

DIVINE TITLES QUOTED TO DENY COMPLEMENTARY ROLES IN THE CHURCH

How to answer egalitarians on ecclesiastical structure

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In an attempt to deny the headship of man in the house and in the church, some resort to certain titles and roles of Christ as being exclusive. Therefore they conclude that both men and women are at the same level and equally eligible for leadership in the church. In their view, any attempt to put man over women usurps that unique position of the Lord. For this reason, it is necessary to show that the distinctive role of Christ and God as our supreme chief who requires our obedience and submission, does not prevent a similar and derived leadership in His representative leaders on earth.

Teacher [Master] (*didaskalos*)

Some quote Jesus when he said: “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ [“which means Teacher” (John 1:38: *didaskalos*)], for you have only one Teacher (*didaskalos*), and you are all brothers” (Matt 23:8). Then, they deduce that only Jesus is the head of the church. But let us not neglect the context, neither restrain its application to Christ as Teacher and Head, at the point of denying that quality to His disciples.

“In ancient Hebrew, *rabbi* was a proper term of address while speaking to a superior” or leader who was invested with an authority that had to be obeyed. The people had to submit to that authority. This was well understood by Jesus when He said, “a disciple is not above his *didaskalos* (teacher), nor a servant above his master” (Matt 10:24-25). The term *rabbi* comes from a root that meant “great,” so the word meant: ‘My great one; my honorable sir.’” This is the reason why Jesus warned His disciples not to do like them, who loved “to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others” (Matt 23:7).

But even if it is true that “a disciple is not above his teacher” (*didaskalos*), Jesus also added that after being “fully trained will [the disciple] be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). As a matter of fact, Paul stated that the Spirit gives gifts, and constitutes some as “teachers” (1 Cor. 12:28-29: *didaskalos*). The same apostle affirmed that he was a *didaskalos*, just before denying that faculty to women in the church, in comparison to men (1 Tim. 2:7,12).

Why did women not have the faculty of “teaching” men? Because the concept of “teaching” in the days of the apostle was not the same as we have today. It implied an authority which required obedience and submission to the leader who was versed in the Torah, something that only corresponded to men in the synagogue as well as in the church. Jesus respected that kind of leadership and authority, though He warned, “practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don’t follow their example. For they don’t practice what they teach” (Matt 23:2-3). In the case of the disciples, the leadership of a *rabbi* or “teacher” was to be performed under the example of humility left by Jesus (John 13:13-15).

In exchange, both men and women could “pray” and “prophecy” (1 Cor. 11:5; cf. Luke 2:36-37), and “expose” or “explain” the Word of God (Acts 18:26), as well as become evangelists (John 4:39-42). As a matter of fact, there were women in the church who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9; see Luke 2:36-37). E. G. White also prophesied, without ever aspiring or requiring the leadership of the church, as she openly expressed it, but being satisfied with her role of “messenger of the Lord.” She never baptized, she never officiated a marriage, she never officiated the Holy Supper. All this is in fulfillment of what God anticipated in prophecy, that the sons and daughters (evidently even singles) would prophesy, in agreement with the mission God gave to women (Joel 2:28).

Let us consider another text which shows us that the concept of “teacher” in the days of Christ was different from what we understand today. Jesus said:

“A disciple is not above his *didaskalos* (teacher), nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his *didaskalos*, [that is, to imitate him], and the servant like his master” (Matt. 10:24-25).

Let us transfer this old world concept of *didasko* to what Paul said in 1 Tim. 2:12. “I do not permit a woman to teach” (*didasko*) above man. What did he mean? That she is not permitted to assume a role over man in the leadership of the church. She might prophesy in the congregation or expose the word of God or teach in our modern concept of teaching, by delegation or authorization of the elders. In other words, her role in the church is equivalent to that which God assigned her in creation, a suitable helper for man (Gen. 2:18). This is what Paul just specifies in the following statement: “to have authority over a man” (*andros*: any man). Does this text make sense now?

