

Women In Ministry

To: Equality in Ministry Committee, Walla Walla College Church

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June 11, 1997

I just read the pamphlet, *Equality in Ministry*, which you sent to all the pastors in the Upper Columbia Conference. If there is a slight chance that the following “cosmic argument” is valid, it might be prudent to consider retracing our steps rather than to continue forging ahead with women’s ordination.

First, a couple of questions:

1. Does ordination invest the person with authority?

God had abundantly blessed the labors of Paul and Barnabas during the year they remained with the believers in Antioch; but neither of them had as yet been **formally ordained to the gospel ministry**. . . . Thus they were authorized by the church not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism, and to organize churches, being **invested with full ecclesiastical authority**” (*Review and Herald*, 1911-05-11, all emphasis supplied here and following).

Obey them that have the **rule over you**, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17).

Let the **elders that rule well** be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17).

2. Does the Old and New Testament have a problem with women ruling or having authority over a man?

As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths (Isaiah 3:12).

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:11-13).

“For Adam was first formed, then Eve.” Here we see Paul’s reason for women not having authority over a man.

The next logical question would be why was Adam formed first? And what difference does that make six thousand years later?

I believe it might be helpful if we could discover the reason behind Paul’s reason for women not having authority over a man? For me it is enough that the Bible says so, however; if there is a reason why God created Adam first, I think it would be worth discovering.

Tell me what you think of my “cosmic argument” against women’s ordination.

The husband is to have the spiritual oversight (ecclesiastical authority) of his home. Why? Because he is more spiritual or more qualified? No. The reason is "Because of the angels."

A group of families comprising a church whose husbands are exercising the spiritual oversight in their homes ought to come under the spiritual oversight or the ecclesiastical authority of a man rather than a woman. Why? Because a woman lacks the spirituality, skills and abilities? No. The reason is "Because of the angels."

What do the angels have to do with the question regarding the relationship between men and women?

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head **because of the angels** (1 Corinthians 11.7-10).

Why is masculine headship taught in the Bible? Is it simply "cultural male chauvinism" or does it have something to do with the phrase "because of the angels?" This expression is regarded as especially difficult by commentators, who have come to at least a dozen different conclusions about what it means. I would like to suggest yet another possible conclusion, one tied to our understanding of the beginning of sin in heaven.

My suggestion is that the angels are learning about the functional subordination of the Son to the Father in the divine relationship as it is reflected in the relationship between woman and man, a model designed by the Creator for teaching this lesson. I realize that based on the contemporary egalitarian ideal dominant in western culture, functional distinctions among persons are regarded as unacceptable. However, distinction in function is a biblical teaching.

The Bible text assigns men leadership in the home, and if 1 Corinthians 11 is taken seriously, also in the worship setting. This leadership is to be exercised within a loving, self-sacrificing manner that will provide actual leadership without any sense of oppression. (The classic statement is Ephesians 5:21-31.) And in the divine plan wives will be supportive in response. I recognize that this teaching is out of harmony with contemporary social philosophy and politicized versions of what is called equality. But it is clearly biblical, and this perspective is supported by Ellen White.

But now back to my angel theory. Why do the angels need a model to help explain divine relationships? The relationship that existed between the Father and His Son was first questioned by Lucifer. This was the issue that ignited the Great Controversy.

Satan in Heaven, before his rebellion, was a high and exalted angel, next in honor to God's dear Son. . . . A special light beamed in his countenance, and shone around him brighter and more beautiful than around the other angels; yet Jesus, God's dear Son, had the pre-eminence over all the angelic host. He was one with the Father before the angels were created. **Satan was envious of Christ, and gradually assumed command which devolved on Christ alone.** The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the presence of all the angels confer special honor upon his Son. The Son was seated on the throne with the Father, and the heavenly throng of holy angels was gathered around them. The Father then made known that it was ordained by himself that Christ, his Son, should be equal with himself; so that wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his own presence. The word of the Son was to be obeyed as readily as the word of the Father. His Son he had invested with authority to command the heavenly host. Especially was his Son to work in union with himself in the anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon the earth. His Son would carry out his will and his purposes, but would do nothing of himself alone. The Father's will would be fulfilled in him. Satan was envious and jealous of Jesus Christ. . . . **Why should Christ thus be honored before himself?** . . . There was contention among the angels. Satan and his sympathizers were striving to reform the government of God. They were discontented and unhappy because they could not look into his unsearchable wisdom and ascertain his purposes in exalting his Son Jesus, and endowing him with such

unlimited power and command. **They rebelled against the authority of the Son** (*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 17-22).

