

Human sexuality

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[0 : 00] Well, we have been looking at some doctrines, some Christian teachings from the book of Genesis. And we are going to look at what it says about male and female.

! The book of Genesis is the book of beginnings, and it lays the foundations for our lives in this world. We have been thinking of God the Creator, His greatness, our security in Him, His provision for us.

The fact that He being Creator and we being created means that we just fit into that place of being thankful and reverent and giving honour and glory to Him.

And what a perverse thing it is to fail to fit into that and not be thankful and not be reverent and not give Him honour and glory. The psalm says, My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

We looked at God and time last week, the richness and meaning of time. We looked a bit at work and rest. And next two Sundays we are going to have a look at sexuality, marriage, gender and that sort of thing.

[1 : 10] And I'll be perfectly honest, I've got virtually all my thoughts from a book which is called True to Form Primer Issue 03, and it's in my bag, wherever that is.

I'm losing things left, right and centre this morning. Now here's my bag and here's the book. And you might like to get a copy of, and here it is, you can find out where to obtain it.

So that's, I'll give my credit to that person. Listen, we live in this current age where there are beliefs and thought patterns on male and female and stuff like that, which are not the same as the ones in the Bible.

And I am not going to try and aggressively pontificate on what the Bible says.

I think what I want to do is tell the story of a more beautiful understanding of male and female than currently is in circulation.

[2 : 29] I would like to engage you in the beauty of what God says is his way. These are the sorts of things that people think about.

And you can, I'm sure there are academic disciplines which define these in a way which make my definitions seem rather amateur and imprecise.

Yes, I'm not pretending that I'm going to be an academic with academic precision about these things. But these are the sort of areas that the thinking is.

So sexism is a thought. Sexism, sexist. Now what do we mean, what is meant by that? Well it can cover quite a variety of things I'm thinking.

I mean the idea that male and female are of different values, which is wrong. But that would be under the heading sexist. The idea that male and female legitimately have different roles and approaches and gifts as male and female.

[3 : 34] Now in the past that might have been just accepted as obvious. But I think you could easily get into the realm of being accused of being sexist if you stated those sorts of things in certain ways.

It's the idea that male and female legitimately have different roles, approaches and gifts as male and female. The belittling or abuse of people on account of their gender.

Is that sexist the right word for that? But an abuse, sort of abuse. The area of sexism. The area of same-sex relations.

Equal marriage rather than, and it's usually put as traditional marriage, but I'm going to say natural marriage. So the realm of thinking here is male and female.

Male-male relationships or female-female relationships have the same, to have, sorry, have, to have romantic and sexual and coital union, which is claimed and accepted as having the same

validity as male-female marriage union.

[4 : 47] In other words, that a same-sex marriage is equal, of equal value and equal validity to a male-female marriage. And you can use the same word for both of those without losing anything.

That idea, we know that that's prevalent. Gender fluidity. The idea that one's, it is said, is not fixed at birth in a binary way.

Binary is nought and one, or one and two, just two possibilities. And the idea that rather than gender being fixed at birth as either male or female, as a given, that there are other valid possibilities which can be chosen by the individual and changed by medical or some other intervention.

It's a little bit like saying, I choose to be a black woman. I can say by looking at me that that's a rather bold claim.

But that I could choose because it is said gender is fluid and choosable and changeable. So here's a quote, I think, from a children's, a book intended to children for sex education.

[6 : 08] Sex is what is between your legs and gender is what is in your mind. Have a think about that. Sex is what's between your legs.

Gender what's in your mind. And what goes with that is the thought that you can separate those completely. And you can, whatever your body is like, you can choose, because gender is in your head, to be identified as something other than what your body says.

And you can change. So there's sort of fluidity. And that sort of thing. So I'm just sketching out the areas that are ongoing at the moment.

And then perhaps we could add making sex either into God or a God. The thought that sex is what fulfills you at your deepest level.

And what would follow from that is that everyone has the right to that in whatever way they feel, they need, or they want. And of course, for Christians, we immediately notice that Jesus was a single, celibate man.