More than a theoretical approach based on the Torah, teaching had to do with a “way” of life. This is the reason why the gospel is referred to as the way Jesus laid out for His disciples, which comes from God since the very beginning of the patriarchal era (Gen. 18:19; Judg. 2:22; 1 Sam. 12:23; Ps. 25:8-9; Jer. 6:16; Hos. 14:9, etc). It is striking to see in this context, that Jesus was told: “Teacher (*didaskale*), we know... you teach *the way of God* in accordance with the truth” (Mark 12:14). The mission He trusted to His disciples was to preach that way of salvation (Acts 18:25-36; 19:9,23; etc). In fact, He said, “I am the way” (John 14:6).

Thus, being a disciple of a *didaskalos* consisted not only in learning what the teacher says, but also following the teacher. This is what we see when a scribe told Jesus: “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go” (Matt. 8:19). This shows us that to be a Teacher meant to be a leader. No man could have told a woman that he would follow her wherever she went. But many women followed Jesus to take care of His needs (Mark 15:41; Luke 8:2-3; Matt. 27:55). Also Paul had women who followed him as helpers in his missionary trips (Phil. 4:2-3). This pattern comes from Genesis (3:16): the woman follows man, not man woman. And this was a principle that applies not only to male leadership in the house, but also in the church.

Even more, in the ancient role, learning at times required a rod for discipline. Of course, Paul didn’t use that methodology to teach in the churches. But on one occasion he figuratively warned the Corinthians who were acting in a disorderly fashion, “shall I come to you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?” (1 Cor 4:21). He could warn the church in that way because he was as a man of authority, an apostle commissioned by God to lead the church. This is too much for a woman to say in a church, even today. The application of discipline in a context of disorder in a house when the sons become adolescents, and in the church with adult people, corresponds to the father and the elders or pastor rather than to the mother in the house, or a lady in the church.

That old concept of discipline in teaching continued along the centuries, to the point where in the Middle Ages, the slogan was “spare the rod and spoil the child”. But this criterion changed more definitely starting with Pestalozzi, a Protestant Swiss educator who introduced a more spontaneous method which did not necessarily require the student to follow or submit to the teacher. Therefore what fits better with our teaching criterion today are two other Greek terms used by NT writers, which are “to prophesize” (1 Cor. 11:5), and “expose” or “explain” (Acts 11:4; 18:26; 28:23: *exezerento*), a role which involves men as well as women.

The word *nabi*, “prophet,” comes from a root meaning “to bubble forth, as from a fountain,” hence “to utter.” In other words, a prophet was a spokesman for God to man, a bearer of God’s message. This role was also fulfilled by E. G. White as “the Lord’s messenger”, without presuming or seeking to take authority over any man in her home or in the church, as she expressed, definitely, more than once. “No one has ever heard me claim the position of leader of the denomination... Neither then [when the work was just starting] nor since the work has grown to large proportions, during which time responsibilities have been widely distributed, has anyone heard me claiming the leadership of this people” (8T 236, 237).

But while the prophetic gift was exercised from the beginning, the prophetic order as such began with Samuel, who founded the school of the prophets. Those who were educated there were brought up to

exercise the office of prophet, which consisted of teaching or preaching pure morality and calling the people to the true worship of the Lord.

Let me specify here that we are not discussing what methodology for teaching is better, but how the people in the first century understood the word *didasko*. It is necessary for us to know what the apostle meant when he forbade a woman to teach in the church. It had to do with occupying a role of authority over man. In a society like ours, where everything is permitted, the notion of subjection and obedience to the elder or pastor who represents God in the leadership of the church, is often lost.

Briefly, when we read today that Paul did not permit women to teach in the church, we have to know that it had to do with a concept of authority which applied only to man, which a woman should not usurp (1 Tim. 2:11-12; see Rev 2:20: *didasko*). That authority to teach and rule in the congregation applied only to the “elders” (1 Tim. 3:2-3). It was, however, appropriate for both men and women to prophesy or expose the Word of God under the authorization of the elder/leader.

