

Women in Leadership

Overview—Current practice, exegetical arguments, & Scripture's positive view of women as leaders in the early church.

Beginning the discussion in our local context:

Redeemer Lincoln, NE believes that women should lead in church

...is a right and thoroughly Christian truth.

Redeemer also believes there is a distinction between men and women

...is a right and thoroughly Christian truth.

How do these truths manifest in the life of church leaders?

THE CONTEXT of Our Denomination:

Women are not able to hold the office of elder or deacon.

Our Church

- Part of Redeemer's family tree grows from a different denomination, the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, which joined the PCA in the 80's. The inclusion of the RPCES brought with it covenant seminary, covenant college, and influential leaders like Francis & Edith Shaeffer.
- The RPRCES always ordained women deacons. Under our previous pastor, the elders of Redeemer with reverend Michael Gordon, implemented this practice of commissioning female deacons within our congregation and we still hold this position as a church.
- In submission to our denomination, Redeemer does not ordain women deacons— We commission (set them apart as lay leaders) instead.

His Church and Our World

- There are real differences in views among Christians who hold a high view of the Bible. Binary views do not need to be toxic among Christians.
- People who hold that women should be elders don't (necessarily) have a low view of the Bible. They believe that the dominance of a man over a woman is an effect of the Fall and therefore the undoing of it as part of the work of redemption. Redeemer will seek to be collegial with other brothers and sisters in different denominations who hold this view.

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- People who hold that only men should be elders are not (necessarily) misogynists. They believe these distinctions of roles predate the Fall and show the unity and diversity of God. Redeemer holds the view that only men should be elders.

THE KIND OF PEOPLE WE MUST BE

*People who experience the harmony and dissonance of holding our views.

Dissonance

Some of us come to the discussions about sex+gender and church leadership with confident views. Either the Bible, social history, and/or current history are clear. This leads us to be tempted to say: Anyone who disagrees with me is clearly wrong, or worse, evil—intending to do harm to me, my position, or the biblical witness.

Harmony

To have a view of women in church leadership that is held with conviction and humility. I would like for harmony to be our aim at Redeemer.

Below has been adapted from another Redeemer Presbyterian (PCA) Church in Winston-Salem, NC.

AN ORIENTATION TO THE QUESTION(S)

- Our views of gender are being redeemed.
- Our sin skews our ability to see truth.
- We live in mystery, even with Revelation.
- History brings challenges and issues to bear.
- Society brings challenges and issues to bear.
- The Way Forward is through: PRAYER | HUMILITY | WISDOM | VIRTUE | STUDY

Hermeneutics (I.E. Interpretation)—aspects that guide our hermeneutics:

- Literal and Literary
- Systematic and Biblical Theology: Typology
- Contexts: Genre, Grammatical, Redemptive Historical, Cultural
- Defining terms informs application of truths: 1. Sex: The biological reality of men and women. 2. Gender: The cultural realities that exist in our world(s) 3. Church: God's visible representation of those who are called out by God and their participation in the Kingdom of God

Creation

Genesis 1:26-28 | Genesis 2:15-24

- Equal: Dignity, Importance, Of my flesh

- Necessary: For Created Purpose and Image Bearing
- Distinctions and Complements

o First-born | Helper * Authority?

Fall

Genesis 3:6-19

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" ...

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

*"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." **Genesis 3***

Ø Equal: Culpability and Curses Ø Distinct and Complements:

- o Nature of Curses
- o Naming
- o Authority

Genesis 3:16b

*16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. **Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.**"*

Possible Renderings

1. *Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. NIV*
2. *Your desire, whatever it may be will not be your own. You cannot do as you wish for your husband rules over her like a despot—whatever you wish is subject to his will*
3. *You will have an immense yearning (psychological dependence) upon your husband and that longing will be his reign over you.*
4. *You will desire to dominate your husband—usurping his authority—but he will still have authority over you.*

Evaluations

1. Generic—great translation, but not helpful for meaning
2. Where many Egalitarians land—authority is a curse to be redeemed
3. Gender neutral re: this debate
4. Where many Complementarians land

Why # 4 makes most sense to me...

