

Position #1 Report of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee
Presented by Clinton Wahlen to the General Conference Executive Committee
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Introduction

Good morning!

I have good news for us this morning: There is far more that unites us than divides us . . . even on the subject of women's ordination.

1. **Christ is the Head of the Church:** We all agree that Christ is the Head of the church, and that it belongs to Christ alone (Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:10).
2. **The Great Commission is for all:** We all agree that the Great Commission applies to every Christian, men, women, and children, and that the Spirit works through every believer around the world to accomplish that work.
3. **Spiritual Gifts are Gender-Inclusive:** We all agree that every believer receives one or more spiritual gifts, and so the gifts are gender-inclusive.
4. **The Priesthood of All Believers:** We all agree that all Christians are part of the priesthood of all believers and have direct access to God through prayer, and that pastors and elders are not priests.
5. **Full Equality by Creation:** We all agree that both men and women are fully equal because all human beings are created in the image of God.
6. **Unity in Christ:** We all agree that in Christ "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" and "heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:28-29).
7. **The End-time Outpouring of God's Spirit:** We all believe in the end-time promise of Joel 2 in the Latter Rain: "I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

[Position #1](#) affirms all of these Biblical teachings. It is not in conflict with any of them.

In addition, the TOSC "Consensus Statement" shows that more than 90% of the committee agreed that the ordination of church leaders is biblical (["Study Committee Votes Consensus Statement on 'Theology of Ordination,'" Adventist Review](#) [August 15, 2013], p. 8, emphasis supplied, also in all other quotations). We can only summarize a few points here:

1. Ordination is a biblical practice, setting apart ministers who oversee the church when they meet the Scriptural qualifications.
2. The New Testament identifies two categories of ordained leaders:
 - Elders, including "supervising" elders who oversee multiple congregations); and
 - Deacons.
3. Some individuals are to be ordained for "global Church ministry."

The Main Question

There was only one question on which we had no consensus:

Do the biblical qualifications for the gospel minister who oversees the church allow a woman to be ordained to this office?

In answering this question, we should not overlook the fact that two of the three groups found clear evidence in Scripture for a biblical model of male leadership. Note this statement from “Position Summary #3”:

We believe that there is a biblical model of male ecclesiological *leadership* that has validity across time and culture. – *TOSC Report*, p. 100 (emphasis original).

So, even on women’s ordination there is a clear biblical answer. It’s found in 1 Timothy (see [“Is ‘Husband of One Wife’ in 1 Timothy 3:2 Gender-Specific?”](#)).

Gender-Inclusive vs. Gender-Exclusive

Unlike most of Paul’s letters, 1 Timothy is not written to a particular church. Like Titus, it’s written to a gospel minister. Its purpose is to give Timothy instructions on church order: “I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

1. Gender-Inclusive (1 Tim. 2:1-7)

When Paul wants to be gender-inclusive, he uses gender-inclusive language as he does repeatedly in 1 Timothy 2 (Gk. *pas, anthrōpos*):

- Prayer should be offered for all people (v. 1);
- God desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (v. 4).
- Christ gave Himself as a ransom for all (v. 6).

2. Gender-Specific (1 Tim. 2:8-15)

Paul also uses gender-specific language to explain how men and women should relate to each other in the worship setting.

Men

- Men are to take the lead in the church’s worship and prayer (v. 8).

Women

- Women should dress modestly

- They should not try to usurp the established teaching authority of the minister who oversees the church (vv. 9-12).

Paul bases this teaching on Genesis 2 and 3, which we'll come to in a moment: "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (vv. 13-14).

3. Gender-Exclusive (1 Tim. 3:1-12)

Beginning in chapter three with the qualifications for church officers, Paul uses even more specific, gender-exclusive language. He does not refer to just "anyone" but says, according to the NASB preferred by Position #2 (*TOSC Report*, p. 69, n. 9), "If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do" (v. 1).

Then he lists the qualifications for this office:

"An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife. . . ." (v. 2).

This is not just gender-specific, its gender-exclusive, for several reasons:

1. It is a fixed requirement, appearing three times: here and in Titus 1:6 for overseers/elders, and for deacons in 1 Tim. 3:12.
2. Women assistants, sometimes called deaconesses, are referred to in v. 11 as a group separate from both elders and deacons, with a different list of qualifications, so they cannot be included in either one.
3. Paul uses the opposite phrase, "wife of one husband" in 1 Tim. 5:9, referring to widows. That means Paul meant what he said.
4. If Paul had wanted to be gender-neutral, he could have combined these two phrases, "the overseer . . . must be the husband of one wife or the wife of one husband." But Paul didn't do this.
5. Paul deals, in order, with smaller and smaller groups: first "all" (gender-inclusive), then "men" and "women" (gender-specific), and finally "husband of one wife" (gender-exclusive).

Note that the text says "must" (Gk. *dei*). The wording is as clear in Greek as it is in English. It's as clear as the command to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exod. 20:8).

