

Women's Ordination

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“The Scriptures are plain upon the relations and rights of men and women” (1T 421).

Ordination Is Biblical: Mark 3:14; Acts 13:2-3; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Titus 1:5; DA 293.2. Made/Appointed = Ordained (incl. false ordinations: 1 Kgs 12:31; 13:33). Ordination is not Catholic in origin or function; **no grace or virtual qualification is added (LP 43).**

“Ordination was a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear the glad tidings of the gospel to the Gentiles.” The apostles “were solemnly dedicated to God by fasting and prayer and the laying on of hands. Thus they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, **being invested with full ecclesiastical authority**” (AA 160).

Ordination Is Gender-Specific: “As in the Old Testament the 12 patriarchs stand as representatives of Israel, so the twelve apostles were to stand as representatives of the gospel church” (DA 291). By “ordaining suitable men to act as officers, the apostles held to the high standards of leadership outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures” (AA 95; Ex 18:25: “able men ... heads”).

“Those who enter the missionary field should be men and women who walk and talk with God.” **But “those who stand as ministers in the sacred desk should be men of blameless reputation”** (5T 598). “God has been moving upon the hearts of young men to devote themselves to the ministry” (5T 85). “The primary object of our college was to afford young men an opportunity to study for the ministry and to prepare young persons of both sexes to become workers in the various branches of the cause” (5T 60). God is “just as particular, as He ever was. Those who profess to be the ministers of Jesus should be men of experience and deep piety” (EW 102; see also 5T 617; 6T 135; 4T 406; 5 MR 449-450).

Jesus Our Example: “Jesus was given to stand at the head of humanity, by His example to teach what it means to minister.” Although “Christ, not the minister, is the head of the church” (ST 1/27/1890; MR 21:274; see also DA 817; GC 51), **“the great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of men ordained [gender-specific] by God to act as His representatives.”** “In Christ’s stead they [men] are to beseech men and women [gender-inclusive] to be reconciled to God.” Ellen White calls ministers “spiritual guardians” and “watchmen” (AA 359-360).

All minister, but not all are ministers: “The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers” (GW 352).

Old Testament

“Male and female”: Humanity was created with an explicit gender differentiation (Gen 1:27). Adam and Eve were equal in value but different in function: Adam was created first, names the animals and his wife, and is given the initial law (Gen 2; 1 Tim 2:12-15). God addresses Adam first after the fall (Gen 3:9). Paul gives Adam full responsibility (Rom 5:12-14; 1 Cor 15:22) although Eve was first to sin. Adam and Eve sense their nakedness only after Adam sins (Gen 3:7). Eve caused a tragic role reversal: Adam is now “with her” (Gen 3:5) instead of Eve being with Adam. “In perfect obedience only were they safe”; Eve **“first erred in wandering from her husband”** (1SG 20).

Contrary to some claims, Eve was not a priestess in Eden.

“Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband’s side ... but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it. A similar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God’s plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them” (PP 59).

Deborah called herself “a mother of Israel” (Jdg 5:7) and was a prophetess (DG 37). Scripture mentions no length of time for her judging, in contrast to male judges. Her role established no exceptions to biblical law or church organization. She did not sit in the city gate (Ruth 4:9-11; 1 Sam 9:18; 1 Kgs 22:10; Jer 38:7), but under a palm tree (Jdg 4:5). “In the absence of the usual magistrates, the people had sought to her for counsel and justice.” Nonetheless Barak “had been designated by the Lord himself as the one chosen to deliver Israel” (DG 37; Heb 11:32).

Kingship—a model for God’s exceptions? No. “He permitted the people to follow their own choice, because they refused to be guided by His counsel. Hosea [13:11] declares that God gave them a king in His anger. 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” so that “through the bitter experience ... 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).

Is denying women ordination like slavery? No. Gender distinctions are a part of God’s beautiful creation, articulated in both Old and New Testament (Gen 1:26-27; 1 Tim 2:12-13); slavery is human oppression, not a divine idea.

“Cry aloud, spare not ... show my people their transgression” (Isa 58:1).

New Testament

Acts 1-2: The Holy Spirit was poured out on a male-led church.

Rom 16:1-2: Was Phoebe a deacon(ess)? Not necessarily. Diakonos is masculine and feminine and often means servant (Jesus: Rom 15:8; Paul: Eph 3:7; Col 1:24-25; Timothy: Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 4:6). Ordination is not a requirement for doing ministry.

Rom 16:7: Was Junia a female apostle? No. We don't even know if Junia(s) was a female (-ias names can be male: Ananias, Zacharias), and the New Testament never lists her or Andronicus among the Twelve. Junia was simply well-known to the apostles, who were men: "The apostles and elders, men of influence and judgment" (AA 196).

