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The wedding of Laodicea and cultural Adventism

Wes Peppers
June 17, 2015

In the timeless struggle between the church and the world, a growing crisis in the last days promises to leave many church members unprepared for the soon coming of Jesus. While the final Laodicean church suffers a barrage of divisive attacks from the outside world, a more sinister deception and cunning temptation has reared within the church, between those who have genuine Biblical faith and those who mimic this lifestyle through their reliance upon the mere religious culture of Adventism.

TWO TWINS, TWO DIRECTIONS

This division is not a new one, and we need only go back to the Genesis account where we find two twins, Jacob and Esau, who could not be more illustrative of the issue. It should be noted that both were raised in the faith (church) by their parents. In addition, they both knew truth, and had a knowledge of God. It is from this point that the similarities of these twins radically diverge. When Esau sold his birthright for a temporary, earthly indulgence, he quickly cast off the restraints of his religious upbringing and gave in to the temptation of his fleshly nature. Consequently, Esau's decision detrimentally influenced the course of his life. His twin brother Jacob, however, found a life altering power through a new birth experience, from his faith and submission to God at Bethel.

Both started out with the same spiritual foundation, so what made the difference? Though from childhood Esau was immersed in the faith of his father's, but he did not seek transformation of heart and character, preferring rather to embrace the culture of his faith. He sought the blessing of God and the benefits of the culture, simply for earthly gain. As one minister duly noted, "Being born in the truth is not the same as being true." How accurate for many today as well!

Jesus also rebuked this superficial mimicry of true faith. In the gospel of John, we read His words, "...you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life..." (NASB, John 6:26,27). They followed Jesus to have their stomachs filled with bread rather than their heart filled with His Spirit and presence. They ate from His hand but not from His heart. Religious culture wishes to sit at Jesus' feet but only to be fed conveniently in this life without any discomfort of preparation for the next. Biblical faith, however, will seek the spiritual bread even at the expense of earthly bread.

LIVING ABOVE THE WORLD, NOT COMFORTABLY IN IT

Herein lies the heart of the problem for many Adventists today. Those who profess Christ within Adventism, but do not testify by bearing fruit of a changed heart, only admit that they are the product of a nice culture rather than divine grace. They may appear to drink of the water of life, and yet be as destitute as the hills of Gilboa. A life enriched by Adventist culture without living faith cannot live above the world, but only comfortably in it. Therefore, without an entire surrender of the will, they do not experience genuine conversion. And without this, they do not come to Christ or practice self denial to lead others to Him.

The 25th chapter of Matthew prophetically describes the distinct division that exists among God’s people right before He comes. A contemporary view of the parable and its application would describe Adventists who have secluded themselves from the world, understanding truth, yet still enjoying the world’s pleasures and benefits. We call these people cultural Adventists. They want deliverance from evil but not from sin. Consequently, they seek their own kingdom rather than His.
True Adventism, by contrast, seeks not only escape from the consequence of sin, but more importantly through surrender to Jesus, seeks and receives freedom from the very root of sin. As a result, the new heart actively seeks to advance the kingdom of God through sharing its faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This new heart is filled with the power of grace because it is in constant surrender to the leadership of Christ. In addition, true Biblical faith views God's commandments and counsel not merely as church rules but as grace from the heart of Christ for an abundant life. It joyfully accepts the plain, straight truth of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, recognizing that it is out of infinite love and the strong delusion of sin that God gives such straightforward instruction. Anything short of this experience is a sure indicator that one is only culturally Adventist, and not a transformed Adventist.

**ADVENTIST CULTURE MUST BE DRIVEN BY TRUE ADVENTIST FAITH**

This distinction being made, it should be noted that there is nothing objectionable about Biblical Adventist culture, as long as it is driven by true Adventist faith. The two can exist together with hope of eternal life, but the former cannot save without the latter and will only result in eternal loss. Adventist culture alone will not meet the requirement in the judgment when we stand before God. We must each seek God personally with all our heart while He is seeking us with all of His. We must be truly born again through living faith in Christ.

**Remedy for the problem of cultural Adventism**

To live each moment saturated with faith, not simply parroting the culture we know so well is the sure remedy for Laodiceanism in Adventism today. It is of paramount importance to revive our first love. Sadly, for many who are baptized members in the church already, there is the need to discover it for the first time.

Are you experiencing true Adventist faith or merely a cultural experience? Are you content to be comfortable in the world or do you want to live above the world? Your answer today is of eternal life and death significance. Choose faith. Choose life. Though we live on the edge of the final prophetic crisis, there is rich hope for any who look to Him today in earnest, heartfelt faith.
Why Women's Ordination Matters

David Read

This is a review of Clinton and Gina Wahlen's book "Women's Ordination: Does It Matter?"

As the TOSC meetings wore on, and it became clear who stood where on the issue, I was struck by the fact that many among those opposed to women's ordination, particularly the leaders of the opposition, were adult converts to the Adventist faith. Raymond Holmes, Gerard Damsteegt, Clinton Wahlen, Ingo Sorke, John Peters, and Doug Batchelor read and studied their way into our faith. Adult converts to Adventism seem to be more often opposed to female ordination than those born into the church. Those of us fortunate enough to have been raised as Adventists identify more with the subculture (particularly the health habits), the parochial education, and the social network than with the method of Bible study by which our doctrines were arrived at. By contrast, those converted to Adventism by Bible study are more conscious of the damage that erasing gender roles in the church will do to our Adventist hermeneutic.

Clinton Wahlen grew up an atheist. He excelled in science and mathematics, and, as a high school senior, was accepted into the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Clinton planned to work for NASA as a rocket scientist, but God had other plans. After graduating from high school and before heading off to MIT, Clinton spent a summer in Willits, California; there, someone gave him a copy of The Great Controversy and told him to pick a chapter that looked interesting and start reading. Clinton accepted the challenge and began reading the chapter, "The Origin of Evil." As he read, objections would come to his mind, but those objections were always answered within a few paragraphs. He kept reading. After finishing The Great Controversy, he began reading Daniel and the Revelation, and was amazed at the accuracy of Bible prophecy. At the end of the summer, he attended a camp meeting at Pacific Union College; when C.D. Brooks made an altar call, Clinton went forward. He was baptized at the Willits Church.

Clinton wrote to MIT, telling them “thanks, but no thanks,” and enrolled at Pacific Union College. Still loving technology but wanting to read the Bible in the original languages, he took a double major, in theology and computer science. Between his junior and senior year he served as a student missionary to New Zealand. Most importantly, he met Gina, a fourth generation Adventist; they graduated together in June, 1984, and were married that December. Clinton served on the staff of the St. Helena church, and Gina worked as a writer at PUC's office of public relations. Two years later, the couple moved to Berrien Springs, MI, to attend Andrews University, where Clinton earned his M.Div. and Gina earned a Masters' degree in interdisciplinary studies.

After a time pastoring in Northern California, the Wahlens, who by then had a son, were called to teach at the newly opened Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia. Clinton taught Greek and New Testament, and Gina taught Christian journalism and English. The Wahlens served in Russia from 1992-1998, near the end of which time a daughter was born, and Gina co-authored True Believer, a bestseller that sold over 10,000 copies. The couple then moved from Russia to England, where Clinton earned his Ph.D. from one of the world's elite universities, Cambridge. After a five year tour teaching at a GC sponsored graduate school in the Philippines, the Wahlens in 2008, were called to the SDA Church's headquarters in Maryland, where Clinton serves as an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI), and Gina worked for Adventist Review and Adventist World, and most recently as editor of the Mission quarterlies at the GC's Office of Adventist Mission.

