

Women's Ordination:

Group #1 Review of Position Summary #3

August 21, 2014

The General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) studied the research and viewpoints of the two traditional views on women's ordination, represented by two different groups on the committee. Group 1 affirms women in ministry but believes that the Bible limits ordination to the office of the elder/pastor to men. Group 2 emphasizes the equality of male and female in the home and in the church and encourages ordination to the gospel ministry regardless of gender. At the fourth and final meeting of TOSC, however, a new "third option" was introduced, combining elements of Group 1's theology with Group 2's conclusion.

The third option agrees with Group 1 that male leadership in the home and church presents the biblical ideal, especially in light of critical passages in 1 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Corinthians. However, it argues that practical concerns (as prompted by diverse local situations) and a desire for unity may allow for women's ordination. Because it was not evaluated prior to its introduction, we will now undertake to review this proposal. Among other things, the third option claims that:

- 1) Male leadership, while being the divine pattern¹ and preferred option,² is not a moral absolute³ and is therefore open to adaptation⁴ and exceptions.⁵
- 2) If we refuse to adapt the biblical pattern of male leadership, we could "hinder the mission of God's Church."⁶
- 3) By considering the ordination of women to be an exception to the biblical pattern of male leadership, we will "leave our hermeneutics and theology uncompromised."⁷
- 4) The "gender qualification of elder" is "one characteristic among many"⁸ and should not therefore be held in a more absolute sense than the other qualifications.
- 5) The current role of the local elder is equivalent to the biblical role of deacon.
- 6) Based on "biblical principles of religious liberty,"⁹ every region of the church should be allowed to make its own decision regarding the ordination of women.
- 7) Its recommendation, built on a "distinction between eternal commands or truths and ecclesiological ideals,"¹⁰ can preserve the unity of the church.

The third option's concluding recommendation is that local organizational units and regions of the world church should be allowed to determine for themselves whether or not to ordain women as

¹ "Position Summary #3," pp. 8, 17, 19; online: www.adventistarchives.org/june-2014-papers-presented-at-tosc; accessed 10 July 2014. Also *General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, June 2014), pp. 103, 112, 114; page numbers to this printed version will appear in brackets. This paper was presented in draft form to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee by Dr. Nicholas Miller on June 2, 2014.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5 [100], refers to the "preferred role for a male in the office of elder," and p. 7 [102] to the "gender preference."

³ For references to moral absolutes and commands, see *ibid.*, pp. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 18 [100, 102, 103, 104, 105, 112, 113].

⁴ For references to adaptation, see *ibid.*, pp. 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 [102, 103, 104, 105, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114].

⁵ For references to exceptions, see *ibid.*, pp. 11, 12, 13, 19 [106, 107, 108, 114].

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18 [113].

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19 [114].

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5 [100].

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19 [114].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7 [102].

gospel ministers.¹¹ We will now evaluate the aforementioned claims that serve as the basis for this recommendation.

Third Option Claim #1: Male leadership, while being the divine pattern and preferred option, is not a moral absolute and is therefore open to adaptation and exceptions.

The third option is correct in viewing some biblical commands as having greater weight than others. Jesus told the Pharisees that despite being scrupulous about tithing, they had neglected “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matt 23:23).¹² However, we must remember that He followed this by saying, “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” Just because a biblical command is not as foundational as others does not give us authority to disregard it.

The third option gives various biblical examples in an attempt to support the idea of adapting “divine ideals.”¹³ The first was that of Israel’s requesting and being given a king even though it was not God’s ideal. This example fails for the following significant reasons: (1) civil leaders, such as judges and kings, are not the same as religious leaders, such as priests, apostles, and elders/ministers; (2) the Israelites would later admit, “we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves” (1 Sam 12:19)—hardly a model to emulate; and (3) the results were disastrous—a permanent division in Israel, the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the loss of ten tribes, widespread apostasy, etc.

The lessons that the third option attempts to draw from this story are lost in a sea of confusion over why anyone, in light of this example, would *ever* recommend going contrary to God’s ideal—even if He did allow it! Though God gave a king to Israel, He did not protect them from the inevitable tragic results. Their request was certainly not a model for the church to follow. If anything, this example teaches us that instead of looking for permission to modify God’s will, we should *seek His blessing* by being careful to obey it.

Furthermore, while God allowed ancient Israel to have a king contrary to His will, this does not give license to the present-day church to establish practices contrary to the teachings of Scripture. If the third option’s logic were consistently applied, the allowance of polygamy and divorce in Old Testament times (Deut 21:15-17; 24:1) would give permission to the church to deviate from even God’s moral law! The mistake in this reasoning is avoided, however, when we recognize that Israel did not receive a king until *God Himself* allowed it in response to the prayer of Samuel the prophet (1 Sam 8:7-9). God did not leave it up to the people. If in His wisdom, God allows a variation from His revealed will to teach the folly of such a course, this is His prerogative; it does not give permission to the church to make future variations to biblical instruction.

The third option states that because we have no modern-day Urim and Thummim¹⁴ or direct communication from God, we must rely instead on collective prayer and study to know if He

¹¹ Ibid., p. 19 [114].

¹² All Bible quotations are from the New King James Version (Thomas Nelson, 1982).

¹³ “Position Summary #3,” pp. 14, 17 [109, 112].

¹⁴ For reference to Urim and Thummim, see *ibid.*, p. 18 [113].

would allow a variation from His “organizational ideals.”¹⁵ We should remember, however, that the reason they studied and prayed at the Jerusalem Council, and that we as Seventh-day Adventists did so at historic “Bible conferences,”¹⁶ was to *discover* the will of God as revealed in the Bible, not to seek permission to vary from it.

Furthermore, if from our study of Scripture we discover that God’s “preferred” will does not agree with a proposed change in practice, we are duty-bound to disallow it unless God gives us prophetic guidance to do otherwise. To move ahead with a practice for which there is no Scriptural basis, merely because God Himself has chosen in rare instances to allow variations from His will, would be for the church to take a prerogative that belongs only to God. In the end, such a decision would sadly resemble the system of the medieval church in which ecclesiastical councils have authority over Scripture, even the authority to modify divine instruction (see Dan 7:25).

While the third option’s other biblical examples of “adaptation” could also be debated,¹⁷ the overarching problem in each case is the conclusion that the church may adapt or disregard biblical instruction without clear direction from God through the Bible or prophetic inspiration. The Scripture gives no such permission, but instead warns, “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32).

The third option states that what makes the male office of elder/minister adaptable is that the specification of gender is merely a “functional, ecclesiastical norm meant to further church order, discipline, and mission.”¹⁸ However, it offers no real basis for this assertion. Given Paul’s emphatic language in 1 Timothy 2 and 3 (“I *do not permit*” and “A bishop then *must be*”), not to mention the biblical pattern of exclusively male priests, apostles, and elders, how do third option proponents conclude that the gender requirement for an elder or minister is nothing more than an ecclesiastical “norm”? Can they be sure that “to further church order, discipline, and mission” fully explains God’s purpose for this requirement? And even if these claims could be proven, upon what grounds would this make the gender requirement open to adaptation? The third option offers no real answers to these questions from the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White, leaving us to conclude that they are merely *assumptions*.

