thus validating his status as an apostle? The evidence indicates that *lounian* was not in either category so if the name does refer to a female apostle she must have received the *spiritual gift* of apostleship when she was baptized on or after the day of Pentecost. If she was a notable female apostle, it is strange indeed that she is mentioned only once in passing in the middle of a long list of people that Paul greeted.

In his review of Eldon Epp's book, John Hunwicke expresses well the dilemma that is faced by those who believe that *lounian* was a female apostle:

“Those who, believing her to be an apostle, are concerned to *maximize* the status of Junia, appear to be on the horns of a dilemma. Either they can make her out to be a leading apostle in a *maximal* sense of that word, together with Peter, James, John, and Paul—in which case they have a major problem explaining her almost-invisibility in the records; or they can assign to her an apostleship in a *minimal* sense of that term, perhaps like that of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25—in which case, they have not proved anything that will be of much use to them in their sociocultural agenda.”

Some who favor women's ordination have highlighted the nine women that Paul salutes for their work in ministry in Romans 16. The question is this: Was Paul extolling these women because they were elders/overseers or apostles? There is no evidence of this. He was simply reminiscing about how these women had been fellow-laborers with him in spreading the gospel. Paul was the consummate believer in women in ministry as can be seen by the many notable women who worked side by side with him in the book of Acts, but at the same time Paul was clear that the office of elder/overseer should be occupied by 'husbands of one wife.'

Perhaps an analogy would help us understand why the apostle Paul extolled these women in Romans 16. I have been senior pastor of Fresno Central Church for close to 18 years and during that time there have been a number of women who have worked tirelessly to further the mission of the church. They have served as church treasurers, church secretaries, finance committee chairs and departmental directors. They have provided food for the hungry, clothing for the homeless and shelter for the destitute. They have given Bible studies and wisely counseled the children and youth. They have taught Sabbath School classes and preached evangelistic sermons. I admire and respect these women and I consider them my friends and fellow-laborers. If I ever accepted a call to another place and then wrote a letter of greeting to the church I would certainly mention by name these many women who helped me and were instrumental in advancing the work of the church. But does this mean that they were

¹²⁴ John Hunwicke, “Junia among the Apostles: The Story behind a New Testament Saint and the Egalitarian Agenda” *Touchtone* (October 2008).

ordained elders/overseers or apostles? Of course not! During my tenure, Fresno Central Church has never ordained any woman to the position of elder/overseer.

So we have multiple uncertainties concerning the gender and apostleship of *lounian*. First, it is not absolutely certain that the name is feminine though the weight of the *post-apostolic extra-Biblical evidence* seems to indicate that it is. Second, it is uncertain whether Andronicus was her husband. Third, it is quite uncertain whether *lounian* was a well-known apostle or well-known to the apostles, and fourth, if the name applies to a woman and she was an apostle (which is a big if!) it is impossible to determine what type of apostle she was. Did she occupy the *apostolic office* or did she receive the *spiritual gift* of apostleship upon her baptism?¹²⁵ The simple and honest answer is that we have no definitive information one way or another!

In her recent article, Dr. Nancy Vyhmeister referred to the 1994 *Textual Commentary* to the UBS *Greek New Testament* where the scholars noted that "Some of the members [of the UBS Committee], considering it unlikely that a woman would be among those styled 'apostles,' understood the name to be masculine." Vyhmeister suggests that the minority's refusal to recognize *lounian* as a woman apostle was driven by the preconceived notion that women could not be called to be apostles simply because of their gender. But is this the case? Were all the members of the committee who thought that *lounian* could not have been a female apostle driven by ideology?¹²⁶

Is there not another possibility? What really drove the minority members of the committee to take the name *lounian* as male? Was it bias or was it simply that they took seriously the overwhelming evidence in the rest of Scripture that apostles were always of the male gender? After all, Jesus chose twelve male apostles, two male finalists were chosen from a larger pool of men¹²⁷ to replace Judas, and all the rest of the apostles who are mentioned in the New Testament were men. That is to say, perhaps the minority on the committee simply allowed Scripture to interpret Scripture. The simple fact is that in the book of Acts (as well as the rest of the New Testament!) the word 'apostle', without exception, is always applied to men.