I had the pleasure of meeting Clinton Wahlen at the TOSC meetings. He is a mild-mannered, soft-spoken scholar and Christian gentleman. Just as you would expect of someone who had planned a career in high technology, Wahlen does not jump to conclusions; he is a careful, logical thinker and speaker.
Although Clinton Wahlen works for the BRI, *Women’s Ordination: Does it Matter?* is not a BRI publication, but independently published. A troubling aspect of the debate on women's ordination is that those in favor of female ordination have had access to official periodicals and publishing houses, but those opposed have had to use independent publications (like ADvindicate) and independent ministries (like *Amazing Facts* and *Secrets Unsealed*) to air their arguments. At last year's Annual Council, Gina approached the president of Pacific Press and asked him if the Press would be interested in publishing a book presenting “the other side of the ordination issue.” He said “no” because: 1) they had committed to publish a book from the seminary on this topic and, 2) since Pacific Press is now a NAD institution, they needed to print “what the NAD constituency wants.” But the NAD constituency should hear both sides of the ordination debate, even if the NAD leadership does not seem to want both sides heard.

The Wahlens continued to feel impressed to write this book. Its purpose is to present pertinent conclusions of scholarly studies, including those presented at TOSC, in lay-reader-friendly language. The book was peer-reviewed by several Bible scholars, and was also read by pastors and lay members for input before going to press. The Wahlens formed “Bright Shores Publishing” to publish the book; due to the current controversy over this issue, their financial backers wish to remain anonymous. I can well relate to the difficulties attending the Wahlens’ project, having formed a publishing company, Clarion Call Books, to publish “Dinosaurs—An Adventist View.” The Wahlens hope that their book will help honest seekers after truth who are carefully considering the women’s ordination question.

Turning to the substance of the book, the Wahlens begin with hermeneutics. Disagreement on a doctrinal issue does not mean that there are not clear biblical answers. The question is, what hermeneutic is being employed? Sunday-keepers use a certain hermeneutic to avoid the conclusion that the Sabbath commandment is binding on Christians: (1) they rely on a few vague, unrelated or tangentially related passages, (2) they ignore or explain away clear passages that do not support their position, and (3) they claim that the lack of a clear command in the New Testament to keep the Sabbath means that God must not require it. Watch for a similar hermeneutic among those who favor female ordination.

In a chapter on the qualifications of the elder/overseer, the Wahlens note that Paul specifies these qualifications—including that the elder must be the husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)—in letters not to churches but to Timothy and Titus. The instructions were virtually identical, even though Timothy was working in Ephesus, one of the largest cities in the empire, and Titus was working on Crete, a rural island with small towns and villages. Paul's instructions were intended to apply not only in Ephesus and on Crete, but wherever Timothy's and Titus' ministries would take them in later years. Indeed, the appointment of elders was important precisely because Timothy and Titus, like Paul, were itinerant, and would soon move on to the next mission field. Paul's instructions were not bound to a given time and culture, but are timeless, universal guidelines for all Christian Churches, from Timothy's day until the parousia.

The phrase “husband of one wife” is just as clear in Greek as it is in English. Had Paul intended “husband of one wife or wife of one husband,” he could have written that; he used the phrase “wife of one husband” in the same letter in describing the type of widows who were eligible for food aid (1 Tim. 5:9), so he knew how to write that phrase. Moreover, the requirement that an elder be the “husband of one wife” was not aimed primarily against polygamy, which was virtually non-existent in Greco-Roman culture; the disapproval of polygamy has always been one of the prominent differences between Western Civilization and the East. By using the term “husband of one wife,” Paul clearly meant to specify a man.

What about the “silence” texts? The Wahlens argue that 1 Cor. 14:34, where Paul says “Women should remain silent in the churches,” is really about orderly worship, and, unlike the epistles to Timothy and Titus, was addressed to a specific church with a specific problem. The disruptive elements in the Corinthian Church were (1) men who spoke in a foreign tongue without an interpreter (v. 27-28), (2) men who began to prophesy while another man was still speaking (v. 29-33), and (3) women who kept noisily asking questions during the church service (v. 34-35). Paul uses a harsh word for silence, sigao, but the point was not that women should never speak, but that they should not...
disrupt. By contrast, in 1 Tim. 2:11, where Paul says that “a woman should learn in quietness and full submission,” the word used is not sigao but hesychia, a form of which is used in 1 Tim. 2:2, where Paul urges us to pray for those in authority that we may live “peaceful and quiet lives.” The Wahlens conclude that the Scriptural teaching is not that women must never speak in church, but that they must (1) not disrupt orderly worship and (2) not authoritatively teach a man in the church, meaning to not usurp the authoritative teaching function of the male elder.

In the chapter on male headship in the home and the church, perhaps the most unusual insight is that in Gen. 3:16 (“your desire shall be toward your husband, and he shall rule over you”) the Hebrew word ‘el can mean either “for” or “against” depending on context. The Wahlens argue that the word in this context is better translated as “against,” as in: “your desire shall be against your husband, and he shall rule over you.” In other words, sin would bring in disharmony, such that the wife would often want something contrary to what her husband wanted; Eve’s sentence was that, when she and Adam were not in agreement, God gave preference to the man. In the extensive questions and answers section at the end of the book, the Wahlens note that the Hebrew construction in the last clause of Gen. 4:7 (“. . . sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”) is almost identical to that in the last clause of Gen. 3:16.

Gina tells a very poignant personal story to illustrate the benefits of a wife's submission to her husband. Clinton purchased an expensive supplemental cancer policy because their regular insurance would not cover everything related to cancer treatment. Looking at the substantial money deducted from their take-home pay, and noting that they were both very healthy, Gina argued that they should drop the cancer rider. But Clinton was firm, and Gina, thinking specifically of Eph. 5:22-25, submitted to Clinton’s decision. A month later, Gina was diagnosed with cancer, which entailed frequent doctor visits, lab tests, major surgery, and radiation treatments, all of which were covered by the supplemental insurance.

In a chapter on Ellen White, the Wahlens note that at the General Conference session of 1881, a resolution was introduced to ordain women to gospel ministry. There was a discussion, then the matter was referred to a committee, which was really just a polite way of defeating the measure. Ellen White never said anything about this measure, and some argue (perhaps having too often seen “A Man for All Seasons”) that her silence means that she consented to it, or even favored it. But is that how we are to read her silence?:

From the light given me by the Lord, I knew that some of the sentiments advocated in [The Living Temple] did not bear the endorsement of God, and that they were a snare that the enemy had prepared for the last days. I thought that this would surely be discerned, and that it would not be necessary for me to say anything about it. Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 202.

Ellen White would have remained silent about the errors in Dr. Kellogg's book if the church had seen and rejected them. She was silent where she did not need to speak. She could remain silent on female ordination because the church discerned that error and rejected it. Ellen White did not say anything about it because she did not need to.

Ellen White opposed injustice in the Church; she spoke out strongly in favor of female workers being paid fairly, about the importance of sustentation for older ministers, and against the unfair treatment of black preachers. But she never said anything about ordaining women to gospel ministry, so she must not have viewed it as an issue of justice or fairness.

The Wahlens relate that a woman named Sarepta M.I. Henry, a Methodist activist in the WCTU who had become an Adventist after a stay in the Battle Creek Sanitarium, was Ellen White's ideal woman minister. S.M.I. Henry's burden was to educate women about their irreplaceable, crucial role in raising and educating godly children. Even though she frequently spoke to large crowds, the thrust of her ministry was to be a “teacher of the ideal” (Titus 2:3-4) to younger women, regarding the duties of the wife and mother in a Christian home.

Ultimately, the Wahlens conclude that this issue does matter, because it is a question of faithfulness to Scripture:
If we ever come to the place as a Church where we can interpret “husband of one wife” to mean “wife of one husband” or simply “faithful man or woman,” then we can make any passage of Scripture mean whatever we want it to mean or whatever our culture tells us it should mean. Could it be that, as a Church, we are now being tested as to whether we will continue to maintain the Bible as the authority for our faith and practice so that, having passed this test, we will be prepared for the greater tests just ahead with regard to same-sex marriage and even the Sabbath?

We are no more at liberty to substitute female elders for the male elders specified in Scripture than we are to substitute the first day of the week for the Seventh day. God wants us to be faithful to the order that He created in the beginning and intended to last for all time.
<p>ADvindicate will be at the GC Session, after all</p>

Shane Hilde  
June 11, 2015

Update: In less than a day, gifts have flowed in and our request was met and even exceeded! A hearty thank you to those who gave. For those still wanting to give, your funds will be used to cover any unexpected expenses during GC Session and future booths. May the Lord bless your generosity.

