

In the Beginning

Message 4

The Beginning of Man II: Male and Female

Genesis 2:4-25; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-16, 23-24

The Pleasure and Pain of Love

Have you ever fallen in love? Have you ever been swept off your feet by a dashing guy or an enchanting girl? Did you ever say, “Wow! What a woman!” How does that work? What causes that irresistible attraction between a man and a woman? Over twenty years ago I fell for Ruth. I wasn’t looking for a girlfriend, but when I met her, I felt as though I couldn’t let her go. I’ll just stop there, lest I embarrass her or myself too much. But although my attraction was undeniably real, I was disturbed that I couldn’t understand it. Since ninth grade I had been studying molecular biology, and it drove me nuts trying to figure the chemical basis of love. You know, even the scripture admits that love is a mystery. Proverbs says, “There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Yes, four which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the air, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the midst of the sea, And the way of a man with a virgin.” (Proverbs 30:18-19) How does a man capture a young girl’s heart? It’s a mystery. But it’s a mystery that ushers us into indescribably joy.

Nothing gives as much pleasure to men and women as love. And nothing gives so much pain. Your pastor has the joy of preparing a delightful couple for marriage and helping them get ready for their wedding day. Weddings are perhaps the happiest occasions we experience, and the wedding is followed by the thrill of the honeymoon. But this same couple may show up in the same pastors’s study years later ready to split up. The love that joined them has shattered into coldness or outright hostility. Nothing is as heartbreaking as a ruined marriage. The pain is so acute that some people have called for the elimination of marriage altogether. The Playboy mentality is to enjoy sex without getting emotionally entangled in another person. But you know, it can’t be done. We aren’t modular beings. We can’t separate our bodies from our souls. And sex without love, while it may give a quick thrill, ultimately leaves a void in our souls. Others go further and advocate going it alone through life. Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique* wrote, “A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.” But she has few followers. Marriage and sex are risky propositions, but life alone is unbearable. So every day men and women seek fulfillment in each other, and every night they weep over the unfulfilled ache in their hearts.

Why? What happens to so many marriages that they end in disaster? Why are the radio waves filled with songs of love and heartbreak? Can’t anything be done to preserve the happiness? We are surrounded by books and advice columns which claim to provide answers, but they fail miserably – as the unrelenting divorce rate proves. Americans can put a man on the moon, perform medical miracles, feed the world, and overthrow terrorists – but we are miserable failures at home. Obviously our understanding of man and woman, and how they relate to each other, is terribly deficient. Face it folks, we don’t need a little help. We need to go back to the beginning and find out where we went wrong. In understanding the way the sexes work we are at a kindergarten level. Fortunately, God has given us the foundational understanding we need to experience enduring love and to build enduring marriages in Genesis chapter 2.

Problem in Paradise

To recap Genesis so far, God created a universe and declared that all His work was good. The last thing God created was man – a creature much different from all the rest of creation because God said He would be the divine image. Man towered over the rest of the earth and ruled over it in god-like fashion. The whole earth was man’s to use – but not to abuse. Man was god-like, but not God. His authority to rule the earth was a real authority, but it was subordinate to God’s authority. Man had a wonderful future in God’s earth, surrounded by all the good things God made. The light, water, minerals, plants, and animals made a

rich and fascinating place for man to live. But although the earth was created good, it wasn't finished. It was like a new house – beautiful but not comfortable until it is filled with furniture, books, food – and people! Man's job was to finish the earth by cultivating it and filling it with people. As an object lesson in how to do this, God made a garden for man. The Hebrew word "Eden" means "paradise", and this was a lush, lavish pleasure garden – a sensuous delight that intoxicated all the senses. It was no doubt filled with insanely delicious fruits and stunningly beautiful flowers. Every desire of body and soul was overwhelmingly satisfied – but one.

Before we move on we must notice that there were two aspects to man's work. Adam's work was described in chapter 1 as ruling the earth. Now in chapter 2 when Adam was placed in the garden He was given the job of cultivating and guarding it. It's a little hard to imagine exactly what was involved in cultivating a garden in a world without sin. In chapter 3 we learn that thorns are a result of sin, so perhaps weeding was not necessary. But I expect that the trees and vines would need to be pruned, the bulbs separated and replanted, the earth loosened, and so forth. Plants don't flourish when they are crowded, so Adam would have needed to keep them in rows and beds. And as we saw last week, His work included extending the garden to include ultimately the whole earth. Even without weeds, Adam had a lot to do!

Adam's second job was to guard the garden. Does this strike you as strange? If the earth was all good, what was there to guard against? We discover in the next chapter. True, the *earth* was good, but there was an evil which would attempt to invade and corrupt the earth. There was an extraterrestrial being who posed a real threat to the whole earth. Adam, as the man in charge, was required to guard the earth against this invader.

