

God's Good Design and the Fall

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[0 : 00] Yes, so the very first book of the Bible we're reading from. And we're starting off in chapter 1 at verse 26. So we're going to read a couple of verses from chapter 1, and then we're going to go into chapter 2.

So chapter 1, verse 26. 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.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him.

Male and female, he created them. 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.

Now we are going to go to chapter 2, verse 15. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

[1 : 51] And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.

For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone.

I will make him a helper fit for him. Now, out of the ground, the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

And whatever the man called them, called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.

But for Adam, there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

[3 : 13] And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, Ah, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Now, the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden.

But God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden. Neither shall you touch it lest you die.

[4 : 36] But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

This is God's word. Well, good morning, everyone. Will you pray with me as we come to God's word?

Father, I pray that you might remove distractions in our minds and around us and I just pray that you would give us humility as we come to your word.

[5 : 54] Lord, give us understanding and the faith to believe what you say is good and precious. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, after this series on men and women, we're going to be into Matthew's gospel for quite a while. And to be honest with you, I'd much rather be preaching through Matthew's gospel.

So why do this series on men and women? I think there's three main reasons. Our cultural times that we're living in, in our society, it's on this topic that I think we're feeling the most pressure to be embarrassed and ashamed of Jesus and the gospel and God's word.

If we don't talk about it, society is going to disciple us in this area. That's the first reason. The second reason we're doing this series is don't you think that relationships and gender and marriages and family, they're a huge part of life, life of walking with God.

There's so much hurt in this area. Some are feeling hopeless in this area. We really need God's peace and his guidance.

[7 : 20] The third reason we're doing this series is as elders we committed, I don't know if you remember this, some of you will be like elders, you're taking forever as usual. We committed to talking about female deacons as a church family and we want this series to kind of get some framework to even begin to have that conversation.

So that's coming later in the year. So they're the three main reasons and I hope you would agree that they're important. To get us into this morning, I've got a quote from a Christian.

I'm not going to tell you who it is, it doesn't really matter. Advocates for patriarchal hierarchicalism, hopefully I got that right, will one day be viewed as derisively as we now view Christian defenders of slavery in the 19th century.

It's a heavy, it's a big, you feel the weight of it, don't you? Advocates for patriarchal hierarchicalism will one day be viewed as derisively as we now view Christian defenders of slavery in the 19th century.

There is a lot of angst, there's a lot of defensiveness in this gender debate, even among Christians. It's as if our identity, our personal worth, our purpose is at stake and you might be thinking, it is, it is at stake.

[9 : 02] I don't think we can experience life outside of our maleness and femaleness, but don't we have such more precious identities, sources of identities than our gender?

Child of God. Is that precious to you? It is to be united to Christ, loved by God in Christ, as Mun opened this morning with.

you're an heir, if you believe in Jesus, you're an heir of the eternal new creation. Can we speak to one another on this topic as if those identities are true?

Can we see each other in the delight that God has in us? There's so much angst in this. I don't think there needs to be. There's important things at stake, don't get me wrong, but let's treasure these things and treasure these truths in one another too.

Well, we're going to go into Genesis. Genesis, in the intensity of the debate, I think it's really helpful. Let's just go to the beginning. Let's touch our toes down to something solid before we go into other passages.

[10 : 28] We also need Genesis to ask a question. Do we see any asymmetrical relationship between men and women in paradise?

Or is male authority in the curse? We've got to answer that. And the third thing I think we're going to see is there is a much, much deeper problem in every human heart.

And we're going to come to that. So, we're going to cover a lot of ground. If you don't have your seatbelts on, now would be a good time. And have your Bible open.

Make sure, make sure what I'm saying is there. So, image of God, chapter 1, verse 27. So, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him.

Male and female, he created them. Even unbelievers admit our Judeo-Christian society ethics is built on this doctrine.

[11 : 35] The inherent worth of every human being, men and women. Only ancient kings were thought to be in the image of the gods. This is radical.

This was transformative back then. It's still radical today. It's, we have the highest value possible. Boys and girls, men and women, highest value possible.

We are created with a capacity to know God. The fact that God creates two genders, I think it strongly suggests that there's something about maleness and femaleness that draws, that reflects

something unique about God.

It's more than just individual though. It's in friendship. It's in family. It's in marriage. It's in church. Together that we image God in our relationships.

But this is profound. Image of God. If we grasp this. Ray Altman says, God seems almost to jeopardize his unique glory by sharing his image and the rule with a mere creature.

