

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ABOUT

WOMEN'S ORDINATION

SOME FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

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Some say that Galatians 3:28 represents Paul's most mature thought while texts such as 1 Timothy 2:12-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 reflect his immature thinking, still affected by his rabbinic training. Is this true?

Since the message of Galatians 3:28 eventually led to the abolition of slave-free differences, should the same truth lead to the elimination of man-woman differences, opening the way for women to be ordained?

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Why does Paul appeal to Adam's being created before Eve to justify his injunction that women should not be permitted "to teach or to have authority over men" (1 Timothy 2:12)? Is it arbitrary to assign leadership on the basis of priority of creation?

Is it true that if Paul's argument about the priority of Adam's creation is valid, then the animals should rule mankind because animals were made before Adam was?

What kind of speaking does Paul prohibit to women in 1 Corinthians 14:34 when he writes, "The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says"?

Does the Bible clearly teach that a church elder should be a man and not a woman?

Does the New Testament distinguish between the office of elder and that of pastor?

Why not ordain women as local elders? Doing so wouldn't mean we would ordain women later as pastors, would it?

But most of the people I know (many of them, anyway) are in favor of ordaining women as elders or even pastors. Shouldn't this count for something?

Why is the issue of the ordination of women as elders or pastors of such crucial importance for the Seventh - day Adventist Church at this time?

What is at stake is the authority of the Bible for defining SDA beliefs and practices. The New Testament expresses its teaching on the role of women in the church in theological terms, basing it on interpretation of earlier Bible passages. It is presented as part of God's "law" and as "a command of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:34, 37). If such a Biblical teaching is regarded as limited to the culture of Paul's time, the same could be said of Biblical teachings regarding Creation, Sabbathkeeping, clean and unclean meats, footwashing, tithing, etc. The authority of Scripture as a whole would thus be undermined and discredited. The issue is important enough that it is scheduled for consideration and resolution at the 1990 General Conference.

Is the authority of the Bible really such an important issue for Seventh-day Adventists?

What issue is more important to Seventh-day Adventists than the authority of the Bible? Our entire belief structure, our reason for existence, and our mission to the world are based on the authority of the Bible.

What does the Bible teach regarding the role of women in the church?

The Bible presents women as full participants with men in the religious and social life of the

church. In the fifth year of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry, the priests went to Huldah the prophetess for counsel (2 Kings 22:13, 14). Women served as musicians and attendants at the tabernacle and Temple (1 Samuel 2:22, 1 Chronicles 25:5, 6, Psalm 68:24, 25). Women prayed aloud and prophesied in the church (1 Corinthians 11:5). They labored side by side with Paul and other workers in the Gospel (Philippians 4:3). In the closing chapter of Romans, Paul begins his greetings and commendations with women, and he includes several other women subsequently in the chapter (16:1-5, 6, 12, 13, 15). Widows (Acts 9:39) may have been an organized body for service in the New Testament church. But women did not serve as priests in the Old Testament (Exodus 28:1, Numbers 3:1-13) nor did they serve in the leadership/teaching role of elder or pastor in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:11-14; 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Corinthians 14:33-36).

What does the New Testament actually say about women in elder-pastor leadership roles?

“I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent” (1 Timothy 2:12). “If anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, . . . an apt teacher” (1 Timothy 3:1, 2). “This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife . . .” (Titus 1:5, 6). “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. . . . If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:33-37). There are more New Testament directives on this subject than there are about tithing or footwashing or the Sabbath. These New Testament passages are examined in this issue.

Was the Biblical exclusion of women from elder-pastor roles a consequence of a prevailing patriarchal, “male-chauvinist” culture and mentality?

No. The culture of the time permitted women to serve as priests. Many religions included women in their priesthood. By contrast, the inspired writers of both the Old Testament and the New Testament maintained the role distinctions as assigned by God to men and women from the beginning.

Why should the Seventh-day Adventist Church resist pressure from humanistic/feminist ideologies that are bent on eliminating role distinctions between men and women?

“Role interchangeability,” which eliminates role distinctions, should concern Seventh-day Adventists because we are committed to belief in the Creation as it is presented in Scripture. Contrary to Christians who interpret the Creation story as a poetic description of the evolutionary process, Adventists accept as factual the account of the six days of Creation. Because we accept the *doctrine* of Creation, we accept the *order* of Creation. But if Adventists accept the humanistic notion that the roles of men and women are completely interchangeable, we will undermine our belief in the doctrine of creation, on which the Sabbath commandment is based.

Also, in terms of day-to-day living, eliminating the clear role distinctions between men and women accelerates the breakdown of the family, leads to confusion of identity among children, and may contribute to acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle.

What has been the experience of churches that have ordained women as priests or pastors?

Some denominations have endured quarrels and divisions over appointing women ministers. For some this has involved forming new churches or even denominations. However, some other denominations feel that their new women ministers have been a real help to them.