The third option fails to evaluate carefully the many examples of those who *assumed* that a “non-moral”¹⁹ command of God was flexible when it was not. Adam and Eve were punished for eating a piece of fruit (Gen 3)—an act that certainly isn’t wrong in every circumstance. Cain’s offering was rejected due to a slight modification (Gen 4:1-7), and Uzzah was punished merely for steadying the ark (2 Sam 6:1-7)—both transgressions of ritual commands. The sons of Aaron were punished for offering a different fire from that which they were instructed to use in the sanctuary (Lev 10:1-3)—again only a ritual command not found in God’s moral law. Miriam challenged Moses’ place of leadership and was punished by the Lord (Num 12).

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 8, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19 [103, 104, 108, 110, 111, 113, 114].

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 18 [113].

¹⁷ None of the examples given by the third option directly or indirectly involves the biblical office of the elder/minister. See appendix for a treatment of the third option’s specific examples.

¹⁸ “Position Summary #3,” p. 5 [100].

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 18 [113].

Perhaps the most relevant example, however, left unmentioned in the third option proposal, is that of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16). These men, along with two hundred fifty leaders of Israel, asked Moses for a higher place in the organizational ranks of Israel. Nearly the entire congregation was on Korah's side and felt that he and his company should be allowed to serve as priests. Everything seemed to be going as planned until the earth opened up and swallowed the chief conspirators alive. God refused to make an adaptation to the "functional, ecclesiastical norm" of the Aaronic priesthood, even though the people strongly believed it should be that way.

The proponents of the third option attempt to distinguish the examples of Uzzah and the sons of Aaron from their own adaptation of Scripture by attributing these failed examples to "individual decisions made haphazardly and based on personal preference."²⁰ But in the case of Korah, he and his company were by all appearances meeting the third option's conditions for an allowable adaptation of an "organizational and ecclesiastical ideal,"²¹ basing it as they were on a group decision and a sense of conviction, equality, and the furthering of the mission (see Num 16:3, 12-14). With the vast majority of the people siding with Korah, some may also have argued that it was necessary to adapt this ritual, organizational ideal to maintain unity in the congregation. Still, their adaptation was unacceptable to God.

The guidance given by the third option for when and how to adapt biblical instruction is both deficient and dangerous. Do church councils really have the authority to stray from God's "preferred" will? Would this not institute a practice of placing tradition above Scripture? Further, how safe is the distinction between moral commands and organizational ideals? Contrary to third option assertions, biblical commands do not fit so neatly into these categories. What about tithing? The ordinances? Lifestyle teachings? Would third option proponents consider these moral and unchangeable, or open to adaptation? Do we have the right to permit baptism by sprinkling, the use of leavened bread in communion, or the drinking of alcohol in moderation? Presuming to take upon ourselves the responsibility of calling biblical instruction flexible, when inspiration has given no such indication, is unwarranted and positively dangerous.²² We are to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 19 [114].

²² Some instruction in the Bible and in Ellen White's writings is given with a measure of flexibility. For instance, while Paul gave counsel to stay single, he also stated that if a man marries, he does not sin (1 Cor 7:26-28). Regarding health, Ellen White taught, "Let the diet reform be progressive" (*Counsels on Health* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1923], p. 478). She plainly identified which articles of diet may be taken moderately, as we continue to grow, and which items were to be immediately discarded (see *Selected Messages*, book 3 [Review and Herald, 1980], p. 287). From these examples, we see that any flexibility with divine instruction is clearly conveyed in the language of the instruction itself. Notice also that within the same category of instruction (e.g., diet), some aspects may be flexible, while others are clearly mandatory. It would be wrong, then, to *assume* that every aspect of an entire category of instruction should be treated the same way (e.g., while eggs and pork are both in the category of instruction on diet, and total abstinence from eggs is not mandatory, this does not mean we can assume that total abstinence from pork must not be mandatory either). This is precisely what the third option does when it: (1) lumps the office of the elder/minister into a loosely defined category of biblical instruction that allegedly includes all non-moral, ritual, ceremonial, organizational, and legal practices, precepts, and ideals, and then (2) concludes that this entire category of instruction is flexible even though much of the instruction, including the gender requirement of the elder/minister that Paul gave to Timothy and Titus, indicates *no flexibility at all*.

Regarding the specific case of women's ordination, the third option asserts that male leadership is God's "preference," implying flexibility, but it can point to no Scriptural indication that a departure from this supposed preference would ever be necessary. While recognizing the consistent pattern of male priests, apostles, and elders in the Bible, it fails to consider seriously that throughout all of salvation history no circumstance ever arose that would merit an exception to this pattern. No exceptions were made to the maleness of the priests. Not one of Jesus' disciples was an exception. Not a single clear example of a female apostle or elder can be found in the New Testament. Why would we assume that God would have us forsake this clear biblical teaching now, in the remnant church, just when Jesus is preparing a people for His coming? Would not the church want to come closer to God's pattern rather than drift farther from it?

Third Option Claim #2: If we refuse to adapt the biblical pattern of male leadership, we could "hinder the mission of God's Church."

Referring to the class of biblical commands it terms "organizational ideals," the third option states, "They should not be lightly or cavalierly disregarded. But neither should they be allowed to hinder the mission of God's Church."²³ This oft-repeated statement, which is at the heart of the debate over women's ordination, is in need of examination. In exactly what way will choosing not to ordain women "hinder the mission of God's Church"? No evidence is offered to support this suggestion. The truth is that nothing hinders women from working for God. They may preach, teach, evangelize, and be involved in continually-expanding opportunities for ministry. The Bible only prohibits women from serving in the role of the ordained elder/minister.

Herein lies one of the most critical points in the entire women's ordination discussion. The unfortunate, albeit unintentional, implication of the view promoted by both the pro-ordination and third option groups is that only when one is ordained can he or she *truly* advance the mission of the church; that a lack of ordination will "hinder the mission." Despite their claim to the noble cause of equality, those in favor of women's ordination may unwittingly be creating an elitist perception of the ordained ministry. By no means should we give such a message in this critical hour, when the church should be empowering the unordained laity as never before.

The proponents of the third option should read carefully Ellen White's criticism of Brother Tay, a missionary to Pitcairn who, because he was not ordained, refused to baptize those who accepted the Adventist message.²⁴ She explained that because no ordained minister was available

²³ "Position Summary #3," p. 18 [113].