1 Cor 11:3: "The head of woman is man." "Head" does not mean source. Headship existed before the Fall (1 Cor 11:7-9) and continues in the New Testament (1 Cor 16:15-16; 1 Thes 5:12-13; 1 Tim 5:17; Tit 2:15; Heb 13:7,17). "Those standing at the head of the work" (1T 572; 5T 672; 7T 283-284; Ev 342; CT 522; FE 208; MM 164-165; 2SM 390; RH May 25, 1905). Stephen stood "at the head" of the 7 deacons (SR 260). The husband is "head of the family" (1T 307). Biblical headship is never abusive (AH 215).

1 Cor 14:34: "Let your women keep silent" to maintain reverence and decorum in worship. God "requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of old" (AA 96).

Gal 3:28: "Neither male nor female": The context of salvation addresses our vertical status before God, not gender roles in ministry. Gal 3:28 doesn't cancel the gender of men and women.

Eph 5:21-33: Christian submission varies by relationship (husband/wife; master/slave; parent/child). The wife submits to a Christ-like husband. "We women must remember that God has placed us subject to the husband. He is the head and our judgment and views and reasonings must agree with his if possible. If not, the preference in God's Word is given to the husband where it is not a matter of conscience. We must yield to the head" (Letter 5, 1861).

1 Tim 2-3: Paul's counsel on "sound doctrine" (1 Tim 1:10) to all churches (1 Tim 3:15). "**I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence**" (1 Tim 2:12; not vocal silence, but attitude—see verse 2 and 1 Pet 3:4). **Reason:** Adam was created first, while Eve was deceived first (1 Tim 2:13-14). **Husband of one wife is gender-specific** (esp. in view of 1 Tim 5:9, "wife of one man"). Godly male leadership in the home is prerequisite for leadership in the church (1 Tim 3:5).

1 Pet 2:9: The Priesthood of All Believers: Quoted from Ex 19:6-7, where not every Israelite was priest. Peter means no human intercessors are now needed. All can offer spiritual sacrifices of obedience (1 Sam 15:22), righteousness in trusting the Lord (Ps 4:5), thanksgiving (Ps 107:22), total surrender of bodies (Rom 12:1), and continual praise (Heb 13:15).

Adventist History: No Woman Elders or Pastors

“We do not learn from the Scriptures that women were ever ordained apostles ... or elders; ... neither do we believe that they should teach as such. Yet they may act an important part in speaking the truth to others” (D. T. Bourdeau, RH 12/2/1862, vol. XXI, p. 6).

Women elders? “We should say at once, No. But there are offices ... which women can fill acceptably.” Often “sisters in the church are better qualified for this than brethren” (church clerk, treasurer, literature, deaconesses) and for “assisting the deacons in looking after the poor.” “The qualifications for church elder are set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:7-9. **We do not believe that it is in God’s plan to give to women the ordained offices of the church.** ... We do not mean to depreciate their labors, service, or devotion. The sphere of woman is equal to that of man. She was made a help meet, or fit, for man, but **that does not mean that her sphere is identical to that of man’s.** The interests of the church and the world generally would be better served if the distinctions given in God’s word were regarded.” M. C. Wilcox (ST 1/24/1895, Question 176). **Paul “was the friend, not the adversary, of women in the work of the Christian church.** It is true he insists upon God’s order being preserved. He objects to that anomalous condition of things in which a woman rules over a household, or where obstreperous [difficult] women run the church.” This “is not God’s plan” (G. C. Tenney, RH 5/24/1892).

Ellen White: Her 1885 credentials had “ordained” crossed out; her bio was marked X as “no” (1909). “She was never ordained by human hands, nor did she ever perform a wedding, organize a church, or conduct a baptism” (DG 248). Prophets differ from priests: “Even the prophet’s feet might not enter” the holy of holies (PK 30). White did not claim she was “leader of the denomination” (8T 236). Women did receive licenses to preach (e.g., Sarah Lindsay, RH 10/12/1869, p. 126). “Women in ministry” (RH 12/12, 19/1878; 1/2/1879) speaks of Sabbath School, literature distribution, and evangelism, not eldership or pastoral leadership.

Motion to Ordain? “Resolved: Females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry” (GC, RH 12/20/1881, p. 392, col. 2). This motion died; no decision was made to ordain women. **Physicians** were set apart (through laying on hands) as medical missionaries, not as elders or pastors (Ev 546).

Divine Order: “It was the highest sin to rebel against His order and will” (EW 145; see also SR 13-15; Num 12; 16; CC 108). In the end, “divisions will come in the church. Two parties will be developed” (LDE 172). Israel will be sifted (Amos 9:9; Ezek 38:19), but “when you think that the work is in danger, pray, ‘Lord, stand at the wheel. Carry us through the perplexity. Bring us safely into port.’ **Have we not reason to believe that the Lord will bring us through triumphantly?**” (2SM 391).

