

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 129 | The Gender of God

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Dave Morlan



Autumn: Welcome to the Vision for Life podcast, an ongoing conversation between the pastors of Fellowship Denver and the Church at Large. Each week we talk about life, faith, the Bible, and how to follow Jesus as we go about our daily lives. I'm Autumn, host of the podcast, and Dave, one of our pastors here at Fellowship, is joining me today. Dave, welcome.

Dave: Thanks for having me on the show, Autumn. Looking forward to our conversation today.

Autumn: Are you?

Dave: Yeah, I am.

Autumn: Okay, good. Well, the topic that we're discussing today is about the gender of God. And I have to say that if you had told me 10 years ago that, A) I would be working for a church for the next 10 years, and B), that I would be having a podcast conversation with one of my pastors and friends that is going to be recorded for people to listen into about a topic such as the one we're talking about today, namely God and does God have a gender, and talking about this theological concept of the gender of God, I would have said, no thank you, I don't want anything to do with that.

Dave: Well, and maybe you ten years ago who said, 'no thank you,' was smarter. Maybe you should listen-

Autumn: That's not comforting.

Dave: Maybe you should have listened to yourself. But here we are nevertheless.

Autumn: I did in fact say no to one of those things, actually a couple of times.

Dave: You did, you did.

Autumn: Well, because of, I guess in those 10 years, many of the conversations in culture have also shifted and intensified, which is why we are discussing this topic today. So, thanks for being willing to do this with me. And you and I had both said, wow, we've never actually had a conversation about this specific topic in any kind of forum in which either of us teach, whether you preaching or teaching one of the various classes that we have at Fellowship, or me teaching in a sort of classroom setting on this topic. So, we are also learning and working our way through this and inviting people into the conversation with us.

Dave: That's right. It's not a new idea, but it is a- how we'll get into Amy Peeler's work here in just a minute, but how she frames it up is, was definitely new for me and I know for you. So, I'm excited to talk through it and hopefully we'll learn some in the process.

Autumn: Yeah. We did, you referenced a book, Dave, and you and I both read a book that was recently released written by a professor at Wheaton. Her name is Dr. Amy Peeler, and she is a Bible scholar. And she recently wrote and released this book that's called *Women and the Gender of God*. And so, we read that together and we're going to be discussing today some of the ideas that are in her work, but also just discussing this big question. And one of the reasons that I was interested in having this discussion, something that has spurred me over the past several months towards contemplating this question of the gender of God with you, with one of our pastors, was that I've been seeing just popular level Christian influencers and authors sharing an idea that basically in its simplest form just says something like God is a *they*.

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And I think to the best I can understand that that's taking categories that are being used in the current conversations about gender and particularly about transgender people and applying them in some way to God and the nature of God. And so, I began to—as I saw some of those things popping up—I began to contemplate this myself, and then saw that this book was being released. And so, I asked you to read it with me.

Dave: Right. And then many of us, you know, are all, most of our kids are in context in public school where they're being told to choose their pronouns. And so, the he/him, they/theirs is, is a discussion that a lot of parents are having with their kids right now. So, gender is sort of an important discussion on the family front. But then to think of it more theologically about how we refer to God adds an interesting twist to it. And a podcast like this, which is designed to help people think through biblically, like how do we follow Jesus? And how do we think about and process following Jesus in the day and age that we live? It's an important discussion to have.

Autumn: How would you summarize or explain the central issues that Amy Peeler is addressing in her book?

Dave: Her main thesis in the book, or I should say her hope in the book, is to reiterate this idea that God values women. That's what she wants to do. And we'll talk about that a little bit later, but she wants to say that God values women. And one of the ways that that is the case is that God himself doesn't privilege males over females in His creation. And historically, she says that there has been this tendency to think of God as male within Christendom. And when you think of God as male within Christendom, it has this byproduct of privileging men over women within the community. And therefore, the idea or the culture that's created is that somehow women aren't as valuable or God doesn't really value women as much as men. So, that's kind of the thing she's addressing in the book. And it's an interesting way to kind of address God values women by dealing with this unusual theological question that no one's ever really asked me about as a pastor for you know, 16 years, no one's ever asked me whether or not God was male/was a gendered person. And yet, she's sort of addressing that as maybe, if not an explicit theology people hold, it's an implicit idea about God that does actually influence how men and women are treated differently within the Church.