²⁴ Ellen G. White, Ms. 75, 1896 (Nov. 12, 1896), pp. 1, 2. Because Pitcairn, a remote island in the South Pacific Ocean, is located 3,500 miles northeast of New Zealand, it was unknown when an ordained minister might be able to visit the island. In fact, it was not until four years later with the completion of the missionary boat Pitcairn that Adventists were able to return to the island, and two ordained ministers, Elders E. H. Gates and A. J. Read, "baptized and organized a church of 82 members and a Sabbath School of 114 members (Dec. 6, 1890)" ("Pitcairn Island," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed. [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1996]). Ellen White wrote in retrospect: "When men go out with the burden of the work and to bring souls into the truth, those men are ordained of God, [even] if [they] never have a touch of ceremony of ordination. To say [they] shall not baptize when there is nobody else, [is wrong]. If there is a minister in reach, all right, then they should seek for the ordained minister to do the baptizing, but when the Lord works with a man to bring out a soul here and there, and they know not when the opportunity will come that these precious souls can be baptized, why he should not question about the matter, he should baptize these souls."

and it was not clear when one could get to the island to baptize the new believers, Brother Tay should have performed the baptisms himself. This example is referenced in the third option position summary²⁵ to help build its case for the adaptation of divine commands. But the third option fails to note that Ellen White did not advise that Brother Tay be *ordained* so that more work could be done. Rather, in such an extreme circumstance, she indicated that the work could and should go forward *without ordination*. Not ordaining women will not impede God's work, because ordination is not necessary for someone to work for God.

The third option contends, "The fact that nearly everyone agrees that women *can* carry a primary role of spiritual leadership *under certain circumstances* (e.g. as currently is happening in China) is significant."²⁶ However, there is an important distinction to be made here that the third option fails to recognize. When a father is absent from the home and the wife and mother must assume the primary position of spiritual leadership,²⁷ this does not make her the father and priest of the home. Likewise, while it is true that certain circumstances may require women to carry "a primary role of spiritual leadership" in the church, it does not follow that they must also be ordained into the biblical office of elder/minister.

The example of China is not comparable since this area is not currently an organized territory of the church and cannot therefore be governed by official church policy. However, there are today official areas of the world church where the circumstances are similar to those existing in China. In these areas, where there are often no qualified men, women serve admirably as unordained church "leaders" to provide management and leadership to local congregations.²⁸ Ordained ministers periodically visit churches in these areas to officiate at baptisms and celebrations of the Lord's Supper as well as to preside at business meetings in cases calling for church discipline. This arrangement adapts to local needs without sacrificing faithfulness to the biblical qualifications of the elder/minister. The third option, while rightly noting that circumstances may call for a woman to serve as a local church leader, fails to give any necessary reason for a woman to be ordained as an elder/minister. Its adaptation of Scripture, therefore, appears not to be based on a genuine need, but upon the very "personal preference"²⁹ that it warns against.

Third Option Claim #3: By considering the ordination of women to be an exception to the biblical pattern of male leadership, we will "leave our hermeneutics and theology uncompromised."

The third option suggests that by considering the ordination of women to be an exception to the biblical pattern of male leadership and an adaptation of an organizational ideal rather than an outright endorsement of women's ordination, we will "leave our hermeneutics and theology

²⁵ For reference to Brother Tay, see "Position Summary #3," p. 16 [111].

²⁶ Ibid., p. 19 [114] (emphasis original).

²⁷ For reference to wives assuming the role of spiritual leader of the home, see *ibid.*, p. 18 [113].

²⁸ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (18th ed.; Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2010), pp. 75-76.

²⁹ "Position Summary #3," p. 18 [113]. In this reference, the tragic results of the attempted adaptation of ritual commands performed by the sons of Aaron and by Uzzah were each attributed to the fact that they were haphazard decisions based on "personal preference."

uncompromised.”³⁰ But the adaptation of biblical instruction proposed by the third option would be a serious departure from the principles of interpretation currently used by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While we may at times adapt practices to *harmonize* with the intended meaning of a biblical text,³¹ the third option argues that it is sometimes necessary to adapt a practice *in contradiction* to the text’s meaning. Specifically, the third option recommends allowing women to be ordained as elders/ministers in contradiction to its own belief that 1 Timothy 2 and 3 teach that God’s ideal, or “preferred” will, is to have “a male in the office of elder.”³²

Some claim that because Paul forbids women to teach and we as a church allow it, we already adapt non-essential divine commands. But the Bible does not prohibit women from all teaching. On the contrary, it mentions women involved in both teaching (Acts 18:26; Titus 2:3-5) and prophesying (1 Cor 11:5; 14:3). Ellen White concurs, urging one gifted female speaker, “Address the crowd whenever you can.”³³ Paul, therefore, could not have been giving an outright prohibition of teaching.

In saying, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man” (1 Tim 2:12), Paul links the prohibited teaching with *authority over men*. A few verses later, he identifies the authority of which he speaks. He transitions naturally into the qualifications for elder, a church office that receives delegated authority in the church by election or appointment and is publicly recognized by ordination. Paul specifies that this office must be held by a man who is “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2; see also Titus 1:9). The prohibition given to women, then, was only that they could not assume the teaching authority that belongs to the elder/minister. We needn’t think that we have been adapting biblical instruction when women are encouraged to teach or preach in various settings; they may do so as long as they do not usurp the authority that belongs to the ordained elder/minister. This humble, non-disruptive attitude toward church authority is described in the text as learning “in quietness.”

This example demonstrates that Adventists do not immediately accept the surface meaning of a text before first considering the internal and external context and all inspired evidence on the topic. Even so, this is not an adaptation of biblical commands as described by the third option. Rather, we use sound principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) to arrive at the author’s intended meaning, taking care not to draw a conclusion that would contradict the clear sense of the biblical text. Here is where the approach of the pro-ordination group (Group 2) fails. After applying their hermeneutical principles, they arrive at a meaning that is quite different from the plain reading of the Bible on the topic. In determining the Bible’s meaning they sometimes seem to

³⁰ Ibid., p. 19 [114].

³¹ E.g., in countries not governed by a monarchy, we may adapt the counsel of 1 Peter 2:17, which says, “Honor the king,” by honoring the applicable government authorities in that country (see also Romans 13:1). Similarly, the instruction to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom 16:16) reflects the customary mode of communicating a warm greeting and “lifting up holy hands” (1 Tim 2:8) represents the mode of prayer in that culture. We may appropriately adapt such practices to current modes that still reflect the clear intent of the biblical instruction.

³² “Position Summary #3,” p. 5 [100].

³³ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), p. 473.

give greater weight to their historical reconstruction than to what the biblical text actually says.³⁴ The mistake of the third option's approach, however, is different. While they appear to arrive at a proper meaning of the text, they then give license to disregard it when it is not a moral command. This is equally dangerous. The reader simply does not have the authority to determine which biblical instruction to obey and which to set aside.

