

When God Goes Calling

A Chapel Presentation at the Seventh-day Adventist
Theological Seminary, Andrews University,
November 14, 1995

By Laurel Damsteegt, MDiv, MPH

Multimedia Developer,

Great Controversy Experience DVD-ROM

www.ChristianHeritageMedia.com

About 2,000 years ago, God was about to bestow the highest honor in all of history on one human being on Earth. What kind of qualifications was He looking for? Good looks? Intelligence? Prestige? Assertiveness? Good social decorum? No!

He wanted someone He could trust with the future of all of Heaven.

If this one failed in the given assignment, a whole planet would be lost, Heaven itself would falter. This one would need to be able to follow orders—implicitly, not create interpretations or rationales for orders, or take them as mere suggestions. This is why intelligence and assertiveness were not necessarily important on God's checklist.

He wanted someone humble enough to take His orders exactly, and not one that would take credit for working out everything wonderfully well.

Isaiah 57:15 says: “For thus saith the High and Lofty One That inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a *contrite and humble spirit*, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

He was looking for someone who would be able to stand up to social stigma. Culture would not go her way.

I say “her” because God was indeed looking for a woman.

A woman! Once before God had trusted the whole planet's destiny to a woman. Unfortunately, she had not stood the test. Eve submitted to the enemy—the food looked good, and she ate.

Eating the fruit had seemed so innocuous. But bound up in one little act was a test so profound it tried Eve's loyalty to the core. Would she obey God's simple request? Would she submit to His word?

Obedience often does not imply doing some great and grand thing. Sometimes there are specifics

that God looks for—little things that often could be regarded as inconsequential, like eating a piece of fruit or keeping one day over another. The loyalty of Bible characters was often tested by their adherence to the smallest of details.

Genesis 3:6 —“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

As we see, she herself not only ate but also became a medium of the serpent to tempt Adam. And when he ate, the human race was plunged into rebellion and anarchy.

Death was the promised result of insubordination (another term for disobedience). But God didn't give up on the ashamed and now quarreling couple.

The God of all hope offered a promise. One would come Who would ultimately live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Because of this One's victory, hope would once again live. The first couple could once again inhabit Eden.

Genesis 3:15 —“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel.”

But now because of their insubordination, certain conditions would prevail on Earth. Sin would have definite effects. The curses that would result were not, as someone said, *proscriptive* (condemnatory and prohibitive), or descriptive, but rather *prescriptive* (to set down a guide, or rule; to enjoin). These “curses” were redemptive—“discipline[s] rendered needful by [man's] sin, to place a check upon the indulgence of appetite and passion, to develop habits of self-control” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 60).

The “curses” were not so much punishment as helps in dealing with this horrible problem called sin, and they will continue until the problem of sin is swallowed up in victory.

Picking up at **Genesis 3, verses 16-19**, we read: “Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy **desire shall be to thy husband** , and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy

sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; **thorns also and thistles** shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

These prescriptions were for their good! The value of their personhood was not destroyed by these prescriptions! Oh, no! When a doctor prescribes exercise therapy to reduce risk of heart disease, one is not denigrated! The doctor knows that if a person goes out walking, rain or shine, heat or cold, building up little by little, that one's heart muscle is strengthened, one's circulation is improved, one's cholesterol is affected. Personhood is not affected by prescription.

With prescriptions come guidelines, not condemnation; hope, not a shaking of the finger. Submission to Another's careful leadership and loving authority was not to be negative but to be pleasant and helpful; subordination to work and toil was to give useful occupation and be redemptive, too.

But these guidelines were only one part of the prescription. The biggest part came in the “curse” on the serpent in verse 15.

Here was a promise: a “Seed” would bruise the head of that old serpent! Here, through the Seed, was a promise of inherent hatred of the evil they had so naïvely embraced. There would be bruising along the way. The snake would be free to bite. But it would not be terminal. Their promise of certain death would not be forever. Death would lose its sting. Yes, there would be lots of pain resulting from this enmity between forces. But in the end this “Seed” would win out.