What do we find in the New Testament concerning teaching leadership? An order which progresses from Christ our Teacher over all the church, to man as teacher [leader] over the church including woman, and to woman in connection to younger ladies (Titus 2:3-4). Let us not forget that the old concept of the word *didasko*, “teacher” or “master” had different connotations, which should prevent us from imposing our own modern understanding on that word. The teacher required obedience and submission (see Heb. 13:17). In order to become teachers according to the biblical concept, we must imitate the divine Teacher as well as those who represent Him (Matt. 10:24-25; Luke 6:40).

“I am holy” (Lev. 11:44)

“You alone are holy,” acclaim the Lord the redeemed, as the reason why all will come to worship God before His throne (Rev. 15:4). However, Paul will consider the members of the churches while they are alive here on earth, as “saints,” without implying to worship them, because neither do the angels accept man's adoration (Rev 22:8-9). The law said: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only” (Deut. 6:13; Matt. 4:10). But God also said, “I am the LORD your God, so you are to sanctify yourselves and be holy because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44). In our realm, which does not require others to worship us, we are to be holy like God is holy in His realm. In God's case, His holiness leads those who come near Him to worship Him.

The same principle is seen in Jesus' words: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Again, God is perfect in His sphere, and in our limited sphere we have to imitate Him, to aspire to the divine perfection. We will never reach, here on earth, an absolute perfection like God has in His sphere. Anyway, by the blood of Jesus, we may be considered already perfect in each step of our ceaseless progression toward the heights of Christian perfection (Phil. 3:12-15).

***Elohim*: God**

Elohim is the most common term to refer to God, and comes from a verbal root which means “to be strong.” In the first commandment God orders not to have other gods before Him (Exod. 20:3). He is still more emphatic when He states, several times, that no other god exists apart from Him, neither before, now, or after (Deut. 4:35; 32:39; Isa. 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5-6). However, He decided to speak through His prophets who wrote the Bible, and through His ministers on earth who proclaim His messages. In consequence, instead of paying attention to human weaknesses, He wants us to consider their message as coming from God. In such contexts, He nicknamed “god” or “gods” divinely inspired legislators, as well as judges, prophets, and princes of Israel.

Let us start with Moses, who had significantly lost his command of the Egyptian language after 40 years of living in the wilderness. In order to illustrate how God uses His prophets to communicate with men, He told Moses:

“I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet” (Exod. 7:1-2). “You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him” (Exod. 4:15-16).

We may see here in a derived and illustrative way, Moses, for referring the words that God gives him, is seen as if he was God, and his brother Aaron as a bearer of his words of divine origin. Actually, God promises to be in the mouth of Moses as well as in the mouth of his brother Aaron, so that the people could hear the words of God through them.

Something similar appears a little later in Exod. 21:6 and 22:8-9. The *elohim* referred to there have been understood as “judges” because they judged with the words that God had given Moses in the Law (Deut. 17:8-12,17; 19:17; 21:5; 2 Chr. 19:5-10; Eze. 44:24). The implicit idea found in this application is clearly expressed by the prophet: “The lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 2:7). This does not mean they were literal gods, or that they were infallible, but that as long as they tied themselves to the Word of God, their verdict should be accepted as coming from God Himself (2 Chr. 19:10; see 2 Sam. 14:17). Even the angels were considered in one occasion *elohim* (Ps 8:5; cf. Heb 2:7), because the law of God “was put in place through angels by an intermediary” (Gal. 3:19).

Also Solomon “sat on the throne of the Eternal” instead of his father David. Here again we may see that that throne of judgment of both kings, David and Solomon his son, represented the throne of God who was the true king of the kingdom (1 Chr. 29:23; cf. 28:5; Ps. 45:5[6]; cf. Heb. 1:8). The kingdom of David, also called “house of David,” should display the principles of the heavenly kingdom. This is the reason why the kings were given a copy of the law of God when they were crowned (Deut. 17:18-19). They also had to foreshadow the future King Messiah, who would reign forever because God promised to affirm a son of David upon His throne (Zech. 12:8; see Isa 9:5). On the contrary, the throne of pagan nations, enemies of the kingdom of Israel, would represent the rebellious prince of this world, Lucifer (Isa. 14:12-14; Eze. 28:12-19). In addition, an antichrist would come, as anticipated by Paul, to sit in the midst of the church, at the place of God in a counterfeit manner.