[12:54] Someone in our Bible study, they fear that they're saying blasphemy because he shares his glory with us. And then verse 28, and God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion.

Bring all the world under your control. Not, not for your purposes, my purposes, but the soul satisfying purpose to image God's character, ruling the world under him.

His character is meant to fill everything as we rule the world under him. If you see gender roles for women in the home and men at work, I want you to consider this verse.

God says to them, have dominion. It's not just to Adam. Both are given the mandate to subdue and have dominion.

It's inherent in being an image bearer. It's royalty language to rule. There's my first nugget to consider. I want to pause and note my worth and your worth as a person is found right here.

[14:27] And at the cross, of course. I spend so much of my time thinking it's my capabilities, my, my title as pastor, my performance as preacher, my success or failure in, in lots of different things.

I spend, are you like me? I spend so long thinking that adds or subtracts from my worth. But if only we would have peace in this truth, that our worth is here.

And our calling and as a died for image bearer. So here's the first conclusion we can draw from Genesis.

Both men and women have the highest value and purpose possible. Called to represent God's character. Ruling the world under him.

Do we learn anything here about biological sex and gender? Doctors have to deal with your body according to sex.

[15:42] There's differences in our biological sex. Gender is how we express our sex. In the clothing I've chosen today, I think I've consciously tried to be masculine.

Every culture has social expectations. Like men are to cook at the barbecue. Like that's the men's domain. Okay. Like, is there really anything different about a barbecue?

Is it really that dangerous? And psychologically, gender, like we, it's how you think of yourself. So that's gender. Here, here we find a principle.

Same, but different. We see this throughout these chapters. In chapter one, God, when God creates everything, he differentiates.

He separates the waters. He separates the land and ocean. That distinguishing is what makes life flourish. When we blur the distinctions God makes, that doesn't lead to thriving.

[16:58] Now, not just about sex and gender. Every human, every one of us push back on God at so many different points. We just don't believe the places he puts things.

So Rob Smith has done, he's at SMBC. We sing some of his songs. He's, he's written a book on this. He's done a, he's done the research and I'm just going to rely on him.

Uh, in the Hebrew, you've got two, uh, sexed forms, Zachar and Necabah. And the gendered expressions of those two is ish and isha, Adam and Eve.

You hear in Adam and Eve, ish and isha. There's the same. And yet there is difference.

There's a beautiful difference. As we saw last week, Genesis quotes here and reaffirms the truth.

Uh, that the man is male.

[18:00] The woman is female. Now, can I, I feel like I'm totally rushing this point. Okay. But those who wrestle with gender dysphoria, it is a real, real pain.

Uh, Andrew Bunt, he's a Christian who, who struggles with gender dysphoria. And, and he says God's word gives him hope. It gives understanding that the world is broken.

Things are not as they should be. And there's pain everywhere. And gender dysphoria is one of those things. But he also says, look to Jesus. The transformation you're wanting is in him.

The longing you have, God promises to end all pain. That's the day when he's going to put things right, including that internal pain.

So that's his advice. So he, that, here's the second conclusion we can draw from Genesis. Uh, gender, manhood and womanhood is the expression of biological sex, male and female.

[19:18] Okay. Okay. Another big question for us. Is there a, a, a symmetrical picture of man and woman relating in paradise?

Before sin. Uh, many don't think so. Many Christians, many very smart Christians, lots of arguments around a lot of, and by arguments, I'm a neutral term, lots of reasons they give that they don't see, uh, that there is anything in chapter two.

I've got to be brief, but the new Testament. Builds on the fact that there is like we saw last week, Matthew 19, Jesus quotes himself and the apostle Paul and one Corinthians 11, one Timothy two, Ephesians five builds on the fact that there is something in chapter two.

Paul, remember, goes a step further. It is the pattern for our hope. The two shall become one flesh. And he says, I'm saying that's about Jesus and the church. That pattern at creation. Is actually about Jesus and the church.

[20:44] So here's the reasons why we think, why we can find a difference in men and women, even in chapter two. Come along with me. First of all, Adam is formed first.

They're not created at the same time. Now, I don't think I would notice that unless the new Testament didn't say it. And build a lot on that fact.

Adam is given the command not to eat of the fruit of good and evil before Eve is created. Now, I think it's reasonable to infer from that, that Adam was responsible to at least communicate that command to Eve.

Now, arguably, that's, I'm making a comment from silence there. I'll admit that. Adam names Eve. He is so full of joy. When God brings Eve to him, he's at last. He's just filled with joy.