Of course, this Biblical command about ministers who oversee the church is not one of the ten commandments, but it's still a command. The command to abstain from unclean foods is not one of the ten but it's still a command. So is Jesus' command to follow His example in washing each other's feet; and His command in connection with the Lord's Supper, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24) Or the Great Commission to, "Go, and make disciples . . ." (Matt. 28:19). None of these are part of the Ten Commandments, but they're still commands. They're not optional.

When Paul says “must,” it’s very clear. He even chose the strongest possible command form in Greek to say it.

The fact that Paul uses the creation order from Eden as the basis for the roles of men and women in the church shows two things: (1) this is a theological issue, not just a practical issue; and (2) these roles were God’s ideal before the fall and therefore reflect God’s ideal for us today.

Studying the account of creation and the fall, we find that Paul and Genesis are in perfect harmony. They do not contradict each other.

Creation Order Leadership in Genesis

Genesis 1 describes the creation of the first human beings in these words: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27.). Since both man and woman are created in God’s image, both have equal value. Modern culture wants us to think that equal means identical. But equality does not destroy our uniqueness. Adam and Eve were alike in the ability to think and reason but different in temperament and body. They were also created by God at different times.

It is no secret why Adam was created first: because God gave him the primary leadership responsibility.

Order of Creation:

- Man – to keep the garden (Gen. 2:15)
– told what to eat and what to avoid (Gen. 2:16-17)
- Woman – given as man’s “helper” (Gen. 2:18).

Manner of Creation

- Eve shares with Adam the divine dominion (Gen. 1:26)
- He cannot lead without her because she is his helper (Gen. 2:18, 20).

In fact, the climax of this second part of the creation account is not the creation of Eve but the creation of the family. Just as the Sabbath forms the climax of the first half of the creation account (Gen. 2:1-3), God’s marriage of the man and woman is the pinnacle of the second half (Gen. 2:24; cf. Matt. 19:4-6).

Genesis 3 relates the story of the Fall, and a reversal of the creation order leadership principle.

Paul’s reasoning in 1 Timothy 2 and 3 takes us back to this foundational leadership principle based on the creation order: “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (v. 13). By mentioning the creation order, man first and then woman, Paul brings us back to

Eden and shows that its ideal leadership arrangement is valid in the church for all time.

Women Keeping Silent in Church

While 1 Timothy 3:2 is very clear—that the minister who oversees the church “must be the husband of one wife,” some say that if we’re going to take this text literally, then, according to 1 Corinthians 14, women must keep silent in church.

Even with this passage, a plain reading of the text applies. Let’s consider some important points about this passage:

1. Unlike the Pastoral Epistles of Timothy and Titus, which were written to ministers serving many different areas, 1 Corinthians was written to a specific church in Corinth.
2. It was written primarily to address specific issues and questions that came up in Corinth.
3. 1 Corinthians 14 addresses the practices of three groups who were causing significant disruptions in the worship service at Corinth.
4. These disruptions were caused by men as well as women:
 - a. men were speaking in tongues without an interpreter (vv. 27-28).
 - b. men were prophesying without interpretation (vv. 29-33).
 - c. women “kept asking questions” (Gk. *eperōtatōsan*) while people were speaking (vv. 34-35).
5. Paul commands all three groups to “keep silent”—using a very strong word in Greek (Gk. *sigāō*), a word he doesn’t use in 1 Timothy where he instructs women during the worship service to learn quietly (1 Tim. 2:11-12).

We need to remember Paul is not talking about a Sabbath School class, but explaining how the Christians in Corinth can preserve reverence and decorum in worship.

Religious Offices in the OT and the NT

Let’s return now to our main question: can women also be ordained to serve as gospel ministers who oversee the church?

To answer this question fully, we must look at what the entire Bible says—briefly because of time.

While we see a variety of female Bible characters who have important roles throughout Scripture (e.g., Miriam and Deborah in the Old Testament; Mary, Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia and others in the New Testament), two key points stand out:

- No woman was ever given a priestly role in the Old Testament.
- And no woman in the New Testament ever functioned as an apostle or gospel minister overseeing the church.

Jesus, as the Head of God's church in both the Old and New Testaments, has made very clear by precept and by practice who is to be ordained to this office.

1. Old Testament

In the Old Testament, even though Israel was a priesthood of believers (Exod. 19:5-6), God commanded that *priests* and *Levites*—all men—be set apart to lead Israel in worship and religious instruction (Exod. 40:12-16; 29:9; Num. 8:10, 18-20; see [Position #1](#), 21-22). For both the priests and the Levites, clear qualifications and rituals were commanded for their ordination. These qualifications were not optional.

2. New Testament

In the New Testament church, Jesus ordained twelve men as apostles. They were His gospel ministers to oversee the church and were commissioned to ordain other leaders from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (Matt. 28:19-20; Rev. 14:6).

The gender requirements were not temporary. Even though Jesus and Paul emphasized that the gospel and even leadership was open to the Gentiles, the gender requirement was never changed. Paul refers to the creation order to show its applicability for all time.

Paul and Barnabas “ordained elders in every church” and Paul likewise instructed Titus, “appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5).

In actual fact, gender is the fundamental qualification upon which the others are all built and “is a clear, unambiguous requirement that gives no room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding.” ([Position #1](#), 13-14).

