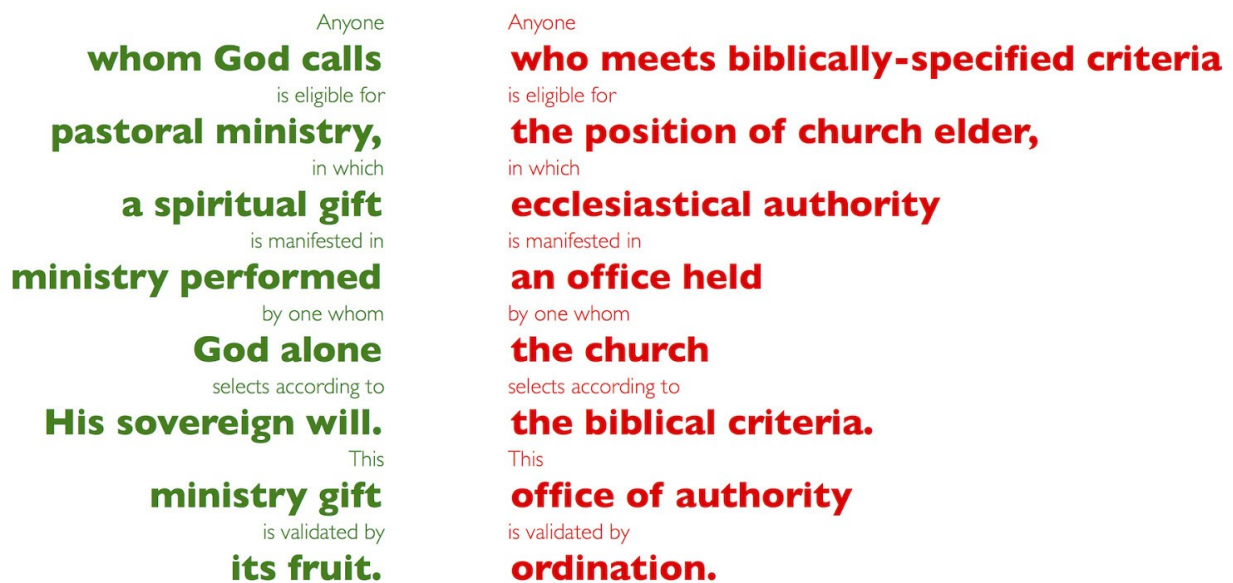


NPUC Constituency -- Why the Ordination Controversy Matters

John Witcombe

Is the women's ordination issue simply a distraction from our mission; something that we should ignore and maybe it will go away? To the contrary, this issue is far more significant than we may have thought. This article will show how vital this issue is relative to the final test.

First of all, carefully read this graphic, which I have adopted [from here](#).



The green column describes the priesthood of all believers; any believer called by God to exercise the gender inclusive spiritual gift of pastoral ministry (Ephesians 4:11) may exercise that gift, whether employed by the church or self-employed. No ordination or approval by the church is required to serve God in pastoral ministry to fellow members or to the world at large.

The red column describes the ecclesiastical office of elder. This office is regulated by the instruction found in the Bible. It has nothing to do with the priesthood of believers or cultural practice. We are required to follow the exact biblical instructions for the ordination of elders in every age and in every region of the world. It is not left to study committees to decide if women may be ordained to ecclesiastical authority. It is clear that only a man can fulfill the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 2:11 through 3:7 and Titus 1:5-9.

The green column speaks of women and men serving in paid or unpaid unordained pastoral ministry. We would love to see twenty women with the gift of pastoral ministry hired by our church to serve as gospel workers where there is today only one. Both men and women with the gift of pastoral ministry

would respect the ordained ecclesiastical authority of the elected elders.

The following statements from the Pen of Inspiration pertain to the green column only:

“It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 322.

“If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth. The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth. The Lord of the vineyard is saying to many women who are now doing nothing, ‘Why stand ye here all the day idle?’ Zealous and continued diligence in our sisters toiling for the spread of the truth would be wholly successful, and would astonish us with its results.”—*Review and Herald*, January 2, 1879.

“The printed page cannot accomplish alone the work that the living minister can do. He can explain the Scriptures to the people, praying with them and appealing to them, and making effective the truths of the Bible. Not merely one or two men are called to do this work, but many men and women who have ability to preach and teach the Word.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, 165.

In the above green and red graphic there are two distinct groups that are complementary. The two are not necessarily one and the same. The confusion in our church today stems from not understanding the difference between the green and red columns.

This women’s ordination issue is critical today because of the Sabbath issue that is soon to test the church and the world.

“Soon God's people will be tested by fiery trials, and the great proportion of those who now appear to be genuine and true will prove to be base metal. Instead of being strengthened and confirmed by opposition, threats, and abuse, they will cowardly take the side of the opposers. . . . To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few,—this will be our test.”—*Review & Herald*, January 11, 1887.

The majority of Seventh-day Adventists will be discarding the seventh-day Sabbath when the test comes. But how could that happen? It will not happen without good cause.

The enemy is even now setting in place the mechanism for this wholesale abandonment of the seventh-day Sabbath. And the majority of our people are unaware of what is taking place within the church right now that will ultimately trigger this avalanche.

Let’s look at the Sabbath commandment. It has some pretty specific language that identifies a particular day of the week that is to be kept holy:

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: [in it] thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger

that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.” Exodus 20:8-11.

Just as God has a specific day he commands that we keep holy so He once had a specific tree from which no fruit was to be eaten: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Genesis 2:16, 17.

Satan suggested that God’s command to leave one tree alone was not really essential: “And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” Genesis 3:1.

As we should well understand, it was not okay to disregard the command of God. We are all suffering the results of that one failure. But because Jesus was willing to take our punishment we each have a second chance. In this second chance do you not think it important to pay close attention to God’s directives and strictly obey what He says to do?