Every mother thinks that her own little baby is the most precious thing there is! Every mother wants only the best for her child. As we look at the sweet, sleeping baby (they always seem the most promising when they are asleep!), we hope for success, greatness, nobleness. We visualize all the best qualities. But in Old Testament times, mothers in Israel had a secret hope passed down from mother to daughter. Someday, somewhere, would come this special Seed. Maybe I will be that mother. Just maybe my own darling Cain, or Joseph, Moses, or Solomon is “seed,” *the* Seed.

Oh, there were many more prophecies along the way of Who this Seed would be, and what He would do, how one could identify Him. Unfortunately, the longing ones read their own oppression into the promises, and their desire for liberation became the object of their deliverance. They

longed not so much for repentance, change, and a putting away of this “sin,” but more for a release from oppression.

In their minds the coming One was to be beautiful. He was to be powerful. He was to conquer and right all the earth, make Israel what it always was meant to be. He would put down all those foreign powers, let the oppressed go free (there were so many inequities, you know; Israel was a servant nation, there were so many oppressions, so many taxes.) The Messiah was to *liberate*. And scholars had everything documented to prove just when and how Seed would come to liberate. But Israel waited, and waited, and waited.

Many a mother hoped her little one was Seed, but the little ones would turn out to be a murderer (like Cain or Moses), or a pervert (like Samson), or would apostatize (like Solomon). Hope grew dim, real dim. People had their expectations raised about imminence too often. Maybe Seed would come, maybe not.

Meanwhile God was working *exactly* on schedule. Here is no hastening or delay. God had always had His remnant. The remnant functioned to keep hope alive, not so much among the intelligentsia but among common people like shepherds, devout old saints hanging around the Temple, and even a few foreigners who did not have the privilege of proper Biblical methodology.

At the same time God was searching for someone to be Seed's mother. God was looking for a woman with a special character for a priceless mission. She would be the one to have to safeguard those early times when The Almighty, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace would not be accountable. She with the coaching of angels would do the early training. She would teach the Child. God needed somebody who would be willing to be humble, gentle, submissive, loving, nurturing, but yet wisely hold firm reign on a child's developing conscience. Every mother can have the privilege of shaping a child's character for society and eternity, but no other human being would ever have the opportunity or responsibility of caring for God Himself.

We do not know about the search process. We do know that God's very envoy arrives not in Jerusalem, but in a northern town, Nazareth, at a pitifully poor dwelling, and finds a young girl busy about her work. When told of her calling, she is amazed. But what is her response? "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38)!

God found a servant! Someone fully submissive to His will. Willing to be nothing, to be all He wants. Willing to do nothing or everything at His bidding! Her only objection? But I'm not even

married! When the envoy assures her that God has His Own ways and means, it is enough. He doesn't have to make sense because “God's ways are higher than our ways.” His ways are past finding out. The angel had said, “With God nothing is impossible”—a direct reference back to Sarah and her dubiousness.

We used to call it blind faith. A faith that believes even though *we* don't understand. A faith that sometimes is vindicated, sometimes not. A faith that is willing to submit to the naked Word—and even die for it when the rest of the world is against you.

Hebrews 11:1—“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Contrast Mary's humble response to Eve's basic unbelief. God had instructed, but Eve hadn't believed. She hadn't taken Him at His word. “He said that, but He really means this,” she mused. “Surely God won't mind if I just have one little bite!”

Another thing about Eve. She was very intelligent. She rather liked theological discussions, and this talking serpent had such fascinating perspectives. Granted, they didn't match what God said, but . . . there was a note of intrigue there.

- She could go up?
- She could be like God—a goddess? Just by eating one little bite?

- Was God keeping something from her?
- Was she really capable of something a bit more than assigned her? This subordinate business, how demeaning! Freedom from oppression! Freedom to mount up!

Ooooo, this serpent was so fascinating. She lingered. She toyed with the ideas. Eve lived in a perfect world. Adam certainly wasn't abusing her. Though in creation order he was formed first to be the head of our race, he was a loving servant-leader, the way Jesus enjoins leaders to be. God's hierarchy is transparent because leaders, or heads, if you will, are so loving that they look out for others before themselves. Sin has introduced a “me first” competitive edge that pushes one's own agenda no matter how others feel. But in Mark 10:43, 44, Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be greatest of all must be the slave of all.”

Adam and Eve, created in God's image, were two parts of a giving organism. Adam, as servant-leader bore responsibility by giving of everything he had and was. Eve responded by cooperating

with her whole heart—a perfect harmony. (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 58.) There was no struggle, no upmanship. Only genuine love.

