

# REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Athens, GA

## Position Paper on Men and Women in the Church

Approved October 2022

God's design for men and women – their identity, purpose, and role – is very important for life in the home, the church, and the world. We believe God's word is clear about what it means for humanity to be created in the image of God as male and female. As our culture's view of sexuality has shifted rapidly over last few decades, the Session of Redeemer Presbyterian Church offers this position paper to explain our theological commitments and our application of these commitments regarding men and women in the life of our church. Not every issue will be dealt with in this paper, but it is our hope that we provide a clear expression of our biblical beliefs with implications for some key areas of ministry. We offer this in a spirit of love (not only for our local congregation, but for our denomination, our community, and the world), edification, unity, and most of all, for the glory of God.

The specific purposes are: 1) to assist our congregation in a better understanding of how men and women are to work together in the church; 2) provide foundational ideas and guiding principles for the Women's Ministry at Redeemer Presbyterian Church; 3) to help others who may be interested in Redeemer Presbyterian Church, or those unfamiliar with the biblical teaching on men and women, see the beauty and power God's design for us as we seek to live in accord with God's plan for humanity.

### INTRODUCTION

We believe our final authority and rule for life and practice is the Word of God. One of the first things the Bible declares about human beings is they are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28). Humanity, created, male and female, has the unique role of image-bearer. The Bible clearly teaches the equal personhood, value, and dignity of all human beings – men, women, and children. There is no hint of inequality or subordination of personhood. Simply stated:<sup>1</sup>

- Men and women are created in the image of God; they are equal in worth and dignity (Gen 1:26-27).
- In Christ, men and women are spiritual equals. They have an equal share in Christ and his benefits (Gal 3:28).
- Christ gifts men and women in the church to serve one another. Every Christian, man or woman, needs the gifts of his or her fellow Christians (1 Cor 12:12-31).
- Among those gifts are gifts of teaching in the local church. God equips women, for instance to teach other women in the Church (Titus 2:3-5), and even privately to help ministers become better communicators of God's Word (Acts 18:26).

At the same time, God does seem to go out of his way in the Genesis narrative (Genesis 1-3) to make it abundantly clear that men and women are not the same and/or interchangeable. The very fact that God created human beings male and female cautions us against an unqualified equation of the two sexes.

While it is important to begin with the sameness of men and women – our equality as created in the image of God – God has also made it clear that we should celebrate our sexual difference. As Alistair Roberts has written, "Our identities as male and female, as contrasting modes of relational beings in

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, *Well Ordered, Living Well*.

committed union and mutual service, are to be explored, enjoyed, elaborated, and extensively expressed.”

### VALUING BIBLICAL TRUTH

There is a fundamental teaching on the subject of sexes to be found in Genesis 1-3; themes are developed in the rest of the Bible in different ways. We first see Adam and Eve in relationship to one another and with God. In the church, we sometimes narrow the discussion about men and women to concepts like authority, submission, and equality. While those are biblical concerns and ideas, we believe the Bible goes beyond these categories. Adam and Eve, men and women, are God’s gifts to one another in order to better do what he calls us to do: “Be fruitful, and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion” (Genesis 1:28). Rather than being pulled apart and pitted against one another, men and women can better obey and serve God and the world as we seek to follow God’s design for us as human beings.

Additionally, Genesis 1-3 clearly demonstrates both male-female equality and male headship (properly defined) were instituted by God at creation and remain permanent, beneficial aspects of human existence. Male headship is not male domination. Male domination is the assertion of the man’s will over the women’s will with no regard for her spiritual equality, rights, and value.<sup>2</sup> We repudiate male domination expressed in any form or fashion. Headship is not a privilege to be exploited or to build up ego. Headship is a responsibility for the benefit of others without regard for oneself.