So what shall we conclude from the experience of the various denominations?

Seventh-day Adventists don't arrive at truth by asking, "Do Baptists get spiritual help from attending church on Sunday?" We don't ask, "Do Pentecostals feel close to God when they talk in tongues?" We don't ask if Catholics find it meaningful to have a pope and a Virgin Mary.

Seventh-day Adventists ask, "What does the Bible say?" We believe God's *best* blessings fall on people who choose to obey His revealed will.

What is Ellen White's relationship to this issue? Was she ever ordained?

Ellen White was never ordained. After more than 25 years of her prophetic ministry, the church voted her the credentials of an ordained minister, but she indicated in 1909 (when she was in her eighties) that she had never been ordained (Arthur L. White, *Spectrum* , 4, 2 [Spring 1972] :7). Nor did she ever exercise the special functions of an ordained minister, such as performing marriages, baptizing, and organizing local churches. As are all church members, she too was ordained of God to work for Him and was given a special work to do. But she was never ordained by human hands.

Didn't Ellen White have a position of authority in the church?

Her authority was in the messages God gave her rather than in any position the church gave her. She specifically rejected the idea of a leadership position in the church. "It is not right for you to suppose that I am striving to be first, striving for leadership. . . . I want it to be understood that I have no ambition to have the name of leader, or any other name that may be given me, except that of a messenger of God. I claim no other name or position" (Letter 320, 1905;

Manuscript Release #340). "I am not to appear before the people as holding any other position than that of a messenger with a message" (*Testimonies for the Church* , vol. 8, p. 237).

Did Ellen White urge the church to ordain women?

To the Gospel ministry and as elders? No. She urged that certain women who were "willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands" (*Review and Herald* , July 9, 1895). It was "to this work," a personal work of visitation and mercy, that they were to be set apart. This is not the same as the role of church leadership entrusted to the pastor or elder.

Didn't Mrs. White encourage women to participate in the work of the church?

Yes, she did. Noting a “sphere” in which God had called and equipped women to work (see *Patriarchs and Prophets* , p. 59), she called for greater involvement. She urged women especially to engage in personal work for women and families. A clear example of this may be found in her article, “Women to Be Gospel Workers” (*Testimonies for the Church* , vol. 6, pp. 114-118). Among other things, she says there that 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 labor is needed” (pp. 117, 118). “Sisters, God calls you to work in the harvest field and to help gather in the sheaves. . . . In the various lines of home missionary work the modest, intelligent woman may use her powers to the very highest account” (*Welfare Ministry* , p. 160).

Does Ellen White warn against seeking a role or “sphere” different from the one we're assigned by God?

Yes. Referring to Eve, she writes: “She was perfectly happy in her Eden home by her husband's side; but like restless modern Eves, she was flattered that there was a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. But in attempting to climb higher than her original position, she fell far below it. This will most assuredly be the result with the Eves of the present generation if they neglect to cheerfully take up their daily duty in accordance with God's plan.

“A neglect on the part of woman to follow God's plan in her creation, an effort to reach for important positions which He has not qualified her to fill, leaves vacant the position that she could fill to acceptance. In getting out of her sphere, she loses true womanly dignity and nobility” (Testimonies for the Church , vol. 3, pp. 483, 484).

Because our women haven't been ordained, has our church undervalued their work and treated them unfairly?

Our church has not handled the pay and hiring issues fairly. Mrs. White protested such unfairness in her own time. But her remedy was not to ordain women, but to treat them justly, as we see in the following example: “And if the Lord gives the wife as well as the husband the burden of labor, and if she devotes her time and her strength to visiting from family to family, opening the Scriptures to them, *although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon her*, she is accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry. Should her labors be counted as nought, and her husband's salary be no more than that of the servant of God whose wife does not give herself to the work, but remains at home to care for her family?” (Manuscript Release #330, emphasis supplied). Again, “This question [appropriate pay for women workers] is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the Gospel, whose work testifies that they are essential to carrying the truth into families” (*Evangelism* , p. 493).

Ordination of Women and the Old Testament

Were women excluded from the Israelite priesthood because of their frequent ritual impurity caused by menstrual flow?

This idea is widely held, but it lacks Biblical support. No Bible text gives any indication that their monthly seven-day ritual impurity (Leviticus 15:19-24) was the basis for women's exclusion. In fact, men became ritually unclean more frequently than women did: not just once a month, but every time they had a natural or unnatural discharge of semen (Leviticus 15:1-18). Women could have

served at the Temple on a rotating basis, like men, according to their ritual status (1 Chronicles 24; Luke 1:5, 9).

What is more, the Bible tells us that women did serve in a limited role at the tabernacle (Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22). If ritual impurity were the factor keeping them from serving as priests, it would also have disqualified them from ministering at the entrance to the tabernacle.

Were women excluded from the priesthood to avoid the dangers of the Canaanite fertility cults and sacred prostitution?