So Adam wasn't abusing her and angels weren't discriminating against her, yet somehow that fallen angel had infected her with the fatal virus, covetousness.

This fallen angel had lived in a perfect world too. And that perfect world had a hierarchy, believe it or not. Within the Godhead there are different roles, yet all are equal. In God's creation order there are archangels, seraphim, cherubim; yet even with this organizational principle, each of these roles, or “spheres” (to use an old-fashioned term) is immensely valued and loved. Here was an equality of soul-worth, yet a **difference of sphere**

.

Lucifer didn't like it. Actually, it wasn't so much that he objected to hierarchy; he objected to being subordinate. He wanted to be like the Most High. Yes, Lucifer through the talking snake had infected Eve with this same dissatisfaction. No matter that God's creation order brought harmony and joy and ease of relationship: Lucifer implied that it was demeaning.

Eve should not have listened. Her safety could only come by implicitly trusting God's spoken word. “All the lessons which God has caused to

be placed on record in His Word are for our warning and instruction. They are given to save us from deception. Their neglect will result in ruin to ourselves. Whatever contradicts God's Word, we may be sure proceeds from Satan” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 55).

Jesus' testimony through the prophet of the remnant revealed that there are restless modern Eves who are infected with the same fallacy. Listen to what Jesus has told us in *Testimonies*, volume 3, page 483: “[Eve] was perfectly happy in her Eden home by her husband's side; but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered that there was a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. But in attempting to climb higher than her original position, she fell far below it. This will most assuredly be the result with the Eves of the present generation if they neglect to cheerfully take up their daily life duties in accordance with **God's plan.**”

Just what was God's plan? The prophet continues in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 59: “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.”

The “restless modern Eves,” to use her terminology, have much more to complain about than Eve and Lucifer did. Both of them lived in the middle of God's perfect world and plan.

Nowadays we women have every reason to be enraged at men. Men rape us, men abuse us, men discriminate against us. The prescription has become almost unbearably heavy on account of sin. “Man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59). Most definitely, reforms are needed in society and in the church. But how are reforms effected? From the outside going in, or in the inside going out?

After nearly six thousand years of sin, genuine oppressions and inequities have dominated society. But the Eves of today do not want to go back to God's plan. They have adopted **Lucifer's discontent with roles and spheres**, and look for a utopia of equal opportunity and equal humanness.

Women's Rights, albeit Women's Liberation, and now Feminism have all done their part to engender women's pride. Many areas have needed re-

form. But reforms need to be based on the Bible and encourage God's plan. While I have no personal vendetta against some fine women and men who espouse feminism, I have serious objections to its teachings.

I cringe at the naïveté of us as a people facing this invasive feminist ideology. Feminism is not out to just right injustices or to get men to quit hitting their wives; feminism is successfully restructuring society and is in the process of reconstructing Christianity, not to mention Adventism. The worldview has been irrevocably changed. Society is not going back, and our church is at the crossroads.

What are some of feminism's objectives over and against the Bible? I will have to be brief here. If some of you want to take a hard look at what is really happening, I would recommend a book by Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism With the Church*.¹

First: Woman's Place in the Home.

A bit of Heaven on Earth is what God envisions for each family. The structure He created in the beginning with loving servant leadership and loyalty to one another becomes a symbol of what God's relationship to the church can be (Ephesians

5). The wife and mother is to be the very heart and joy of the beautiful home, with all her creativity on the forefront to bring sunny support; careful, intelligent guidance and discernment; and love.

Because Satan has so marred and fractured God's beautiful picture through selfishness, today's women often wish to be free from family responsibilities altogether. Marriage, for the most part, is still "in." But the feminist ideal is to obliterate stereotypical homemakers. Woman must be free to do anything she desires. Family considerations cannot interfere with self-realization.

Second-wave feminism came on the heels of the sexual revolution in which women were set free from monogamous marriage expectations (as they claim men always have been). But because biology is so intertwined with her sphere, pregnancies and small children can interfere with being who she wants to be. If woman has no control over her own body, she is "enslaved." Women want the same freedom from responsibility that they perceive men have. This is why birth control and abortion, as well as childcare, have become such important elements of feminist ideology. Woman must have a *choice*.

