

When difficulties come, continue in the Scriptures

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[0 : 00] 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.

And God said, behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

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. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

[1 : 21] And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Then the Lord God said, it is not good. Sorry, fans just blown the page up. Start again. 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 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.

[2 : 31] 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.

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, 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. Well, this is the third of our series of talks on identity, what it means to be human.

So far, we've thought about the fact that we are made to rest, to know God, to live in relationship with God. And we are made to rule, to work.

[3 : 38] If you've missed either of those talks, then do listen to them online. Today, we are made male and female. I guess they're probably the very first words that were spoken either to you or of you.

It's a boy. It's a girl. And the fact that to be human is to be gendered is never far from the headlines, whether it's the issue of the gender pay gap and the issues behind that, or the crass gender stereotyping that millions of people are watching every evening on Love Island.

But what's it mean to be made male and female? And especially in a culture such as ours, which is becoming more and more egalitarian. Not in the sense of seeing everyone as equal, which I presume we would all agree with, but rather in the sense of seeing everyone as being exactly the same.

Because what we're going to see this morning is that while God has indeed made male and female, men and women equal, he has also made them different.

Which means that the sameness agenda of so many in our culture actually takes us down a path of becoming less male and less female than God intends.

[5 : 05] Now you may be here this morning as a believer or as a skeptic or an inquirer. I take it that for all of us these are important issues. And my aim is simply for us to be convinced that we discover and express what it means to be truly male and truly female only in Jesus Christ.

I hope we'll see that the Bible, which so often is written off as being irrelevant in the modern world, not only addresses the issue head on, but actually is far more compelling in terms of what it teaches, far more compelling and makes far more sense of who we are and the way in which we think about ourselves than the voices of contemporary culture.

And I've put an outline on the back of the service sheet. Do please follow that. First of all, male and female in creation or what we might call the creation blueprints for gender.

And it's there on the outline. God created men and women to be equal and different and therefore complementary.

Genesis 1 verses 26 to 27. 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.

[6 : 35] So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. Notice, will you, verse 26, mankind is created in the image of God.

That is then repeated, verse 27, where we see mankind is created, male and female, who are equally made in the image of God. In other words, male and female are equal, equal in status, equal in dignity, equal in their humanity.

They are both made in God's image and both are needed to represent him and to reflect his character, his image in the world. And yet, they are different, male and female.

We see that unpacked in chapter 2 in the account of the woman's creation. Have a look at chapter 2, verse 18. Then the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone.

I'll make him a helper fit for him. Now that phrase, fit for, literally means like opposite.

[7 : 54] Like opposite. She'll be like Adam, as fully human in God's image, but opposite Adam, as his helper. Her helping role is not the same as his leadership role, although it is no less important.

In order to be the leader God wants him to be, Adam needs Eve to help him. In order to be the helper God wants her to be, Eve needs Adam to lead her.

Now, of course, the obvious objection, I guess especially in our culture, is hang on a moment.

Doesn't that mean that women are second class citizens? Not at all.

In the Bible, God is the helper of his people. Someone they need. Someone they come to rely on.

I've put Deuteronomy chapter 3, verse 29 there on the outline. Blessed are you, O Israel. Who is like you? A people saved by the Lord. He is your shield and helper.

[9 : 00] Helper. And, of course, the fact that shield and helper are put together like that shows that to be helper is in no way a kind of weedy role or anything like that.

It is a strong role. So, men and women are equal but different and, therefore, complementary.

Equality doesn't have to be the same. It doesn't have to be sameness. Now, that, of course, is something which our culture finds very hard to grasp. But it's why, I take it, in verse 23, Adam rejoices in Eve's likeness to him, yet he is also thrilled that she is different.

Verse 23, then the man said, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, the sameness. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man, the difference.

Which means, of course, that we are not to lament the differences between men and women. In the musical My Fair Lady, Henry Higgins asks, why can't a woman be more like a man?

[10 : 09] That would be a disaster because men and women are meant to be different. We are designed to complement each other, to go together. Just think for a moment of the England football team as they prepare for their game against Croatia on Wednesday evening.

Do we want all the players to have the same role? I mean, they could do, couldn't we? We could kind of say, well, look, let's make everyone into a goalkeeper. Which, at least it would have the advantage, presumably, of meaning that Croatia couldn't score any goals.

But then again, nor could we. Or, let's make them all into attackers. Which, presumably, at least would have the advantage of us being able to score a lot of goals. But then, presumably, so would

Croatia.

No, each player is an equally valued member of the team, of course. But they have different, and therefore, complementary roles. And for those who are completely fed up with the football, then think of your own illustration, of which, of course, there are millions.

Okay? The creation blueprint shows, then, that men and women are created equal. We should, therefore, applaud some of the aims of the feminist movement.

