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## Proving more than intended

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Surprising as it may seem, we sometimes prove more than we set out to if we extend our methodology to its logical conclusions.

### The case of jewelry

For example, some have argued that one of the best reasons for modern Christians not to wear jewelry is that we are currently living in the antitypical day of atonement.

In the Old Testament the annual Day of Atonement was the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar. It was a day of self-examination, judgment, and cleansing. And it wasn't just a day for the priests to offer special sacrifices. Every individual had to be involved, lest he or she be "cut off." Repeatedly the Israelites were told to "afflict" themselves on that most solemn day (see [Lev. 16:29 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev.%2016.29\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev.%2016.29), [30 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2016.30\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2016.30); [23:27 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2023.27\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2023.27), [32 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2023.32\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2023.32); [Num. 29:7 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num.%2029.7\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num.%2029.7), RSV). "Who ever is not afflicted on this same day shall be cut off from his people" ([Lev. 23:29 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev.%2023.29\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev.%2023.29)). It was a serious day indeed.

"The commandment to 'afflict yourselves,'" writes Gordon Werham, "underlined the need for every individual to examine himself and repent of his sins."<sup>1</sup> Others have argued that part of this affliction would be humility and plainness of dress. Thus those truly searching their hearts would put aside their jewelry.

I find this to be an interesting position. But it seems to me that it is simpler to prove that one shouldn't have sex on the antitypical day of atonement. After all, [Leviticus 15:16-18 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Leviticus%2015.16-18\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Leviticus%2015.16-18) says that those who have sexual intercourse are ceremonially unclean until evening. That implies that they would be disqualified from performing the religious duties of the annual Day of Atonement. When that interpretation is extended to the antitypical day of atonement, it becomes even more fascinating. It is one thing to not have sex on a holy day; it is quite another not to participate in it during the entire time of the antitypical period. Of course, those with a proclivity toward such an application can also find eschatological justification for their position. After all, doesn't [Revelation 14:1-5 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Revelation%2014.1-5\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Revelation%2014.1-5) teach that the 144,000 will be "virgins"? While some may jump for joy over such an interpretation, others would probably see it as more "affliction" than they are happy to deal with.

Of course, it is even more easily proved by the above line of logic that all work is forbidden on the antitypical day of atonement ([Lev. 23:28 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev.%2023.28\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev.%2023.28), [30 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2023.30\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2023.30), [31 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2023.31\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev%2023.31); [Num. 29:7 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num.%2029.7\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num.%2029.7)). But while that point is most easily proved, the average mind doesn't find its consequences nearly so interesting to contemplate as the no-sex argument.

At this juncture it is important for me to point out plainly that I am not arguing either for or against jewelry, sex, or work. My point has to do with the proper use of Scripture. Specifically, I am pointing out that we sometimes inadvertently prove more than we intend through our use of logic as it relates to the Bible. It is important also to note that I do not doubt the sincerity of those who have set forth such arguments. The issue is one of methodology rather than sincerity. There may be excellent arguments against the use of jewelry (and sex and work) in the Bible, but it seems to me that the argument related to the antitypical day of atonement is not one of them. Typology (as is also true of parables), while valid for many inferences, has definite limitations.

## The case of the ordination of women

Another illustration of an argument that proves more than intended has to do with the ordination of women. The Seventh-day Adventist Church (along with several other denominations) has seen a great deal of argumentation on both sides of the topic for the past few years.

One speaker recently based his argument against women's ordination on the fact that the Adventist Church is a church of the Bible and thus "God's Word must be our focus." Given that solid foundation, he quite appropriately quoted [Isaiah 8:20](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isaiah%208.20) (<http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isaiah%208.20>): "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

He next guided his hearers to the "timeless message" of 1 Timothy 2, emphasizing especially verse 12: "I do not permit a woman to have authority over a man" (paraphrased). That was followed by a threefold argument favoring male leadership.

This speaker was quite certain that Paul's advice had nothing to do with culture. To the contrary, the counsel was set forth as a universal moral imperative, and transgressing it means nothing less than "the derailment of a mission-driven church."