Issues & Perspectives

Women in Ministry: The Holy Spirit “prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God” (6T 322). This pastoral work applies to canvassing (see also 5T 60, 598). Ellen White never used the term “Pastor” in the sense of leader of a church when referring to women. However, “there are many ways open before you. Address the crowds whenever you can.” Ellen White to Sister Henry (Ev 473). “Although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon them” (GW 452), women “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” (ChS 27; MS 22, 1892; Ev 471-473; Ed 264; 491-493; 12MR 160; 19MR 56; DG 20, 110; GW 452; 9T 128-129; see also Titus 2:3-5; Acts 18:26). “Through various lines of home missionary effort they can reach a class that is not reached by our ministers” (RH 12/10/1914).

Church Growth, Truth, and Unity: “If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished ... that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands” now in error (GC 598). “Men would effect a union through conformity to popular opinions, through a compromise with the world. **But truth is God’s basis for the unity of his people**” (GW92 391). “**We cannot purchase peace and unity at the cost of truth. The conflict may be long and painful, but at any cost we must hold fast to the Word of God**” (HS 197).

The Homosexuality Connection: “On the ecclesiological level, if not the biblical hermeneutical level, **the question of women’s ordination and homosexual ordination are homologous [same]. Thus, every mainline denomination that has previously ordained women is now debating the validity of ordaining homosexuals.**” Jenson & Wilhite, *The Church: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Kindle 1966-1974).

“The fight over sexual orientation is personal and complicated ... **the Bible itself is on trial.**” “**The marriage debate ... is about the Bible itself. ... The roots of the conflict are deeply theological.**” “It is not an accident that **the women’s-liberation movement preceded the gay-liberation movement.** Discriminatory attitudes and treatment of LGBT people is rooted in patriarchy, and **in order to embrace and affirm gays, evangelicals will have to address their own patriarchy and sexism.**” “**So far no Christian tradition has been able to embrace the LGBT community without first changing its views about women.** The same reasoning that concludes that homosexuality is sin is also behind the ... view that husbands are the spiritual leaders of marriages and men are the leaders in churches.” In E. Dias, “Inside the Evangelical War Over Gay Marriage,” *Time* 1/26/2015 (46-48).

“I was referred to Romans 1:18-32, as a true description of the world previous to the second appearing of Christ” (CG 440).

The Word, Not the World

“Before accepting any doctrine, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” (GC 595).

The Bible “was not written for the scholar alone; ... it was designed for the common people.” None will “lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God. We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves” (SC 89; 5T 388; Prov 8:8-9; 30:5-6; Mt 4:4; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12). **Let the Bible explain its own statements. Accept it just as it reads, without twisting the words to suit human ideas**” (LLM 55). “One sentence of Scripture is of more value than ten thousand of man’s ideas or arguments” (7T 71).

People “would have no difficulty in understanding their duty if it were in harmony with their inclinations. **It is plainly set before them in the Bible or is clearly indicated by circumstances and reason.** But because these evidences are contrary to their desires and inclinations they frequently set them aside. ... But God will not be trifled with” (PP 440). “Those who disregard the requirements of God in this life would not respect His authority were they in heaven” (4T 311). “God can accept no partial obedience, no lax way of treating His commandments” (CC 176).

“We must be careful lest we misinterpret the Scriptures. The plain teachings of the Word of God are not to be so spiritualized that the reality is lost sight of. **Do not overstrain the meaning of sentences in the Bible. ... Take the Scriptures as they read**” (1SM 170). “His words are not permits, not suggestions, but the decisions of an infallible Judge. They are divine maxims, the very specified laws which will judge us in the last days. **No man is excusable for acting as though he were at liberty to cancel the decisions of God,** to disregard His directions and injunctions, to review them, criticize them, reverse them as he sees fit.” “The words of God ... are strangely unheeded. If men cannot shape His sayings to their liking, they depart from His directions, and break His commandments.” “Man cannot depart from God’s plans, except at the peril of his soul.” **“The religion of every man must be in harmony with the Bible. No man can disregard one word of God, or walk contrary to his expressed will, receiving or rejecting it as he pleases, and be guiltless in the judgment. He will be brought face to face with the record, and will have to answer to the charge against him”** (4MR 450; see also GC vii, 268, 521, 598f.; Ed 227; 7T 71; MB 146).

“Men have been unwearied in their efforts to obscure **the plain, simple meaning of the Scriptures,** and to make them contradict their own testimony; but ... the word of God outrides the storms that threaten it with destruction” (GC 69). The battle is “between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition” (GC 582).

Simple Truth: “Truth is straight, plain, clear, and stands out boldly in its own defense; but it is not so with error” (EW 96).

“No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation” (RH 12/20/1892).