

GENESIS 2:18-24

OUR STORY AS MEN AND WOMEN

John Gray. Does that name ring a bell? In 1992, John Gray wrote a book called “Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus.” He’s still going strong at MarsVenus.com, offering advice on how to help men understand women, and how to help women understand men, because, after all, men are from one planet, and women are from another planet.

We all know that’s true, don’t we? Men are logical, and women are emotional. Men are task-oriented, and women are people-oriented. Men don’t talk enough, and women talk too much. Men are linear, and women “spider-web.” Men fight and get over it, and women fight and never get over it. Men like beef, and women like quiche. Men are like microwaves, and women are like crock pots. That’s all true, isn’t it? Or is it?

This year, we are journeying through the story of our God, our world and our lives. We are nearing the end of the first scene of creation. In Genesis 2, we are discovering details of the creation, and today we reach the creation of the first woman.

Men and women. Mars and Venus. We live in a culture that has fought over this subject like no one else in human history. We enter the creation story with all the baggage of our stories. I have known men who truly don’t know what to make of women. I have known women who have truly hated men, for the way those men have used and abused them. Despite all of this, let’s try to see what God designed, and let’s discover a little of how God’s grace returns us to God’s original purposes, as we live out this story as men and women.

Let me try to organize this part of our journey around two big truths that emerge from these words. Here is the first: **WE ARE ALIKE.**

We read verse 18, and we read of *A PROBLEM*. The Lord God says, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” This is startling to us, because everything seems to be going so well. We keep reading that God’s creation is good - even very good. Even last week, when we received a hint of the trouble to come, we still saw a man in perfect relationship with his Creator and the creation. But now, something is not good. Something is not right. Something is not complete.

In the verses that follow, we read of the “parade of animals.” God brings these other creatures to the man, and he names them. It must have been quite a scene. But it was a scene with a purpose: to find a “suitable helper” for the man. But none is found.

So what are God and the man looking for? What is a “suitable helper?” The word “helper” sounds condescending to us. You imagine the man saying to the woman, “Oh, you can be my little helper.” But it is not like that. As you read through the Old Testament, you sometimes find God described as the “helper” of his people. This is a position of dignity and honor.

But not just anyone can be this helper. This must be a “suitable” helper. The idea here is of someone who corresponds to someone else. The two creatures need to be able to get along, and they need to be able to get on with the work God has given them. The man needs someone who is much like him, and who can help him like nothing else in all of the creation.

What is *THE SOLUTION*? In verse 21, we read that God puts Adam into a deep sleep. Maybe this is the first use of anesthesia! If so, it is a sign of God’s mercy, because the next step seems painful. God takes a rib from the man, closes up the flesh, and forms the woman. She will be made of the same “stuff” as the man, and she will be the “suitable helper” for the man.

Pastor James Boice explained it this way. Envision the moon. Envision the left half of the moon, as we see it. What is most like the left half of the moon? It’s not a trick question! What in the world is most like the left half of the moon? The right half of the moon! They are not exactly alike. They each possess some distinct features. But nothing is more like one half of the moon, than the other half of the moon.

The man has a problem: the need of a suitable helper. God provides a solution, by making the woman, who corresponds to him like nothing else. So what do we make of all of this, as we think of man and woman as

God made them? Let's say it this way: We are not exactly alike, but we are alike. We do have our differences. But the emphasis here is on our likeness.

What does this mean for the way we journey through our story? I offer two ideas.

First, *the Bible affirms the full dignity and worth of both the man and the woman, for they are equally made in God's image.* We are farther down the road in the story, and we know every culture has struggled with this issue. Even in our culture, where we think we are so advanced and enlightened, we have struggled over the dignity and worth of women. This is still true.

Yet this is true, too. We live in a culture that has been heavily influenced by feminist teaching that not only asserts the equality of women, but sometimes argues for the superiority of women. Throughout my adulthood, I have observed an ongoing pattern, especially in our entertainment culture, of women portrayed as heroes and men panned as fools. Just as we should reject the demeaning and diminishing of women, we should reject the demeaning and diminishing of men.

