

Ordained to Serve Pastor Tom Hughes

Galatians 3:28

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Today we are going to look at the call to ministry that each church member receives. We all have a God given ministry, and the God given gifts to perform it. God does not discriminate against anyone when it comes to ministry. Male or female, young or old, rich or poor, we all have a ministry to perform. Our divinely ordained purpose is to serve God and our fellow man.

“The Savior’s commission to the disciples **included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time.** It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. **All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men.** For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be **co-workers with Christ**”. {DA 822.2}

1 Peter 2:9

9 But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

The Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches that each member is a priest, divinely ordained to minister for God. We are all set apart to carry the gospel into the entire world. Both men and women are called to this priestly ministry, which replaced the Old Testament system of sacrifices and oblations. There is no earthly priesthood, other than the priesthood of all believers.

Our great high priest is in heaven, ministering at God’s right hand. In the church today, each member is called to perform a ministry and bear witness to the truth. The gifts of the Spirit are available to all believers, and the Spirit distributes them as He wills, regardless of the race or sex of the receiver.

Today we are focusing on the ministry of the elders and deacons, and how God uses them in ministry. Interestingly, God does not differentiate in his word between deacons and deaconess’, but mentions both as deacons.

The position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Ohio Conference is that men and women are free to minister in these positions, if called by God, and recognized as such by the local church.

There are many biblical texts that make the case for the church’s position, and we will examine them this morning. It makes me proud to know that our Conference takes a position that encourages people, regardless of their race or sex to minister in the way in which the Holy Spirit calls them. Discrimination against a person because of their race or sex would certainly not be in keeping with the church’s high calling.

1. Those who are ordained to serve as Elders

It is interesting that the word ordination does not occur in the New Testament, and the verb ‘to ordain’ does not occur either. There is no evidence that even the apostles were ever ordained. The most important information concerning ordination comes from the Pastoral Epistles.

1 Tim 4:14

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of the elders laid their hands upon you.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;³ not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;⁴ one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

There are many qualifications here to be an elder. As we read the list we are all aware that no one could measure up to these qualifications perfectly and at all times. However, the person should be a committed Christian who, by God's grace does his best to live up to his high calling. They should be a person of integrity who has a good reputation, both in the church and without. The person presented here is a balanced, open, friendly, loving, humble person, who is willing to use the gifts of the Spirit, like teaching to benefit the church and the community. They are truly ordained to serve.

Some have suggested that since a woman could not be the husband's of one wife, she could not serve as an elder. If this were the case, neither Jesus nor Paul could have served in that capacity, since neither of them was married. It's obvious in this passage that Paul required that the elders, and later the deacons not be polygamists.

Of greater concern to me, is the passage found in Timothy most often used to exclude women from ministry.

1 Timothy 2:9-14

9 in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. 11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And ***I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man***, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Some have used this text as a justification or banning all women from serving as elders in the church. However a careful study of the text in its context reveals that Paul was not writing about all women as a class or group. In the Greek Paul did not use the article, which would have denoted women as a class, nor did he use the plural word for women. He used the singular woman instead, indicating He was writing about a specific group of women who had problems with modesty, chastity and the exhibition of wealth. (Vs. 9)

To suggest that all women of the first century were guilty of immodesty, unchastity or exhibition of wealth is biblically inaccurate. There is nothing in this passage to support the silencing of Godly women, or forbidding their teaching in the church, their call to any form of Christian service, or the use of all the gifts the Triune God has bestowed upon them.

This letter was written to Timothy who was ministering in Ephesus as a guide to his ministry. Ephesus incidentally has been called the bastion of the female spiritual principal in ancient religion. Remember that the group claimed for their prophetesses a special revelation, superior to that afforded men, and even to Christ. They worshiped Diana, Goddess of the Ephesians.

Remember that Ephesus boasted thousands of sacred prostitutes. "Sacred marriage" enacted by priests and priestess or by sacred prostitute and worshiper, effected a union with the god, bringing salvation and fertility.

Such cult prostitutes constituted a significant proportion of the Ephesians' population both in the world-famed temple of Artemis (or Diana) of the Ephesians and also at the temple of Aphrodite (Venus) the Harlot. The temple of Artemis was where the Roman Goddess Diana was worshiped as the goddess of the woods and hunting, as well as the patron of women in childbirth.