No. Many pagan priestesses lived celibate, devoted lives. The fact that some pagan priestesses served as prostitutes cannot have been the reason God excluded devout Israelite women from serving with honor as priestesses at the sanctuary. The sons of Eli “lay with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting” (1 Samuel 2:22), yet their mutual immorality resulted in the abolition neither of the male priesthood nor of the ministry of the women who served at the entrance to the sanctuary.

Furthermore, the danger of *male* cult prostitution was equally present in Old Testament times. Scripture condemns it as being equally, if not more, abominable than female prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:18; Revelation 22:15). If the danger of prostitution were the reason for excluding women from the priesthood, men would not have been eligible either.

Why then were women included in prophetic, religious, and social ministries in Old Testament times, but excluded from serving as priests?

One reason appears to be that the role of the priest was seen in the Bible as representing the head of the household. During patriarchal times the male head of the household or tribe functioned as the priest, representing his household to God (Genesis 8:20; 22:13; Job 1:5). Later God appointed the tribe of Levi as priests instead of the firstborn son or head of each family (Numbers 3:6-13). “The Levites shall be Mine, for all the firstborn are Mine” (Numbers 3:12, 13).

A woman could minister as a prophet, communicating God's will, but a male was appointed to the priestly role because the male was viewed by Bible writers as the “firstborn” of the human family (Genesis 2:7, 21-23) to whom God assigned the headship role in the home and in the church.

The New Testament continued this concept, appointing representative males as elders or pastors. The New Testament practice ran contrary to the culture of the time, since most pagan religions had priestesses as well as priests. The New Testament practice was based on the divine revelation in the Old Testament (see 1 Timothy 2:12, 13), pointing to a headship role established at Creation for man to fulfill at home and in the household of faith.

It was God's plan, of course, that every *individual* should be a “priest” in Old Testament times (Exodus 19:6) as in our own times (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6)—but this was as individuals in our individual relationship to God, not as ordained priests representing the community.

Is the Creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:4, where man and woman are presented as equals, more trustworthy than the account in Genesis 2:4b-25, where woman is subordinate to man?

Such a view pits the Bible against itself. There is no reason to assume that a contradiction exists between Genesis 1 and 2. Moses, the author of Genesis, obviously saw the two accounts as

complementary, not contradictory, or he would not have put them together.

When one recognizes the different purposes of chapters one and two, the apparent tension resolves. Chapter one portrays man and woman in relation to *God*. Here both are equal, for both are created in the image of God and both are subordinate to God. Chapter two portrays man and woman in relation to *one another*, and reveals a functional subordination of woman to man.

Jacques Doukhan, a professor of Old Testament at the SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, has shown in his doctoral dissertation that Genesis 1 and 2 are not contradictory but complementary. The principle of equality in being and subordination in function not only resolves the apparent tension between Genesis 1 and 2 but also explains why women are presented in the Bible as equal to men in personhood and yet subordinate to men in certain roles.

Are “equality in being” and “subordination in function” contradictory terms?

Not necessarily. Such a “contradiction” existed in our Saviour Himself. On the one hand Jesus could say, “I and the Father are One” (John 10:30) and “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), while on the other hand He could say, “I can do nothing on My Own authority; . . . I seek not My Own will but the will of Him Who sent Me” (John 5:30), and “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).

The subordination of woman to man in the Bible is a subordination not of inferiority, but of unity. An equal accepts a subordinate role for the purpose of greater unity. In this relationship the head governs out of genuine love and respect and the subordinate responds out of a desire to serve common goals. It is a similar kind of subordination to that which exists in the Godhead between the Father and the Son. In fact, Paul appeals to this heavenly example to explain the way a husband is the head of his wife, namely, as God is the head of Christ. “The head of a woman is her husband, and the Head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). This is the unique kind of Christian subordination that makes one person out of two equal persons.

Wasn't Eve's subordination to Adam in Genesis 3:16 a part of the curse, which Christ came to take away?

In the Bible, neither blessings nor curses are arbitrary, but are directly determined by one's relationship to God's law. “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). The same commands bring a blessing if followed, or a curse if violated. The curse is the law's application to a rebellious heart. Christ takes away the rebellion from the heart, so that we may realize the blessings of obedience.

What we often call the curse in Genesis 3:16, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you,” is part of a broader description of the results of their rebellion on the man and woman's pre-Fall functions. For example, God had commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply.” Now, after sin, Eve's part in that function would be by pain and labor (Genesis 3:16). Likewise Adam had been placed in the garden “to till it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). But now, after sin, his efforts would be laborious, the ground would bear thistles, and he would survive by “the sweat of [his] face” (Genesis 3:17-19). The man and woman are not given new functions here, but sin's effect on their established functions is spelled out. In this setting the “rule over” statement appears. What had been a natural and happy leadership before the Fall would now have to be asserted in conflict, as a result of the spirit of rebellion and the desire for supremacy that sin has brought into the human

heart.