Second: Male Leadership.

When the Bible teaches and demonstrates that men and women fulfill different roles in relation to each other, it charges man with a unique leadership role, basing this difference not on temporary cultural norms but on permanent facts in the Creation account and Fall (Genesis 1-3; Ephesians 5:21-33; and 1 Timothy 2:11-14).

The whole of Scripture's culture was based on this creation order that is a mere extension of the universe. Leadership in Scripture is largely handled by men, with very few exceptions (for example, Athaliah chose herself, Barak needed a little bonding up by Deborah). The Old Testament theocracy had God choosing leaders (patriarchs, kings, priests) throughout His people's history. The New Testament found Jesus choosing twelve men as His apostles, and the Holy Spirit inspiring Paul (in two epistles) to write that an elder of the new church should be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).

Feminists hate differentiated spheres or roles because they believe that they demean women. They feel that a submissive role means that woman is permanently an inferior person. But spheres have nothing to do with **soul value**. Galatians 3:28 —"There is neither male or female," does not have to do with non-differentiation. The context bears out that this passage talks about soul value

(ontological worth, if you want to get technical about it). Real worth has nothing to do with position or sphere, but rather with the infinite price paid for my redemption. Worth is not tied to potential but rather to who we already are in Christ. Jesus' model of value certainly did not include position. But His model showed how true greatness is not afraid of going down and never expecting to come up.

Feminists are down on the Biblical system of the **patriarchy**. They feel that the Bible was written with a bias. Patriarchs and all peoples (and presumably God) were prejudiced. They say that passages were written by authors who were *men* of their own culture. No need to hate Paul! He was just a victim of his times. But are his words to be taken seriously? No, they are merely of local (not universal) import. Or they are restricted to families.

How do we know whether something is of local import or universal import in Scripture? When Paul stipulates that men should hold the position of elder or overseer, does he say, “Now Timothy, this counsel is just for your problematic church”? On the contrary, a few verses later, in 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul stipulates that this counsel is given so that Timothy would know how he ought to behave in the church of the living God. God lives on—the

message lives on! We are told, “ **All** Scripture is given by inspiration.” Scripture is of no private interpretation.

Further, do we interpret all of Scripture on the basis of one text—Galatians 3:28? As Wayne Grudem demonstrates, we may only find out what Scripture says by interpreting the “smaller parts faithfully in their nearer context. This is called the **hermeneutical circle** : the parts determine the whole, and the whole affects how we interpret the parts. Our concern is that any supposed ‘whole’ or ‘theme’ or ‘thrust’ . . . should not be used to nullify the contribution of any other part of Scripture.”²

Much is made of the feminists’ **trajectory** (direction) of Scripture that culminates in Galatians 3:28. Aside from the fact that 1 Timothy and Titus were penned after Galatians, such a view has a liberation theology construct rather than the viewpoint of the great controversy. Liberation theology’s main concern is freedom from oppression, whereas the central problem of the great controversy is freedom from sin, not oppression (though freedom from sin would certainly include freedom from all oppression forever and ever). Jesus’ peers hoped He would come to set them free from the Romans. Jesus disappointed them. He came to deliver the sinful heart. Feminists today would like to tell us that Jesus came to set us free from male

superiority. In fact, He does. His design is to make the male's headship so delightful that it is a privilege and joy to submit.

Evangelical feminists generally have trouble with the Scriptural roles of women. But radical feminists go much farther. Because these feminists believe that the authors who penned Scripture were under “patriarchal influence,” all Scripture becomes open to reinterpretation and reconstruction, or subject to being put on a par with any other literature. Elizabeth Cady Stanton edited *The Women's Bible* back in 1895 by seriously reinterpreting all stories and passages that were troublesome to women's rights. She advocated reading “the Bible as we do all other books, accepting the good and rejecting the evil it teaches.” She felt that “its objectionable features would long ago have been apparent had they not been glossed over with a faith in their divine inspiration.”³

Third: God's Name.

In Scripture, God tells us Who He is. It is not really up to us to decide on a name we like for God, for He has given us many names. A study of God's Self-designation of His Person is the essence of theology. In the Bible the name of God represents the very reality and being of God.

“Those who know Your **name** will trust in You”

(Psalm 9:10). “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other **name** under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12); “They will see His face, and His **name** will be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4).

