Ordination: Biblical typology male and female

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When we approach the subject of women’s ordination, we find the Bible’s beauty and harmony strangely misunderstood. Thinking is pulled this way and that by magnets of social acceptance or personal preference. We can miss the “theology behind the theology” that links the Bible together as one. At times all have set up soap-boxes or mounted mole-hills to propound understandings---not realizing our failure to climb beyond the social conditioning and personal predilections tainting our conclusions.

The only way we have ever been able to discern truth about any given subject is to immerse ourselves in its biblical understanding as offered by God’s divinely-inspired penmen. There, we let chips fall where they will. Through parallelism, poetic style, chiasm, typology, and other means, God has directed us to His truth through the Bible, His masterpiece of human history. It is as when lost in a city or wilderness and needing to gain altitude to ascertain one's location and where one is going. Overall perspective is key to understanding.

When I first became a Christian---specifically, an Adventist Christian---I was taught to study the Bible as Jesus did on the road to Emmaus with His disciples (Luke 24:27). By this means one may ascertain what the Bible teaches on any subject, consistently and clearly,
cover to cover. This approach enables one to understand in a meaningful way God’s revealed perspective. The Scriptures touch the entire history of mankind, from Genesis to Revelation. When we apply this method of study to the topic of roles or functions throughout the Bible, a clear pattern emerges. We may not like that pattern; it may go against our personal, deeply held feelings or opinions; nonetheless (as we shall see), there is indeed a pattern which is present.

When I left behind the counter-culture in the '60s and '70s to became a Christian, I was a believer in women’s equality with men. It seemed only fair that for equal work each should be paid equally, along with all the attendant social trimmings that would level the playing field.

But as I read the Bible I found myself confronted with an astonishingly clear differentiation between male and female roles. Was this distinction cultural, or God-ordained? If cultural, how could I mark off what was and was not cultural? And, if more of the content in the Bible was “cultural,” how was one to know what was absolute and what relative? I found myself back in the dilemma of my secular life before Christ: I chose what was right and what was wrong!

This, clearly, was untenable.

But as I prayed and studied a pattern began to emerge.

From the very beginning, God Himself inaugurated that pattern by creating man first, not woman. Paul reiterates this pattern in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:8, 9). It had nothing to do with the value or rank God put upon men and women, but solely with God’s choice. But that choice had everything to do with a pattern He was establishing. He was creating a typology to gloriously represent something astonishing to the universe.

How saddened I am when I hear sentiments that the roles of men and women are now different than in New Testament times, and that this divine pattern—typology—of Eden and throughout the Old Testament, is no longer valid or applicable. Have we truly worked through the implications that follow an embrace of such beliefs? Are we ready to accept that
the divinely-inspired Word of God was infiltrated by a culturally male-chauvinistic perspective, obscuring, if not obliterating, woman’s true role? And, if we do accept this viewpoint, where do we stop invoking that influence? Just before we get to the Sabbath subject?

Who decides? We must answer the question biblically: can it be that quoting Galatians 3:28 “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female,” trumps the divine typology set forth through thousands of years of Bible history, beginning in a perfect Eden with a perfect man and woman?

The Biblical subject of male and female roles is clear as we consider the facts given for our admonition. Aberrant, bad and sinful behavior of men toward women aside, here are the facts:

Man was created first. The dominion of Earth was to be overseen by the man, for not until Satan overcame Adam was it usurped. (See Patriarch and Prophets, p. 56, 57, 68. The curse could have been avoided and dominion retained had Adam obeyed even after Eve ate the fruit). The Second Adam was to be a male (Jesus); the man was the priest/head of the family; the father was said to be responsible for the daughters (Numbers 30:3, 4, 13); the first-born male was dedicated to God; when the Levites were chosen, males served in the Sanctuary; the Messiah was depicted as male; priests were to be males; the census counted only the males; primarily only males are recorded as dying; genealogies recorded males; Jesus chose 12 males to serve as apostles; the males were those counted in the miracle of the loaves and fishes; elders/pastors in churches were to be "husband of one wife."

It's no wonder feminists have a problem with the Bible! Why all this supposed male dominion? Were women somehow inferior? Second class?

