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Interpreting Scripture on the Ordination of Women

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Interpreting Scripture on the Ordination of Women

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7 **Introduction**

8 The interpretation of the Bible is at the center of the current discussions of the
9 Theology of Ordination Study Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day
10 Adventists. Various studies are shared presenting arguments for or against the ordination
11 of women to the leadership positions of elder/minister/pastor in the church. The impact of
12 these presentations on the participants is mixed.

13 We might ask, “How can scholars on both sides of the issue who claim to have a high
14 view of Scripture and to accept the church’s view of how to interpret the Bible and Ellen
15 G. White’s view of Bible interpretation come to diametrically opposed views on the
16 ordination of women?” If opposite views are admitted, it would mean that the Bible and
17 the writings of Ellen White are useless in resolving the question of women’s ordination.
18 The purpose of this paper is to apply the longstanding method of Bible interpretation
19 Seventh-day Adventists have used since their origins to the issue of the ordination of
20 women to the church offices of elder and minister.

21 **The “Bible and the Bible Only” the standard of interpretation**

22 From their beginnings, Seventh-day Adventists have maintained the motto, “the Bible
23 and the Bible Only.” In interpreting Scripture they are in harmony with the Protestant
24 Reformers, saying that the Bible is the final authority for church doctrine and practice.
25 The Bible claims that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for

1 doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God
2 may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17, NKJV).¹

3 Ellen G. White affirms that the Bible is the standard by which we test every teaching
4 and practice. “The Word of God is the great detector of error; to it we believe everything
5 must be brought. The Bible must be our standard for *every doctrine and practice*. We
6 must study it reverentially. We are to receive no one’s opinion without comparing it with
7 the Scriptures. Here is divine authority which is supreme in matters of faith. It is the word
8 of the living God that is to decide all controversies.”²

9 It is not necessary to find the meaning of words or texts from non-biblical sources.
10 Ellen White recommends the Bible as the sufficient and ultimate authority, stating that
11 “Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the
12 Lord’ in its support.”³ As the Bible is the standard for every practice, it should shed light
13 on the question of whether it is proper to ordain women to the biblical leadership office
14 of elder or minister.

15 The supreme authority of the Bible is also affirmed in the Methods of Bible Study
16 Document (MBSD),⁴ which has been accepted as the fundamental exposition of Seventh-
17 day Adventists’ methods of Bible interpretation (hermeneutics). It states, “The sixty-six
18 books of the Old and New Testaments are the clear, infallible revelation of God’s will
19 and His salvation. The Bible is the Word of God, and it alone is the standard by which all
20 teaching and experience must be tested (2 Tim. 3:15, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa.
21 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Thess. 3:14; Heb. 4:12).”⁵

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all textual references are from the NKJV.

² Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 44, 45.

³ *Ibid.*, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, 1911 ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 595. Italics added.

⁴ “Methods of Bible Study Document” was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 12, 1986, and is available from <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁵ *Ibid.*, section 2. b. (1).

1 **The Bible was written for everyone**

2 In studying the question of ordination it is important to know the purpose and audience
3 of the Bible. Ellen White reminds us that the message of Scripture is practical and aimed
4 at all people. She writes, “The Bible was given for practical purposes”⁶ and “was written
5 for the common people as well as for scholars, and is within the comprehension of all.”⁷
6 “It was written,” she says, “in a plain, simple style to meet the understanding of the
7 common people.”⁸ The MBSB also affirms the practical purpose of the Bible. It states,
8 “The Scriptures were written for the practical purpose of revealing the will of God to the
9 human family.”⁹

10 Regarding understanding the Bible, Ellen White affirms that it “was designed for the
11 common people, and the interpretation given by the common people, when aided by the
12 Holy Spirit, accords best with the truth as it is in Jesus.”¹⁰ No matter the educational level
13 of a person, the truth about anything the Bible deals with, even women’s ordination, can
14 be discovered by anyone who sincerely studies the Scriptures with an open mind and
15 prays for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This concept of full access to the Scriptures by
16 all believers is fully in harmony with the principle of the priesthood of all believers
17 advocated by the apostle Peter (1 Pet 2:9). The MBSB mentions that it is through the
18 work of the Holy Spirit that the “believer” is able “to accept, understand, and apply the
19 Bible to one’s own life.”¹¹ Seventh-day Adventists, therefore, believe that interpreting the
20 Bible and understanding it is the privilege of anyone.

21 **How do we interpret the Bible?**

22 The next step in studying the subject of women’s ordination is to find biblical
23 principles for interpreting the Bible.

⁶ Ibid., *Selected Messages*, 1:20.

⁷ Ibid., *Review and Herald*, Jan 27, 1885; *ibid.*, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, 23.

⁸ Ibid., *Child Guidance*, 513, 514.

⁹ MBSB, section 4. p.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:331.

¹¹ MBSB, section 3, a.