The assurance given by the third option that it will “leave our hermeneutic uncompromised” is simply not true. The kind of adaptation it proposes does not represent the current practice of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We believe that the only safe course is to follow what the third option refers to as God's “preferred” will, as revealed in the Bible, in *all* matters of faith *and practice*.³⁵

Third Option Claim #4: The “gender qualification of elder” is “one characteristic among many” and should not therefore be held in a more absolute sense than the other qualifications.

The third option describes “maleness”³⁶ as just one of the many qualifications of an elder. Therefore, it concludes that we should not single out maleness as being necessary when the other qualifications are not always treated this way. This is untrue for at least three reasons: (1) being male is not technically a qualification, but an intrinsic attribute of an elder; (2) being male is absolute; it is not measured in degrees as are the listed qualifications of an elder; and (3) being male is necessary not only to meet the qualifications but also to harmonize with the prohibition against women having authority over men given in the previous chapter, 1 Timothy 2. We will now take a closer look at each of these three reasons.

In 1 Timothy 3, maleness is not technically a qualification but an assumption. Being the “husband of one wife” is a qualification. Being “one who rules his own house well” is a qualification. But being a man is assumed in the text. It is a prerequisite to the qualification. A woman would not likely say, “I want a husband who is kind, loving, and male,” because maleness is assumed of a husband. So it is with Paul's assumption of a male elder. To be “the husband of one wife,” you must be male. To be the one who “rules” his own house well, you must hold the responsibility of ruling the house given to the priest and spiritual leader of the home. Therefore, being male is not so much a qualification of an elder but a preliminary requirement even to be eligible for consideration.

³⁴ Based on a highly questionable reconstruction of the historical context, and disregarding the Apostle's own timeless basis for his instruction (“For Adam was formed first, then Eve”), the pro-ordination group determines that the instruction on gender in 1 Timothy 2:12-14 is addressing only a local issue in Ephesus. Instead of seeking to understand in what way Paul intended that women should not have authority over men, their historical reconstruction *takes away any present day meaning from the text* and concludes that women can in fact hold any and every position of authority over men in the church.

³⁵ In *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1950), p. 249, Ellen G. White wrote that the “grand principle” of the Protestant Reformers “was the infallible authority of the Holy Scriptures as a rule of faith *and practice*. They denied the right of popes, councils, Fathers, and kings, to control the conscience in matters of religion. The Bible was their authority, and by its teaching they tested all doctrines and all claims” (emphasis supplied).

³⁶ “Position Summary #3,” p. 7 [102].

It is true that we live in a less than ideal world. This causes us to elect elders who may not meet every ideal of the biblical qualifications. Some are less “temperate” than others, some are more or less “gentle,” some more or less “hospitable,” etc. These qualifications are measured in degrees; and where degrees are involved, it is not safe for us to draw arbitrary lines. This is not so, however, with the gender requirement. Men are not more or less male. Gender is not measured in degrees. It is a clear, unambiguous condition of serving as an elder/minister that gives us no room for misunderstanding. Where prohibitions are measured in degrees, we must give room for the individual conscience. Where the prohibition is unambiguous, however, we must draw the line in the same place that Scripture does. To do otherwise would be to disobey a clear command of God.

The third reason that maleness cannot be considered just one of many qualifications is that the elder’s qualifications were presented within a larger context. They are listed only a few verses after the Apostle Paul’s prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12, where he states, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” The elder is the very one who must be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2) with the authority given by church appointment or election and publicly recognized by ordination. Therefore, the male nature of the elder in chapter 3 (“husband of one wife” and “one who rules his own house well”) is not just one of many flexible qualifications. Rather, the gender-specific language of chapter 3 is necessary in order to be in harmony with the prohibition of the Apostle Paul in chapter 2, that women are not to teach from the position of official church authority occupied by the elder/minister. Paul’s language does not communicate flexibility, such as “I do not suggest,” but rather, “I do not permit.” And he bases this command not on culture or merely local circumstances but on the creation order and subsequent fall of Adam and Eve (see 1 Tim 2:13, 14).

Third Option Claim #5: The current role of the local elder is equivalent to the biblical role of deacon.

The Bible does not give two separate qualification lists for the ordained minister and the local elder. It has only one list for the office of elder/bishop/overseer (both Peter and John, for example, refer to themselves as elders in 1 Pet 5:1 and 2 John 1; 3 John 1). Therefore, the biblical requirement that an elder must be male applies to both the ordained minister and the local elder. However, while acknowledging that God’s preferred will is for the ordained minister to be male, the third option surprisingly assumes that the case of the local elder is different.

The third option introduces the topic of the local elder by stating that if the church were to go back to reserving this office for men, it “would be extremely destructive to the Church and its unity.”³⁷ But how can its proponents be so sure? The truth is that if Scripture teaches that we should reserve the role of the local elder for men, then it “would be extremely destructive to the Church and its unity” *not* to obey the Bible. In fact, many would say that the current disunity existing in the church has only been intensified by the 1984 decision to allow women to be ordained as local elders. Nevertheless, the third option claims that the biblical pattern of male elders refers only to ordained ministers and not to local elders. To sustain this claim, it states that

³⁷ Ibid., p. 20 [115].

the position of elder “as it is currently carried out in most local Seventh-day Adventist congregations, is in practice more akin to the biblical office of deacon.”³⁸ Since we recognize female deacons, or deaconesses, the third option concludes that local elders may also be women.

This logic, however, is flawed for the following important reasons: (1) if the local elder is equivalent to a deacon, then the deacon serves no biblically-designated purpose; (2) local elders, unlike deacons, often fulfill the role of pastor for their local congregation, whether due to the pastor’s being called to another field or due to his being responsible for many churches; and (3) rather than being satisfied with pastors who “hover over” the churches³⁹ and a diminished role for local elders, we should return to the biblical duties of the minister, elder, and deacon.

Third Option Claim #6: Based on “biblical principles of religious liberty,” every region of the church should be allowed to make its own decision regarding the ordination of women.

Based on “biblical principles of religious liberty,”⁴⁰ the third option proposes that any region of the church that conscientiously decides to ordain women should be allowed to do so. This, however, is a misapplication of the concept of religious liberty. Seventh-day Adventists have long been champions of the cause of religious freedom. We believe that all are free to worship according to their own consciences. People can be Seventh-day Adventists or choose not to be, to stay in the church or leave it at any time. But the church’s loyalty must be to God and His Word, not to the varying individual convictions of its members.

Many biblical examples illustrate the danger of adopting changes in church practice based solely on the desires and convictions of church members. Despite the whole congregation’s crying out for a change in leadership, Aaron’s effort to honor their wishes with a golden calf was met with punishment (Exod 32). Despite the people’s pleading with Saul to set aside animals for sacrifices from the flock of the Amalekites, his acceptance of the plan caused him to be rejected by God (1 Sam 15). Despite the whole congregation’s asking for a change in organizational structure, Korah and those with him were denied their convictions (Num 16).