[11 : 25] Of course, equal rights, equal pay, abolishing glass seedlings, female directors, female prime ministers. All these are just and good because they reflect the equality of men and women in creation.

Just as we need to take issue with those elements of the feminist movement, which give the impression that actually men aren't really needed. But men and women, as well as being created equal, are created different.

I mean, we know this, don't we? We laugh about it. Men are generally more task-orientated. Women, more people-focused. Men tend to compartmentalize their lives, like little ice cubes in individual trays.

Whereas for women, everything is much more interwoven. Men tend to have more acquaintances, fewer friends. While for women, it's often the other way around.

And we have different bodies, which reflect our gender. Such differences are not accidents of evolution. We are different by design.

[12 : 31] And within marriage, men and women have complementary roles. Now, the beautiful thing, the really beautiful thing, about this whole pattern of equal but different and therefore complementary, is that it reflects God himself.

Did you notice chapter 1, verse 26? Then God said, Let us make man in our image. Not let me make, but let us make.

God is one God, but one God in three persons. God the Father, God the Son, Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity, equally God, neither inferior nor superior to the other, yet they are different.

They have different complementary roles. To be created male and female, equal but different, therefore complementary, is to reflect God's image in his world.

Secondly, male and female under curse. In Genesis chapter 3, and we've seen this throughout this series, Adam and Eve reject God's good rule, and instead they decide they'll be the rulers in God's world.

[13 : 53] Notice, will you, verse 11, that Adam is the one God now holds to account. Why? Well, because he is the leader with responsibility. Verse 11, God said, Who told you?

You were naked. Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? Indeed, if you look on to verse 17, the wrong that Adam has now done is not simply notice that he ate the fruit, but he listened to the voice of his wife.

In other words, the whole order of creation has been completely flipped over on its head. She took the lead, and he failed to lead.

He failed to say, No, we mustn't eat that. The Lord God has expressly forbidden it. And then notice in verses 16 and 17, God explains that they will each experience the consequences of their sin in respect to their different primary roles.

So in verse 16, she will feel God's curse in her role as mother and wife. To the woman, God said, I'll surely multiply your pain in childbearing.

[15 : 05] In pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. Correspondingly, verse 17, he will experience God's curse in his role as breadwinner and provider for his wife and family.

To Adam, God said, because you've listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it. Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

But notice as well as that, will you, in verse 16, that what I guess we might call the battle of the sexes, the battle between the sexes, now begins. If you look at the footnote, that phrase, your desire will be for your husband, has the sense of against your husband.

It has exactly the same sense in Genesis chapter 4 as well. As the woman now seeks to control the man. That then is the temptation that wives face to control and to manipulate their husbands.

Just as the temptation that husbands face is either to be harsh and dominate their wives or to be passive and abdicate responsibility.

[16:24] I wonder if you've yet seen the newly released film Oceans 8. It is a sequel to Oceans 11, 12 and 13, all directed by Steven Soderbergh, starring George Clooney, Brad Pitt and their gang of either 11, 12 or 13 criminals as they undertook a series of increasingly unlikely robberies.

Now, Oceans 8 has a similar plot, but the star casts are all women. So Sandra Bullock, Anne Hathaway, Helena Bonham Carter and others.

Now, of course, at one level it's just a bit of fun, it's just a film and so on. But at another level it reclaims loud and clear, doesn't it, that the creation difference between men and women has indeed been overturned.

Now, of course, it's not only in marriage that we see the battle of the sexes. In the workplace, men who lead in a selfish, domineering manner and women who do the same.

Or think of all the teenage boys getting caught up in a gang culture collecting knife wounds as if they're badges of honour. Where are the male role models for them? And as for women, well, Carrie Sandham in this excellent book, Different by Design, says, women may not be as physically strong as men, but they know how to manipulate and control them.

[18:02] What's more, as liberal Western societies seek to become more egalitarian in the sense of seeing everyone the same, not just equal, but the same, the result is increasingly an unhealthy homogenisation that not only masks the differences between men and women, but actually seeks to do away with the differences altogether and to eradicate those differences.

So women, for example, are encouraged to ignore the unique role that they have as child bearers, to rebel against God's good design, and to embrace a full and satisfying career instead.

Carrie Sandham, again, the desire to be treated the same as men, to enjoy all the benefits of a long and successful career, means that motherhood and family life are devalued and undermined.

So can we see what has happened to the creation blueprint under the curse? Well, I put it there on the outline. What has happened to equality?

Well, it's become the battle for supremacy. What has happened to diversity? It's become uniformity, and therefore complementarity has been replaced by conflict.

[19:25] And I think for those of us who perhaps are sceptical of Genesis chapter 3, indeed of the whole Genesis account of creation, just ask yourself, does Genesis chapter 3 describe the world we live in?

Does it describe the nature of relationships of the world in which we live? And of course the answer is yes. Third, male and female in Christ.

