

## 9. BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."<sup>29</sup> And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.<sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to*

*everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.<sup>31</sup> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. —Genesis 1:26–31*

## 9.1 What Does “Complementarian” Mean?

One of the thirty-year theological trademarks of Bethlehem is the way we understand God’s purposes for how men and women relate to each other in family and church and society. If you want a name to put a name on this understanding, we would say we are complementarian—based on the word “complement.” In other words, we believe that when it comes to human sexuality, the greatest display of God’s glory, and the greatest joy of human relationships, and the greatest fruitfulness in ministry come about when the deep differences between men and women are embraced and celebrated as complements to each other. They complete and beautify each other.

The intention with the word “complementarian” is to locate our way of life between two kinds of error: on the one side would be the abuses of women under male domination, and on the other side would be the negation of gender differences where they have beautiful significance.

This means that, on the one hand, complementarians acknowledge and lament the history of abuses of women

personally and systemically, and the present evils globally and locally in the exploitation and diminishing of women and girls. And, on the other hand, complementarians lament the feminist and egalitarian impulses that minimize God-given differences between men and women and dismantle the order God has designed for the flourishing of our life together.

So complementarians resist the impulses of a chauvinistic, dominating, and abusive culture, one the one side, and the impulses of a sex-blind, gender-leveling, unisex culture, on the other side. And we take our stand between these two ways of life not because the middle ground is a safe place (it is emphatically not), but because we think this is the good plan of God in the Bible for men and women. “Very good,” as he says in Genesis 1.

In fact, I would say that the attempt by feminism to remedy the male abuse of women by nullifying gender differences, backfires and produces millions of men that women cannot enjoy because of their unmanliness, or cannot endure because of their distorted, brutal manliness. In other words, if we don’t teach boys and girls about the truth and beauty and value of their differences, and how to live them out, those differences do not mature in healthy ways but dysfunctional ways. And a generation of young adults comes into being who simply do not know what it means to be a mature man or a woman; and the cultural price we pay for that is enormous.

The way I would like to approach this is move from

the general to the specific: a word about being human, an illustration about being male and female, and then a specific text to show the biblical roots.

## 9.2 The Wonder of Being Human

Let me start by saying a word about being human. My first Sunday at Bethlehem, July 13, 1980 in the evening I gave a message titled “Life Is Not Trivial.” In it I said,

*Every human being now and then feels a longing that life not dribble away like a leaky faucet. You’ve all tasted the desire that day-to-day life be more than a series of trifles. It can happen when you are reading a poem, when you are kneeling in your closet, when you are standing by the lakeside at sunset. It very often happens at birth and death.*

I quoted Moses from Deuteronomy 32:46, “Lay to heart all the words which I enjoin upon you this day, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For *it is no trifle* for you but it is your life.”

Deep in every God-created human being, bearing the insignia of humanity in the image of God, there is a longing for life, not to be meaningless. Not be trivial, frivolous, inconsequential. I recently read this quote from the crime novelist, Agatha Christie (1896–1976),

*I like living. I have sometimes been wildly, despairingly, acutely miserable, racked with sorrow, but through it all, I still know quite certainly, that just to be alive, is a grand thing.*

I think this is wonderfully true. To be a living human being is a grand thing. Haven't you all had those rare and wonderful moments when you are standing by a window, or door, or anywhere, and suddenly, unbidden, and powerful comes the awakening: *I am alive. I am alive. Not like a tree or rabbit, but like a human being. I am thinking, feeling, longing, regretting, grieving. Alive. Made in the very image of God. And this is a grand thing.*

It is a grand thing. And part of the grandeur of being a living human being created in the image of God is that you are either male or female. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Nobody is a generic human being. There is no such thing. God never intended that there be. God creates male human beings and female human beings. And this is a grand thing.

It is a travesty of these human natures to think God's only design in the differences was for making and nursing babies. The differences are too many and too deep for such a superficial explanation. A woman is a woman to the depths of her humanity. And a man is a man to the depths of his humanity. And this is a grand thing. So my first point is that God has done a grand thing in

making us male and female in his image. Don't diminish this. Delight in it. Glory in being alive as the male or female person you are.

### 9.3 Gender Roles Are Not About Competency

Let me create an illustration to portray some of the differences between manhood and womanhood. A picture may be worth a thousand words—even a word picture.

Suppose among the young adults at the Downtown Campus a young man and woman, say 20-years old, find themselves chatting before the worship service. He likes what he hears and sees, and says, "Are you sitting with anyone?" They sit together. They notice how each other engage with God in worship.

