

“The Battle Continues”

Ephesians 5:22-33

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The eyes of the world have been focused on Russia and Ukraine for the past three weeks. We talked about that last Sunday. Today, though, we are going to focus on another conflict, one that has been going on for a long time and continues with no end in sight. It is a clash that impacts every single one of us. It is often called the battle of the sexes, men vs. women. This struggle started at the beginning of history, when in the Garden of Eden, *Adam blamed* Eve for his disobedience to God. Yet, in the past 40-50 years the conflict has certainly escalated. There are plenty of women out there who, if they don't *hate men*, certainly have a difficult time liking them. A few years ago, a professor at Boston University refused to let men attend her classes. She was sued by a male student, yet it was eventually decided that it was permissible to exclude men in order to create an environment where women would feel safe.

Of course, plenty of men fall into the category of being misogynists, women haters. Like Professor Henry Higgins in “My Fair Lady,” they say, “I’d face a new edition of the Spanish Inquisition than to *ever let a woman in my life.*” The lines are clearly drawn, men on one side and women on the other.

Listen to some of the bullets that have been fired in this battle of the sexes. Charles Whittman said, “Whatever women do they day must do twice as well as men to be thought of as half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult.” Lady Nancy Astor once remarked, “I married beneath my level. All women do.” On the other side, there is W. C. Fields who said, “Women are like elephants to me. I like to look at them, but I don’t want one of them in my house.” Someone, I think a man, said, “On one issue at least, men and women agree. They both mistrust women.” Or there is the line that countless boys have learned in grade school. “Boys go to Mars to get candy bars; girls go to Jupiter to get more stupider.” To that the gals would respond, “Girls have many faults, boys have only two, everything they say and everything they do.” Now, it is easy to see why these attitudes toward the opposite sex can have a negative impact on marriages. H. L. Mencken said, “Marriage is the only war where you sleep in the same bed as the enemy.”

The battle of the sexes has resulted in enormous casualties, leaving a trail of divorce, spousal abuse, and broken families. This conflict is very real, and the church is one of the battlefields on which it is being fought. Whether or not women should be ordained and serve as pastors has maybe been the most controversial issue within Evangelical churches in recent decades. Even in this room, I suspect there are some who have a tough time really respecting people of the opposite sex. So, as we journey through the book of Ephesians there is a bit of tension in the air as we come to the apostle Paul’s statements in 5:22-33. To even suggest that wives ought to submit to their husbands, as Paul does in verse 22, is considered blasphemy or hate speech in some circles. When I perform a wedding, I usually ask the bride if during the vows she wants to say, “Love, honor and obey” her husband, or if she prefers to say, “love, honor and support,” just like the groom does. I don’t want anyone to make a vow before God, that he/she doesn’t intend to keep. Yet, the fact remains the Bible does indeed say that a wife should submit to her husband, and this is something with which all Christians need to come to grips.

Now, maybe some of you men are sitting out there thinking, “This is going to be a great sermon! I cannot wait to get home and say, ‘See, woman, the Bible says you are supposed to do what I tell you to do.’” Some women, maybe saying to yourself, “Forget it, Pastor Dan. How sexist can you be? I am not submitting to any man, for any reason.” Folks, today I am not going to preach on Ephesians 5”22-33. I plan to do that in two weeks. My fear is that some of us will miss the point the Lord is making through the apostle Paul in that passage unless we first develop a general understanding of what the Bible teaches about the relationships between men and women. Because we have sometimes been in the midst of this battle, I fear we may not be ready to hear the specific instructions the Lord has for us on marriage in Ephesians 5. We need to first grasp God’s perspective on how men and women should relate to each other as human beings. That will be our focus today. Let’s pause the Lord would enable us to understand and apply what I am convinced is a very important truth.

So, what does the Bible say about men and women? It teaches three basic truths.

Number 1, there are men and there are women. The Bible takes a clearly binary perspective. There are two and only two sexes or genders and one's gender is determined by one's biological sex. **Genesis 1:27 so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.** Jesus himself affirms this in **Matthew 19:4 "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female."** Now, we live in a time where "transgenderism" has become quite popular in some circles. It started with the idea that through surgery and hormonal treatment one could basically change his/her biological sex. A man could become a woman and vice versa. The people begin to claim that gender is not really about biology at all. A person can have all the physical characteristics of a male, but still identify as a female, and all that really matters is how one identifies. Recently, it has become more common to hear that when choosing your gender identity, there is no need to limit yourself to two genders. Friends, when this combines with a wide range of sexual preferences, it seems a bit confusing and to me, more than a little crazy.

