

Genesis 1:26-28: Complementarianism in Corporate Worship

Since we are at a natural transition point in the Sermon on the Mount, I want to take a pause and address some things over the next few weeks related to life in the church.

This morning I want to address the role of women in the Sunday morning service. Both Andy and I want to do this because it's important that both men and women be encouraged to be as involved as possible in our Sunday gathering. Men and women should use the gifts God has given us to our maximum ability not only outside of our weekly gathering, but in our gathering as well. So we want to encourage ladies to be as involved as possible.

And we also want to open up a couple of ways that our ladies serve during Sunday morning because we are convinced by Scripture that they should be able to serve in these ways. In short, as elders we are convinced by Scripture that women should be able to - and be encouraged to - publicly read Scripture during the Sunday morning service. And we are convinced by Scripture that they should be able to - and be encouraged to - pray publicly during Sunday morning service. And I'll flesh out exactly what all that means in a bit.

But let me start with: why now? We've been gathering together for 2 1/2 years - almost 120 Sundays. Why the change? Well, simply, because we continue to learn and grow. And as we've learned and grown, we believe this is what the Bible says.

If you never change a theological position in your life you're probably doing something wrong. Someone who never ever changes a view on the Bible either doesn't read the Bible or is proud. No one ever comes to faith in Jesus with perfect theology. Changing your view - or at least being open to other biblical views - is a healthy thing.

I'm not talking big issues like salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Or the resurrection or the Trinity. If you change your mind on issues crucial to salvation you're not a Christian. But secondary issues we should be willing to at least explore.

When we first began Redeemer Bible Church we had a lot of decisions to make. We were putting together our doctrinal statement - what we believe. We were establishing our bylaws - how we operate as a church. We created our commitment of fellowship - membership expectations. We were figuring out what elements to include in each Sunday morning service. We don't do interpretive dance - that's intentional. We were selecting songs, so on. There was a lot to do.

Well, we were convinced that we should incorporate a time of public reading of Scripture.

1 Tim. 4:13: Until I come devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

When the Bible says we are to devote ourselves to something, I think we ought to devote ourselves to it.

So we wanted a Scripture reading time. Then we asked: Who can read? Men only or men and women? And we talked for quite some time - and studied Scripture - but we never came to a real conviction one way or another. And so what we decided is that we would have only men read for 2 reasons. First, we knew men for sure could read because Paul commands Timothy to read.

But second, since we weren't sure about women, we didn't want to violate Scripture by simply shrugging our shoulders and saying "we don't know so let's do it anyway."

Side: If you not sure whether God allows something or not, don't do it! It's always better to err on the side of caution and restraint until you know for sure.

We also knew we wanted to incorporate the Lord's Supper every week because we see that pattern in the Bible. Wine is used in the Bible so we wanted that. But, again, the question was: can men and women pray for the elements and pass them out or just men? We had a similar initial conclusion. But now are convinced by

Scripture that women can pray publicly and, as it relates to the Lord's Supper, that they can pray for the elements and pass them out as well.

But I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Before we even dive into all that, we need to begin in **Gen.** because we need to understand that the Bible teaches what is called complementarianism. Men and women are complements.

Not "compliments" as in you say nice things to other people. Complements as in two things that go together that are necessary for each other.

Sandwich world: Peanut butter and? Jelly.
Electronics world: Hardware and? Software.
Machine world: Nuts and bolts.

I think you get the idea. Two things that are both important that go together.

Well, in the Bible, complementarianism is the biblical doctrine that God has created men and women equally in his image, but men and women have different roles. Men and women are equal in terms of worth and dignity and value to God; we are equally made in God's image. But at the same time God has wonderfully designed us to do different things. There is some overlap, but there also distinctions.

And we start with that here in **Gen. 1** - all the way at the very beginning of creation. **Read 26-31**

So several things to point here. First is that both Adam and Eve - and therefore men and women - are made in the image of God. **Read 27**

So when Moses says "man" he's really referring here to all mankind. All mankind - male and female - is created in the image of God. So a woman - all on her own - is made in the image of God. And man - all on his own is made in the image of God.

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? A lot of people will say it means to be thinking and speaking and artistic ability and personality and on and on. Actually, all we see here is that to be made in the image of God means 2 things: 1) that we subdue and rule over creation and 2) that we are designed to have babies who we raise to rule over and subdue creation. That's really it.

And - just because we're here - all humans are made in the image of God from the moment of conception whether they are married or barren or quadriplegics. God has not called everyone to marriage and not everyone has the ability to have babies or rule over the earth with equal capacity. But nevertheless this is God's design for humans as agents made in his image.