The Bible is clear in its teaching regarding God’s will. Satan tried to destroy the Bible and keep it out of our hands. He failed. The average home has 4.4 Bibles. So he’s come up with a strategy to make God’s word of no effect. He has brought in new methods of interpreting the Bible, or rather, interpreting its teachings away. Protestants have historically used the Historical-Grammatical method of interpreting the Bible. This is the hermeneutic used by our Adventist pioneers.

But new methods are being introduced into our church. One of these new methods is called the Principle-Based Historical-Cultural Hermeneutic. This interpretive method looks to culture for guidance in understanding the Bible. For example, our culture today is against patriarchy, and, guided by our culture, we read the Bible as specifying no headship in the Godhead, in the family, or in the church.

This method, along with the Trajectory Hermeneutic, carried the day in the North American Division’s (NAD) Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report. This change of hermeneutic was necessary in order to reach the conclusions that female elders are biblically permissible. If we hold fast to the old Historical-Grammatical method, the Bible clearly forbids female headship in the church.

So the NAD report introduced these two new methods of understanding the Bible. And with these methods there is no biblical prohibition to ordaining women as elders or gospel ministers.

[Here is a description](#) of the Trajectory Hermeneutic:

“Trajectory theology or hermeneutic has to do with an interpretive method which finds progressive change in the application of Scripture through the trajectory of time going beyond the completion of the New Testament. For example, Robert Webb's book *Women, Slaves, and Homosexuals* proposes a trajectory hermeneutic on the issues of slaves and women, believing that while the Bible never completely overturned the institution of slavery or the degraded role of women we should none the less look toward the direction in which the Scripture was headed and see a trajectory in time that plays out in our present understanding even though the NT had not

made it to this point yet. In other words, whatever direction the Scriptures were heading, we are to take up that ball and carry it to its finality.”

What would happen to our landmarks if we applied the Principle-Based Historical-Cultural Hermeneutic to them?

Let me try to illustrate: Might not such a method of interpretation take into consideration that the dominant culture of the First Century recognized Sunday as a day of rest and celebration, and in order to be culturally relevant and to connect with the world of their day, the early Christians moved their day of worship to Sunday? Why wasn't this a good and valid reasons for such a change? And since, today, the overwhelming majority worship on Sunday--and there is a near-worldwide culture of Sunday worship--and Adventists must complete our Christian mission within this culture, shouldn't we abandon the Sabbath so as to better fit in with the culture in our mission field? What's more important: keeping the Sabbath in defiance of culture, or adapting to culture in order to win souls to Christ? Didn't Paul say, "I have become all things to all people in order that I might win some"?

And hasn't the Holy Spirit been leading us to this place? Don't the mighty works of so many Sunday-keeping Christians--the thousands of hospitals, schools, orphanages, and the many millions converted to Christ in heathen lands and throughout the world--show that the Holy Spirit is working through Sunday-keepers? Who are we to deny a day, and the keepers of that day, that the Holy Spirit has very clearly endorsed through manifold gifts and wonderful works?

The Trajectory Hermeneutic would argue that the Bible writers were, over time, progressively moving from the bondage of the Old Testament law code to the freedom of New Testament grace. The Sabbath points us to the rest we find in the resurrected Christ, so if the Bible were written today wouldn't it clearly identify Resurrection Sunday as the Lord's Day? And should not we therefore follow this "trajectory of Scripture" where it leads?

[Here is an example](#) of the thinking that comes from adopting wrong methods of interpreting the Bible:

“From all of these verses we can see that the Sabbath clearly isn't a day of the week. It's neither Saturday nor Sunday! We enter into the Sabbath rest when we stop working, and that only happens when we accept that Jesus' sacrifice was for each of us. His work is done, and He invites us to join Him.”

“I live in the Sabbath everyday by resting in the finished work of Christ for my salvation. That is how we keep the Sabbath. . . . You sound like you have been listening too much to the Seventh Day Adventists. I would encourage you to break from that denomination. They "spit out a gnat and swallow a camel" when it comes to this area of the Sabbath.” <http://tbm.org/sabbath.htm>

The scriptural arguments of the Sunday-keepers seem valid to them, and their efforts at soul-winning have undeniably been attended with success. But their scriptural arguments, and their apparent success at soul-winning, do not tip the scales for us. We keep the Sabbath because we have a plain "thus saith the Lord" on the issue.

Those who oppose the seventh-day Sabbath say any day will work, and God is no longer concerned

about which day. We counter with "it is written," and stay with the clear statements in the Word of God.

So how should Adventists respond to those who say that God is no longer concerned that only men be ordained as elders, and whatever gender best comports with culture will do just fine? We must counter with "it is written," and stay with the clear statements in the Word of God.

If we don't allow the Bible to have the last word on the specifics of ordination we will have no credibility with the world when we insist that the Bible is to have the last word on which day to keep. People will see our inconsistency. Our own members who have embraced these new methods of interpreting the Bible will be among those who will give up the Sabbath in the coming crisis.

These new methods of interpreting the Bible allow for the culture to impact our understanding and when the culture is keeping Sunday in honor of the resurrection those who embrace these new methods will go along with the world.

When seen in this light, the women's ordination issue is not simply a distraction or chasing rabbits, it is a brilliant, strategic move of the enemy to enable him to overthrow the majority of Seventh-day Adventists in the final battle.

Accepting women's ordination requires one to overlook the plain reading of the Bible, and prepares the mind to be able to overlook the plain reading of the Bible regarding the seventh-day Sabbath, and thus receive the mark of the beast.

[Editor's note: For more information, search the Internet: "How Our Presuppositions Shape the Education of Adventist Youth", by E. Edward Zinke.]