[7 : 23] And he's the finest example of humanity ever. And it sort of shows that actually that's a lie that sex is what fulfills you at your deepest level.

And it's a lie that you have to have whatever sex you feel you need or seek. Because Jesus was a proper, fulfilled man who was celibate.

So anyway, there's the sort of thought areas that Christian thinking comes into, perhaps comes into conflict with, needs to steer through, and so on.

So those are the areas. Now, let's look at what the Bible says. So we're going to look in Genesis, in the bit that was read to us.

And we're not going to do it by going straight for propositional statements. A propositional statement would be, grass is green. If you eat cyanide, you will be poisoned.

[8 : 28] Those are propositional statements. But the way I'd like to approach it this morning is just the feel and the texture and the flow and the beauty of the narrative which God gives.

And the way, if you like, the story tells itself or the way God tells us this story about who we are. So I'm trying in a way, at this point, to capture our imaginations with the vision and beauty and the desirability of what God puts forward to us.

So that's what I'm going to try and do. And we could ask, so as we go through the story, we could ask, does it actually say that male and female are equal in value?

We could ask, does it say that male and female are interchangeable? So it doesn't really matter whether it's the man or the woman. They're just interchangeable. So equal and interchangeable. Why has God made male and female? Why is there such a thing as sex and marriage and gender? Why has God not made male and female and 50% male, 50% female or 30% male, 70%?

[9 : 47] Why hasn't he made a spectrum like that? Why has he even made human beings at all? So that's the sort of questions that we can have in the back of our minds. What I'm not even going to pretend to ask is, if, so here's somebody, maybe you're sitting or listening and thinking, I experience thoughts and feelings that apparently are not appropriate for my biological sex.

What should I think and do? That's sort of a more personal question. I'm not going to try and answer that yet. Or how should I think of my friend, family member, neighbor, workmate who is very much into same-sex, I don't know, I can't remember what GF stood for.

Thank you, gender fluidity. All sorts of letters which I'm confused by. But if you have somebody in your family who's in that realm of things, somebody in your workplace, you'll probably know a lot

more about it than I do.

I'm not answering that question. What civic and political avenues are open to me to register my Christian views and seek to change thinking or guidance or legislation?

I'm not going to answer that either. They're all legitimate questions, but I can only do so much. And we will do our best just to go through the story and pick up on what it says. So, will you please turn in your Bible to Genesis chapter 1.

[11:14] And I have to say, I did like this drawing, which goes back to when we did the Genesis in detail.

These are the days of Genesis. It starts off with the earth being formless and void and darkness over the face of the deep. And then we go days 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

And 1 is separating light from darkness. 2 is separating the waters underneath and the waters above. 3 is separating the land from the sea.

And on which I think that is named as sky and sea. Now, is that named as land?

God does some naming. He doesn't name everything. He calls the darkness night. He calls the light day. In the second three, these spaces that are filled.

[12:18] So, we have the sun. We have the greater light to govern the night and the lesser light to govern. No, what did I say? Did I say that wrong? The night.

He also made the stars. We have the spaces above and beneath filled with fish and birds. And then we have land animals.

And finally, we have humankind to rule. So, that you will remember is the very quick outline of Genesis chapter 1.

So, here's my comments. Interesting that God has different, subtly different, noticeably different methods of working. First few days, he separates and forms places.

This is producing order. And I want to suggest to you, and it's a suggestion. Could we call that ruling? Just hold that thought.

[13:23] The second method of working is to fill and populate in abundance. So, the sky is filled with stars. I can't do that both ways, can I?

The heavens are filled with stars. The skies are filled with birds. The fish are filled with... The seas are filled with fish. And the dry land is filled with plants and animals.

So, the second three is a filling activity, producing fullness. Those are two complementary methods of working that God has.

And as I said, he names, but he doesn't name everything. And he doesn't finish naming everything, as we shall see. So, that's the first...