Perhaps a more important biblical example, however, is the positive process and outcome of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The decision made at this Council is repeatedly used by both the pro-ordination and third option viewpoints to justify allowing each division or region of the church to choose for itself whether or not to ordain women. Referring to the final outcome on church issues such as women’s ordination, the third option suggests, “The decision, though taken collectively, may not require uniformity of action on the part of all, as the Jerusalem council allowed Jews and Gentiles to approach circumcision and ritual differently.”⁴¹ This argument is categorically untrue. The Council’s decision *did in fact require uniformity of action on the part of all*.

The key to understanding this is first to remember that the issue in Acts 15 was never whether or not Jews or Gentiles *could* be circumcised, but whether or not it was a *necessary requirement*

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ White, *Evangelism*, p. 382.

⁴⁰ “Position Summary #3,” p. 19 [114].

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 15 [110].

for salvation (Acts 15:1, 5). And though many strongly believed that circumcision must be required of the believing Gentiles, the Jerusalem Council refused to honor their convictions.⁴² Furthermore, this decision applied to *every* believer *everywhere* and in *every case*. Absolutely no religious liberty, as defined by the third option, was given to those who wanted to require circumcision or teach that it was necessary for salvation. They were not permitted to do so, but were bound by the decision of the Jerusalem Council. Contrary to the third option's assertion, there actually was "uniformity of action on the part of all" the churches. Even though, as Paul indicates, some Jewish believers continued to undermine the Council's decision, the question was never brought back to the apostles and elders in "General Conference" again.

Whether or not individual Jews or Gentiles could privately choose to be circumcised is a separate matter entirely and one that never was in question. Thus Titus, in reaching out to Gentiles, was not circumcised (Gal 2:3), whereas Timothy was circumcised in order to facilitate outreach to Jews (Acts 16:3). The question of whether or not to ordain women as elders or ministers is not the same as the personal choice of whether or not to be circumcised; it is not a matter of individual conviction or even of furthering the mission. Since ordination is a recognition of *God's* selection of a person for a particular church office, the key question to be answered is whether ordaining women to the work of elders and ministers is biblical—whether it is *God's will*. As even the third option recognizes, there is no Scriptural basis for this practice. The biblical pattern and qualifications express God's will in the matter, and it is the church's responsibility to teach and practice it.

Many of our own members, whose convictions differ from the long-held beliefs of the church, are watching closely the current debate concerning women's ordination. Using freedom of conscience to shape the church's beliefs and practices could open the way to the promotion of same-sex marriage, academic freedom for teachers of evolution in our schools, and other causes that may arise in the future. For many, these things are just as much a matter of conscience as is the ordination of women. But even if civil authorities began requiring ordination on the grounds of equality, it would still not be right for the church to acquiesce. The issue of homosexuality is already starting to bring similar pressures and demands, and we must not be afraid to take a stand for Bible truth, whether now or in the future.

Third Option Claim #7: Its recommendation, built on a "distinction between eternal commands or truths and ecclesiological ideals," can preserve the unity of the church.

Here is just one of multiple statements highlighting the unity of the church as the overriding concern of the third option: "This distinction between eternal commands or truths and ecclesiological ideals can provide, we believe, a key insight that can help the Church move forward in unity, if not uniformity, on this question."⁴³ The third option appears to be an attempt, for the

⁴² The Jerusalem Council's decision was not based on personal testimony but on the Bible and prophetic inspiration. Note the following: (1) God's prophetic revelation given to Peter (Acts 15:7-11, 14); (2) the Scriptural confirmation of Peter's revelation when he "remembered the word of the Lord" (Acts 11:16); and (3) Bible prophecy's foretelling of the incorporation of the Gentiles into Israel on equal terms (Acts 15:15-18).

⁴³ "Position Summary #3," p. 7 [102].

sake of unity, at providing an acceptable trade-off between two opposing positions. It states, “We believe that the central concerns within the various positions in the ordination discussion can be affirmed without sacrificing principle, while still maintaining the unity of the body of Christ.”⁴⁴

Though the third option expresses a concern for faithfulness to the Bible, one cannot escape the fact that its driving purpose is to preserve unity in the church. This, however, is a fundamental flaw. When unity is our primary concern, biblical faithfulness always suffers. The third option appears to suggest that the current issue is not significant enough to brave the perceived consequences of choosing to follow God’s “preferred” will. But just as we encourage new believers to obey the Sabbath or return an honest tithe regardless of feared consequences, following the example of the three Hebrew worthies (Dan 3), so we too must exercise faith in God and obey the Bible. Our only hope for genuine unity⁴⁵ in the church is first to discover the meaning of Scripture, and then follow it, trusting the consequences with God.

Another fundamental flaw in the third option is its attempt to preserve or maintain unity where unity does not exist. The fact that we all operate within the same church organization does not make us united. It is not unity that led us to conduct such an expensive, comprehensive study on the topic of ordination. The purpose of this study was to settle biblically what has been to the church an undeniable source of *disunity*. With this goal in view, the third option leaves us worse off than when we started. Rather than recommending a decision based upon the authority of Scripture, it attempts to eliminate the disunity by concluding that we are not bound to follow what the Scriptures teach on this particular issue.

Adopting the third option’s recommendation would set a dangerous precedent. Instead of preserving unity, it would in effect institutionalize disunity and seriously weaken the confidence of our people in the Bible. Furthermore, it would threaten our identity as a truly worldwide church organization because it would move us toward a more congregational system of church governance, one in which each division, union, conference, and local church is free to do what is right in its own eyes (see Judg 17:6; 21:25).

Already there have been Seventh-day Adventist unions that have ordained women as ministers in direct opposition to voted church policy. Did these unions have a special or extreme circumstance that would necessitate the ordination of women? The third option mentions none, and yet these unions were willing to force on an entire region of the church a practice that is in clear opposition to the decisions of the worldwide church made at General Conference sessions. How does accommodating those who have fostered disunity preserve unity? The third option fails to answer this question. We can only assume that its proponents fear the consequences they imagine would result from requiring unions such as these to follow the “preferred” will of God. The problem with taking this position, however, is that the consequences of *not* following the Bible would be even worse. The history given us in Scripture is “written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11). We ignore it at our peril. If we allow for variance

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 3 [98].

⁴⁵ According to the prayer of Jesus in John 17:17-21, biblical unity is only accomplished when as a church we are sanctified, or set apart from the world, by following the truth of His Word.

from the biblical pattern in this instance, then what matter of faith or practice will we next feel obliged to concede?

While forecasting disunity if we choose to follow God's will, the third option fails to forecast the terrible impact of its own recommendation. Since it teaches that God's pattern and preference is to have male elders and ministers, dedicated church members may legitimately ask, "If we believe the Bible teaches that the elder/minister should be male, then why do we ordain women?" Pastors and church leaders would be faced with the impossible task of explaining that with certain biblical instructions, if the duly authorized majority feels differently, we do not have to follow the Bible. Then, in our evangelistic outreach, appeals to follow the Bible rather than the precepts of men would be made hollow as we try to explain why, in certain cases, we as a church have chosen a different path from God's preferred will.