1 *Willingness to obey.* Jesus revealed that total obedience to the Word of God is central
 2 to understanding the Bible. He taught, “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know
 3 concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority”
 4 (John 7:17). Total obedience to follow anything the Scriptures command is the key to
 5 understanding them and to solving the issues that may arise. Again Christ said, “I am the
 6 light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness” (John 8:12). If we love
 7 the light Jesus has given us, we will not walk in darkness but desire to study the
 8 Scriptures to find the truth as it is in Jesus. The MBSD states the need for the believer “to
 9 render obedience to all scriptural requirements.”¹²

10 The MBSD points out the need to follow light already given in order for us to receive
 11 the guidance of the Spirit. “Only those following the light already received can hope to
 12 receive further illumination of the Spirit.”¹³ To be sure of receiving truth or new light, the
 13 student of Scripture needs to put aside all prejudice and preconceived ideas. Interpreters,
 14 therefore, “must be willing to submit all presuppositions, opinions, and the conclusions of
 15 reason to the judgment and correction of the Word itself.”¹⁴ “The investigation of
 16 Scripture must be characterized by a sincere desire to discover and obey God’s will and
 17 word rather than to seek support or evidence for preconceived ideas.”¹⁵ Ellen White
 18 writes, “All who exalt their own opinions above divine revelation, all who would change
 19 the plain meaning of Scripture to suit their own convenience, or for the sake of
 20 conforming to the world, are taking upon themselves a fearful responsibility.”¹⁶

21 *Influence of lifestyle of the interpreter.* Ellen White also points out that obedience to
 22 the Bible’s spiritual, moral, and physical laws affects the way we interpret the Bible. Her
 23 writings show that even “differences in lifestyle can be the determining factor in why
 24 interpreters of the Bible can come to opposite conclusions on the meaning of Bible
 25 passages while using the same principles of interpretation.”¹⁷

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., section 3. c.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.d.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 268.

¹⁷ P. Gerard Damsteegt, “Ellen White, Lifestyle and Scripture Interpretation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, vol. 6, no. 2, Fall 1996, 46.

1 *Prayer and fasting.* Ellen White calls upon students of Scripture to engage in “ferve
 2 prayer”¹⁸ and states that our positions of truth should be “thoroughly and perseveringly
 3 searched, with prayer and fasting.”¹⁹ This prepares the searcher for truth for the guidance
 4 of the Holy Spirit who not only moved the writers of the Bible, but also guides those who
 5 try to understand the Bible and reveal truth for the last days.²⁰

6 *Use of the Spirit of Prophecy.* Regarding the guidance of the Holy Spirit today,
 7 Seventh-day Adventists take Ellen White’s counsels very seriously. “If White
 8 understands a passage literally, that should suggest that we take it literally as well. If she
 9 understands it within a particular context, we should take that context seriously as well.
 10 If she makes a particular application of a text, we should not lightly regard her
 11 application and readily dismiss it as not an exegetical interpretation.”²¹

12 When opponents disputed with Jesus, He questioned them about the Scriptures: “What
 13 is written in the law? How readest thou?” (Luke 10:26, KJV). The following principles
 14 are important in understanding the Bible and discovering its truths.

15 **Take the Bible as it reads**

16 Jesus pointed out that the way we read the Scriptures is important in understanding its
 17 truths. Ellen White expresses similar thoughts, showing how to take a word, text, or
 18 passage literally or symbolically. “The language of the Bible should be explained
 19 according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed.”²² In explaining
 20 the Scriptures to others it is best to share the truth about Jesus in as simple a manner as
 21 possible. Says she, “A great work can be done by presenting to the people the Bible just
 22 as it reads. . . . Admonish them to take the Bible as it is, to implore divine enlightenment,
 23 and then, when the light shines, to gladly accept each precious ray and fearlessly abide

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, “In Demonstration of the Spirit” in RH (September 4, 1888), 561.

¹⁹ Ibid., *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:708.

²⁰ Damsteegt, “Ellen G. White on Biblical Hermeneutics” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Jan. 22-24, 2013), 27-31, 51.

²¹ Edwin Reynolds, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Headship in First Corinthians” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24, 2013), 8.

²² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 599.

1 the consequences.”²³ This method would prevent people from getting confused by
 2 misinterpretations of the Bible. Ellen White counsels, “If men would but take the Bible as
 3 it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would
 4 be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ
 5 thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.”²⁴ The MBSD affirms this
 6 approach to reading the Scriptures when it states, “Seek to grasp the simple, most obvious
 7 meaning of the biblical passage being studied.”²⁵

8 A frequent reason why plain reading is not done is “an assumption that the text was
 9 culturally conditioned and that the author’s intention was misguided and there needs to be
 10 a corrective brought to the teaching based on other factors outside of the text.”²⁶ Such an
 11 assumption “is most dangerous when the outside factors are socio-cultural rather than
 12 biblical, but it can be dangerous even when there is an assumption of biblical disparity
 13 rather than of biblical unity.”²⁷ Ellen White emphasizes, “When those who profess to
 14 believe present truth come to their senses, when they accept the Word of the living God
 15 just as it reads and do not try to wrest the Scriptures, then they will build their house upon
 16 the eternal Rock, even Christ Jesus.”²⁸

17 When the apostle Paul indicated that elders who have the function of overseeing the
 18 operation of a church should be a “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2), Adventists have
 19 always taken literally what it says, that an elder should be a man, not a woman. Scholarly
 20 exegetical studies confirm that a “husband of one wife,” in its context, is gender specific
 21 and not gender inclusive.²⁹ Therefore, it cannot mean anything other than a man.

²³ Ibid., *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:388.

²⁴ Ibid., *The Great Controversy*, 599.

²⁵ MBSD, section 4. c.

²⁶ Reynolds, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 5.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 21 vol. (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981, 1990, 1991), 21:346.

²⁹ Ingo Sorke, “Adam, Where Are You? On Gender Relations,” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24, 2013); Clinton Wahlen, “Is ‘Husband of One Wife’ in 1 Timothy 3:2 Gender –Specific?” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Jan. 21-25, 2014).

1 **Study the context of the passage**

2 The historical-cultural context of texts, chapters, and books of the Bible is important
 3 because of its practical value. Ellen White remarks that “an understanding of the customs
 4 of those who lived in Bible times, of the location and time of events, is practical
 5 knowledge; for it aids in making clear the figures of the Bible and in bringing out the
 6 force of Christ’s lessons.”³⁰ In addition, it is important to carefully study not only the
 7 immediate but also the larger context of the biblical texts.