That's the sort of outline of chapter 1. Are you okay with that? Does that make sense? It just gives us a little background of that part of the story. So, here's a little bit of a summary.

[14:27] God has made a world of impregnable time. So, this is something that came up last time when we looked at this.

That time is something that, as it were, can be impregnated so that it becomes pregnant, so that it produces something. So, there's a fruitful flow of time.

God makes, in chapter 2, a base camp garden. God makes it a world to be named and ruled and filled.

God makes it a world to be named and tamed and ruled and filled. And that we shall see man and woman in their particular labors and relations are to bring order, richness and abundance to the world.

That's where we're going with this. Okay? Now then, let's look at one verse in detail. So, this is chapter 1, verse 26. Verse 26. Now, interestingly, when David read it, there was a couple of words, at least a couple of words, which are not, as I understand it, quite exact to what the original language says.

[15:47] You might notice this as we go through. So, I've written it out in the order in which it is in the original. And when in English there's three words, but in the original there's only one word, I've tied them together with a little, whatever that thing is.

What's that called? Hyphen. That's it. So, let us make, in Hebrew, is one word. And God said, let us make Adam.

So, I'm translating verse 26 in a clunky way. In our image, according to our likeness. Let them rule.

And then you get the list. Over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the livestock, the earth, over all the creatures that move along the ground. And created.

God. Adam. Because Adam and man is the same word. You understand? So, if in Hebrew it said Adam, I will say Adam. And the translators have put man, haven't they?

[16:59] And created God, Adam, in his image. In the image of God. In the image, that's one word. Of God. He created him.

Now then. N-I-V. If you've got an old N-I-V, it says him. Am I right? Please look. So, God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. If you've got a new N-I-V, it says them. Of course, it says him. The original says him. Male and female. So, male and female. He created them. And blessed them, God.

And said to them, God. Be fruitful and multiply. And then you get another list. Fill the earth. Subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea. The birds of the air.

[18:03] Over every living creature that moves on the ground. So, let's ponder. It's quite structured that, isn't it? So, look at the number of times God is mentioned.

God said. God created. Image of God. Blessed them, God. Said to them, God. So, God is right active here, isn't he?

Notice what it says of his activity. Created. Created. Created. And also, make. So, not quite the same word, but all along the same line.

So, it's just hammered home, isn't it? Repetitively. God makes. He creates. He creates. He creates. And what's the next one?

Who or what did he create? Well, this is interesting. Let us make Adam in our image, according to our likeness. And God created Adam in his image.

[19:07] In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. Then. It's quite interesting, isn't it? All in parallel. Adam, Adam, him, them.

And what way was Adam created? In our image, according to our likeness. God created Adam in his image. In the image of God, he created him.

So, another strong statement there. And then look at where we go from here. Oh, sorry. I should have put the male and female. That's sort of right at the heart of this, isn't it?

It's right at the heart of it. And when we go to let them rule. And let them fill. Let them be fruitful and multiply.

So, there's that very important sentence. And you can just see the sort of multicolored intertwining of the things that are being said.

[20:11] Hold that thought. There it is. A little bit too small to read. But here's some things. Adam is both singular and plural.

God created Adam. He created them. He created him. So, that's interesting, isn't it? Adam is an individual, but he's also a plurality of them.

The Apostle Paul is going to pick up on that much later and talk about the solidarity of Adam and that in Adam, we all belong in him.

Anyway, Adam is both singular and plural. And the humanity that is created is all sorts of things. It's a kind, a species.

Now, you could have a species with only one member. So, it could be just, and God created Adam. It was the only Adam he made. There he is, one-off, totally unique.

[21:20] So, that could be a species. We've got an example of that with the priest Melchizedek, who is a one-of-a-kind priest. Do you remember that?

That's picked up on the New Testament. It's a species, but there's only one of him. God could have just made one Adam, an Adam. There it is.

That's the Adam I've made. But humanity is more than that. It's a race. And a race is to do with generations, is to do with reproduction, is to do with multiplication and offspring.

