

WEEK 4 | GENDER & SEXUALITY

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

– Genesis 1:27

MALE AND FEMALE

Confusion over gender is rampant in our culture. Gender is viewed as largely a social construct with no basis in objective reality—as evidenced by the vocal, and sometimes violent, support for radical gender transitions, even in children. Gender dysphoria has become increasingly common, especially in young people. This is not an issue Christians can (or should) avoid, and it is imperative we develop a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches about gender.

I. A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF GENDER

A. Gender in Genesis 1:26-28

1. A Creation of God

In Genesis 1:26 God sets out to “make man.” In the report of this created act the narrator writes poetically that God “created man. . . male and female he created them” (1:27). From the outset, we see that gender is a creation of God—He created the genders that mankind is comprised of. This reality militates against the vogueish belief that gender does not actually exist but is an oppressive cultural construct meant to perpetuate hegemonic power.

2. A Binary

In connection with the above point, we see that God creates gender as a binary: male and female. This is an important exegetical truth to highlight given the cultural belief that gender (if such a thing exists) is fluid and exists on a spectrum. “In Gen 1:27 the generic term for humankind (*ha'adam*) includes both male and female. ‘The man and the woman together make man.’ The holistic picture of humankind is only complete when both male and female are viewed together. Such a description points to the individuality and complementarity of the sexes, and will be more fully developed in Gen 2.”¹

¹ Richard M. Davidson, “Andrews University Seminary Studies 26.1” (Spring 1988) 5-21, (Andrews University Press, 1988), 8.

3. A Purpose

Following the statement that God created mankind as “male and female” is God’s commission to them to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). God’s creative act and His commission are inextricably related: there can be no multiplication without the two genders. God created man and woman in such a way so that their union has the capacity for procreation. This will become more clear as we enter into the discussion on gender from Genesis 2.

4. A Good Thing

Genesis 1 closes with the statement “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (1:31). The “everything” that God deemed good and fitting included the existence of genders comprising humanity. As one scholar notes, “The Hebrew expression *tob meod* (‘very good’) connotes the quintessence of goodness, wholesomeness, appropriateness, beauty.”² Thus, the genders and all that they assume—distinctions, their complementary nature, and the authority-submission structure—are a good thing. In a day and age where the idea of gender has taken on such a negative connotation, we must remember that God declared gender good.

B. Gender in Genesis 2:4-25

1. Complements

The gender binary presented in Genesis 1:26-28 and reinforced here in chapter 2 points to the fact that there are differences between the two genders. In Genesis 2 we see that the man is created “of the dust of the ground” (2:7) while the woman is created from the rib of the man (2:21-22). God does this because “it is not good that man should be alone” (2:18). The man needed a complement, a “helper fit for him” (2:18).

The Hebrew *‘ezer*, “helper,” connotes the idea of a partner who provides aid and support; often, the term is used to describe God and his provision of Divine assistance. What this indicates is that the male gender alone was incomplete and was in need of a complement that would make mankind whole. The man highlights this in two ways. First, he names the woman *isha*, a play off the word for man, *ish*. Though homonyms, the two words are derived from different roots, thus highlighting both their unity and their diversity.

Second, the man poetically highlights the closeness and intimacy of the relationship that exists between himself and the woman, calling her “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). This phrase would later become an idiom for familial, kinsman relationships (Genesis 29:14; Judges 9:2; 2 Samuel 5:1). Davidson summarizes nicely:

² Davidson, “Andrews University Seminary Studies 26.1,” 11.