8 Ellen White warns against the practice of some who “in order to sustain erroneous
 9 doctrines or unchristian practices,” use certain “passages of Scripture separated from the
 10 context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining
 11 portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite.”³¹ The MBSD affirms the
 12 importance of context: “Study the context of the passage under consideration by relating
 13 it to the sentences and paragraphs immediately preceding and following it. Try to relate
 14 the ideas of the passage to the line of thought of the entire Bible book.”³² Furthermore,
 15 even though the Bible was given “in an ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean context, the
 16 Bible transcends its cultural backgrounds to serve as God’s Word for all cultural, racial,
 17 and situational contexts in all ages.”³³ As interesting as such cultural facts may be, the
 18 Scriptures are the final authority by which all non-biblical documents must be evaluated.

19 One example of paying close attention to the context is the Bible’s assertion that the
 20 woman was created for man as a “helper” (Gen 2:18). Some have suggested that this
 21 phrase, “a helper comparable to him,” is evidence of a functional equality between Adam
 22 and Eve. However, when we look at the larger biblical context of the word “helper”
 23 (*‘ēzer*), this interpretation is incorrect. Gerhard Pfandl points out that “Man is never said
 24 to be a helper of his wife. Whether in Genesis 2 or elsewhere, the one who gives help and
 25 the one who is helped cannot have the same level of responsibility.”³⁴ One scholar

³⁰ Ellen White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, 518.

³¹ *Ibid.*, *Great Controversy*, 521.

³² MBSD, section 4. f.

³³ MBSD, section 2, (4).

³⁴ Gerhard Pfandl, “Evaluation of Egalitarian Papers” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Jan. 21-25, 2014), 3.

1 perceptively commented that “what makes an *‘ezer* a ‘helper’ in each context is that he or
 2 she comes to the aid of someone else who bears the primary responsibility for the activity
 3 in question.”³⁵ The text, “A helper comparable to him” (NKJV), “indicates that there is a
 4 functional differentiation. When God is the helper, the functions of God and Israel are not
 5 the same. The same is true for the relationship between Adam and Eve, they had different
 6 functions.”³⁶ This can be observed throughout the Bible. The opinion that “the word
 7 ‘helper’ never refers to a subordinate person is based on the assumption that Adam and
 8 Eve were absolutely equal in every respect, which is the point to be proven.”³⁷ This
 9 shows that a careful study of the context prevents misinterpreting the Scriptures.

10 Another example of the importance of the context is the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2
 11 and 3.³⁸ In this letter almost nothing is actually written about the situation in the city of
 12 Ephesus. All we truly know about the situation in the church of Ephesus is what is
 13 recorded in Paul’s letter. This letter mentions the presence of false teachers, and the two
 14 false teachers that are mentioned are men (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17, 18; 4:14). Paul’s letter
 15 to Timothy has much to say about conduct in church (1 Tim 3:15). In the light of the
 16 plain reading of the text, Paul provides advice to the men regarding prayer (1 Tim 2:8),
 17 followed by advice to women about having modest attire (1 Tim 2:9, 10). Next Paul gives
 18 the admonition that he does not permit a woman to teach or “usurp authority over a man”
 19 (1 Tim 2:12, KJV). Paul lists two reasons for his command. “Adam was formed first,
 20 then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13). The second reason is the role of Eve during the Fall: “Adam was
 21 not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim 2:14). After
 22 Paul has made his point against a woman’s usurping authority or domineering over a
 23 man, he lists the kind of qualifications a man needs in order to be an elder or overseer in
 24 the church (1 Tim 3:1-7). A similar list of qualifications one finds in Paul’s letter to Titus
 25 in Crete (Titus 1:5-9). The fact that Paul has similar gender qualifications for an overseer
 26 in two different geographical locations reveals the universality of Paul’s instructions

³⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 129-130.

³⁶ Pfandl, “Evaluation of Egalitarian Papers,” 3.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ For the exegesis of 1 Tim 2 and 3, see Sorke, “Adam, Where Are You?”; Wahlen, “‘Husband of One Wife’ in 1 Timothy 3:2.”

1 about the gender of the overseer. The context of the message of 1 Timothy written to the
 2 church in the cosmopolitan city of Ephesus and the message of Titus 1 written to the
 3 island of Crete makes it clear that the gender requirement for an elder or overseer of the
 4 church is universal; the elder ought to be a man, not a woman.

5 **Accept the harmony between the Old and New Testaments**

6 Christ pointed out that there is a close connection between the Old and New
 7 Testaments. The Old as well as the New reveals Jesus Christ and His teachings (Mt 5:39,
 8 46). This harmony is no surprise, because Jesus stated that He was the God of the Old
 9 Testament (Ex 3:14; John 8:58). This view of the harmony between both Testaments was
 10 adopted by Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White writes, “He who gave commandment in
 11 the New Testament is the One also who gave the instruction contained in the Old
 12 Testament. The Old and New Testaments are both sacred; for they both contain the words
 13 of Christ.” We should not be “anxious to bring in something not revealed in the Word,”
 14 but to be doing those things which Christ has commanded in the Old and New
 15 Testaments.³⁹

16 She further explains, “The Old and the New Testaments are inseparable, for both are
 17 the teachings of Christ.”⁴⁰ “The New Testament explains the Old.”⁴¹ “One is not
 18 complete without the other.”⁴² We should remember that “The New Testament does not
 19 present a new religion; the Old Testament does not present a religion to be superseded by
 20 the New. The New Testament is only the advancement and unfolding of the Old.”⁴³ So in
 21 interpreting texts about relationships between the genders, we cannot limit ourselves only
 22 to Old Testament passages, but need to consider what the New Testament teaches on
 23 gender relationships. Further, we need to use the New Testament references to the Old
 24 and not disregard them or explain them away. The MBSD mentions the importance of

³⁹ *The Kress Collection*, p. 126 (Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power*, 327).

