

A Response to the North American Division (NAD) Ordination Request

***My Assigned Topic:
“Why Am I Not in Favor of the
North American Division’s Request”***

- **Presented by P. Gerard Damsteegt
SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University**

I Strongly Support the Involvement of Women in God's Work

- **Women have unique gifts needed to finish its mission.**
- **They have done a great work in the past and we need them even more today.**
- **They can reach people men can never reach.**
- **We must develop new strategies to attract them to participate in the work of God.**

I Deeply Sympathize with the NAD

What is the dilemma the church is facing?

- The Annual Council in 1989 voted that
 - Women ordained as elders can perform all the duties of ordained ministers.
 - However, they cannot be ordained as ministers.
- **Result: A very unhappy situation.**
 - No one really likes this solution.
 - Some accuse the church of unfairness, discrimination and injustice.
 - Some threaten to ordain women with or without the church's permission.

How to Solve This Dilemma and Preserve Church Unity

*Two options cited by the NAD president
(Adventist Review, Feb. 1995)*

- **1. To go back and acknowledge that it was a mistake to begin ordaining women as elders.**
- **2. To press on and request full ordination of women.**
 - **The NAD leadership has chosen the second option. They sincerely believe that this is the way to preserve unity and prevent open rebellion in certain areas.**

Why I Cannot Not Support the NAD Request

It is out of harmony with three SDA doctrines

- 1. It conflicts with the **doctrine of the church**.
- 2. It violates the **doctrine of the Holy Scriptures**.
- 3. It destroys the **doctrine of unity** in the body of Christ.

The Implications of the Request

It presents a major change in the structure of church leadership

- It rejects the generally held SDA position that the Bible teaches clear differences in function between men and women within the church.
- It assumes that the Bible allows women to occupy positions of spiritual headship in the church such as
 - head of a local church
 - conference president
 - union president
 - general conference president

The Test for New Doctrine or Practice

- **Isaiah 8:20:**

- “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (NKJV)

- **Light from the 1888 General Conference**

- “The Bible must be our standard for every doctrine and practice ... It is the word of the living God that is to decide all controversies.”
(Ellen White, 1888, 44, 45)

- The ordination issue deals with **a significant practice**
 - the practice of appointing ministerial leadership in Christ’s church.

God's Word Must Be Our Focus

We are a Bible church

- **Does the Bible speak to the question of the right of women to occupy positions of leadership with full ecclesiastical authority?**
- **Is there any light from Jesus on this question?**
 - **Yes there is!!!**

“The Scriptures Are Plain”

- Though Ellen White strongly supported two reform movements of the 19th century, the abolition of slavery and temperance, she strongly rejected the third—**women’s rights**.
- The prophet warned that “those who feel called out to join the movement in favor of woman’s rights ... might as well sever all connection with the third angel’s message. The spirit which attends the one cannot be in harmony with the other. **The Scriptures are plain upon the relations and rights of men and women**” (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 421).

I. The Request Conflicts with the Doctrine of the Church

*“The church derives its authority
from Christ, who is the incarnate
Word, and from the Scriptures, which
are the written Word”
(Fundamental Belief 11)*

What Does the Bible Teach on Relations between Men and Women?

It teaches true equality of nature and worth before God

- **1. In nature men and women are created in “the image of God” (Gen 1:27).**
- **2. In worth Jesus reveals that before God we are all exceedingly precious. God “shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34) because we are all “one in Christ Jesus.” Therefore “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female” (Gal 3: 28, NKJV).**
- **On this we fully agree.**

Are Men and Women the Same in Every Sense?

- **The Bible teaches that they have the same value and standing before God but that they are different in their functional roles.**
- **The North American request overlooks this fundamental Biblical teaching.**
- **1 Timothy and Titus clearly present this teaching which speaks directly to our situation.**
- **Unfortunately the Women's Study Commissions in Mohaven, Washington D.C. and Cohutta Springs never grappled in a focused way with this Biblical counsel. Therefore there is no better time to study it than at this time.**

The Message of 1 Timothy

A timeless message for the church

- Timothy was instructed “to teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables ... which cause disputes rather than godly edification” (1 Tim 1: 3, 4, NKJV).
- The Lord provided counsel on how to preserve His church from heresy, confusion and divisions.
- Timothy received God’s plan for the structure and operation of the church during the Christian era.
 - “I am writing these instructions to you so that...you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3:14, 15, RSV).