Feminists have trouble with a male God. If one has no trust or love for males, how can one love a male God? Feminism has taken the liberty to rename God. Mother God, God of lights, Mother in Heaven, Goddess, Heavenly Parent—the new names are infinite. Of course by renaming, one is redefining the very essence of God.

As Kassian summarizes: “To challenge or change the name of God as God has revealed is a denial of God. It is a denial of Who God is. It is by God's name that we know Him, it is by His name that we are saved, and it is by His name that we are identified. Feminism's attempt to rename God is a blasphemy that comes out of the very depths of Hell. We have no right to name God. The only right we have, as created beings, is to submit to addressing God in the manner He has revealed as appropriate. It is not we who name God, it is God Who names Himself.”⁴

Fourth. Inclusive Language.

Scripture tells us: “God created man in His Own image, . . . male and female created He them.”

“Man” was a unit, an inclusive term that brought us all together in one family.

But feminism wants to be specifically named and not be lumped in as an extension of someone else. Out of this philosophy comes inclusive language. Whereas in the past women considered themselves as “mankind,” no longer. The success of this inclusive sweep alerts one to the tremendous power of the feminist movement.

Even Bible translations have gotten into the act. How can one make a faithful translation of the text and yet be inclusive? It can be difficult, because sometimes the Bible is specific, where it now needs to be inclusive; and so translators have to fudge a bit. Please give me a translation that is faithful to the original.

The White Estate has even been putting out some Ellen White devotional books that have been rendered gender-inclusive. Why are we as a people accepting this tampering? Why are we not protesting more?

Now hear me carefully here. Am I accusing every woman of being a feminist? No. Am I accusing all feminists of believing all of this? I am not. But feminism is a continuum. Society and persons do not remain at the same level. Feminists who were

just writing nice books about ordination and equality of position 20 years ago, now promote Woman Church, goddess worship, lesbianism, and whatever. Ask any feminist if he/she believes exactly the same as 20 years ago. Of course not; he/she has “grown”.

Feminism has its dangers. Our prophet wrote years ago in *Testimonies*, volume 1 , page 457: “Those who feel called out to joining the movement in favor of woman's rights and the so-called dress reform might as well sever all connection with the third angel's message. The spirit which attends the one cannot be in harmony with the other. The Scriptures are plain upon the relations and rights of men and women.”

Oh yes, God goes on calling. He was disappointed in the cool of the day when He called Eve. He must have been overjoyed when Mary responded to the angel with such humility, “Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”

Today He calls each of us.

1 Peter 2:9 tells us: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” He wants every single one of us to be totally involved in the work of His kingdom. Each one of us can feel the quickening of the Holy Spirit as we

thrill over a personal application of Scripture. Depending on who we are, the application is different. Humbly, carefully, we take up our assignment and follow Him as He wills.

God can call some men to leadership. He can call women to have a part in public ministry, as well. Dorcas worked in families; Priscilla shared the Word; the Samaritan woman was an evangelist, a witness to what Jesus had done for her. Children and youth are called, as well. The boy Samuel responded, "Speak; for Thy servant heareth." Jeremiah thought he was too young, but God assured him: "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak."

Sometimes the sphere to which God calls us differs from the one *we* have in mind. Sometimes He takes us through situations that frankly hurt us very much, in order for us to learn meekness and service. For each of us there is a call in harmony with His order. Our greatest happiness depends on our surrender to the Lord and to His plans.

When God comes calling, He will whisper, "Follow Me."

It is not ours to ask, "Where, Lord?"

It is not ours to plot the destination or the stops along the way; but it is ours to follow.

And following Jesus means going down, being willing to be all or nothing for Him. May our answer be: “Be it unto me according to thy word.”

Endnotes

¹ Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism With the Church*. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1992). Another very important work is *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1991). For distinctly Adventist perspectives, see Ray Holmes, *Tip of the Iceberg* ; Samuel Koranteng-Pipim's *Searching the Scriptures* ; and Mercedes Dyer, ed., *Prove All Things*. (All available from Adventists Affirm, P.O. Box 36, Berrien Springs, Mich. 49103 or www.adventistsaffirm.org.)

² Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 408.

³ Kassian, p. 222.

⁴ Kassian, p. 244.