

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE OPPONANTS OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

TEN QUESTIONS I'D LIKE YOU TO ANSWER

Pastor Tom Hughes

As a Pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church for over 35 years I have seen many controversial subjects discussed. However, as our GC president has taken a very negative stance on women's ministry, and prominent Television ministries, and publishing houses have done the same, I must publically, and respectfully disagree with them and so I'm writing this open letter to draw attention to Ten Questions that concern me.

FIRST QUESTION: DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS, OR THE LEVITICAL, and CATHOLIC CONCEPT OF MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but THEY SHALL BE PRIESTS OF GOD and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

1Pe 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, AN HOLY PRIESTHOOD, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

1Pe 2:9 But ye *are* a chosen generation, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

The Bible clearly teaches that the Levitical Priesthood ended at the cross. It also teaches that in the New Testament the priesthood is now inclusive of ALL BELIEVERS. That includes men and women. Why do you insist on excluding our sisters from this high and noble calling to carry the gospel into all the world, and will you exclude them in heaven too during the 1000 years?

During the dark ages, the Roman apostasy instituted a counterfeit priesthood and gospel in order to deceive the world and institute a false system of salvation and organization. This included the catholic concept of ordination of only men as priests modeled after the Levitical priesthood. This is in opposition to the biblical concept in the New Testament of the priesthood of ALL believers. Why do you embrace the Catholic concept and reject the priesthood of all believers by trying to exclude women from their rightful place in this ministry?

SECOND QUESTION: DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, PROPHETS; and some, EVANGELISTS; and some, PASTORS and TEACHERS;

Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Eph 4:13 TILL WE ALL COME IN THE UNITY OF THE FAITH, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

In the New Testament women are priests just like the men are. The gifts of the Spirit are Prophets, Evangelists and Pastors. THE GIFT OF PROPHET; God called Ellen White to be a

Prophet. She said that Mary was the first Evangelist called to preach the risen Christ. 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. THE GIFT OF EVANGELIST; Mary was an evangelist and worker for God. 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.

THE GIFT OF PASTOR; "IN FITTING FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY. It is the accompaniment of THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD THAT PREPARES THE WORKERS, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, TO BECOME PASTORS UNTO THE FLOCK OF GOD." 6T p.322 {Becho, September 18, 1899 par. 13} The gift of pastor is a gift the Spirit gives women also. Both can be called as pastor's by the Spirit.

THIRD QUESTION: DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT ARE GENDER SPECIFIC?

If we are a priesthood of ALL believers, and if the gifts of the Spirit are for ALL BELIEVERS, and they are; by what authority to you declare the gifts of the Spirit to be gender specific? Are you really wanting us to believe that the Holy Spirit only gives the gifts of the Holy Spirit to men? If so which gifts of the Spirit are you saying women ARE NOT ALLOWED TO RECEIVE? The answer is NONE OF THEM. THEY ARE NOT GENDER SPECIFIC.

FORTH QUESTION: WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO EXCLUDE THE GIFT OF PASTORING FROM WOMEN?

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT ARE FOR EVERYONE. Why are you trying to exclude women? Which specific gifts of the Spirit do you want to tell women THEY CANNOT BE CALLED TOO? By the authority of GOD'S WORD I declare unto you that you do not have the authority to deprive women of ANY GIFT. Women can be called, and endowed with ANY OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT.

FIFTH QUESTION: DO YOU BELIEVE WOMEN CAN HAVE THE GIFT OF PROPHECY?

As a church, we believe that women have been given the gift of Prophecy in the past (Miriam, Mrs. Isaiah, the daughters of Phillip) and today (Rev. 12:17; 19:10). We believe Ellen White is a true Prophet of God and she wrote: "THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD THAT PREPARES THE WORKERS, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, TO BECOME PASTORS UNTO THE FLOCK OF GOD." 6T p.322 {Becho, September 18, 1899 par. 13} If you believe women can be prophets, in the same scripture is also says one of the gifts of the spirit is pastoring. Your prophet states both men and women can be pastors.

SIXTH QUESTION: WHY ARE YOU CONTRADICTING HER PLAIN STATEMENT ENDORSING COLPUERTERING AS TRAINING GROUND FOR MINISTERS INCLUDING WOMEN TO BE PASTORS WHO WEAR THE YOKE OF CHRIST?

