

Equality in Ministry
The Short, Simple, Biblical Case
for the Ordination of Women
in the Seventh-day Adventist Church
By: Elden Walter

In a few minutes we can set forth the essence of this discussion. It really does not need all the complex and confusing treatment it has often generated.

First, those who oppose the ordination of women have gone to great lengths and tortured logic to wrest from the Scripture what we will call "A Theology of Headship, Leadership, and Authority That Excludes Women." You have read it in their books and papers, heard it on their tapes and read about it in Dr. Damsteegt's speech in Utrecht. It sounds quite impressive to the masses, I suppose. But in their effort to sustain the argument, they must ignore the plainest teaching and evidence of the Bible.

If, as they say, God has such a "principle," which they call "God's Order," it is quite impossible to explain why God Himself violated it so often! For instance, God called Deborah to be judge and prophetess in Israel (Judges 4). Now Deborah wasn't "elected" to that office by a majority vote in Israel, with a majority of the population of Israel being women. She wasn't appointed by a committee having a majority of feminists on it. No, she was called by God Himself. Surely God could have called a male, if indeed He had a "principle" of excluding women from headship, leadership, and authority roles in His Old Testament church. But the fact is that God Himself called a woman to the highest civil and military authority, the highest spiritual headship, and the highest judicial leadership. Then she recruited another woman, Jael, whose leadership was credited for the military victory that followed an encounter with an enemy! Obviously, the theological invention which says that God excludes women from these callings is an abandonment of the principle of biblical authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It saddens me that they don't take the Bible just as it reads. Such a concocted theology is in danger of destroying the unity in the church and creating division!

A little later in the Bible story we find the account of the prophetess Huldah. She was called by God to fill not only the highest spiritual headship, but also a top leadership role in the reformation crisis of the hour. If you question that she was called to a role of leadership and authority, read what she told King Josiah (2 King 22:15).

The Bible makes it clear that the role and function of the prophet/prophetess is a role of the highest authority and leadership in God's church. It is second to none. Prophets speak with unquestioned authority to all other heads and leaders, including kings, priests, and generals. They do not need, nor do they seek any permission or approval of their message. They are not in submission to nor do they operate under the umbrella of male authority of any kind or station. Plus, Deborah was also judge in Israel, the highest civil and judicial authority. Let me emphasize again that these women were chosen and called by God Himself. They were placed in these roles of leadership and leadership by His will and His choice. He could have chosen either gender, but He chose women. How can anyone claim, if he/she accepts the authority of the Bible, that God's order excludes headship and leadership roles of authority for women? Surely, to teach such an unbiblical theology undermines the historic position the Seventh-day Adventist Church has given to the Word of God!

When God expressed His intention to baptize the world with His message, under the power of the Holy Spirit, preaching His gospel with mighty eloquence. He said He would call women as well as men to that last day appeal (Joel 2:28,29 and Acts 2:17,18). "Your sons and daughters .. both men and women" (NIV). When Peter said these words on the day of Pentecost, surely he was applying this word of God to the work the disciples were doing at that very moment, and to the work of the gospel in the New Testament church. To suggest otherwise is to do violence to the clear word of God! This inspired commission to preach the gospel to the world explicitly included women! Those who would reason otherwise are obviously not willing to take the Bible just as it reads!

The same must be said with regard to all the gifts of the Spirit as listed in various letters of the New Testament. Nowhere is it even hinted that some gifts are exclusively for men, but others could be enjoyed by women, or by both genders. Indeed the passages on the gifts of the Spirit, which include apostles, pastors, evangelists and teachers, mention not a word about gender exclusiveness. Such a notion is utterly unbiblical. Those who are willing to submit to the authority of Scripture will gladly encourage women into all the callings the Holy Spirit offers.

We should take time to point out that the New Testament also specifically mentions women in the role of prophetess, as well as other church leadership roles-Anna, holding the baby Jesus and proclaiming His Messiahship, the four daughters of Philip and several others mentioned by Paul in his letters (Rom. 16:1- 8;

Phil. 4:2,3).

Clearly, a theology that teaches that God's order excludes women from roles of headship and leadership in his church dishonors the Bible and parrots instead the sentiments of the Roman church's priesthood theology. We should take our stand on the historic Seventh-day Adventist position of basing our theology on the authority of the Bible.

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