¹²⁵ Ellen White explained that although the apostolic *office* of the twelve was unique, later God imparted the *spiritual gift* of apostleship to various members of the church (1 Corinthians 12:28). Regarding this Ellen White stated: "*Later in the history of the early church, when in various parts of the world many groups of believers had been formed into churches, the organization of the church was further perfected, so that order and harmonious action might be maintained. Every member was exhorted to act well his part. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to him. Some were endowed by the Holy Spirit with special gifts--"first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."* 1 Corinthians 12:28. But all these classes of workers were to labor in harmony." AA 91

¹²⁶ Dr. Nancy Vyhmeister approvingly quotes the writings of openly pro-ordination scholars such as Scot McKnight, Linda Bellville, Richard Bauckham, Craig Keener and Eldon Epp. Epp, a noted New Testament higher critic, believes that 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 is an interpolation, that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is the work of a later Paulinist and Ephesians and Colossians are deutero-Pauline. Vyhmeister affirmed in her article that Epp, in his book, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* 'made a well-documented case for Junia as a woman and one of the apostles.' Vyhmeister is actually half right. Epp did make a well-documented *post-apostolic* case for Junia as a female but he did not do quite as well in proving that Junia was an apostle. Epp dedicated 85 pages (chapters 1-10) of his book to the gender of the name and only 13 pages (chapter 11) to the meaning of the disputed phrase 'of note among the apostles'.

¹²⁷ Acts 1:16 refers to the pool of men from which the two male finalists were chosen as 'men' and 'brethren' (*andres adelphoi*)

Should we base a woman apostolate upon one ambiguous verse whose meaning is uncertain and inconclusive? Would it not be better to take the evidence that all apostles in the New Testament were men and use this to argue that *lounian* was either a male or if she was a female she was renowned to the apostles? Those who confidently affirm that *lounian* was a female apostle must build a case based on *post-apostolic second hand* testimony, conjectures, calculated guesses, assumptions and personal biases.

As Adventists we have always followed the sound hermeneutical principle that ambiguous texts must be interpreted in the light of clear ones. It would be most unusual for the church to use a single text, and a disputed one at that, to prove or disprove any doctrine or practice. We cannot establish the apostleship of women based on *one* text whose meaning is inconclusive. There must be other texts to support the idea that women were apostles, and the simple fact is that there are none. The issue of *lounian's* gender and apostleship must not be resolved by the church fathers,¹²⁸ Bible versions, the comments of Bible scholars, or textual critics. It must be resolved internally from within Scripture itself.

So how certain can we be that *lounian* was a famous female apostle? In the light of the evidence that we have examined, the following confident assertion of J. D. G. Dunn¹²⁹ must be seriously questioned on several counts:

“We may firmly conclude, however, that one of the foundational apostles of Christianity was a woman and a wife.”

Is J. D. G. Dunn’s ‘firm’ conclusion as firm as he would lead us to believe?

First, there is no certainty that *lounian* was an apostle

Second, there is no evidence that *lounian's* role was *foundational* in the early church

Third, there is no conclusive evidence that *lounian* was a *woman*

Fourth, there is no firm evidence that *lounian* was the *wife* of Andronicus!

The lack of conclusive evidence must lead us to be cautious about making categorical statements about *lounian's* gender and apostleship. As Adventists we have always followed the sound hermeneutical principle that ambiguous texts must be interpreted in the light of clear ones. It would be most unusual for the church to use a single text to prove or disprove a doctrine or practice. We cannot establish the apostleship of women based on *one* text whose meaning is inconclusive. There must be other texts to support the idea that women were apostles, and the simple fact is that there are none.

¹²⁸ Nancy Vyhmeister refers to John of Damascus who lived in the late seventh and early eighth centuries and the *Liturgikon* which is used today in the missal of the Byzantine Church as evidence that *lounian* was a notable female apostle. The *Liturgikon*, without a shred of Biblical evidence, also sees Mary Magdalene and Thecla as apostles. Mary Magdalene is never called an apostle in Scripture and Thecla is not even mentioned in the Bible; she is first referred to in the apocryphal book, *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. The problem with using John of Damascus and the *Liturgikon* is that these sources are far too late to prove anything of substance. As is well known, by the time of John of Damascus, the church had been infected with an epidemic of traditions that had no foundation in Scripture. Some church theologians were teaching that Mary was the Mother of God, that she had ascended bodily to heaven, that she was the mother of all the faithful and that she had been conceived without original sin. Like Aristotle’s six legged spider, unreliable traditions can be handed down and accepted as gospel truth by succeeding generations when upon close examination they have no substance in reality.

¹²⁹J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1988), p. 895.