The real issue, he asserted, was that we trust the Bible writers. At that point the argument became even more intense and certainly more interesting from a hermeneutical perspective. "Now, the question is," he said to his audience, "How do we interpret the Bible?" His reply was that *the Bible doesn't need interpretation*. Or, as he put it: "*The Word of God is infallible; accept it as it reads*. We have plenty of counsel about the danger of modifying God's instructions. . . . *What we need as Seventh-day Adventists, friends, is submission to the Word of God, not reinterpretation*" (italics supplied).

Subsequently, he cited Ellen White as saying that "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms." He concluded his study in part by claiming that he was against the ordination of women to ministry because "*it violates the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures by not accepting Scripture as it plainly reads*" (italics supplied).

## What was really proved?

There is no doubt that he was speaking the honest convictions of his heart. Yet I sat dumbfounded as I read and contemplated his forceful presentation. For one thing, [1 Timothy 2:12](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.12) (<http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.12>) says absolutely nothing about ordination. Then again, I could hardly believe the presentation came from a Seventh-day Adventist; maybe a conservative Calvinist, but not an Adventist. After all, Adventists have the phenomenon of Ellen White. I was struck full in the face with the fact that if one accepted his presuppositions, what had actually been demonstrated was that Ellen White is a false prophet.

Roger Coon illustrates my point well when he relates his experience with an itinerant evangelist who came to Napa, California, and placed a large advertisement in the local newspaper promising to destroy the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a presentation on Thursday evening and demolish their prophet the following week. Coon attended both sessions. In the second the evangelist "proved" the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a false church because one of its primary founders was a woman who defied the teachings of the apostle Paul forbidding women to speak in Christian churches.

Adventists, for obvious reasons, have always resisted that interpretation. The church has traditionally justified Ellen White's public ministry by noting that the counsel given about women being silent in church in [1 Timothy 2:11](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.11) (<http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.11>), [12](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.12) (<http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.12>) was rooted in the custom of time and place and was not to be woodenly applied now

that conditions had changed. Thus, as The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary puts it: "Because of the general lack of private and public rights then accorded women, Paul felt it to be expedient to give this counsel to the church. Any severe breach of accepted social custom brings reproach upon the church.... In the days of Paul, custom required that women be very much in the background."<sup>2</sup>

Let's return to our Adventist speaker and examine a bit more carefully his use of 1 Timothy 2. The first thing to note is that he read only that portion of the passage that suited his purpose. The words immediately preceding the partial verse he quoted were: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission" ([1 Tim. 2:11, NIV \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Tim.%202.11\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Tim.%202.11)). And the words immediately following the "timeless message" he read merely reinforce that sentiment. His paraphrase also left out the words "to teach or" since his only focus was on the restriction dealing with "authority." Let me quote verse 12 in full: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (NIV).

Now it is obvious that if one is testing everything in the strictest sense by the words of the law and the testimony, and if one is not "modifying" God's instructions (or reinterpreting them), but simply accepting Scripture as it "plainly reads," then it is a necessary conclusion that Ellen G. White must be a false prophet of the most serious type.

To put it mildly, she seldom remained silent in church. In fact, she taught authoritatively to men and women everywhere she went. She was the ultimate transgressor if in fact [1 Timothy 2:11 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.11\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.11), [12 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.12\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.12) is expressing a "timeless message" that doesn't need interpretation.

Let's face it: after one examines all the arguments on headship and/or the significance of Eve's sinning before Adam and after one is exposed to all the fine points of argument coming from the biblical Greek and Hebrew and the scholarly German and French the plain fact is that the Bible says in unmistakable English that women are not to teach, that they are to be silent.

Of course, if one's hermeneutic allows for the consideration of the time and place in which Scripture was written, then the problem isn't nearly as serious. But our friend allowed himself no such out. Thus he is stuck with the fact that when tested by a "plain reading" of the Bible, Ellen White is a false prophet. *He had proved more than he intended.*

On the other hand, if one concedes that the part about silence needs to be "modified" a bit (should I be bold enough to say "interpreted" or "contextualized" to time and place?), then one must also grant that such license must be extended to the whole verse. But that, of course, would lead to an undermining of the entire argument. While that might seem frightful to some, the only alternative is to be stuck with a false prophet.