“The meaning of wholeness is also amplified in Gen 2 with regard to the differentiation between the sexes. Whereas from Gen 1 it was possible to conclude in a general way that both male and female are equally needed to make up the image of God, from Gen 2 we can say more precisely that it is in ‘creative complementariness’ that God designed male and female to participate in this wholeness. Gen 2 opens with the creation of man. But creation is not finished. The man is alone, he is incomplete. And this is ‘not good’ (vs. 18). Man needs an ‘ezer *kenegdo*--a helper/ benefactor who is his counterpart. Thus begins man’s quest to satisfy his God-instilled ‘hunger for wholeness.’ Such hunger is not satisfied by his animal companions but by the sexual being God has ‘built’ (‘aesthetically designed’) to be alongside him as his complement. Adam in effect exclaims at his first sight of Eve, ‘At last, I am whole! Here is the complement of myself!’ He recognizes, and the narrative instructs us, that ‘man is whole only in his complementarity with another being who is like unto himself.’”³

2. Distinctions

Male and female complement each other because they are distinct. Though equal in essence, value, and dignity (“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”), Genesis 2 presents man and woman as different. God recognizes that man needs a helper “fit for him.” The literal rendering would read, “like/as opposite to him.” The phrase indicates that this helper will be like the man in his “humanness,” but will not be identical to him. The two will be diverse in their makeup and roles. Kenneth Matthews writes, “the woman will play an integral part, in this case, in human survival and success. What the man lacks, the woman accomplishes. . . The woman makes it possible for the man to achieve the blessing that he otherwise could not do ‘alone.’ And, obviously, the woman cannot achieve it apart from the man.”

The rest of Scripture occasionally references these distinctions between males and females. Scripture presents a leadership hierarchy rooted in the creation narrative, a differences in the roles they are to fulfill. Paul writes, “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. . . For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9). In the book of Ephesians Paul calls on wives to submit to their husbands, and he calls on husbands to love their wives sacrificially (Ephesians 5:22, 25). The roles of men and women in the context of the local church also differ (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; 3:1-13).

In addition, Peter calls on husbands to “live with your wives in an understanding way,” in part because woman are “the weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7). While woman are on average physically weaker than men, Peter here seems to be referencing not something inherently negative but something positive, an emotional tenderness and sensitivity that is worthy of “showing honor.”

³ Davidson, “Andrews University Seminary Studies 26.1,” 19-20.

II. WHY GENDER MATTERS

A. A Conflict of Worldviews

The Biblical material on gender makes it clear that gender matters. Gender is a biological reality instituted by God at creation. There are only two genders, male and female, and distinctions exist between the two in both constitution and roles. The genders complement each other and enable mankind to fulfill God's creation mandate.

This stands in stark contrast to the secular worldview which exhibits extreme confusion on the issue of gender. Nancy Pearcey identified this as far back as 2010, writing,

In fact, the cutting edge today is the idea that gender itself is a social construction—and therefore it can be deconstructed. In her influential book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that gender is not a fixed attribute but a fluid, free-floating variable that shifts according to personal preference. Gender is a 'fiction,' a 'fabrication,' a 'fantasy,' that can be made and re-made at will. . . [Butler's theory] has become popular on college campuses, especially among transgender students—'trannies,' for short. These are students who reject the binary male/female system as a mere social construction, and an oppressive one at that.⁴

This trend has only continued and, in the past few years, accelerated. Today, gender identity is a hot topic, and culture is telling people they have the freedom to identify as virtually anything they want. The state of California tells teens that "Gender identity is how a person feels and who they know them self to be when it comes to their gender."⁵ A list of different gender identities includes (but is not limited to):

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Gender neutral
- Non-binary
- Agender
- Pangender
- Genderqueer
- Two-spirit
- Third gender
- All, none, or a combination of the above

⁴ Nancy Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning* (Crossway, 2010), 65.

⁵ <https://teentalk.ca/learn-about/gender-identity/>

In reality, the number of genders is infinite, limited only by the number of self-identifiers available; this can be seen vividly in the ever-expanding acronym LGBTQQIAAP+. What this represents is a clash of worldviews:

Christian View of Gender

God exists → God creates with purpose → God created the human body and gender for His purposes → the human person is to use his/her God-given body and gender as a means to glorify God

Secular view of Gender

The universe is a result of blind random chance → We are here by blind random chance → a person's body and gender have no inherent moral value or meaning → a person can determine what he/she wants his/her gender to be for his/her own desires⁶

The secular worldview is nothing short of a denial of reality, a manifestation of foolish thinking and a darkened heart (Romans 1:21). If this church is “pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), we must be clear on what the Biblical teaches on gender so that we can contend for truth in the world.