Principles of Authority in the Church

- **The early Christians had to face some of the same problems we do today. In certain places women interpreted the freedom of the Gospel as freedom to exercise the spiritual headship role in the church.**
- **Paul's response was swift:**
 - **“I do not permit a woman ... to have authority over a man” (1 Tim 2:12, NKJV).**
- **Was Paul's reasoning based on culture? Women in the culture of that time served as priestesses. Why should they not have the same rights in the Christian religion?**

God's Plan for Spiritual Headship—1

Christ's creation order before the Fall

- Paul based his first theological reason against women having authority over men on **the order Christ established before the fall into sin.**
 - “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1Tim 2:13, NKJV).
- What conclusion does Paul draw from this?
 - Jesus wanted men to be the spiritual leaders.
- Notice that this order of creation reflects Jesus' actions. **It has nothing to do with culture.**

God's Plan for Spiritual Headship—2

Christ's order after the Fall

- **As the second theological reason against women having spiritual authority over men, Paul states**
 - **“Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (1 Tim 2:14, RSV).**
- **After sin entered the world Jesus reaffirmed the role distinctions between men and women He already established before the fall.**
- **Again this has nothing to do with culture.**

God's Plan for Spiritual Headship—3

Christ's order after the cross

- These role distinctions Jesus instituted are not cancelled by His redemptive work.
- God's Word proclaimed:
 - “The head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3, RSV).
- Thus priestly headship of the man in the home and church is still in effect during the Christian era.

What Are the Qualifications for an Elder or Overseer (1 Tim 3:1-7)?

Requirements for spiritual headship

- Immediately after his counsel on the role of women Paul addresses who is to have the spiritual headship role.
- An elder must be blameless.
- He must be the “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, NKJV).
- He is to be of the male gender. Here the word “husband” in Greek is “**aner**” which is always a man, not a woman.
To appoint a woman as elder is not Biblical.
- He must have proven his leadership in the home.

Successful Home Leadership Qualifies for Spiritual Headship

- An elder must be “one who rules his house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” (1 Tim 3: 4). Why
- “For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim 3: 5, NKJV).
- The Spirit of Prophecy emphasizes distinctive roles in family and church government (*Adventist Home*, p. 321). Men are to exercise a caring, sacrificial headship in home and church (Eph 5:22-24, 28; 1 Cor 11:3). Women are called to supportive leadership while respecting the headship of men.
- This is not as a cultural custom, but as a divinely ordained principle (“as to the Lord,” Eph 5:22, NKJV).

The Structure of Authority in the Doctrine on the Church

- ***Fundamental Belief 11*** affirms that “the church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word, and from the Scriptures, which are the written Word ... The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head.”
- Jesus as the head of the church delegates His authority to leaders of the church in harmony with the Bible.
- In harmony with Jesus’ created order He has assigned the position of elder, or overseer, to men, not to women.
- Any change in this divine plan for His church will result in confusion, disunity, and derailment of a mission-driven church.

II. The Request Violates the Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures

*“The Holy Scriptures are the
infallible revelation of His will” and
“the test of experience”
(Fundamental Belief 1)*

Was Paul Culturally Biased?

- The question really is, **Can we fully trust the Bible writers?**
Yes, because
 - God is the author of the Bible. Therefore the Bible is “the infallible authority ... as a rule of faith and practice” (*Great Controversy*, p. 249).
 - It is not affected “by human prejudice or human pride” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 596).
 - The Bible, therefore, is **trustworthy and unbiased**.
- **How should we interpret the Bible?**
 - “The Word of God is infallible; accept it as it reads” (*Ellen White in Review and Herald*, Feb. 11, 1896, p. 81).