Now I said at the start that the aim of this talk is for us to be convinced that we discover and express what it truly means to be female and what it truly means to be male only in Jesus Christ.

Let me say that again. We discover and express what it truly means to be male, what it truly means to be female only in Jesus Christ. Now I'm conscious that may raise a few eyebrows.

and yet in contrast to the gender confusion and conflict we see all around us, actually the teaching of Jesus Christ is wonderfully refreshing and liberating.

[20:33] We see it reflected in the way in which Jesus related to both men and women. He encouraged both men and women to learn from him.

He received the support of women along with that of men. He healed both men and women. He used both men and women as illustrations and characters in his parables and teaching.

All completely counter-cultural, completely counter-cultural in the first century world which generally regarded women as second-class citizens. And yet at the same time he appointed only men as apostles and followed the pattern of male leadership from the Old Testament.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul spoke of the equality of men and women in Christ. I put Galatians 3, verse 28 on the outline where he says there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Men and women equal in salvation. just as they are equal in marriage. The Apostle Paul teaches that men and women are equal, equal even in the bedroom.

[21:56] 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 3 to 4 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights. Likewise, the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body but the husband does.

Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his body. But the wife does. Equal sexual rights in the bedroom.

I wonder 2,000 years later how many of our so-called progressive liberal elite have caught up with the Apostle Paul when it comes to sexual ethics. And yet, men and women are different.

So in marriage, for example, the Apostle Paul paints a beautiful picture of the ideal of a husband's loving sacrificial leadership and of the wife's respectful submission.

As husband and wife fulfill God's original creation design as they live out their respective roles as both leader and helper and all for the glory of God.

[23 : 03] Ephesians 5 verses 23 to 24 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

And that same pattern, equal but different, which we see in a marriage relationship, also then in the New Testament applies in the church. Men and women are equal partners in the work of the gospel, equally valued as members of the local church.

And yet it's inappropriate for a woman to teach a man such that she exercises authority over him by preaching, for example, or by being a bishop.

It's not her role. And I'll put some verses on the outline which you can look up later. Grasp this, though, this doesn't limit the ministry that women have.

Can I say that again? This doesn't limit the ministry that women have. In fact, it's quite the opposite because it is as a woman understands who she is in Christ and the unique role that she has as a woman that she is then liberated to be the woman that God wants her to be.

[24 : 29] and to do the work that he has given her to do for the unique work that she can do because she is a woman. While overall church leadership, the responsibility of being an elder is for godly qualified men.

now the point is this, that in the whole area of leadership and submission, I hope we begin to see that Jesus Christ is the model, the great role model.

You see, men, just think for a moment, who are the kind of role models you might look up to, to see what does it mean to be truly male? perhaps Harry Kane, the England captain, perhaps someone like Barack Obama, former US president, or Elon Musk, the entrepreneur.

But actually when it comes to real leadership, Jesus is the role model you and I need. Jesus shows what godly, sacrificial, costly, servant leadership looks like.

Jesus who came not to be served but to serve, to give his life, as we remind in the beginning of the service this morning, to give his life so that those who trust in him might be forgiven.

[25 : 54] Women, likewise, who do you look to as your role models for what it means to be truly female? Well, perhaps the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, or the Radio 4 presenter, Martha Carney, or the athlete, Serena Williams.

But again, you see, the great role model of what it means to be truly female is Jesus Christ. Not because he's kind of effeminate or anything silly like that, but in his willing submission to his heavenly father.

Jesus shows it to be equal in status with men, in marriage and the church, and yet to have different roles. Far from being demeaning, is in fact honorable.

Jesus himself, fully God, equal with God, and yet different, a different role, such that he is the son who submits to God the father.

I guess there are loads of examples of that. I guess the most obvious example is when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his arrest and crucifixion. We're told he fell on his face and prayed saying, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

[27 : 11] Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. Jesus Christ is the great role model for all of us, which therefore, of course, means that it's as we put our trust in Jesus that we discover what it means to be truly male, what it means to be truly female.

For the men in our gender confused culture to be unashamed to be truly male, looking to Jesus Christ to see what it looks like to exercise godly, loving leadership, to do that within the family, within the church, within society as a whole.

just as women find their true identity in the Lord Jesus Christ, not trying to be like men, not trying to catch up with men, but by being truly female, looking to him to see what it looks like to exercise godly submission within marriage and within the church.

I hope we can see that God's plan for men and women is consistent throughout the Bible. I hope we can see it is good. We've had that refrain, haven't we, throughout Genesis, everything that God does is good.

God's plan for men and women is consistent, it is good, equal, different, it is complementary, it's good, it's beautiful, which means that we have the most wonderful privilege of being able to reflect God's image in the world in this way, as male, as female.

[29 : 00] And of course it means that as we put our trust in Jesus, we become more human and not less human as we reflect what it truly means to be male and female.

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