General Conference Exhibit Manager Dean Rogers contacted ADvindicate today, asking if we were interested in having a booth at the July 2015 General Conference Session. We said yes! We're not sure who vetoed the North American Division (NAD) decision to disallow our booth at Session, but we feel God had bigger plans and we just had to wait for Him to work.

Our booth space is B118. Gerry Wagoner, Shane and Mary Hilde, David Read and Monte Fleming will be at the booth, so please stop by and say hello.

As a result of this news, we have an immediate financial need for those willing and able to donate. Since the NAD blocked our booth last August, we had no plans to go to General Conference Session. Now that God has opened the door, we are in need of $5,000 for expenses. You can help ADvindicate by giving your tax-deductable donation today. Our goal is to raise these funds by June 26. Thank you in advance for your generous support. It's because of your prayers and dedication coupled with divine intervention that you will see our booth in San Antonio next month.
How did you two meet?

AW: Even though Naomi comes from a different church district than I do, we both attended the same Amish school. We were married in 2004. We have been blessed with seven children. We are very happy together.

What does a normal day look like in your family?

AW: I work as a handyman and carpenter. We have a good sized vegetable farm and I also build furniture.

Naomi Weaver (NW): I take care of our children and tend a large garden, with the help of the older children.

Tell us about Amish life.

AW: There are many things that I appreciate about being raised Amish. I’m glad that we don’t know everything that is going on in the world. Some people are so consumed by who is president and political things and the television. I like the close families and simplicity that we were raised with. I love horses. Nothing against cars, but given a choice between an auto and my horse, I would prefer the horse [laughs]. I also like the fact we would help each other in the community. We had a lot of fellowship.

NW: I liked the Amish life style. I liked the family community. With all the problems in the world, we kind of created our own world.

How did you learn about the Adventist message?

AW: We had a neighbor that was an atheist. One day he sold his property and I was helping him clean his barn out. He said that a Seventh-day Adventist had purchased the farm. I didn’t know what that was. I was curious to meet them. One day my older brother met these Adventist people. He was pleased to learn that these people believe in the Ten Commandments, and New Testament Communion. They gave him a tract on Daniel and Revelation from Amazing Facts. My brother and I both read the tract and liked it. We compared it with the Bible; there was no question it was true. Later, they gave us a copy of the Desire of Ages. I love to read and had a hard time putting it down at first, but it began to trouble me. I would read the book, and then put it down and go outside and walk around the house. I was thinking.

What were you thinking about?

AW: I was thinking this is going to cost a lot if I accept it. This is so powerful it demands change in my life. I was taught the Ten Commandments as a boy and then I discovered that I was violating one of them. I realized that this
book was going to take us somewhere. So I avoided the book for a while. I feared that change might bring strife to my family.

NW: I was here by his side. We read the book together—sometimes Andy would read it to me. I agreed that it was truth, but I was also fearful what it might mean for us.

How long did you wrestle with God over the Advent Message?

AW: About a year. There were times when I wanted to turn back. Thank God He did not let us turn back. I got to the point where I felt trapped. It began to affect my life too. I lost a good bit of weight. I had no peace and was under stress. Naomi was part of my burden; I worried how this might affect her and our marriage.

NW: People thought Andy had a disease. I was fearful for him and our family.

Then what happened?

AW: A year after reading the Desire of Ages I reached a turning point. I was Amish on the outside, but my heart was Adventist. My father and a brother came to visit me. They had watched me carefully for a year. They questioned my loyalty that night. My father tried to talk me out of leaving the Amish community. I made my decision. I decided I was going to leave the Amish church. I was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist church. Peace filled my life.

Were there any Scriptures that became special to you during this time?

AW: Yes. Mark 7:7, “In vain they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” And John 12:35 “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.” These verses still mean a lot to me.

How are your children adjusting to the change in your life?

AW: I have a funny story. Our children went to Amish school last year. One day while the students were reciting the Ten Commandments, after reciting the 4th commandment, the teacher turned and looked at our children. They were thinking about it in a new way.

How did the change affect your marriage?

AW: God protected us. What we went through strengthened our appreciation for each other. It improved our family; made it better. Prayer became real to us. We get in a circle and pray together. We have Bible study together.

NW: I always had hope. I had to rely on God and believe that He will work it out. My faith was weak at times, but God would help us through.

Have you lost any friends because of your change?

AW: Many people we thought were friends became enemies. I know circumstances changed--they have to shun us. We have gained new friends--lots of them. I learned that people who you can relate to spiritually become better friends.

What will you do now?

AW: We have a burden to reach souls with the Advent Message. We also have a burden for the Anabaptist people. Some Amish are distrustful of their leaders. We want to help them find hope and peace in the Bible. We live in a changing world and Jesus is coming again. I believe the world is starting to shake. I believe it is happening in the
Adventist church too. Some people want the blood of Christ, but not His righteousness. Two groups are emerging in the world. To reach people we are starting a ministry called West Salem Mission in Northern Ohio.

**What needs do you have?**

AW: Number one, prayer for God's leading. Also that He would open doors for us to share the everlasting gospel to people. Some of this will require transportation. We would like to buy a fifteen passenger van for this.

(A special fund has been set up for those who wish to contribute to the West Salem Mission.)

**The Amish need many things that we have; what can Adventists learn from your life story?**

AW: Each of us can benefit from a wholesome simpler lifestyle. Some Adventists could also benefit from the Amish work ethic, spiritual fellowship, and family. Also helping each other more. An Amish proverb says, “You don’t know a person until you break a sweat with them.”

**It’s been a real pleasure getting to know you both. Do you have any parting words for us?**

AW: Yes. We must preach and live the everlasting gospel. All people are coming to a concrete wall--they are going have to make a decision how to get over the wall. The question is will I follow the Commandments of God or the traditions of men? We want to cast our crowns at Jesus’ feet.

May God help us to learn from our mistakes and other people's mistakes. My experience taught me a lot about God's patience. At times I would pull back and then God would draw me to Him with mercy and truth. I'm not a special person--the Lord is. The time is short and people will be safe if their heart is right.
Feasting or fasting?

Lee Folkman

On Oct. 22, 1844, Jesus Christ, our High Priest, entered once into the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary. Then began the process of cleansing of the sanctuary, of which every tenth day of every seventh month of every year was a type. The day of atonement was a day of solemnity when all in the camp of Israel were to “afflict [their] souls and do no work at all,” (King James Version, Leviticus 16:29), neither an Israelite nor a sojourner. “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD” (vs. 30). It was a day when all who were not found afflicting their souls on that day would be separated, or cut off, from among God’s people. This day was also known as “the fast” (Acts 27:9) because it was a day of fasting and prayer in connection with the work of the high priest.

During the last few decades, a movement to promote the moral obligation to keep the feast days recorded in Leviticus has been making inroads among reform-minded Seventh-day Adventists. Why so much emphasis on the feasts in the great antitypical day of the fast? Is this new light that needs to be proclaimed before Jesus can return? Or is it a scheme of the enemy of souls to divert sincere followers of Jesus Christ from the true latter rain message?

HOW SHALL WE KNOW?

When studying either the Scriptures or the Spirit of Prophecy, it is important to allow plain statements to guide our understanding of more difficult passages. Regarding her own writings, Ellen White wrote:

“...the key to the testimonies is the testimonies themselves... (15 Manuscript Releases, 295).

A key is a simple instrument used to unlock a complicated mechanism. In like manner, simple statements, in context, help us to understand or unlock more difficult passages. When one utilizes complex reasoning to explain a simple passage of scripture or testimony, one is missing the key. Here are some simple passages that help us to understand the feast day question.