Danger of Modifying God's Instructions

- “The very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church. Rome began by enjoining what God had not forbidden, and she ended by forbidding what He had explicitly enjoined” (*Great Controversy*, pp. 289-290).
- “True faith consists in doing just what God has enjoined, not manufacturing things He has not enjoined” (*That I May Know Him*, p. 226).
- Modifying God's instructions undermines the authority of the Scriptures “as the infallible revelation of His will” (*Fundamental Belief 1*).

SDAs Need Submission to the Word of God, Not Reinterpretation

- **We should repent of the unbiblical view that relegates Jesus' creation order to a bygone era, irrelevant for the Remnant church.**
- **The Remnant church is a movement at the end of time that still is to reveal the characteristics of the NT church, even in the authority structure of church leadership.**
- **The Bible says the elder is to be "the husband of one wife." We believe the Bible!**

III. The Request Destroys the Doctrine of Unity in the Body of Christ

“Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children” (Fundamental Belief 13).

Results of Approving the Request—1

It allows the use of two conflicting methods of Biblical interpretation for SDAs

- **One method follows the NT church, the Protestant Reformation and the Advent pioneers, including Ellen White**
 - This approach favors a plain meaning of the Bible and its regulations for church leadership.
- **The other method follows the approach adopted by the fallen churches of Babylon since 1844.**
 - This new approach to the Bible is strongly influenced by the trends of today's culture. It sees the Biblical passages on male headship as culturally conditioned. Thus the plain meaning of the text is not the norm for 1995.

Results of Approving the Request—2

Effect of conflicting methods of Bible interpretation

- **It establishes two conflicting theologies of church leadership.**
 - **Ordination will not have worldwide validity any longer.**
 - **Some fields will not recognize the leadership from other fields.**
- **Approving conflicting theologies and practices leads**
 - **Toward division, not unity.**
 - **Toward national churches, not a world church.**
 - **Ultimately toward congregationalism.**
- **For unity SDAs must follow the Bible.**

What Will I Do If the Assembly Votes for This Proposal?

God calls for unity in Christ

- **I will stay with the church. Where shall I go?**
- **The Messenger of the Lord states:**
 - **Stay with the ship, for it will go through. The ship may be heavily damaged but it will go through. I will stay with the ship, for there is no better place outside of it. The future is bright for Bible believing SDAs.**

God's Promise for Bible Believing SDAs

- **“God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support”** (*Great Controversy*, p. 595).

What About Arguments in Support of Ordination?

- **Argument:** Women's ordination is for the good of the church. It will preserve its unity.
- **Reply:** Unity cannot be kept by a policy contrary to Scripture. It brings confusion and drives people to independent ministries.
- **Argument:** Some women testify that they have a "call" or a spiritual gift to be a minister of a church.
- **Reply:** Not every call or gift comes from God. "Test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1, RSV).
- **Argument:** It establishes fairness and justice in ministry.
- **Reply:** The Bible must be our standard to judge what is fair and just. We must follow the Bible, not the standards of society.

Why I Cannot Not Support the NAD Request

It is out of harmony with three SDA doctrines

- **1. It conflicts with the doctrine of the church by instituting an unscriptural structure.**
- **2. It violates the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures by not accepting Scripture as it plainly reads.**
- **3. It destroys the doctrine of unity in the body of Christ by introducing a practice that violates the conscience of many and nullifies the worldwide validity of ordination.**

SDAs are the Continuation of the Protestant Reformation

- **When Luther, the great reformer, was confronted with a choice between human opinions and the Bible he said, “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning—unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted ... I cannot and will not” change my views, “for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience.”**
- **From their humble beginnings SDAs have had the same conviction. Will they still continue as successors of the Reformation? The actions of this afternoon will reveal the true spirit of the Reformation in our church. May God help us.**

Selected Bibliography

- *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991).
- *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement To Unite Feminism with the Church* by Mary Kassian. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992).
- *The Tip of an Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry* by C. Raymond Holmes. (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Affirm, 1994).
- *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call To Biblical Fidelity* by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim. (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Affirm, P.O. Box 36, 1995).