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**Headship, Gender, and Ordination
in the Writings of Ellen G. White**

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Headship, Gender, and Ordination in the Writings of Ellen G. White

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Introduction

26 The topic of women's ordination has been hotly debated in nearly every
27 Christian denomination. Churches have split over this issue. Around 1844 when
28 the Seventh-day Adventist Church arose, there was great unanimity on this
29 subject, and no denomination thought of ordaining women as elders or
30 ministers, except the groups on the fringes of Christianity, such as the Shakers,
31 Quakers, and later the Spiritualist Church. Within these groups the impressions
32 of the Spirit dominated the community, and the Spirit's movements were placed
33 above the written Word of God. But gradually over the years, more and more
34 churches have adopted the practice of ordaining women to the office of elder or
35 minister.

1 This paper will bring out the position on women's ordination held by the
2 Adventist pioneers and the Seventh-day Adventist church through most of its
3 history, and which can be found in the writings of Ellen White.

4 Today there are honest persons, well-educated, who claim that the Bible is
5 silent or even supports ordination of women to the office of spiritual leadership
6 as elders or ministers. I do not wish to criticize them as persons or impugn their
7 Christian standing. Many earnest, dedicated women sincerely long to serve the
8 Lord with their whole hearts. I wish to thank them for their service for the Lord,
9 while I may disagree with their views on ordination.

10 The study will focus on the teachings of Ellen White on the role of the Bible in
11 this controversy and the principles for interpreting the Bible to find a solution to
12 the current situation. The paper will also look at her understanding of equality
13 and submission in God's universal kingdom, and the function of headship in
14 Jesus' model of leadership and its relation to gender in regard to the
15 qualifications for the biblical office of overseer in the church and their
16 implications in regard to ordination. All of these aspects form an integral part of
17 Ellen White's theology of ordination.

18 **How to Solve Disagreements about Women Ordination**

19 Currently in the Seventh-day Adventist Church there are two views on
20 ordination of women to a church office. These views are contradictory, yet both
21 sides claim that their views are in full harmony with the Bible and the Methods
22 of Bible Study Document (MBSD).¹ How are we to solve this problem? This
23 paper is based on the light that Jesus has revealed to us, light that has come by

¹ The "Methods of Bible Study" document (MBSD) was voted by the Autumn Counsel of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in 1986. The document recognizes the importance of the writings of Ellen G. White, stating, "Seventh-day Adventists believe that God inspired Ellen G. White. Therefore, her expositions on any given Bible passage offer an inspired guide to the meaning of texts without exhausting their meaning or preempting the task of exegesis (for example, see *Evangelism*, 256; *The Great Controversy*, 193, 595; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 665, 682, 707-708; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 33-35).

1 inspiration, which is found in the writings of the Holy Scriptures and the Spirit
2 of Prophecy to the Remnant Church as revealed in the writings of Ellen G. White.

3 The Holy Scriptures are the key to help us evaluate teachings and to correct
4 them when necessary. The Bible states: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of
5 God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in
6 righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for
7 every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17, NKJV).²

8 Ellen White similarly affirms that the Bible is the standard by which we test
9 every teaching and practice. “The Word of God is the great detector of error; to it
10 we believe everything must be brought. The Bible must be our standard for every
11 doctrine and practice. We must study it reverentially. We are to receive no one’s
12 opinion without comparing it with the Scriptures. Here is divine authority which
13 is supreme in matters of faith. It is the word of the living God that is to decide all
14 controversies.”³ As the Bible is the standard for “*every . . . practice*,” it should shed
15 light on the question whether it is proper to ordain women to the biblical
16 leadership office of elder or minister.

17 **The Role of the Bible**

18 *The purpose and audience of the Bible*

19 In studying the question of ordination it is important to know the purpose and
20 audience of the Bible. The writings of Ellen G. White remind us that the message
21 of Scripture is aimed at all people. In the interpretation of Scripture, therefore,
22 the common people as well as the scholar can participate in discerning truth.
23 Furthermore, one should never lose sight of the fact that “The Bible was given for
24 practical purposes.”⁴ “The Bible,” she wrote, “was written for the common

² Unless otherwise indicated, all textual references are from the NKJV.

³ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 44, 45.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:20. See MBS D 4p.

1 people as well as for scholars, and is within the comprehension of all.”⁵ She
 2 cautioned that “the Bible was not written for the scholar alone; on the contrary, it
 3 was designed for the common people.”⁶ “It was written,” she said, “in a plain,
 4 simple style to meet the understanding of the common people; and, with proper
 5 explanations, a large portion of it can be made intensely interesting and
 6 profitable to very small children.”⁷ And because “it was designed for the
 7 common people,” she wrote, “the interpretation given by the common people,
 8 when aided by the Holy Spirit, accords best with the truth as it is in Jesus.”⁸ This
 9 means that no matter the educational level one has reached, the truth on the
 10 subject of women’s ordination can be discovered by anyone who studies the
 11 Scriptures with an open mind and prays for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

12 ***How to interpret the Bible or What does the Bible mean?***

13 The next step in studying the subject of women’s ordination is to find the
 14 correct method of interpreting the Bible (hermeneutics). Jesus pointed out that “If
 15 anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is
 16 from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). It is total
 17 obedience to the Scriptures that is the key to understanding the teachings we are
 18 confronted with all the time. Again He said, “I am the light of the world. He who
 19 follows Me shall not walk in darkness” (John 8:12). If we love the light, we will
 20 not walk in darkness but will have a desire to study the Scriptures deeply, so that
 21 we may hear the voice of the true Shepherd.

22 Next comes the question, “How shall we read the Bible to discover truth?”
 23 Here the writings of Ellen White added the following important principle.

24 *Take the Bible as it reads.* “The language of the Bible should be explained

⁵ Ellen G. White, “Thoroughness in Christian Work,” *Review and Herald*, Jan 27, 1885; *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, 23.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 89.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, 513, 514.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:331.

1 according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. . . . If
2 men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to
3 mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would
4 make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon
5 thousands who are now wandering in error.”⁹ “A great work can be done by
6 presenting to the people the Bible just as it reads. . . . Admonish them to take the
7 Bible as it is, to implore divine enlightenment, and then, when the light shines, to
8 gladly accept each precious ray and fearlessly abide the consequences.”¹⁰

9 Besides their commitment to total obedience to Bible truth, the participants in
10 the Great Second Advent of the 1800s used the principles of Bible interpretation
11 that came from the Protestant Reformation. Adventist doctrine is based on these
12 principles as formulated by William Miller, the inspirational leader of the Great
13 Second Advent Movement of the nineteenth century. Ellen G. White fully
14 endorsed Miller’s hermeneutical rules. She wrote: “Those who are engaged in
15 proclaiming the third angel’s message are searching the Scriptures upon the
16 same plan that Father Miller adopted.” White enumerated the following rules of
17 Miller and described them as “simple but intelligent and important rules for
18 Bible study and interpretation.”¹¹

19 “1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the
20 Bible.” This means that one must see that every word on a subject makes its
21 proper contribution to that subject studied throughout the Bible. However,
22 White mentioned elsewhere that one needs to keep in mind that it is the Bible
23 writers, and not the words themselves, that were inspired.¹²

⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 599.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 5:388.