Ultimately, the persuasive power of our message and the mission of the church would be sacrificed—all for the sake of protecting an imaginary unity. To make matters worse, the third option suggests that those who would continue to express open dissent to this departure from the Bible would risk "opposing God,"⁴⁶ a suggestion that appears to place the authority of the church above the authority of Scripture. In the end, an acceptance of the third option's recommendation would further strengthen the very thing it hoped to avoid. It is not unity, but disunity, that would be the sure result.

Conclusion

We have great respect and appreciation for those who have endeavored to provide a third option in the current debate over the ordination of women. Still, other than minor nuances, their proposal does not present any unique insights on the biblical passages related to women's ordination. Instead, it attempts to provide a biblical rationale for flexibility on this and other "non-moral organizational ideals"⁴⁷ as a way of dealing with our differences. The argument that this approach is biblical, however, is not convincing for the following reasons: (1) it is based on inferences drawn from descriptive examples rather than prescribed instruction; (2) it looks for isolated exceptions allowed by God in ancient times and under extreme circumstances to justify the broad scale allowance of a non-biblical practice in His last day church under what amounts to any circumstance; (3) it confuses what God allows in His mercy with what He endorses with His blessing; (4) it draws unwarranted conclusions from Bible stories and then applies them to the current issue of women's ordination; (5) it does not address key biblical examples that would contradict its conclusions; (6) it fails to see the disastrous results of applying its logic in every case; (7) it places church councils in a position of authority over God's Word; and (8) it presumes to regard biblical instruction as flexible when inspiration has given us no such indication.

When reading the third option's position summary, one may easily be influenced by the continual references to some biblical teachings as being *organizational* or *ecclesiastical*. These words have the effect of lessening the weight of the instruction, giving it a mere human quality and

⁴⁶ "Position Summary #3," p. 17 [112].

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 18 [113].

making it easier to view as flexible. We must remember, however, that the gender requirement of the office of the elder/minister is more than just an organizational guideline or ecclesiastical norm; it is a biblical requirement. This is not the *Church Manual* or working policy that we are dealing with here, but the Bible. We simply do not have the authority to adapt or disregard inspired instructions.

By labeling their proposal as the “moderate”⁴⁸ position, third option proponents unfortunately imply that to recommend that the worldwide church obey God’s preferred will would be an extreme position. The truth, however, is that we will do the church a great injustice if we *do not* follow the biblical instruction regarding who is qualified for ordination to the vital office of the elder/minister. It is not only contradictory, but potentially fatal to our mission, to say that though the Bible teaches one thing, the church has the authority to establish different practices in areas where the majority so decides. We must remember that the decision of the Jerusalem Council, which applied to every church, was not settled merely by group discussion, careful reasoning, or inspiring testimonies. All these were important, but no solution to the debate could be accepted until it was shown that “the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written” (Acts 15:15).

In the same way, the issue of whether or not to ordain women cannot rightly be settled by ecclesiastical councils alone, however careful and prayerful they may be. The “preference” of God, and not man, must prevail. “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.”⁴⁹

While the third option differs greatly from the pro-ordination view in many respects, there is one key similarity that should give pause to every Bible-believing Seventh-day Adventist. In order to conclude that the church may ordain women as ministers, both groups have had to introduce methods of interpreting Scripture (hermeneutics) that are new to the Adventist Church. The pro-ordination view, in order to explain its conclusion, was compelled in the North American Division’s *Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report* to introduce a new hermeneutic called Principle-Based Historical-Cultural.⁵⁰ Now, the third option has introduced a new method of interpretation in which entire categories of biblical instruction are considered flexible, whether indicated as such by inspiration or not. Both of these new methods were necessary to avoid the conclusion, gained by a straightforward reading of the applicable Bible passages, that the office of the elder/minister is reserved for men. Therefore, if we accept the view of either of these groups, we must also be ready to accept that: (1) we are adopting an approach to the interpretation and

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 3 [98], note 1.

⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1950), p. 595.

⁵⁰ “Report Summary,” *North American Division Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report* (November 2013), see the chart on p. 8 and the further explanation of this new method of interpretation in Kyoshin Ahn, “Hermeneutics and the Ordination of Women,” pp. 25-26 of the same volume. The traditional method of interpretation used by Adventists, Historical-Grammatical, is clearly presented in the majority of this report as being different in some key respects from the one used by pro-ordination proponents. See also in this volume Edwin Reynolds and Clinton Wahlen, “Minority Report,” 195-197.

application of Scripture that is foreign to the Adventist Church; and (2) in so doing, we are opening a door to aberrant interpretations of the Bible that will be nearly impossible to close.

We have great sympathy for the third option's desire to hold together a church that is currently divided on the issue of women's ordination. However, its noble intent will never be realized by the plan it recommends. While it aims to preserve unity, it rewards and institutionalizes disunity. While it claims to leave our hermeneutics uncompromised, it introduces a foreign method of adapting biblical instruction that would be disastrous to our mission and even our credibility as a Bible-based church. While it seeks to protect gender distinction, it actually lessens it by calling the gender-specific language of the elder "only one among a number of qualifications." While it claims to prevent the mission of the church from being hindered, it in fact hinders the mission itself by implying to the unordained laity that ordination is necessary for *truly* advancing the work. And in an effort to protect religious liberty, it ends up marginalizing those whose consciences are bound to the clear teaching of Scripture.

While exceptional circumstances will merit the involvement of women in greater spiritual leadership roles, we see no safety in opening the doors of ordination to women in direct contradiction to biblical requirements. "Let no one deceive himself with the belief that a part of God's commandments are nonessential, or that He will accept a substitute for that which He has required. . . . God has placed in His word no command which men may obey or disobey at will and not suffer the consequences."⁵¹ The church has experienced a growing polarization in many areas of faith and practice over the past few decades. The issue before us is not the only one in which we will face conflicting opinions. We must not set a precedent of leaving disputed areas of Scripture to every division, union, conference, or local church to decide. We are a world church, and we must remain united on biblical truth no matter how strong the pressure might be to do otherwise.

Rather than confining our interest in the ministry of women to the question of ordination, the church should be opening to women a broader range of ministry opportunities. It should provide enhanced educational options to prepare godly women to serve in those areas where they can do a greater work than that of men. "The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and this will give them a power that will exceed that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their work is needed."⁵² As a church, we should also be making far greater efforts to affirm, support, and assist the work of Christian mothers. And as for women employed in ministry, they should be compensated in harmony with the vital importance of their work and the time they dedicate to it. These worthwhile initiatives should be started without delay. However, to make allowance for acting contrary to God's Word would only bring injury to the cause of truth and the church we love. May God help us to remain faithful to His Word while reaffirming and further enhancing the roles of women in ministry.