By citing Psalm 82, Jesus also explained that “the Word of God came” to those who were nicknamed “gods” in the Old Testament (John 10:34-35; see Eze 6:1; 7:1, etc). The word of God that was in their mouth under divine inspiration, was God (John 1:1), but they would die like men because, in fact, they were not God (Ps 82:2,6-7). For this reason the apostle Paul said: “as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20).

Father

“Do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven” (Matt 23:9). How may we understand these words of Jesus? The Roman Catholic church made void this requirement of Christ, because it requires that every minister of that church be called “father”, and “pope” himself to be referred to as “Holy Father.” This, of course, is a double blasphemy of Holy and Father (Rev 15:4). That blasphemy is increased by the pretension of requiring people to kneel before such ministers and confess their sins to them.

Even so, the apostle Paul refers to himself in a non-blasphemous paternalistic manner concerning those to whom he brought the gospel, stating that “in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:14-17; 2 Cor. 2:14; Philemon 1:10). Paul gives an illustration that is easy for all to understand. Just as children imitate their fathers, the members of the churches over which he was pastor should imitate him, especially meaningful at a time when most people didn’t read. This did not mean they were not to imitate God (Eph. 5:1), but that they should imitate the apostle in the same way he himself imitated God (1 Cor. 11:1). They were also to “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised” (Heb. 6:12). “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7).

Some have employed the term “spiritual father” to refer this biblical paternalism. This is a blasphemy, unless we understand this expression as an “adoptive or affective father,” like Paul felt when he compared himself as a father or a mother (1 Thess. 2:11: “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children”; Gal 2:17; 1 Thess. 4:19; 1 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4). Actually, the only one who begets spiritual life is God through His Holy Spirit. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13; 3).

The “paternity” of Paul over his churches then is no more than an illustration requiring those who received the gospel through him to take him as a pattern in the way that younger brothers imitate their elder brothers. At the same time, it illustrated the spiritual authority that God had given him over those who were under his care in the churches. But regardless of that, he was never called or pretended to be called, “Holy Father” or “Holy Mother”.

In his old age, John wrote with affection to those who had received the gospel, as “my dear children” (1 John 2:1,12; 5:21). As a father claims authority over his sons, so also Paul exerted that role as head, leader, of those to whom he had proclaimed the gospel. This must be also the attitude of the pastors and elders of the Lord’s flock.

In the patriarchal system, “the father was the proper ruler of his own family as long as he lived. His authority was not to cease, even after his children were grown up and had families of their own” (PP 293). “Let every husband who claims to love God carefully study the requirements of God in his position. Christ’s authority is exercised in wisdom, in all kindness and gentleness; so let the husband exercise his power and imitate the great Head of the church” (AH 215).

Head

Resistance to the headship of male leaders in the church is often the result of how the term “head” is to be understood. Since Paul compared the church as a body with Jesus as its head (Eph 1:22-23), many argue that only Christ is the head of the church. This is consistent with that parable. But we cannot push parables too far, especially when we find other parables that introduce Jesus as the husband of the church (Eph 5:23), and in a wider context, man as head of woman. In addition, we find in the Old Testament that God is also called “head” of the people, without implying that no other head existed in the people (see below).

Partisans of the view of the *egalitarian* role of women restrict the use of the term head to the relationship between husband and wife. For them, only Christ is head of the church, and any attempt to apply the term “head” to men in the church is seen as a pretension by usurping the place of Christ in the community of believers. But for the partisans of the view of the role of women as *complementary*, this restriction of head to marriage is forced. Among other things, Paul places the government or leadership of man in the little church in one’s home as a prerequisite to rule or leadership in the greater church in which he is nominated bishop or elder (1 Tim. 3:4-5; 5:17). This is what the Spirit of Prophecy also does.

“The home is a school where all may learn how they are to act in the church...” (CG 549.2).
“Every Christian family is a church in itself... The father... is the priest of the household, accountable to God for the influence that he exerts over every member of his family” (3 SM 209.2).
“The father as a priest of the household, the mother as a home missionary” (CCh 143.1). He who fails to be a faithful, discerning shepherd in the home, will surely fail of being a faithful shepherd of the flock of God in the church” (6 MR 49).