¹¹ See Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *Review and Herald*, Nov 25, 1884.

¹² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:21.

1 “2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent application
2 and study.” This means that it is necessary to consult the whole Bible in the
3 study of a subject.

4 “3. Nothing revealed in Scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in
5 faith, not wavering.”

6 “4. To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you
7 wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can form
8 your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error.” This means that
9 one cannot come to a sound conclusion on a particular doctrine or teaching
10 without looking at all texts related to the topic studied, comparing scripture with
11 scripture. One can only come to the correct understanding on the matter of
12 ordination when all passages dealing with ordination have been studied. Failure
13 to follow this approach has led to a misunderstanding of ordination.¹³

14 “5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on
15 a teacher to expound to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or desire to have
16 it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his guessing,
17 desire, creed, or wisdom is my rule, and not the Bible.” This means that our
18 conclusions must be derived from the Bible only, not from extra-biblical sources,
19 or using extra-biblical culture and guessing how it may have impacted the
20 church, thereby creating a scenario by which we interpret Scripture.

21 Commenting on these rules, Ellen White said, “The above is a portion of these
22 rules; and in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set
23 forth.”¹⁴

24 The Seventh-day Adventist Church has followed these rules for most of our
25 history. Immediately after listing these rules, White warned against basing our
26 faith on emotions, which is one of the delusions of the time of the end: “Genuine

¹³ Cf. MBSD 4e.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *Review and Herald*, Nov 25, 1884.

1 faith is founded on the Scriptures; but Satan uses so many devices to wrest the
 2 Scriptures and bring in error, that great care is needed if one would know what
 3 they really do teach. It is one of the great delusions of this time to dwell much
 4 upon feeling, and to claim honesty while ignoring the plain utterances of the
 5 word of God because that word does not coincide with feeling. Many have no
 6 foundation for their faith but emotion."¹⁵ Thus, a person's sense of God's calling,
 7 or justice, or church leadership and administration, must correspond with what
 8 the Bible teaches along every line.

9 ***Application of the principles of Bible interpretation (hermeneutics)***

10 The study of the ordination of women to the position of an elder or minister
 11 involves more than the study of one or two Bible texts. It involves the application
 12 of these principles of interpretation to a study of the nature of the relations
 13 between male and female throughout the whole Bible. This focuses on all
 14 relationships in God's universal moral kingdom that bring out God's leadership,
 15 involving the areas of:

- 16 1. The universal nature of God's church
- 17 2. The nature of relationships within the Godhead
- 18 3. The nature of relationships among the angels
- 19 4. The nature of male and female relations at creation
- 20 5. Male and female relations after the fall.
- 21 6. Male and female relations in the Old Testament
- 22 7. Male and female relations in the New Testament
- 23 8. Male and female relations in the Remnant Church

¹⁵ Ibid.

1 **The Universal Nature of God’s Church**

2 *God’s church in heaven and on earth*

3 The principles upon which God’s church operates in His kingdom are timeless
 4 and universal. All created beings throughout His universe are part of His church.
 5 The angels are “ministering spirits” (Heb 1:14) for our salvation. Ellen White
 6 called such unfallen beings “the church in heaven.”¹⁶ Through the ministry of
 7 angels Jesus aims to bring the church on earth into a close relationship with the
 8 church in heaven. White called the church in heaven “the complement of the
 9 church on earth.”¹⁷ With this understanding she strongly desired believers to be
 10 united so that they will reflect the church in heaven: “The church on earth would
 11 indeed be a symbol of the church in heaven if the members were of one mind
 12 and of one faith. It is those who are not moved by the Holy Spirit that mar God’s
 13 plan.”¹⁸ Only through this unity will the mission of the remnant be a success. She
 14 stated, “The church on earth, united with the church in heaven, can accomplish
 15 all things.”¹⁹ For this to happen, the church on earth must cooperate with the
 16 heavenly church.²⁰ This can be realized by following the principles of the church
 17 in heaven, not those of the world. She counseled, “His people are not to borrow
 18 the forms and customs of the world, but are to be instinct [infused] with the
 19 principles which make the church on earth a symbol of the church in heaven, a
 20 channel through which heaven’s rich blessings can flow.”²¹

21 *God’s church in the Old and New Testament*

22 Believers in the Old Testament era and the New Testament era were
 23 also considered part of God’s church. White described the accounts of
 24 God’s mercy from the time of the Old Testament as providing comfort to

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 11.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, 95.

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 6:239.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 7:31.

²⁰ See Ellen G. White, *To Be Like Jesus*, 216.

²¹ Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, 123.

1 “the church of God from that day to this.”²² The order and harmony of the
 2 church of ancient Israel is to be an example for today. Commenting on
 3 Israel’s church organization in the wilderness, she wrote:

4 Christ was the invisible General of that company of more than a
 5 million people, and there were no haphazard, disorderly
 6 movements made. Order, dispatch, and exactitude were required of
 7 each one, at the post of duty assigned him. . . . The management of
 8 that great church in their journeyings in the wilderness symbolizes
 9 the management of the church till the close of earth’s history, till we
 10 come into possession of the heavenly Canaan.²³

11
 12 Here we notice the continuity of God’s church on earth throughout the
 13 centuries, in which the principles of organization continue to be relevant for
 14 today. From the church’s failures and successes shown in the Bible, God’s people
 15 living in the time of the end can learn valuable lessons on how to operate the
 16 church today.

17 **The Relationships within the Godhead**

18 The relationships within the Godhead give an insight into the operation of the
 19 headquarters of God’s dynamic universal kingdom. In the sacred Scriptures we
 20 are introduced to a mysterious interaction that reveals the unity as well as the
 21 diversity of the divine personalities of the Godhead that provide an example for
 22 harmonious relationships within the church of heaven and the church on earth.

23 ***The persons of the Godhead are equal in nature***

24 The Bible teaches that the persons of the Godhead are equal. This is based on
 25 the concept that all are divine. They have the same purpose, power, and
 26 authority. There is no inferiority among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

27 Jesus said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

²² Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 466.

²³ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1148.

1 ***The persons of the Godhead have different roles***

2 Alongside equality there is a diversity of roles in the Godhead. The Bible
3 teaches, “the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3). Furthermore, it brings out that
4 Jesus Christ fulfills a unique function: “who, being in the form of God, did not
5 consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation,
6 taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being
7 found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the
8 point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:6-8). At the end of time He
9 will subject Himself to God the Father. The Bible explains, “when all things are
10 made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put
11 all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

12 ***There is no inferiority within the Godhead***

13 The diversity of roles within the Godhead reveals a unique relationship. The
14 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all have different functions or roles, yet there is no
15 inferiority among them. They are all equal in nature, being, purpose, and
16 authority.

