

“WHAT ABOUT PASTORS IN DRESSES?”

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First Christian Reformed Church

June 15, 2014, 6:00PM

Sermon Texts: I Timothy 2:11-14; 3:1-2; Genesis 1 & 2

Belgic Confession Article 31

Introduction:

For the past few weeks we have explored the nature of the church and church leadership. We have talked about the importance of good church government and doing things decently and in order. We have talked about the Biblical foundations for having a plurality of qualified elders and deacons.

One thing we haven't talked about is whether the officers of the church must be men or not. There are few things in the contemporary church today that have caused more division and debate than the issue of women in spiritual leadership over men.

Why do some denominations and some churches have them and some don't? Why doesn't First CRC have women elders or deacons or let women preach?

Is it because of past prejudices born out of long standing tradition?

Is it because we are uncomfortable with that kind of change, we just aren't quite ready for it yet?

Is it because some think women are inferior or not as smart or too weak?

Is it because of first century culture, and the lack of education for women of that time?

Is it because the Bible was written by a bunch of male chauvinists?

Is this just our interpretation and it's no better than anyone else's? After all don't lots of serious scholars disagree on this issue?

Is it just because of our current pastor and as soon as we get a different one who is more open minded things will change around here?

The push to ordain women in the past 50 years has not come from a church that after 1900 years of progressive enlightenment has now finally opened its blind eyes to see the truth. The push is coming from a culture that has lost or thrown off its Biblical mooring.

We live in a day of blurred distinctions, and especially when those distinctions are sexual. Almost all boundaries are gone, and the church has entered into that confusion and blurring of distinctions. She has lost her moorings in the timeless truth of God's Word.

Our generation doesn't want God to define who we are and what we may do. So when that's cast off, what's left to guide us but the shifting winds of culture? This is true whether we are

talking about when human life begins or what marriage is or what the nature of spiritual authority is.

Let's turn to Scripture and lay the foundation for why we do what we do so that when our understanding is challenged we will have a good answer. Since our text appeals to Genesis let's start at the beginning.

Genesis 1 and 2, As it was in the beginning.

God created us not as generic beings but as male and female and that distinction is important, it's part of our identity and goes right down to the core of our being.

Laverne Cox, the man turned woman, who was on the cover of Time magazine two weeks ago, is not a woman. He is a male, a very confused male, but a male from conception until death. He can change his appearance, but he can't change reality, his chromosomes are still xy. We should not treat delusions as biological facts. Transgender issues are just the next battle in the blurring of all sexual distinctions created by God.

Genesis 1 makes clear that God created us to be male and female and that both are created in the image of God. Both are equal in value, in potential and in destiny. As Peter says we are both heirs together of the grace of life (I Peter 3:7) and of eternal life.

All through Scripture women are acknowledged as having equal dignity, intelligence and personhood. When it comes to being saved by grace and receiving salvation and the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. That's what Galatians 3:28 is talking about.

But equality does not mean interchangeability. We are equal and different and the difference is significant, it matters. Males should act like men and females should act like women.

Genesis 1 emphasizes what we have in common between the sexes, Genesis 2 emphasizes that is different, what is not shared. Think about all the differences spelled out in Genesis 2. God created man and woman at different times, from different material, and for different purposes, for different roles and responsibilities.

God created Adam before He created Eve. The firstborn carries certain responsibilities and authority. Naming in Scripture is a sign of authority. God names man and the stars. Man names the animals and the woman God brought to him. The man was designed and created for leadership, for taking responsibility, for taking initiative.

Woman was made from man, from his side. She was designed and created as Adam's helper. Woman was made for man, to help man. He was made to need the help, she needs to help. No inferiority or superiority, none.

Notice, woman is the best helper, supporter, counselor and ally that a man can have. No suitable animal even comes close, not even a dog. She is good, very good.

Man's headship responsibility is also seen in that God gave the command not to eat the fruit of a particular tree to Adam and not to Eve.

The fact of responsible male leadership is seen after the fall. God came to Adam first, the sign that he has the one responsible, the one who was head. Eve was ultimately not the one responsible for the fall, Adam was.

Romans 5:12-14 Therefore, just as *sin came into the world through one man*, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— 13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet *death reigned from Adam* to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

I Corinthians 15:21-22 For as *by a man came death*, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as *in Adam all die*, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

The fall was a failure of leadership, of taking responsibility, and a reversal of roles. Do you ever wonder what Adam should have done in the garden? He should have come to God and said, "My wife ate of the tree. I offer my life for hers; let me die in her place." He didn't do that, but the second Adam did. Jesus who was without sin came to earth to offer His life for His bride and He died in our place. That's headship, that's leadership, that's taking responsibility.

Authority and submission.

Let me say something about headship and submission because that is something the modern mind has trouble with. Unbelievers hear those terms and right away think of power and coercion. They think headship and submission are inconsistent with man and woman being equal before God and both bearing God's image.

God created an authority structure for the human race. Our entire world is built around authority and submission, around leading and following.

All of us, men and women alike, exercise authority and exercise submission every day.

We submit in the classroom to the teachers instructions.

We submit in the courtroom to the judge.

We submit in the hospital to the doctor's orders.

We submit in the workplace to our supervisors and bosses.

We submit in the military to superior officers.

We submit when we pull over because of the police car behind us.

We submit as citizens to our government, to the DMV and IRS.

We submit as church members to pastors and elders.
We submit as children to our parents.
We submit as wives to our husbands.

The necessity of authority and submission is seen even in the most feminist of organizations such as NOW. They have a president and vice-president and managers down to a receptionist.

Would you like the supreme proof that equality is not inconsistent with headship and submission and that they aren't about who's better?

Philippians 2:6-8 though [Jesus] was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Authority and submission are not strange or foreign or evil concepts. Human culture and life depends on it, without it everything would be chaos.

