

Identity: Womanhood

Westview Church | Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15-25 | Pastor Brett Toney | January 24, 2021

Culture & Standpoint Epistemology

Glass ceiling. Toxic masculinity. Patriarchy. Woman-owned. Girl power.

These phrases are used in varying degrees within our society to convey a message about female identity. Even this past week, our society esteems a woman as the pinnacle of feminine pride simply by virtue of the office she holds. We are bombarded with a message of what a woman is all the while that same culture cannot with clarity and consistency define what a woman is. Yet it is with certainty that the “standpoint epistemology” of our day would declare me unable to speak into what womanhood is since I am not a woman. I cannot know what is true about femininity without standing in the very position of being feminine—your identity determines what it is that you can know.

Friends, the biblical worldview approaches this very differently. We can know who we are as men and women with clear conviction because the God who has created us has revealed himself and his purposes in his Word. As we try to drill down in Scripture, as Pastor Haakon addressed last week, to what the core of masculinity is, I think a good summary statement from another pastor is “the glad assumption of sacrificial responsibility.”¹ If you will be a man as God has created you, you will joyfully take on hard things. The complementary parallel then for our consideration this morning is that womanhood is the glad

¹ Crawford Loritts, “[Lessons on Biblical Manhood Learned from His Father](#)”

assumption of godly service. Women, created in the image of God, will joyfully take on helpful, God-like service of others.

Differentiated Similarity (Genesis 1:26-28)

But before we press in to how God has made women distinct from men—because we are, in fact, different—we must see how God has made us in differentiated similarity. Men and women are, at essence, more similar than dissimilar. So, we see in Genesis 1 that on the sixth day of creation that the Triune God set out to create humanity unique among all the creation. This creature, unlike any other created thing, was to be made in his image, after his likeness.

There has been much written about what the “image of God” entails, but I think most clearly God's intent is that humanity would image him, would reflect him, in the created order. Humanity's essence as divine image bearers would be intimately connected to our *function* in ruling over this world like God—ruling as a reflection of him, not in place of him. So, we're told in 1:27 that God created humanity “in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” The wording conveys this differentiated similarity as the singular pronoun “him” gets expanded on to include both men and women.

As we'll see more in a minute in Genesis 2, the image of God is not fully conveyed by men alone or by women alone. Humanity is created in the image of the Triune God. The Father, Son, and Spirit have always been in relationship, always differentiated similarity, and so it follows that a core aspect of humanity imaging God is that we would be like that as well. And so it is to this two-part

image that God gave the commission to rule and reign over the creation. God did not tell Adam to rule and reign, and, “Oh, Eve, you kinda do whatever he says.” No, men *and* women, together as the image, are to fruitfully multiply, filling this earth with more of the image, exercising dominion over all the creation that it would be filled with a knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea (cf. Habakkuk 2:14). Men and women, united as the image yet two in person, ruling together.

United Differences (Genesis 2:15-25)

Essentially, we are similar, and so we are united in our differences. What distinguishes women from men does not set them in opposition to one another but highlights how it is that they come together, like puzzle pieces or a dovetail joint. The united differences take the prominent place in the retelling of the creation of humanity in Genesis 2. God breathes life into the man fashioned from dust (2:7) for the function of working and keeping the Garden, of providing and protecting, of gladly assuming sacrificial responsibility (2:15). Yet there is a deficiency in this image bearer. “It is not good that the man should be alone” (2:18). To fulfill the unique function of manhood, Adam was lacking. The image was incomplete.

With divine authority, Adam reviews and names every animal and bird formed by God from the ground, yet none of them were a “helper fit for him” (2:20). In this, we see the purpose for which woman was made. The clarity of the objective for which she was created reveals what is central to femininity. The

woman was fashioned from the man's rib as a co-equal image of the divine, completing the sufficient display of God's personhood. She does this by being a helper, being created for godly service.

She is a helper in the global task of dominion. She is not the same as the man nor created for the same purpose. He is to take on sacrificial responsibility, and she godly service. That of course does not preclude him from service nor her from responsibility. There is unity in the differentiation. He is to form more garden, and she is to fill it—working together to accomplish the mandate.

If this godly service is the purpose of her creation, does that then mean women can only live up to their divinely instituted femininity in relation to men? No. Does that mean women live in servitude to men? No. But the complementary nature of men and women is most clearly displayed in the unity of marriage—this is why Genesis 2 concludes with a wedding ceremony and the reunification of bone and bone, flesh and flesh. They are different yet united.

Kids, I hope you're following along. We are talking about who God has made you to be. God has made you to be smart, creative, strong, and thoughtful. Boys, God has made you to do hard things in the place of other people. Girls, God has made you to work diligently for the good of others. That he makes boys, boys and girls, girls is not something to be hated or ignored. It is to be celebrated by honoring one another in those differences.

Glorying in Difference

Ladies, do not hear God's created purpose for you to be a "helper," to be created for godly service, as a slight. It is not a lesser or degrading purpose. This is most evident in the fact that the word here, "helper," is often applied to God himself. Moses' son is named "My God is My *Helper*" (Exodus 18:4). The LORD is Israel's *helper* for delivering the nation from Egypt (Deuteronomy 33:29). Hosea condemns Israel for their rebellion against God, against their *helper* (Hosea 13:9). We are too conditioned by our culture to think that being a helper, of serving, is to diminish our potential or have less value. Yet serving is at the heart of the kingdom of God (cf. Mark 9:35). And so you need not be married or a mom to be a woman who gladly assumes godly service. Creatively look for ways to serve the creation of culture, to serve the advance of the discipleship of the nations.

And for you ladies who are married and who are moms, do not belittle the tremendous calling God has placed on your life. God tells pastors in Titus 2 to "teach what accords with sound doctrine" that older women would be equipped to train younger women "to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their husbands" (Titus 2:1-5). Those early years of marriage and the early years of mothering can be especially full of unseen and thankless service. You won't get promotions, plaques, or pay raises. That does not make it less valuable—it makes it more! Your Father in Heaven who sees your service in secret *will* reward you (Matthew

6:6). Don't be pressured to work outside the home for validation or a greedy dream. You have a calling that will reverberate through eternity.

Boundaries

Now there is much more to be said about how men and women relate to one another and their respective roles. But I want to draw attention to the reality that the differences between men and women do have associated boundaries. And boundaries are not a bad thing. Freedom is enjoyed in the context of godly boundaries. Freedom is *not* everyone doing what is right in their own eyes. The Law of the Lord is good lest we would be enslaved to our sinful passions and the whims of those who could control and influence us.

Pushing against the boundaries of biblical masculinity and femininity is a direct result of the Fall—part of Eve's curse is that she would *desire* her husband and that he would *rule* over her (Genesis 3:16). This is just like how in Genesis 4:7 sin was crouching at the door in Cain's soul—sin *desiring* to have Cain. So also the woman was cursed to have such a desire for influence and authority over her husband. And just as the LORD told Cain he must *rule* over sin, so also in the curse is the parallel dysfunction of the husband *ruling* her, conquering and subduing. Yet it is by faith in the promise made in the midst of curse that the Son of the Woman would crush the head of the serpent that we press on in the hope of redemption, even of our masculinity and femininity. It by that faith and in that hope that we turn now to the Table.