Autumn: I'm going to attempt—we'll see, you can correct me, Dave, because I am desperately trying to read and understand current gender theory. And so, I know I don't have a handle on it yet.

Dave: Well, I've read exactly one book, Autumn. It's the book that you told me I needed to read.

Autumn: Well, I'm working on a couple of others. But just by way of explanation, I think I'm going to attempt to define something so that as people listen in, they know how we're using these terms in our conversation today. And so, the terms "man" and "woman" currently, within the postmodern context in which the cultural discussions and the culture wars, if you will, are being had, man and woman were previous to this era of conversation used in a way that was pretty synonymous with man being male, woman being female. Those terms have in the current discussion been divorced from one another. So, male is a reference to something that is now called biological sex and female to a female-sexed person. So, we'll probably lean into using those terms more in our discussion, male and female, because they hold that connotation in the current conversation versus man and woman. That's not to indicate that you and I also hold those views, but in an attempt to be clear in the language that we're using in a way that also reflects a current understanding of it and culture. We'll probably use those terms more. And we're using the terms like male-sexed person to indicate someone who possesses male biology, is that accurate?

Dave: Yeah, it is. Yes, and I appreciate that clarity just for folks who are listening in.

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Autumn: Yeah. Okay. All right. So, let's jump in to these questions.

Dave: Let's dive in.

Autumn: My first question, Dave, that Amy Peeler is examining in her work, and then that I also want to ask you because this is the central one of the central questions at play both in our conversation and in her book, and then I think is important for us to consider in light of the current cultural conversation, is, what is the orthodox understanding of the nature of God and resulting of the gender of God?

Dave: Well, the historic kind of orthodox understanding of this question is that God is not male; He isn't a sexed person. God is spirit. And our understanding of male and female is something that God created. But as creator, there is a distinction between the creator and what is created. And so, God is not male as we would think about male-female today.

Autumn: And you said that's the orthodox understanding. So, this has been the historically held view of the nature of God for centuries.

Dave: That's right. And it's what made Christianity distinct from pagan religions of the day. So, it wasn't at all uncommon. If you think of just the Greco-Roman worldview and the pantheon that was held of the gods, they were sexed. The gods, the divinities did have a sexed sort of existence and were thought of in that way. And so, the Judeo-Christian understanding of God was distinct and different because God was spirit and didn't possess that biological kind of expression as a sexed person.

Autumn: And that becomes even more important as the theology unfolds because those pagan gods also often used their biological sexed selves as a means of interaction with or oppression of the people who worshiped them.

Dave: That's right. And to literally have sex with women—the males, you know. And so, that was, again, an important distinction within the early church and the rise of Christian theology, which is the second and third and fourth centuries, to really hash out the distinction between how a Christian understands God and how it's different than how most people sort of in the cultures of that day would understand and relate to God as male.

Autumn: Okay, so first of all, the orthodox understanding is God is spirit. He is not male in the sense that He does not possess male-sexed biology in the same way that human males do. And then another consideration within this discussion is that Scripture does employ both feminine and masculine descriptors of God, and depicts God as possessing sometimes what we would call both masculine and feminine characteristics even. What are ways in which that shows up in Scripture?

Dave: Well, in the Old Testament, God is described as like a mother who is caring for her child and depiction of breastfeeding. It's this really powerful image of God. Jesus would describe himself as a mother hen who wanted to gather up her chicks under her wings. Jesus would use that image about Himself even. And so, you see that in the Old Testament, you see it in the New Testament; feminine usages of or images ascribed, characteristics ascribed to God. Probably the most significant one—I know that we've talked about, Autumn—is Proverbs 8, that this idea of lady wisdom and its obvious, clear, kind of feminine characteristics of lady wisdom and its sort of God's creative agent. Lady wisdom

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with God in the beginning; it's what God used to make the world that we have today. And it's described in strongly feminine sort of language.