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1094.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, *Evangelism*, 578.

⁴² *Ibid.*, *Christ Object Lessons*, 126.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:392.

1 examining the complete Bible because, “when studied as a whole it depicts a consistent
2 harmonious truth.”⁴⁴

3 In the study of the relationship between man and woman before the Fall, it is the New
4 Testament that defines clearly that the man was the head or leader. The apostle Paul
5 points out that their relationship before the Fall is based on a headship principle that
6 already existed within the Godhead, a principle that explains the relationship between
7 Christ and humans, and between human beings (1 Cor 11:3, 7-9; 1 Tim 2:13).

8 **Interpret the Bible in the light of the 3 angels’ messages.**

9 In addition to the above-mentioned principles, Adventists interpret the Bible in the
10 light of the three angels’ messages of Rev. 14:6-12. The biblical end-time prophetic
11 context of the issues with which we are dealing is vital. As we live in “the time of the
12 end” (Dan 12:4), during which Satan makes war on the remnant (Rev 12:17) to deceive
13 even the elect, we need to be aware of his final strategy to deceive them. This makes it of
14 utmost importance to understand the historical and prophetic context of the rise of the
15 three angels’ messages that led to the establishment of God’s last day church.

16 The apostle Paul warned believers that before the return of Jesus Christ a most
17 dangerous apostasy would take place, revealing the man of sin, iniquity, and lawlessness.
18 This apostasy led to gross misinterpretations of the Bible, the establishment of an
19 episcopal organization of the church under the pope, the limited accessibility of the Bible
20 to the Latin Vulgate, and a time of great persecution.

21 With the invention of the printing press and the coming of the Renaissance and the
22 Protestant Reformation, God raised up leaders who translated the Bible from the original
23 languages and made the Word of God again accessible to the common people. The truth
24 these leaders discovered in the Bible and the principles they developed for its
25 interpretation brought about a revival in Bible study that led to the rejection of papal
26 leadership of the church and a movement towards a restoration of the New Testament
27 model of church leadership.

⁴⁴ MBSD, section 2 (3).

1 During the centuries following the Reformation, many Protestants did not continue
2 their focused study of the Bible as had the major Reformers. As they directed their
3 attention to the writings of these reformers instead of to the Scriptures themselves, and
4 under the influence of the emerging spirit of rationalism and worldliness, the
5 Reformation stagnated. But starting in the latter part of the 18th century, a series of
6 providential events such as the momentous earthquake of Lisbon in 1755, the
7 supernatural Dark Day of 1780, the French Revolution that led to the captivity of Pope
8 Pius VI in 1798, and the falling of the stars in 1833 brought about a revival in study of
9 the prophecies about the return of Christ. This revival led to the Great Second Advent
10 Movement of the 1840s, with its worldwide impact, and eventually developed into the
11 Seventh-day Adventist Church with a mission to proclaim the three angels' messages of
12 Rev. 14:6-12 as Jesus' last message of mercy to a lost world. This message proclaimed
13 Christ's righteousness in the context of a call to repentance because the hour of His
14 judgment has come, the fall of Babylon, and the restoration of the Sabbath as part of
15 God's law. Those who joined this movement keep God's commandments and the faith of
16 Jesus (Rev 14:12).

17 **Adventist principles of interpreting the Bible**

18 Prophecy shows that the Lord led this prophetic Advent movement, whose historical
19 rise is pictured in Revelation 10. God chose William Miller as leader of the Great
20 Second Advent Movement. To establish this movement on a firm foundation, Miller was
21 frequently visited by angels who provided him with great insights into the prophecies that
22 are to prepare people for the Second Advent.⁴⁵ Much of the Movement's success was
23 because its participants used principles of Bible interpretation that came from the
24 Protestant Reformation. Adventist doctrine is based on these biblical principles as
25 formulated by William Miller. Ellen G. White fully endorses these principles of Bible
26 interpretation. She writes: "Those who are engaged in proclaiming the third angel's
27 message are searching the Scriptures upon the same plan that Father Miller adopted."

⁴⁵ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 229.

1 Ellen White enumerates the following principles of Miller and describes them as “simple
2 but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation.”⁴⁶

3 Miller’s first rule is that “Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject
4 presented in the Bible.”⁴⁷ Every word or text on a subject is to make its proper
5 contribution to that subject studied throughout the Bible. The interpreter needs to study
6 the immediate context as well as the larger context of a chapter, book, or the whole Bible.
7 In a similar manner, the MBSD points to the importance of the context. “Study the
8 context of the passage under consideration by relating it to the sentences and paragraphs
9 immediately preceding and following it. Try to relate the ideas of the passage to the line
10 of thought of the entire biblical book.”⁴⁸ It cautions, “Before going outside of the local
11 literary context, the text must first be understood within its own context. Subsequently, it
12 may be appropriate to enlarge the context to the book, the author, the Testament, even the
13 entire canon.”⁴⁹ If we apply Miller’s first rule to the topic of ordination, every word in a
14 passage or text relating to ordination needs to be studied throughout the Bible before a
15 conclusion can be made.

16 The second rule is that “All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent
17 application and study.”⁵⁰ One must consult the whole Bible in the study of a subject. No
18 final conclusion about women’s ordination should be made about a passage in the Old
19 Testament without studying it in the light of the New Testament.