And you see, he talks about being fruitful, multiplying. So, part of what he's made is not just a particular species, but an ongoing race, a multiplying thing.

And, of course, key to that is maleness and femaleness. Because you couldn't have a race if you just had an Adam, a male Adam.

[22:26] You need more than that, don't you? You know that. I don't have to do the biology. And humanity is a multitude filling the earth.

So, the idea of filling and multiplying. But the multitude is not just like sand in a sack, where you would have a multitude of grains, and they all are, and they just fall all over the place, and you empty the sack.

The way the multitude relates specifically is male and female. So, there is a way that members of this multitude interact with one another.

And what we're told in this verse is male and female. He made them in his image, male and female, with the possibility of relating to one another as male and female, and all that that might involve.

And will you notice my two red bits, ruling and being fruitful and multiplying? And I sort of wonder whether they correspond to those first three days, which had the rule of imposing order, and the second three days, which had the role of filling.

[23 : 51] And I wonder, and I'm not going to put it much stronger than a wonder, whether we've got something here of like these two aspects that are already in God's work.

Ruling, filling, multiplying. Hold on to that thought. This verse, in effect, is a commissioning of the human race with a task, a destiny, a purpose to, as God's image, to rule, to be blessed, to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth.

So that's going to take some time, isn't it? But that's the thought of that verse when we come to look at it in slow motion, which is what we've done.

Okay, so that's that part of the story. Let's move on into chapter 2. In chapter 2, the differentiation between male and female is more noticeable.

So let's follow through the story. We had it read to us. And it says, in verse 5, No shrub of the field had appeared on the earth. No plant of the field had yet sprung up. For the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth.

[25 : 20] And there was no Adam to work the ground. But streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. So you notice there it's saying we need an Adam.

There was no Adam. And what would the Adam do? Well, the gap is that he doesn't work the ground. Working meaning to serve. It's the word from which the name Abed comes.

Don't we have any people in CIC called Abed or Ebed? I know somebody called Abed. It means servant. And there was no Adam to work, serve the ground.

You will know if you've heard on this subject before that Adam is the name of the man. And Adama, Adama is where he comes from.

That's the ground. You notice the link between those two words. So, because of this gap, because of this deficiency, verse 7, the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the Adam became a living being.

[26 : 45] So notice quite specific. Adam is formed. Do you have that word in your Bible? Formed. Formed is the word used for a potter.

Quite often used for a potter. He's formed from the dust of the ground, Adama. Adam is formed from the Adama. So notice the way the story develops.

And in verse 8, it says, The Lord God had planted a garden in the east in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. Now, did he make the garden first?

Because it's the had. In Hebrew, it's difficult to know whether it's had planted or planted, because Hebrew tenses don't work the same as European tenses do.

So either before forming the man or after forming the man, God planted the garden where the man is going to go.

[27 : 51] Now, notice please, it is the man. There's a gender specificity to all of this. And around the garden, we're told in verse 10, of all the things that are around the garden, so there's rivers flowing out, and over there is gold, and over there is onyx, and over there is aromatic resin.

And it would be a grand thing if Adam could make his own sandwiches and go off for the day and get the gold and bring it back into the garden.

Or get the resin, bring it back and work out what on earth resin is and what you do with it. Of course, you normally put it on a violin bow, but he hasn't invented the violin yet, so a lot of things for him to think about.

And we're told again in verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it.

So two words are the working and serving and the keeping. It's often used guarding, actually, shamar. It means to guard or to keep, to safeguard, if you like.

[29 : 14] So that's what Adam's there for. And in verse 16, it is to Adam that the Lord God entrusts this instruction.

You are free to eat of any of the tree of the garden, but you must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat of it, you will die. So it's Adam who receives that. And it's at this point, verse 18, that the Lord says it is not good for the man to be alone. And you can sort of see this, can't you, that we've been building up the role that he has, the task and opportunity that's before him, and you suddenly realise, well, he's got to do this all on his own. And it's not good for him to be alone. And the Lord says, I will make a helper suitable for him. It's suitable to match him, and I would say, got to match the task that's before him. And they go through all the animals, and God doesn't name the animals.