THE TWO-FOLD SYSTEM OF LAW

Most Adventists agree that the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy present a two-fold system of law: the ceremonial and the moral. What makes up the ceremonial and the moral laws? Consider the following passages from Ellen White:

“There are two distinct laws brought to view. One is the law of types and shadows, which reached to the time of Christ, and ceased when type met antitype in his death. The other is the law of Jehovah, and is as abiding and changeless as his eternal throne. After the crucifixion, it was a denial of Christ for the Jews to continue to offer the burnt offerings and sacrifices which were typical of his death. It was saying to the world that they looked for a Redeemer to come, and had no faith in Him who had given his life for the sins of the world. Hence the ceremonial law ceased to be of force at the death of Christ” (Signs of the Times, July 29, 1886), emphasis mine.

“While the death of Christ, as we have seen, brought the law of types and shadows, or the ceremonial law, to an end, it did not in the least detract from the dignity of the moral law, or make it void. On the contrary, the very fact that Christ died to satisfy the claims of that law, shows the immutability of its character” (Signs of the Times, July 15, 1880).
"The moral law was never a type or a shadow..." (Review and Herald, April 22, 1902)

These passages, and others like them, clearly point out the difference between the two systems of law. A law that is a type or shadow would fall under the ceremonial law, while the moral law was never a type or shadow, but existed from eternity. One is typical; the other is eternal.

FEASTS – MORAL OR CEREMONIAL?

Because the ceremonial law came to an end by the death of Christ, while the moral continues to this day, any moral obligations we have to God are solely those that fall under the moral law. Under which law do the feast days fall?

“The Passover was to be both commemorative and typical, not only pointing back to the deliverance from Egypt, but forward to the greater deliverance which Christ was to accomplish in freeing His people from the bondage of sin. The sacrificial lamb represents ‘the Lamb of God,’ in whom is our only hope of salvation. Says the apostle, ‘Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.’ 1 Corinthians 5:7..." (Patriarchs and Prophets, 277).

“The Feast of Tabernacles was not only commemorative but typical. It not only pointed back to the wilderness sojourn, but, as the feast of harvest, it celebrated the ingathering of the fruits of the earth, and pointed forward to the great day of final ingathering, when the Lord of the harvest shall send forth His reapers to gather the tares together in bundles for the fire, and to gather the wheat into His garner...” (Ibid, 541).

Paul said, “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). The sheaf of first-fruits, which at the time of the Passover was waved before the Lord, was typical of the resurrection of Christ.

“Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Corinthians 15:23). Like the wave-sheaf, which was the first ripe grain gathered before the harvest, Christ is the first-fruits of the harvest of redeemed ones when He returns.

Jesus’ birth, death and resurrection, explained in the OT types were fulfilled, not only as to the event, but also as to the time.

“In like manner, the types which relate to the second advent must be fulfilled at the time pointed out in the symbolic service. Under the Mosaic system, the cleansing of the sanctuary, or the great Day of Atonement, occurred on the tenth day of the seventh Jewish month, [Leviticus 16:29-34.] when the high priest, having made an atonement for all Israel, and thus removed their sins from the sanctuary, came forth and blessed the people. So it was believed that Christ, our great High Priest, would appear to purify the earth by the destruction of sin and sinners, and to bless his waiting people with immortality...” (The Great Controversy, 398, 399).

Just as it is clear that there are two systems of law, it is also clear that the feast days fall under the ceremonial law. The moral law, existing from creation, was never a type or shadow. The feasts, on the other hand, were commemorative of events relating to the Hebrew nation and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Both the ceremonies and the appointed times were typical of the life, death, and high priestly ministry of Jesus. This places the feast days under that law which the death of Christ abolished. This is why the apostle Paul plainly stated,

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17).

Indeed, they “are a shadow of things to come.” They taught and continue to teach us the work of Jesus Christ in the heavenly temple, that temple made without hands, which the Lord built and not man. This our pioneers, including the messenger of the Lord, clearly understood, as evidenced by the following quote from Ellen White:

“One day as Elder Corliss stepped out of a train, the guard [conductor] stopped him with the request that he explain Colossians 2:16. They stopped, and as the crowd rushed by, the explanation was given, and from Leviticus 23:37,
38 it was shown that there were sabbaths besides the Sabbath of the Lord…” (Review and Herald, January 7, 1896)

The explanation given is that these sabbaths are shadows and are not the Sabbath of the Lord. It is only recently that a movement has arisen which seeks to complicate that which the Lord had already made plain.

So, are we feasting or fasting? Do we teach the observance of the shadows that pointed forward to the reality, or do we accept the fact that the reality has come in the person of Jesus Christ? Even now He stands in this great antitypical day of fasting, performing a work that will prepare His people to stand before a holy God without an intercessor and to be translated without seeing death. Afflict your souls, dear brothers and sisters, and prepare to meet your God.
Ty Gibson's argument still falls short

Kevin Paulson

As the General Conference session in San Antonio approaches, final arguments in the case for and against women's ordination grow more earnest and passionate, with their strengths and vulnerabilities increasingly more evident. Such is certainly the case in the new article by Ty Gibson of Light Bearers Ministry titled “A Closer Look at Women’s Ordination.”

The author acknowledges that he, like others in this controversy (including the present writer), has changed his position regarding gender roles in ministry. The willingness to permit one’s stand to be altered by evidence is admirable to be sure. What is most unfortunate, however, is that the article in question leaves unaddressed a considerable volume of evidence from Scripture, the writings of Ellen White, the recorded convictions of Adventist pioneers, and the facts of duly voted Seventh-day Adventist Church policy relative to the subject before us.

The present review will start with the article’s discussion—and omission—of key biblical evidence in this controversy, then move to the writings of Ellen White, relevant statements by Adventist pioneers, the article’s attempt to discount the connection between the ordination controversy and the homosexual issue, and finally, the article’s observations regarding what he holds to be likely consequences if the world church in San Antonio votes in either direction.

The Bible

A major, even decisive gap in the article’s study of the biblical evidence on ordination, concerns both the Genesis narrative of the fall and the New Testament declarations as to who was in fact responsible for leading the human race into sin. While the article seeks to localize—and morph into a mere pastoral pronouncement—the apostle Paul’s use of the original created order as a model for gender roles in the church (I Tim. 2:12-13) (3), the article fails to consider the Old Testament evidence for Adam’s original primacy and the significance of this primacy for both the later plan of salvation and the principle of spiritual male headship.

The fact is that Paul’s declaration that “Adam was first formed, then Eve” (I Tim. 2:13), and the significance Paul attaches to this fact so far as church order is concerned, is based on the actual Genesis record. It is to Adam that the care of the Garden is committed, along with the command as to which trees to partake of and to avoid (Gen. 2:15-17). It is Adam who names the animals (verses 19-20), as well as Eve—both before and after the fall (Gen. 2:23; 3:20). And it is based on this divine order that the man is instructed to take the initiative in marriage by leaving father and mother and cleaving to his wife (Gen. 2:24).

When sin enters the human experience, it is not till Adam sins that the consequences of disobedience occur (Gen. 3:7). And when Adam and Eve attempt to hide from God’s presence, it is to Adam—not Eve—that the Lord calls (verse 9). This primacy given to Adam is the reason why the apostle Paul identifies Adam, not Eve, as the one through whom sin and death enter the world (Rom. 5:12-19; I Cor. 15:22), this despite the fact that Eve was the first to sin. This is why the second person of the Godhead came to earth as the second Adam, not the second Eve.

The article in question seeks to debunk the headship argument without even considering the above evidence from Genesis and from Paul. The article’s claim that Paul’s statement about Adam being created first is merely a pastoral, homiletical ruse to quell disruption by “some out-of-control, loudmouth ladies,” ignores the universal Biblical testimony in favor of spiritual male headship—from Adam’s primacy in pre-Fall Eden to the all-male patriarchs, anointed and appointed rulers, and priests of the Old Testament to the all-male apostles, elders, and deacons of the New. What Paul says about the roles of men and women throughout his epistles is merely a continuance and reflection of this universal pattern.
When the article does in fact confront the headship issue, its case is equally inadequate. No consideration is given, for example, to the fact that the context of 1 Corinthians 11:3 (“the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man”) is not a discussion of the family, but of the church. The point in this passage is not that all men have headship over all women, only that the biblical order of gender authority within the home—which the article in question affirms (Eph. 5:22-25; Col. 3:18; I Peter 3:1-7) (5)—also applies to the fellowship of faith (I Cor. 11:3; I Tim. 2:12-13).

