

Husbands and Wives  
Genesis 1-3

Turn to Genesis 1-3. There are many places in the Bible where many pages in a row give no teaching on women and men, on what it means to be a male human or a female human, or how these should treat each other.

But the first pages of the Bible are not like that. The opening pages of the Bible show us much about being male or female.

In fact the whole book of Genesis is full of all kinds of family stories: wives and husbands, and parents and children, and brothers and sisters. Genesis actually focuses on this. This tells us that it's a huge part of being human, and it's important to God.

Today we'll look at what seem to me the most important Scriptures in Gen 1-3 on being a human male or a female. God wants girls and boys and men and women to understand who they are in his eyes, since we're not just "people," we're either male or female.

God wants us to see how this looks to him, so we'll understand ourselves and so we'll treat each other well.

Gen 1:26-27: the image of God

*26 Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

*27 So God created human beings in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

*Three times in those two verses we read the word "image." People are the image of God, and male and female are right at the core of what it means to be in God's image.*

There are quite a few ideas floating around on what it means to be in God's image, and I'll not cover that. The starting point, though, should be the way images and gods are used elsewhere in the OT. People had images of their gods.

Ancient peoples made an image of their god out of wood or stone or metal. In Numbers 33:52, Moses says, "destroy all their carved images and cast idols.

2 Kgs 11:18 reports that all the people of Israel went to the temple of Baal and destroyed it and its altars and its images (NIV "idols," but Hebrew word is "image," tselem). [See Ezek 7:20; 16:7.]

So God made an image of himself, a representation of himself, the way an idol represents a God, and humans are the image. And, male and female is at the core of this.

I'll not say more about image except to state the obvious, that females and males are the image in an equal way. One is not more image than the other, nor one less than the other.

27 So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

### Genesis 2:18-20 - suitable helper

*18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." 19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.*

When we read "it is not good for the man to be alone," we tend to assume that the man was lonely, and needed a companion. That is probably not what is going on here.

The man has tasks. He's to fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule the creatures. He's to fill the earth and turn in all into garden. He needs a helper. It does not say he needs company, or that he needs a companion. He needs a helper.

The Hebrew word for "helper" here does not mean a servant, or someone under the man. This same word is used of God himself. Psalm 10:14 says you are the helper of the fatherless.

Psalm 30:10: O LORD, be my helper. Ps 54:4: Sure God is my helper. These and others all use the same Hebrew word, *ezer*, as helper in Genesis 2.

So the picture of the first couple here is a team. They are partners who have things to do. The woman is not made to take care of the man, or the man to take care of the woman. They are made as a team, to fill the earth and take care of the earth.

These observations: one, that both genders are the image and likeness of God; and two, that a husband and wife are partners, a team, is I think the basic foundational teaching on gender and marriage. Let's apply this a little bit.

Spouse Selection: marriage has lots of benefits for the couple, but the purpose of marriage is not for the two people to try to satisfy each other and made each other happy. It is to make a team that will take its part in filling the earth and turning it all into garden.

And from this I would like to talk to the young people on spouse selection: how will you think when you decide to marry, and when you decided who you would marry?

Do not marry for romantic love, because it will not last; and to not marry for sex. It lasts, but it is not enough. (repeat)

God invented romantic love, and he invented sexual intimacy. He things both are great ideas. But he did not intend that either one, or even both together, would hold a wife and husband together.

The feeling of romantic love fades. It doesn't take long for that to begin. Once that feeling begins to fade, and only then, the real stuff shows through: can you be courteous and kind and considerate to someone without that feeling?

Can you be devoted to that person, and act for their good, without romantic love? At that point either long lasting love takes over, real love, or the relationship crumbles.

If real love will take over when romantic love fades, then attraction for each other will show up with some regularity again.

Assuming sexual intimacy lasts but it is not enough to hold a couple together (because it is not), and assuming romantic love will fade, the question to ask is: could I live as a partner with that person?

For many days of your life together, you'll get no help from either. Think about those days. So don't ask "Am I in love? Do I love them?" No, ask, could I share the rest of my life with that person? Can that person do this with me?

*Romantic love and attraction will pull you toward a particular person: ask these questions.*

Feminism: let's talk about feminism a little bit, based on male and female being equally image of God, and based on husband and wife together being partners, teammates.

Feminists wanted to accomplish three things. I know this oversimplifies, but it will get us started. One, feminists wanted the right to manage their own bodies, which meant they wanted sex without consequences, which was a right that many men assumed they had. For women, this meant the right to abortion.

Two, feminists wanted women to have equal rights in the workplace. They wanted women to have the same job opportunities and benefits as men.

And three, feminists wanted women's bodies to be "desexualized." They did not want women to be valued for the attractiveness of their face or their figure. Feminists wanted men to stop thinking and acting like the only important things about a woman was how sexually attractive she looked, and they wanted women to stop going along with this so wholeheartedly.

Let's take a look at these three. Before God, neither men nor women have any right to sexual intimacy without consequences. We were made to increase in number and fill the earth, and we were given that task, and sexual intimacy makes that happen.