[30 : 30] Adam names the animals. Let me just come back. It's not good for him to be alone. He needs a helper suitable. Well, God could make another Adam. He could do a sort of copy and paste, and make another Adam, and maybe make a few more.

Make lots of Adams. But this won't work. This is not what God says is the real help and the real suitability.

Because he doesn't just need another guy to go gardening with. He needs more than that. And the thing that is lacking, when we say it's not good for man to be alone, we think perhaps he's a bit lonely.

You know, he's got nobody to sit and have his meal with in the evening. It isn't just a psychological issue. It isn't just his personal psychological comfort that is at stake.

He's got a world to conquer. He's got a world to fill. How on earth can he do that on his own? So we're talking about not just his own inward life, but his task.

[31 : 49] And when I was choosing songs about this, I found that most of the songs that talk about male and female relating to one another sort of look inward to the couple looking into one another's eyes or maybe their own home.

But this text looks much further than that. It's saying there's a whole world out there and that's what you can't manage on your own.

You need a helper to face this task. Not looking into one another's eyes or even looking around your home, but looking out in this whole wide world. This is what I think the story is saying to us. He has a commission and a role to rule and fill and he needs a helper. And in 19 and 20, Adam continues what God started by naming the animals.

It's interesting that God started naming things, but it's not a complete encyclopedia of names. And now Adam takes over and starts naming things. It's interesting that.

[32 : 57] But the animals are inadequate for the need. But wouldn't an elephant do? I mean, an elephant could help shift a lot of this rocks and make a nice garden. That's not what we're talking about.

And what God does is to take a side of Adam to build the woman.

So build is bana. So you notice it's not form. Adam was formed from ground. Adam was formed from Adama, but the woman is built from the man.

So in a sense, there's a relation between Adam and the ground, but there's a relation between the woman and the man. They're different. They're not interchangeable. They're made in a different way.

We're told that. So let's note things from chapter 2. So I hope I didn't do that too quickly, but we've sort of gone through the story to pick up on the way that that tells itself to us.

[34 : 00] So thinking about chapter 2, it says we have not been created by a cut-and-paste method. Adam, surround him.

Cut, paste. Cut, paste. You know, we're not made like that. Nor are we made along a sexual spectrum, but it's distinctly said we are made male and female because this is exactly the beauty of what God intends for the human race.

And this relates profoundly to our human commission and purpose given to Adam. He's the one who's given the commission.

So there is a significance, as the Apostle Paul says later on in the Bible, to Adam being formed first and Eve being formed second.

There's a significance to that. And the commission and purpose is not given... God doesn't wait until he's got both of them there and say, right, this is your commission and purpose.

[35 : 17] He gives the commission and purpose in this chapter to Adam and then says, you can't do it on your own. You need a helper. Now, this is not saying that all men must be farmers and all women must be mothers.

I think that would be simplistic and reductionistic. The story is more subtle than that. But it is saying something.

And I wonder whether it's relating to, perhaps in a subtle way, to those two modes of God's working, of ruling and ordering and filling.

And might we say that the male center of gravity of his actions and labors and approaches is similar to that ruling, ordering that God did in the first three days and that the female, the woman center of gravity of being and operating is more related to the filling and the abundance and the relationships that are brought into being in that sort of way.

Our broader callings develop from these gendered aptitudes, capacities, perceptions, approaches and bodies.

[37 : 00] The way God has done it is to link together our bodily makeup and our hauling as male and female to rule this earth and to fill it with beauty.

Now, different cultures express that male-female difference which I've called genderedness in different cultural expressions.

Now, they may be done in a oppressive way but it is not necessarily an oppressive thing.

It is not necessarily an external artificial imposition of oppressive power but there is a rightness of expressing the rich beauty of our creator's intention.