Unusual Cases

It is customary for the women's ordination advocates to take exceptional, out-of-the-ordinary cases and make them the norm to be followed in all situations. For example, as I documented in my recent book, *Reflections on Women's Ordination*, they regularly bring up the unusual case of China where women, due to irregular political circumstances and a lack of a denominational organizational structure, have had to assume leadership positions in the church.

Deborah and Huldah

Another *out-of-the-ordinary* instance is that of Deborah, the judge and prophetess of Israel. The women's ordination advocates argue that if such an influential woman as Deborah could be a judge and prophetess in Israel, then women should be allowed to serve as elders/overseers in the church. They also argue that Huldah, the prophetess, occupied a *prominent* leadership position in Israel and therefore women today should be ordained as elders and gospel ministers along with men. But is such a leap of logic sound? More importantly, does it square with the biblical evidence?

Before we answer these questions, let's take a look at a statement from The Great Controversy which addresses the simplicity of Scripture:

"The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in *doubt and darkness* by learned men, who, with a pretense of *great wisdom*, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These men are *false teachers*. It was to such a class that Jesus declared: "Ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God." Mark 12:24. The language of the Bible should be explained according to its *obvious meaning*, unless a symbol or figure is employed. Christ has given the promise: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." John 7:17. If men would but take the Bible *as it reads*, if there were no false teachers to *mislead and confuse* their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would *bring into the fold* of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error."¹³⁰

First of all it is important to realize that the period of the judges is *not the ideal pattern* for what James and Ellen White called 'gospel order'. The period of the judges was a somewhat unruly stage of Israel's history between the death of the elders who succeeded Joshua (ca. 1300 BC) and the Hebrew monarchy (ca. 1050 BC).

Inspiration tells us that while Moses was alive he set up an organizational system in Israel which Ellen White referred to as a '*perfect organization*'. It is clear from Scripture that this perfect organizational structure was passed along to Joshua when Moses laid hands on him shortly before he died:

¹³⁰ Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 598, 599

“Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had *laid his hands on him*; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.” (Deuteronomy 34:9)

Apparently this ideal organizational system continued not only under the leadership of Joshua but also during the period of the elders who outlived him:

“Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.” (Joshua 24:31; Judges 1:6-9).

Ellen White is in full harmony with Scripture on this matter:

“Until the generation that had received instruction from Joshua became extinct, idolatry made little headway.”¹³¹

But then came the period of the Judges when the organizational system under Moses, Joshua and the elders seemed to a great degree to fall apart. Scripture tells us that “another generation arose after them [the elders who succeeded Joshua] who did not know the Lord or the work *which He had done for Israel*” (Judges 2:10).

The Bible record makes it clear that during this transitional period there was no centralized authority in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

The crucial question at this point is this: Should the period of the judges be the ideal model for church organization today? Would it not be better for us to focus on the organizational system that was established in the days of Moses which Ellen White described as a ‘perfect order’? The Lord’s servant explicitly affirmed that we should learn lessons from the organizational order that was established under divine guidance by Moses:

“Has God changed from a God of order?—No; he is the same in the present dispensation as in the former. Paul says, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.” [1 Corinthians 14:33.] He is as particular now as then. And he designs that we should learn lessons of order and organization from the perfect order instituted in the days of Moses, for the benefit of the children of Israel.”¹³²

When the elders who succeeded Joshua passed away the organizational system of Israel entered a somewhat chaotic period. During this time, a series of magistrates arose to ‘judge’ Israel among which was Deborah. It must be underlined that during this period it was highly unusual for a woman to serve as a civil magistrate. Ellen White explains that Deborah’s service was outside the norm:

¹³¹ Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 544

¹³² Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 6, p. 647

“She [Deborah] was known as a *prophetess*, and in the absence of the *usual magistrates*, the people had sought to her for counsel and justice.”¹³³

Ellen White’s remark is clearly corroborated by examining the list of *seventeen judges* in Israel (including the two sons of Samuel): Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson, Eli, Samuel, Joel and Abijah. What stands out in this list of seventeen judges is that *only one* of them was a woman! Further, all the judges from Othniel to Samuel served as military leaders, Deborah being the lone exception!

The question is, were there no men in Israel that it was necessary for Deborah to do what a man should have been doing? Of course there were! What the story of Deborah in Judges 4 and 5 teaches us is that if a male will not step forward as God intended, then God will use a woman *prophet* to encourage the male to step up to the plate and fulfill his leadership role.