The Prophetess Ellen White states that the work of a Colporteur prepares BOTH men and women for ministry. "THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD THAT PREPARES THE WORKERS, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, TO BECOME PASTORS UNTO THE FLOCK OF GOD." 6T p.322 {Becho, September 18, 1899 par. 13} The dictionary definition of Colporteur is "A person who travels to sell or publicize Bibles, religious tracts, etc. "I'm familiar with this concept because I worked as a colporteur for the church for 3 years. While going to Washington Adventist University (CUC) I sold books and experience first-hand what Ellen White meant. Souls were saved, people were baptized and I was molded and trained for the ministry. She clearly states in her writings that the Colporteur work prepares both men and women to BE PASTORS. Why are you contradicting our prophet and denying women the opportunity to do this work?

SEVENTH QUESTION: WHY ARE YOU BEING SO HARSH, UNKIND AND ATTACKING IN YOUR LANGUAGE AND DEMEANOR?

I will not answer my own question by providing all your arguments against women in ministry. I refuse to give you any further advertising by posting your comments, filled with aggressive and derogatory comments in both word and tone. I simply want to know why you feel that it's ok for you to question the calling of the women who are now working as elders and pastors in the church in such a disrespectful and condescending manor. Your prophet would not approve: "They will practice true Christian courtesy, bearing in mind that CHRIST THEIR COMPANION WILL NOT APPROVE OF ANY HARSH, UNKIND WORDS OR FEELINGS. Their words need to be purified. The power of speech should be regarded as a precious talent, granted them to do a high, a holy work. THE HUMAN AGENT IS TO REPRESENT THE DIVINE COMPANION WITH WHOM HE IS ASSOCIATED. To that unseen, holy companion he is to show respect and reverence, because he is wearing THE YOKE OF CHRIST, and is learning His pure, holy ways and manners." 6T p.322 {BEcho, September 18, 1899 par. 13}

EIGHTH QUESTION: WHY DO YOU DENY THE TRUTH OF ROMANS CHAPTER 16?

In Romans the 16th Chapter, Paul gives us unmistakable evidence that women were considered pastors, or co-workers with Paul. He also had a deep respect for women APOSTLES.

Rom 16:1 I commend unto you PHEBE our sister, which is a SERVANT OF THE CHURCH which is at Cenchrea:

Rom 16:2 That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye ASSIST HER in whatsoever business SHE HATH NEED OF YOU: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of MYSELF also.

Here Paul tells the Roman Church to receive Phebe and uses the Greek term for co-laborer, or colleague in ministry and tells the church to assist HER, and to do WHATEVER SHE HAS NEED OF because she had been a mentor, trainer, of many INCLUDING PAUL.

Also in Romans 16 Paul clearly states that Priscilla is a co-worker with him and she is not only an evangelist, and a Bi-Vocational pastor, but she has the church in her own home. When speaking of Priscilla Ellen White makes it clear that Priscilla was a leader, though not called to full time ministry, who taught both Paul and Apollos gospel truth. If women are not allowed to teach as you say, how is this possible? Why are you denying the truth in Romans 16?

Rom 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila MY HELPERS in Christ Jesus:

Rom 16:4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also ALL THE CHURCHES of the Gentiles.

Act 18:26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and EXPOUNDED UNTO HIM the way of God more perfectly.

1Co 16:19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the CHURCH THAT IS IN THEIR HOUSE.

Ellen White confirms this in her writings:

Among the Jews who had taken up their residence in Corinth were Aquila and Priscilla, who afterward became distinguished as earnest WORKERS for Christ. Becoming acquainted with the character of these persons, Paul "abode with them." {AA 243.2}

Aquila and Priscilla had accompanied him to Ephesus, and he left them there TO CARRY ON THE WORK that he had begun. {AA 269.1}

Among his hearers were Aquila and PRISCILLA, who, perceiving that he had not yet received the full light of the gospel, "took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." Through THEIR TEACHING he obtained a clearer understanding of the Scriptures and became one of the ablest advocates of the Christian faith. {AA 270.1}

THE GIFT OF APOSTLE Also in Chapter Romans 16 Paul commends a FEMALE APOSTLE as noteworthy:

Rom 16:7 Salute Andronicus and JUNIA, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, WHO ARE OF NOTE AMONG THE APOSTLES, who also were in Christ before me.

Junia the female apostle represented her gender well by being noteworthy of Paul's accommodation. We all agree that an Apostle is listed above the gift of Pastor. If a woman can be an apostle, she can also be a pastor, because BOTH ARE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT. One of our most famous TV ministries was adamantly denouncing women in ministry. One of my church members wrote to him and asked about Junia the Apostle. He wrote back, "There were no female apostles, if there were I would have known about it". That is the attitude manifested by many. I told my members to follow the bible, not someone who did not know what it taught on that subject. Why are you denying the truth contained in the 16th Chapter of Romans?

Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

At the end of the chapter Paul admonishes his readers to mark those that cause divisions contrary to the doctrine he taught. Paul taught that women should be leaders, co-workers, apostles, and that they should be respected teachers and pastors leading the church. Those who oppose women's ministry would do well to consider Paul's counsel and stop being so divisive.

NINTH QUESTION: THE BIBLE CLEARLY TEACHES THAT THE GIFT OF PASTORING AND THE GIFT OF ELDER IS THE SAME OFFICE. THESE ARE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT AND A CALLING OF GOD. WHY DO YOU DENY THEY ARE THE SAME GIFT?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always held the truth that pastor and elder are the same gift of the Spirit. The truth that Elders are co-pastors with the pastor of the church. Bishops of the flock in every sense of the word. For decades women have been accepted as elders in the church. They have ministered with distinction for decades. Why are you now, after all these years, challenging their gift of the Spirit and trying to keep them from being ministers?

Pastor and Elder is the same office. Why have you now decided to fight so ferociously against women pastors, when you have accepted the service of thousands of female elders for decades?

IF PASTOR AND ELDER ARE THE SAME GIFT AND OFFICE, WHY ALLOW ONE AND NOT THE OTHER? WHY EXCLUDE WOMEN FROM THE SAME OFFICE THEY ALREADY HAVE?

TENTH QUESTION: WE HAVE ALLOWED WOMEN TO TEACH AND MINISTER AS ELDERS FOR DECADES IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH. WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO DENY THIS GIFT AND REMOVE THEM FROM OFFICE AND STOP THEIR MINISTRY?

Why are you now saying women cannot teach in the church after allowing women to teach your children in the Sabbath School and teach you in the adult divisions for decades? If pastor and teacher are both spiritual gifts, as much as apostle and evangelist are, and women have been very successful and distinguished in all those offices, exercising their gifts for decades, why are you unwilling to grant them the recognition they deserve in ordination? This is a Catholic concept, of refusing women a role in the pastoral ministry. Biblically they are priests who can exercise any of the gifts of the spirit. Why deny them the opportunity of using this gift? Is not teaching the word of God the work of the ELDER? If women have been teachers and elders in our church for years, why are you now trying to deny them the right to exercise their spiritual gifts, and remove them from office, and stop their ministry as pastors/Elders? If God has called them, how can it be fair or right to deny them the same laying on of hands you set aside the men with? How can you not recognize the priesthood of all believers, the gifts of the Spirit and the full and complete bestowing of the offices they have been called to?

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Can you, as the primary generator of the negative forces that are diminishing the gifts of women in ministry, please tell us why you are using your sizable and influential platform in your office and ministries to prevent women from exercising the gifts of the Spirit, and the calling they have received from God? Please answer these questions. As a fellow minister of the Gospel, I want to implore you to stop diminishing and negating the gifts of the Spirit and the calling of God as exercised by women in our church. Please join with me in encouraging them, rather than

discouraging them. Please join with me and help every believer who has been called as a priest of God to use every gift God has given them to win souls for Christ and help finish the work so that we can all go home together!

As I close this OPEN LETTER TO THE OPPONANTS OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY I will leave you with a quote from a woman who had the gifts or PROPHET, EVANGELIST, PASTOR, AND TEACHER.

"Just as the truth presented in the books becomes woven into his own experience and developed in his character, will be his strength, his courage, his life. The experience gained will be more benefit to him than all the advantages he might otherwise obtain IN FITTING FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY. It is the accompaniment of THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD THAT PREPARES THE WORKERS, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, TO BECOME PASTORS UNTO THE FLOCK OF GOD. As they cherish the thought that Christ is their companion, a holy awe, a sacred joy will be felt by them amid all their trying experiences and all their tests. They will learn how to pray as they work. They will be educated in patience, kindness, affability, helpfulness, wherever they may be. They will practice true Christian courtesy, bearing in mind that CHRIST THEIR COMPANION WILL NOT APPROVE OF ANY HARSH, UNKIND WORDS OR FEELINGS. Their words need to be purified. The power of speech should be regarded as a precious talent, granted them to do a high, a holy work. THE HUMAN AGENT IS TO REPRESENT THE DIVINE COMPANION WITH WHOM HE IS ASSOCIATED. To that unseen, holy companion he is to show respect and reverence, because he is wearing THE YOKE OF CHRIST, and is learning His pure, holy ways and manners." 6T p.322 {Becho, September 18, 1899 par. 13}

Sincerely in King Jesus,

Pastor Tom Hughes

TomHughes@BibleBiker.com

Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventist

Pastor of Newark/Lancaster District