Lucifer said in essence, "It's my turn to be the Son for awhile." Lucifer had no qualms with the Father's authority. It was the Son of God he was jealous of. "The Son of God was next in authority to the great Lawgiver" (*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 9). Satan wanted a turn at being next in authority.

"God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son" (*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 268). Satan and a portion of the angels could not see how the Son could be equal to the Father and at the same time be next in authority? "Being under authority to His Father must make the Son somehow inferior and so why should we obey Him?" Lucifer may have reasoned.

The human family would be an object lesson for the watching universe. They would be created in God's image, after His likeness. Thus the wife was positioned next in authority to her husband, just as the Son is next in authority to His Father.

Have you ever given any thought as to why the father of the bride walks his daughter down the aisle and presents her to the groom? The minister then asks the question, "Who gives this lady to be married to this man?" The father responds, "I do." Where did this tradition come from?

This is yet another beautiful illustration of the divine relationship between the Father and His Son. Because the woman has the privilege of representing to the watching universe the Son's subordinate relationship to the Father, she must always be under authority and that authority is transferred from her father to the groom in the wedding ceremony.

This transfer of authority is illustrated in Numbers 30.1-8:

And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded. If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth. If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth; And her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the LORD shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her. And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul; And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard it: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard it; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the LORD shall forgive her.

Besides having the honor of illustrating the Son of God in His relationship to His Father, women also have the high calling of representing the church in its relationship to Christ.

Ephesians 5.22-25 states

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

Ellen White adds,

The husband is the head of the family, as Christ is the head of the church; and any course which the wife may pursue to lessen his influence and lead him to come down from that dignified, responsible position is displeasing to God. It is the duty of the wife to yield her wishes and will to her husband. Both should be

yielding, but the word of God gives preference to the judgment of the husband. And it will not detract from the dignity of the wife to yield to him whom she has chosen to be her counselor, adviser, and protector (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 307).

Why would God ask a woman in the home one minute to be under the authority of her husband as priest of the home and then, if she was the pastor or a local elder, turn around and place her in a position of ecclesiastical authority over him in the Church? This confusion is avoided by adhering to the Bible and not ordaining women as pastors or local elders.

It is no evidence of manliness in the husband for him to dwell constantly upon his position as head of the family. It does not increase respect for him to hear him quoting Scripture to sustain his claim to authority. It will not make him more manly to require his wife, the mother of his children, to act upon his plans as if they were infallible. The Lord has constituted the husband the head of the wife to be her protector; he is the house-band of the family, binding the members together, even as Christ is the head of the church and the Savior of the mystical body. 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 (*Adventist Home*, p. 215).

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the **head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God** (1 Corinthians 11:3).

For he **(Father)** hath put all things under his **(Son)** feet. But when he **(Father)** saith all things are put under him **(Son)**, it is manifest that he **(Father)** is excepted, which did put all things under him **(Son)**. And when all things shall be subdued unto him **(Son)**, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him **(Father)** that put all things under him **(Son)**, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15.27, 28).

The Son has always and will always be in submission to His Father. Lucifer resisted the authority structure in heaven. Whatever he and his fallen angels can do to

obliterate the model of heaven's order of authority here on this earth, you can be sure they'll try. The relationship between a husband and wife illustrates that relationship between the Father and His Son--a relationship questioned by many of the angels.

Woman was God's final act of creation.

She would teach the watching universe something about the relationship that the Son of God has with His Father. She would represent the Son of God, the One whose position was challenged. Any course the church takes that would lead women to come down* from her exalted, dignified, noble, responsible position of representing the Son's subordinate relationship to His Father, would not go over well with the loyal angels.

*"A neglect on the part of woman to follow God's plan in her creation, an effort to reach for important positions which He has not qualified her to fill, leaves vacant the position that she could fill to acceptance. In getting out of her sphere, she loses true womanly dignity and nobility" (*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 484).

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: John and Sharon Witcombe have ministered in churches in Washington and Oregon. John began to serve as a pastor in 1994. Presently they serve in Southern Oregon. Their daughter has recently blessed them with a grandchild.