The temple served as a bank both for safe deposit of others wealth and for loans at a profitable rate of interest it also owned extensive lands and Fisheries that contributed to the temples great wealth. Because of its size and wealth, the temple of Artemis was acclaimed as one the Seven Wonders of the World. It was 220 ft. wide and 425 ft. long. It had 127 columns that were 60 ft. tall. (OBC p. 61)

The office of Temple courtesan, whether temporary or permanent, was considered commendable, as is evidenced by inscriptions proclaiming the piety of those who served in this manner.

Many of these temple prostitutes were converted and found their way into the early Christian Church. They brought with them their belief in this superiority of women as mediators and tried to impose their unchaste and in modest form of

sexual religion upon the church. One of the concerns appears to have been over women who formulated new and unorthodox doctrine. As woman heretics were known to be involved in sexual immorality (1 Tim. 5:11-15; 2 Tim. 3: 6-7), we also postulate that they were teaching a religious practice that included sex and symbolic death.

That the prohibition does not include orthodox female teachers seems apparent from the reference to Priscilla (2 Tim. 4:19), who instructed Apollos at Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28), who became a pastor of the church at Ephesus. How silly it would be to state women couldn't teach and then acknowledge that a woman taught one of the greatest apologists for the Christian faith, Apollos! Paul also spoke highly of Eunice and Lois, Timothy's mother and grandmother who shared their faith with Timothy. (2 Tim. 1:5). Furthermore, older women are encouraged to be "teachers of what is good" (Titus 2:3).

It is tragic to disbar women from orthodox ministries to which they feel called of God by the use of 1 Tim. 2:12. There is a greater likelihood that the scripture refers to the heretical doctrines and practice of women and their assertion that they have been given a special revelation, which only they can impart, to men. A vaunted superiority, an assumption that God could speak most authoritatively through an individual of a particular sex, does not accord with the teachings of Jesus Christ, in whom there is neither male nor female.

We deny that any person has a privileged position with God on the basis of gender. The only inside track is the one given to us by Jesus Christ through his shed blood, and His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as our great high priest. We reject the all male priesthood, and acknowledge the priesthood of all believers. Jesus is the *only* mediator between God and man. (1 Tim. 2:5)

As we have seen by carefully considering the context of this passage, immodest, unchaste, wealth-flaunting women were the ones not permitted to teach, or dominate men. Orthodox women who were modest, chaste and humble were not excluded from a teaching ministry, such as Priscilla, Eunice and Lois.

Ellen White makes strong statements regarding women in ministry:

"There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God"-- Manuscript 43a, 1898. {Ev 472.1}

"Sister R and Sister W are doing ***just as efficient work as the ministers***; and some meetings when the ministers are all called away, ***Sister W takes the Bible and addresses the congregation.***-- Letter 169, 1900. {Ev 473.1}

"Teach this, my sister. You have many ways opened before you. ***Address the crowd whenever you can***; hold every jot of influence you can by any association that can be made the means of introducing the leaven to the meal. Every man and ***every woman has a work to do for the Master.*** Personal consecration and sanctification to God will accomplish, through the most simple methods, more than the most imposing display".--Review and Herald, May 9, 1899. {Ev 473.4}

"Missionary work--introducing our publications into families, conversing, and praying with and for them--is a good work and one which will educate ***men and women to do pastoral labor***".-- Testimonies, vol. 4, p. 390. (1880) {CM 7.1}

"The experience, (canvassing) thus gained will be of the greatest value to those who are fitting themselves ***for the ministry***. 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. (1900)

Let's look at other texts that are relevant to our study.

Philippians 4:2-3

2 I implore ***Euodia*** and I implore ***Syntyche*** to be of the same mind in the Lord.³ And I urge you also, true companion, help ***these women who labored with me in the gospel***, with Clement also, and the rest of ***my fellow workers***, whose names are in the Book of Life.

These two women are called Paul's "fellow workers who labored with me in the Gospel". Preaching, teaching, and spreading the gospel with the apostle would certainly qualify them to lead out in any modern day church.