From this we learn that man is in essence a farmer and a warrior. These are the two fundamental, irreducible roles that man plays on earth. Some of us may literally till the land and others of us may fight with guns to ensure the safety of the rest of us. But in a sense we all contribute to these basic tasks. Engineers design machines which enable us to care for the earth, chemists gain information to extend our dominion, computer scientists construct tools we all use, and teachers instruct the young to be productive in whatever they do. The fundamental task of mankind is to cultivate the earth and guard it against evil.

Did you notice, by the way, that this work given to Adam was part of the goodness of the creation? Since man sinned, we have had a sinful attitude toward work. We hate work. We live for the weekend and for retirement. We endure the misery of work now in the hope of salvation from work later. But this is not reality. Reality is that work is good. Work is a blessing, it's pleasurable. Man cannot be fulfilled and satisfied unless he works. Why is work necessary for man's fulfillment? Because God is a worker, and man is made in His image. God worked six days to build the creation, and then rested one day as a pattern for man. You see, if we don't work, we will be miserable, because we won't be doing what we were made for. A rug is a good thing at your door to clean off your shoes. But if you use your shirt to clean off your shoes, the shirt will soon tear and look awful. It wasn't made for wiping shoes. You aren't made to lounge in leisure. You are made for work, and you will be miserable if you don't work. Now it's true that since sin has entered the world, work is corrupted and is often unpleasant. This is a result of sin, and I don't deny that work can be unpleasant or down right horrible. But that doesn't negate the principle that man is made in God's image to work.

Adam's home was incomprehensibly wonderful. He had everything he needed for a satisfying life – but one. From the beginning of creation God had periodically stopped to declare His work good. But in verse 18 God broke the pattern. Now God declared that there was one thing which was "not good". Adam was alone. Now, why is it "not good" for man to be alone? Nothing in the creation narrative so far has indicated anything wrong with the state of affairs, right? Wrong! We might have noticed ourselves that man should not live alone. For one thing, a man by himself cannot subdue and fill the earth. He needs a woman

to produce offspring. So sure, with the necessity of children in view, man alone is a very “not good” condition. But also, if we remember that man was created in God’s image, we should have known that he needed others like him. God is a social being. From all eternity God has been unalone. He has existed eternally in fellowship among the Father, Son, and Spirit. So if God is multi-personal, surely man His image must be multi-personal, too. The image of God is not merely an individual, but a whole race of personalities.

A Mate for Man

So God set out to provide a companion for man. He brought the animals all before Adam to observe, and Adam discovered that while they all had amazing qualities, none was a suitable companion for him. Why not? What was missing in the animals? Clearly the essential difference between Adam and the animals was the image of God. As we said last week, although man is biologically an animal, he actually resembles God much more than he resembles animals. Put yourself in Adam’s shoes. Perhaps at times you have been angry at the world and found solace in the companionship of your dog or other pet. But really, if you never, ever saw another human being, would you really be satisfied with a pet? A pet can’t talk, and reason, and feel as humans feel, and hope, and love, and long... Human beings are social creatures. We can’t exist in isolation. Humanity is a race of people who need and depend upon each other. Adam was very definitely in need of another person who corresponded to him.

The meaning of this passage hinges upon a clear understanding of the Hebrew word **כַּנְגְדוֹ**. Found in verses 18 and 20. The best literal translation of this word is “corresponding to”. Some translations use “comparable to” or “suitable”, which are close enough. Adam’s encounter with the animals reveals that a helper “corresponding to” himself would need to be like him. Essentially, that helper would need to be a human being, one made in the image of God. The truth we gain from this is that man and woman are more like each other than anything else in creation. In his commentary on Genesis, James Boice illustrates this with the children’s riddle about the moon. “What is most like half of the moon,” the child asks, expecting people to say a grapefruit half, or half a baseball, or half a cheeseball. But the answer, of course, is that what is most like half the moon is the other half of the moon! So with the human race. The thing in creation which is most like a man is a woman.

But although **כַּנְגְדוֹ** indicates close similarity, this word does not mean equality. Man and woman are not identical. They are different. And this difference is more than skin deep. The feminist movement would have us think that women are just like men, only with different bumps on their bodies. Rubbish! We said earlier, human beings are not modular. We are whole entities. We can talk about different aspects of people – body, mind, spirit – but these cannot be separated. So when Genesis says God made man male and female, it means the whole person – all the way through. This means that while both men and women engage in rational thought, they don’t do it the same way. Men and women alike have feelings, but they operate differently. Even spiritually, we interact with God differently. Like the moon, one half is very much like the other, but not identical. So woman is very much like man, but not identical.

Now the notion that men and women are fundamentally different is enough to send some people into spasmodic fits. For example, consider our military. In spite of the fact that women are physically and emotionally less capable than men to wage war, we insist they can be soldiers as well as men. Soldiers on the field know this isn’t true, but our society refuses to accept reality. Issues such as this are cast in terms of equality and fairness, principles which are at the core of American life. The problem is that we confuse three critical ideas: value, abilities, and roles. The principle of equality is true in relation to our value. Men and women are equally valuable. Both are made equally in God’s image, and both are equally redeemed by Christ. This is the thrust of Galatians 3:28, “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.” Many Christians, even pastors and theologians, have totally misused this verse by making it say that there is no difference between the sexes.