B. A Present Danger

The detrimental effects of this worldview seem to be inordinately directed towards children. Queer theory and transgender ideology are being pushed in schools, even to elementary age students. Teachers are affirming student self-identification without the knowledge or consent of parents. Pre-pubescent children are being prescribed hormone blockers that stunt the growth of sex organs and prevent normal sexually development. Boston Children's Hospital recently published a series of videos describing the gender reassignment surgeries that are being performed on young teens.

The fact is this ideology is dangerous and is having harmful effects on those who are most vulnerable and least equipped to defend themselves from such pernicious doctrine. Christians who know and believe the truth must be equipped and ready to condemn these kinds of evil, defend the vulnerable, and argue for God's vision for mankind in the world. This issue will become increasingly provocative; we must be equipped with Biblical truth if we are to contend with a dark, foolish, and twisted culture.

ONE FLESH

⁶ Borrowed from Vlach, “Theo 3 Course Notes,” 55.

I. SEXUALITY & GENDER

Genesis 2 not only narrates the creation of mankind as male and female, but also narrates the creation of human sexuality. God's blessing and commission in Genesis 1:28, to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it," implies sexual union between the man and the woman that will produce offspring.

A clear implication of the creation narrative is that gender is a biological reality created by God, not a social construct developed by human beings. Gender and biological sex are inextricably connected.⁷ In Genesis 2, before creating the woman God parades the animals before the man so that he might name them; in doing so, God shows the man his incompleteness and need for a mate. "The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:20). As Adam looks upon all the animals he begins to recognize that they come in pairs, male and female, something that is not true of him. It is only when God creates the woman to relate to Adam in a complementary way that Adam is whole:

Closely connected with 'complementary wholeness' is the idea of relationship. . . According to Gen 2, the creation of Eve takes place in the context of loneliness. The keynote is struck in vs. 18: "It is not good that the man should be alone...." The "underlying idea" of vss. 18-24 is that "sexuality finds its meaning not in the appropriation of divine creative powers, but in human sociality." Man is a social being; sexuality is for sociality, for relationship, companionship, partnership. In principle, this passage may be seen to affirm the various mutual social relationships that should take place between the sexes (as is also true with the "image-of-God" passage in Gen 1); but more specifically, the Genesis account links the concept of sociality to the marriage relationship. This is apparent from 2:24: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." The introductory "therefore" indicates that the relationship of Adam and Eve is upheld as the ideal for all future human sexual relationships. Certain significant insights into the nature of sexuality call for attention in this verse.⁸

Sexuality and gender are linked in the created order and cannot be separated from each other. As Michael Vlach writes,

Both God's creation of gender and biological reality show sexuality is objective. It is not subjective or something to be determined by the whims of individuals and societies. Also, no person should claim he or she is really another gender. Nor

⁷ Genetics has made this obvious. Men and women are chromosomally different, an objective reality that cannot be ignored.

⁸ Davidson, 20.

should anyone seek to change his or her gender. Gender confusion is addressed in Deuteronomy 22:5: “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.” God commands women to present themselves like women, and men to present themselves as men. For a woman to dress like a man or vice versa is considered “an abomination,” an extreme offense against God. This shows that God expects the person to live in accord with the gender God granted him or her at birth.

