**Man and Woman in Christ Core Seminar**

**Week 4 – Man and Woman in Christ (PB)**

I’d like to start this class this morning by thinking back to something from last Sunday. I don’t mean something that was said or taught in this class. No, something that happened in the main service. After the prayer of confession, as usual, the children were dismissed to go to their classes. I looked at my eight year old leave with her friends and just at that moment, we began singing another set of hymns. That usually doesn’t deter my girls from running to their class, but this time, it did. That’s because we started singing their favorite song. “I will call upon the Lord.” As we started singing, Emma looked at her friend Hazel and said, “oh no I don’t want to leave during this song!”

It’s not just their favorite song. Look at the most popular songs on Capitol Hill Baptist Church’s Spotify page, and there it is. #1. Perhaps the greatest Christian hymn produced in a perhaps otherwise forgettable era for great hymns of the faith, the 1980’s. I will call upon the Lord. Raise your hand if you like that song.

Now, *why?* (Look for answers)

Think about it:

First, of course, because in it our church is passionately singing God’s promises to one another. But that’s not unique for this church. What’s unique is that when we sing “I will call upon the Lord” we first sing in parts (male & female voices), and then we join together - “The Lord liveth and blessed be the rock.”

The composers knew what they were doing.

Men’s voices are generally an octave lower than women’s. A musician can tell you that lower notes are more foundational and higher notes are more decorative. So in the song, men’s voices (low notes) first control the ***direction*** of the music, and then women’s voices (high notes) ***glorify it***. Men start, women finish. Men form, women fill.

Of course, the whole song is not in parts. The song does not end just with simply women’s voices or only men’s voices. The song ends with men and women *together* clapping and singing “Let the God of my salvation be exalted.” The Christian man has a “God of my salvation.” The Christian woman has the same “God of my salvation.” Both want to see him exalted, together. Difference and unity. Complementarity and equality.

Singing in church really is like a preview of our worship in the new creation isn’t it?

In Matthew 22, Jesus got into a conversation about men and women, together in the new creation. If you’ll remember, in Matthew 19 the Pharisees tested Jesus on his views of marriage, especially if his views on divorce were different from Moses’s. In response, he pivoted towards the beginning. Moses gave divorce laws to accommodate a fallen world, but “it was not so in the beginning,” said Jesus. (19:8) **The life of men and women was different *before sin.* So understanding men and women must involve a serious consideration of our fallenness.** That’s how we kicked off last week. Well in Matthew 22, the Sadducees decide to also test Jesus on marriage. Their question is…in a world with remarriage, what marriage is ultimate? With them, instead of pivoting backwards, Jesus pivots forward.

Matthew 22:23-30

[23] The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, [24] saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.’ [25] Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. [26] So too the second and third, down to the seventh. [27] After them all, the woman died. [28] In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.” [29] But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. [30] ***For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.***

So with the Pharisees, Jesus takes us back to the beginning. With the Sadducees, he takes us to the end. With the Pharisees, he wants them to remember a world ***before sin.*** With the Sadducees, he wants them to imagine a world ***beyond sin.*** For our class, what this means is that any consideration of sexual difference according to the Biblical worldview, then, must have a textured understanding of redemption in Christ. Because Jesus says that on the other side of redemption, in the resurrection, the pre-fall sign of marriage will no longer be needed. Somehow, a perfect world in Genesis 1-2 will be better. Somehow, the garden will be turned into a city. And as Christians today we are those who live in the overlap of the ages – we experience both fall and redemption everyday. The story of last week isn’t the only one for us. A whole new dimension of sexual difference comes into view in light of the person and work of Christ our redeemer.

And it’s to that new dimension to the story we’ll turn now.

1. **Sexual Difference and Redemption**

I have attempted multiple times to learn other languages. Emphasis on the word attempt. In any new language course you have to learn progressively more complex words, and a set at a time. So maybe 15-20 new words with new definitions.

Sexual difference is a key vocab set of vocabulary. That’s not just true in nature, it’s also true in redemption. The story from fall to redemption involves themes that require familiarity with the vocabulary of sexual difference.