The article insists that ordaining women to the gospel ministry would change nothing in the relation of ordained women to their husbands. What the article ignores, however, is the fact that pastors and local elders do not simply function in their responsibilities while in church. These responsibilities are their's on a 24/7 basis. How is a female pastor or local elder to submit to a non-pastor, non-elder husband when she functions as his spiritual overseer both in and out of formal church settings? The fact is that the role of the husband as well as that of the elder or elder/overseer (the latter being what we today call a pastor) is a constant one. At no point does one role begin and the other leave off. When, may we ask, and in what context, is the female pastor or female elder to submit to her husband? It isn't hard to imagine the intensifying of role confusion that the blurring of gender authority through women’s ordination would mean for both homes and congregations.

All of us agree Christ is the ultimate head of the church, but the article in question is quite mistaken when it asserts that “there is no intermediate category of heads that exist between Christ and His church.” In the Old Testament, God was the ultimate head of Israel, with Moses Israel’s leader under God’s direction. Yet it was under the Lord’s guidance, and at the advice of his father-in-law, that “Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Ex. 18:25). Commenting on this experience, Ellen White declares, “God gave to Moses special direction for the management of his work. He directed Moses to associate men with him as counselors, that his burdens might be lightened” (Testimonies to Ministers 340).

On the following page, after recounting the larger context of this passage from Exodus 18, White writes, “This counsel is for us. It should be heeded by our responsible men.” And like the priests and seventy elders later appointed (Ex. 28:1; Num. 3:3; 11:24), the aforementioned rulers—called “heads” (Ex. 18:25)—are identified by inspiration as males.

The idea that there are no intermediate heads between Christ and His church is also contradicted by another New Testament passage:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (I Peter 5:1-4).

While the word “head” is not used here, the word “chief” is, referring of course to Christ. What is clear in this passage is that while Christ is the chief Shepherd, the elders of the church function as His undershepherds in “taking the oversight” of the Lord’s flock. The article in question cites the above passage in its attempt to equate “pastor” with “shepherd” as a means of arguing for gender-inclusive spiritual gifts. But while the question of distinct-versus-identical gender roles in pastoring is separate from the question of whether spiritual heads are to function in the church under Christ’s ultimate authority, the above passage from 1 Peter is clear—like the passage in Exodus regarding Moses and the rulers (Ex. 18:25)—that human heads do in fact exist in the church under Christ’s supreme authority.
When the article in question refers to the tenth commandment, and its injunction not to “covet thy neighbor’s wife” (Ex. 20:17), along with Jesus’ statement about men looking on women with lust being synonymous with adultery (Matt. 5:28), it seems not to have considered how such statements again affirm the primacy of the male gender in God’s intended order, even though these verses—as the article correctly states—obviously apply to women also. When humanity is named in Scripture as “man” and “mankind,” this male primacy is further evident. Men were originally intended by God to lead and to represent the human race. This is why Scripture identifies Adam as humanity’s representative in both Testaments (Gen. 3:9; Rom. 5:12-19; I Cor. 15:22), and why generic references to the human family in inspired writings nearly always speak of “man” and “men.” Never does an inspired reference to humanity in the generic sense ever speak of “woman” or “women.”

The article tries to make gender-neutral Paul’s command that deacons be “the husbands of one wife” (I Tim. 3:12) on the basis of Phoebe being referred to in Romans 16:1 by the same word used for those described as deacons in 1 Timothy 3. Though a popular argument in the pro-women’s ordination camp, it is a classic case of making language work overtime. In our contemporary vernacular, for instance, it is common to refer to laypersons in various lines as having a “ministry.” But this obviously doesn’t mean such persons are the same, or function the same, as the ordained minister. So the mere fact that Paul uses the same word for Phoebe in Romans 16:1 as is used in 1 Timothy 3:12, in no way contradicts his counsel elsewhere regarding gender requirements for church officers. We need to remember Ellen White’s caution regarding inspired language, “Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea” (Selected Message Vol. 1, 20).

Another major gap in this article’s survey of biblical evidence occurs in the following statement:

One of the arguments being offered against allowing for the ordination of women is that the Old Testament priests were all men. Therefore, it is reasoned, only men should be allowed to occupy the pastoral role in the church. The problem with this argument is that it fails to recognize that within the biblical narrative, the Old Testament Levitical priesthood gives way to the New Testament priesthood of all believers.

But the above statement overlooks the fact that the New Testament passage often cited in connection with the priesthood of all believers (I Peter 2:9) is taken directly from the Old Testament. Peter’s identification of Christians in the above verse as “a royal priesthood” and “a holy nation” is echoed by the following words of God to Moses, “And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex. 19:6).

But did the fact that Israel was divinely intended to be “a kingdom of priests” imply that every Israelite was entitled to serve as a priest in the sanctuary? Obviously not. We recall how Korah and his sympathizers, when aspiring to the dignity of the priesthood, declared to Moses that “all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them” (Num. 16:3). Certainly this is what God intended for Israel, according to Exodus 19:6. But clearly this did not mean all were eligible to serve as priests. The subsequent fate of Korah and his followers offers plain evidence that God’s designed order of authority, in heaven and on earth, merits respect on pain of grave consequences. Similar consequences were meted out to Judah’s King Uzziah, who thought he was entitled to offer incense in the temple like the priests (II Chron. 26:16-18), and was subsequently struck with leprosy (verse 19).

The article in question fails to note the distinction between the type of teaching declared by Paul to be off-limits for women (I Tim. 2:12) and the type of teaching in which women could in fact participate (Acts 18:26). The word used in 1 Timothy is more a reference to administrative authority and governance than instruction. The word used in 1 Timothy 2:12 is used for women in only two other New Testament passages—Titus 2:4, where Paul exhorts older women to teach younger women, and Revelation 2:20, where the church of Thyatira is rebuked by Jesus for allowing “that woman Jezebel” to teach. By contrast, the word used in Acts 18:26 is entirely different, where both Aquila and Priscilla are described as teaching Apollos about the gospel.

The article is somewhat confusing about the issue of women and silence so far as Paul’s writings are concerned. In one statement, it is claimed—quite correctly, in fact—that “silence” as Paul describes it refers to a calm and submissive spirit. Yet in another statement it is implied that Paul’s command regarding silence is not a “timeless
moral mandate." But why wouldn’t an exhortation to calmness and submission be timeless? The article doesn’t explain.

The fact is that Paul’s counsel regarding the silence of women in ecclesiastical settings is explained very clearly by the use of similar language by Paul as well as Peter in other passages. Prior to exhorting women to be silent in First Timothy 2:11-12, Paul writes of the necessity of leading a “quiet and peaceable life” relative to civil authority (verse 2). This obviously doesn’t mean Christians should never communicate at all with such authorities; it is simply enjoining a spirit of yielding and submission. Peter says the same thing when he writes of women needing to possess “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit” (I Peter 3:4). He obviously isn’t telling women to never talk, as he writes a few verses earlier of how unbelieving husbands may be “won by the conversation of the wives” (verse 1). What is the issue here, as in Paul’s writings, is a spirit of yielding and submission, not vocal silence.

The article includes additional arguments from the biblical text whose flaws are equally egregious. Reference is made to Paul’s statements about lifting up holy hands to the Lord (I Tim. 2:8), that elders who “rule well be paid double wages (I Tim. 5:17), and that slaves are to remain subject to their masters (I Tim. 6:1).” First, we need to keep in mind the biblical principle of two or three witnesses being essential to establish matters (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 1 Cor. 14:29; II Cor. 13:1; I Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28). No single inspired passage anywhere is sufficient to establish a doctrinal or moral tenet. In no other Bible verse is the lifting up of hands enjoined as a universal divine mandate. Male headship, as we have seen, is indeed a universal biblical principle, extending back to pre-fall Eden and encompassing both testaments.

Regarding double wages for elders who rule well (I Tim. 5:17), the text simply reads “double honor,” and doesn’t imply exactly what this means. Again, without further clarity from the inspired consensus, such a verse cannot become the basis for a universal, timeless command.