20 The third rule is that “Nothing revealed in Scripture can or will be hid from those who
21 ask in faith, not wavering.”⁵¹ The Bible provides the solution to the controversies in the
22 church, including the subject of women’s ordination.

23 The fourth rule is that “To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the
24 subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can

⁴⁶ Ibid., “Notes of Travel,” *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ MBSD, section 4, f.

⁴⁹ Reynolds, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 8.

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

1 form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error.”⁵² One cannot come to
 2 a sound conclusion on a particular doctrine or teaching without looking at all texts related
 3 to the topic studied, comparing Scripture with Scripture. This approach, called the
 4 analogy of Scripture principle, is fully endorsed by the MBSD: “The meaning of words,
 5 texts, and passages is best determined by diligently comparing scripture with scripture.”⁵³
 6 Thus one can only come to the correct understanding on the ordination of women when
 7 all passages dealing with the relationships of men and women as they are connected to
 8 ordination have been studied. A careful exegetical study of Genesis 1 to 3, 1 Corinthians
 9 11 and 14, 1 Timothy 2 and 3, and Titus 1 reveals that the Bible teaches that men, not
 10 women, qualify for the church offices of elder and minister.⁵⁴ Failure to follow this
 11 approach has led to a misinterpretation regarding who qualifies as leaders to be ordained.
 12 This rule is a key component of the principle that Scripture is its own interpreter.

13 Some have stated that in Genesis 1 and 2 there is no evidence for the headship or
 14 leadership of Adam. However, careful reading of the first few chapters of Genesis shows
 15 that the Bible reveals the headship of Adam. In the first three chapters of the Book of
 16 Genesis God introduces us to the creation of the human race. In the first chapter He
 17 reveals that both male and female are created in the image of God. They are commanded
 18 to be fruitful and multiply, populate the earth and subdue it, and exercise dominion over
 19 all living things (Gen 1:26-28). Interpreting this chapter by following the principle of the
 20 plain reading of the chapter shows that both male and female have a basic equality of
 21 nature, essence, or being (ontological equality), because they are created in the image of
 22 God.

23 In the second chapter the Lord God explains in detail how He created man and
 24 woman. Most of the scenario deals with the creation of the first man, called Adam. The
 25 chapter begins by describing the formation of the man in simple terms, “the Lord God
 26 formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ MBSD, section 4. e.

⁵⁴ Paul Ratsara and Daniel K. Bediako, “Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3: Ontological Equality and Role Differentiation” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24, 2013); Reynolds, “Biblical Hermeneutics” ; Sorke, “Adam, Where Are You?”; Wahlen, “‘Husband of One Wife’ in 1 Timothy 3:2.”

1 man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). Next the Lord God prepared a garden and gave
2 Adam the responsibility “to tend and keep it “(Gen 2:15). Then He commanded Adam
3 regarding what he could do and gave him a warning about what he was forbidden to do:
4 “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may
5 freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the
6 day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen 2:16, 17). Then He brought the animals
7 and birds to Adam and gave him the responsibility to name them. “And whatever Adam
8 called each living creature, that was its name” (Gen 2:19). As a result of this assignment
9 Adam discovered his own need: “There was not found a helper corresponding to him”
10 (Gen 2:20). To alleviate Adam’s lack, “the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on
11 Adam, and he slept, and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. From
12 this rib the Lord God made a women and brought her to the man” (Gen 2:21, 22). Then
13 Adam said, “She shall be called Women, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:23).
14 From this experience the Bible points out that in order to consummate a marriage
15 relationship the man must take the initiative and leave his family to become united to his
16 wife (Gen 2:24).

17 What type of relationship existed between the man and the woman at this time? Here
18 we need to follow the important rule in Bible interpretation of consulting the whole Bible
19 to see if there are any other references about the relationship between the man and the
20 woman in Genesis 2 before sin. We find that there are New Testament verses which are
21 particularly helpful because “the New Testament explains the Old.”⁵⁵ The apostle Paul
22 points out that Adam and Eve’s relationship before the Fall was based on a
23 headship/leadership principle that already existed within the Godhead and which explains
24 the relationship between Christ and humans, and between human beings. In the context of
25 how to behave in church, Paul wants believers to know this headship principle teaches
26 that “the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is
27 God” (1 Cor. 11:3). This reveals that as God the Father is the head of Christ, so Christ is
28 the head of every man, and man is the head of woman.

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 578.

1 The New Testament provides additional insight into the relationship between a man
2 and a woman through Paul's comment that man "is the image and glory of God; but the
3 woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor 11:7). The reason for these differences in glory is
4 based on the origin of the woman in Genesis 2. Paul states, "For man is not from woman,
5 but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1
6 Cor 11:8, 9). The implications of the pre-Fall headship on the early Christians were that
7 man fulfills his headship position through his leadership in the home and, if selected, in
8 the church as well. The woman was to show her compliance with this divine principle by
9 having respect for the man's leadership in the church as well as in the home. In Paul's
10 time, in church, headship was demonstrated by the man having his head uncovered but
11 the woman by having her head covered. Today the headship principle is still respected by
12 those who accept the Bible as the supreme authority because it is based on a pre-Fall
13 principle. Although this principle may be expressed differently in Adam's days than in
14 Paul's Corinth or later in other societies, yet wherever this principle is honored it will
15 result in respect for the leadership of man and a voluntary submissiveness of the woman
16 in the church and in the home.