A car can't have two steering wheels, we cannot serve two masters. Someone has to take initiative. Someone was to be responsible and take responsibility. Someone has to lead and someone has to follow. It's not about who's better.

Observing this the great British writer and thinker G.K. Chesterton wrote a little poem:

“If I set the sun beside the moon,
And if I set the land beside the sea,
And if I set the town beside the country,
And if I set the man beside the woman,
I suppose some fool would talk about one being better.”

I Timothy 2:12-14, so what about women as elders and pastors.

I Timothy 2:12-14 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Since the fall and the curse there has been a sinful tendency in women to want to dominate or manipulate or control. There are degrees obviously. And men have a sinful tendency to abdicate, to sit back and be lazy, or let their wives just run the show.

Paul is not saying women don't know how to teach or lead, nor is he saying women can never teach or lead. They teach and lead in the home with their children and in schools with children and in the church among other women. Scripture urges older women to teach and lead younger women.

It's clear in I Timothy 3 that the office of pastor and elder is an office of teaching and leading, of having authority. Paul says women are not to hold the office of teaching which includes elders and pastors. He gives two reasons for this.

First, because there is an order to the sexes. Adam was created first and that means something in God's creation and design as we saw in Genesis. This command is grounded in creation, not in circumstances or culture or education.

There are other commands in Scripture that are grounded in the creation order, before the fall.

Homosexuality is contrary to nature, it violates the male, female principle of marriage. Divorce is contrary to nature, it violates the principle that the two shall become one flesh, and what God has joined together ought not to be separated. All food is to be received with gratitude because God created all foods to be received with thanksgiving (I Timothy 4:3-5).

God did not create two heads. God created an order for our blessings and our benefit and for the sake of maintaining lasting relationships.

By being created first God gave Adam the primary responsibility to lead. For this reason women are not to have spiritual authority over men, it turns the order upside down.

Second, because Eve was deceived and became the transgressor.

This doesn't mean that Adam didn't also sin and fall, but that Eve was the cause and the source, she was the one deceived. This doesn't mean that men can't be deceived, they clearly can be.

Paul is reminding us of the created order and how Satan subverted the creation order by going around Adam to deceive Eve. Satan subverted the headship authority of Adam and destroyed the sexual order God gave to creation.

The reversal of roles in the garden is the second reason why the roles ought not to be reversed in the home and church.

This is just one key text. From I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and I Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 and the whole counsel of God's Word the consistent witness of the Christian Church for the first 1950 years has been that God ordained that men be the heads of their homes and the heads in the church as pastors, elders and deacons. That's why we do what we do here.

Conclusion.

What about Deborah or Priscilla or Junia?

God's extraordinary acts do not change His ordinary rules which He has given to us to follow. Aren't these rare exceptions that prove the rule. And remember Deborah told Barak to lead and he wimped out.

God can make the sun stand still and the rain to cease for three years. God can make a shadow move backwards and a donkey to talk. This doesn't conflict with Him giving us laws and rules to guide our lives. His authority and wisdom are evident in those laws given to us for our benefit and blessing.

The words apostle and deacon can describe offices or they can describe functions (actions). Apostle can mean one who is sent out and deacon is one who serves. Jesus was sent out by God; the apostles were sent out by Jesus; Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church.

What about deacons?

Some churches have an office of deaconess which is perfectly Biblical assuming it is an office of mercy and help and not one of teaching and authority. Some churches include the wives of deacons in a more official capacity. And this can be Biblical for the same reason.

In the CRC denomination the deacons and the elders serve together on the council with equal voice and vote. For this reason, since in the CRC, both offices have some functions that are exercising authority having women deacons would be blurring distinctions and would open the doors to further blurring and watering down of the authority structure God gave in the order of the sexes.

What about women who are pastors or elders, who say they are called by the Holy Spirit?

Scripture says we are to test the spirits and the test of the spirits, the test of everything is the Word of God. A call cannot be a true call if it's contrary to the inspired Word of the Holy Spirit.

We are getting ready to talk about spiritual gifts and exercising those gifts in the church, and this is not an issue of gifting. Many women have gifts in teaching and leading and some are better than some men in those areas. This is an issue of calling, of roles and responsibilities, of obedience to God's created order.

What can women do? Can women lead?

Are women second class citizens because they can't be elders or deacons or pastors?

Are people under 35 second class because they can't be president?

Are the men who haven't served on council second class? Are they less important? Do they have less to offer?

Since when is being on council the pinnacle of being a church member? There are a hundred ways to serve in the church, being on council is only one.

Let's drop the second class citizen thing and let's drop saying council is more important than serving in the nursery or making a meal for someone in need.

Does this teaching belittle women?

Of course not. Submission doesn't imply or mean being less than or inferior.

Which is better a hammer or a tea cup?

Which is better a snow mobile or a sowing machine?

Are men better because they are stronger?

Are women better because they can bear and nurse children?

There are different roles and responsibilities and some of them are sex/gender specific.

Does this mean husbands get to be bosses or tyrants or dictator over their wives? Not if he's smart it doesn't. Husbands love your wives and lead them as Christ loves and leads the church.

Does this mean husbands don't have to ever listen to their wives or do what they say? Not if he's smart. She is your helpmate, your partner, confidant, your extra counsel. Nabal was a fool for not listening to his wife Abigail.

Husbands are wise when they delegate authority or responsibility to their wives in certain areas of family life or where she is particularly gifted. If the kitchen is one of those areas then he should submit to her there.

I Peter 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.

Every time I forget that I get in trouble.

There is obviously so much more that can be said and needs to be said. There are dozens of questions in our minds for which there are good answers. I welcome your questions and hope you give me the opportunity and grace to answer or point you to the answers.