Gender cannot be changed; further, gender is one factor which limits the appropriate expression of human sexuality. God created them male and female with the intent that through their sexual union, offspring would be produced. Homosexual activity of any kind—sexual activity that breaks this gender barrier—is clearly condemned in Scripture:

- Leviticus 18:22
- Leviticus 20:13
- 1 Corinthians 6:9
- 1 Timothy 1:10

II. SEXUALITY & MARRIAGE

Men and women were created for relationship, not for isolation. As Kenneth Matthews notes, “Isolation is not the divine norm for human beings; community is the creation of God.” In Genesis 2:22, God presents the woman to man, eliciting Adam’s response of joy and gratitude for a partner and helper fit for him. Immediately, Moses inserts an editorial comment noting that, at this moment, God Himself created the institution of marriage. Moses writes, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (2:24). From this editorial comment we learn:

A. God Created Marriage

Marriage is not a creation of the state, nor is it a holdover from less advanced cultures, nor is it an institution conferring an evolutionary advantage to humanity over and against the animals. Marriage is a God-ordained institution and an integral part of God’s plan and purpose for humanity in this creation.

The other thing we should note from this passage is that marriage is meant to be the normative experience for men and women—something our individualistic culture finds repulsive. While Scripture clearly grants that marriage is not God’s will for all, this should be seen as a unique gift given to some, while most will enjoy the gift of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:6-7). God’s intention for man was that, through the one-flesh union of marriage, the earth would be filled with image-bearers.

B. God Defines Marriage

Because God is the Creator of marriage, God alone gets to define what constitutes marriage. The Biblical record is clear: marriage is the covenant union between one man and one woman. This is described in Genesis 2:23-24 and reaffirmed repeatedly throughout Scripture:

- Matthew 19:4-6
- 1 Corinthians 7:2
- Ephesians 5:31-32

The idea of a covenant union is drawn from Moses' language describing how a man will "leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife" (Genesis 2:24). The word for "leaving" describes a change in priorities; the man will now be beholden to his wife first, even before his parents. The word for "hold fast" is a covenant term used to describe the necessity for Israel to "hold fast" to the Lord (Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22). It describes a union that is not meant to be broken—hence Jesus' instruction, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9). God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), and his allowance for divorce under certain circumstances is an accommodation to peoples' "hardness of heart" (Mark 10:5).

A significant element of defining marriage as between one man and one woman is the fact that procreation is a central purpose. This can be seen in the mandate given to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). After the fall, God will use procreation to save the human race, allowing humanity to propagate and survive in the face of impending physical death (Genesis 3:15). The mandate to procreate is reiterated to Noah (Genesis 9:1, 7), showing that procreation and filling the earth remains a part of God's intention for mankind. (For this same reason, God institutes the death penalty for murder, which would have threatened man's ability to multiply, c.f. Genesis 9:6.) Even in the millennial kingdom, men and women will continue to procreate, as made clear in Isaiah's visions of the Messiah's reign (Isaiah 65:20, 23)

Notably, John 18 condemns prolonged, conjugal cohabitation, making clear that it does not constitute marriage and is a sinful perversion of God's intent for marriage and human sexuality. Given that Scripture condemns homosexual behavior (see above and below) and defines marriage as between one man and one woman with the purpose of procreation, a homosexual union cannot rightly be called a "marriage" by definition.

C. God Delimits Marriage

God alone has the right boundaries on what kinds of behavior are appropriate in and outside of marriage. The Bible routinely condemns any sort of sexual behavior outside the bounds of the marital union between a man and a woman, including:

- Fornication – Acts 15:29; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Hebrews 13:4
- Adultery – Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Mathew 19:18

- Bestiality – Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 18:23; 20:15-16; Deuteronomy 27:21
- Homosexuality – Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27

Paul even instructs believers to limit themselves to marrying only another believer, for “what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

A. God Declares Marriage Good

Like gender, marriage is a part of God’s good creation and is included in His declaration that everything He had made was “very good.” Though limited to this age (Matthew 22:30), marriage continues to hold a central place in God’s purposes for mankind in this fallen world, but it is not a symptom of the fall. In fact, marriage is a good and gracious gift from God. Proverbs 18:22 tells us that “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.” Marriage points us to the greater reality of Christ’s love for his bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32), and should be marked by mutual respect, honor, and love (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:7).