When the service is over, as they are leaving, he says, "Do you have any lunch plans? I'd love to treat you to lunch." At that point she can signal she is not interested, "I do have some plans. But thanks." Or she can signal the opposite: "I do, but let me make a call. I think I can change them. I'd love to go."

Neither has a car, so he suggests they walk to Maria's Café down on Franklin Avenue, about 10 minutes from the church. As they walk he finds out that she has a black belt in martial arts, and that she is one of the best in the state. At 19th Street two men block their way ominously and say, "Pretty girlfriend you've got there. We'd like her purse and your wallet. In fact, she's so pretty we'd like her."

The thought goes through his head: “She can whip these guys.” But instead of stepping behind her, he takes her arm, pulls her back behind him, and says, “If you’re going to touch her, it will be over my dead body.”

When they make their move, he tackles them both and tells her to run. They knock him unconscious, but before they know what hit them, she has put them both on their backs with their teeth knocked out. And a little crowd has gathered. The police and ambulance come and she gets in the ambulance with the young man just regaining his consciousness. And she has one main thought on the way to the hospital: *This is the kind of man I want to marry.*

The main point of that story is to illustrate that the deeper differences of manhood and womanhood are not superior or inferior competences. There are rather deep dispositions or inclinations written on the heart, albeit often very distorted. Notice three crucial things.

First, he took the initiative and asked if he could sit with her and if she would go to lunch and suggested the place and how to get there. She saw clearly what he was doing, and responded freely according to her desires. She joined the dance. This says nothing about who has superior competences in planning. God writes the impulse to lead on a man’s heart, and the wisdom to discern it and enjoy it on a woman’s heart.

Second, he said that he wanted to treat her to lunch. He’s paying. This sends a signal from the young

man: “I think that’s part of my responsibility. In this little drama of life, I initiate, I provide.” She understands and approves. She supports the initiative and graciously accepts the offer to be provided for. She takes the next step in the choreography. And it says nothing about who is wealthier or more capable of earning. It is what God’s man feels he must do.

Third, it is irrelevant to the masculine soul that a woman he is with has greater self-defending competencies. It is his deep, God-given, masculine impulse to protect her. It is not a matter of superior competency. It is a matter of manhood. She saw it. She did not feel belittled by it, but honored, and she loved it.

At the heart of mature manhood is the God-given sense (disposition, inclination) that the primary responsibility (not sole responsibility) lies with him when it comes to leadership-initiative, provision, and protection. And at the heart of mature womanhood is the God-given sense (disposition, inclination) that none of this implies her inferiority, but that it will be a beautiful thing to come alongside such a man and gladly affirm and receive this kind of leadership and provision and protection.

#### **9.4 The Testimony and Application of Ephesians 5:22–33**

For those who disagree with this complementarian view, the likely criticism would be that it is all culturally



determined. “It’s not innate and it’s not from God.” Complementarians, they would say, are just reflecting the home they grew up in and the biases of their childhood.

Now that’s possible. Everyone brings assumptions and preferences to this issue. The question is: “Does God reveal his will about these things in his word?”

Let’s look first at a biblical text dealing with marriage and then one dealing very briefly with the church. In both texts, Christ-like, humble, loving, sacrificial men are to take primary responsibility for leadership, provision and protection. And women are called to come alongside these men, support that leadership, and advance the kingdom of Christ with the full range of her gifts in the paths laid out in Scripture.

First, a text on marriage and the home. Ephesians 5:22–33,

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.<sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.<sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,<sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,<sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she*

*might be holy and without blemish.* <sup>28</sup> *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* <sup>29</sup> *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,* <sup>30</sup> *because we are members of his body. [Then, quoting Genesis 2:24]* <sup>31</sup> *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* <sup>32</sup> *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* <sup>33</sup> *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Here are four observations in this text:

- › Marriage is a dramatization of Christ’s relationship to his church. Verse 32: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”
- › In this drama, the husband takes his cues from Christ and the wife takes her cues from God’s will for the church. Verse 25: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Verse 22: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.”
- › So the primary responsibility for initiative and

leadership in the home is to come from the husband who is taking his cues from Christ, the head. And it is clear that this is not about rights and power, but about responsibility and sacrifice. Verse 25: “As Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.” No abuse. No bossiness. No authoritarianism. No arrogance. Here is a man whose pride has been broken by his own need for a Savior, and he is willing to bear the burden of leadership given to him by his Master, no matter how heavy the load. Godly women see this and are glad.

