

Women in Ministry at Redemption Hill Church: Condensed Paper

Introduction

At Redemption Hill Church, we believe and celebrate what the Bible teaches about the equality in value of men and women as God's image-bearers, as well as differing roles in both the home and church settings. The shorthand for this view would be Complementarianism.

While gender roles are different, they serve the same end goal of putting God's beauty and glory on display and advancing his kingdom. It is important for us in our practice to put on display the beauty of how men and women complement each other closely in ministry. Biblical headship and submission must be expressed not as a ranking system, but as crucial teamwork where one cannot function without the other in ministry. Hence, we want to avoid giving the impression that complementarianism means men are the ones running the show and women are only to take the back-seats. We want to express and celebrate the many important roles in ministry that women play in RHC. This is essentially because both the genders were created to complement and need each other. Through the fulfilling of their unique God-given roles, they ultimately reflect God's image more fully and fulfil the purpose he has given his image-bearers.

However, it is imperative for us to be mindful as we seek to articulate a theological vision of complementarianism for ministry. Women have been subjugated and mistreated throughout history around the world, both within and without the church. Even in societies considered more enlightened or progressive, it is still possible to be perpetuating certain fears and stereotypes. What's more, we face a cultural context that's hostile to this doctrine on one hand, and yet on the other hand, how overly-conservative complementarianism (not our viewpoint) can contribute to a negative self-deprecating mindset even among godly women.

This implies that we must seek to be faithful and true to the Bible and yet be sensitive, gracious and compassionate in our application. It also implies that we must actively pursue and include women in key ministry and leadership roles so as to show that the church really needs both male and female serving in order to flourish. The elders of RHC are committed to these implications.

There are three documents relating to this issue of women in ministry that we have compiled:

1. the long exegetical version of our convictions as a church on complementarianism, based on the Village Church's paper with our own Cover Note;
2. the ministry implications flowing from our position and convictions on this issue; and
3. this document, which is a condensed version of Papers 1&2 above.

Gender and the Role of Women in Scripture

Our commitment to complementarianism stems neither from tradition or culture, but from Scripture itself. As enshrined in our statement of faith, we believe Scripture to be the ultimate authority and the very voice of God, without error and sufficient for all things pertaining to faith

and conduct of life.

First, we believe that Scripture teaches the equal dignity of both sexes as image-bearers and yet having distinctive roles according to divine intention. The story of Genesis began with a gracious God who created all things by his Word through his Spirit. On the 6th day, at what would be the zenith of His creation, he made mankind, both male and female, in his own image (Ge 1:27). It is important to note here that the image is borne by both sexes, and hence God cannot be faithfully represented by a single gender. While both male and female are equal in dignity and image bearing, the story of how Eve was created showed that God intended their distinction to be displayed in their differing roles. Eve was meant to be a helper¹ to Adam, and thus Adam cannot fulfill his task without Eve. Both men and women need each other deeply to obey God's will.

Second, we believe that Scripture expressly states that the distinctive roles are to be lived out in the realm of family and church, with equal dignity and worth. Marriage as an institution reflects the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:23). As such, husbands are called to sacrificial servant leadership (Eph 5:24), while wives are called to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord (Eph 5:22)². Within the church, the office of elder is reserved only for qualified men according to the requirements laid down in 1 Tim 3:1-7. Elders lead and care for the church as under-shepherds and mirror Christ's sacrificial leadership and care for his people (1 Peter 5:2-4). At the same time, the Bible expects women to be heavily involved in all kinds of ministry at church. The examples range from giving personal encouragement to brothers (Acts 18:25-26), to prophesying or praying during services (1 Cor 11:4), to being a deacon³ (Romans 16:1) amongst many others. Paul's command of not permitting women to teach or exercise authority (1 Tim 2:12), under a careful reading of 1 Timothy, seems to be confined to the context of the church gathered⁴. As such, the implication would be that women are free to teach in varied capacities in church except the Sunday pulpit.

Finally, given the equal dignity of both men and women as image-bearers who yet have distinct roles within church and home, it is worth noting that the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations is given to all and sundry. Both men and women are expected to be mobilized and used by God in his mission for his glory. Jesus himself taught and welcomed women (Luke 8:1-3) and in what would be a counter-cultural move then, allowed women to be the first witness of his resurrection (Matt 28:1). Euodia and Syntyche were described by Paul as those who labored "side-by-side" with him in the gospel. This shows that just as both men and women are needed to fulfill the cultural mandate, both are needed to fulfill Christ's Great Commission given to his people.

¹ While we may be tempted to think that's denigrating, Psalms 54:4 says, "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life." The same Hebrew word is used to describe God and the sense is that this helper needs to be strong and offers indispensable and critical support so that the task can be completed or the life (as in this case!) can be continued.

² It should be noted that both husband and wife reflect Jesus here. The former in his selfless sacrifice and the latter in his complete submission to the Father.

³ Phoebe here in ESV is described as a servant, but the Greek word here would be the same as the word used for deacons.

⁴ For a more detailed exegesis of this, please refer to the lengthier ministry document and the biblical-theological paper from the Village church.

Implications for ministry at RHC

We see the following implications for ministries at RHC:

1. **Teaching.** Apart from preaching on Sunday in the context of the church gathered, we're committed to see women to be involved in public teaching in varied contexts – in Christian Education classes, membership classes and in CGs. In particular, we believe that women can lead a CG with both male and female members. This would also imply a commitment to train and equip everyone (not just men) in the study of the Word and theology.
2. **Missions.** As we see that the Great Commission is given to all, we need to be more intentional in raising up women missionaries, while not neglecting to challenge men to rise up at the same time. The elders are committed to come along side sisters to help them discern God's call in their lives and also train and equip them who have the desire of advancing the gospel through missions. A practical implication of this is that church internships are really open to both genders.
3. **Ministry.** The ministry of the local church can only thrive when both men and women are actively mobilized and involved. This means that we should be mindful when ministry teams are formed, to ensure that both suitably gifted men and women are included. At the same time, the call to full-time ministry must be extended to women. Even on Sundays, we must ensure that ladies can lead various suitable elements so that the church can hear their hearts and voices shaped by God.
4. **Leadership.** While eldership is reserved for qualified men, we recognize that healthy leadership must take into account the wisdom and input of both men and women in relevant areas of ministry. The elders are then committed to proactively include the involvement of women in elders' appointed commissions and committees. The proposals put before the elders would then have substantial involvement from all relevant parties, so that the decisions made by elders would have included the wisdom of both genders.