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1958), p. 360.

⁵² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), vol. 9, p. 128.

Appendix: Bible Data and Stories Related to the New Proposal

Problems with the Third View's Biblical Examples

The “Third Way” suggests several biblical examples that are meant to serve as models of exceptions for “secondary matters.” While we have addressed key examples briefly in the body of the paper, somewhat more extended treatment has been reserved for this appendix. Curiously, none of the examples presented by this view actually justify a systematic or long-term violation of God’s written instructions. Whether tragic, or temporary, or singular, these stories do not lend themselves to further the claims of the Third Way. They do not provide justification for variation from the biblical ideal.

1. A King in Israel

Israel’s wish for a king and God’s concession to that wish should be a dire warning to us not to follow Israel’s example. The move from a theocracy directly led by God to a monarchy modeled after surrounding nations and led by some of the most corrupt leaders proved catastrophic. While kingship was eventually divinely sanctioned, implemented, and respected (1 Sam 24:6; 26:11; 2 Sam 1:14; 19:21), the Seventh-day Adventist Church has no such direct mandate for alternate forms of leadership. In fact, the church finds itself again under a non-state theocracy: “we are sacredly denominated by God and are under His theocracy” (7T 109; cf. 8T 180). We would therefore do well to take this astonishing analogy very seriously.⁵³

The Lord had, through His prophets, foretold that Israel would be governed by a king; *but it does not follow that this form of government was best for them or according to His will.* He permitted the people to follow their own choice, *because they refused to be guided by His counsel.* Hosea declares that God gave them a king in His anger. Hosea 13:11. When men choose to have their own way, without seeking counsel from God, *or in opposition to His revealed will,* He often grants their desires, in order that, through the bitter experience that follows, they may be led to realize their folly and to repent of their sin. Human pride and wisdom will prove a dangerous guide. That which the heart desires *contrary to the will of God* will in the end be found a curse rather than a blessing. (PP 605, emphasis supplied)

God permitted the monarchy, not as an exception to a rule, but as a pedagogical tool that would lead to disciplinary action. A proposition that builds its case on this experience (that ironically catalyzed *disunity* and spiritual disaster) must be called into question from the start. Simply put, this is not an example to be emulated. *Far more could be said on this point.*

⁵³ 10:2 “This story ... shows that God is willing to vary His organizational ideal to accommodate cultural circumstances and the desires of his people.” This is true if “willing to vary” is equivalent to “willing to punish.” We don’t want to vote a policy that would call down such willingness.

The call for women’s ordination as an exceptional policy also resembles the time described in Exodus 16:12-13 when God honored Israel’s rebellious murmuring prayer for flesh food. Why did He send quail? Clearly, it was not that His will had been modified. He did not approve of their self-indulgent demands, even when he granted them. As the Psalmist points out, “So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire; They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel” (Ps 78:29-31).

2. Deborah and Barak

We approve of the conclusion of the paper regarding Deborah and Barak. “The story of Deborah shows that women, when they played the role of judge, were expected to play a more limited role than that of a male judge.”⁵⁴ Deborah violated no express command or instruction in the book of Moses and certainly shouldn’t be used as evidence that others may violate such instruction in the New Testament.

3. King David, Ruth, and the Moabite Restriction

Two factors militate against the claim that David’s presence in Jesus’ family tree presents an exception to the Moabite exclusion.⁵⁵ Moabites could, after all, be converted to the God of Israel. And Isaiah 56:6-7 specifically invites foreigners into the community of faith:

Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant—Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Additionally, if “to the tenth generation” is read strictly, Ruth 4:18 indicates that an inclusive reading of the generations from Moses to David would, in fact, render David precisely part of the tenth generation.⁵⁶

In any case, Ruth’s children would not be considered Moabite since their father was of the tribe of Judah. In other words, and stated simply, God did not violate His own policy when He instructed Samuel to anoint David as king. It is critical scholars, not prophets, who have brought up the supposed problem of Moabite contamination in David’s lineage.

⁵⁴ 13:2.

⁵⁵ See Deuteronomy 23:3-6.

⁵⁶ *Receiving the Word*, p. 285.

4. David, the Showbread, and Christ (1 Samuel 21:5-6)

Sometimes non-moral ideals are put in tension with each other. It is ideal for me to wear a shirt. But if you do not possess one, it is ideal for me to give you mine, leaving me temporarily disrobed (Isaiah 58:6-8).

Why was David not charged with guilt for eating the old showbread? (ST, November 30, 1876, par. 9). Was it because ritual law gave way to physical extremity? No; God was simply forbearing toward a desperate man and touched his heart with remorse by letting him experience the folly of his course. You see, David had done much more than eat hallowed bread. He *had lied boldly* and in such a way as to cause the death of the priests of Nob. See 1 Samuel 21-22.

God's forbearance, in this context, though it is worthy of emulation, is no excuse for poor decisions. Using it as an excuse is like turning God's grace into permissiveness. Rom 6:1, 15; Jude 4.

The case of David does indeed show where a non-moral command (and even a moral one) was broken in a situation where Divine forbearance overlooked the acts. That such a case exists we readily admit. Jesus wished the Pharisees would imitate God's forbearance in their treatment of the disciples.

God is forbearing with us, too. But the church shouldn't have forbearance with itself. It should do what is right and spare itself from the regret that haunted David for days after his lying blunder.

5. Acts 15: Was It God's Ideal that All Gentile Christians Should Keep the Law of Moses and Be Circumcised?

We take issue with how the third group has used Acts 15. They have argued as though the council adapted some biblical ideal to the needs of the local situation. But this is far from true. *Rather, the council discovered the hard facts about what God expected, and it voted accordingly.* With physical circumcision out, its teachers could insist on neither its validity nor practice.

The council didn't *change the law* about circumcision; it *recognized* that this law had passed away at the cross.

In choosing which aspects of the Law of Moses to make obligatory on all believers, the Jerusalem Council could certainly have elevated circumcision above the rest and made it a matter of requirement, like it did the prohibition of blood and fornication. But since circumcision was ceremonial, it was no longer a requirement for Christians, whether they be Jews or Gentiles.

Notice that the faction that *lost their bid* for doctrinal control of the Christian church was strong in the home division where the church had started (Jerusalem) and where the council was held. That made the work of the church more difficult, but not impossible.

The local opposition to the decision was reason enough for Paul to circumcise Timothy when working to promote the views of the council in Jerusalem itself in the next chapter. *Was this an adaptation or violation of God's revealed will in Acts 15?* Had the council decided to forbid circumcision of believers? Did it permit Jews to require circumcision of each other? In both cases the Bible answer is "no."

The council concluded that the ceremony was classed with those laws that passed away, those that had separated Israel from the rest of mankind (compare Colossians 2 with Ephesians 2).⁵⁷

So for Paul to have Timothy circumcised might have been wise or might have been ill-judged, but it was not out of harmony with any binding requirement of God. Paul remained compliant with all that was written and binding for Christians.