- › This leadership in the home involves the sense of primary responsibility for nourishing provision and tender protection. Verse 29: “For no one ever hated his own flesh (that is, his wife), but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.” The word, “nourishes” implies nourishing provision. And the word “cherishes” implies tender protection. This is what Christ does for his bride. This is what the godly husband feels the primary responsibility to do for his wife and family.

So a complementarian concludes that biblical headship for the husband is the divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christlike servant-leadership, protection and provision in the home. And biblical submission for the wife is the divine calling to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through

according to her gifts. “A helper suitable for him,” as Genesis 2:18 says.

*We don't have time to develop the arguments for how this applies to the church. So I will just make some summary comments so you can know how we as complementarians see it. In 1 Timothy 2:12 Paul says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man.” In the context we take that to mean: the primary responsibility for governance and teaching in the church should be carried by spiritual men. These are the two functions that distinguish elders from deacons: governing (1 Timothy 5:17) and teaching (1 Timothy 3:2). So the clearest way we apply this passage is to say that the elders of the church should be spiritual men.*

In other words, since the church is the family of God, the realities of headship and submission that we saw in marriage (Ephesians 5:22–33) have their counterparts in the church.

- › “Authority” (in 1 Timothy 2:12) refers to the divine calling of spiritual, gifted men to take primary responsibility as elders for Christlike, servant-leadership and teaching in the church.
- › And “submission” refers to the divine calling of the

rest of the church, both men and women, to honor and affirm the leadership and teaching of the elders and to be equipped by them for the hundreds and hundreds of various ministries available to men and women in the service of Christ.

That last point is very important. For men and women who have a heart to minister—to save souls and heal broken lives and resist evil and meet needs—there are fields of opportunity that are simply endless. God intends for the entire church to be mobilized in ministry, male and female. Nobody is to simply stay at home watching soaps and ballgames while the world burns.

### **9.5 A Specific Challenge to Men**

The biblical picture of manhood and womanhood is a call for men and women to realize it is a grand thing to be a man created in the image of God, and it is an equally grand thing to be a woman created in the image of God. But since the burden of primary responsibility lies on the men—let me challenge them mainly.

Men, do you have a moral vision for your families, a zeal for the house of the Lord, a magnificent commitment to the advancement of the kingdom, an articulate dream for the mission of the church and a tenderhearted tenacity to make it real? You can't lead a godly woman without this. She is a grand being!

There are hundreds of such men in the church today. And more are needed. When the Lord visits his church and creates a mighty army of deeply spiritual, humble, strong, Christlike men committed to the word of God and the mission of the church, the vast army of women will rejoice over the leadership of these men and enter into a joyful partnership. And that will be a grand thing.

## **I. MORE ABOUT BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD**

### **Conflict and Confusion After the Fall**

God created us in his image as male and female. This implies six important things: 1) equality of personhood, 2) equality of dignity, 3) mutual respect, 4) harmony, 5) complementarity, and 6) a unified destiny.

#### 1. Equality of Personhood

Equality of personhood means that a man is not less a person than a woman because he has hair on his chest like a gorilla, and woman is not less a person because she has no hair on her chest like a fish. They are equal in their personhood and their differences don't change that basic truth.

#### 2. Equality of Dignity

Equality of dignity means that they are to be equally honored as humans in the image of God. Peter says (in 1 Peter

2:17), “honor all,” that is, all humans. There is an honor to be paid to persons simply because they are humans. There is even an honor that we owe to the most despicable of criminals just because they are human and not a dog. And that honor belongs to male and female equally.

### 3. Mutual Respect

Mutual respect means that men and women should be equally zealous to respect and honor each other. Respect should never flow just one direction. Created in the image of God, male and female should look at each other with a kind of awe—an awe that is tainted but not destroyed by sin.

### 4. Harmony

Harmony means that there should be peaceful cooperation between men and women. We should find ways to oil the gears of our relationships so that there is teamwork and rapport and mutual helpfulness and joy.

### 5. Complementarity

Complementarity means that the music of our relationships should not be merely the sound of singing in unison. It should be the integrated sound of soprano and bass, alto and tenor. It means that the differences of male and female will be respected and affirmed and valued. It means that male and female will not try to duplicate each other, but will highlight in each other the unique qualities that make for mutual enrichment.

## 6. Unified Destiny

Unified destiny means that male and female, when they come to faith in Christ, are “fellow heirs of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7). We are destined for an equal enjoyment of the revelation of the glory of God in the age to come.