When Jesus quells the rebellion in the heart, He does not free woman from the travail of giving birth nor man from the laboriousness of his toil. Indeed, they may each find blessing there. Neither does Jesus change the structure of the man-woman relationship. But He changes the quality of that relationship to reflect His submission and self-sacrificing love. Under His lordship, and within this structure, He has provided for us to live happily together until He makes “all things new,” and “there shall be no more curse” (Revelation 21:5; 22:3).

What evidence is there for a “structure” in the relationship of the man and woman before the Fall?

These are some indications of God's design for man's leadership role in their relationship: 1) Genesis 2 tells us that God made the woman *of* the man, to be a helper fit *for* the man, and that God brought her *to* the man. This implies no inferiority, but it does establish the structure of their relationship. 2) The warnings about the tree of knowledge are given to the man before the creation of the woman (Genesis 2:15-17). Evidently he was responsible to convey to her the knowledge of God's will in this matter. 3) Adam names the woman (Genesis 2:23), an act indicating an authority over her.

Did Adam “rule over” Eve before the Fall?

Not in the same way as after. God appointed him head, but before sin there was no disharmony that would have caused conflict. Though Adam was king in Eden, Eve was not his slave but his queen. He held her in the highest regard, and it was spontaneous and natural for her to be in harmony with him and with the will of God as revealed through him. She never conceived of this structure as involving subjection or self-denial, for there was no rebellious “self” to deny. Nor did she think of Adam as “ruling over” her, but as one through whom God had revealed to her her greatest privilege and pleasure, to glorify God through and with her husband, to whom she had been given as a helper. Law and authority remain virtually unrecognized when there is perfect and natural harmony of wills.

But with the entry of sin, lawlessness and a spirit of rebellion became a part of man's nature, and all of this changed. Before the Fall the authority structure had been natural and even unrecognized. The woman's will was in harmony with the man's and both were fully under the lordship of the Creator. So it had been with the angels: “When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy” (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* , p. 109).

Sin in the heart makes the law of God evident to us, because it is no longer natural for us to obey that law. Submission to God-ordained authority was a nonissue to woman prior to the Fall and the consequent rebellion it created in her heart. But after the Fall she became conscious of the law and its necessary new application to her in a sinful condition. “The law of God existed before the creation of man or else Adam could not have sinned. After the transgression of Adam the principles of the law were not changed, but were definitely arranged and expressed to meet man in his fallen condition” (*Selected Messages* , book 1, p. 230).

Does Mrs. White say that Eve was Adam's equal before the Fall and that only after the Fall was Adam to be her ruler?

Ellen White says both that Eve was Adam's equal before sin entered and that woman is man's equal today. But in her writings this equality doesn't give man and woman identical roles and neither does it deny the Biblical concept that in some respects woman is to be in subjection to man.

Testimonies for the Church , vol. 3, p. 484, says that “when God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. . . . But after Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse.”

This subjection is evidently *still* a part of God's plan. Ellen White also said, “We women must remember that God has placed us subject to the husband. . . . We must yield to the head” (Letter 5, 1861). “The husband is the head of the family, as Christ is the Head of the church; and any course which the wife may pursue to lessen his influence and lead him to come down from that dignified, responsible position is displeasing to God” (*Testimonies for the Church* , vol. 1, p. 307). Indeed, when a woman honors that requirement of God, she helps her husband to develop into the responsible, loving man that God calls him to be.

But along with the ongoing subjection there remains also something of the original equality. *Adventist Home* , p. 231, says, “Woman should [today, now] fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband's equal.”

However, never, at Creation or at the present time, has equality implied that men and women have identical God-given roles. Two sentences after the Ellen White statement just quoted occurs this sentence: “We may safely say that the distinctive duties of woman are more sacred, more holy, than those of man.”

In the Garden of Eden man and woman were assigned different duties to perform, but they also enjoyed perfect harmony. The man led kindly and the woman cooperated joyfully. Sin, however, made selfishness grow in human hearts, just as it made weeds grow in the ground. Eve's independence of her husband in the first sin would show up repeatedly as woman would seek repeatedly to circumvent man's leadership. Adam's original disregard for God's law would show up repeatedly as man attempted to dominate woman with unloving authoritarianism. Role distinctions would be marred by sin—and the Gospel, when it came, would not obliterate these distinctions. Instead, the Gospel would reinfuse the distinctive roles of “equal” men and women with the love and joyfulness that God had given them in Eden.

What are the implications of this for the issue of ordination of women to the headship positions in the church?

In our current situation, we must see what it means to follow the eternal principle of harmony with God-ordained authority. What is the leadership structure that God has given to the church in His Word? The apostle Paul outlines that structure in light of the Creation and Fall narratives of Genesis (1 Corinthians 11:7-12; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12-14). He indicates that God has established the leadership of certain qualified men in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The whole great controversy began with Lucifer over the issue of harmony with God-ordained authority. The church only perpetuates the sin problem when it tries to establish authority contrary to God's directions, no matter how desirable that may seem. In the very context of authority (here, appointing a king), Ellen White says, “That which the heart desires contrary to the will of God will in the end be found a curse

rather than a blessing” (*Patriarchs and Prophets* , p. 606). On the other hand, when we set the heart willingly to obey God, even what seemed a curse to us will be seen to be a blessing. “The Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you” (Deuteronomy 23:5).