Autumn: I'm glad you mentioned that passage, Dave. Yes, you know that I would really love that passage in Proverbs. Lady wisdom is one of the characters who's speaking, but she's also a personification of God's wisdom and used in ways that are synonymous with the acting agency of God's spirit and reflects the poetic language that's present in Genesis 1. And then actually John in the Gospel of John picks up on that language from the first chapter in Genesis and Proverbs eight in the first chapter of John in which He talks about the word being present in creation. And so, this aspect of God that's presented with these feminine characteristics is depicted for us as being present in the act of creation with God from the beginning. So, there's a timeless aspect of that, of Lady Wisdom. And then in Proverbs it says that she continues to speak. So, I really-

Dave: Calls out from the gates.

Autumn:: Calls out, yes.

Dave: Anyone who is simple, listen to her.

Autumn: Yeah, I love that picture. So, there are, we could point out more examples, but the summary is Scripture uses both feminine and masculine language for God. And yet-

Dave: Oh, I knew there was a 'but' coming.

Autumn: And yet I think the obvious question within this though is that Scripture predominantly uses masculine language for God. So, routinely uses the pronoun "He" and "Him" for God. And beyond that even, Scripture teaches us to call God "Father." So, why is that also true?

Dave: Well, if we understand Jesus to be God incarnate, so He shows us what God is like, then how we understand who God is and how to relate to God principally comes from Jesus. And when His disciples asked Him, how do we relate to God? How do we pray to God? It's really clear that Jesus taught His disciples, when you pray, pray like this, 'Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be thy name.' And so, Jesus- I think the immediate answer to that question is that Jesus taught us as His disciples to relate to God principally as Father. As we understand the Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. So, relating to God to Father is a key insight that we learn from Jesus, and we model like it was modeled for us by Him, and He invites us into that.

So, that's the number one reason why. And I think in addition to Jesus teaching us how this is, how we relate to God, we also see that God is our Father and that we derive our existence from Him. So, the Apostle Paul, he would actually quote, and he actually gets kind of in shaky territory because he quotes a pagan author, Erastus. This is in Acts 17. And as a way to sort of connect with his audience in Athens, Paul says, quoting Erastus, 'Are we not all God's offspring?' And so, it's this idea that our very existence, our movement, our life that we have it, derives from God. And so, in this sense, He is our progenitor. He is our Father, and that we get our existence from Him originally. Now there is distinction between creator and creation we can talk about that is different than earthly fathers being connected to their children in a DNA-matching type of way, of course. But there is this also ultimate sense in which we derive our being from God. And

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so, because of that, we can think of Him as Father in terms of progenitor, in terms of everything we have comes from Him. And so, there is this sense that we relate to Him as Father in this more general sense as well.

Autumn: Yeah, that idea of God as progenitor is interesting too, in that this is, you've already mentioned, Dave, this is a distinction actually in the Judeo-Christian worldview and understanding of this nuance of God as Father versus ancient pagan religions that still understood their origin to be somehow derived from the gods. In their origin myth though, there was still a DNA donation, a biological donation, as it were, from those male and or female figures. In the origin story in Genesis, in the Judeo-Christian worldview, God does act, but by means of His Spirit and His Word and the way in which He creates and produces offspring, the man and then a man and woman, Adam and Eve, are uniquely different in that sense. So, even in this understanding of God as Father, we can retain the understanding that God is spirit and not embodied. That the way in which He creates and acts is still uniquely different from the way in which He gave us the ability to create and produce life, to reproduce.

Dave: That's right.

Autumn: Dave, before we move on to our next main point of discussion, could you help me reflect for a moment on a couple of the issues that Amy Peeler is bringing to the surface, calling attention to, that do exist if we understand even subtly that God is male in the sense in which human men are male. And the first is this, that Genesis teaches us that both men and women are created in God's image. So, what do we do with that?