Fundamentally, physical circumcision was no longer necessary in order to be part of God's people, period. Paul's circumcising of Timothy (Acts 16:3) but not Titus (Gal 2:3) only reflects the singular action by the apostle in the sensitive context of his early mission and during this time of transition. Paul's individual decision did not become a proposal for the Gentile church at large.

6. Jesus and Divorce

Moses had permitted divorce on the basis of a husband's discontentment. Jesus permitted it only on the basis of adultery. When the disciples challenged Jesus on this point, Jesus pointed back to Genesis for the ideal and to heaven's view of the matter for authority (Mt 19:3-12).

Did Jesus provide an example of adjusting moral values? No, Jesus instituted no moral change at all. The civil law of Israel permitted divorce. The Roman law permitted the same. But civil laws never define moral limits. Instead, they enforce a minimum standard against deviance. They permit lust, but not rape; covetousness, but not theft; hate, but not murder. They forbid domestic violence, but not divorce.

This is why Adventists are not embarrassed about the Old Testament stoning of a Sabbath-breaker. That was a civil law enforced by a civil judgment. And Israel's civil laws became irrelevant when the nation lost its sovereignty.

Jesus clarified that the civil law of Moses (like all civil laws) was crafted with the hard-hearted in mind. It was an ideal law for a nation, even if it didn't define the ideal limits of sin. Civil laws

⁵⁷ For evidence of its ceremonial nature, see also Ezekiel 44:9; Acts 7:51; Romans 2:28-29; Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4.

shouldn't impose limits that are unattainable by unconverted persons. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Rom 8:7).

7. Paul and Tithe, and Related Thoughts

Did Paul bend a Bible principle around the local needs in his mission program? Some say he did, and they cite 1 Corinthians 9:14: "Even so the Lord has commanded [*diatasso—arranged, appointed*] that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." In other words, God appointed and confirmed the tithing system.

Think about this carefully. This plan, the plainly revealed will of God for the support of the ministry, is ideally implemented only when the laity are educated and willing enough to cooperate intelligently. God's will, in other words, is not for ministers to demand support from an unready audience. And so Paul could say, in the very next verse, "But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things that it should be done to me." 1 Cor. 9:15.

Paul did not mean, of course, that God's will regarding tithing is flexible in the sense that giving is optional. Rather, God's plan is comprehensive enough to allow for alternate means of support for church planters whose potential supporters may include insufficiently educated and unwilling persons. Paul violated no "Thus saith the Lord" in willfully neglecting to ask for tithe support.

8. Ideal and Variation in the Writings of Ellen White

The Third Way offers a solid section on the common-sense approach to implementing Ellen White's instructions. Some conclusions gathered there, however, warrant further clarification.

The ideal that children be trained at home obviously presumes a home where training is available. Like tithing for ministerial support, it is an ideal dependent on intelligent and willing cooperation. W. C. White corroborates this viewpoint:

The world is doing a great work for the children through kindergartens. In places where we have institutions, **and both parents are employed**, they would gladly send children to a kindergarten. I have been convinced that in many of our churches a kindergarten properly conducted for a few hours a day, would be a great blessing. I have not found anything in your teachings or rulings, Mother, or advice to our people that would be contrary to it. (3SM 223, emphasis added)

We have seen enough of the interesting stories and testimonies urged as evidence of God's flexible approach to our obedience. What we have concluded consistently is that God always requires strict compliance with the Bible norm. *It is our rule of faith and practice.*

Counter-Examples and other Ellen White Testimony

Following are Bible stories that counter either or both of the central tenets of the Third Way. When alluding to a few of these stories, their paper draws from them a *caution* sign where we see a *stop* sign. Ultimately (and ironically) their caution softens to a yield.

On pages 24-25 is found one of the most dangerous propositions in the paper, one that the authors probably view less strongly than they state it. The authors remind us that we have no Urim or Thummim. But they comfort us that God can “verify adaptations” of His will and speak to us also when we study together and pray as did our early Adventist pioneers. The danger lies in the implication that the church has authority to disregard the Scriptures on some point. This authority has never been granted to any church. **When we study together, it is to discover the Bible rule, not to modify it.**

Prominent among stories that counter the primary thrust of the paper is that of Lucifer’s insubordination (Isa 14; Ezek 28), a rebellion against divinely established order and governance that led to war in heaven.

Thousands of years later Miriam (Num 12) acted out her heartfelt insubordination and suffered public consequences. And a few centuries after that, the end of Saul’s one-king dynasty followed on the heels of his improper ambition to the priestly role (1 Sam 13:9).

Ellen White has also made strong statements related to the issues we are discussing in this paper. We close the appendix with three of them.

A belief that does not lead to obedience is presumption. . . . Let none cherish the idea that special providences or miraculous manifestations are to be the proof of the genuineness of their work or of the ideas they advocate. When persons will speak lightly of the word of God, and set their impressions, feelings, and exercises above the divine standard, we may know that they have no light in them. (MB 146)

Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme are in grave peril. It is Satan’s studied effort to separate such ones from those who are channels of light, through whom God has wrought to build up and extend His work in the earth. To neglect or despise those whom God has appointed to bear the responsibilities of leadership in connection with the advancement of the truth, is to reject the means that He has ordained for the help, encouragement, and strength of His people. For any worker in the Lord’s cause to pass these by, and to think that his light must come through no other channel than directly from God, is to place himself in a position where he is liable to be deceived by the enemy and overthrown. The Lord in His wisdom has arranged that by means of the close

relationship that should be maintained by all believers, Christian shall be united to Christian and church to church. (AA 164)

The most incisive call against partial obedience arises from Saul's "appearance of great conscientiousness":

But his piety was not genuine. A religious service performed in direct opposition to the command of God only served to weaken Saul's hands, placing him beyond the help that God was so willing to grant him. In his expedition against Amalek, Saul thought he had done all that was essential of that which the Lord had commanded him; but the Lord was not pleased with partial obedience, nor willing to pass over what had been neglected through so plausible a motive. God has given men no liberty to depart from His requirements. The Lord had declared to Israel, "Ye shall not do . . . every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes;" but ye shall "observe and hear all these words which I command thee." Deuteronomy 12:8, 28. In deciding upon any course of action we are not to ask whether we can see that harm will result from it, but whether it is in keeping with the will of God. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12. . . .

Yet with the sin of Saul and its result before us, how many are pursuing a similar course. While they refuse to believe and obey some requirement of the Lord, they persevere in offering up to God their formal services of religion. There is no response of the Spirit of God to such service. No matter how zealous men may be in their observance of religious ceremonies, the Lord cannot accept them if they persist in willful violation of one of His commands. (PP 634)

"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11 NKJV).

Maranatha – Come, Lord Jesus!