Some argue that if women can work in full-time ministry, why shouldn't we give them what some are asking for? Why not ordain them? We cannot do that for one simple reason:

It is not ours to give as we see fit, for God says that he is to be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2) and that it is not permitted for a woman to usurp his authority as the gospel minister who oversees the church (1 Tim. 2:11-12). The Bible is so plain on this point in order that there would be no misunderstanding as to the qualifications for ordination to the office of gospel ministry.

The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15

Now let's briefly consider the Jerusalem Council as recorded in Acts 15. As you know, some Jewish Christians continued to believe in the temple, its services, and its laws, meaning, in their view, that Gentile believers, in order to be saved, had to be circumcised (Acts 15:1). Therefore, it was a theological issue that was at stake.

- Circumcision was not instituted in the Garden of Eden like the Sabbath, the family, and creation order leadership.

- Circumcision began with Abraham, who was the father of the Hebrews.
- Unlike the Sabbath and creation order leadership, which cannot be changed, circumcision is connected with the ceremonial law (Acts 15:5).
- Like the ceremonial law, circumcision is a shadow pointing forward to the gift of the Spirit and the new birth symbolized by baptism.
 - Peter indicates as much in his speech to the Jerusalem Council: God was “giving them [Gentiles] the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us [Jews]; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8-9).
 - Like the ceremonial law, circumcision was a “shadow of things to come” and came to an end with the death of Christ and God’s rending of the temple veil from top to bottom.

Creation Order Leadership	Circumcision
From Eden, like the Sabbath and the family	From Israel, like the ceremonial law
Began with Adam, father of human race	Began with Abraham, father of the Hebrews
Like the Sabbath, points back to Eden	Like the ceremonial law, points forward
Godly leadership	Foreshadowed baptism
Reality	Shadow
Unchangeable, for the church in all ages	Temporary, ended with death of Christ

The Jerusalem Council listened to all sides of the issue. However, because it was a theological matter, their decision was based exclusively on the Old Testament Scriptures and God’s revelation given three times to Peter in vision.

The Jerusalem Council did not establish two different standards based on culture—one for Jewish believers and another for Gentiles. The decision of the council was a decision that pertained to all Christians everywhere—both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ. And because of that, the result was a unified church worldwide.

The Jerusalem Council did not institutionalize a division in the church between Jews and Gentiles—just the opposite. They reaffirmed that Christ’s death on the cross broke down the wall between Jews and Gentiles: “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace” (Eph. 2:14-15).

In other words, by its decision the Jerusalem Council declared that there was no such thing as Jew or Gentile anymore, and that all had to live by the same laws—the laws of the kingdom of heaven, as one people, united in Christ.

The Jerusalem Council shows us that when there is disagreement and dissension in the church—we are not to look to our own culture for wisdom and guidance. Instead, God provides a solution based on Scripture and divine revelation.

Conclusion

1. Because *the issue we are facing today is theological* and connected with the creation order, it is far greater than whether a woman should be ordained as a gospel minister overseeing the church. The question is whether Scripture or culture will guide the church.

2. As we have seen, Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, is clear, and if we compromise our faithfulness to Scripture on this point, we will have compromised our only basis of unity. As much as we appreciate diversity, *it is Scripture, our Bible-based faith and practice, that holds us together*, not diversity. It is this Bible-based unity that will protect us from the scourges of pluralism.

Our confidence in the unity of Scripture can only be maintained if we continue to interpret it in the way the Bible interprets itself. If we begin to interpret it differently in different places, there is nothing to keep the church from splintering over tithing, congregationalism, homosexuality, and other issues. Just as the Sabbath and marriage cannot be compromised without compromising the unity of the church, neither can the creation order leadership given in Genesis and affirmed by Paul, because it applies to self-sacrificing leadership in the church. That principle cannot be compromised without ultimately destroying the unity of the church.

If we allow diversity here, it will divide us. It already *has* divided us to some extent. When Israel demanded a king, rejecting God's kingship and His plan for leadership over them, Israel was divided, and ultimately Israel was destroyed.

3. *The Jerusalem Council made its decision based on divine revelation.* After deep, thorough Bible Study, we can reaffirm the Scriptural basis for the decisions of the GC sessions in 1990 and 1995.

Position 1 respectfully and prayerfully recommends the following to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in its [Way Forward Statement](#):

- ✓ Reaffirm and encourage, with public recognition and licensure, women whom God has called to gospel work;
- ✓ Provide enhanced access to educational opportunities for women in gospel work and ensure fair and just treatment upon their placement in ministry;
- ✓ Return to the biblical practice of electing and ordaining only men to the office of local elder throughout the world church, while providing for women to serve as un-ordained church leaders under certain circumstances;
- ✓ Retain the scriptural practice of ordaining/commissioning only qualified men to the office of pastor/minister throughout the world church in harmony with the consistent example of Christ, the apostles, and the Adventist pioneers;
- ✓ Promote the greater development of various lines of ministry for women, according to their spiritual gifts, including but not limited to personal and

public evangelism, teaching, preaching, ministering to families, counseling, medical missionary work, departmental leadership, etc.