Dave: Well, I think that is a major problem. Then if you think God is male, then in what way then are we to interpret the clear description that God made man male and female, He created them in His image? And the phrase 'in His image' was used a couple of times there in Genesis 1. So, it's clear that the writer there wants us to understand that both the male and the female reflect God, image Him. And so, I think it's sort of clear, it's probably not even an issue in the mind of the writer, that He is somehow correcting some pagan understanding of God that existed and that ancient world at the time. But simply just describing this is in fact what happened when God made Adam and Eve, He made them both in His image. And so, they both reflect His image together. So, then that means that if God was male in a more direct sense, then Eve couldn't have reflected His image in the way that Scripture clearly says that she does and did, and therefore women generally. So, that would be a problem if someone were to kind of hang on to that idea of that God was male.

Autumn: There's a figure in the creation story who is initially called Adam. And this becomes important then in our understanding of Jesus, His nature, His personhood, and in the story of the incarnation. Can you explain what the concept is of the Adam and then the process by which God created male and female?

Dave: So, God makes Adam just means earthling, one who's made from the earth. And in Genesis 2, we're given the order of creation of Adam and Eve. Genesis 1, we're not. It just says that in the image of God, He created them male and female, He created them. Genesis 2, we get the order. And so, we see Adam who is in the garden being given instructions on what to do, and yet in the first time in all of creation, before sin enters into the picture, God says it's not good for Him to be alone. So, that doesn't mean that He's any less the image of God, ironically, but it does mean that He's in isolation. And God says that's not good. So, He says, I'm going to make a helper suitable for Him. And then after that, God has this whole sort of drama unfold for Adam in which He allows Adam to actually see that He is in isolation. He had all of the created animals come before Adam and He names them. And it's this idea like, how long is it going to take for Adam to realize there is no one else like Him in all of creation. And then after that, that's where God puts him, has a deep sleep, causes him to fall asleep and takes a rib and then breathes life into Eve, the woman. Adam says, this at last is now bone

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of my bone, flesh of my flesh. And so, what we see here is something really beautiful about the male and the female both being made by God in His image. And yet, also in some important sense made for each other. The chapter ends, it says they're both naked and ashamed, the two shall become one flesh, this idea of oneness, of intimate relationship with each other to be totally exposed for they are and yet also not afraid to be distinct and different. The nakedness kind of highlights how they're different, but both yet also totally unashamed and safe. So, that's Genesis 2. So, then the question though is that the Adam is still representative and has a representative function for both males and female throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament, or we get Jesus as the second Adam is representative as well.

Autumn: Yeah, so that initial picture in Genesis 2 of the Adam, and you said it means earthling, created from the dirt made from the ground, the dust of the ground. And that human, that first human, is representative in the story of all humanity. And then as you said, the story unfolds from there. And then Adam and Eve in the way that we conceive of them as male and female then come about in the flow of the story. But that idea of the Adam, the first human, and then the second Adam, Jesus as the second Adam, both are representative of humanity.

Dave: That's right.

Autumn: And Jesus as the second Adam then ties back to the first Adam, who was unable to be the sort of representative of the divine that He was intended to be. He did not fulfill His intended role as God's representative on earth in the way that God had designed. And so, we see the restoration of that in Jesus. And yet both still represent humans, all of humanity.

Dave: That's right. And it's this idea of headship where Adam failed. And all of humanity because of the responsibility He had and the headship He had, all of humanity suffered the consequences. And Jesus likewise as the second Adam had the ultimate headship as well. And yet His victory now becomes the victory of all those who are underneath Him, His headship. And the Apostle Paul talks about this beautifully in the book of Romans, of course.

Autumn: Yeah. Let's hang on to that idea. We'll circle back to it in a little bit when we talk more about Jesus. So, first, to remind people of where we were at, the first of the interpretive problems that can arise, if you understand that God is male, is this idea that men and women are both created in God's image, both reflect Him fully. The second issue that can arise is that if God is male—you already alluded to this, Dave, just want to unpack it a little bit more before we go on to our next point—if God is male, then male-sexed persons are actually closer to the nature of God. And this is an idea that was inherent in many of the religions of the day, both that predated Christianity and then in the first and second century.