Second, God has made the distinction between men and women a good distinction. In fact, he calls it a very good distinction in **Vs. 31. Read**

So God says that men being men and women being women and both being made in his image to rule and procreate is **good**. In fact, it's very good. The biblical perspective is that we celebrate women being women and men being men. It's God's good design that we have different roles and are designed differently yet we are equal in worth.

1 Pet. 3:7: Husbands live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Peter says that women are not equal in all ways. There are aspects where women are weaker. Most everyone agrees that points to physically weaker, but there is some debate as to whether it also means emotional and in other ways. My point isn't to get into that debate. My point is that women are not precisely the same as men - there are differences. And I don't know if you caught it, but as a result of this weakness husbands are to show

their wives honor precisely because of they are the weaker vessel. We show honor because of the difference. And I think all men should show honor to all women for that same reason.

Maybe this is a news flash: but sexism is a sin. Derogatory remarks, the good ol' boys club, harassing women - is vile in the eyes of God. We as men are to show honor to all women because they are made in the image of God. We treat all women, who are not our wives, as our sisters or as our mothers with the highest honor and purity and respect and gentleness.

And women, it's okay to be shown honor. It's okay to be the recipient of chivalry and deference and kindness from men. The command to men assumes women should accept that honor because God has designed distinctions between men and women.

People who reject distinctions between the roles of men and women are called egalitarians. This is opposite side of complementarian. Egal in French means equal. They would say that not only are men and women equal in value and worth, they are equal in capacity. They are equal in the roles they can play in life and in the church.

Initially, this was the battle cry of feminists: Anything a man can do a woman can do what? Better. Well, frankly, there **are** a lot of things women can do better, because they were designed by God for different roles. But there are some things men are designed to do better.

God has designed women to be mothers, to nurture, manage the home. That doesn't mean they can't do other things, but those are intrinsic. There is a softness and a gentleness and tenderness with women that doesn't exist with men. Women are more nurturing by design. That doesn't mean ladies aren't tough or that some men aren't softies. I cry at end of Cars 3 every time.

Men are designed to protect and provide spiritually and physically. Not that women can't have a job, but this is how God has wired men.

So there's feminism on the one hand that says men and women are equal in every way. But now there's the transgender advocates who say that there are no men or women. There's whatever I feel like being on any given day.

Just this week I saw 2 headlines. "Illinois will now allow biological males to be listed as mothers on birth certificates" and "Convicted sex offender say he identifies as 8-year-old girl). This is not the satirical Babylon Bee! These are actual headlines.

(<https://disrn.com/news/illinois-will-now-allow-fathers-to-be-listed-as-birth-parents-on-state-documents>).
(<https://disrn.com/news/following-child-pornography-conviction-sex-offender-says-he-identifies-as-8-year-old-girl>).

This is a fundamental rejection of God's design. This is radical blindness and radical depravity that we see from Romans 1 where people are exchanging what is natural for what is very unnatural. It's a rejection of God's good design.

Third, God designed women as helpers to their husbands. **Read 2:15-25**

So **Gen. 2** is a clarification of what happened on Day 6 of creation. And Genesis 2 says that God purposefully made Eve to be a helper for Adam. So Adam's naming all these animals and noticing that as they come by 2 by 2 there's similarities, but there's differences. And this is true with every animal. But it's probably dawning on him that he does not have a counterpart. And so God makes Eve, a helper fit for him. Corresponding to him. Complementing him.

So here we see that the man is primarily designed for physical labor. When God curses the land in Genesis 3, he addresses the man. He says: You're going to be working harder now. Fighting against thorns and thistles and working by the sweat of your brow (**Gen. 3:17**). And the woman is cursed in her role as helper and child-bearer. The curse affected the very roles God designed us for.

We could say more, but to recap: complementarianism says men and women are equal in terms of worth and value to God. But that God has created us for different roles. That's true in marriage, but we also see that in the life of the church. That's what we're focused on this morning. **Turn over to 1 Tim. 2:8-15**

We know there are some boundaries of how women can be involved in the church. What are those boundaries? Well, Paul gives us some here. Now, just a heads up, there's about 5 hot topics just in these verses that we're not going to tackle this morning, I just want to hone in on how this affects the local church.

Read 8-15

So men are to pray without arguing. Check.
And women are to dress modestly and with good works. Check.
Can women wear braids and jewelry? Pass.
Does salvation come through child-bearing? Pass.

Suffice it to say that women should be more concerned about their personal godliness and modesty than with looking fabulous. And women should view childbearing - having kids - as an honor because they are living out God's purpose for them. It doesn't save them from hell, but it preserves - saves - God's design for women.