[21:50] All love songs are just an expression of this first love song. He's full of joy, but he does name Eve. God doesn't name her.

She doesn't name herself. Now, Eve was deceived, 1 Timothy 2 says. But I don't think that's blaming Eve as the primary person responsible, because Adam transgressed.

In other words, transgression is the sign on the fence saying, what's it called? Trespassers will be prosecuted.

Thank you. Mental blank. Transgression is going, here's a clear sign and you willfully step over it. Eve was deceived, deceived. Adam willfully transgressed.

Transgressed. In chapter 3, verse 6, we're told Adam was with Eve and he remained silent. I think that's evidence.

[22:54] He abdicated his responsibility. It was Eve who ate first. They both ate, but it was Adam who was held ultimately responsible.

God calls them into judgment. Where are you? Sorry, I'm saying that loud because I'm speaking to myself. Where are you?

In taking the responsibility. The ultimate penalty of sin is death. That curse comes through Adam. Adam. He's ultimately responsible for the fall. Now, this is a bedrock of Christian theology.

Adam, his disobedience brought death to his family. Jesus, the second Adam, his obedience brings eternal life to his family.

[24:02] I think we see difference even in paradise. And it's a good difference that Adam was primarily responsible for his family. But we want to be clear here.

Adam's headship doesn't give license to male domination. In fact, he needs to be the first to confess. He shouldn't have shifted the blame. He should have took the blame.

So the third conclusion, Adam was held ultimately responsible for his family disobeying God.

What about Eve? Do we see anything in chapter two about Eve? Eve is called helper in paradise. Now, I know as soon as we hear that word, we think inferior.

Don't you? It's just, it's like Batman and Robin. Who cares about Robin? Isn't that the sense you get?

[25:07] But the Lord himself is happy to be called Israel's helper and the church's helper. We saw it in Hebrews 13, verse six, the Lord is my helper.

I will not fear. What can man do to me? Now that cannot be a statement of inferiority. We find refuge in the fact that God is helper.

He supplies what we lack. Eve supplies what Adam lacks. That's what it means. It's a good thing. Someone defines it this way. A helper, therefore, is not a sidekick or assistant, but rather someone who channels their power to help someone who lacks that power.

As someone else points out, Eve was created to help Adam fulfill God's mission, not merely Adam's mission.

[26 : 17] It's not that helper is to get on board with Adam's mission. No, it's God's mission. And she supplies what he lacks in fulfilling that.

It's not competitive, but it's in partnership. If the wife is, I'm just going to dive straight into a bit of application here.

If the wife is better at finances, she can manage the money. That is not a threat to your manhood.

Emma gives me sermon feedback, and I'm not threatened by that at all.

Now, even if I'm initially threatened, it's like my exegesis wasn't right, or she gives a clearer outline, or more careful illustrations, I shouldn't be threatened.

She's just supplying what I lack. Great. I think it's way too...

[27 : 33] restrictive, to confine to home and work. Helper, home, man, work. Again, chapter one, called to rule the world together, supplying what he lacks to do that.

So here's our fourth conclusion. Eve was Adam's equal in the only sense that worth can be found. Image of God. And she supplies what Adam lacks in fulfilling God's mission.

In chapter two, verse 18, the only thing the Lord said is not good is for the man to be alone. It's very unlikely that Adam had any internal awareness of being alone.

He was with the Lord. He was fine. He was fine. What's not good is God's design isn't finished yet.

When God walks Eve down the aisle, it's like a proud father. And we get that first poem and love song.

[28 : 50] Oh, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. All these animals were brought before me. They're all beneath me. And the Lord is above me.

But now at last, the companion on my level. He's not threatened. He's not threatened by her. Oh, no, I have to share my rule now.

He's not threatened. This is a beautiful partnership. They're one flesh. My very flesh. We're meant to picture one body.

His counterpart. Someone in my Bible study called it synergy. The combined effect is greater than the parts.

It's this beautiful partnership. Marriage is God's idea. It is a good thing. It's not society. It's not a curse. It is beautiful. It's a bedrock of society.

[29 : 51] And it's a bond even deeper than the flesh and blood of father, parents to children. Because when they become one flesh, a new family.

It is a deep unity. More than sexual. Of course it includes sexual, but it's the fusion of two lives. Two wills.

The covenant, permanent bond. You're authorised in marriage. You're authorised by God to give yourself over to your spouse. It's a partnership.

It's a friendship. To work together for something greater than even your relationship, the glory of God. And they're naked and not ashamed. They had nothing to hide.