Can Joel 2:28, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,” settle the issue for us of men and women filling the same spiritual roles?

The New Testament, like the Old (Joel 2:28), provided for women to serve as prophets and to have visions and dreams. But neither the Old Testament nor the New permitted women to serve as ordained religious leaders of the congregation.

Ordination of Women and the New Testament

Did Jesus intend to open the way for women to serve as pastors and elders?

Jesus treated women in a revolutionary way—affirming their personhood, appreciating their intellectual and spiritual capacities, accepting some of them into His inner circle of traveling companions, and honoring them with the first announcement of His resurrection. Is this evidence that He intended to open the way for women to serve as pastors and elders?

Jesus did indeed treat women as persons of equal value to men. He admitted them into His fellowship. He took time to teach them the truths of the Kingdom of God. A woman was first with the story of the resurrection, and at least one woman (Mary) received the Holy Spirit with the others at Pentecost. Yet the fact remains that Christ called no woman to be part of the twelve apostles. Why would Jesus not have commissioned women to preach or teach publicly, if this had been His intention? Whatever the cultural situation may have been in Palestine (we have very little *contemporary* evidence of how women were treated there), such a move would have been quite acceptable in the larger harvest field, since the priestly role of women was readily accepted in the Gentile world, where the Gospel was to be preached.

Jesus never dealt with the issue of a leadership role for women. But through the Holy Spirit He clarified that issue in the writings of the apostles. Those messages are as much the voice of Jesus as if He had spoken them while on Earth. Jesus' Own choice of twelve male apostles was consistent with the Old Testament headship role man was called to fulfill at home and in the community of faith. The same role structure was respected in the life and order of the apostolic church.

Some say that Paul, in contrast to Jesus, was an antifeminist who viewed women as inferior and for this reason excluded them from leadership roles within the church.

Is this the same Paul who proclaimed, “There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28)? In this well-known statement Paul affirmed the spiritual oneness in Christ of both men and women. In other places he commended a significant number of women for working intensively with him in the missionary outreach of the church. In fact, he may have worked more actively with women than Jesus did. A number of women were “fellow workers” with Paul in his missionary outreach (Romans 16:1-3, 6, 12, 13, 15; Philippians 4:2, 3).

Ordination of Women and Paul

Did Paul imply that certain women served as congregational leaders in the apostolic church?

Does Paul's commendation of certain women as “fellow workers” (Romans 16:3) and as those who have “worked hard” (Romans 16:12; Philippians 4:3) in Gospel service imply that certain women served as congregational leaders in the apostolic church?

No. The same Paul who praised women for their outstanding contribution to the mission of the church also instructed women not “to teach” (1 Timothy 2:12) or “to speak” (1 Corinthians 14:34) as representative leaders of the church. Thus, his insistence on different roles for men and women at home and in the church must be seen as an indication not of Paul's chauvinism but rather of his respect for the role distinctions established by God at Creation.

His practice accorded with the rest of the apostolic church. In the New Testament church there were no women apostles, no women public evangelists, elders, or pastors. No women engaged in public “teaching.” No woman served as the head or leader of a congregation. The reason is not that the culture was chauvinistic, but rather that the church faithfully respected the role distinctions assigned by God to men and women at Creation.

Does Galatians 3:28 represent the great breakthrough in which Paul proclaimed the abolition of all differences between men and women, opening the way for women to be ordained as pastors or elders?

No, for this same Paul vigorously upheld role distinctions for men and women (1 Corinthians 11:3-15; Ephesians 5:22).

If Galatians 3:28 does not abolish all role distinctions among Christians, then what does this passage say?

The text asserts the basic truth that in Christ every person, Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, enjoys the status of being a son or daughter of God. This truth is made clear in the following verse that says, “If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (v. 29). This means that to be “one in Christ” is to share equally in the inheritance of eternal life.

The real issue in Galatians 3:28 is religious. The great concern of Jews and Christians of the first century was religious status, that is, the status of men and women before God. By contrast, the primary concern of many people today, including many Christians, is social status, often focusing on the social equality of men and women. The prevailing perception among such people today is that we can only bring about true equality by abolishing all role distinctions between men and women, thus realizing what sociologists call “role interchangeability.” Though popular, this view is a distortion, a perversion, of God's Creation order. In the Bible equality does not mean role interchangeability. Christianity does not abolish the headship of the husband or the subordination of the wife; rather, it redefines these roles in terms of sacrificial love, servanthood, and mutual respect.