Not at all! The entire biblical pattern simply fulfills the God-ordained typology Paul presents in Ephesians 5:22-33. Husbands/males represent Christ; wives/women represent the bride/church of Christ. Paul says it is “a great mystery” (vs. 32), and a stunning one it is! When offering pre-marital counseling, I teach that every man is to represent Christ, and every
woman to represent the Church. This is the divinely-inspired destiny of humankind. Every husband and wife was destined to be a walking billboard, a living representation of Christ and His bride with all that this implied. Ponder the effect of our witness to the world when Christians reflect this relationship!

Contrary to popular opinion, the most basic way to think of our race has no reference to a generic kind of humanity. The race is defined by God Himself. "Male and female created He them" (Genesis 1:27). Our individual access to salvation through Christ, whether male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free, does not replace or destroy this God-created reality. The most primary understanding of the beginnings of the human race that we can have, is man and woman; Adam and Eve. It is also true that whether a man or woman remains single by choice, by distrust of the opposite sex, or by the calling of God, the God-ordained typology remains intact because it is the very pattern God Himself determined for us at creation.

Just as Satan so masterfully caused Israel of old to disrupt typologies of Jesus as the Rock and the Lamb, the typology of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and many others, he follows the same plan today. He knows that when the type is changed, the message from God is garbled and we are led away from the truth He has commissioned us to reflect.

The question we should be asking is not: “How can we persuade church members that women are to be accepted as full-fledged pastors and leaders?” Rather, it is, “How can I, as a male, properly reflect Christ in my life in whatever my vocation is, based on the pattern for males I see in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy?” Or, “How can I, as a female, properly reflect the Bride of Christ motif, typology, in my life based on the pattern for females in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy?”

Consider again the typology in the creation account. When Adam woke from his sleep, his bride was there to greet him, brought forth from his side by the power of God. And when Jesus, after His crucifixion woke from His sleep in the tomb, by the power of God through the blood of cleansing and water of life that flowed from His side, then the bride of Christ came forth.
He was greeted by Mary, who, of all the disciples was a fit example of His fledgling church/bride. It was Mary who was first to the tomb. It was Mary who loved much knowing she had been forgiven much. It was she who poured her love and gratitude upon Him for what He had done for her in oil and tears. It was Mary who fittingly represents the effectual working of that precious blood that flowed from His side to cleanse her of her sins, and the water that likewise flowed that gave her new life in Christ. Truly, Mary is a fitting representation of the bride brought forth from His side.

This analogy of marriage with the church is one that weaves its way all through the Old Testament. We read that “your Maker is your husband” (Isaiah 54:5); “though I was a husband to them, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:32); “Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me” (Jeremiah 3:20). There is also the Song of Solomon, the beautiful allegory of Christ and His bride.

We see the patterns in the New Testament as well, where Jesus is called the “Bridegroom” in John 3:29; fittingly begins His Ministry with His first miracle at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11); is seen as the Bridegroom again in the parable of the ten virgins asleep; as the Son whose Father invites all to a wedding feast; Jesus is the husband Paul says we marry (2 Corinthians 12:2). And finally, it is mirrored in the many parallels in Genesis and Revelation (creation --- recreation; tree of life removed --- tree of life restored; a prepared place, garden of Eden --- a prepared place, New Jerusalem; mark of Cain --- mark of the Beast; bride of Adam --- bride of the Lamb), we see the bride/church having “made herself ready” in Revelation 19. By the time of Earth’s final events, she has accomplished her task, becoming Christ’s helper in the goal of being fruitful and multiplying in the winning of souls into the family, the kingdom of God.

When God in Exodus 25:8 called for His people to make Him a sanctuary that He might dwell among them, He was really continuing the process of becoming one with His bride/church that Satan had derailed by the introduction of sin. Then, when Jesus came to earth, He reiterated the fact that He and the Father were one, and that He wanted His entire
church to be one in Him and in the Father (John 17:22, 23). This oneness harkens back to the promise of Genesis 2:24 pronounced upon a perfect Adam and Eve. The destiny of mankind has always been to be restored to this oneness that God promised in the typology of Adam and Eve’s marriage.

The only way the above typology works is when the Husband performs His function in the relationship and the bride performs hers. God is the savior/provider Husband, and the bride is the recipient/fruit bearer of His love. The bride willingly submits to her Husband because she knows that all that she is comes from Him (Eve coming from Adam’s side). Out of joy and love she bears fruit to glorify that supreme truth. That’s why in 1 Corinthians 11:1-9 Paul systematically shows us the relationships of Father to Son, Son to man, and man to woman in the headship principle.