The fine points of my argument seem to have been missed by two recently published books that follow the same general line of argument as discussed above. Both see [1 Timothy 2:11-14 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.11-14\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.11-14), along with the somewhat parallel passage in [1 Corinthians 14:34 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Corinthians%2014.34\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Corinthians%2014.34), [35 \(http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Corinthians%2014.35\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Corinthians%2014.35), as being crucial texts in the case against ordination (even though neither passage mentions the topic), both see the issue as being one of biblical authority, and both take the position that the Bible can be faithfully read only as it is.

Having said that, however, they immediately begin to modify and interpret the part about women being silent in church. As one of the volumes points out, "the issue here is not muzzling women into silence." The other book claims that the 1 Corinthians passage certainly *doesn't really mean* that women have to be silent in church, since that "would contradict other Pauline teaching." "The conclusion is that the restriction" on women speaking in church "must be in reference to *authoritative* teaching that is a part of the pastoral *office*, the position of leadership and spiritual authority over a congregation."

Now, that is an interesting interpretation, but it doesn't get Ellen White off the false prophet hook. After all, she spoke quite authoritatively even to the leading ministers both in the church and out. In fact, she found herself often enough in public conflict with male ministers, and managed to argue quite authoritatively in spite of Paul's injunction.

It is an interesting point that for some years Ellen White held ministerial credentials and her credentials were those of an ordained minister, even though she was never technically ordained by the laying on of human hands. She was (and is) the most "authoritative" minister the Seventh-day Adventist Church has ever had. If anyone in Adventism---male or female---has ever spoken with authority, it has been Ellen White.

When the second volume comes to explaining the significance of the statement about women being silent in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 (<http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%202.11-14>), it arrives at the apex of modification and adapted interpretation. "What is prohibited to women," our author tells us, "is teaching in the worship services as a part of the ecclesiastical office of pastor, which involves the exercise of spiritual authority. *Women who are asked to participate in worship services, whether by praying or exhorting, do so on the basis of the authority delegated by the male pastor who holds the ecclesiastical office and whose spiritual authority is derived from Christ*" (italics in original).

So much for not interpreting, and for reading just the plain words of the Bible.

Even that massive *reconstruction of the text* doesn't get Ellen White off the hook. She exercised spiritual authority in public and in private, and her hearers were both male and female. Of course, people can continue to finesse their definitions so as to make Paul come out with their conclusions, but doing that is hardly a reading of the "plain words" of the Bible. And such a procedure most certainly fails to follow its own hermeneutical method to its logical conclusions.

## Some final thoughts

Before moving away from the stimulating topic of women's ordination, perhaps I should share one more argument that proves more than intended. One day in my pastoral formation class one of my students came up with the "airtight answer" to the issue of women's ordination. "Read the Old Testament," said he. "Every ordained priest was a male."

"True," I replied, "but you have proved too much if you stick to your argument. If you follow your logic, you will have to conclude that very few, including you, are biblically eligible for ordination, because the Old Testament approved only the ordination of male Orientals. And even at that, not just any Oriental would do. They had to be Hebrew, and then only of the Aaronic line of the Levitical family."

"Well," say some who want to extend the argument, "look at Jesus. He appointed only male disciples." True, but it can just as truly be argued that He appointed only non-Diaspora Jewish disciples. Let's be faithful to the logic of our own arguments.

"But," says another, "Paul was a male from the Diaspora who was 'kind of a disciple, even though not one of the twelve.'" Yes, but some of the original non-Diaspora male disciples might point out that Paul is where all the trouble began. After all, look at the problems he raised when he began to apply the gospel to the context of first-century Gentiles. He nearly split the New Testament church. "But," yet another suggests, "that's why Paul's experience is in the Bible. With him all justifiable contextualization must cease. After all, you can't go to extremes on this business of applying the Bible to new times and places."

And the arguments can go on and on. And they will.

In closing I want to say again that the topic of my article is not jewelry, sex, work, or the ordination of women. Rather, it is a caution to examine the full consequences of our theological method lest we prove more than we intend; it is a plea to be faithful to our own logic and to the totality of the texts selected to demonstrate our point. Thus jewelry and ordination merely provide contemporary illustrations that prompt a call for the sound use of Scripture. After all, there is a major difference between using the Bible to prove a point and developing a sound biblical argument. A "high view" of the Bible demands a wholesome hermeneutic.

2. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957, 1980), vol. 7, pp. 295, 296.