Regarding slaves and slavery, the collective testimony of Scripture is clear that involuntary servitude is not part of God’s plan for humanity. And slavery cannot be compared to gender roles because gender distinctions were created by God in the beginning (Gen. 1:27), while slavery is a human institution crafted during the age of sin. While economic, social, and gender differences are not an obstacle to salvation (Gal. 3:28), gender differences are the only ones created by God in a sinless world, and the only ones maintained in God’s order of authority for both the family and the faith community across the centuries of the Sacred Narrative.

Ellen White’s Role and Writings

The article under review insists repeatedly that Ellen White’s call to the prophetic office proves the role of elder and elder/overseer to be open to women. The author maintains that God “has called and empowered women to be in teaching, preaching, leading positions for the church. Ellen White is the most obvious and immediate example for Seventh-day Adventists.”

Yet the fact still remains that Ellen White never held an administrative post in the church, never pastored a congregation, never performed a wedding, never conducted a baptism. Ellen White’s role in early Adventism was as distinct from that of the ordained minister or church administrator as the role of prophet in the Old Testament was distinct from that of the ruler or the priest.

The fact that our early pioneers responded persuasively to objections raised to Ellen White’s gift on account of her gender, as the article in question notes, doesn’t mean in any sense that those defending Ellen White in this way were claiming identical roles for men and women in ministry. We will see in the following section that a number of our pioneers made very explicit statements regarding diverse gender roles in ministry, which speak with vastly greater clarity than any of the comments cited by the article in question.

Like other women’s ordination advocates, the author of this article focuses at length on Ellen White’s statement regarding “both men and women” being “pastors to the flock of God” (Testimonies Vol. 6, 322). Elsewhere the article
cites another passage where she speaks of missionary work as a means to “educate men and women to do pastoral labor” (Review and Herald, April 4, 1882), and still another where she quotes Isaiah 61 regarding the outpouring of God’s Spirit on “both brethren and sisters,” and then speaks of God’s faithful people—identified in context as both men and women—serving as “priests of the Lord” and “ministers of our God” (Oct. 15, 1901).

But in none of these passages are men and women described as performing identical or interchangeable roles in ministry or pastoral labor. As we noted before regarding Phoebe, laypersons can have ministries while not being ordained ministers. The above Ellen White statements merely confirm this. And as we observed in our review of those Bible passages which identify the entire faith community as a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6) and “a royal priesthood” (I Peter 2:9), it is clear this identification did not mean everyone could function as a priest in the sanctuary, nor that gender roles in the faith community have ceased to be distinct.

As in its treatment of Scripture, the article in question sadly ignores those Ellen White statements which draw a clear distinction between the gender-specific role of the ordained minister and those categories in church life or ministry which are gender-inclusive. The following statements, omitted from the article in question, draw this distinction clearly:

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. (Testimonies Vol. 5, 60)

Those who enter the missionary field should be men and women who walk and talk with God. Those who stand as ministers in the sacred desk should be men of blameless reputation. (598)

The great Head of the church (Christ) superintends His work through the instrumentality of men ordained by God to act as His representatives. . . . In Christ's stead they are to beseech men and women to be reconciled to God. (Acts of the Apostles 360)

Notice how again we see the biblical headship principle enunciated. Jesus is the ultimate (or great) head of the church, yet He governs the church through the instrumentality of men ordained to act as His representatives. And quite obviously “men” is not generic here, as a few sentences later she describes these men as beseeching “men and women” to accept Christ and be reconciled to God. Ellen White is thus fully capable of being either gender-specific or gender-inclusive in her writings, depending on the point she seeks to make.

The article in question cites another Ellen White statement which declares, “It is not always men who are best adapted to the successful management of a church. If faithful women have more deep piety and true devotion than men, they could indeed by their prayers and their labors do more than men who are unconsecrated in heart and in life (Manuscript Releases Vol. 10, 70).

In light of the inspired consensus on gender roles, the above statement is best seen as referring to exceptional situations, similar to the circumstances that called for Deborah’s leadership in ancient Israel “in the absence of the usual magistrates” (Daughters of God 37). Such leadership does not require ordination, and is the exception rather than the rule.

**Prominent Adventist Pioneers on Male Headship and Gender Roles in Ministry**

Those who have alleged that the doctrine of spiritual male headship is something new in modern Adventism, had best consult the following statement by A.T. Jones, made in 1891:

This word does indeed speak to man of his son, his daughter, his manservant, his maidservant, etc., not because it contemplates his duty to man, but because it contemplates his duty to God; contemplates man as the head of the family, and as such responsible to God for the conduct on the Sabbath day, of those under the jurisdiction which God bestowed upon man in his headship of the family. (The American Sentinel, June 25, 1891)
Consider the views of J.H. Waggoner, while he served as editor of the "Signs of the Times":

The divine arrangement, even from the beginning, is this, that the man is the head of the woman. Every relation is disregarded or abused in this lawless age. But the Scriptures always maintain this order in the family relation. 'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.' Eph. 5:23 Man is entitled to certain privileges that are not given to woman; and he is subjected to some duties and burdens from which the woman is exempt. A woman may pray, prophesy, exhort, and comfort the church, but she cannot occupy the position of a pastor or ruling elder. This would be looked upon as usurping authority over the man, which is here [1 Timothy 2:12] prohibited. (Dec. 19, 1878)

In a later issue of the Signs, a reader asked, “Should women be elected to offices in the church when there are enough brethren?” Here is the response of Milton Wilcox:

If by this is meant the office of elder, we should say at once, No. But there are offices in the church which women can fill acceptably, and oftentimes there are found sisters in the church who are better qualified for this than brethren, such offices, for instance as church clerk, treasurer, librarian of the tract society, etc., as well as the office of deaconess, assisting the deacons in looking after the poor, and in doing such other duties as would naturally fall to their lot. 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. By this 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 [or role] 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. (Jan. 24, 1895)

Consider also the following statement by D.T. Bordeau, a prominent Adventist author and Bible student from the pioneer days, "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" (Review and Herald, Dec. 2, 1862).

The Gay Connection

Because the article in question denies, on account of its truncated survey of inspired evidence, that women’s ordination is in fact contrary to Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, it ventures to deny any connection between acceptance of homosexual practice by the church and the elimination of gender role distinctions in ministry. Since women’s ordination, in the article’s view, is not contrary to Scripture, the article’s logic insists that women’s ordination couldn’t possibly lead to such unscriptural practices as homosexuality.

The article employs the same argument with regard to higher criticism, asserting that the case for women’s ordination is not based on the higher-critical approach to Scripture. However, the article and its author ignore key pieces of contrary evidence. The following statements—one from the North American Division Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report, the other from a leading European Adventist scholar—offer decisive evidence that the case for women’s ordination relies in large measure on an approach to inspired writings which places the reader in charge of the text, rather than the other way around:

The text is primarily seen as a construct, insofar as meaning is taken to reside in the encounter or interchange between text and reader. Meaning thus emerges as an outcome of interplay between text and reader, both of which are culturally and historically conditioned (Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report 28).

For them (supporters of women’s ordination), biblical inspiration is a mediated process in which God imparts information that is then “contaminated” by the social, cultural, historical, and language context of the human author. In its nature, Scripture, while containing the divine message, also contains human baggage (Jan Barna, Ordination of Women and the Two Ways to Unity: Ecclesiastical and Biblical, 4).
This is how higher criticism reduces the Bible to merely another religious document open to diverse interpretations, as distinct from the classic Adventist contention that inspired writings explain themselves. Ellen White has perhaps best summarized this point as follows, regarding both Scripture and her own writings, "The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture" (Selected Messages Vol. 1, 42).

What is more, the article in question totally ignores the very recent record of other Christian denominations so far as women’s ordination and the homosexual issue are concerned. The recent statement in Time magazine—a source not likely biased toward biblical fundamentalism, much less conservative Adventism—comments on the current evangelical struggle over gay marriage as follows:

And there is another, just as fundamental, obstacle. 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 traditional evangelical view that husbands are the spiritual leaders of marriages and men are the leaders in churches. . . .