As I have read the egalitarian literature on Deborah I have found that it stretches the evidence to the breaking point by referring to Deborah as one having authority over men, as being the highest leader in Israel and as one who exercised political and judicial power over the entire nation, including men. But is this the picture that Scripture really portrays?

What do we know for certain about Deborah? We know that before she was a *judge* she was a *prophetess* (Judges 4:4). That is to say, her predominant calling was that of a prophet. We also know that because she was respected as a prophet her services were retained by the people as a judge (Judges 4:4). The Scripture record states that Deborah judged *private* and most likely *civil* cases of individuals who came to her under a palm tree (Judges 4:4) which is definitely a strange place for a courtroom!! Deborah did not serve as a priest, a Levite, an elder or a king.

Furthermore Deborah is called a *mother in Israel* who was chosen to deliver messages of counsel and encouragement from God to the military commander, Barak. The expression ‘mother in Israel’ undoubtedly refers to the fact that Deborah was a perceptive woman who provided wise prophetic counsel to the military commander, Barak. That this is the case can be seen in the only other reference to this title in 2 Samuel 20:19. There, an unnamed woman provided wise counsel to another military commander, Joab, thus sparing an entire city from destruction.

Contrary to what pro-ordination advocates claim, Deborah *did not summon* and lead Israel to battle but rather advised Barak to do so (Judges 4:6, 7, 14, 15). Ellen White explicitly affirms that God had chosen Barak to go to battle, not Deborah. According to the clear testimony of Scripture Barak was to be the leader, not Deborah:

¹³³ Ellen G. White, Sons and Daughters of God, p. 37

"Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with *you* ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against *you* I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into *your* hand'?" . . . Then Deborah said to Barak: "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into *your* hand. Has not the Lord gone out before *you*?" So *Barak went down* from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following *him*. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword *before Barak*; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot."

Ellen White concurs with Scripture:

"Although *he had been designated* by the Lord Himself as the one chosen to deliver Israel, and had received the assurance that God would go with him and subdue their enemies, yet he was timid and distrustful."¹³⁴

By prophetic instruction from God, Deborah told Barak to assemble the men of Israel to lead them to battle (Judges 4:6). When Barak vacillated and insisted that Deborah accompany him (Judges 4:8) she rebuked him and promised that he would lose honor because God would deliver Israel from their enemies by the hand of a woman (4:8, 9). This strongly suggests that Barak had failed to exercise his manly duty as Israel's leader.

Contrary to what the women's ordination lobby claims, Deborah was not the woman who delivered Israel from the hand of Sisera. Judges 4:14-16 unambiguously indicates that Sisera was delivered into the hand of Israel under the leadership of Barak and the woman who killed the commander of the enemy hosts was not Deborah but rather the woman *Jael* who drove a stake through Sisera's head (Judges 4:21).

Why did Barak hesitate to go to battle without Deborah's support? Contrary to what one may think, it was not because Barak was a coward. Rather, he had little confidence that Israel would pay him heed and rally for battle. As we have shown before, there was no central government that required the men of Israel to respond to Barak's call. Inspiration tells us:

"He accepted the *message from Deborah* as the *word of God*, but he had little confidence in Israel, and feared that they would not obey his call. He refused to engage in such a doubtful undertaking unless Deborah would accompany him, and thus support his efforts by her *influence and counsel*"¹³⁵

It was because Deborah was a prophet and the people respected her judgment that the military leader Barak felt that her presence would encourage Israel to go to battle. It will be noticed that Deborah

¹³⁴ Ellen G. White, Sons and Daughters of God, p. 37

¹³⁵ Ellen G. White, Sons and Daughters of God, p. 37

provided support for Barak's efforts and not he hers. Further, Deborah did not help Barak by taking over military leadership but rather by her influence and counsel.

A similar example of the role of a prophet can be seen when Israel returned to Israel from Babylon after the captivity. Zerubbabel (the civil leader) and Joshua (the religious leader) spearheaded the reconstruction of the temple while the prophets Haggai and Zechariah helped them by providing guidance and encouragement. Here is the record:

"Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, *helping them*" (Ezra 2:1, 2)

At the time Zerubbabel was the civil leader in Jerusalem and Joshua, as the high priest, was the spiritual leader. Did the prophets Zechariah and Haggai usurp the leadership positions of Zerubbabel and Joshua? No. The text clearly states that the prophets helped them in their task of rebuilding the temple by encouraging them to go forward with the project. Haggai 1:12-15 clearly reveals the role that was played by God's prophets. God called Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the leaders to build and Zerubbabel and Joshua in turn answered the challenge by encouraging the people to build. The result was that the temple was finished in just five years. Thus the prophets inspired the leaders but did not usurp their legitimate authority.