17 The functional role distinctions complement each other. The Father leads; the
18 Son came to earth and was the active Member in the role of salvation, all the time
19 submitting to the Father’s will; and the Holy Spirit submits to the Father and to
20 the Son while manifesting God in the life of the church since Jesus’ ascension.
21 The dynamics within the Godhead are a perfect example of the operations of
22 God’s moral kingdom.

23 Each person of the Godhead is equal, yet different. The nature of this equal-
24 but-different relationship is seen throughout God’s creation, becoming the model
25 for interactions of all created beings. This relationship model is seen among the
26 angels and human beings, as well as animals.

1 **The Relationships among the Angels**

2 The relationships among the unfallen angels reflect the relationships among
3 the Godhead. Again we observe equality in nature and at the same time a
4 diversity of functions, with leaders and subordinates.

5 ***The angels are equal in nature***

6 Angels have equality in nature, a nature which is slightly more elevated than
7 that of human beings. The Bible states: "You [Lord] made him a little lower than
8 the angels; You crowned him with glory and honor" (Heb 2:7).

9 ***Angels function in different roles***

10 Among the angels there is a diversity of roles with different ranks that are
11 specifically assigned to assist humans in obtaining salvation. Ellen White
12 explained, "The very highest angels in the heavenly courts are appointed to work
13 out the prayers which ascend to God for the advancement of the cause of God.
14 Each angel has his particular post of duty, which he is not permitted to leave for
15 any other place. If he should leave, the powers of darkness would gain an
16 advantage."²⁴ "Each angel has his own mission, and is at his post, ready to
17 cooperate with you, and by combining divine power with human effort, make of
18 no effect the opposition of foes."²⁵

19 ***A hierarchy exists among angels***

20 This relationship is also hierarchical. Note the leadership roles of the
21 commanding angels at the trial of Jesus. "The angels cast their crowns and harps
22 from them and with the deepest interest silently watched Jesus. They wished to
23 surround the Son of God, but the commanding angels suffered them not."²⁶
24 "Many companies of holy angels, each with a tall commanding angel at their

²⁴ Ellen G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 4:1173; *Lift Him Up*, 370.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, "Why Are the Churches so Indolent?" *The Southern Work*, Oct 24, 1899.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 167.

1 head, were sent to witness the scene."²⁷ "It was difficult for the angels to endure
 2 the sight. They would have delivered Jesus, but the commanding angels forbade
 3 them."²⁸ "There was commotion among the angels. They would have rescued
 4 Him instantly; but their commanding angels restrained them."²⁹ From these
 5 statements we conclude that these tall commanding angels are leaders of
 6 companies of angels, instructing them what to do. The angels obey the
 7 commanding angels, even against their own wishes.

8 ***Sin began when an angel left his God-appointed position***

9 When the highest among the angels, Lucifer, was not satisfied with his
 10 position and refused to submit to the special function God had appointed him,
 11 sin entered into God's kingdom. The result was a celestial war, the expulsion of
 12 Satan and his angels from heaven, that led to the fall of the human race. "How
 13 art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut
 14 down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine
 15 heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I
 16 will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will
 17 ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa 14:12-14,
 18 KJV). God in His love for human beings developed the way to escape eternal
 19 ruin through His Son Jesus Christ. He came to restore fallen humanity to the
 20 image of their Creator by returning to God's designed positions and roles for
 21 which men and women were created, as we will show.

²⁷ Ibid., 168.

²⁸ Ibid., 170.

²⁹ Ibid.

1 **The Male and Female Relations at Creation**

2 In God's kingdom, the relationships among human beings are designed to
3 reflect the relationships among the Godhead and the angels, which are
4 characterized by equality and submission.³⁰

5 ***Humans are created equal in nature***

6 Male and female are created in the image of God. The Scripture record states,
7 "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (Gen
8 1:26). This creative act brings out the fundamental truth that men and women
9 share an equality in nature, as do the members of the Godhead.

10 Next the creation account reveals the relationship between the two genders
11 that is derived from the manner in which the woman was created. "And the
12 LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of
13 his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God
14 had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.
15 And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh'" (Gen
16 2:21-23).

17 Ellen G. White commented on the relationship between human beings in this
18 creation story as follows:

19 God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided "an help meet for
20 him" – a helper corresponding to him – one who was fitted to be his
21 companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. Eve
22 was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she
23 was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an
24 inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by
25 him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his
26 second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that
27 should exist in this relation. "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but
28 nourisheth and cherisheth it." Ephesians 5:29. "Therefore shall a man
29 leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they
30 shall be one."³¹

³⁰ Ibid., 167.

³¹ Ellen G. White, *Partriarchs and Prophets*, 46.

1
 2 This observation shows that the woman is to stand by the man's side as an
 3 equal—not to be inferior nor superior, but equal to the man. White further
 4 commented, "When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess
 5 neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be
 6 his equal. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other; and
 7 yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting."³² If the woman is to be "in
 8 all things" the man's equal, are there any differences?

9 ***Does human equality mean sameness?***

10 The creation account shows that with equality God also created some
 11 differences. These distinctions are related to roles, functions, or responsibilities.
 12 From the creation story we discover that the Creator purposely designed male
 13 and female with unique characteristics that complement each other. The
 14 following elements in the creation story show that Adam was to have the
 15 leadership role.

16 *Adam was created first.* Adam was the first human being God created. The first
 17 thing God did after Adam's creation was to instruct him on the cultivation of a
 18 garden and warn him about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "And the
 19 LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may
 20 freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for
 21 in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Gen 2:16, 17). This instruction
 22 came prior to the creation of woman. At her creation, the relationship between
 23 Adam and his wife became a model of the partnership God intended between a
 24 man and his wife. The fact that God created Adam first indicated that his role
 25 was to be the leader of his family. The New Testament Scriptures explain this
 26 and clearly forbid a woman "to have authority over a man. . . . For Adam was
 27 formed first, then Eve" (1 Tim 2:12, 13). This New Testament admonition reveals

³² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 3:484.

1 that Adam is a type who illustrates God's intention that men are to be the
 2 spiritual leaders rather than women. This leadership experience in the home
 3 family was to prepare some for leadership in the church, which is made up of
 4 multiple families.

5 *Adam named the animals.* The second thing God did was to assign Adam to give
 6 names to all the living creatures of His new creation. "Out of the ground the
 7 LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every bird of the air, and brought
 8 them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called every
 9 living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds
 10 of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a
 11 helper comparable to him" (Gen 2:19, 20). After God created Eve as a companion
 12 to Adam, he also gave a name to his companion. "And Adam said: "This is now
 13 bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she
 14 was taken out of Man" (Gen 2:23).