Lastly, the imagery of husband, wife, and family are important. While not all of us are husbands, wives, mothers, or fathers, we are all important and a vital part of the family of God. Even so, marriage and parenthood are symbols that reveal what male and female are designed to be. They help disclose what it means for us to be men and women; they do not comprehend the full reality and purpose of sexual identity but they disclose distinct and characteristic forms of relation and action. The family relationship emphasizes our unity, our common heavenly Father, and frees us to live together in love and honor, rather than in competition and threat. There is no subordination of value and dignity in families. There is a mutuality, joy, and common cause. These symbols can help us serve together with relational carefulness. When men and women see each other as spiritual siblings, we can cultivate an environment of brotherly and sisterly love within complementarian gender commitments. We seek to foster healthy ministry and relationship between men and women where each is freed to glorify God with their gifts and desires in light of God’s call for each of us.

#### **Based on Scripture , our beliefs on gender are summarized below:**

- WE AFFIRM that both men and women have been created in the image of God with equal value and a dignity as human beings. Together they share derivative authority to be ‘culture-makers.”
- WE DENY that one or the other sex is adequate and sufficient in and of themselves to fulfill God’s commission for humanity. God has created us similar but different and that is something to celebrate. When we deny our differences (or limit them to simply biological or physiological differences) we are subtracting not only from God’s word but from his blessing.
- WE AFFIRM that both men and women are needed and necessary for the health and ministry of the church. We are partners in the life of the church, using our diverse gifts for the good of the body.

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<sup>2</sup> Ray C. Ortlund, Jr. “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship”, *RBMW*.

- WE DENY that the church can flourish without brotherly/sisterly love and partnership. The body of Christ cannot be all God wants it to be if men and women don't work together in their God ordained roles and responsibilities, of which many overlap, and some do not.
- WE AFFIRM the beauty and significance of the woman being created from Adam as 'helper.' The description of 'helper' is not meant to mean anything demeaning – it is also used in the Bible to describe how God is our helper. It implies someone who is uniquely fit, for not only Adam, but also in terms of her wider calling in the world.
- WE DENY any characterization or theological position that leads to the subjugation, abuse, or neglect of women, whether single or married, young or old.
- WE AFFIRM male headship defined as the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, where the man bears the primary responsibility to lead that partnership in a God-glorifying direction.<sup>3</sup>
- WE DENY male domination defined as the assertion of the man's will over the woman's will, heedless of her spiritual equality, her rights, and her value.

Prior to any discussion about our particular denomination (Presbyterian Church in America) and our particular local church in that denomination, it is important to state that we are complementarians (the belief that God made men and women equal and distinctive: equal in value and dignity, and distinctive in certain responsibilities and roles). Our sexuality is complementary and is a basic feature of the creation itself. Since the family is the most basic institution of all human society, male leadership follows, not simply as a law added to the creation, but as a natural feature of the way creation is constituted. Male leadership in the family is a matter of creation, embedded in our natures, and therefore, male-only ordination in the church is an indication that ecclesiastical leadership is itself ordered as such. Male-only ordination is defended as coming from God as he has created us, not merely a perplexing New Testament injunction. In other words, the Church should be a picture of reality.<sup>4</sup>

### MINISTRY IN OUR DENOMINATION (PCA)

The Constitution of the PCA, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures, the inerrant Word of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, together with the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Book of Church Order*. We ordain elders and deacons. Ordination is a public acknowledgement granting authority because of the gifting that should already be present in the man. We humbly and gratefully embrace Scriptures' teaching that the Church's leadership is to be composed of qualified men who are entrusted by Christ to lead God's people.

We are aware that some in our denomination have formed an 'un-ordained' diaconate made up of men and women. Not only does this seem to be poorly aligned with the spirit of the two offices of the church outlined in our constitution,<sup>5</sup> we believe this is unwise and confusing to the congregation. It is clear that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist not only the deacons in many ways (BCO 9-7 – caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress of need), but also the elders. We not only are doing

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<sup>3</sup> The affirmation and denial concerning male headship and male domination: Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Wedgworth, "Male-Only Ordination is Natural: Why the Church is a Model of Reality."