Ellen White makes this statement about women teachers:
“Intelligent women, if truly converted, can act a part in this work of **holding Bible classes. There is a wide field of service for women as well as for men.**”--Letter 84, 1910. {Ev 473.5}

Romans 16:3-4

3 Greet **Priscilla** and **Aquila**, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also **all the churches** of the Gentiles.

Priscilla, according to most scholars was the one who was the evangelist in the family. We have already mentioned how she taught Apollos, (Acts 18: 26) who became one of the greatest apologists for the Christian Church. Paul as a fellow worker, which in our conference means minister, does not only recognize her, but she was recognized and appreciated by all the churches she ministered to. She must have been an extremely knowledgeable and capable teacher to instruct Apollos. She “ministered the word” which is exactly what an elder does.

Romans 16:7

7 Greet Andronicus and **Junia**, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, **who are of note among the apostles**, who also were in Christ before me.

This manuscript is from the 4th century. So three hundred years after Christ, the Bible speaks of a female apostle who was noteworthy. **John Chrysolstrom had no doubts regarding Junia’s sex or value when he exclaimed, “Oh how great is the devotion of this woman that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!”**

According to the Oxford Companion to the Bible, Junia was “The only woman called an apostle (Rom. 16:7) in the New Testament. Paul’s relative or compatriot, Junia had been in prison, perhaps for the gospel. Her name suggests that she may have been a freedwoman or a descendant of a slave freed by a member of the Junian clan. **As an apostle Junia must have claimed to have seen the risen Jesus and have engaged in missionary work (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1)**

Although previous scholars interpreted the name Junia as masculine, **church fathers, including Origin (3rd Century), John Chrysostom (4th Century) and Jerome, identified her as a**

woman. Further, while the hypothetical male name Junias is unattested in ancient inscriptions, **the female Latin name Junia occurs over 250 times in Greek and Latin inscriptions found in Rome alone. Therefore scholars today generally interpret the name as feminine. ” (OBC p. 405)**

Dr. Richard Choi

Professor of Greek, Andrews University

According to Dr. Richard Choi, who is the head of the Greek department of Andrews University, the Greek word used here is definitely feminine. He informed me that women were apostles, teachers, deacons, evangelists, and church leaders involved in every aspect of church life, until the Roman Bishops apostasy. The Papal attitude towards women brought in the negative interpretations of these Bible texts, and resulted in an exclusively celibate and male leadership in the church. It is my belief that we need to return to the Biblical model, and allow all God’s children, male and female to lead God’s church in whatever capacity the Holy Spirit chooses to call them.

Women as Prophetess’

In the following texts it becomes clear that in the last days women would be called upon to be prophets for God. If a woman can be a prophet, and prophesy the word of God, surely none could argue that she should be excluded from ministering in a lesser position of being an elder or a pastor. Those who do so resemble the Roman mother church in their attitude towards women rather than the clear teachings of the word of God.

Joel 2:28-32

28 “And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your **daughters shall prophesy**,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.

29 And also on My menservants and **on My maidservants**

I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

30 “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:

Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

31 The sun shall be turned into darkness,

And the moon into blood,

Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.

Other texts where woman are used by God in prophetic ministry: Ezek. 13; 17; Acts 2: 17-18; 11:27; 13:1; 15: 32; Phillips 4 daughters 21: 9, 10; Miriam Ex. 15:20; Deborah Judges 4:4 Huldah 2 Ki. 22:14; Noadiah Ne. 6: 14; Isaiah's wife Isa. 8:3; Elisabeth Lu. 1: 41-45; Anna Lu. 2: 36-38; And of course Seventh-day Adventists can point to the prophetic ministry of one of our founders and preachers, Ellen G. White.

1 Corinthians 11:4-5,11

4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.⁵ But ***every woman who prays or prophesies*** with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.¹¹ Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.

In this text, we can see that Paul did not forbid women to preach, speak for God, minister the word, or pray in the church. Women routinely spoke and prayed. He did tell married women to refrain from shouting out questions to their husbands on the other side of the room, and to do everything in a decent and orderly manner. Men and women worshiped on separate sides of the synagogue, and uneducated women would shout questions to their educated husbands. The Corinthian church was noted for its disruptive worship services, and this no doubt contributed to the confusion.