Two quick examples:

1. **Circumcision**

In his wisdom, God didn’t just tell his people he was committed to them and command them to be faithful in return. In Genesis 17 Abraham was given a sign of this covenant, circumcision. What was required was a ritual where the foreskin of the male's reproductive organ was surgically removed. As if to train his people thousands of year in advance, God was teaching that covenants with him would involve the shedding of blood. This painful but significant ritual was to symbolize that God’s people were committed to obedience, purity, and dedication to him, and that their sin needed to be removed from them. All of this created a physical marker of being part of the covenant community and bond between the Israelites and Yahweh.

In the Bible the image of circumcision is picked up again and again. The outward sign came first and the Israelites were to grow up under that sign and grow up into its reality. They were not just to be circumcised in the flesh, but in the heart. Paul would say in Romans 4:11 that the sign was always meant to point to righteousness by faith. One day they were to start looking beyond the sign to Jesus, who as the Messiah would be cut off for them, enacting a new covenant by the shedding of his blood. Now, that brief overview doesn’t do the topic justice. ***What I hope it does is help you see how the male body, sexually differentiated from the woman, and this accompanying ritual, was always meant to point to greater things. It was always indexed towards redemption in Christ.***

1. **Birth complications**

Let’s consider a feminine alternative. If you want to have a more textured and rich understanding of redemption in Christ, and of the unique dimensions of life in the overlap of the ages, consider the prominence of birth complications and birth pangs in Scripture.

Let’s look again at those curses directed towards the serpent and woman. Gen 3:15-16a

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” 16 To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.

First, notice that the child of the woman is at enmity with the serpent. This is good news, actually. It’s better that after the fall there be a war with Satan as opposed to an all out surrender to him. There’s gonna be enmity. There’s gonna be beef. And notice it’s the *woman’s* seed who will crush the serpent's head. Redemption ain’t happening without women.

Her fertility will be inextricably linked with hope and triumph. And yet in a fallen world, her fertility will be mingled with delay and decay. By infertility, and by pain. These themes are drawn out again and again in the Bible.

Struggle to conceive is a dominant struggle in Genesis. And yet when there is no hope, God will miraculously open the wombs of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel. Later in Scripture it’s Hannah and Elizabeth. In each case, the births of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, and John stand against the seed of the serpent. And then, finally, the most miraculous of births occurs in the virgin birth of Mary. Her lack of seed was not because of infertility but because of her virginity. Her son would not just foreshadow the messiah. He would come and finally crush the head of the serpent in his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return.

Pregnancy and childbirth have incredible significance in scripture. Paul in particular picks up on this reality to help us understand how we all long for redemption. In Romans 8:22, Paul says “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” Creation itself is like a pregnant woman.

And this process is painful. The curse remains. There is *groaning*. And then, there is joy.

Do you see how birth pangs, something that comes with the curse, is transformed as an image of redemption? ***Just as we considered for the man, the female body, sexually differentiated from the man, with different pains and potentialities, was always meant to point to greater things. It was always aimed to help us better understand the new creation.***

And in that sense, childbirth and birth pangs are only symbols. There won’t be child births in the new creation. There won’t be marriage either. And those sisters in Christ who are unmarried or longing for children even knowing the pain can cling to promises like this one in Scripture.

Isaiah 54:1-3:

“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD. 2 “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. 3 For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.”

Isaiah prophesies that in the kingdom to come there is a type of motherhood available to *every woman*. The realm of parenthood will not be a realm closed to barren women or single women any longer. Though you know the pains of the curse, you will know the joys of contributing spiritual children you’ll spend eternity with.

We’ve thought about circumcision and childbirth. This “vocab lesson” reminds us that attentiveness to sexual difference ***isn’t just a nice to have, It’s a must have.*** It’s a must have because it gives us an ability to notice and appreciate things about the gospel we would never be able to comprehend as neutered, sexually undifferentiated creatures. All of it testifies to God’s goodness and wisdom.

But of course we can’t fully understand the new creation as it regards to man and woman unless we learn from Jesus himself. That brings us to point 3.