But the thing we're homing in on is **Vs. 12-14** where Paul says that in the context of the church - that's what this section is about - there are 2 specific limits: 1) she cannot teach a man and 2) she cannot exercise authority over a man. And did you notice why Paul says this is the case? **Read 13-14**

He goes back to Genesis, doesn't he? Adam was formed first, then Eve. And also Eve's sinful taking of Adam's place: she transgressed. This has nothing to do with Roman or Jewish culture. Nothing to do with social standing of women in the ancient near east. We're not more woke now in America so this doesn't apply. No, it is based on God's design from **Gen. 1-2**.

What does that mean in the church? It means that women cannot teach men. Teaching here is formal instruction of doctrine or Scripture. It's the role of a pastor or teacher - in that regard they are to be silent.

Paul is not saying that women can't chime in in Sunday school. He's not talking about telling a group of people after church about a Scripture that was really impactful to you this last week. He's not saying you can't rebuke a man for being rude. I would even say a woman can give her testimony or tell how God has blessed her in the congregation and it not be teaching.

The idea here is no formal instruction. Can I touch on a controversial person? This means that Beth Moore - the popular Southern Baptist teacher - is in sin because she willfully and unapologetically preaches and teaches to mixed audiences and encourages other ladies to do the same. That is rebellion to God's design for men and women. Joyce Meyer - who is a false prosperity gospel teacher - as well as other gals who preach in the gathered assembly, who engage in formal instruction to men: they're disregarding this passage.

Now, when does a man become a man? What's the age or rite of passage? Ten? Twelve? Nineteen? Forty-three? Forty-three is probably a little old, isn't it? Nineteen...you can lay down your life for your country. There's no magic number, but usually churches pick a number because we can all acknowledge a boy becomes a man or adolescent at some point. Most evangelical churches that hold to a complementation view say 12 or 13 to err on the safe side. A woman could formally teach a Bible lesson or Sunday school until a boy is 12 or 13. There's no hard and fast rule, but that's probably about where I'd be comfortable as well.

Second prohibition is exercising authority over a man in the context of the church. What does that mean? It is the authority built in to the office of pastor/elder/overseer. It's spiritual authority that comes along with overseeing a church and shepherding people.

Some people want to reject this command because they come up with absurdities. "Well, if a woman can't exercise authority then she can't yell at a man to stop his car who's about to run over a child in the parking lot."

“If a woman can’t exercise authority then she can’t tell a visitor ‘The bathroom is over there.’” Or hand out a bulletin or ask the congregation to stand during singing. That’s all nonsense.

This is the spiritual authority that comes from pastors/elders. Why do I say that? Look at the very next section.
Read 3:1-7

The role of overseer is limited to men. There are no NT examples of women elders or leaders. No NT examples of women preaching. People will often mention Deborah in this discussion - she was the female judge over Israel. But she is an exception to this discussion which only proves the rule. And if you read the story in Judges she encourages men to lead but they refuse to do so to their shame.

The office of elder/pastor/overseer is for qualified **men**. And the office is one of oversight, which means authority. And it also includes the ability to teach. And it includes the corresponding command of the congregation to submit to elders. The role of an elder is weighty because people are to submit to elders. Women don’t take that role of authority in the church.

Just to clarify some things. This is in the context of the local church. If you have a lady history professor in college, I’m okay with that. If you have a manager at work who’s a woman, I’m okay with that. That’s not the church. Also, within the church, I’m okay with women teaching women, women teaching children.

But stepping back, we want to be sure to uphold what the Bible does say: that because of how God designed men and women, he has said they are not to take part in this role. This isn’t me, this is God. This isn’t patriarchal society, this is God. This isn’t twisting Scripture, this is a simple reading of Scripture.

So no exercising authority, no preaching/teaching of men: those are the limits. But what we want is to encourage women to do everything they possibly can in the assembly outside of those 2 things. All people, women included, should use their gifts to the maximum ability to the benefit of the church.

So let’s get to our two things we talked about earlier: reading Scripture and praying - specifically for us: praying for the elements and passing out the elements in the Lord’s Supper.

Is reading Scripture the same thing as teaching or applying it? No. **Look at 1 Tim. 4:11-14. Read**

Notice that Paul makes a distinction between reading and exhorting (application) and teaching. These are not the same things. For Timothy as a pastor, it’s not enough to simply read the Bible, even though the Bible has authority. He is called to also teach and exhort. To explain doctrine, ethics, and apply the Word as a function of his being a pastor.

That’s why Paul commands him in **2 Tim. 4:1-3** to **preach** the Word.

So merely reading the Word is not preaching or exhorting. It’s just reading words. There’s no authority that a woman is exercising over a man. All the authority is in the text. When we move from the text to teaching or preaching or exhorting then we are taking the authority of the office of pastor.