Galatians 3:28

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In the world ordained by Jesus Christ, women of ill repute, like the woman at the well were treated with respect. They weren't talked down to. Jesus revealed himself more plainly to her as the Messiah than he did to anyone else he talked to. Jesus respected women.

Mary was allowed to sit in the circle with the elders. One who was admitted to the Rabbi's circle was considered a disciple of the master. She was one in name and in deed. After his resurrection, Jesus "sent" Mary forth with his message to the cowering disciples. An apostle is "one who is sent forth" in the name of their master. Mary was a mighty worker for God. In

Christ there is neither male nor female. We are all one, on equal footing.

Ellen White writes of Mary the preacher, sent forth to minister, and then wishes we had 20 women preachers where there is now one, and finally she calls women to the great work of preaching the truth. Is this not the work of the elder in God's church? To minister the word to the world in need?

"Women can be the instruments of righteousness, rendering holy service. It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus. . . . 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."--Review and Herald, Jan 2, 1879. {Ev 471, 472}

Jesus set the example, and expects us to treat women as equals, giving them the respect they deserve. In God's church they are not second-class citizens that can be discriminated against because we want to keep them in the same status as women of the first century.

Did they treat women as property, as slaves in those days? Yes. Should we do it today? Absolutely not! Both Paul and Jesus were revolutionary in the way they treated women with respect, as co-workers in the gospel of Christ. Jesus had no problem sending his female disciples forth to minister his word to the people. Can we as a church do any less? I think not.

2. Ordained to Serve as Deacons and Deaconess'

1 Timothy 3:8-13

8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.¹¹ Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.¹² Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

He who desires the office of a deacon or deaconess desires a good thing. It is a noble work. It is a work of ministry, not just in keeping up the building, or taking up the offering, but in visiting the sick, in distributing the churches goods to the poor, and in ministering to the discouraged and the downtrodden.

“Ministry does not consist alone in preaching. **Those minister who relieve the sick and suffering, helping the needy, speaking words of comfort to the desponding and those of little faith.** Nigh and afar off are souls weighed down by a sense of guilt. It is not hardship, toil, or poverty that degrades humanity. It is guilt, wrongdoing. This brings unrest and dissatisfaction. **Christ would have His servants minister to sin-sick souls.** {DA 822.3}

God challenges our deacons and deaconess’ to be ministers of comfort to the elderly in the nursing homes, to be leaders in the community service ministries, to be teachers of the young ladies, instructing them in marriage, to take communion to the shut ins and help heal the broken hearted.

Ellen White states clearly that deaconess’ that minister to the sick and the young, ministering to the necessities of the poor, should be ordained by the laying on of hands:

“Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to **the service of the Lord** should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. **They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.** In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, **they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church.** We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, **not a soul discouraged**, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work. **Place the burdens upon men and women of the church**, that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness”. {RH, July 9, 1895 par. 8}

We read in the Bible about many faithful examples, like Stephen who gave his life for Jesus, and lead the Apostle Paul to Christ by his example. We see in the book of Romans how God used a woman to reach out and minister to all the churches in a large area, and not just in a single church:

Romans 16:1-2

I commend to you **Phoebe** our sister, who is **a servant of the church** in Cenchrea,² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been **a helper of many and of myself also.**

According to Chrysolstrom, Phoebe was a deaconess who was “hindered in no way by her sex”.

She is described here as a servant of the church. The Greek word for servant used here is **Diakonon**. The English word for deacon comes from this word. Paul here calls her a deacon, and says she helped many in the church. This is another biblical example of a woman in ministry.

We have read in the book of Acts about Dorcas the wonderful deaconess who ministered to so many that when she died the church was devastated.

Example after example is there for us to read. Wonderful men and women who gave all their money, time and even there very life for the sake of the church, and their community.

Oh, that God would raise up men and women today, who would be willing to give of themselves in this day and age to reach a dying world! Thank God that God still calls men and women to serve him! Thank God many even in this church, have answered the call of the Holy Spirit, and are here today to be ordained to minister according to their spiritual gifts.

May God Bless each and every one of you, as you are, both men and women- Ordained to serve!

**May God use you as his ministers to your fullest potential is my prayer,
In Jesus name, Amen, and Amen**