This is all captured in the most recent edition of a new American tradition: the Super Bowl commercial. Am I the only person who thought this year's commercials reached new heights of idiocy? With some exceptions, here was the message: men are beer-swilling morons who will do anything to have fun. Women are nothing but pieces of meat to be lusted after, and more often than not, they happily go along with this. This is nothing new, but I have never seen it so openly and frequently expressed. You say, "Those are only commercials." But remember: advertisers want us to buy their products, so they make commercials that reflect the way we like to think. We are so far from affirming the full dignity and worth of men and women.

But that is out there. What about in here? Men, how do you think and speak about women? Women, how do you think and speak about men? Do your thoughts and words affirm the full dignity and worth of the other gender? Young men, how do you think and speak about women? Young women, how do you think and speak about young men? What kind of jokes do you tell? What kind of stories do you enjoy? What cutting words do you use to slice 'em up? Adults, if we do not like what we hear and see from them, where did they learn it?

We are not exactly alike, but we are alike. The Bible affirms the full dignity and worth of both the man and the woman, for they are made equally in God's image. That truth means this, too: *While the Bible affirms that man and woman are not exactly alike, the emphasis in the creation story is on their likeness.*

Men are logical, and women are emotional? Men are task-oriented, and women are people-oriented? Men don't talk enough, and women talk too much? Men are linear, and women "spider-web"? Men fight and get over it, and women fight and never get over it? Men like beef, and women like quiche? Men are like microwaves, and women are like crock pots? Who says so? We say so in our culture, but does the Bible say any of this, in any way? We perceive all of these differences, but they come much more from our culture, than from the Bible.

Let me push you a little farther. If we are listening to our Bible, not our culture, we will learn that many (if not all) of the differences between men and women are physical. Those differences are real, and we should not ignore them. But beyond physical differences, we should be very careful about generalizing about men and women. Certainly, we can all find many examples of all of those differences between men and women. But are they created differences? Or are they the result of sinful people living in a rebellious world?

I call this "damnation by generalization." We generalize about people. We say, "They are all..." When we do this, we can dismiss them as worthless and hopeless. Guys are all just brutes. Women are all just whiners. Men might as well not have ears, for all they use them. Women don't know anything about running a business. When I use damnation by generalization, I don't have to deal with you as a human being of worth and value. I can just trash you.

In a biblical church, we insist that men and women do have some distinct roles in the home and the church. As a denomination, we have stood for these distinctions, and we are sometimes hated for it. But in the home and the church, while we insist on some distinction of roles, we must resist any distinction in dignity or

worth. And we must resist cloaking our cultural prejudices in the garb of the Bible. We are not exactly alike, but we are alike. Nothing is more like a man than a woman, and nothing is more like a woman than a man. Do we know this? Do we speak this? Do we live this?

Speaking of living, let's move to the second big truth in this part of the story. If we are alike, **WE ARE TO LOVE**. Our likeness should change our relationships as men and women. We will never be perfect, but we should strive to grow in loving each other well, as men and women.

We must grow in this love, first, *IN OUR HEARTS*. In verse 22, God brings the woman to the man. Then in verse 23, the man says, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

We have here, the roots of Motown.

I've got sunshine, On a cloudy day. When it's cold outside,

I've got the month of May.

I've got so much honey, the bees envy me.

I've got a sweeter song, than the birds in the trees.

I don't need no money, fortune or fame.

I've got all the riches, baby, one man can claim.

I guess you'll say, What can make me feel this way?

My girl. 'Talking 'bout my girl.

This guy is happy! He sings a song of thanksgiving for this blessing that God has provided for him. He declares her to be bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. He sees the essential unity between himself and this woman. In his heart, he delights in her.

What about you and me? I am not talking just about marriage. The man and the woman don't get married until the next verse. I think especially of the man here. I am talking about a delight in the heart of all men, that God has blessed us with this "suitable helper" we call women.

Author Douglas Coupland tells the story of preaching a sermon on Mother's Day. A woman came up to him after the sermon and said that she finally understood that "God values women in a far greater way than our society ever will." Men, we will never catch up to God on this, but are we trying? I think of the honor we give, and the dishonor we give up.

The honor we give is what we used to call "chivalry." I am not talking about the silly notion that women are only weak and always wimpy, and that we have to open the door for them because they might hurt their precious little arms if they do it. I am talking about the godly notion that women are a blessing, and that as men, we ought to treat them that way.