**III. Men and Women in the Ministry of Jesus**

In his *Reformed Dogmatics,* The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck draws out the beautiful and biblical theme that “grace restores nature.” He writes, “Grace is opposed not to nature, only to sin . . . Grace restores nature and takes it to its highest pinnacle.”[[1]](#footnote-0)

Bavinck understood, rightly, that sin cannot corrupt nature *structurally.* Instead it corrupts nature *directionally*. In his i*nteractions with* men and women, and ultimately in his work of r*edemption for* men and women, Jesus comes not to change nature structurally, but instead to restore it and redirect it.

Specifically, in his ministry, we see Jesus **reaffirming**, **reforming,** and **relativizing** aspects of sexual difference and relationships between men and women. I’ll intentionally camp out mostly on the the second one, in part because we’ve spent a good amount of time so far in this course looking at the created order the first and in classes to come on marriage and singleness we’ll look more into the relativizing aspects.

1. **Reaffirming**

Jesus himself was incarnated as a man. As Genesis 1-3 signaled towards, the incarnation of Jesus as a male is an example of how in the Biblical worldview the male can represent the whole human race in a way in which the female cannot. This is even true in the Old Testament sacrificial system, where priests and leaders had to offer *male* animals as sin offerings. Even the sex was specified. Beyond his incarnation, the clearest way Jesus **reaffirms** the structure of relationships between men and women is by calling all male apostles.

Why were all the apostles men? It was certainly *not* because he lacked female disciples, as we’ll see next in his reforming work. Instead, Jesus was continuing the pattern of male leadership which had been built in before the fall and had been characteristic of the offices of King and priest in the Old Testament. Further, in appointing twelve of them he was linking them to the leadership of the 12 tribes of Israel, a new Israel for a new creation to come. Just as the male voices in the song we reflected on in the beginning are foundational and directional, these men, diverse as they were in background, status, and temperament, would become the foundation for the church.

1. **Reforming**

And yet, when it came to relations between men and women, Jesus saw a need for *drastic* **reform**.

There is no doubt that in the Jewish environment Jesus lived an unbiblical misogyny had emerged, especially during the intertestamental period. Women were regarded as incapable of bearing witness. One particular Rabbi in the second century instructed Jews to recite the following prayer every day: “Praised be God that he did not create me as a Gentile! Praised that he did not create me as a woman! Praised that he did not create me as an ignorant person!”[[2]](#footnote-1)

By and large, women were not instructed in the Torah. Another first century rabbi wrote, “He who teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her dissoluteness…May the words of the Torah be burnt before anyone delivers them up to women.”

Even conversing with women was frowned upon, especially by rabbis. At home, when hosting guests, it had become custom for the wife to not share in the meal at all, and even for her to serve at the table was considered unacceptable.[[3]](#footnote-2)

It’s against this dark backdrop that Jesus’s ministry to women shines. Jesus aroused anger by allowing himself to be touched by a female sinner (Luke 7:37), by disregarding the ceremonial uncleanness of the woman with the discharge of blood (Mk 5:24-34), and by coming to the defense of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:11).[[4]](#footnote-3)

Over meals in the gospels, women are present and Jesus allows himself to be served by them

(Luke 10:38-42). Jesus actually teaches women such as Mary Magdalene and in such a way that causes offense to religious leaders (Jn 4:27, Lk 20:39, Mk 7:24-30).

In his parables, Jesus was happy to make women the hero of the story. Remember the parable of the poor widow? Or how about the woman who finds the lost coin?

Surely one of the shock effects for the first hearers of this parable would be that God, in the story, is represented by a **woman!** Of course Jesus is not teaching that God is a woman any more than he’s saying God is a man. He does indicate, though, that women are equally able to represent God’s character as man is. Like God with his people, a woman who lost her coins will go to great lengths to find them.

To Jesus, women were equally capable of reflecting his character. And apparently, they were equally capable of bearing witness to his ministry. He regularly had women accompanying him, some of whom stayed with him all the way to the cross (Luke 8:1-3, Mk 15:40-41). They were famously the first to bear witness to the empty tomb. Women are regularly named, especially in Luke’s gospel, in order to signal to the reader their importance for firsthand testimony in compiling his account, and perhaps for their ongoing notoriety in the early church.