17 The New Testament brings out further evidence regarding relationships from Paul's
18 instructions about headship toward the end of his life. In his letter to Timothy, Paul
19 reiterates this headship principle, illustrating it by referring to the creation of the man in
20 Genesis 2. Stressing the importance of how to behave in church, "the house of God,
21 which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15),
22 Paul writes that he does not permit women to teach or "to have authority" (1 Tim 2:12) or
23 "to usurp authority over the man" (KJV). The reason he alluded to is the importance of
24 the pre-Fall creation of the man in Genesis 2: "for Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1
25 Tim 2:13).

26 In explaining the relationship between the man and the woman before sin entered the
27 world, the New Testament clearly teaches that the man has been given the leadership
28 function in the home and in the church. As headship and submission is a principle in
29 heaven, so it is on earth among human beings who have been created to reflect the image
30 of God.

1 In Genesis 3 the Bible relates how sin came into the world. Here we observe a
2 dialogue between the woman and Satan who is successful in deceiving her, causing her to
3 think that God was withholding something good from her. In trusting Satan more than
4 God, she ate from the forbidden fruit and was able to convince Adam to follow her in
5 disobeying their Creator. With the Fall, Adam's headship role becomes more
6 pronounced. It was only after Adam, as leader, followed his wife in the path of
7 disobedience and sinned that their eyes were opened and they realized their sinful
8 condition. Next the Lord God appeared on the scene and began to question Adam as the
9 responsible leader, after which He addressed the woman and then Satan. Then He
10 decreed the punishment on each one of them, and Adam was given the death penalty,
11 which also applied to the woman. Finally Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden,
12 his wife following him.

13 The Fall of Adam and Eve brought a change in their relationship. The divine
14 punishment on the woman was that "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall
15 rule over you" (Gen 3:16). For the significance of this punishment we need to look
16 throughout the Bible. Again, when we use the rule of comparing Scripture with Scripture,
17 the New Testament provides the answer on how it affected the relationship between male
18 and female. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he holds Adam, not Eve, responsible for the
19 entrance of sin into the human race. This indicates that Paul sees Adam as the leader of
20 the first couple. Paul contrasts Adam's sin that brought death with Christ's death that
21 brought righteousness. "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin,
22 and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—. . . For if by the one man's
23 offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace
24 and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Therefore,
25 as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even
26 so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification
27 of life" (Rom 5:12, 17, 18). Clearly, Paul's contrasting of Adam's role with that of Christ
28 is rooted in his understanding of Adam's leadership.

29 The New Testament provides an additional argument for why a woman should not
30 have spiritual authority over a man. The apostle Paul points to Genesis 3: "Adam was not

1 deceived, but the women being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim 2:14). Even in
2 his following his wife’s leadership in disobedience, the Bible continued to honor Adam’s
3 role as head of the human race and his family.

4 Paul does not end merely by forbidding spiritual leadership authority to women in
5 church. In the next chapter (1 Tim 3) he progresses by indicating who qualifies for
6 leadership in God’s church. He points out that not every man qualifies, but only certain
7 men who meet proper standards. These qualifications are that a church leader, meaning
8 an overseer or elder, needs to be a male who is faithful to his wife, giving evidence of
9 successful leadership in his family so he can likewise fulfill faithful leadership in the
10 church, which is made up of many families. In addition, he needs to be blameless,
11 temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, to exhort and
12 convict by sound doctrine those who contradict, and have a good reputation among
13 outsiders (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-7). It is obvious that not all men qualify for the sacred
14 calling of leading the church congregation but only those who have a proven record of
15 successful leadership in the home and have a high spiritual and moral lifestyle. This
16 interpretation of the Creation story through the plain reading of the text and the use of the
17 principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture between the Old and the New Testament
18 in the proper context shows that between Adam and Eve there is an equality of nature,
19 being, or essence, and functional differences at the same time.

20 Today there are interpreters who limit their interpretation of the relationship between
21 male and female to Genesis 1 to 3. From this limited context they conclude that there is
22 no headship principle in chapter 2 before the Fall. Only in chapter 3 is the man placed in
23 a leadership position over Eve until the coming of Christ, who will come to restore the
24 equality between male and female as it existed before the Fall. Consequently they miss
25 the inspired commentary on the Genesis passages in the New Testament by the apostle
26 Paul and arrive at serious erroneous conclusions that destroy the special leadership role of
27 the man in the home and in the church with the supportive function of the woman in both
28 of these positions.

29 The fifth of Miller’s rules is that “Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule
30 of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or

1 desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his
 2 guessing, desire, creed, or wisdom is my rule, and not the Bible.”⁵⁶ The MBSD affirms
 3 this principle by stating, “the Bible is its own best interpreter and when studied as a
 4 whole it depicts a consistent, harmonious truth.”⁵⁷ This means that our conclusions must
 5 be derived from the Bible only, not from extra-biblical sources, which lead to
 6 assumptions about extra-biblical cultures and guessing as to how they may or may not
 7 have impacted the church, thereby creating a true or false scenario by which we interpret
 8 Scripture.

9 Commenting on Miller’s rules of Bible interpretation, Ellen White says, “in our study
 10 of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth.”⁵⁸ As we have seen, the
 11 MBSD fully endorses these principles of Bible interpretation.

12 Since its beginnings, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has followed Miller’s
 13 principles. Immediately after listing these rules, Ellen White warns against basing our
 14 faith on emotions, which is one of the delusions of the time of the end: “Genuine faith is
 15 founded on the Scriptures; but Satan uses so many devices to wrest the Scriptures and
 16 bring in error, that great care is needed if one would know what they really do teach. It is
 17 one of the great delusions of this time to dwell much upon feeling, and to claim honesty
 18 while ignoring the plain utterances of the word of God because that word does not
 19 coincide with feeling. Many have no foundation for their faith but emotion.”⁵⁹ Thus, a
 20 person’s sense of God’s calling to church leadership as elder or minister must be tested
 21 by the qualifications listed in the Bible, not depending just on the realm of experience.