Nonsense! This verse means that Christ died equally for men and women. Neither men nor women are in greater need of salvation than the other, nor is either any more likely to respond to Christ. We all stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. All people – men, women, children, slave, free, black, white are equally valuable in God's sight.

But it's obvious that we aren't all equal in abilities. Some are smart enough to enter Lehigh University, but others aren't. Some are skilled enough to play football for the NFL, but the rest of us aren't. Some are able to play the violin, but not the rest of us. It's a trivial truth that we are not equal in abilities. But when we apply this simple principle to sex differences, we are hit with a hurricane of hostility. No, men make the best soldiers, but women make the best mothers. Our abilities are different, but our value is equal.

Then there are different roles. Some of us are teachers, or scientists, or lawmakers, or pastors – or husbands or wives. God has created the universe with a social structure and we each have our place in it. This also is a truth which is strenuously opposed, but it is inescapable – for God is a hierarchical being. The trinity is an example of what we are saying here. The Father, Son, and Spirit are all equal in divinity, majesty, and power. But the Son is inferior to the Father in role and the Spirit is inferior to both. That doesn't make Him any less God, or any less powerful or wise or glorious. But there is no escaping the hierarchical nature of the trinity. So God's image on earth also takes up various roles. And in man also, role distinctions ought not to imply a difference in value. I have the privilege of speaking here tonight, but that does not in any way make me more valuable than you. You will leave Lehigh with a valuable degree and take a corresponding job, but that doesn't make you more valuable than manual laborers.

We expect people to have the abilities to perform the roles they have been assigned, but in some cases it may be necessary for someone to perform a role even if his abilities are less than another's. There may be someone here tonight who understands this passage better than I, or who speaks better than I – but I am the one appointed to speak to you. There may be someone more capable of leading our nation than President Bush, but for now, he must fill that role. You may have better ideas about how your church should operate, but if you do not have the position of elder, you must submit to those who do. Ability is an important part of role assignment, but it is by no means the only consideration.

This has profound implications for society. If we refuse to accept the president's authority, our country will be plunged into anarchy. This is the problem in places like Afghanistan. Roles are determined by such factors as elections, appointment, or even birth. I'm sure that your home was less than blissful if you refused to accept your parents' authority. You play a subordinate role because you were born to your parents. And when we come to marriage, the man plays a leading role and the woman follows. Woman was created as a helper for man, not the other way around. That means that the man takes charge and leads the way, and his wife helps him. Now I know that many people despise this idea. It is so demeaning, so subservient, so humiliating. But it's not true. Submission is not demeaning, or Christ would be less than God. And if Christ can submit to the Father without losing His divine glory, a woman can submit to her husband without losing her dignity. Woman's submission to man in marriage has nothing to do with value and little to do with ability. She remains equal to man in dignity. She may have greater ability than he in some ways. In his commentary on Genesis, Boice had this to say about woman's ability: "In her pristine glory Eve would have made Wonder Woman or the Bionic Woman look sick." (p. 132) But she was created to help man, and the whole earth will suffer if she refuses.

Now lest we begin to think that this makes the woman a mere slave, let's remember who it was that she was made to help. Adam was installed as king of the world, so this means that Eve was his queen! She wasn't his servant. She was his chief counselor, the manager of his household, and the bearer of princes and princesses. Any dignity that Adam had was Eve's also. And since Adam was a cultivator and guardian, Eve was also a cultivator and guardian, although in feminine ways.

The Divine Husband

We have already noted that Jesus, in His submission to the Father, is the perfect model of woman's submission to her husband. But at the end of the gospels Jesus steps forward as the perfect man. Just as Adam began life in the garden, Jesus began His resurrected life in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just as Adam met his wife there, Jesus met Mary Magdalene in the garden. (John 20:11-18) Recent books and movies have perversely portrayed Mary as Jesus' sexual partner, which is groundless. But she undoubtedly symbolizes the church, which the New Testament calls the bride of Christ. Jesus emerges from the ground a new Adam, head of a new human race with a new bride. Jesus is the King of creation, and is making the whole earth a garden. Helping Him is His bride, the church, the Queen of creation. All those who believe in Him are reborn into this new race of human beings and are working with Him to extend His dominion all over the world. And that is why God brought you here to Lehigh – to prepare you for an important role in ruling the earth. By God's grace, may we bear much fruit in the world.

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Psalm 139

- 1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me. *
- 2 *You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.*
- 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, *
- And are acquainted with all my ways.*
- 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, *
- But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.*
- 5 You have hedged me behind and before, *
- And laid Your hand upon me.*
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
- It is high, I cannot attain it.*
- 13 For You formed my inward parts; *
- You covered me in my mother's womb.*
- 14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; *
- Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.*
- 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *
- And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.*
- 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. *
- And in Your book they all were written,*
- The days fashioned for me, **
- When as yet there were none of them.*
- 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; *
- Try me, and know my anxieties;*
- 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, *
- And lead me in the way everlasting.*