Dave: Right. And one of the byproducts of that pagan idea of the maleness of God was an assumption then that women who didn't fully reflect the image of God then were treated as such. And so, they were considered weaker, less than their capacity for thinking was sort of widely held to be less than what men could have. And you see this, I mean, it's written in like the legal code, Roman legal code, they're not shy about a real a deficient understanding of women in society that you can draw a line all the way to how it is they understood sort of the divine as having this sort of a strict kind of male biological kind of image in their mind. And it did, it caused significant, you know- history is what it is. And yet, an orthodox understanding of God corrects that misunderstanding, I think, that can trickle down into community. And that's precisely what Amy Peeler is sort of encouraging the Church to do, to have a sort of a reorientation towards an orthodox understanding of God in that respect. And she's sort of hoping that that might play out into, for women themselves to understand their value, but also in a more communal sense that women would be appreciated as full image-bearers of God alongside of males.

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Autumn: And that's present in the New Testament, most definitely in the interactions that Jesus had with women, in His inclusion of them as His followers, in the way in which He addresses them, and then also, I think, in the epistles, in the way in which women were referred to, included in ministry, spoken of as leaders in the Church, and called sisters, and treated that the encouragement to treat them as such with respect and dignity acts as a corrective against those ideas in the culture of the day. There's a way in which it's not an exact parallel, but there's a way in which the evangelical church in America is undergoing a sort of corrective and reckoning in this issue as well, in that I think we've imported some cultural notions of gender roles that were pretty predominant in a post-industrial revolution world. So, in the wake of the industrial revolution, and then particularly after World War I and World War II in the United States, gender roles and norms settled into these predictable patterns in which men, by and large, left the home to go work, and women primarily took care of the keeping of the home and the raising of children. And those were really cultural adaptations of gender roles and norms, but those very much got imported into the Church in many ways. And so, we saw those cultural aspects of patriarchy reinforced in the Church in ways that really aren't biblical.

Dave: That's right. They were just cultural. We talked about this a few days ago, but I recently finished a book about RGB, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, *The Notorious RGB*. It's a fascinating little book. And I was struck by how when she was in law school, for her to be admitted into law school as a woman, well, Harvard wouldn't admit her. So, she had to go to Columbia. Finally, she did end up getting into Harvard, but she had to say to her advisor to get in, the big question is, why do you want a law degree? And the acceptable answer was, so that I could have polite conversation with my husband, who was also a law student at Harvard. And this is sort of, you know, of classic liberal elite institutions. And yet it wasn't that long ago that to be a woman in a place like that was unheard of culturally, absolutely unheard of. And so, it doesn't take a lot of logic to go, I mean, if that was the case at Harvard and all these sort of elite institutions, progressive institutions, in the late 60s, then of course it's going to be right throughout all of culture. And so, there's going to be remnants of that everywhere in most institutions today. So, that was, to me, that was really eye-opening, because I think just living where we live right now, it's easy, I think, to think that it's always been the case that there's equal number of men and women who get admitted into colleges and who have equal kind of access to professions. And it's easy just to kind of take that for granted. But in fact, culturally, it wasn't that long ago when that was not the case. And nor were there pathways for that legally in terms of protections under the law.

Autumn: Wow. That is crazy that that was her answer to have polite conversation with her husband. Yeah, that is such an interesting- that acts as kind of a microcosm in a really great way of the culture in which she was attending Harvard. And that represents a pretty dramatic shift, as you mentioned, from then until 2023 when we are recording this.

Dave: And when she said that, she actually, in the book, she says, it wasn't untrue. She had a really beautiful relationship with her husband. She did want that. And she wanted to be a lawyer too, you know? So, it wasn't untrue, but it was half the story as well.

Autumn: Okay, so let's move on to our next point of conversation in this, which is a central issue that Amy Peeler is addressing in her book, *Women and the Gender of God*. So, one of these ideas, the first is that Orthodox understanding of the nature of God is that God is spirit. He's not bound by the categories in which we exist, the categories that He actually created for us to exist within. And those categories allow us to thrive. And yet, they aren't necessarily the same way in which God exists. His existence as creator is different than the way in which we exist as creation, as created beings. And then the second main point that we want to discuss that's also really prevalent in Amy Peeler's work, in which she handles really beautifully, is this, that the person of Mary is incredibly important in the whole story arc of the

Bible, in her figure as the mother of Jesus. But then that there is a way in which the person and presence of Mary and her central role in that story actually acts as a symbolic figure then over time for the goodness of the way in which God created women and the value of women and the importance of the role of women over time in the whole history of the church and then to the present day. And I think this can definitely be a weakness in evangelical circles. In the departure from the Catholic Church, Protestant churches largely set aside the doctrine of sainthood, and in doing so, also sort of set aside the person of Mary in many ways. And she usually just occurs then as an important person during Advent and in the story of how Jesus came into being. So, what did you think of this section of the book that we read, Dave, and Amy Peeler's point about Mary?