This is the role of a prophet. A prophet is a *wise counselor* that encourages leadership to go forward in faith and wisely lead God's people. The prophet does not usurp the leadership position but encourages the leaders to fulfill their God-given duty to lead!

The Jehoshaphat Example

Another example of this *advisory role* of a prophet is found in the story of 2 Chronicles 20. As the chapter begins we see Jehoshaphat fearful because a triple alliance with a massive army was on the march against Judah. In this time of crisis, the people prayed earnestly to God for deliverance and the King himself then uttered a beautiful prayer.

In the midst of the crisis the prophetic gift fell upon one Jahaziel who encouraged the King to lead the battle not with weapons but by singing the praises of the Lord. Jehoshaphat accepted the counsel and went before the armies along with the Levites and commanded Israel to sing. To rally the troops Jehoshaphat uttered the famous words:

"Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God and you shall be established; believe His prophets and you shall prosper."

Thus the king and the people were *encouraged by the prophet* to go out to battle with the assurance of victory. The prophet did not lead the battle. The prophet simply encouraged leadership to pay heed to the counsel given by God and go to battle. The result of Jehoshaphat and Israel paying heed to the prophet was a signal victory for God's people over their enemies. Now back to the story of Deborah and Barak.

As a prophet Deborah encouraged the leader to do his duty just as Ellen White later encouraged and counseled the male leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Notably, God called two males to be His prophets before Ellen White and neither of them accepted the call so God chose the weakest of the weak as His prophet. He chose the most unlikely of candidates—a poor, sickly, young, unstudied woman and He used her powerfully!

The story of Judges 4 is absolutely clear:

- It was *Barak* who summoned Israel to battle (verse 10)
- It was *Barak* who led them into battle (verse 14)
- It was *Barak* who routed the army of Sisera and defeated it (verse 15)
- It was *Barak* who pursued the armies of Sisera until there was no one left (verse 16)
- When Sisera fled on foot it was *Barak* who pursued him (verse 22)

Nowhere in the story are we told that Deborah led the armies into battle and that she gained the victory over the enemy. Did Deborah take over the reins of military leadership when the man Barak was remiss to do so? No! She actually encouraged Barak to do it and she provided moral support!

When the victory was gained, Deborah and Barak both sang a song of praise to the Lord who had given Israel the victory (5:12). It is a significant fact that when Samuel later reminisced about this experience he named Barak as the main protagonist of the story and did not even mention Deborah:

“And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and *Barak* and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety.” (1 Samuel 12:11, ESV)

Did Samuel leave out a reference to Deborah because he lived in a male dominated society? Pro-ordination lobbyists may suggest that this was the reason but they are simply reading into the text what is not there.

It bears noting that when the book of Hebrews describes the Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith, mention is made of *Barak* as the protagonist of the story and Deborah is not even mentioned:

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets.” (Hebrews 11:32)

Does this mean that Deborah's role was not important? Of course not! Her role as a prophet was indispensable to encourage the leader Barak and the troops, but she did not usurp Barak's leadership role to lead Israel into battle as is often argued by the women's ordination lobby.

To use the story of Deborah the judge and prophetess of Israel to justify the ordination of women as elders and pastors in the church denotes a lack of sound reasoning. If Deborah had been a priestess the parallel might be justifiable but she was not. Does the following syllogism make logical sense?

- **Major premise:** In the Old Testament women served as prophets and judges
- **Minor premise:** Deborah was a woman
- **Conclusion:** Therefore Deborah could serve as a priest

The facts speak for themselves. The most that can be argued from the story of Deborah is that God today might call women to be prophets and judges but there is no evidence whatsoever in this story that God calls women today to be senior pastors, elders, or Conference, Union, Division or General Conference presidents. To argue in this manner denotes a careless misuse of the biblical evidence as well as illogical thinking.

It is an undeniable fact that the Bible mentions a good number of women who served in the role of a prophet. Among these are Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3), Anna (Luke 2:36), and Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9). The apostle Paul even said that it was legitimate for women prophets to speak in the congregation as long as they followed the cultural custom of covering their heads as a sign of their submission to male authority (1 Corinthians 11:5). We are also told that in the last days not only sons but also daughters will prophesy (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). And who could ever forget the role of Ellen White as the prophetess of the remnant?