<sup>5</sup> See page 51 of the AIC Report on Women Serving in the Ministry of the Church to the 45<sup>th</sup> GA of the PCA.

this (Shepherding Commissions, Crisis Intervention Team, mercy cases, etc.), but we want to find more and better ways to continue this work.

### **MINISTRY AT REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Athens, GA**

We are not interested in devising simple, weak, and/or symbolic actions to highlight the importance of women in our church. Men and women together are the engine of history and God has designed them to work alongside each other, recognizing the unique way God has created us male and female. The Proverbs 31 woman is not primarily (or simply) about an actual woman who does all sorts of good things. She is not a woman who would be described as being able to “do anything an un-ordained man can do.” She does things uniquely; even some of the same things a man can do, but differently, and some of these things she can do much better. The woman depicted here (in Proverbs 31 and many other places in Scripture) is a heroic figure, a lady of valor – this is lady wisdom. We desire a church where women can thrive and flourish and help build the kingdom of God as image-bearers of God; to work alongside and with men in the church.

### **REDEEMER’S WORSHIP SERVICE**

#### **Why is Redeemer’s Sunday worship service led by men?**

We believe the Bible provides us with a progressive unfolding of the divine will concerning God’s self-revelation and how he is to be worshiped. We also believe a redemptive-historical reading of Scripture teaches that public worship on the Lord’s Day should be elder-led.<sup>6</sup> Building on patterns found in the Old Testament, the New Testament presents a biblical case that the church’s elders lead the public worship of the gathered church. They are tasked with the public reading and preaching of the Word of God (1 Tim. 4:13) and the administration of the sacraments. In Acts 6, the summary of the elders task is “prayer and the ministry of the word” (a comprehensive summary of the task committed to the apostles and now the elders).

#### **What about the women who prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14? Didn’t they participate and help in worship?**

While 1 Corinthians 14 describes the worship of the church in Corinth during the apostolic age (which clearly included non-ordained men and women who exercised revelatory gifts), there are important differences between what Paul describes and the church’s worship in the post-apostolic age. Paul is describing (in 1 Cor 11-14) the various ways in which God was revealing himself, by the Spirit, to the church. It can be argued that once God gave to the church a complete canon, this type of special revelation ceased. The extraordinary activities that Paul recounts therefore no longer characterize the church’s worship. The ordinary elements of the reading and preaching of the Word, public prayer, the singing of praise, and the administration of the sacraments characterize the public worship of the church.

This is not to say that public worship is not participatory. In saying that worship is elder-led, we are not saying that the congregation is rendered passive. We all participate in worship. The criteria of office is important and not simply about gender. The same criterion that excludes women also excludes most men.

### **CONCLUSION**

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<sup>6</sup> 1) Beginning with Adam and Eve, pre-fall; the line of Seth, Noah, the patriarchs, Mosaic worship with the Levites, and worship in the exile and post-exile. 2) Moving into the New Testament with apostles after Christ’s resurrection; Paul’s instructions concerning worship and church leadership moving from apostles to elders. 3) From Genesis to Revelation a pattern unfolds leading us to an understanding of male-ordained leadership, especially in liturgical settings.

The Session of Redeemer Presbyterian Church is convinced that it is vital for the church to understand our identity as men and women for the sake of healthy individuals, marriages, families, and churches. Even more important, we believe it is important for the true expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our world. Our desire is to always align our understanding of men and women with the truth and reality found in God's word in order to best reflect the beauty of God's design for the world as he continues building his Kingdom. We seek to be a place, a church, the people of God, here in Athens, Georgia where Jesus Christ is proclaimed in all his glory. In light of this, we will continue working to foster healthy ministry and relationships between men and women where each is freed to glorify God with their gifts and desires in light of God's call for each of us.

*"Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth."*

1 John 3:18