This shows us that just as man is head, leader at home, so also he is leader of the church. And just as woman complements the work of her husband in his leadership at home, so also she does it by cooperating in the church in supporting the leadership of elders and pastors. All this, of course to exist in its true sphere and with the borders inherent in that position.

Let us insist that the problem lies in what many understand by the term "head". They imagine a dominion equivalent to that of the husband at home, and deduce that this prerogative does not belong to another man. But if we see the term head, as in the OT, in a more limited scope than that corresponding to God, in reference to the role of ruling, leading, to be prince (not dictator), there is no problem in referring to the leaders of the church as E. G. White did it, as being "at the head of the work" (5T 672; 1T 572; RH Mayo 25, 1905). This does not authorize anyone to exceed his sphere of action and become a despot, because we must follow the example of humility given by our ultimate Teacher. His was a different authority than the authority exerted by the kings of the nations who dominated over their subjects (John 13:13-14; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

What does the Bible say? That God appointed Jesus "to be head over everything for the church" (Eph 1:22). He "is the head over every power and authority" (Col. 2:10). Does it mean that there are not "heads" on earth? No. Paul will say that man is head of woman, which he himself defines as meaning submission (Eph 5:23-24). Therefore we may see that while we may agree that Christ requires submission of man to his headship, we cannot deny that woman must also submit to man in his sphere, in the little church within their home. Does Paul also require submission and obedience of the members of the church to the leadership of pastor or elder in the church? Yes.

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb. 13:17).

In 1 Cor. 11:3, Paul insists once more that God is the head of Christ, Christ of man, and man of woman. By the fact that in Eph. 5 Paul employs the symbol of man as head of his woman to illustrate the role of Christ over the church, some want to limit all comparison made by the apostle, before or after this one, to this conjugal relation. Thus, those who want to deny the principle of man's headship in the church, restricting the application of 1 Cor. 11:3 to a marital context, affirm that the term *aner*, "man", and *guné*, "woman", must be translated respectively by "husband" and "wife." But a look into the Greek NT lexicons shows us that these terms did not necessarily specify the civil condition (see Matt 9:20; 13:33; 26:7; Rom 4:8; Eph 4:13; 1 Cor 13:11; also Luke 5:8; 8:27; Acts 8:12; 17:12; 1 Tim 2:8-9, when used in parallelism, etc). For this reason, translators have tended to be cautious when dealing with 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Tim 2:11-12, preferring to keep the generic name of "man" as head of "woman," someone who occupies a leadership position which corresponds only to man.

Some reply that only married women bore a veil on their head. But this is not true. All women used veils on their head, be they maiden, married, or widow, even in the Greco-Roman world. In addition, some veiled in special circumstances their face, indicating they were prostitute widows (Gen 38:14). But in Gen 24:65, Rebeca put the veil over her head before knowing Isaac and before marrying him (though during the trip she could travel more comfortably without a veil). Even "the virgin daughter of Babylon," according to the figure, used to carry a veil on her head, because in the text, she is described as having to take it off in disgrace (Isa 47:1-2).

Under this context, the universalized expression in 1 Cor. 11:5, "all [or every or each] woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered," implied not only married ladies, but also maiden and widows (see Acts 21:9: four unmarried daughters prophesied, who lived under the care of their father; Luke 2:36-37: Anna the prophetess was a widow). All of them should cover their head, meaning that they were subjected to male authority in the church. The same may be said in relation to the generic term "man". The apostle said: "all [or every or each] man who prays or prophesies," no matter if he is married or not. By the way, maiden ladies were under the authority of the father who alone decides when and whom to which man to give her in marriage (Exod. 21:7). Anyway, Paul is not specifying here the father or the husband or the master as head of woman. He brings out a biblical principle which comes from creation, that man is the head, leader of the church, over the role of woman, though under the government of Christ and God.

