

## **God's Beautiful Design – Created In God's Image (Gen 1)**

I believe the Bible consistently holds up & assumes God's design for marriage as one woman with one man. I believe it does so from a number of angles... The *'one man one woman'* is the model for marriage God instituted at creation (Gen 1:26-31; Gen 2: 4-24) & the only one Jesus (Matt 19:4-6; Mark 10:5-9; John 2:1-11) & the NT letters reaffirm (Rom 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7; Eph 5:22-23; Col 3:18-20; 1 Tim 3:2, 12; Heb 13:4; 1 Pet 3:1-7). Every other arrangement recorded in Scripture is a result of or was necessary because of the fall (apart from celibacy which Jesus & Paul also hold up as at least equally honourable – Matt 19:10-12; 1 Cor. 7). None of the other marital arrangements recorded in Scripture, even the ones difficult to explain, erase God's clear, original & beautiful design for marriage between the two complementary genders he created, evident in both Scripture & in how the male & female are created. Notably none of the other marital arrangements recorded include same sex unions.

Scripture does not hide the mess of relational & sexual brokenness & sin that we all know at some level (it's not a pretty picture...) but neither does Scripture hide God's original created design for gender, marriage & sexuality. One which I believe is foundational for a healthy & flourishing family, church & society. With this in mind I want to aim to show in this series how I believe the Bible holds up the original design here in Genesis, in the rest of the OT & in the NT. I equally want us to see how God is still at work in the midst of sexual & relational brokenness in the Bible & today.

One of things about the early chapters of Genesis is that genuine Christian's view them differently. Some read them very literally; others read them more like a parable or poem explaining how God created the world & humankind & his purpose. In fact there are five different views which can be considered evangelical. The main thing is however that we see it as inspired Truth about God, creation & humankind. Christian's believe Truth is contained in & communicated through the story of creation as with the rest of Scripture. What is being communicated about God, the world & humanity is what is most important. In the Bible Truth comes in many forms. It comes through direct laws & letters, through songs & poetry, through prophetic & historical accounts, through parables & stories. Not everything in the Bible is to be read literally – some things are metaphoric – but everything in the Bible is to be read as God's Truth. In all these various ways God communicates Truth about himself & his purposes. This is where correctly handling the word of truth comes in.

There are others who are liberal in their theology who would try to argue that the creation accounts are simply stories from ancient near eastern cultures that made their way into the Bible. I don't believe that nor do I find it that convincing. Simply because while the creation account resembles other such accounts in style & structure (which makes sense since it was written to people of the same time & world) it holds up a radically different world view than others of the time. In a world that believed in many gods the creation account declares there is one God who

is creator & Lord over everything. In a world where polygamy among other things was the norm the creation story held up a story about the creation of Adam & Eve & then declares; **“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”** The creation story continues to hold up this vision for marriage today.

Note that Adam & Eve did not have a father & mother since they were the first humans. However since the creation story is being crafted & told to instruct God’s people about God’s design & order we find both the ideas of father & mother, & man & wife. That is very significant because it communicates something about God’s original design for human family.

Here is one other thing to consider which only makes the case stronger.

John Walton, a professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College explains.

*“The ancient world, Israel included, was more interested in how the world was ordered than in how the world was manufactured. Think about the place you live. You could talk about that place as a house or as a home. You could talk about how it was constructed, or how it became your home, how it functions for you, how it’s ordered for your family. Both stories are important, but they’re different stories. They’re interrelated because you need the house to have the home. The ancients, however, were more interested in the home story—how God ordered this world for us.”*

Both sides of the story are important – origins & order – but what is significant is that if he’s right then those hearing this first, those who it was

first written too, would have been more concerned with how the world was ordered than how it started. For this reason it is very likely that the inspired writer of these accounts had communicating God’s order & purpose at the forefront of his mind. That is very significant indeed for how we approach these passages. ***With that in mind let’s now turn to & read Genesis chapter 1.***

The creation of mankind – male & female – is the final activity of the week when the crown of creation is created by God. More space is given to the creation of humankind than anything else in the chapter & the next chapter zooms in & gives a more intimate account of what happened on the sixth day. It doesn’t do that for the animals or anything else.

Also up until day six the word **‘create’** has not been used that much – only in verse 1 & 21 – but in verse 27 it appears 3 times. Communicating that God is creating something unique & special. One other thing, up until this point God has simply said **“let there be”** or **“let the water team with living creatures”** etc & it’s been very fast paced. However in verse 26 God appears to slow down & instead of simply commanding begins consulting with himself; **“Let us make mankind in our image.”** The chapter is fast paced up until this point. God simply speaks & it happens, God speaks & it happens... Each section begins with **“and”** but this section describing the creation of humanity begins with **“then”**. This is where we’ve been rushing to. This is the climax. So here the story slows down & time is taken time because the pinnacle of the creation story is reached. There is deliberation

within the Godhead. Calvin noted; *“God has been introduced simply as commanding; now, when we approach the most excellent of all his work, he enters into consultation.”*

We have been carefully conceived in the mind of the Godhead, thoughtfully created by the one true God – you, me & the rest of humankind. So we can sing with David in Psalm 139; **“I praise you because I am fearfully & wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”** In Psalm 8:3-6 he declares; **“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon & the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that your care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels (or God) and crowned them with glory & honour. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.”**

In Genesis 1:26 God said **“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...”** In Genesis 1:27 says; **“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.”** Not only does God reveal truth about himself, but these verses teach us that in certain ways we are like God. We are not gods since we are not all-powerful for example, but there are things about us which make us like God & distinguish us a special in creation. We are made to love & have fellowship like God for example, we are spiritual beings created to be connected with God... To be human is to bear the image of God. *“While all creation bears witness to the being & glory of God, humanity above everything else expresses & represents God.”*

All human beings, even in our fallen state, are still human & therefore still bear some likeness of God, even though sin has marred that likeness to varying degrees in every human. This gives dignity to every person.