So in creating human beings as male and female in his image, God had something wonderful in mind. He still has it in mind. And in Jesus Christ he means to redeem this vision from the ravages of sin.

### Understanding the Curse

I want you to sense very keenly what the conflict is between men and women and how great the confusion is today about what it means to be a man or a woman.

Let’s look at Genesis 3:16. Adam and Eve have both sinned against God. They have distrusted his goodness and turned away from him to depend on their own wisdom for how to be happy. So they rejected his word and they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God calls them to account and now describes to them what the curse will be on human life because of sin. In Genesis 3:16 God says to the woman, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, and your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

This is a description of the curse. It is a description of misery, not a model for marriage. This is the way it’s



going to be in history where sin has the upper hand. But what is really being said here? What is the nature of this ruined relationship after sin?

The key comes from recognizing the connection between the last words of this verse (3:16b) and the last words of Genesis 4:7. Here God is warning Cain about his resentment and anger against Abel. God tells him that sin is about to get the upper hand in his life. Notice at the end of the verse 7: “Sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it [literally: you shall rule over it].”

The parallel here between 3:16 and 4:7 is amazingly close. The words are virtually the same in Hebrew, but you can see this in the English as well. In 3:16 God says to the woman, “Your desire is for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” In 4:7 God says to Cain, “Sin’s desire is for you, and you shall rule over it.”

Now the reason this is important to see is that it shows us more clearly what is meant by “desire.” When 4:7 says that sin is crouching at the door of Cain’s heart (like a lion, Genesis 49:9) and that its desire is for him, it means that sin wants to overpower him. It wants to defeat him and subdue him and make him the slave of sin.

Now when we go back to 3:16, we should probably see the same meaning in the sinful desire of woman. When it says, “Your desire shall be for your husband,” it means that when sin has the upper hand in woman, she will desire to overpower or subdue or exploit man. And when

sin has the upper hand in man, he will respond in like manner and with his strength subdue her, or rule over her.

So what is really described in the curse of 3:16 is the ugly conflict between the male and female that has marked so much of human history. Maleness as God created it has been depraved and corrupted by sin. Female-ness as God created it has been depraved and corrupted by sin. The essence of sin is self-reliance and self-exaltation. First in rebellion against God, and then in exploitation of each other.

So the essence of corrupted maleness is the self-aggrandizing effort to subdue and control and exploit women for its own private desires. And the essence of corrupted femaleness is the self-aggrandizing effort to subdue and control and exploit men for its own private desires. And the difference is found mainly in the different weaknesses that we can exploit in one another.

As a rule, men have more brute strength than women and so they can rape and abuse and threaten and sit around and snap their finger. It's fashionable to say those sorts of things today. But it's just as true that women are sinners. We are in God's image, male and female; and we are depraved, male and female. Women may not have as much brute strength as men, but she knows ways to subdue him. She can very often run circles around him with her words and where her words fail, she knows the weakness of his lust.

If you have any doubts about the power of sinful

woman to control sinful man, just reflect for a moment on the number one marketing force in the world—the female body. She can sell anything because she knows the universal weakness of man and how to control him with it. The exploitation of women by sinful men is conspicuous because it is often harsh and violent. But a moment’s reflection will show you that the exploitation of men by sinful women is just as pervasive in our society. The difference is that our sinful society sanctions the one perversity and not the other. (There are societies that do just the opposite.)

### Different Movements in a Marvelous Dance

This is not the way God meant it to be before sin, when man and woman were dependent on him for how to live. This is the result of rebellion against God. How, then, did God mean it to be? What was the relationship between Adam and Eve supposed to look like before sin entered the world?

We’ve seen part of the answer: they were created in the image of God according to Genesis 1:27 and so the relationship they have was supposed to be governed by equality of personhood, equality of dignity, mutual respect, harmony, complementarity, and a unified destiny.

But that’s only part of the answer.

It’s like saying to a man and woman ballet dancer: “Remember, you are both equally accomplished dancers; you are equally regarded among your peers; you

must seek harmonious execution; you must complement each other's moves; and don't forget you will share the applause together."

That kind of counsel is very important and will deeply affect the beauty of the performance. But if that's all they know about the dance they're about to perform, they won't be able to do it. *They have to know the movements.* They have to know their different positions. They have to know who will fall and who will catch. Who will run and who will stand. It is of the very essence of dance and drama that the players know the distinct movements they must make.

If they don't know their different assignments on the stage, there will be no drama, no dance.