I'm still tempted to hide things from Emma. Nothing to hide. They're actually innocent at this point.

So they had no reason to be seen and fear rejection because they're actually innocent.

[30 : 57] And they had no fear that others would mistreat them and not treat them with dignity.

They didn't have fear of that. I don't think any of us have, we only get little tastes of the goodness of that, of not being able to hide.

If you knew everything about me, would you still love me? To be seen totally as you are, warts and all, and embraced and even rejoiced in, it's this one flesh, beautiful partnership.

So marriage is God's good idea. The man is responsible for the family and the woman bringing all her strength to supply what he lacks.

A deep, profound unity of companionship and partnership. The same but different. And that's to be enjoyed.

Okay, I want to go a step further. Can we say anything from Genesis about the essence of manhood and womanhood? Is there something different about our design that goes deeper than the obvious?

[32 : 19] Men are generally physically stronger. Different reproductive systems. Can we say anything more than that? Is there something that goes even to our psyche, our soul?

It wasn't long ago. Our society wasn't afraid to go. That's obvious. Do you remember 1992? Men are from Mars.

Women are from Venus. It wasn't long ago. 30 years. We were saying, yes, there is a difference. That was the highest rank book in the 1990s.

It was two years on the bestseller list. So society has moved very quickly on this one. I think we can only draw speculative conclusions.

I don't think it's illegitimate to ask the question and to draw some speculative conclusions, but we've got to hold on to it really lightly at this point. I think the call on men to bear the responsibility and the call on women to supply companionship, which obviously includes the nurture of children, and I think we can infer from that that our design is probably best suited to fulfil that calling.

[33 : 44] I'm going to lean heavily on Christian psychologists I've found helpful, Dr. Larry Crabb. He says that the fundamental to human nature, men and women, is we all crave connection and significance.

Connection, we need relationships. We need love. We need to be known and belong. We all crave that. But we all crave significance.

Make a difference. Make your mark on the world. Have a good impact. We crave both these things. I think they're helpful concepts. Generally speaking, women more highly perceive and value connection.

Men more highly perceive and value impact, significance. I think of the amount of relationships you women can maintain.

I feel tired thinking about that. Sometimes I catch up with friends and M's like, did you ask about this and this going on in their family?

[35 : 04] I'm like, we just talked about work and soccer. Anyway, you may not resonate with those comments. This is just speculative, okay?

This point is speculative. But could it be, could it be that God has designed us to give the other gender exactly what they crave to receive?

I find that a pretty positive thought. I was listening to a secular podcast on being men and women and lots of useful observations, but the main thing I took away from it was thankfulness.

If we take God at his word, we have so much deeper things to say. We have so much deeper things to say than just relying on social observation and evolutionary theory, image of God and all those things.

Let's be thankful that God has given these things. I want to pause and I want to highlight something I despise. There's other Christians who believe the doctrines, the observations I've just outlined in Genesis, and there's something I despise.

[36 : 43] And it's really hard to put your finger on. And I think it's just this attitude of male superiority. It comes across in different ways, like men speaking over women, or you're in a discussion and the woman's input is just dismissed.

I think it comes across when men make jokes about women objectifying or as if marriage is a burden rather than honouring. I've got to be careful, will you?

I wasn't expecting tears at this point.

There's no room for male superiority in Genesis. In the image of God to rule together, supplying what Adam lacks, deep delight and partnership.

Adam is responsible for the fall. Anyway, there's a side note. Now, I'm guessing at this point you're either cheering me on, yes, go gender roles, or you just want to, if it was culturally more acceptable, you would be shouting at this point with objections.

[38 : 04] Because the inference that it sounds like I'm saying is that if as individuals and as a society we would be fine, we would be fulfilled and content if only we embrace traditional gender roles.

I don't know if that's where your mind is going. But here's where what we looked at last week is so, so important. We're in that overlap of the ages.

The eternal kingdom is coming and is broken into history. The intimacy that we crave is actually found in heaven, in the kingdom of God.

So much, it's going to be so good. Marriage is obsolete. Family, it's God's family that lasts forever. The original design was always pointing forward to the true husband and the true family. Jesus as the husband you can totally rely on and we need.

[39 : 12] God as our father. Otherwise, the call of the gospel makes no sense. Listen to the comforting promise that Jesus gives in Mark, chapter 10.

And hear the overlap of the ages. Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel.

Who will not receive a hundredfold now. Now. And I think he's talking about the church. In this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.

We've got to keep that overlap of the ages. There's a deeper problem that Genesis points to than either embracing gender roles or rejecting them.

