

Questions About Female Elders-Pastors & 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1

By Pastor Ed Anderson

How does the Seventh-day Adventist Church reconcile having **female elders or pastors** with the biblical qualifications in **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1**, where it appears church leadership is limited to men?

Answer:

That's a heartfelt and sincere question — and an important one that many thoughtful Christians wrestle with today. Let's respond carefully, biblically, and respectfully.

The Question at Hand:

How does the Seventh-day Adventist Church reconcile having **female elders or pastors** with the biblical qualifications in **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1**, where it appears church leadership is limited to men?

The short answer is: **This is an area where faithful Adventists can and do disagree**, and the official Adventist position **allows for female elders and pastors**, while also recognizing this is not practiced uniformly around the world. Here's a fuller explanation:

1. What Do 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 Say?

These passages lay out the qualifications for elders and overseers (pastors). They include phrases like:

- “The husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)
- “He must manage his own household well...” (1 Timothy 3:4)

On the surface, this seems to limit leadership roles to men. Many traditional interpretations conclude that only men should serve as elders or pastors.

2. What Are the Two Major Interpretations?

There are **two major interpretive frameworks** within Protestantism — and within Adventism — that address this:

Complementarian View:

- Believes men and women are equal in value, but have different roles.
- Only **men** may be ordained as elders/pastors.
- Uses 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as **literal gender-based requirements**.

Egalitarian View:

- Believes Scripture teaches **equal roles and authority** for men and women in the church.
- Sees texts like Galatians 3:28 as overriding cultural restrictions:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek... male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

- Argues that 1 Timothy and Titus reflect **first-century cultural norms**, not timeless mandates.
- Notes that other qualifications in these same lists (like being married, or having believing children) are not applied rigidly today either.

3. How Does the Adventist Church Interpret This?

The **Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a universal policy against women elders or pastors**. In fact:

- **1984:** The General Conference officially allowed **ordination of women as local church elders**.
- **2010s:** Some divisions, like North America, voted to allow **commissioning (not ordination)** of female pastors.
- **2015:** The GC voted **not to authorize regional divisions** to ordain women pastors — but also did **not reverse** existing permissions for women to serve.

In practice, **female pastors serve today** in many parts of the world with the full support of their local conferences.

4. Biblical Examples Supporting Women in Leadership

Some Adventists and many Protestants point to these **biblical precedents**:

- **Deborah** — a judge and prophet (Judges 4–5)
- **Huldah** — a prophetess consulted by male priests (2 Kings 22:14)
- **Priscilla** — taught Apollos doctrine alongside her husband (Acts 18:26)
- **Phoebe** — a deacon (Romans 16:1)
- **Junia** — “outstanding among the apostles” (Romans 16:7)

- **Joel 2 / Acts 2** — “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...”

These examples are used to support the idea that God can and does **call women** into spiritual leadership roles.

5. But What About “The Husband of One Wife”?

Many scholars interpret that phrase as a **moral requirement** — that the elder must be **faithful in marriage** — not a **gender restriction**. After all, if taken strictly:

- Paul would be disqualified (unmarried).
- Widowers or those without children would be disqualified.
- Even Jesus wouldn’t qualify under that standard.

So some see these qualifications as describing the **character** of the leader more than their **gender**.

6. Final Thoughts: Unity and Mission

The Adventist Church seeks to maintain **global unity** while allowing **regional variation**. Not every region has embraced female pastors, and that’s respected. But where the Spirit is leading, **the Church has allowed space for women to serve** in leadership.

The key point remains:

Does the message of the church match the message of the apostles and the Bible?

The identifying marks of God’s remnant church are:

- Keeping the commandments of God.
- Holding the faith of Jesus.
- Preaching the everlasting gospel.
- Teaching truth in harmony with Scripture.

If women are teaching and preaching these truths, **many believe Scripture supports their calling**.

A Gentle Encouragement

Your question is **deep, biblical, and wise**. It’s good to test all things by Scripture. But let us also remember:

“In the last days... I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy.”

— **Joel 2:28 / Acts 2:17**

The final work of God will include both men and women boldly proclaiming His truth. Let us support **whoever God calls** — as long as they preach **Christ and Him crucified**.