Now, in the fallen world in which we live there are hermaphrodites, people who have sex organs and other characteristics of both male and female, though genetically they are one or the other. It is also no surprise that some people have what is called gender dysphoria or gender confusion. For a variety of reasons, a woman may feel that though she is a female on the outside, she is truly a male on the inside. As Christians we should have great compassion for people who struggle with their sexual or gender identity. Often a big part of the problem is not their sin, but the fact they have been sinned against. Yet, our true compassion will cause us to encourage these folks to recognize the Bible truth that God created us male and female. That means our true gender is the same as our biological sex. Thus, our gender identity is not something we choose, but something given to us by God, who has made us either male or female. Now, if you think I am being too simplistic on this topic I would love to chat with you later.

Number two, men and women are equal. We were created equal. **Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he**

created him, male and female he created them. Both men and women bear the image of God, and there is no indication one does more so than the other. And the Bible also teaches we are equal in Christ. In **Galatians 3:28** the apostle Paul says, **There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** Paul is certainly not suggesting there are no distinctions between men and women, but he is affirming an essential equality. Now, the idea of men and women being equal seems like an obvious truth to many of us, but in many societies, both throughout history and in other parts of the world, it is kind of a radical idea. A lot of folks claim Christianity is the great enemy of women's rights, but that clearly is not true. Wherever Christianity has spread, the rights and respect given to women have increased.

Many First Century Jews would include in their morning prayers, "Lord God, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile or woman." When Paul says that in Christ there is no male or female, that both are equal in God's eyes, that both have equal access to God, that both are equally His children, he is saying something that sounded pretty extreme to most First Century Christians. Of course, he is really just affirming what God said in Genesis, both male and female bear God's image.

This Bible teaching counters the claim made by radical feminists that women are inherently superior to men. And it clearly contradicts those who think of or treat women as the inferior sex. Because most women lack the physical strength of the average male, they are sometimes thought of as less capable than men. But there is no reason that should be the case. A woman does not need to be able to bench press as much as a man in order to be his equal. Might does not make right, and physical strength has nothing to do with intelligence, competence, and emotional well-being. Yet, sometimes men, even Christian men, try to treat women as something less than they are. Both men and women need to remember that we are equal, equal as image bearers of God, and equal as *brothers and sisters in Christ*.

Number three, though men and women are equal, we are also different. That is clearly taught in both the Old and New Testaments, as the Lord gives specific instructions to just men and to just women. The physical differences between male

and female are usually obvious. Even small children, with no understanding of human physiology quickly learn, by just looking, to distinguish a boy from a girl. And when, for whatever reason, it is difficult to tell the difference, most children find that troubling. A few years ago, a group of feminist researchers took some GI Joe dolls and talking Barbies and switched voice boxes on them. They were surprised that when the children started to play with the dolls, they immediately realized something was wrong. GI Joe did not sound like a man sounds. The researchers had hoped to show that the expectations of what a man or woman sounds like are totally arbitrary and cultural. Yet, as sometimes happens, the kids were smarter than the researchers. They knew that men and women sound different because we are different.

Now, some of our differences have a very practical purpose, such as being able to procreate and have children. Yet, the differences between male and female are more than physical. When God made Eve, He did not clone Adam. He made her different so that Adam and Eve would complement each other. We still are meant to have that complimentary relationship. For example, various studies have found men to be more deductive thinkers and women more intuitive. That does not mean that men are smarter or that women are more perceptive. It just means we often approach situations from different perspectives. The bottom line is that there are more differences between men and women than the ways our bodies are shaped.

So, this is a little more controversial, I think these inherent differences often mean different roles for men and women. For example, construction workers and first grade teachers. I do not believe there should be any legal or social reason why a woman cannot be a construction worker or a man a first-grade teacher. I do not think there should be any job discrimination because of sex. But I suspect that even today, more little boys than girls want to be construction workers when they grow up, and more little girls than boys want to be first grade teachers. Why? It is because our society conditions us that way? Maybe partly, but I think the main reason is that God has made us differently. These differences allow us to complement one another and help each other in many ways.