Some say that Galatians 3:28 represents Paul's most mature

thought while texts such as 1 Timothy 2:12-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 reflect his immature thinking, still affected by his rabbinic training. Is this true?

To claim that Paul in his epistles was sometimes immature or inconsistent because of the influence of his rabbinic training undermines the authority of the Scriptures and assumes that an intelligent man like Paul was incoherent at times.

It makes more sense to believe that Paul saw no tension between oneness in Christ (Galatians 3:28) and the functional subordination of women in the church (1 Timothy 2:12-15; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-35). This tension is not in Paul nor in the Bible, but in the minds of modern critics.

Since the message of Galatians 3:28 eventually led to the abolition of slave-free differences, should the same truth lead to the elimination of man-woman differences, opening the way for women to be ordained?

Three important observations discredit this popular argument. First, Paul compares the relationships among Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, and men and women in only one common area: the status distinction these created in one's relationship to God. He declares that everyone stands on a level before the cross.

Second, in other areas Paul recognized that the distinctions among the three relationships still existed. Being one in Christ did not change a Jew into a Gentile, a slave into a freeman, or a man into a woman; rather, it changed the way each of these related to the other.

Third, there is an important difference between Paul's view of the man-woman relationship and his view of the slave-freeman relationship. While Paul defends the subordination involved in the man-woman relationship by appealing to the order in which man and woman were created, he never teaches that slavery is a divine institution, a part of God's order of Creation and should be perpetuated. On the contrary, he encourages the slave when offered the opportunity of emancipation to take advantage of it (1 Corinthians 7:21), and he classifies slave-kidnappers among the "unholy and profane" (1 Timothy 1:9, 10). While slavery is a temporary human institution resulting from the Fall, male-female differences are unchangeable biological distinctions originating from Creation.

If Paul allowed slavery, which we today condemn, can we say on the basis of "progressive revelation" that if he were alive today God would inspire him to change his mind on both the slavery issue and on women's ordination?

Paul did not endorse slavery, as we have shown above. On the contrary, the principles he laid down for modifying slavery led to the abolition of slavery in Christian countries.

God cannot contradict Himself. What He reveals is truth; hence, what He reveals at one time is always in harmony with what He reveals at another time. Some people go so far as to say that under "progressive revelation" gay men can now be ordained as ministers. Such a conclusion cannot be justified, however, because the Bible clearly condemns homosexuality. Some say that under "progressive revelation" women can now be ordained as elders and ministers. But this conclusion also is unsound, for the Bible forbids their filling those roles. Revelation may be progressive but it is

never contradictory.

Is it unfair or even immoral not to ordain women to the Gospel ministry or eldership if they are qualified in every other respect than gender? Galatians 3:28 claims that in Christ “there is neither male nor female.”

Some have tried to portray this as an issue of basic fairness or morality. But there is no Biblical command enjoining ordination for women, so a failure to ordain is not a violation of a Biblical injunction. On the contrary, there is a command in the New Testament that the church should not appoint women to the headship role of pastor/teacher, a role upon which ordination is normally conferred. Should we violate that injunction?

The principle set forth in Galatians 3:28 is that all Christians are of equal value in the eyes of Christ. To say that this puts us under moral obligation to ordain women is to fail to see the difference between worth and function. For all to have equal worth is not the same as all having identical function. The doctrine of spiritual gifts argues eloquently against equality of function.

Paul expresses it this way: “If the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? . . . But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as He chose” (1 Corinthians 12:16-18). “But God has so composed the body, . . . that the members may have the same care for one another. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers

. . .” (1 Corinthians 12:24-28). Not all have the same function, but all are equally needed and important to the body. This is how God has arranged it. Immoral? Unfair? No, His design. And His appointment of different ones to exercise the gifts does not override the instructions in His Word regarding their exercise.

Does Ellen White support the view that role distinctions between husband and wife have been done away in Christ?

No. On the contrary she writes: “The husband is the head of the family, as Christ is the Head of the church; and any course which the wife may pursue to lessen his influence and lead him to come down from that dignified, responsible position is displeasing to God. It is the duty of the wife to yield her wishes and will to her husband. Both should be yielding, but the Word of God gives preference to the judgment of the husband. And it will not detract from the dignity of the wife to yield to him whom she has chosen to be her counselor, adviser, and protector. The husband should maintain his position in his family with all meekness, yet with decision” (*Testimonies for the Church* , vol. 1, pp. 307, 308).

Pauline Passages about the Role of Women

What is the significance of Paul's discussion about head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 for the discussion of the role of women in the church?

In spite of certain difficulties of interpretation, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 provides one of the clearest statements on the fundamental significance of the role differences which must exist between

men and women at home and in the church. The lengthy discussion about head coverings can mislead a person today into thinking that Paul majored in minors. In fact, the discussion on head covering is only secondary to the fundamental principle Paul asserts about the headship of man (“the head of the woman is man,” v. 3, NIV) and of the subordination of woman (vv. 5-10), which must be respected at home and in the church.