In a similar way, no one would accuse the ladies who sing up front of exercising authority over them or teaching them even though the songs we sing are saturated with Scripture and biblical truth. Those truths are intrinsic to the songs. Same is true with simply reading the Bible.

Another thing we wrestled with was: what if a visitor comes in and sees a woman reading Scripture? Will they get the wrong impression that she has authority in our church? The answer: maybe. But visitors could get a lot of wrong impressions by visiting a church just one time. We can’t address every possible issue in every possible scenario. What we can do is be equipped to give them an explanation for why we do what we do. And we can show them in Scripture what the boundaries are.

Another question: Is this just a slippery slope to a woman preaching in church and becoming elders? Start with reading Scripture, then move to short devotion, then preaching. Well, the answer is it could be, but doesn’t

have to be. As long as there is no teaching, no homily, no exhortation I think we're pretty safe. Again, we could use the slippery slope argument with women singing songs or praying. "Ladies are singing, next thing you know they'll be preaching." I'm sure that's how some churches have fallen into liberalism, but as long as reading stays reading and praying stays praying I think we're safe.

Side: One common objection is that maybe it's okay for women to read, but we should reserve it for men because men really need to step up and have opportunities to lead. Well that may be true: men do need to step up and lead and play a role in the church. But where does argument end? Should only men sing up front and play instruments and clean and teach Sunday school to kids because they need these opportunities? No, we want to encourage all people - men and women - to be fully involved in the body of Christ as much as Scripture allows for. **Look back at 1 Cor. 11.**

Here's another passage that deals with difficult issues, specifically head coverings. My goal isn't to tackle that right now. But I do want you to notice 2 things. First, Paul grounds his argument in the creation order, in Gen. 1 and 2. And second, women can pray and prophesy in the church. **Read 2-6**

Again, we can save the head covering discussion for another time: is it a cultural thing? Is it a timeless principle? What we know for sure though in the passage is that women both prayed and prophesied in the church. Paul doesn't say, "Whoa, what are ladies doing prophesying and praying in church? Cut that out!" No he says it should be done in a proper manner.

By prayer he means that they are using their words in the assembly. When I pray corporately here, we're all praying, right. That's a given. But the issue here is the woman using her voice, her words, to pray in the assembly. Paul was fine with that. There's no authority being exercised with prayer. There's no teaching happening even though she might be saying true things. It's not formal theological instruction, it's a conversation with God.

Also, Paul is fine with women prophesying. Now, this gets into the whole spiritual gifts conversation. But suffice it to say that at the very least prophesy was receiving some kind of revelation from God to pass along to the congregation. **1 Cor. 14:3** says it's a form of encouragement, consolation or upbuilding that is publicly spoken in the congregation. So God was giving some measure of revelation that women were passing along to the congregation. And Paul doesn't say "Cut it out; a woman can't do that!" He just says make sure your head is covered when it happens. So she's passing along revelation to the congregation in a non authoritative way; similar to reading the Bible.

By the way, this wasn't unique to the Corinthian church. The head covering - as it related to praying and prophesying - was an issue in all the churches. The apostles and elders let women pray and prophesy in all the churches. **Read 16**

What he means there is that he's not going to argue about the issue because this in all the churches women pray and prophesy. Egypt, Rome, Jerusalem, Galatia, Damascus - the women are all allowed to pray and prophesy.

See, the gospel does not eliminate all distinctions between men and women in service.

So here's where we land. We want to encourage women to be as involved in the corporate worship service as biblically possible. Since reading Scripture carries no intrinsic authority or teaching elements in the person, we believe that ladies should be allowed and encouraged to read Scripture. We would ask ladies, as well as men, to be members of RBC to read Scripture. But we encourage everyone to do so. You don't have to even be a great reader to read Scripture. I actually think it's awesome when people who struggle with reading read Scripture because it's not a show anyway, it's the church gathering to hear the Word.

Also, during the Lord's Supper, we believe ladies should be able to pray for the elements and pass them out. We don't believe in transubstantiation or consubstantiation where the elements are changed into the body and blood of Christ in any way through prayer, so there's nothing magical happening when we pray. We're simply thanking God for the gospel we are enacting in the Supper.

We're not asking ladies to give the homily - the little devotion before the Supper - because that would be what? Teaching. But we are asking them to pray and serve.

So if you're a lady - and a member - we'll talk about membership in a couple weeks - but if you're a lady and a member we invite you and encourage you to come read Scripture Sunday mornings and pray and serve the Supper as a means of serving the congregation. We believe this is good and right and pleasing to God.

Pray