We also see in these verses that mankind is male & female. God’s word does not encourage superiority or inferiority of either gender. The vision we’re given here is not one gender ruling over another, but male & female ruling together with God’s blessing. There is no gender hierarchy, only two complementary genders who equally need each other to fulfil the mission given to them by their Creator – to image God, rule together & increase in number. It was not considered necessary to specifically mention gender in the case of other creatures, but it is considered an important element in the story regarding mankind. *“The man & the woman are images of God separately, & they are also the image of God together.”* All this will be built on & expanded when we move to chapter 2.

Another important thing to point out is the contrast between the phrase **“after our own likeness”** in reference to mankind & the phrase **“according to their kind”** regarding vegetation & animals. Man is not broken down into kinds. The only distinction at all is regards the two complementary genders equality created to image God. There is no racial distinction which underlines the equality of every human being. All men & women are created equal & therefore are given equal dignity. God doesn’t divide mankind us into races, all that comes as a result of the fall & curse. And we

know that in Christ walls of hostility between races will be broken down as we become one in Christ.

In the ancient Near East the king often was viewed as representing his god on earth & was described as bearing his god's image. However here we are taught that all human beings have kingly functions in that they bear the image of the one true God & have been created to be his representatives on earth. Again this gives equal dignity to each of us in spite of our role or position in life. And again we see in places like 2 Cor. 5 how Christ restores this to those who trust in him & in the fact the book of Revelation envisions a kingdom of priests & kings. This is what we were created for & this is what we a being recreated for in Christ.

There is a glorious reason & purpose for our existence which ought to fill every aspect of our lives with meaning & define how we view others. We do not exist by accident or chance. We have been carefully & beautifully designed by God to reflect his image in his world. This is where we find our deepest & truest identity, purpose & worth. This is *God's Beautiful Design* which brings the greatest dignity to every human being & he has not given up on it in spite of the fall. Rather he has done everything needed to secure redemption & restoration through his Son who imaged him perfectly because he is the image of the invisible God, the exact representation of his nature & through Christ & the work of his Spirit within us we can increasingly reflect that image again. As Paul writes in 2 Cor. 3:18; **“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's**

**glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”**

When we get connected to Christ he gives us back our deeper & truer identity, purpose & worth. Therefore this enables us, & we must be prepared, to forsake whatever is it we need to forsake to follow him – a lesser identity, a wrong relationship, a selfish dream... He is worth it. He can deal with our past, he can handle our present, he can change our orientation from sin to righteousness, he can heal our brokenness, he can cleanse our consciences, he can purify our hearts & minds, he can lead us all the way back to *God's Beautiful Design* for us. Only he can!

The words of Genesis 1:26 are repeated again in Genesis 5:1-2. As things are continuing to spiral out of control after the fall the inspired writer of Genesis holds up *God's Beautiful Design* again in the midst of the chaos. This is what we the Church are called to do **“in a warped and crooked generation”** (Phil 2:15-16). We are to shine like stars & we shine like stars to the degree that we reflect the image of our creator God – which includes reflecting his purpose for gender, marriage & sexuality!

For the same fundamental reason we cannot tolerate racism, we cannot support anything that the Bible condemns as sexual immorality (which is an issue we'll need to go on & explore) – for it mars the image of God & that is not the purpose for which we have been created. And the truth is the gospel calls most of us away from some form of sexual immorality in

order to reflect the image of God, either as a single man or woman or as a married couple. Therefore it would be wrong for the church to victimise one form of sexual immorality but it is equally wrong for one type of sexual sinner to make themselves out to be a victim... Our creator & designer has called us away from many forms of sexual immorality to follow Christ. To follow Christ is to walk a narrow road which leads to life.

What is often forgotten in the equality argument is that equality is fundamentally a biblical & Christian idea. It doesn't work with an evolutionary, 'progressive', survival of the fittest, philosophy... However equality does not give us the right to form our own morality since the whole basis for equality & morality is rooted in the belief humanity is created in the image of God – to reflect his nature, his holiness, his love, his likeness etc. In fact equality also helps ensure all will be judged by the same moral standard of God. Life is fundamentally not about us & our rights & we only distort the whole meaning of life when we make it so. It is all about God & his purpose for the world & people he made. Things only really work when the makers design is followed. Marriage not a human right it is a gift given by God & it comes with instructions & purpose...

Why do we think there is so much sexual perversion in the world today? Do we really think things like pre-marital sex, casual sex, same sex activity, sex trafficking, pornography are not related to each other & to the increase of sexual & relational brokenness in the world? Are they all not the fruit of despising & departing from God's original & beautiful design for humanity

which includes how he has designed & defined gender, marriage & sexuality? Trevin Wax says; *"One reason our culture is sex-saturated is that we are transcendence-starved."* It's not firstly about us & our rights it is firstly about God's glory, God's purpose & what is best in his world. And more than anything we need, & our culture needs, a fresh & Biblical revelation of his glory!

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