It is not an accident that the women’s-liberation movement preceded the gay-liberation movement,” [Episcopal Bishop Eugene] Robinson says. ‘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, not just their condemnation of LGBT people” (Elizabeth Dias, “A Change of Heart: Inside the evangelical war over gay marriage,” Jan. 26, 2015, 47-48).

The following statement from a former Anglican is a bit lengthy, but it is worth citing in full on account of its profound relevance to the present Adventist controversy:

Last Autumn was the tenth anniversary of the Church of England’s vote to ordain women as priests. In the hubbub of such a historic decision a little detail was missed by many. The week after the momentous vote, a short letter appeared in an Anglican weekly from the Gay and Lesbian Christian Movement. It read, ‘Dear Sir, Please note that all the arguments used for the ordination of women can also be used for the ordination of practising homosexuals.’

It might seem astounding to link the two issues, but the author of the letter was correct in his analysis. The arguments for the ordination of women were of three types: sentimental, utilitarian and political. The sentimental argument went like this: ‘Suzy is such a compassionate person. She too has suffered by being excluded, so she can identify with the marginalised in our society. She is such a good person, not to ordain her is so hurtful!’ The utilitarian argument was, ‘Janet is a good preacher and a bright theologian. She can do the job as well as any man. As a woman she brings special gifts. She will complement the totally masculine ministry.’ The third argument was political: ‘This is an equal rights issue. Women can now do any other job in our society. Why not the priesthood?’

Make the necessary changes and you can see how the same arguments are equally valid for the ordination of practising homosexuals: ‘Gary is such a compassionate person. He too has suffered by being excluded. Why be so judgmental and unkind? Why exclude him just because he lives with Dennis?’ The utilitarian says, ‘Kevin is a brilliant theologian and a compassionate pastor. Why should his sexual preferences affect his ability to do the job?’ Richard Kirker, the chairman of the Lesbian and Gay Christian movement, summed up the political argument. In a comment to the Church Times a week after the vote in 1992 he said, ‘The vote now opens the way for the Church to move with determination to the last remaining major injustice inflicted among its members: lesbian and gay people, unless celibate, are not officially accepted into the ordained ministry.’

In the women’s ordination debate any appeal to the usual sources of Christian authority were whisked away with the sleight of hand of ‘interpretation.’ So when conservative Evangelicals noted that St Paul said, ‘I do not permit a woman to have authority over a man in church.’ (I Tim. 2:12) the authorities said, ‘this passage may not have been written by St Paul. Besides, we now know more about gender roles than they did in the first century.’ If tradition was appealed to we were told that it is the duty of the church to adapt to fresh understandings and insights of the Holy
Spirit. St Peter’s admission of Gentiles to the Church (Acts 10) was used as an example of the radical change that the Spirit demands.

The same rubbery attitude to Scripture and tradition is used to condone the ordination of homosexuals. Do the Scriptures forbid homosexual activity? Biblical scholars are wheeled out to show that St Paul probably didn’t write those passages, and if he did, well, we now know that he wasn’t condemning homosexuality per se, but promiscuous homosexuality. Does tradition prohibit homosexual unions? Once again, ‘tradition must change as we come to understand more and more about human sexuality.’ Thus both Scripture and Tradition become our flexible friends, and like statistics, they mean whatever we want them to mean.

Here is another recent statement, from a Lutheran pastor:

Those who like to create a link from the ordination of women to every theological heresy or distortion are simply wrong. But there is a sense in which there is some truth to what they say. The churches that have chosen to ignore Scripture and tradition and ordain women have also chosen to leave behind what the Scriptures teach about such diverse and disparate subjects as evolution and creation, same sex marriage, gay and lesbian ordination, etc. It is not that one causes the other but both proceed from the same poisoned well.

Need more be said?

**Implications for Unity**

The article in question both begins and ends with predictions of dire consequences for the church if each world division is not permitted to go its own way on the ordination issue. For starters, the author seems to have little knowledge of the denomination’s governing and trademark policies. Such claims as the following bear witness to this fact:

A NO vote has the potential to split the Seventh-day Adventist Church on a denominational level, possibly leading to the separation of some Unions from the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Because Unions have their own Constitutions and Bylaws, and their own voting constituencies, If the General Conference moves in the direction of discipline it is likely that the church will enter into internal legal battles that could potentially divide Adventism into at least two denominations.

The author would do well to consult the current General Conference Working Policy. The following statement from the Working Policy is a legal requirement for inclusion in the Constitution and Bylaws of every Union Conference in the Seventh-day Adventist global structure:

The ____ Union Conference is a member unit of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church and is located in the territory of the ____ Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The purposes, policies, and procedures of this union conference shall be in harmony with the working policies and procedures of the ____ Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This union conference shall pursue the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in harmony with the doctrines, programs, and initiatives adopted and approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in its quinquennial sessions. (General Conference Working Policy 2013-2014 edition, 138)

In the General Conference Working Policy the above statement is found in boldface print. On the previous page it is stated, "Those sections of the model bylaws that appear in bold print are essential to the unity of the Church worldwide, and shall be included in the bylaws as adopted by each union conference."

Clauses with identical wording are declared by the Working Policy to be mandatory for Union Missions (152-153), Unions of Churches (166), and local Conferences (206-207).
There is therefore no legal separateness between any of the above entities and the General Conference, any more than there is legal separateness between a local church and the local Conference of whose sisterhood it is a member. Individuals of course are free to leave these entities and thus leave the worldwide Adventist body, but the entities themselves—and thus their assets—would remain at the disposal of the Seventh-day Adventist world structure in the event of discipline or dissolution.

And regarding the notion of the church potentially splitting into “at least two denominations,” Gibson should remember that the Seventh-day Adventist name is trademarked, and thus unavailable for use in the name of any possible organization which disaffected church members might wish to start. If another organization were to be started, it would be an offshoot movement—pure and simple.

The article in question asserts, with breathtaking naïvete: “A YES vote would not produce a denominational split.” The author seems not to have considered that never before in Seventh-day Adventist history has a biblical issue been relegated by official General Conference action for local resolution. And in light of widespread doctrinal, liturgical, and moral disagreement in Western Adventism, it isn't hard to envision the fragmentation that would likely break out if a precedent for regional settlement of theological issues were to be set by the world church.

The following statement by one Karl Mcalla, a respondent on the website where the article in question is posted, perhaps says it best:

Of much greater concern for me, and it should be for our Church, is having each Division make its own decision on this matter. Some say it is just for this one instance so that this matter can be resolved. I think that's “pie in the sky” thinking. Given the climate of the various attitudes and thinking in our church regarding some of the pillars of belief that we espouse, such as the Sanctuary Doctrine, the Sabbath and the 7 day creation, the Gift of Prophecy as given to Ellen White, the gift of marriage between a man and a woman and so on, it would be just a matter of time until these issues become forefront and demand decisions. If Divisions were to take differing views on these matters our Church would be in chaos as to what Seventh Day Adventists believe. It is a slippery slope that we must avoid.

Well said!

Conclusion

The article in question makes much of “letting the Holy Spirit” decide the ordination debate at the pending GC session. I agree wholeheartedly, but the inspired pen is clear that the Holy Spirit can never contradict the written Word, whose evidence in opposition to identical gender roles in ministry has been assembled by this reply. The following Ellen White statements are pointedly clear about the strict adherence of the Holy Spirit to the written counsel of God:

Since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word. The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Says the apostle John, “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (The Great Controversy vii)

When the Savior imparts His peace to the soul, the heart will be in perfect harmony with the Word of God, for the Spirit and the Word agree. The Lord honors His Word in all His dealings with humanity. It is His own will, His own voice, that is revealed to them, and He has no new will, no new truth, aside from His Word, to unfold to His children. If you have a wonderful experience that is not in harmony with the express directions of God’s Word, you may well doubt it, for its origin is not from above. The peace of Christ comes through the knowledge of Jesus whom the Bible reveals. (From the Heart 299)

May this written Word remain the supreme, transcendent, unalterable guide of the worldwide Advent movement in
the weeks, months, and years to come, is my prayer.
In the mirror

Wayne Blakely

June 7, 2015

I’ve lived most of my life as an active gay man. I don’t remember a day I wasn’t same-sex attracted. Not able to make sense out of God’s word and my “feelings,” I left God and the church when I was eighteen. Six years ago I found myself sitting in my bedroom in front of the computer, about to encounter Jesus one on one. For years I had opted to live life the way it “felt” most comfortable to me. My decisions were not a result of God’s plan or design conveyed through His Holy Word. They were a result of my “feelings.”