There's a deeper problem. Many thoughtful Christians think that male authority is actually found in the curse.

[40 : 40] In chapter 3, verse 16. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband and he shall rule over you. Now, there's two possible ways of interpreting this.

One is positive. He must not allow you to rule. Or one's negative. It's going to be an ungodly domination. Now, I think observation, we all know.

I'm happy to accept the negative. There's a lot of ungodly domination in history still today. The power struggle is the opposite of this one flesh partnership.

So I'm happy to agree with all that. But here's where I want to go. I think Genesis 3 says more than that.

Blaming feminism and finding the solution in affirming gender difference and tradition, it doesn't understand the deeper problem in chapter 3.

[41 : 48] If you blame male authority and find the solution in gender equality, you're failing to understand the deeper problem. Blaming your spouse as the cause of your own discontentment.

Blaming not being married as the cause of that emptiness. Blaming the expectations of the patriarch in your family that you're feeling not valued.

There's just so much blame going on. There's so much finger pointing. We're just following in the footsteps of Adam and Eve who blamed each other.

Why are we blaming each other? And we look for solutions in creation. A man will fulfill me. A wife will fulfill me. Being a great mum will fulfill me.

Being a strong and successful man will fulfill me. Being beautiful and having a career as a woman and having great family, having everything will fulfill me. Do you sense how insecure we all are?

[43 : 02] I'm including myself. The effect of sin is chapter 3 verse 7.

Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. They're ashamed.

They feel worthless. They feel worthless. There is a deep emptiness in every human heart.

And we blame others rather than taking personal responsibility for that emptiness. We look for solutions in everything, even good things like marriage and family.

We look for solutions there instead of looking to God. That pride of thinking, I can feel that emptiness if only this. And if I get it, great.

[44 : 06] If I don't, I blame. It leaves us empty. Apparently, Madonna, in an interview, said she didn't feel like anyone special.

Madonna. And she said that when I receive a new level of fame, I feel special for a moment, but then I need to reach even higher and even higher. It's that emptiness.

Tennis. Or apparently Chris Evatt, a female tennis player, Hall of Fame, said, winning made me feel pretty. Tennis.

Feeling that hole. Unless we're profoundly so sure of your worth, and none of us are, we look to things other than God and his grace to clothe that shame, that sense of worthlessness.

I heard of a woman in her 40s, and she was really beautiful. And she just got in with men who committed crimes, and that just sent her life spiralling.

[45 : 28] So eventually that prompted her to go see a counsellor and go to church. And the counsellor identified her problem. She says that when you see a man, you just think, I've got to have a man loving me or I'm nobody.

You've got to stop doing that. Finish your education. Be financially independent. Be a career woman. Be proud of that.

And the woman said, because she was going to church, so you want me to get rid of a female idolatry and adopt a male idolatry.

That's your solution. So you want me to stop falling apart if a man doesn't love me and fall apart if my career fails me.

Is that the solution? And she said she found Colossians 3 really helpful, and she preached it to herself. Your life is hid with Christ in God.

[46 : 33] When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will appear with him in glory. And she would tell herself, she would see a guy checking her out, and I'll stop myself and tell my heart, I'd love to be married.

You might be a great guy. I don't know. But you're not my life. You are not my life.

To hear the gospel, Jesus alone can hit that emptiness in all of us. We're all profoundly empty at our centre, shifting the blame, looking for solutions where we shouldn't look for them.

Here's the solution at the end of the chapter. Chapter 3, verse 21. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Now it's just a little hint of hope. Sacrifice is what it takes to clothe you, that sense of shame, that you really are precious, that you really are a somebody.

[47 : 56] There's only one thing that can do it, and that's the cross. Unlike the first Adam who shifted the blame, Jesus took your blame.

And in our case, we deserved it, but he took it. To restore you, to clothe you in his name, to make you his bride forever.

However, that, believing that, has the power to know I'm loved. I'm somebody.

Even if my husband rejects me. Even if my father or mother disown me. This has the power to fill that emptiness and clothe us with glory.

In this area of being men and women, there's just so much angst and defensiveness and hurt and blaming. If only we saw the real problem, it's in our heart, and come to God and his grace.

[49 : 14] It's only at the cross, only at the cross, that we are clothed in glory, that you are loved.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, I pray, at whatever point my own words have got in the way of yours, that your spirit would make your word break through that, that you would counsel each of our hearts, that we would find contentment in you and in your son, shedding his blood to make us his own.

So, Lord, I pray that for each one of us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.