It is frequently argued by the women's ordination lobby that if God chose women to be prophets then we should allow women to be ordained as elders and gospel ministers. In fact, I have found that Joel 2:28 (along with Galatians 3:28) is one of the most frequently quoted texts in favor of women's ordination.

Sometime ago I was speaking with a conference president about women's ordination and he boldly stated: "I settled this issue in my mind long ago. If God called Ellen White to be a woman prophet then He can also call women to serve as pastors and elders." He seemed to suggest that the office of 'prophet' was a higher calling than that of an elder or minister and therefore women prophets should be allowed to serve in the 'lesser' office of pastor or elder. In other words, if a prophet can be a woman then certainly she can also be an elder or gospel minister, right? But is the call of a prophet really higher than that of a gospel minister? Ellen White answers this question:

“There must be no belittling of the gospel ministry. No enterprise should be so conducted as to cause the ministry of the Word to be looked upon as an inferior matter. It is not so. Those who belittle the ministry are belittling Christ. The highest of all work is ministry in its various lines, and it should be kept before the youth that there is no work more blessed of God than that of the gospel minister.”¹³⁶

What did Ellen White mean by ‘ministry in its various lines’? The succeeding context indicates that she was not writing about ministry in general nor was she gender inclusive. She was referring to young men entering the ministry.

“Let not our young men be deterred from entering *the* ministry. There is danger that through glowing representations some will be drawn away from the path where God bids them walk. Some have been encouraged to take a course of study in medical lines who ought to be preparing themselves to enter *the* ministry. The Lord calls for more ministers to labor in His vineyard. The words were spoken: "Strengthen the outposts; have faithful sentinels in every part of the world." God calls for you, young *men*. He calls for whole armies of young *men* who are large-hearted and large-minded, and who have a deep love for Christ and the truth.”¹³⁷

So we come back to our original questions:

- Is the office of prophet higher in rank than the office of the gospel minister?
- Does the fact that God calls women to the so-called ‘higher office’ of prophet mean that they can also serve in the supposed ‘lesser office’ of pastors and elders?

Many in the women’s ordination lobby would answer in the affirmative.

It is amazing to me how those who argue in this manner are not able to discern the fallacy in their reasoning! Let’s analyze the argument from a logical perspective in the form of a syllogism:

- **Major Premise:** God called women to the prophetic office
- **Minor Premise:** Ellen White was a woman
- **Conclusion:** Therefore Ellen White was called to be a pastor or elder

The question is: Does the conclusion logically follow the major and minor premises? Of course not! In order to be logical, the syllogism would have to look like this:

- **Major Premise:** God called women to the prophetic office
- **Minor Premise:** Ellen White was a woman
- **Conclusion:** Therefore God called Ellen White to the prophetic office

¹³⁶ Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 6, p. 411

¹³⁷ Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 6, p. 411

The most that can be argued on the basis of women prophets is that women today can be called by God to be prophets. The gift of prophecy is a spiritual gift that is given by God without regard to gender but this gift must not be mingled with the leadership role of elder/overseer. The Bible allows for gender inclusiveness when it comes to prophets but it does not allow for this in the case of elders/overseers. In fact, there is not a single instance in Scripture of a woman prophet who was one of the twelve founders of Israel, a member of the council of the seventy, a Levite, a priest, a king, an apostle, a deacon, an elder/overseer, a pastor or a husband of one wife!

The Case of Huldah

Yet many egalitarian scholars still insist that a woman's call to the prophetic office proves that they can also serve as elders/overseers. The fact that Ellen White was God's prophet to the Remnant Church has led one pro-ordination scholar to affirm:

"And if there has ever been anyone in our midst who was a leader and a person of authority, it has been Ellen White. In the context of Eph 4:11-14, it becomes difficult to imagine 'ordaining' those exercising other gifts/offices in the church—apostles, evangelists, pastor-teachers—without also being willing to 'ordain' those deemed to be 'prophets'."

Questions and More Questions

Several questions need to be asked about this statement: Was Ellen White actually a leader and a person of authority in the sense of being an elder, a pastor, or a Conference, Union or General Conference president? Is the role of a 'prophet' interchangeable with that of an elder/overseer? Were prophets called by God to be leaders in Israel?

Huldah

The role of the prophet in Scripture as it relates to leadership can be clearly discerned in the story of the discovery of the book of the Law in the days of King Josiah (2 Kings 22, 23). As is well known, in the eighteenth year of his reign Josiah ordered the temple of the Lord to be repaired. In the process, Hilkiah, the high priest, found the book of the Law which somehow had been lost. When Shaphan informed the king that the high priest Hilkiah had found the book of the Law that contained the covenant blessings and curses, the king rent his robes because he knew that Judah deserved to suffer the curses because of her unfaithfulness.