15 *Adam as protector.* Commenting on the couple's relationship, Ellen White
 16 pointed out that Adam's role was to be the protector of his wife. Eve was "to be
 17 loved and protected" by Adam.³³

18 *Adam as king, monarch, and representative of humanity.* In addition to his
 19 leadership in his family, Adam was to represent humanity. Ellen White called
 20 Adam "the father and representative of the whole human family."³⁴ Not only
 21 was he the representative, but "Adam was crowned king in Eden. To him was
 22 given dominion over every living thing that God had created."³⁵ He was "the
 23 monarch of the world," until Satan dethroned him.³⁶

24 *Adam as teacher.* From the above information it is clear that it was Adam's
 25 responsibility as first-created to teach Eve what God had revealed to him. Thus

³³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁵ Ellen G. White, in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 1:1082.

³⁶ Ellen G. White, "Redemption—No. 1," *Review and Herald*, Feb 24, 1874.

1 Adam instructed her about the need to obey God's warning concerning the
2 dangers of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and to teach her the names
3 of all living creatures. This teaching role shows Adam's role as protector and
4 leader when he taught Eve how to avoid the danger of dying. The Bible points to
5 Adam's leadership role as a model for the relationship between a man and a
6 woman. When in the New Testament a woman tried to usurp authority over a
7 man, the inspired apostle Paul, referring to the order of creation, stated, "I suffer
8 not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man. . . . For Adam was
9 first formed, then Eve" (1 Tim 2:12, 13, KJV).

10 *Eve's role as helper.* The Bible points out that Eve had an important role to
11 fulfill: "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will
12 make him a helper comparable to him'" (Gen 2:18). This shows that the woman
13 was created to function as a helper suitable or fit for Adam. The creation account
14 reveals that because the woman was created after man, out of man, and as his
15 helper, God intends that the man is to fulfill the leadership role and the woman
16 is to support the man in fulfilling this role.

17 **The Male and Female Relations after the Fall**

18 The introduction of sin into the world had a profound effect on the human
19 race. When Satan deceived Eve she became the first human to transgress God's
20 command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After she had
21 eaten, she offered the fruit to Adam. He decided to follow Eve's example, and he
22 also ate from the fruit. It should be noted that only after Adam had sinned did
23 the effects of sin become clearly visible: Eve gave the fruit to Adam, "and he ate.
24 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were
25 naked" (Gen 3:6, 7). Now God entered into the picture, and the way He
26 dialogued with the couple reveals much about Adam's leadership role in the
27 entrance of sin into the world.

1 *God held Adam responsible.* After the couple sinned, God approached them and
2 began to question them. However, He did not begin by questioning Eve, who
3 sinned first, but He first addressed Adam. “Then the LORD God called to Adam
4 and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (Gen 3:9). This question to Adam reveals that
5 God held Adam responsible as the head of his family and of the human race. The
6 New Testament clearly designates Adam as the one responsible for the entrance
7 of sin: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death
8 through sin, and thus death spread to all men” (Rom 5:12).

9 *Through Adam’s sin Satan conquered the world.* Ellen G. White noted that it was
10 through Adam that Satan conquered the human race. “Having conquered Adam,
11 the monarch of the world, he [Satan] had gained the race as his subjects.”³⁷ Adam
12 failed in his spiritual leadership role. Instead of leading Eve to obey God’s
13 command, he listened to “the voice” of Eve and followed her into the path of
14 disobedience (Gen 3:17). His failure to fulfill his God-given role as protector
15 made him responsible for the entrance of sin into the human race.

16 *Through the reversal of God-appointed roles sin entered the world.* The question
17 remains: What was it that led to the entrance of sin into the world? Ellen White’s
18 writings indicate that it was the reversal of the God-appointed roles for the
19 couple. It was Eve who took on an independent leadership role. She left her
20 husband’s side, not following the warning “to beware of separating herself from
21 her husband.”³⁸ “She had fallen into temptation by separating from her
22 companion, contrary to the divine direction.”³⁹ Having followed Satan’s advice,
23 “she became the agent of Satan in working the ruin of her husband.”⁴⁰ “It was by
24 her solicitation that Adam sinned.”⁴¹ Satan “had tempted the woman to distrust
25 God’s love, to doubt His wisdom, and to transgress His law, and through her he

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 53.

³⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁴¹ Ibid., 58.

1 had caused the overthrow of Adam."⁴² Eve had not been content with her God-
2 given role. "She was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that
3 which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position,
4 she fell far below it."⁴³

5 ***Divine sentence upon humanity***

6 *The judgment on the woman.* The consequences of Eve's transgression were
7 threefold. First, there came sorrow and pain: "To the woman He said: 'I will
8 greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth
9 children.'" Second, there came yearning for her husband: "Your desire shall be
10 for your husband." Third, the husband would rule over her: "he shall rule over
11 you" (Gen 3:16).

12 Ellen G. White provided further insights into the divine sentence that Adam
13 was to rule over Eve: "After Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the
14 Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her
15 husband, and this was a part of the curse."⁴⁴ As Eve led her husband into sin,
16 now she would no longer be led by Adam but be ruled by him. This sentence
17 was the divine remedy to preserve the order of relationships between male and
18 female. It is a call to the woman to return to her God-given function to be a
19 support for the man. Before sin Adam's leadership could be noticed but it was
20 not emphasized. After the fall God clearly spelled it out so that no one would
21 have any doubt about what the relationship between male and female should be.
22 However, this does not give any license for dictatorial leadership; instead, it
23 should be a caring, loving, self-sacrificing leadership. A leadership in the spirit of
24 Christ is a blessing to relationships, not a curse.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid., 57.

⁴³ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 3:484.

⁴⁵ See Eph 5:22-29.

1 After the entrance of sin, harmony among the human race could only be
 2 achieved by respecting role differences between genders, and one submitting to
 3 the other. "Sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained
 4 and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other.
 5 Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by
 6 separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her
 7 solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her
 8 husband."⁴⁶ This sentence, Ellen White said, was also intended as a blessing:
 9 "Had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race,
 10 this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a
 11 blessing to them; but man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often
 12 rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden."⁴⁷ Today this
 13 sentence can still be a blessing if the man executes his God-given role in the spirit
 14 of Christ and the woman respects the execution of this role.

15 *Judgment on the man.* After his sin Adam deplored his failure to lead, and he
 16 "mourned that he had permitted Eve to wander from his side" (PP 56). He truly
 17 failed as leader to protect his wife.

18 The result of Adam's failure to exercise his leadership role brought sin to the
 19 human race, requiring punishment. Consequently the earth was cursed, causing
 20 hardship and death to the human race. "Then to Adam He said, 'Because you
 21 have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I
 22 commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat of it": Cursed is the ground for your
 23 sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. . . . In the sweat of your
 24 face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were
 25 taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return'" (Gen 3:17, 19). God
 26 pronounced the death sentence on Adam because he was responsible for the

⁴⁶ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 58.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 58, 59.

1 entrance of sin that affected every human being. The death sentence on him
2 included Eve and all of his descendants.