22 **Principles from the Methods of Bible Study Document**

23 Besides the above cited principles of interpretation from the MBSD, the document
 24 provides the following additional helpful insights. The MBSD rejects the use of the

⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884.

⁵⁷ MBSD, section 2, a, (3).

⁵⁸ Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884. For an extensive presentation of biblical principles of interpreting the Bible and their endorsement by Ellen White, see P. Gerard Damsteegt, “Ellen G. White and Biblical Hermeneutics” (presented at the January 2013 meeting of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

1 historical critical method of Bible study, and “even a modified use of this method that
 2 retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is
 3 unacceptable.”⁶⁰ Edwin Reynolds makes some insightful observations in his analysis of
 4 this document.⁶¹ He concludes that interpreters are to avoid “keeping the principle of
 5 criticism that still undermines the message of the Scriptures by making the interpretation
 6 subject to external factors based on human reasoning rather than to the internal control of
 7 the ‘analogy of Scripture’ principle.”⁶²

8 The MBSD addresses the issue of the Bible and culture and whether the Bible
 9 messages are culturally conditioned.⁶³ Seventh-day Adventists believe that “the message
 10 of Scripture transcends its cultural backgrounds and sets forth principles that are valid for
 11 all people at all times and places.” Yet a study of the texts should not ignore the historical
 12 and cultural background. The MBSD states, “In connection with the study of the biblical
 13 text, explore the historical and cultural factors. Archaeology, anthropology, and history
 14 may contribute to understanding the meaning of the text.”⁶⁴ But the document does not
 15 advocate an approach that supports a belief “that the text was culturally conditioned such
 16 that it does not set forth universal principles but only that which was perceived by the
 17 penman to be valid for the local situation at the time or, even worse, reflects then-current
 18 prejudices and misunderstandings. Thus its relevance for other times and places is muted,
 19 and it may not even reflect divine truths or principles.”⁶⁵ We should keep this caution in
 20 mind in studying women’s ordination, including the biblical passages of 1 Corinthians 11
 21 and 14, 1 Timothy 2 and 3, and Titus 1.

22 Following carefully the principles and rules described in the MBSD will guard against
 23 an approach to the Bible that has been called “trajectory.” This approach assumes that
 24 there is a development of Bible truth on specific teachings that are not clearly present in
 25 the Bible, but through the light of the gospel this truth has become accepted in today’s
 26 society. Trajectory arguments regarding slavery, use of alcohol, and vegetarianism have

⁶⁰ MBSD, section 1, Preamble.

⁶¹ Reynolds, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 1-12.

⁶² Ibid., 2.

⁶³ MBSD, section 2. a. Origin.

⁶⁴ Ibid., section 4. k.

⁶⁵ Reynolds, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 3.

1 been used to justify the ordination of women. The danger in using this line of reasoning
2 lies in “creating a ‘trajectory’ ... when there is nothing within the text that would point to
3 such a trajectory, or even worse, when such a trajectory actually would be contradictory
4 to the explicit intention of the text itself.”⁶⁶ This is the case in using trajectory reasoning
5 in support of women’s ordination. Limitations of trajectory arguments can be seen below
6 in Appendix A.

7 **Conclusion**

8 This study focused on the fundamental principles of Bible interpretation used in the
9 study of the ordination of women to the offices of elder and minister. The foremost
10 principle is that the Bible and the Bible only is the standard of interpretation. Next, that
11 the Bible is a revelation of God’s will for all people and that anyone, no matter the level
12 of their education, can understand its message. It is important to take the Bible as it reads
13 rather than to put a different meaning on the text than its plain reading. One needs to keep
14 in mind its context. This involves the immediate context of the text or passage as well as
15 its larger context as a Bible book or the whole Bible. Furthermore, we should recognize
16 the harmonious relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the expanding
17 understanding of the Old Testament text through the New Testament.

18 Adventists need to understand that, as the prophetic remnant, they should look at these
19 texts in the light of the three angels’ messages, a study which will bring a unique
20 perspective to the understanding of the text. Here Adventists preserve the contribution of
21 the Protestant Reformers to the interpretation of the Bible, and that of William Miller,
22 leader of the Great Second Advent Movement, with his formulation of the principles of
23 Bible interpretation that have been endorsed by Ellen White. Adventists also give careful
24 attention to the abundant counsels of Ellen White regarding how to interpret the
25 Scriptures. The 1986 Methods of Bible Study Document summarizes Adventist principles
26 of Bible interpretation and is helpful in applying the above principles and methods of
27 Bible interpretation.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.

1 When applied to the issue of whether to ordain women to the church offices of elder or
2 minister, all these methods of interpretation, used from our movement’s beginnings,
3 provide sound evidence in support of male leadership in the home and in the church.
4 Though women and men share an equality of nature, being, or essence, their functions are
5 different. A study of Genesis 1 to 3 reveals that since the creation of Adam and Eve there
6 is an equality of nature with functional differences between men and women. A plain
7 reading of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:5, 6 clearly states that men are to be elders or
8 overseers; therefore, women do not qualify for the ordination to the offices of elder or
9 minister. It is God’s design for the human race that only men who fulfill the biblical
10 qualifications should function as elders or ministers in the church. These findings have
11 been adequately supported in papers presented to the meetings of the General Conference
12 Theology of Ordination Study Committee in 2013 and 2014.