Many do not realize that the apostle Paul spoke of man as “head,” “elder,” “pastor,” and “bishop,” based on the OT to refer to the role of man, his leadership in the church. He borrowed these words from similar terminology found in the OT in connection with the leadership of the people. Thus, *rosh* (head), is employed in the OT in relation to *tsaqen* (elder), *nashi*’ (chief), *sar* (prince), *qasir* (ruler), and even with *qohen* (priest). In this scheme, God is the principal head or head per excellence over His people, and is represented even as an “Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7). As such, He presides over a court of elders, like the elders in ancient times who judged the people together with their king (Ps. 122:4- 5; 1 Kgs. 12:6-8; Rev. 4-5).

Let us bring out here that the “elders” of Israel were “heads” (*rosh*), that is, leaders of the people (Josh. 23:2; 2 Chr 5:2). They were heads not only of their family, but also of their clans and tribes. God put them also as heads over other people. Let us share here some samples (you will find more on my webpage: www.adventistdistinctivemessages.com).

“He shall become head [*rosh*] over all the inhabitants of Gilead” (Judg. 10:18; 11:8-9,11). “Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads [*rosh*] over the people, leaders [*sar*] of thousands, [*sar*] of hundreds, [*sar*] of fifties and [*sar*] of tens” (Exod. 18:25). “These are they who were called of the congregation, the leaders [*nasi*’] of their fathers’ tribes; they were the heads [*rosh*] of divisions of Israel” (Num. 1:16). “So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads[*rosh*] over you, leaders [*sar*] of thousands and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes” (Deut. 1:15). “Hear now, heads [*rosh*] of Jacob and rulers [*qasin*] of the house of Israel “ (Micah 3:1).

Let us pay attention to the fact that those men who were heads of their homes and tribes and the people in general, were it under their principal Head who is God (see 2 Chr. 13:12: “God is our *rosh*, Head”). It is just this pattern of social leadership in the old Israel, which the apostles Paul and Peter adopted in the leadership or government of the church. These “elders” and “pastors” of the flock lead or rule in the church under the Prince of the pastors or Head of the church, Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 5:2-4; Eph. 1:22). And just as the fact that the principal head was God in the OT did not preclude the leadership of His earthly representatives; so also the fact that Christ is the principal head in the NT, does not deny His headship through His representative men in the church. This is what the document "Adventist Ordination Crisis" brings out with support from passages of the NT and of the Spirit of Prophecy.

Please, don’t say that this concept means machismo, because it has to do with the plan of God which comes from creation itself. We know that in Medieval times, an authoritarian lordship took place in the Roman Catholic Church. This may also happen at the head or leadership of our church, when the plan of God delineated in the Bible is abused and corrupted, encroaching upon the leadership of our supreme head, Jesus Christ. At the Last Supper, Jesus contrasted His leadership with the abusive lordship of the rulers of the nations. But in the church, man's “headship” is to be administered according to the manner of Christ, humble and meek as if He didn’t have that authority (1 Pet 5:3).

Does this mean that under special circumstances, a pastor cannot impose his authority like Paul when he told the Corinthians: “Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Cor. 4:21). Yes. But the point here is that a lady could never say this to a church, even today, because it is beyond the limitations of her authority.

In 1 Cor. 11:3, Paul employs this principle of “head” (authority, leadership) which comes from the OT, and brings out that it corresponds to man, who continues being head of woman in the church when she prays or prophesies as well as when he is at home. God never gave woman a ruling preeminence in the church. A distinctive characteristic of the Bible is that contrary to all the other nations surrounding Israel, women and homosexual weren’t accepted as priests. This was characteristic from the time of Abel and the Patriarchal era and on through the leadership of the Christian church. God did not depend on culture to require male leadership of His people. As a matter of fact, the term “head” was never applied in either testament to woman.

What did E. G. White mean, then, when she said that “Christ is the only head of the church?” (21 MR 274; DA 817; GC 51). She explains it in the following statement: “He only has the right to demand of man unlimited obedience to His requirements” (21MR 274). This unlimited obedience cannot be required by the elder and leader of the church even of his own wife and children at home. But, why did E. G. White also write that “Christ, not the minister, is the head of the church”? (ST Jan 27, 1890). The context of this statement reveals an unhealthy dependence on ministers, a warning against the all-too-common reality of ministry where the head (the pastor) works without the help of the body of laity! (See AOC, 68).