God's people for the most part have opposed abortion on demand, and that's the right thing to do. It was too bad that the feminists started with this agenda, because it created a wall between Christians and Feminists, and Christians should have and could have supported the other two agendas.

Feminists have made quite a bit of progress in women getting the same opportunities and benefits as men in their jobs, and this is good, and God's people should be a part of this.

The third agenda of feminists, to "desexualize" women's bodies, has made no progress at all, maybe even gone backwards. There are so many men who are willing to make a woman's attractiveness the main characteristic that governs how they will treat that woman, and there are so many women who seem entirely satisfied to go along with this.

God made both to be living images of him. Men insult women and insult themselves by going along with this, and women insult men and insult themselves by going along with this.

There is nothing wrong with attractiveness. But it does NOT have to be paraded, shown off wherever possible. And we do NOT need to consider it in how we treat each other. It is everywhere, and it is evil.

If we take seriously that women and men are equally in God's image, and that woman was made because the man needed a helper, a partner, then we need to think and treat each other in ways that fit these truths. Let's get back to Genesis.

#### Genesis 2:21-22a

*21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man.*

In simplest terms, God takes one person and pulls that one person into two parts. That's the way God makes the helper: God pulls one into two.

This is why later on it will talk about two becoming one flesh: because they started out as one flesh, and God made them into two fleshes. God pulled one into two parts.

#### Genesis 2:22-23

*22 Then the LORD God brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."*

The man immediately recognized the other part of himself: bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. God brought the woman to the man, and the man named her. In the context of the OT, this means that the woman in some way is under the man's direction.

The woman and man equally are in God's image, and the woman is not the man's servant; she is a partner, a teammate.

But that God brought her to the man to be named, and the man named her, means that there is some kind of ordering between the two of them that puts the man over the woman. People find all kinds of things in Gene 1-3 to support this, and most of them don't persuade me, but this one to me seems undeniable. More on this next week.

*Genesis 2:24 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

There are three steps here to a man and woman coming together. This was Jesus' favorite line on marriage. He used it several times to teach about marriage. First, a man leaves the people most important to him.

Second, the man is united to his wife, he joins her, by which we understand the vows of faithfulness that a man makes at the wedding. And third, they become one flesh.

In marriage, a woman makes the same promises to the man. But this Scripture is directed specifically to men. I am not sure I know why, but it clearly is. But let's connect this to the man naming the woman.

The man names the woman, which makes him over her in some way; but the man realizes that the woman is the other half of himself, so he leaves all to have her. He names her, which puts her under him in some way, and then he makes her the highest priority in his life.

I know this is all too biased for some people, but I don't know how else to takes this sequence of verses. It is a powerful sequence. Now, I want to pull in one more Scripture.

*Genesis 3:16 - 16 To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."*

In Genesis 3 the people listened to the serpent, and ate the fruit God told them to leave alone. They sinned, and brought big trouble. The consequences of sin brought pain to everyone. The woman from then on had pain in her family life.

The man had painful toil (3:17). And even God had pain: in the flood story a few chapters later it says, The LORD was grieved that he had made people on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."

Let's look at one line in God's words to the woman: Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. The first half - your desire will be for your husband - can be taken in different ways, and it is hard to be sure what exactly that means.

And he will rule over you - is the part we should examine. One of the consequences for the woman was that her husband would rule over her.

This has most certainly happened. Human history has a lot of examples of husbands ruling over their wives; it quickly became normal, and it is an ugly history.

Let's try to understand what changed with sin. In the garden, before sin, the man named the woman, which in some way suggests that she defer to him, and the next thing he does is make her first in his life, leaving even his parents in order to be joined to her.

I want you to feel the difference between leaving parents to be joined to his wife, on the one hand, and on the other hand ruling over her. In both there is an established order, but they are very different. One lefts the wife up, and the other puts her down.

*Mark 10:42-45 42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

In the kingdom of God, leaders don't rule over others. In the kingdom, leaders are servants. The Son of Man came to serve, and he gave his life. That's the kind of leadership the man had in the garden. After the fall, it got very sour.

This is why I don't like the phrase "traditional family values." In the traditional family, husbands ruled over their wives, and if they were Christian they supported it with the Bible.

There were always some kind men who did not operate that way at all, but the people of God assumed the Scriptures also supported those who preferred to exercise authority over their wives.

That is all a part of the fall, but in the kingdom we go back to the Garden. Paul says, "*husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. That is the same sentiment as for this reason a man will leave his father and mother, and will be joined to his wife.*"

The foundation of the relationship is that male and female are the image of God, and that the woman was made to be the man's partner, not his servant. The husband lives out his leadership by enduring loss in order to be joined to his wife.

Humans have consistently made huge errors in the basics of family relationships. This message has ended with a call to men and husbands, because it seems to me that Genesis 1-3 leans in that direction.

God our Father has designed marriage and family, and he's very concerned with how families live in their relationships to each other, and how women and men live with each other. This is all a part of our relationship to him, and part of our walking toward him.