The king then commanded that the Lord be consulted about this matter and messengers were sent to Huldah who was known in town as a prophetess. Huldah received the messengers and with them sent a message to Josiah prefaced with the words: "this is what the Lord God says." She informed Josiah that the predicted disaster would come upon Judah but that it would not transpire while he was alive.

Was Huldah the Leader?

The important point to remember here is that Huldah did not take the reins of leadership in Judah. She did not take over the throne. She did not take over the priesthood to clean up the apostasy. She was merely the messenger that God used to encourage Josiah to lead out in the needed reformation. Huldah did not clean up the mess! It was Josiah, the elders and the priests as the leaders of Judah who took her message to heart and led out in the initiative to make the necessary changes.

It was the king who ordered the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets and all the people to come to the temple of the Lord to renew the covenant with Him (2 Kings 23:1-3). It was the king who then commanded Hilkiah to clean up the temple and the land from all the paraphernalia that had been used in the pagan cultus and it was the king who commanded that the unfaithful priests be slain. And it was the king who was extolled by the Lord for being a faithful leader:

“Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him.” (2 Kings 23:25)

Once again it must be underlined that Huldah did not take the reins of the government or the priesthood to have all of this done. Huldah imparted to the king the message that God gave her but the designated leader chose to implement her counsel. Josiah could have ignored what the prophet said and the doom upon Judah would have come during his lifetime.

There is clear Biblical evidence that prophets served as inspired advisors and counselors to rulers and yet the rulers had the governing authority to accept or reject the counsel. That the rulers had executive power over the prophets is made clear by what the rulers frequently did to prophets who delivered politically incorrect messages. Among others, Isaiah was sawn asunder, Elijah had to flee, Jeremiah was committed to the dungeon (2 Chronicles 36:11-15), John the Baptist was beheaded, Stephen was stoned and Ellen White was shipped off to the Land Down Under.

We are told concerning the leadership of Josiah and the reformation that took place in Judah:

“And he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. Thus Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country that belonged to the children of Israel, and [Josiah] made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers.” (2 Chronicles 34:32, 33)

The Adventist Advantage

Seventh-day Adventists have a distinct advantage when it comes to understanding the role of a prophet as it relates to leadership because we have had one in our midst. As one looks at the life and ministry of Ellen White we never find her occupying a position of leadership in the church. She was never a Conference, Union or General Conference president. She was never a pastor or an elder/overseer. She was never referred to as Elder White or Pastor Helen. She was always Sister White or Mother White. Not only did she deny that she was a leader, but when she spoke of the Seventh-day Adventist organizational system she underlined that at each level *competent men* should be elected as officers:

“No one has ever heard me claim the position of *leader* of the denomination. . . He has not provided that the burden of leadership shall rest upon a few *men*. Responsibilities are distributed among a large number of competent *men*. . . Every member of the church has a voice in choosing officers of the church. The church chooses the officers of the state conferences. Delegates chosen by the state conferences choose the officers of the union conferences, and delegates chosen by the union conferences choose the officers of the General Conference. By this arrangement every conference, every institution, every church, and every individual, either directly or through representatives, has a voice in the election of the *men* who bear the chief responsibilities in the General Conference . . . neither then [when the work was just starting] 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.”¹³⁸

Make no mistake, God did give Ellen White counsel for the leaders of the church but she did not usurp their authority to implement or not implement the counsel she gave. She unambiguously stated:

“This is my work--to give to the people the light that the Lord gives me. I am commissioned to receive and communicate His messages. I am not to appear before the people as holding *any other position* than that of a messenger with a message.”¹³⁹

This is why she repeatedly referred to herself as the ‘messenger of the Lord’. When her counsel was followed the church was blessed but when her counsel was ignored or rejected the church suffered spiritual loss.

By her own witness, Ellen White took orders from church leadership when she did not have any direct light from God to the contrary. The leadership extended a call for her to go to Australia and even though she would have preferred to stay in California, she responded to the call and spent nine years with great physical pain in the Land Down Under and while there wrote some of her most deeply

¹³⁸ Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 8, pp. 236, 237

¹³⁹ Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 8, p. 237

spiritual books. It is a sobering thought that Ellen White, the Messenger of the Lord, would follow the leadership of the brethren!