Why? Because the submission of the woman to man is the typology of the submission of the Bride/Church to the Husband/Christ. In fact, Paul seeks to encourage women by pointing out that Christ Himself has entered into this very typology with His Father, willingly submitting to Him for the purpose of saving mankind. Christ, who is God in verity, chooses to willingly submit, to step down from glory, to fulfill the function He and the Father planned He should fulfill.

The incredibly high calling of women is such that they, of the all the human race, have been given the privilege and honor of emulating Christ in His salvific relationship with His Father. The helper from Genesis 2:18 that is the forthcoming Eve, is a reflection of this relationship Christ willingly stepped into: not the head, in charge, but one to help fulfill the overall purpose of mankind. The typology of Christ helping His Father accomplish their task of saving mankind is a parallel to Eve with Adam. It is not Adam who is called the helper. It is Eve. Her function is defined by God Himself. This is the beauty that Paul lays out for us in 1 Corinthians 11:1-9.

While none of us even remotely would suggest that this willing submission on Christ’s part to His Father makes Him “the lesser God,” or somehow inferior or second class, this is
unfortunately what some are saying should modern day “Eves” somehow be “forced” into this headship principle. What a sad day it would be should we choose not to reflect what God has chosen for us to reflect! Here we benefit from the words of Ellen White in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59:

Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband’s side in her Eden home; but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it. A similar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God’s plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them.

Mrs. White understood that God Himself had appointed particular roles for man and woman from the beginning. They were given “life duties in accordance with God’s plan.” This function and typology is wonderfully summed in the book of Revelation. While the entire Bible reveals the typology of Christ/Husband, church/bride in a variety of ways, Revelation brings it together in startling conclusion.

What we see is condescension by our Creator entering into time and space to become one with His creatures for the sake of redeeming them—never to divorce Himself from this connection! Employing the typology of marriage from the beginning of His relationship with His human creatures, He opens to all eyes the consummation of that type in the pages of Revelation. What was to be the purpose of that relationship, as viewed from the instructions given to Adam and Eve? Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”
In Revelation comes the fruit of the married relationship. Christ with His bride, the church, in Revelation 7:9, 10, “a vast multitude which no one could number” are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). The command in Genesis 1:28 is wonderfully fulfilled in Revelation 7:9, 10. It is the fruit of the marriage of Christ and the church. In this short article we have briefly described this pattern and destiny. But here, at the conclusion, is where superlatives truly fail us.

Echoing the promise to Adam and Eve that “the two shall become one,” Ellen White writes,

By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan's purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son.' John 3:16. He gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature (Desire of Ages, p. 25).

This is the fulfilling of the antitype of marriage. The two shall become one. Adam and Eve represented this. The reality was always divinely intended to point to Christ and His bride!

And finally, the over-arching purpose of the marriage typology from Genesis to Revelation is seen in the graciously, magnanimous consummation of Revelation 21 and 22, where the control room of the Universe is moved from heaven to Earth as God comes to remain eternally with His redeemed. Why?

Thus it is that God desires to fulfill for us His purpose of grace. By the power of His love, through obedience, fallen man, a worm of the dust, is to be transformed, fitted to be a member of the heavenly family, a companion through eternal ages of God and
Christ and the holy angels. Heaven will triumph, for the vacancies made by the fall of Satan and his host will be filled by the redeemed of the Lord (The Upward Look, p. 61).

And another:

God created man for His own glory, that after test and trial the human family might become one with the heavenly family. It was God’s purpose to repopulate heaven with the human family, if they would show themselves obedient to His every word. Adam was to be tested, to see whether he would be obedient, as the loyal angels, or disobedient” (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1082).

This is the “theology behind the theology”! This should inform our discussions of ordination and the role of men and women in the Church. Cultural male chauvinism it is not. It is a divinely inspired plan that we would do well to emulate, because it’s the raison d’être for Mankind. It lifts up woman to her God-given destiny. If only we would choose today to reflect this fantastic typology, engraven into our very biological and spiritual DNA. What a high calling is ours, whether male or female, to reflect what Adam was ordained to reflect, or, what Eve was ordained to reflect. May God help us do just that.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:** Bob Stewart serves as pastor in Michigan Conference. He counts it one of his richest blessings to have a Godly wife working by his side. Bob and Sandi were called to serve in pastoral ministry 18 years ago.