I WAS RAISED IN A STRONG CHRISTIAN, ADVENTIST HOME

I was raised in a strong Christian, Adventist home, plagued with same-sex attractions and unresolved considerations about what caused them. Worse was the fact that in church sermons, Sabbath School studies, prayer meetings and Christian education, “homosexuality” was never openly discussed. “Homosexuality” was known as sin, but we lumped temptation and sin together. Disgust long prevented that which began to steal away God’s precious children.

Somehow, there are still those today who believe that if we don’t talk about it, it will just go away. Others believe that we don’t need to talk about it, we just need to embrace it. We’ve done this with a number of human/sin issues in the church. It’s almost as though we don’t think these issues reside in our denomination. In our ignorant silence the world has backed us into a corner and we can’t afford to remain in silence and ignorance any longer.

Satan is cackling as he maneuvers his ways about those who would most likely be susceptible to responding to his cunning deceptions during this dark silence.

Matthew Parish, recently wrote this: “Even as a (gay) atheist, I wince to see the philosophical mess that religious conservatives are making of their case. Is there nobody of any intellectual stature left in our English church, or the Roman church, to frame the argument against Christianity’s slide into just going with the flow of social and cultural change? ”

I’m not “politically correct.” I can’t afford to be when I look to Jesus and He convicts my heart over this life and death matter. We arrive with the stain of fallen flesh. Of course we do. We are the descendants of Adam and Eve whose sin has marred us. God has made His ways and requirements known from the beginning. Eve departed from the knowledge God provided and acted on her “feelings” instead. “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want” (NIV, Galatians 5:17). What happened in the garden has been repeated for six thousand years. God is still waiting for His people to emerge.

Without the Spirit of God a knowledge of His word is of no avail. The theory of truth, unaccompanied by the Holy Spirit, cannot quicken the soul or sanctify the heart. One may be familiar with the commands and promises of the Bible; but unless the Spirit of God sets the truth home, the character will not be transformed. Without the enlightenment of the Spirit, men will not be able to distinguish truth from error, and they will fall under the masterful temptations of Satan.

The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit’s working. They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up. This class are represented also by the stony-ground hearers. They receive the word with readiness, but they fail
of assimilating its principles. Its influence is not abiding. The Spirit works upon man's heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. (Ellen White, Christ Object Lessons, 410-411)

For the last five years I have been blessed to share my testimony of freedom from homosexuality around the world. Perhaps one of the strongest attributes of these seminars is being transparent. I believe God preserved me for such a time as this. Not to go out and pound people over the head with academic and scholarly truths, but to share a practical Christianity that’s lacking in Adventism today. Not just about “homosexuality,” as the hot topic of the day, but about becoming complacent about any sin residing in us.

I can now laugh at some of the accusatory things being written about me. Some have frozen video frames, in order to print a snapshot, making me appear as an angry man. I’m pretty sure that most of these people haven’t heard my personal testimony. It’s not about me. It’s about the power of Jesus Christ to change any sinner from continued indulgence in “any” sin. And brothers and sisters we are all sinners indeed. We must stop playing the game called “my sin is less offensive than your sin”. Are we not all broken and in need of the Savior? Are we being honest with ourselves? Are we humbling ourselves before God?

Yes, I believe God called me and I don’t want to be one of the five virgins who only had a knowledge of truth rather than the working application God grants those who will accept Him.

When I stand in front of a mirror, I see a man who is still tempted. I see weak flesh. There are those who still try to classify me as “gay,” simply because I am tempted. Wasn’t Jesus tempted all the way to the cross? Didn’t He have to call out to His Father for strength to endure?

As brothers and sisters in Christ today, I invite you to participate in my sufferings by lifting me up in prayer to Jesus, praying for the healing that is promised to all of us in James 5:16. I’m not better than you. I can’t afford to be self-righteous. Jesus didn’t make the wrong decisions I’ve made. I’m responsible, and because of my wrong choices, I bear the scars of sin today. But not without the strength of Jesus to see me through every temptation that continues to come my way.

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age…” (NASB Titus 2:11,12).

Today I am witnessing the approval of sin from pulpits. More than a few are delivering “itchy ear” messages to those who insist that change is not possible. There isn’t a single verse in God’s word that supports same-sex sexual behavior. And yet there is a seeking to rewrite the word of God according to the desires of the flesh, even going so as far as to put God’s stamp of approval on it.

God’s Holy Word is inspired for all time. His word is inspired with a message of love that if allowed, would change our hearts to live in agreement with our Creator. Also inspired are the words of His messenger in Acts of the Apostles, p. 504. “Ministers of the gospel sometimes do great harm by allowing their forbearance toward the erring to degenerate into toleration of sins and even participation in them. Thus they are led to excuse and palliate that which God condemns, and after a time they become so blinded as to commend the very ones whom God commands them to reprove. He who has blunted his spiritual perceptions by sinful leniency toward those whom God condemns, will erelong commit a greater sin by severity and harshness toward those whom God approves.”

**JESUS INVITES ME TO SURRENDER**

Jesus invites me to surrender and to abide in Him each and every moment. He invites me to come away from the pleasures and delights of the world and get to know Jesus. I am to deny myself for the kingdom and live my life for Him, who gave His life for me.
The change that's taken place is not in exchanging gay sex for straight sex demonstrated through "conversion" and "reparative" therapies. These are therapies that promise the gay person that they can be made "straight." Many such therapies have caused great harm.

Only the love of Jesus can bring about the "change" in anyone's life to live in agreement with Jesus. According to His Holy precepts, sex is not promised to any of us. Many believe that sex is a rite of passage for everyone. But this is not found in scripture. However, when "marriage" occurs between one man and one woman as is ordained by God, the gift of intimacy is provided with God's blessing.

There are widows, widowers, heterosexual singles and same-sex attracted people who will experience temptation and endure only by surrendering those temptations to Jesus and grasping the strength He promises.

We can't endure without knowing Christ and choosing to obey Him as a result of our deep love for Him. We must stay securely fastened while weathering the storm.

As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbath keepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them.

In this time of persecution the faith of the Lord's servants will be tried. They have faithfully given the warning, looking to God and to His word alone. God's Spirit, moving upon their hearts, has constrained them to speak. (Great Controversy 608)

**I CAN'T HIDE BEHIND A MASK OR PRETEND TO BE SOMETHING I AM NOT**

Hiding behind a mask, or pretending to be something that I am not wouldn't be an honest representation of my walk with God. God is calling those who long for freedom from that which has controlled them. He is calling us from Satan's passions and deceptions, wrapped in "self-truth" rather than gospel truth.

Paul gives us a beautiful promise. “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (NIV, Romans 6:18).

In the face of adversity in and outside the church, I'm committed to sharing the only "pure" love that promises to change people's lives. The love of Jesus that replaces our self-love and the sin we love. Victory is possible. It's been paid for with the blood of Jesus. Grace abounds for the forgiveness of our sins. When we see the enormity of what sin causes, we come and weep at Jesus' feet and He offers us this “Amazing Grace.” How blessed we are to partake of this sweet grace and of the divine nature of Jesus.

My prayer today is that hearts will open wide to this love message that offers hope, freedom and forgiveness. We are in need of our “Redeemer” and all that He offers.

When I look in the mirror I see a changed man who is in need of constant change. I am not someone for people to look up to, but someone who wants to point others to Jesus, the Savior of mankind.

I want to demonstrate to others that we are loved while we are still sinners, but that Jesus offers us a way out of intentional sin. We have an identity in Jesus rather than being identified by our temptations. In Jesus Christ, we are free from the burden of sin, if we choose.
“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:24, 25).