When we recognize that “head” means simply “chief,” “leader,” and that every leader out of Christ has a limited action, there is no reason to take offense when we understand that position to correspond to consecrated men. Actually, God appointed man to rule His creation at the beginning, to rule also over his wife, later on over His people, always under the supreme leadership of the heavenly King. All this was to follow the pattern of Christ's headship, in humility and meekness (John 13:13-14).

“Jesus was given to stand at the head of humanity, by His example to teach what it means to minister... The great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of men ordained by God to act as His representatives... Christ’s ministers are the spiritual guardians of the people entrusted to their care. Their work has been likened to that of watchmen” (AA 360).

“God has provided light and truth for the world by having placed it in the keeping of faithful men, who in succession have committed it to others through all generations up to the present time. These men have derived their authority in an unbroken line from the first teachers of the faith. Christ remains the true minister of his church, but he delegates his power to his under-shepherds, to his chosen ministers, who have the treasure of his grace in earthen vessels. God superintends the affairs of his servants, and they are placed in his work by divine appointment” (ST, April 7, 1890, par. 6).

We could add here other statements where she refers to the leaders of the church as those who are “at the head of the work” (see above). We also find statements where she mentions angels leading other angels as their head, each group under one head, even if they are equals in nature. Christ was also essentially God (Col 1:19), but submitted all headship to His Father in what has to do with roles (1 Cor. 11:3). Should it come as a surprise then if we refer to the principle which comes from creation itself with respect to the leadership of man in the church?

Elder

The Bible introduces God as “Elder” per excellence, presiding over a court of elders like Him in connection with the final judgment (Dan 7:9-10; Rev 4-5). This shows us once more that the fact that no one is older than God or has more experience than Him to judge, does not disqualify those whom He chooses from assisting Him in His work of judgment. What tasks did the elders appointed by Paul and his disciples in the churches have, according to the pattern of Ancient Israel, which could not be performed by women nor was required to deacons? That of “ruling” the church (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17). The terms *radah* (to have dominion, to subjugate), and *mashal* (to rule), were always employed in connection to man, never to women (though two evil queens usurped for a moment the kingdom, until they were killed). This principle comes from the divine design which God would emphasize after the fall, because He knew that all authority would be disputed under this new reality: “he will rule (*mashal*) over you” (Gen 3:16).

Neither did the New Testament use the term *proistemi*, “to rule”, in reference to a position of woman in the church. The fact that Phoebe became deaconess, and that one of the conditions to become deacon was to be husband of only one woman, changed nothing. That is because deacon meant “servant,” and this is a characteristic that fits both men and women in the church. But when Paul stated that the elder must be “husband of only one woman,” he brings out his faculty to “rule,” a position that he doesn’t mention for deacons. For this reason, no woman is found in the NT with a position of “elder.”

Conclusion

After reading the requirement given by Paul to become elder, we find several of them that are denied to woman. This allows us to positively affirm that the Bible is not silent on the role of woman in the church, but rather openly excludes her from the position of bishop or elder of the church. Among these exclusive requirements that are applied to men to officiate as elders, we find the principle of headship at home as well as in the church, the gift of “teaching” which in ancient times required obedience and submission, and for which women were disqualified excepting over other younger ladies.

Is the testimony of the Bible confusing regarding the different roles of man and woman? No.

“Those who feel called out to join the movement in favor of woman’s rights and the so-called dress reform 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” (1T 421). “Many ladies... may talk of woman’s elevated sphere, and of her rights, yet they themselves fall far below the true sphere of woman” (DG 211.3).

The testimony of the Bible and of the Spirit of Prophecy about the different roles of men and women in the church has been made confusing by many who replace the authority of Scripture with our modern corrupt culture. Biblical words like “submission” or “subjection” to a human authority are distasteful to mankind by nature. That spirit of insubordination to all systems of government tries to break every divine and human social norm so that everyone lives and works without any care for others (see GC, chapter 36). It is this very spirit which, in some churches, conferences, unions, and divisions, motivates many to work on their own, bypassing the decisions and intentions of the larger body.