Different cultures do it different ways. In Sri Lanka, so if you're invited to a meal in Sri Lanka, the correct and polite method is for the host and hostess to operate in the following way.

[38 : 36] The host will stand while you eat your meal to make sure that you have as much food as you want. The lady of the house will be in the kitchen and she will be preparing as much food as you want and she will not eat until everybody else has eaten.

When I went to one house, the husband actually ate last of all. And we think that's very peculiar. But you, I'm sure there's sort of pluses and minuses but you can see what it's aiming at, isn't it?

It's aiming at providing for your guests in a way that suits the capacities of the husband and the wife whose home it is.

the gender differences in our story in Genesis 2 are not portrayed as a basis for conflict and competition which sadly they can degenerate into.

Differences against each other but they're portrayed made as differences for each other. That the woman can bring to the relationship what the man cannot bring and the man brings to the relationship what the woman cannot bring but together they can do more together than they could individually apart.

[40 : 18] In the context of God saying I want you to rule this world and I want you to fill it. So let's think of a chapter of Genesis chapter 3 and then we'll finish.

So Genesis chapter 3 is where it all goes wrong and it goes wrong at the very crucial points that it was supposed to go right.

So the Adam fails to serve and safeguard the garden because we've got a snake in there that snake shouldn't be in there. He fails to safeguard the garden he allows evil to enter.

the woman fails to help her man but she manages to undermine him by her suggestion that it wouldn't be such a bad idea to eat the fruit which God had said you shouldn't eat.

And Adam does not serve in partnership with his creator which was sort of the genius of this relationship but he chooses to go his own way he'll eat that fruit even though God has said trust me on this you shouldn't.

[41 : 32] And the punishment sort of fits the crime the punishment strikes at Adam's relationship with the ground he came from. So his relationship with the ground even his name tells him that and that relationship becomes problematic and an irritant and a difficulty and there's hardness in that labor it says in Genesis chapter 3 that the ground will produce thorns and thistles for you.

And it strikes at the woman's role in fruitful multiplication because she is the one who fills the earth she has the capacity to fill the earth through childbearing.

And that's the bit that now becomes problematic to her. I'll greatly increase your pains in childbearing with pain you'll give birth to your children.

So we've been through the story and tried just to pick up on the way it's told, the picture it gives us. And I would say there's a beautiful picture of maleness and femaleness as being wonderfully of the essence of what God has called us as human beings to be and to do.

We've been made in his image male and female. This is a profound and beautiful truth. And I would say come back to that.

[43 : 10] probably within 10 minutes of leaving this church building, you will have other thoughts and agendas will assail us.

I don't know whether it's correct to call it progressive orthodoxy. The orthodoxy which people say, well, it's obvious that the Bible, we should think a different way to the Bible. we should try not to get ourselves sucked into that.

We should try and question that. If you're a student, I guess you get this sort of thing said more powerfully and more expertly than I've even hinted at.

But question it. Is it true to what God has really made? When Western society does indulge its folly, now here's the question, does that actually really change what God has made us?

Or do we just mistake how to think about it? And if we mistake how to think about it and act upon it, we actually only harm ourselves.

[44 : 29] And also to say as a conclusion that whether you are young or old, whether you are single or married or widowed or separate from your partner in some way, here is the call, the call of God to be the man or woman that God has made you to be, appreciating the richness of it, the potential, the dignity, the beauty.

And to say that in a fallen world, the only way to live as gendered members of a fallen race is to turn from making sex into our God and to make Jesus Christ totally the center of our lives.

we don't live for sex, for the fulfillment that that offers. We live for Jesus Christ. He is the one who makes us truly human.

He is the one who fulfills our lives. He is the one who makes life worth living. And it's not just in this world but in the world to come. And let me say there are many people around us who have been victims of what I think the Bible would call folly.

And I'm not out to denounce or anything like that. I'm saying these men and women are image bearers of God.

[46 : 12] God. So let's have compassion. We're going to close by singing a song which puts Jesus Christ at the center of our identity, our lives, our hopes, our fulfillment, and everything.