Rebecca McClaughin beautifully reflects on this aspect of the gospels:

The testimony of women is not just tacked on to the end of Gospels. It’s also woven in…If we worked through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and cut out all the scenes that were *not* witnessed by women, we’d likely only lose a small proportion of the texts. But even if we limited our scope still further and only kept the parts of Jesus’s life that were witnessed by women named Mary, we’d lose very little! Indeed, we could legitimately call the Bible the four accounts of Jesus’s life the Gospels of the Marys, as they’ve preserved for us the testimony of at least five–Jesus’s mother, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph–whose knowledge of Jesus stretched from his conception to his resurrection.[[5]](#footnote-4)

And while there are quite a few women named Mary, don’t think all of the women closest to Jesus were the same. While women in general lacked power, Jesus had female followers of means as well who supported his ministry.

Open up to Luke 8:1-3:

8 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them[a] out of their means.

These women had means. Joanna, the wife of Chuza, would have certainly had access to significant cultural and political power as well. So why doesb Luke choose to name a woman like Joanna here?[[6]](#footnote-5)

Joanna would have stuck in Luke’s first readers’ minds because of her status and connection with the Herod who had imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist. Luke tells us that when Herod hears about Jesus, he wants to meet him, and says, “John I beheaded,” he says, “but who is this about whom I hear such things?” (Luke 9:9). It’s not clear in the text who Herod is talking to. It’s quite likely this account was sourced by Joanna. As Herod’s household manager, Joanna’s husband Chuza would have been in Herod’s inner circle. She would have had access to the court gossip, and her abandonment of court comforts to travel with a controversial rabbi would cause a stir. In light of this position, one can see how Joanna’s decision to become a disciple of Jesus involved real danger. In later chapters in Luke, we learn that while Herod was intrigued by Jesus, he also wanted to kill him (13:31). As a member of Herod’s court, Joanna takes a tremendous risk by leaving everything to follow Jesus, and the unique insights Luke has about Herod’s thinking and behavior may well be thanks to her.

Second, Joanna’s high social status also illustrates that some of the women who traveled with Jesus were not present merely to perform domestic tasks for the men. A woman of Joanna’s status would have almost certainly had servants back home to cook and clean for her. This woman had status, connections, and means. And yet, in Jesus she saw one for whom all that was worth laying down. The Jesus movement was one in which women had real and lasting influence.

Jesus was intending to bring **reform** to the relations between men and women amongst the people of God. Specifically it seems as though Jesus came to ***redirect*** the vision of the men of his day to see women as their equals — equally significant in God’s eyes, equally critical to the advance of the kingdom, equally capable of bearing witness. One implication of this equality in the teaching of Jesus was that for followers of Jesus, easy divorce for men was no longer an option.

In Matthew 19:9, Jesus responds to the Pharisee’s question about divorce by saying “that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

As if you hadn’t already been convinced a reformation was needed, in verse 10 we read the disciples saying “if such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry!” It’s as if they can’t possibly imagine it.

Glen Scrivener has insightfully pointed out that if the sexual revolution of our day is all about women being given every incentive to be as promiscuous as men, this sexual revolution from 2000 years ago, was the opposite. The revolution that Jesus brought was about men becoming as chaste as woman had always been, in part because if they weren’t they’d be divorced and left with nothing.[[7]](#footnote-6) Jesus’s revolution, His reform movement is one we still need today.