Now, what I just said is my opinion. It is fine if you disagree with me about construction workers and first grade teachers. Yet, the bible does teach that there are two areas where men and women are to have different roles. One is the Church, and the other is the home. The topic of the proper roles of men and women in the Church is controversial and it is one we will save for another day. My belief is that 1 Timothy 2 and 3, as well as 1 Corinthians 11 make it clear that men and women are to have different roles as they share together in Christian ministry. Our focus, today and in our next sermon is marriage and the different roles God has for husbands and wives in that relationship. In the Bible's view, a man cannot be a wife and a woman cannot be a husband. These roles are not interchangeable. This, of course, precludes same sex marriages, and means that being a husband is different from being a wife.

“But, Pastor Dan, you are contradicting yourself. If men and women are different, they are not really equal, especially if you say the role of the wife includes submitting to her husband.” I disagree. I do not think submission requires inequality. A good analogy is God, the triune God. The Bible is clear that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three persons of the Trinity, are all God and are all equal. Yet, it also teaches that the Son chooses to submit to the Father, and, in a sense, the Holy Spirit submits to both the Father and Son. Does Jesus submit to God the Father because He is inferior? No, not at all. The Son submits because He fulfills a different role than the Father. Friends, on a football team the quarterback calls the plays, not because he is the best player, but because that is his role. A running back, wide receiver, or offensive tackle, may be more talented, and make more money, but he does not call the plays because that is not his role. The different roles that God has for wives and husbands doesn't mean that one is superior of the other.

Folks, what we have talked about today is really an introduction to our text, Ephesians 5:22-33. If you are not able to be here on March 27, make sure you take time to listen to that sermon on YouTube as we explore specific instructions God gives to husbands and wives. However, there is an important question to ask ourselves before we consider that. When you see what the Bible says, are you willing to do what God asks you to do? Are

you willing to follow God's instructions as to how you relate to your spouse, either your current spouse or a future spouse if you are single. If you are not, then it is kind of a waste of time to study what Ephesians 5 says. I also believe if you are not willing to follow the Bible's instructions, you are making a mistake. The reason you are on this planet is to glorify God, enjoy Him, and love Him forever. As Christians, Jesus tells us, John 14:23 "If you love me keep my commandments." It is not necessarily easy to obey God's commands concerning how you relate to your spouse, but as a follower of Jesus, that is what you should strive to do.

So, ask yourself this question: Am I willing to treat men and women as equals? We have seen today that the Bible teaches that both sexes are created in God's image, and both share fully in God's kingdom. A lot of people, however, view male or females as inferior. Maybe that makes them feel more important than half the population. That attitude can be held by both men and women. Yet, the Bible makes it clear that this type of thinking is totally contrary to what God desires. It is wrong, it is sin, and if that is your attitude you need to repent and ask for God's forgiveness. If you are a man, ask yourself, "Do I think women are inferior? Do I treat them that way?" If you are a woman, ask yourself the same questions about men. Again, if you realize you have a bad attitude, you need to admit you are wrong and ask God to forgive you and help you to change. Then look for practical ways you can show proper respect for those of the opposite sex.

Then ask yourself this question: Am I willing to accept and fulfill the role to which God calls me? As we have seen, the Lord has created men and women to be equal, but different, and calls us to complementary roles. It can sometimes be difficult to do this. The instructions the Lord give both husbands and wives in this passage go against a lot of the thinking in our society. But, you have to make a choice, friend. Will you follow the opinions and expectations of the people around you, or will you obey God's word? It is not always an easy decision. Yet, the good, right and best choice is to obey the Lord, even if it goes against the spirit of the age and the tide of public opinion. As believers in Jesus Christ, we need to let God define how we should live as men and women. We need to be willing to accept and follow whatever that means in a particular situation. I

encourage you to ask the Lord to help you do just that. Friends, it is important that we be willing to respond in obedience to God's word. If we do so in this area of life, I think one thing that will happen is that peace will break out in the battle of the sexes. God gives us commands for a reason, and when we treat those of the opposite sex as equals, when we are willing to accept the differences and diverse roles to which God has called us, then I believe we will find that men and women can get along.

In Ephesians 3, Paul says that one of the marvels of the gospel is that it has broken down the walls that separated Jews and Gentiles. In chapter 5, he expects the gospel to do something else that will cause us to marvel. It can bring men and women together. It an end the battle of the sexes, as both males and females focus on living for the glory of God. May that happen in our midst today, and in the days ahead.