3 God's original design of role distinctions has not changed. In referring to the
4 order of transgression the inspired record states that a woman is not "to have
5 authority over a man," because "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being
6 deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Tim 2:14). This shows that many years after
7 the death of Christ, the Scriptures affirmed that the effects of the Fall are still
8 with the human race and have not been done away with by Christ's death on the
9 cross. During the Christian Era God's goal for His church is that the man still
10 remain the spiritual and authoritative leader in the home and in the church.

11 *Lessons from Eve's experience*

12 Ellen G. White depicted a sad parallelism between Eve and many modern
13 women, a comparison that contains a valuable lesson for today.

14 Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband's side in her Eden home;
15 but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering
16 a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to
17 rise above her original position, she fell far below it. A similar result will
18 be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties
19 in accordance with God's plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which
20 He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they
21 might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have
22 sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left
23 undone the very work that Heaven appointed them.⁴⁸

24
25 Ellen White indicated that in order to live happily in unity and harmony,
26 woman ought to follow God's plan in her creation. Here we should note that
27 White did not speak about Eve's position after the Fall, but of her created
28 position or role.

29 A neglect on the part of woman to follow God's plan in her creation,
30 an effort to reach for important positions which He has not qualified her

⁴⁸ Ibid., 59.

1 to fill, leaves vacant the position that she could fill to acceptance. In
 2 getting out of her sphere, she loses true womanly dignity and nobility.
 3 When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither
 4 inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be
 5 his equal. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each
 6 other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting. But after
 7 Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that
 8 Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband,
 9 and this was a part of the curse. In many cases the curse has made the lot
 10 of woman very grievous and her life a burden. The superiority which
 11 God has given man he has abused in many respects by exercising
 12 arbitrary power. Infinite wisdom devised the plan of redemption, which
 13 places the race on a second probation by giving them another trial.⁴⁹

14

15 One can conclude that God created male and female equal, but with different
 16 roles, giving the man the spiritual leadership role before as well as after the Fall.

17 Some have suggested that just as slavery was a part of the Old Testament
 18 experience which was later abolished during the Christian era, so the man's
 19 leadership role should be eliminated in the government of the church, giving
 20 both male and female an equal leadership role in overseeing the operation of the
 21 church. This reasoning is not correct, because God already established Adam's
 22 leadership before the Fall. Therefore the development of the abolition of slavery,
 23 a practice established after the Fall, cannot be used as an example for the
 24 abolition of the leadership role of a man that was already established before the
 25 Fall.

26 **Organization of the Old Testament Church and Its Relevance**

27 During the era of the patriarchs, the head of each family was considered ruler
 28 and priest of his own household.⁵⁰ Later, in the days of the theocracy when
 29 Moses was the leader, leadership responsibilities were distributed among the
 30 Levites, elders, and other officers of each tribe.

⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 3:484.

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, 50.

1 Ellen G. White urged today's believers to learn from the organization of God's
 2 church of that time. The ancient Israelites constituted God's church. Today we
 3 should take notice of how God organized this church.

4 Has God changed from a God of order? No; He is the same in the
 5 present dispensation as in the former. Paul says: 'God is not the author of
 6 confusion, but of peace' [1 Cor 14:33]. He is as particular now as then. And
 7 He designs that we should learn lessons of order and organization from
 8 the perfect order instituted in the days of Moses for the benefit of the
 9 children of Israel.⁵¹

10

11 In Israel's theocracy, God, as the head of the nation, delegated His authority to
 12 human leaders, and all of them were men. Regarding that organization Ellen
 13 White observed,

14 The government of Israel was characterized by the most thorough
 15 organization, wonderful alike for its completeness and its simplicity. The
 16 order so strikingly displayed in the perfection and arrangement of all
 17 God's created works was manifest in the Hebrew economy. God was the
 18 center of authority and government, the sovereign of Israel. Moses stood
 19 as their visible leader, by God's appointment, to administer the laws in
 20 His name. From the elders of the tribes a council of seventy was afterward
 21 chosen to assist Moses in the general affairs of the nation. Next came the
 22 priests, who consulted the Lord in the sanctuary. Chiefs, or princes, ruled
 23 over the tribes. Under these were "captains over thousands, and captains
 24 over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens," and,
 25 lastly, officers who might be employed for special duties. Deut. 1:15.⁵²

26

27 Regarding the services of the house of the Lord, the stipulations were to be
 28 carried out faithfully and carefully. "The Lord did not leave His holy tabernacle
 29 to be borne [carried] indiscriminately by any tribe that might choose. He was so
 30 particular as to specify the order He would have observed in bearing the sacred

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 1:653.

⁵² Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 374; see also "Order and Organization," *Review and Herald*, Oct 12, 1905.

1 ark and to designate a special family of the tribe of the Levites to bear it.”⁵³ When
2 Uzzah disregarded this order, he died instantly (2 Sam 6:6, 7).

3 Even within the tribe of Levi God had clearly specified in the Scriptures that
4 only members of the family of Aaron were to serve as priests in the sanctuary.
5 When other Levites coveted the priesthood, the Lord affirmed the priesthood of
6 Aaron through the miracle of the blossoming rod of Aaron. (Num 16:8 to 17:13.)
7 This sign of God’s order of government was placed near the Ten
8 Commandments in the sanctuary “as a witness to succeeding generations. This
9 miracle effectually settled the question of the priesthood.”⁵⁴ In a vision about
10 Jesus’ high priestly ministry in the Most Holy place of the heavenly sanctuary,
11 Ellen White was shown the ark and the Ten Commandments with Aaron’s
12 budded rod.⁵⁵ This rod reminds us of the challenge to God’s leadership model in
13 His Old Testament church and shows its relevancy for today. As the Old
14 Testament Scriptures settled God’s priestly leadership order, so the New
15 Testament Scriptures settle God’s leadership structure in His church in the time
16 of the end.

17 Under the reign of Solomon additional organizational improvements took
18 place that are important for the church today to understand and follow.

19 The thoroughness and completeness of the organization perfected at
20 the beginning of Solomon’s reign; the comprehensiveness of the plans for
21 bringing the largest number possible of all the people into active service;
22 the wide distribution of responsibility, so that the service of God and of
23 the king should not be unduly burdensome to any individual or class –
24 these are lessons which all may study with profit, and which the leaders
25 of the Christian church should understand and follow.⁵⁶

26

⁵³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 1:650.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 403.

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 32

⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, “Order and Organization,” *Review and Herald*, Oct 12, 1905; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 3:1128.

1 Israel's "perfect organization," their subsequent rebellion, and their
2 punishments have all been recorded for us as a warning. The reason for their
3 severe punishment was simply "because of their unwillingness to submit to
4 God's wise arrangements — this faithful picture is hung up before us as a warning
5 lest we follow their example of disobedience and fall like them."⁵⁷ Thus we
6 notice that the matters concerning the operation of God's church and its religious
7 services were performed by persons whose qualifications and functions God
8 carefully prescribed.