Ellen White and Credentials

For many years Ellen White did receive an 'honorary' ministerial credential but she was never set apart or ordained for a leadership position in the church by the laying on of human hands or any other means. An examination of the extant records indicates that she was the only person, male or female, during her lifetime who received a ministerial credential in spite of never being ordained. Other women did receive a ministerial license but none received a credential.

Some women's ordination lobbyists have affirmed that Ellen White was ordained. But this is simply an unfounded fable. The Ellen G. White Estate has in its possession six of Ellen White's paper ministerial credentials: 1883, 1885, 1887, 1899, 1909 and 1913.

- On the 1883 credential (issued by the Michigan Conference) the word 'ordained' is not crossed off
- On the 1885 credential (issued by the General Conference) the word 'ordained' is neatly crossed off.
- On the 1887 credential the word 'ordained' is not crossed off.

This has led some women's ordination advocates to say that she was ordained sometime between 1885 and 1887. However, this presents serious problems. Does this mean that she was ordained in 1883 when the Michigan Conference issued her a ministerial credential, she was then unordained in 1885 because the word 'ordained' is crossed off and then she was re-ordained in 1887? The simple fact is that she was never set apart as an ordained minister. She was ordained by God to be a prophet not a pastor an elder or a bishop!

Biographical Information Sheet

Further evidence that Ellen White was never ordained is found on a biographical information sheet that was filled out on her behalf by her assistant, Mary Steward. The form was filled out on March 5, 1909, as requested by the General Conference Office of Records. I quote from the Ellen G. White Estate website:

"Question 19 asked, 'If ordained, state when, where, and by whom.' The line was marked with an 'x' indicating that she had not been ordained, just as an 'x' was recorded for question 26, 'If remarried, give date, and to whom.'

W. C. White Confirmation

The final line of evidence that Ellen White was never set apart by the laying on of human hands is found in a letter written by Dores E. Robinson in response to a question that had been asked of W. C. White regarding Ellen White's ordination status. The letter is dated November 17, 1935:

"[W. C. White] tells me that Sister White was never ordained; that she never baptized, nor did she ever give the ordination charge to others."

W. C. White was Ellen White's son. Certainly he knew Ellen White's ordination status better than those who are attempting to rewrite history. In spite of all this evidence, the Ellen White ordination fable is passed on from mouth to mouth as gospel truth. Never mind the facts!

In Conclusion

In conclusion, we can safely conclude that Ellen White was set apart by God to be a prophet, not an elder/overseer or a pastor. To say that because Ellen White was a prophet she had the right to be an elder or pastor would be like saying that because I am an elder I have the right to be a prophet! The conclusion simply does not follow the premise!

So, the evidence is crystal clear concerning Deborah and Huldah. In neither case is there a shred of evidence that would justify the ordination of women as elders or pastors. To use these stories in this manner denotes either careless scholarship or a preconceived agenda in favor of women's ordination. God has called women to very important roles in the church but the apostle Paul leaves no doubt that the elders, pastors/bishops of the church must be the 'husbands of one wife'.

Summarizing the Evidence

The Biblical evidence in favor of male headship in the home and in the church is overwhelming.

First-born males as heads of household, male leaders in the home during the patriarchal period, twelve male founders of the twelve tribes, male rulers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens in Moses' time, seventy males in the governing council of Israel, male Levites, male priests, the names of twelve males on the breastplate of Aaron, all male kings, twelve male apostles, a male successor of Judas chosen from a pool of males, male deacons, male elders, male bishops, husbands of one wife, twelve males sitting on thrones and judging the twelve tribes of Israel, twelve male names on the gates of the New Jerusalem, twelve male names on the foundations of the Holy City. How much more evidence is needed to make a Biblical case for male leadership in Israel, in the home and in the church?¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ The scope of study in this paper was limited to headship in the New Testament but in a forthcoming book that will be published in Spanish and in English in the spring of 2014 I will broaden the scope to include the Old Testament as well.

We have examined 1 Peter 2:9, 10 and Galatians 3:28 and have found that neither of these texts is dealing with leadership roles in the home or in the church. Both are dealing with events that occur at the beginning of the Christian walk when a believer is baptized and not with leadership roles in the church which come later. We have examined explicit statements from Paul to the effect that it is still God's plan for men to be the head in the home and in the church. We have examined the cases of Phoebe, Junias, and women prophets and have found no basis for the ordination of women to positions of leadership in the church as elders/overseers.