Dave: Well, I, for the most part, loved it. She's a gospel scholar and did fantastic work explaining how Luke in particular describes the role of Mary in the incarnation process and also her role within the early church and how prominent of a figure she was. But for years, I've taught the gospel of Luke and I've written about the gospel of Luke and I've seen Mary—I mean, I don't think it's controversial; I think it's, sort of, among Lukan scholars, it's sort of a known thing that Mary really is the original model disciple of Jesus. Her response to the angel, that you are going to be the mother of the Christ, how she responds, her inquisitiveness, the stakes that were so high for her and her response to say, let it be unto me according to your word, God honoring her, she is the favored one, you know, and then her carrying the child and the magnificent song she sings to God, all of which, together, I think paint this really beautiful picture, not just a faithfulness, but also clearly in Luke's mind as He's writing the gospel, He's sort of highlighting her as a model of how is it that we respond to Jesus. How do we respond to the gospel, to how God intervenes in the world. And she's really given to the Church at large as sort of a picture and a model to follow. And so, Lukan scholars have known this for a long time, and I really appreciate Dr. Peeler kind of highlighting that and giving maybe some pathways, especially for Protestant evangelicals to kind of appreciate Mary afresh without sort of reverting back to maybe older kind of classic kind of Catholic sort of ideas of just praying to Mary or things like that, but more just elevated understanding of her as an important biblical model to follow. And then something that I hadn't probably ever really thought of before reading it in this book that I appreciate. It's always been there, of course, but I just hadn't, didn't have the eyes to see it. But she highlighted that it's the body of Mary that gave birth to Jesus. And she talks about that God saw fit that the Word of God actually was brought forth out of the body of a woman. And then to reflect theologically, what does that communicate to us about the value of a woman? That God was sort of, in the day and age where the body of a woman was devalued culturally, but that God actually chose a body of a woman to bring forth His living Word. Tells us something I think really important about women. I think it can be derived more broadly about women and about Mary. And it gave me a lot of material of really reflect on about God's chosen means to bring about Jesus. It does mean something about women, I think.

Autumn: There's a parallel there too. We talked about Jesus being the second Adam. And there is a parallel in the story of Mary that is a reversal as well. So, Jesus, in a sense, acts as a reversal of the curse. He's the second Adam. And Mary also acts as a reversal in that she said the ultimate 'yes' to God. When in the account of creation and the fall, Adam and Eve said no to God and elevated themselves and chose to go their own way. Mary actually humbles herself and calls herself the servant of God. And her 'yes' enables that reversal. So, both Mary and Jesus are present in that reflection of the creation and fall. And then her 'yes' acts as a reversal to that initial 'no.'

Dave: That's right. And she highlights in Luke, and I've never seen it before, but that the angel didn't depart from her until she said, 'Let it be unto me according to your word.' And then the angel departed. So, she has this whole discussion about consent that was interesting and she's addressing, I think some more sort of modern kind of womanist sort of

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theologies that are out there currently right now. But making the case clearly that Mary had agency throughout this and that her 'yes' to God's will in her life is really significant.

Autumn: Yeah, I think that Dr. Peeler does a good job of pointing that out because of a term Mary uses. She calls herself the 'slave of God.' And yet it is also clear in the account that just as we discussed earlier in the idea of God as father, the concept of God as progenitor, that that is similarly true. It's reflected, there's parallel language in this discourse as well in Luke, in that Mary says, yes, and then the Spirit of God was the acting agent. So, once again, the gospel accounts of the incarnation and Mary becoming impregnated with the son of God, reject a pagan idea and instead reinforce this idea of God acting in a different way to bring about life that He again acts upon creation in a unique way that only God can do.