9 **Organization of the New Testament Church and Its Relevance**

10 New Testament church began with a divinely ordained structure. It began
11 with Jesus' ordination of the twelve apostles. In conjunction with quoting Mark
12 3:13, 14, Ellen G. White described the importance of this event. "It was at the
13 ordination of the twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the
14 church that after Christ's departure was to carry on His work on the earth."⁵⁸
15 About how this ordination was performed, she wrote, "When Jesus had ended
16 His instruction to the disciples, He gathered the little band close about Him, and
17 kneeling in the midst of them, and laying His hands upon their heads, He offered
18 a prayer dedicating them to His sacred work. Thus the Lord's disciples were
19 ordained to the gospel ministry."⁵⁹

20 The next step of further organization took place in the church at Jerusalem,
21 after Christ's ascension. When difficulty developed in the newly established
22 Jerusalem church, the apostles were led by the Holy Spirit to appoint seven
23 assistants (Acts 6:1-7), who came to be known as the seven deacons. From that
24 time onward there were two classes of church leaders or officers: the apostles,
25 who were succeeded by elders, responsible for the general oversight of the
26 church; and the deacons, with their supportive roles taking care of the business

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 1:652.

⁵⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 18.

⁵⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 296.

1 matters of the church. This simple but effective two-level organization the Lord
 2 prescribed as a model for future congregations: “The organization of the church
 3 at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every
 4 other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel.”⁶⁰

5 Sometime later in the New Testament church, after the two-level
 6 organizational model with the leadership offices of elder-overseer and deacon
 7 was established, the community of believers was ready for a further perfection of
 8 church organization. Ellen G. White described this development as a result of the
 9 bestowal of spiritual gifts:

10 Later in the history of the early church, when in various parts of the
 11 world many groups of believers had been formed into churches, the
 12 organization of the church was further perfected, so that order and
 13 harmonious action might be maintained. Every member was exhorted to
 14 act well his part. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to
 15 him. Some were endowed by the Holy Spirit with special gifts—“first
 16 apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then
 17 gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” 1
 18 Corinthians 12:28. But all these classes of workers were to labor in
 19 harmony.⁶¹

20
 21 It is important to see the distinction between the *leadership offices* and *spiritual*
 22 *gifts*. Not until God through the Holy Spirit had established the leadership
 23 structure of the local church was there a widespread outpouring of spiritual gifts
 24 upon the church. Every believer receives one or more spiritual gifts, but not all of
 25 these qualify a person to occupy a leadership office of an elder or deacon. Being
 26 part of the leadership structure, the elders and deacons of the local churches have
 27 the responsibility to assign every member a post where they can use their

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 91.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 91, 92.

1 spiritual gifts in harmony with each other so that the unity of the church is
2 maintained.⁶²

3 Regarding the use of spiritual gifts, not all are qualified for whatever position
4 they may “feel called” to occupy. The Bible lists qualifications for leadership
5 positions, like in the Old Testament church. Just because persons think or feel
6 they have the spiritual gift of leadership does not necessarily mean that they
7 should be ordained to the office of an elder or minister. Unless all the moral,
8 lifestyle, and gender qualifications for that office as outlined in the Bible are met,
9 even if they have the gift of leadership, they do not qualify for that office.

10 ***Qualifications for elected leadership offices in the New Testament Era***

11 Near the end of his long ministry, under divine inspiration, Paul provided
12 instructions in two instances regarding the qualifications for overseers or elders.
13 At that time the churches in Ephesus and Crete were having trouble preserving
14 order and harmony. To solve this challenge to church authority, Paul spelled out
15 in great detail who was qualified to restore order and lead the church under
16 proper management.

17 In the first instance Paul instructed Timothy how to help solve the problems of
18 the church in Ephesus, the city famous for the worship of the goddess Diana
19 (Greek: Artemis; Acts 19:23-28). Paul’s instruction deals with how one should
20 behave “in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and
21 ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

22 One of the problems Paul addressed is the issue of authority in the local
23 church, where attitudes or actions of some women led to friction with the
24 leadership role of the men. In response, Paul wrote that he did not allow a
25 woman “to usurp authority over the man” (1 Tim 2:12, KJV). As the first reason
26 for male leadership, he pointed to the creation order in which God created

⁶² Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, 62; “God’s Means of Diffusing Light,” *Review and Herald*, Mar 24, 1891 and Dec 19, 1912.

1 human beings: “For Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Tim 2:12). For the
2 second argument, he used the order of transgression: “And Adam was not
3 deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim 2:14).
4 Paul’s explanation of the leadership role of the man is not cultural, as some have
5 suggested, but is based on Creation and the Fall, before any cultures had
6 developed.

7 This leadership model is in full harmony with Paul’s earlier counsel to the
8 Corinthian believers, which revealed the fundamental principles of headship in
9 the plan of salvation: “I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ,
10 the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3). Here
11 Scripture presents the three levels of submission that explain God’s leadership
12 order for the human race. The Word of God declares that the man has to
13 acknowledge Christ as his head and Lord. Next, under Christ as supreme Lord,
14 the woman is to respect and accept the leadership and protection of the man.
15 Finally, Christ, although equal with the Father, submits Himself to God’s
16 headship in harmony with His own role in the plan of salvation.

17 After restricting the leadership of the local church according to gender in 1
18 Timothy 2:12-14, Paul addressed the qualifications a man needs to have in order
19 to be the overseer or elder of the local church, recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. A
20 study of these qualifications makes it plain that the Lord, as Head of His church
21 (Eph 5:30), is interested in having His church under husbands and fathers who
22 have a proven record of successful leadership in their homes. They must be
23 accomplished leaders of their own families. The elder or minister must be “one
24 who rules his own house well, . . . for if a man does not know how to rule his
25 own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim 3:4, 5).

26 In the second instance, Paul wrote to Titus, whom he had left behind at Crete
27 to put things in order in the churches of the island. Paul provided a list of
28 qualifications that local elders must have in order to be leaders or overseers of

1 the church. Although this letter does not mention a leadership authority problem
 2 between males and females as in his letter to Timothy in Ephesus, here again
 3 Paul stipulated that the office of an elder is gender specific. He stated that an
 4 elder should be “blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not
 5 accused of dissipation of insubordination” (Titus 1:6).

6 In both these instances, the qualification requirements for elders make it clear
 7 that Jesus’ model of leadership – in Creation, in the Old Testament Church, and
 8 the New Testament Church – is gender specific, revealing that men who have
 9 been successful in leading their own families are the ones who qualify for the
 10 position of overseer or elder/minister in the church. According to these biblical
 11 requirements, women do not qualify for the position of elder/minister.

12 **Church Organization of the Remnant Church**

13 Is the model of church organization that God gave to the first Christians still
 14 the model for Seventh-day Adventists to follow until the Second Advent? Ellen
 15 G. White fully endorsed the New Testament lists of qualifications for the office of
 16 elder. Seventh-day Adventists are a theocracy. This is clear in White’s writings:
 17 “We are sacredly denominated by God and are under His theocracy.”⁶³ “The
 18 place assigned you by the Lord was under Him in the divine theocracy.”⁶⁴ “We
 19 are to work for the spiritual recovery of mankind to God, to bring them under
 20 His theocracy.”⁶⁵

21 From the very beginning of our church, God has led Seventh-day Adventists
 22 to a model of church organization that was the best for them, and He showed
 23 them how to deal with persons who felt that God had called them to the ministry
 24 while they did not have the biblical qualifications. Mrs. White was shown that
 25 these were false teachers planted by Satan to bring confusion into the church.
 26 When she asked the angel in the vision what could be done to stop this

⁶³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 7:109.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8:180.