The principle was being challenged by emancipated Corinthian women who interpreted the freedom of the Gospel as freedom from wearing a sign of submission to their husbands (head covering), especially at times of prayer and sharing in the church service. To counteract this trend, which would have resulted in the violation of role distinctions that God Himself had created, Paul emphasizes at length the importance of respecting the custom of head covering as a way of honoring the Creation order.

What does Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 on head coverings mean for us today?

Paul urges respect for the head-covering custom because in his time it fittingly expressed sexual differentiation and role distinction. Applied to our culture, the principle means that if certain styles of hair and clothing are distinctively male or female, their gender association must be respected in order to maintain the clear distinction between the sexes enjoined in Scripture. This principle is particularly relevant today, when some promote the blurring of sexual differences (unisex), while others are adopting the dress and sometimes the behavior of the opposite sex.

Why does Paul say, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men” in the church (1 Timothy 2:12)? Is it because women in his day were uneducated?

That is an assumption without support in the Bible. If lack of education had been the basis of Paul's prohibition, he would have prohibited both men and women to teach in the church if they were uneducated. But women as well as men could have been trained to become good teachers. Deaconesses and other female workers in apostolic teams must have received some training.

In fact, the situation in Ephesus may have been quite different from what is often supposed. Some of the women may have been more educated than many men, and so they may have felt justified to act as teacher-leaders of the congregation. Priscilla was well enough educated in the Christian faith to instruct an intellectual like Apollos, when he went to Ephesus (Acts 18:26). All of this suggests that the reason for Paul's instruction was not that women were uneducated.

Does 1 Timothy 2:12 really forbid all kinds of teaching and speaking by women in the church?

If the Adventist Church took Paul's statement literally, “I permit no woman to teach . . . she is to keep silent,” following it would cripple us, since we use the talents of women so heavily in Sabbath School and in other teaching and speaking ministries.

The Bible is clear that in Paul's ministry women were not expected to be totally silent. They prayed, prophesied, and exercised an appropriate teaching ministry (1 Corinthians 11:5; Acts 18:26; Philippians 4:3; Romans 16:12; Titus 2:3, 4) that Paul encouraged. The nature of the teaching forbidden to women in 1 Timothy 2:12 is the authoritative teaching restricted to the pastor, the elder-overseer of the congregation. This conclusion is supported both by the meaning of the parallelism

“or to have authority over men,” v. 12) and by the use of the verb “to teach” and of the noun “teaching” in Paul’s writings, especially in his letters to Timothy.

Paul’s letters to Timothy present the teaching ministry as a governing function performed by Paul himself, by Timothy, or by other appointed elder-overseers of the congregation (1 Timothy 2:7; 3:2; 5:17; 2 Timothy 1:11; 2:2). Paul charges Timothy to “command and teach” (1 Timothy 4:11), “take heed to yourself and to your teaching” (4:16), “teach and urge these duties” (6:2), “preach the Word . . . in teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2).

In light of the restrictive use of the words “to teach” and “teaching” in these letters, it is reasonable to conclude that the teaching forbidden to women is the authoritative teaching done by elder-overseers.

Why does Paul forbid women to teach as leaders of the congregation?

Because the women were not to occupy the headship role of authority over men. This role is inappropriate for women, not because they are any less intelligent or dedicated than men, but because of the order for men and women established by God at Creation (1 Timothy 2:13; 1 Corinthians 11:8).

Does Paul or any other New Testament writer ever portray women as teaching?

Yes. Paul uses the Greek word *kalodidaskalos*, “teacher of good things,” to refer to what the aged women were to be in the instruction they gave to younger women (Titus 2:3, 4). On the other hand, the Greek verb used for the authoritative teaching role that Paul assigns to the elders is *didasko*, “to teach.” The only place in the New Testament where *didasko* is an action of a woman is in Revelation 2:20, where the church at Thyatira is reprimanded because “you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who . . . is teaching.”

Is it true that Paul’s argument about the priority of Adam’s creation (“For Adam was formed first, then Eve,” 1 Timothy 2:13) is faulty because it is based on the wrong Creation account (Genesis 2 instead of Genesis 1) and because it attaches significance to the fact that man was created before woman?

Accusing Paul of being “faulty” can have serious consequences. If we say that Paul made a mistake in interpreting the meaning of Genesis in respect to the role relations between men and women, how can we know he was not also in error in interpreting the meaning of the Second Advent, or the relationship between faith and works in the process of salvation?

Paul clearly stated the basis of his authority to those who challenged it: “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37, 38). Strikingly, Paul made this very claim in the context of his teaching about the role of women in the church. It behooves us to accept his interpretation.

Why does Paul appeal to Adam’s being created before Eve to justify his injunction that women should not be permitted “to teach or to have authority over men” (1 Timothy 2:12)? Is it arbitrary to

assign leadership on the basis of priority of creation?