Dave: That the Word, the Spirit, hovered over her is the same word used in Genesis 1; the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the deep. And so, it's creator-creation language, not biological-male-fathering language, which is fascinating. But it's doing some of the same things that is creating life, making life. And so, in that sense, Jesus is called the Son of God, which is the language that Luke uses in that, and God as Father, but also clearly distinct from the pagan ideologies of the day as well.

Autumn: Yeah it is really beautiful, the treatment of Mary and the elevation of Mary that Dr. Peeler's highlighting in her book and then calls out from the actual text from these accounts, particularly Luke's account, is beautiful in that God elevates the position of the woman and uses His creation to reinforce that she too fully images God, and that her womb, which can carry and sustain and give life, is the means by which God chooses to bring His Son into the world. And then she also points out that Mary was a contributor; her actual flesh, her DNA, was present then in the body of Jesus who became the Savior.

Dave: That's right. She ends that segment with this beautiful statement, 'A male-embodied Savior with female-provided flesh saves all.'

Autumn: That is really beautiful. And it is, also, I think, a good reminder that largely in evangelicalism, we don't have robust mother figures, and yet Mary stands throughout time as exactly that. And so, I really appreciated her pointing this out. And I appreciated the encouragement to think about the role of Mary in a much broader way and the importance of Mary's presence in the story. And actually, Mary's importance in the story continues beyond just her birthing Jesus. She was present when He was being raised. She was present as His mother figure. And because He is also symbolically representative of all humans and then actually representative of all humans in the act of justification is the ultimate sacrifice, Mary's presence continues even up until the point of His crucifixion and then His resurrection.

Dave: And was present at Pentecost and throughout Acts, we see her as sort of a part of the original community of the early Church and prominent throughout the remainder of her life.

Autumn: There are a couple of important takeaways, Dave, and then one question that I would love for us to address together.

Dave: Now I'm nervous about that final question.

Autumn: Well, the two important takeaways we can just touch on briefly, but that we, in our discussion in preparation for today, for recording today, were these; they're a little disjunct, but I think they're both very important. And our two

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Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Dave Morlan



important takeaways that we want to make sure we leave all the listeners with is the first is this. And this is the first one is important because of the current tone of the cultural conversation and the way in which postmodern deconstructionism is affecting our understanding of reality and what is given—our givenness—in the way in which we are significant and have meaning and purpose, because as we understand it within the Christian tradition, what we're discussing today, because that is given to us. So, first of all, the first takeaway is this, God doesn't exist within any of His own created categories, nor can He be bound within or placed within these constructions of human culture. And you pointed out a great point, Dave, and that is that we shouldn't look to creation to find God. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Dave: Well, certainly all of creation has the fingerprints of God. It's His hand. It is His handiwork. We are His handiwork. And so, there's a sense in which we, we, you know, it's the book of creation, the book of nature does give general understanding of who God might be. But when we take it one step further and begin to elevate creation and think that we can know definitively who God is based on creation, well, then that, that is a, is a drift into idolatry. And so, the more orthodox understanding is that we don't worship creation, we don't orient ourselves around what God has made, we orient ourselves around the Creator, about around the one who made it. And there is a distinction between the Creator and the creation. And so, it's really important for us to maintain that distinction as we worship God as one who makes, He makes the world, He makes, is the, is the creative genius behind all of nature, in which there are all of these categories.

And yet, and yet when we think about Him, it's important not to think of Him in terms strictly of the creation itself. Of course, we're limited, and God uses and provides language within Scripture that is understandable to us. And it's going to be language that is wrapped in our culture. We can't help but use in our culture because we live within it, right? And yet, part of the task of loving God as God is also to appreciate the distinction between our cultural and the natural categories we have and who God actually is as One who transcends them.

Autumn: Thank you. We'll leave that there. So, that's our first major takeaway. And the second is this, and that's that God values women. And I want to repeat the quote that you- or perhaps it's a bit of a paraphrase, 'A male savior with female-provided flesh saves all humanity.' And so, in this discussion, one of the central issues at play for Dr. Amy Peeler, and that we want to bring into our discussion, is that we don't want subtle reinforcements of ideas that are not scriptural to influence our understanding of the value of men and women. So, we want to state very clearly that God values women.