⁶⁵ Ellen G. White, “The Secret of Successful Work,” *Bible Training School*, Sep 1, 1908.

1 confusion, he answered that they were to follow the Bible on church
 2 organization. He said, "The church must flee to God's Word and become
 3 established upon gospel order, which has been overlooked and neglected."⁶⁶
 4 There we find the biblical qualifications for the office of overseer or elder that
 5 protect the church against false teachers. Failure to follow these qualifications
 6 will lead to incorporating false teachers into the structure of the church.

7 To counteract the dangers of false teachers, by divine guidance the New
 8 Testament church was given a list of qualifications so that church leaders could
 9 safely select and appoint those truly called by God, distinguishing the true from
 10 the false teachers. Thus "the brethren chose men who had given good evidence
 11 that they were capable of ruling well their own house and preserving order in
 12 their own families, and who could enlighten those who were in darkness."⁶⁷
 13 These persons who gave evidence of successful leadership in the home were
 14 chosen to be ordained "by the laying on of hands."⁶⁸ White strongly warned the
 15 church to be on guard against false teachers. "I saw that we are no more secure
 16 from false teachers now than they were in the apostles' days; and, if we do no
 17 more, we should take as special measures as they did to secure the peace,
 18 harmony, and union of the flock. We have their example, and should follow it."⁶⁹

19 How should Seventh-day Adventists determine a person's calling? By
 20 following the Bible. White stated that "brethren of experience and of sound
 21 minds should assemble, and following the Word of God and the sanction of the
 22 Holy Spirit," they "should, with fervent prayer, lay hands upon those who have
 23 given full proof that they have received their commission of God, and set them
 24 apart to devote themselves entirely to His work. This act would show the

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 100, 101.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

1 sanction of the church to their going forth as messengers to carry the most
2 solemn message ever given to men.”⁷⁰

3 Ellen White warned that unless a man meets the biblical qualifications for
4 elder, he should not be ordained. She strongly cautioned against so-called “self-
5 sent” persons. “Men are hurried into the field who lack wisdom and judgment,
6 perhaps not ruling well their own house, and not having order or government
7 over the few that God has given them charge of at home; yet they feel capable of
8 having charge of the flock.”⁷¹ Before they ordain persons to the office of an elder,
9 Ellen White stressed that ministers should give careful attention to following the
10 Bible qualifications listed in Titus 1:5-7 and 1 Timothy 5:22. About the selection
11 of church leaders she said,

12 The apostle Paul writes to Titus: “Set in order the things that are
13 wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: if any be
14 blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused
15 of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God.”
16 [Titus 1:5-7.] It would be well for all our ministers to give heed to these
17 words and not to hurry men into office without due consideration and
18 much prayer that God would designate by His Holy Spirit whom He will
19 accept.

20 Said the inspired apostle: “Lay hands suddenly on no man.” [1 Tim
21 5:22.] In some of our churches the work of organizing and of ordaining
22 elders has been premature; the Bible rule has been disregarded, and
23 consequently grievous trouble has been brought upon the church. There
24 should not be so great haste in electing leaders as to ordain men who are
25 in no way fitted for the responsible work – men who need to be converted,
26 elevated, ennobled, and refined before they can serve the cause of God in
27 any capacity.⁷²

28
29 From this study it has become clear that Ellen G. White endorsed the biblical
30 leadership requirements for elders and ministers listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus
31 1, which are gender specific, given nearly 2000 years ago. Men are to be
32 successful leaders in the church of their own family before they should be

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 97.

⁷² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 5:617, 618.

1 appointed to take care of the larger church that is made up of many families.
2 Throughout her ministry White recommended that Seventh-day Adventists
3 follow these Bible qualifications.⁷³ This means that the ordination of a woman to
4 the office of an elder or minister is not biblical. However, her gifts are greatly to
5 be valued in the church and need to be utilized in the gospel work till the end of
6 time.

7 **The Significance of Ordination**

8 Recently it has been suggested that we should just drop the term “ordination”
9 because the term has pagan roots, and the practice has been greatly distorted by
10 the Roman Catholic Church, carrying with it the concept of sacramentalism. This
11 might have been a problem for Seventh-day Adventists had it not been for the
12 corrective influence of Ellen G. White’s writings that gave Adventists the proper
13 meaning so they can avoid the distortions connected with the word
14 “ordination.”⁷⁴

15 In her comments on the “ordination” of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3), Ellen
16 White said that it was God who “instructed the church by revelation to set them
17 apart publicly to the work of the ministry. Their ordination was a public
18 recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of
19 the gospel.”⁷⁵

20 She further explained that before the ordination service took place, God
21 already had commissioned Paul and Barnabas. Therefore, the laying on of hands
22 did not give them any special grace or added qualifications. She wrote, “Both
23 Paul and Barnabas had already received their commission from God Himself,
24 and the ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual

⁷³ See, for example, *ibid.*, 5:617; 2:620, 621; MS 104, 1901 and MS 67, 1900, in *Manuscript Releases*, 5:449, 450; Letter 164, 1902, in *Manuscript Releases*, 21:98. See also Ellen White’s comments in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 2:1009.

⁷⁴ See Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 18, 94, 161, 162.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

1 qualification."⁷⁶ Commenting on Paul's attitude, she said, "Paul did not depend
2 upon man for his ordination. He had received from the Lord his commission and
3 ordination."⁷⁷

4 If God had already commissioned them, what did the act of laying on of
5 hands during the ordination ceremony then signify to them? This act of
6 ordination signified an official installment to an office, and it now gave them the
7 authority of that office. Ellen G. White explained: "It was an acknowledged form
8 of designation to an appointed office and a recognition of one's authority in that
9 office." Through this ordination the church officially put its sign of approval on
10 these candidates: "By it the seal of the church was set upon the work of God."⁷⁸
11 Henceforth "they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but
12 to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, being invested with full
13 ecclesiastical authority."⁷⁹

14 Although ordination of persons to the biblical leadership office of elder or
15 deacon is accompanied with the laying on of hands, *not every instance of the laying*
16 *on of hands was referred to as ordination by Ellen White* . Here the practice in the
17 early days of the Adventist church is helpful. Ellen White instructed the church
18 that missionary physicians should be set apart for their work as is the minister of
19 the gospel. "The work of the true medical missionary is largely a spiritual work.
20 It includes prayer and the laying on of hands; he therefore should be as sacredly
21 set apart for his work as is the minister of the gospel. Those who are selected to
22 act the part of missionary physicians, are to be set apart as such. This will
23 strengthen them against the temptation to withdraw from the sanitarium work to
24 engage in private practice."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid., 161, 162.