13

14 **Appendix A**

15 **Remember Slavery, Social Welfare, and the Trajectory of** 16 **Scripture⁶⁷**

17 *Trajectory argument.* The New Testament neither abolishes slavery nor prohibits the
18 use of alcohol. And it does not even come close to recommending a vegetarian diet.
19 Adventists recognize these reforms as logical outgrowths from ideas that were being
20 taught by prophets. The trajectory of the Bible’s teachings on these points warrants taking
21 a high stand today. Society wasn’t ready for these reforms two thousand years ago, but
22 today society is ready for them. In the same way, the trajectory of Scripture showed a far
23 greater respect for women than was current in the days of the prophets. On the basis of
24 this trajectory we should be able to extrapolate today a policy devoid of gender
25 discrimination.

⁶⁷ Adapted from Eugene Prewitt, “Questions Asked by Those Who Favor Women’s Ordination,” in *Women’s Ordination: 31 Popular Arguments and Biblical Answers* (Roseville, CA: Amazing Facts, 2013), 37-39.

1 *Reply.* First, the Bible does teach abstinence from alcohol. While it is not within the
2 scope of this paper to address this issue thoroughly, it is reasonable to say that “wine”
3 includes grape juice since the Bible speaks of the “wine” in the “cluster.” And when
4 grapes are crushed, it is in a “winepress,” not a “juice press.” The fact that wine could age
5 and become intoxicating is addressed in those New Testament passages that forbid
6 drunkenness. Furthermore, we are a royal priesthood. In other words, we are kings and
7 priests. And in the Bible intoxicating beverages are forbidden to two classes of persons,
8 royalty and priests. And so it is that the Bible opposes the use of alcoholic beverages to
9 Adventists.

10 And what does the Bible teach about slavery? God’s law established that men might
11 indenture, bind or bond themselves either by crime or by debt or even through a desire of
12 some advantage (such as the hand of a daughter.) This “slavery” has none of the moral
13 evils that come with a more modern idea of slavery. Indentured service had an end at the
14 years of release and jubilee, showing that slaves were of the same class of men as were
15 free persons. The rights of slaves, even before their date with freedom, were protected by
16 Moses’ laws. (The rights of the employer were also protected.)

17 But under typical pagan nations slavery had no such protections and regulations as it
18 did under God’s law. Slavery under such persons varied from simple voluntary domestic
19 service to forced labor of a cruel type. You might remember how David and his men
20 encountered the Egyptian slave of an Amalekite who had abandoned the sick man to
21 suffer and starve to death. That was the wicked kind of slavery that blighted American
22 history. It wasn’t the servanthood of the Jews.

23 Then in the New Testament, Rome had real slaves (though some rose to important
24 responsibilities in the empire). And as Rome was not a subsidiary of the Christian church,
25 the church could not abolish Roman slavery. What the church did do is teach slaves how
26 to be good slaves and masters how to be good masters. And to be a good master was to
27 regard your servants as deserving compensation.

28 Col 4:1 Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing
29 that ye also have a Master in heaven.

1 So, to get back to our topic, it just isn't true that the Bible taught faulty principles
2 regarding intoxication and slavery. The Bible is a harmonious and authoritative whole.

3 The same is true regarding diet. In the time of Jesus, before interstate transport of fresh
4 foods, it was not possible for a poor Palestinian to get a year-round variety of fresh fruits
5 and vegetables. Refrigeration was not yet invented and even sealed-tight canning was yet
6 a future development. What, then, is the best diet that a poor working man could eat? It
7 would be bread and fish supplemented with seasonal fruits and vegetables. There are
8 places in India today where we should never encourage the poor people to become
9 vegans. There are too many homes that subsist on white rice and the products of the goat,
10 chickens, and neighbors' water buffalo. The healthiest diet for such a person includes
11 eggs.

12 What I am saying is that Jesus lived perfectly. He did what was best to do. And while
13 He was not a vegetarian, He was a health reformer and even a medical missionary.
14 Vegetarianism is not an addition to scriptural teaching; it is merely an application of New
15 Testament principles directly to the plentiful produce of the 21st century. Jesus would be
16 a vegetarian in North America and even in rural India if He was not dependent there on
17 the charity of the poorest persons.

18 What have these things to do with women's ordination? Not much. That is, unless you
19 think that the Bible is sub-ideal; unless you think that its values were inclining upward
20 and were left for us to perfect. We shouldn't buy the idea that the Bible needs
21 improvement. The refining of those words was done before they were penned. We have
22 the books of the Bible delivered to us as pure truth.

23 Ps 12:6 The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of
24 earth, purified seven times.

25 **Does the Old and New Testament assume acceptability or does it**
26 **condemn the practice of slavery?**

27 Under the Theocracy slavery was a protected civil institution that had short limits
28 (Exodus 21:2) except by the consent of the slave. It was not racism, but respectable

1 indenturement. Even of Gentiles there was a limit set by Jubilee. The race of the
2 Gibeonites, by contrast, were punished with servitude to the nation. God respected their
3 rights as was seen in His judgments against Israel after Saul's ill-judged slaughter of
4 them. Under the Roman power, God's church converted slaves, educated them and did
5 not become an agent of social justice. (How could it? It was itself lethally persecuted.)
6 Slavery as practiced in the Hebrew economy is not to be condemned. Many would be
7 benefitted by indenturing themselves today. But slavery as racism is condemned in the
8 Bible where all men are made of one blood. As conducted in the USA it is condemned by
9 Bible principles where even Daniel and Joseph, slaves, were obliged to put personal
10 religion above the demands of their masters. Slavery where one man owns another is
11 condemned by even a plain and simple reading of the Bible, especially of Philemon.