Dave: And to reinforce that truth, it may be helpful for some of our listeners to go to Luke 1 and Luke 2 and to be reminded afresh of Mary's role in the incarnation. And some of our listeners might find fresh realization and an appreciation of women maybe from a place that maybe you hadn't thought to look at before. And I think that's credit to Amy Peeler's work.

Autumn: There's one question that this left, I think in both of our minds, Dave. You don't need to be afraid of the question. And that is-

Dave: By the way, I'm always afraid whenever someone says, don't be afraid of this question. That means I'm even more afraid.

Autumn: All right, fair point. And that is this, that I think there is a depth to which we won't quite fully grasp the purpose, perhaps, of the overwhelming presentation of God in masculine terms. But the one passage or presentation that Dr. Peeler didn't deal with as much is, in the New Testament, the redeemed people of God are called the bride of Christ. And Jesus did arrive on earth in a male body. And then this feminine language is applied to His redeemed people. And that applies to everyone in the Church. There's no differentiation in that term towards male and female persons in the church. And so, the theological idea, the concept that you have pointed out, is this concept of headship. And so, how does that idea factor into this conversation and nuance kind of our theological understanding?

Dave: Well, the idea of representation is really important here. Because in the New Testament—it's in the Old Testament, but really in the New Testament—there is this concept of headship. It's in the Ephesians 5 passage that she addresses, but she doesn't actually address the headship part of it. And yet it's there. I assume at the very end of the conclusion of her book, she talks about having wrestled with text in the New Testament that for years made her feel devalued. And that kind of through this process of grappling with Mary, she's found a lot of freedom and joy through that process. But she doesn't actually address the texts that were really difficult for her to go through. I can only assume, and I haven't asked her, but I can only assume that it was these headship texts that were really difficult for her. But for us, it isn't like we can't just not address it either. And we'll get into this more later in other episodes. But I think though it's important to think of Adam. He was representative of the entire human race. It was a negative result because of something that he did, all of humanity suffered. And Jesus as the second Adam also has this headship because of what He did. For those who are in Him, the life that comes from Him can be derived as a result. So, headship, representation, headship in this sense is in Scripture.

And I think it's important to note, maybe just for today, that Jesus being head doesn't favor male or female, any one over the other. He is representative in a beautiful holistic way for both male and female. And so, I think maybe that's just good to say for now. There are of course a lot of implications of headship when we get into, how do we relate within the church, church structure, how is the home organized? Because the word "head" or "headship," it's Christ is the head of the Church. And then Paul says, a husband is the head of His wife. And then all of a sudden you begin to have, okay, so what are the marital implications of that and the distinctions with headship that then has. There are gender implications there. But she doesn't really address that in relationship to headship. Instead, she really highlights the role of Mary as this so elevates Jesus, and in such a way that whatever it is we do with our understanding of headship with male-female, it can't work to such a detailed degree that it overrides the powerful theological reality of how God chose to bring the Word of God into the world via the body of Mary. So, I don't know, those are immediate thoughts with that question. And I think there's a lot more to get into in terms of the complementarity between men and women, male and female, in the New Testament that does have implications for how we relate to each other and ministry in the home today.

Autumn: Yeah, thanks, Dave. Well, we will wrap today's conversation there, and we are going to continue these conversations in a series of episodes. So, I appreciate you spending time with me discussing this today. And, as I mentioned at the top of this discussion, this is a first for you and I discussing something of this nature, especially in a way that is shareable with a bunch of people. And we would love to hear your thoughts and questions. Chances are, we are asking many of the same questions. So, I always love hearing from people, but on these issues, particularly in which we really do desire to have a rooted scriptural understanding that allows us to navigate these conversations that are taking place in culture in a faithful way, but that is attuned actually both to God, the Spirit of God at work currently in us, and to the realities within which people are living, and the way in which these conversations and questions are being asked. And so, I appreciate you doing this with me today, Dave, taking this on with me. And to all of you listening, please send your

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