⁷⁷ Ellen G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1088.

⁷⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 162.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 161.

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 5, 1908 in *Evangelism*, 546.

1 Some have concluded from this counsel that physicians who work as
 2 missionaries should be ordained to be ministers. However, Ellen White did not
 3 use the term “ordination” but spoke of setting this physician apart for a
 4 particular work. She gave two reasons why missionary physicians who do the
 5 work of the true medical missionary should be set apart. The first reason is
 6 because part of the true medical missionaries’ work “includes prayer and the
 7 laying on of hands,” they should be sacredly set apart for their work. The second
 8 reason was that the setting apart “will strengthen them against the temptation to
 9 withdraw from the sanitarium work to engage in private practice.”⁸¹ These
 10 reasons are quite different from those relating to the leadership roles associated
 11 with the work of elders and ministers, roles that involve baptizing new believers,
 12 the general oversight of a church and keeping order, organizing and raising up
 13 churches, etc. On the contrary, this laying on of hands sets missionary physicians
 14 apart for involvement in true medical missionary work, healing patients and
 15 leading them to accept the Lord Jesus Christ, and assures the physicians of their
 16 need to be closely connected with the church instead of going into private
 17 practice.

18 Another of Ellen White counsels involves some women who should be set
 19 apart for a specific part-time work.

20 Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service
 21 of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and
 22 minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this
 23 work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to
 24 counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted
 25 women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for
 26 good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building
 27 up the church.⁸²

28
 29 In this passage some have seen counsel that women should be ordained to the
 30 ministry. However, as in the case of missionary physicians, Ellen White did not

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ellen G. White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895.

1 use the word “ordination” but spoke about setting these women apart for a
2 particular work or ministry. Here are some observations. These women are part-
3 time workers who are appointed “to visit the sick, look after the young, and
4 minister to the necessities of the poor.” This appointment does not make them
5 church officers or ministers because, as White suggests, “in some cases they will
6 need to counsel with the church officers or the minister.” She indicated further
7 that “this is another means of strengthening and building up the church,”⁸³
8 which suggests that she was not referring to any existing office or ministry in the
9 church. The church leaders are advised to set them apart to this specific work “by
10 prayer and laying on of hands.”⁸⁴ The purpose of this ceremony is that “this is
11 Again this ceremony is not ordination to one of the New Testament offices, but
12 the laying on of hands sets them apart for a specific ministry that will strengthen
13 the church.

14 These instances make it clear that the laying on of hands can be used to
15 appoint church members to specific tasks or ministries, affirming the unique
16 abilities, talents, or gifts God gave them, but should not be equated with
17 ordination to a specific biblical office of leadership.

18 Ellen White indicated that the meaning of ordination was greatly perverted in
19 the history of the Church. She stated, “At a later date the rite of ordination by the
20 laying on of hands was greatly abused; unwarrantable importance was attached
21 to the act, as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination,
22 which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work.”⁸⁵ From the
23 above insights that came through Ellen G. White, Adventists have been
24 prevented from having a Catholic sacramental understanding of ordination. And
25 as long as they keep these insights in mind, Adventists will not be influenced by
26 a distorted view of ordination and can continue ordaining church leaders.

27 When a man meeting the biblical qualifications of an elder is set apart to the

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 162.

1 office of elder through the laying on of hands by the church leaders, the local
 2 church recognizes his authority in the office of elder. Now he is authorized by
 3 the local church not only to teach the truth but also to function as an overseer of
 4 that church, with all the leadership responsibilities connected to the office of
 5 elder.

6 When the elder has successfully functioned as a local church elder, the
 7 conference leadership may ordain him to the position of a minister of the world-
 8 wide church. Now the ordained minister has larger responsibilities, extending to
 9 overseeing several churches, training members, planting and organizing new
 10 churches, and is recognized as a minister of the gospel wherever he may go.

11 **Conclusion**

12 Ellen G. White's theology of ordination demonstrates the vital importance of
 13 the correct method of interpreting the Bible on ordaining women to the
 14 leadership office of elder and minister as portrayed in the Scriptures. Her
 15 writings reveal that the Bible was written for practical purposes. Its audience was
 16 the common people as well as the scholars, but it was especially written for the
 17 common people, whose interpretation when aided by the Holy Spirit accords
 18 best with the truth as it is in Jesus. A study of these writings on how to interpret
 19 the Bible brings out a wealth of principles and rules on how to approach the
 20 Bible to arrive at a correct interpretation of the Word of God.⁸⁶ These counsels on
 21 interpretation are in harmony with the principles of interpretation developed by
 22 the Protestant reformers and used by the Adventist pioneers. The validity of her
 23 hermeneutical approach has also been recognized by the current "Methods of
 24 Bible Study" document voted by the Annual Council of the Seventh-day
 25 Adventist Church in 1986.

26 In her writings Ellen White applied these principles to relationships between
 27 male and female throughout Bible in the context of all relationships in God's

⁸⁶ See P. Gerard Damsteegt, "Ellen G. White on Biblical Hermeneutics," paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Laurel, MD, January, 2013.

1 universal kingdom, including the Godhead and the realm of angels. Her writings
2 attest to the existence of a basic equality as well as a submission among all living
3 beings. She revealed that among human beings the spiritual leadership roles in
4 the home and church are gender specific. This gender-related nature of
5 leadership has been called the headship of the male. It was God's plan from the
6 very beginning of the creation of Adam and Eve and continued after their Fall
7 into sin. With Christ's First Advent as Savior and Redeemer, His goal was to
8 restore humanity into the image of God. This restoration did not abolish the
9 headship of the man, as the New Testament reveals, but placed it in a loving,
10 sacrificial leadership function in the home and in the church, a leadership that
11 God intended was to exist from the beginning, but which sin has distorted and
12 abused.

13 Ellen White indicated that not every man would qualify to be a spiritual
14 leader in the church. The Bible is very specific that only those men who have a
15 proven successful record as priests and leaders of their families would qualify.
16 How can those who fail in guiding their own families, with whom they are
17 intimately related, be able to lead successfully a church made up of many
18 families with whom they are not intimately associated? This study shows that
19 Ellen White fully supported the headship principle of the man in the home and
20 in the leadership offices of the church throughout the Old and New Testament.
21 Both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White support the view that women do
22 not meet the Bible standards for the spiritual authoritative office of an overseer,
23 elder, or minister. This explains the fact that White used the word "ordination"
24 only in connection with the New Testament biblical offices, each of them in the
25 gender-specific settings of male leadership. It would be well to pay careful
26 attention to these counsels of Ellen White, whose writings Seventh-day
27 Adventists regard as a manifestation of the Spirit of Prophecy to the Remnant
28 Church. She herself wrote, "All who believe that the Lord has spoken through
29 Sister White and has given her a message will be safe from the many delusions

1 that will come in these last days."⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3:83, 84.