Paul does not tell us why he reasons in this line. Often Scripture does not feel obligated to justify itself. But it seems likely that Paul saw in the priority of Adam's creation the symbol of the leadership role God intended man to fulfill at home and in the church. From a logical standpoint, it seems arbitrary to assign leadership on the basis of priority of creation. From a Biblical standpoint, however, the arbitrariness disappears because the priority of creation is not an accident but a divine design, intended to typify the leadership and headship role man was created to fulfill. Further, the significance attached to the priority of Adam's formation is reflected in the meaning that Scripture attaches to the "firstborn," a title used even with reference to Christ ("the Firstborn of all creation," Colossians 1:15).

The sanctification of the seventh day provides another example. From a logical standpoint it seems arbitrary that God should choose to bless and sanctify the seventh day instead of the first day, since all days consist alike of 24 hours. From a Biblical standpoint, however, it is not arbitrary that God should choose the seventh day as a symbol of Creation and as a type of re-creation and sanctification (Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 31:13, 17; Ezekiel 20:20).

Is it true that if Paul's argument about the priority of Adam's creation is valid, then the animals should rule mankind because animals were made before Adam was?

Of course not. Proponents of this argument fail to note that the Bible attaches no significance to the prior creation of the animals. Animals were created before mankind, but man does not derive from animals. On the other hand, Paul clearly associates the priority of Adam's formation with Eve's derivation out of man (1 Corinthians 11:8, 9).

It is amazing how we will argue even with Bible writers when they tell us something we don't want to hear.

What kind of speaking does Paul prohibit to women in 1 Corinthians 14:34 when he writes, "The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says"?

Paul is not here prohibiting all kinds of speaking by women in church, since a few chapters earlier he speaks kindly of "any woman who prays or prophesies," provided only that she dresses modestly (1 Corinthians 11:5). The key phrase that qualifies the kind of women's speaking Paul had in mind is, "but should be subordinate" (v. 34). This phrase suggests that the speech denied to women was speech that was seen as inappropriate to them as women or wives. Such speech may have included speaking up in the church as authoritative teachers of the congregation, or as critics of the prophets, elders, or even their own husbands. It may also have included any form of questioning viewed as challenging church leadership. In other words, it probably included all forms of women's speech that reflected lack of subordination to their husbands and/or to the church leaders.

Does the Bible clearly teach that a church elder should be a man and not a woman?

Yes. In the lists of qualifications for an elder in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, specific reference is made, among other things, to the fact that an elder must be a husband (Greek *aner*, man

or husband) of one wife. The elder, then, is to be a married man loyal to his wife. Whether we like it or not, the specifications require males.

The very structure of the passage in 1 Timothy supports this conclusion. The qualifications for the office of elder (3:1-7) include being “an apt teacher.” They follow immediately after the prohibition of women as teacher-elders (2:11-15). This placement of the qualifications for eldership (including fitness for teaching) immediately after the prohibition respecting women reveals explicitly that women should not be elders. Making them elders would cast them in a type of teaching role that Scripture specifically prohibits to them.

Does the New Testament distinguish between the office of elder and that of pastor?

No. The term “pastor” (Greek *poimen*) is used only once in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11) and it refers to leaders of the congregation better known elsewhere as elders, overseers, or simply as leaders. Such leaders, however, were clearly seen as “pastor/shepherds,” as indicated by the use of such picturesque expressions as to “shepherd the flock” in describing the work of elders (1 Peter 5:1, 2; Acts 20:17, 28; John 21:16).

In view of the fact that the term “pastor” is seen in the New Testament as descriptive of the shepherding function of elders, the present policy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to allow for the ordination of women as local elders but not as pastors is based on an artificial distinction between the two offices, a distinction which does not exist in the New Testament. Even the church's ordination practice underscores the Biblical unity of the two offices: We often read the same Bible passages for both ordinations.

Why not ordain women as local elders? Doing so wouldn't mean we would ordain women later as pastors, would it?

We have no right to approve a practice that Scripture forbids in principle. Further, the ordination of women as elders will be used as a lever to pressure the church into ordination of female pastors. Though many people now claim that the two issues are unrelated, they exhibit a strong sense of urgency to ordain women elders in as many churches as possible, before the General Conference Session in 1990. If widespread, the practice will be a power base from which to point out that Biblically *there is no difference*. Then the argument will be, Since we are already ordaining women as elders, how can we justify denying them ordination as pastors? Fidelity to God's Word is always best for God's church. It is our strength. Compromise on God's Word brings confusion and weakness.

But most of the people I know (many of them, anyway) are in favor of ordaining women as elders or even pastors. Shouldn't this count for something?

Many, many Adventists as well as a large number of other Protestants oppose women's ordination. But popular opinion does not define Scriptural truth. Ellen White, in harmony with historic Protestantism, reminds us that “the Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture” (*Education*, p. 190). Opinion polls, culture, and sociology may be interesting, but they must not be allowed to reinterpret the meaning of the Bible.