1. **Relativizing**

But where the ministry of Jesus most altered the direction of his redeemed humanity was in how Jesus **relativized** sexual difference and the relations between man and woman. Jesus does this in regards to **the family, singleness, and marriage.**

With the family, Jerome Neyrey says that Jesus creates what he deems a “new index of honor.”[[8]](#footnote-7) In Mark 3:31-35, Jesus is told his mother and brothers are seeking him. He said in response,

“Who are my mother and my brothers? ... For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (33, 35)

It was understood then just like it is now that *Family* has a huge claim on us. If mom wants to come and stay — she comes and stays. If your brother calls you and needs something from you, you give it to him. He’s family. Jesus says that he has another family that has an even bigger claim on him — those who do the will of God. Do you see how he is relativizing our relations? He’s not saying natural relations are unimportant, he is saying they exist on a lower plane than those of the spiritual family. Understanding the importance of the spiritual family would be impossible without knowing the basic importance of the physical one. One is a sign, one is substance.

**Jesus relativizes singleness as well.** When the disciples hear Jesus say that men were locked into marriage just like women were, they say, “Well it must just be better not to marry!” Jesus responds Matthew 19:11-12:

[11] “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. [12] For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and ***there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven***. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

In Jesus’s own singleness, and in teaching like this Jesus gives a new dignity to those who have voluntarily remained single *for the sake of the kingdom of heaven*. There is a shift from the epoch of the Old Testament which privileged marriage and procreation to the New Testament’s value for unmarried and barren life. The eunuch for the kingdom understands that, while unmarried, he or she is still *made for another*. That singleness testifies to that reality, and to an era to come when none shall marry or be given in marriage.

Oliver O’Donovan put it this way:

The new testament church conceived of marriage and singleness as alternative vocations, each a worthy form of life, the two together comprising the whole Christian witness…the one declared that God had ***vindicated*** the order of creation, the other pointed ***beyond it to its eschatological transformation.”[[9]](#footnote-8)***

So where does all of this leave us? 3 lessons to leave you with:

**Attentiveness**

The whole story of salvation relies on the vocabulary set of sexual difference. As a result, we need to be more attentive to the outworking of sexual difference in the world and in the Word. If one were telling a conventional history of the events that take place in the Bible, we would likely never mention characters like Joanna. All of the incidents of the women’s infertility and birth complications would likely not receive the amount of attention Scripture gives them. But the biblical story is not a conventional history. We cannot read the story of redemption well unless we are reading the stories of *women* (and the stories of *men*) as integral to the whole story. We need Rachel, Hagar, Elizabeth. We need the five mary’s and Joanna. Luke certainly thought so at least!

**Wisdom**

Too often our field of inquiry when it comes to the Bible and sexual difference can be quite narrow. We come to the text firstly with pressing debates and questions in mind. We relate to the Bible firstly as *a rule book*, which of course it is. But I hope you’ve seen in these first four weeks that our burden has been to expose you to more texts and themes. The Bible presents a worldview, a take on reality that is God breathed, good, expansive, and beautiful. The Bible doesn’t just give us a set of rules, but a set of spectacles. Approaching it this way we hope will make us more understanding of some of the more didactic teachings of Paul. Paul’s teaching did not just emerge from “thin air.” He was steeped in the Biblical story. He had the “spectacles” on we’ve talked some about. And we need those spectacles too. They will help us show off the goodness of our maleness or femaleness even in a world very different than the Bible’s. They will equip us to exercise wisdom as men and women following Jesus, which we will certainly need. Consider Joanna again. I can imagine she needed *great* wisdom in how she could live out her discipleship as a woman of wealth and status. We will too.

**Longing**

Our human families, our marriages, and even our own bodies — are signs. They are pointers to that which we were ultimately made for. Deeper reflection on each of them should grow our longing for our ultimate destiny. Which is not marriage to another person, but a never ending union between Christ and his church. A greater wedding. Not just in a garden but in a garden city.

Let’s pray.

1. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 577. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Tosephta, Ber. 7,18; Talmud, pBer 13b; bMen 43b. Quoted in Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption,* 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood,* 327-329. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Teacher’s note: because of text critical issues in this passage in John 8, you might find it wise to remove this. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Rebecca McLaughlin, *Jesus Through the Eyes of Women: How the First Disciples Help Us* (Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2022), 173-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. The following draws significantly from Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 109-199, esp 189-190. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe: How We All Came to Believe in Freedom, Kindness, Progress, and Equality* (The Good Book Company, 2022), 90-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Jerome Neyrey, *Honor And Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)