One form of this is a willingness to physically protect women. Not all men are stronger than all women, but as men we are generally stronger, and we should be willing to protect women if we must. Some of you have known me long enough to know that if you are a woman, and it is night, I will not leave you in this building alone, and if we are in a less than great part of town, I will not let you walk to your car alone. This is how I honor you.

Yet the honor we give is more than this. It is opening a door for a woman. It is letting a woman sit, while you stand on a bus or a train. It is hauling chairs at a church event, because that's generally easier for a guy to do. It is helping a woman with her coat. It is lugging something heavy for a woman. It is taking the arm of a woman so she does not slip in the snow. This is not looking down on them. This is honoring them. This is you and me as men saying, "You are valuable. I think more highly of you than myself."

If the honor we give is what we used to call chivalry, then the dishonor we give up is what we now call "pornography." In our culture, we use this to demean and diminish women. As men, we are tempted to see women as mere sexual objects for the lusts of our eyes and our bodies. Rod Mays coordinates our denomination's college ministry - Reformed University Ministries. I once heard him say, "We have raised a generation of men who can't relate to women who haven't been airbrushed. They cannot relate to people, when

they have related to a screen.”

This pornographic dishonor not only disrupts and sometimes destroys marriage, it distracts men from having godly, healthy relationships with women. If, as a man, I see you, as a woman, only as sexual candy, how can I have a holy relationship with you? Yes, I will see that you are attractive, but I will strive to think of you as a sister, and I will give up whatever would feed a different mentality - including the soft and hard pornography that surrounds me.

Men, is this a dishonor you that must give up? Do you need to come to me or someone else and confess your involvement in this dishonor? We give this up, because it soils our hearts - hearts that should long to reflect the heart of the God who made women in his image.

We are to love, in our hearts. We are to love, *IN OUR MARRIAGES*. In verse 24, the man and the woman “get married.” God establishes this “leaving” and “cleaving” institution. We leave father and mother, and we cleave to one another in a relationship of oneness.

We will not all marry. But those who marry receive a great blessing. As we read these words, and as we think about the story of our God, our world and our lives, we are challenged to ask whether we have received this blessing as the blessing it is.

We do not have time for a long discussion of marriage. Husbands and wives, I will simply ask you this: do you value your marriage? Do you treasure the great blessing that you have received? We do not worship our spouses. They are no substitute for God. But we should richly value our marriages, and we should demonstrate it by the way we live in our marriages.

Are we? We will all do this differently. Maybe you value your spouse by carefully listening to his or her worries and cares. Maybe you value your spouse by giving a wonderful gift on special occasions. Maybe you value your spouse by painting the bedroom. Maybe you value your spouse by finding ways to have fun together. Maybe you value your spouse by just being together. Maybe you value your spouse by sticking close when sickness comes. Maybe you value your spouse by repenting. Maybe you value your spouse by forgiving.

This reminds me of my favorite marriage story. It is the story of a battle in Germany in the year 1141. One army had defeated another army, and the duke of the defeated army was trapped inside a castle. Plans were made for surrender. But the women in the castle had one request. They wanted to leave the castle with as many valuables as they could carry. The request was granted, and the women emerged from the castle, not carrying gold or jewels, but straining under the weight of their husbands. Those were the valuables they would not easily give up.

When we say, “For better or worse,” we know there will be worse. But the issue in marriage is not whether things are better or worse. The issue is whether this man and this woman, united before God, value each other, and the relationship, enough to survive and even thrive. Husbands and wives, how do you value your marriage today? What if you talked about that later today?

Yet there is this, too. When a man and woman live in the unity of marriage, they are living out more than the Creator’s design. They are living out the Redeemer’s design. Jesus lived and died and rose for his people, so that they would be in a perfect and permanent union with him. Our marriages reflect that glory, as we value them, in the same way that he valued us. We are to love, because we have been loved. We love the God who creates and redeems, by loving each other in marriage. Is this reflected in your attitudes and actions as a husband or wife?

We are not exactly alike, but we are alike. Men are not from Mars. Women are not from Venus. We are of the earth, made in the image of the Creator of heaven and earth. Yes, we have our differences. But we share so much.

Since that is true, this is true: we are to love. Man and woman, search your heart. Seek his grace, in all of your relationships, so that you may love, as you have been loved.