- The demerits of the others
- The context of the passage
- The nature of blessing in the curses
- Genesis 4:7
*7 But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it **desires** to have you, but you must **master** it. **Redemption:** We'll see...but I think we can assume...it's for our good—the fact that this brokenness exists.*

DEACON(ESSE)S, AUTHORITY, & OFFICE

1 Timothy 3:2, 8-16—Qualifications for Deacon

NIV Translation

2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...

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8Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. 9They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. 10They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

*11In the same way, **their wives** are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*

12A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. 13Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Young's Literal Translation

2 ...it behoveth, therefore, the overseer to be blameless, of one wife a husband, vigilant, sober, decent, a friend of strangers, apt to teach...

8 Ministrants -- in like manner grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not given to filthy lucre, **9**having the secret of the faith in a pure conscience, **10** and let these also first be proved, then let them minister, being unblameable.

11 Women -- in like manner grave, not false accusers, vigilant, faithful in all things. **12**Ministrants -- let them be of one wife husbands; the children leading well, and their own houses, **13**for those who did minister well a good step to themselves do acquire, and much boldness in faith that [is] in Christ Jesus.

GUNAIKAS: v Wives

Ø Their or the

Ø Omission of elders wives... Ø But similar to vs 12 and 2

v Women

Ø All Women

- Yes it's theologically true
- It's in a list of qualifications of office
- The context is best suited for something else
- Why distinction, why further qualifications
- Why not write Diakonia—deaconesses?
- Phoebe...
 - Ø Women associated with the Deacons or Elders
 - Part of the conversation

• Acts and Paul

Ø Some third group/order that are called "Women"

• LITERARY STRUCTURE

Ø Separated out in construction

v **Interruption? 10-12**

v **The similarity of the lists**

Ø Including elder list from 3:2ff

Ø Including older women list from 5:9 and Titus 2

What is the exegetical line of argument for Women Deacons?

1. The adverb “likewise,” “similarly” (hosautos) repeated from verse 8, points to a new category or class of officials, as does the list of qualities parallel to those in verses 8-10;

2. If deacons’ wives were in view, we might expect an article (tas) before “women,” or the pronoun “their” (auton); It’s 50-50.
3. To single out deacons’ wives while making no mention of overseers’ wives would be very strange.
4. Though the NT does not know the technical term “deaconess” (diakonissa), this verse, together with Ro 16:1, hints at that office.

Or Wives of Male Deacons?

1. It’s awkward to interrupt “women” of verse 11 to have some auxiliary or dependent identity in reference to deacons—yet different qualifications
2. If Paul wished to introduce a separate class of women deacons he could have made it clear by introducing tas diakonous
3. Later in the letter a lengthy section is devoted to a council of women workers or ministrants in the church (the “widows” in 1 Timothy 5:9-16); note the similarity between the requisite qualities in 3:11 and those for older women in Titus 2:3, where there seems to be strong parallels with women deacons
4. Historically the most likely antecedent to the deaconess is order of widows
5. “if some women were deacons, further qualifications would be unnecessary”

*There is so much more to say on this topic. There is so much *listening* that the church needs to engage in *with* women. Jesus’ church must navigate these issues in light of God’s revealed Word. I’ve borrowed much of this information from other churches in different parts of the U.S. also called Redeemer (NY city & Wintson-Salem). Much of my personal views on women in the church have been shaped by Kathy Keller’s book, “Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles.” In addition, Mary Beth McGreevy has helped our denomination reframe this conversation into what women can and are called to do in the church. At the 45th general assembly of the PCA, a committee was formed to study this topic in great detail, and I whole heartedly commend this study report to any who wish to study further what our denomination believes. That report can be found here: <http://wrfnet.org/sites/default/files/PCA%20Report%20on%20Women%20in%20Ministry.pdf>.