

The sanctity of marriage

Reference: *Counter Culture – Following Christ in an anti-Christian Age* by David Platt

MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM

Our understanding of marriage is built upon our understanding of sexuality. According to our culture, sexual differences are merely social constructions. Sure, men and women have physical distinctions, but even these can be altered or disregarded, if we prefer. Even if we maintain an understanding of human beings as distinctly male and female, we view them as equal—and by equal, we mean identical. Consequently, it makes complete sense for a man to marry a man or a woman to marry a woman, just as it makes sense for a man to marry a woman. There is no difference since we are identical—so our culture says.

But what does God say?

The first two chapters of Genesis record complementary accounts of human creation. Genesis 1 tells us, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (verse 27). The dignity of men and women is on display from the start. Nothing else in all creation, not even the most majestic angel, is portrayed “in the image of God.” Men and women alone are like God, but not in the sense that we share all of his qualities. He is infinite; we are finite. He is divine; we are human.

He is spirit; we are flesh. Yet in a way that nothing else in all creation can, men and women share certain moral, intellectual, and relational capacities with God. We have the power to reason, the desire to love, the ability to speak, and the facility to make moral decisions. Most important of all, men and women have the opportunity to relate to God in a way that dogs and cats, mountains and seas, and even angels and demons can’t. As soon as God creates man and woman, he immediately blesses them, beginning a relationship with the only beings in all the created order who resemble him.

This is where any Bible-informed conversation about men and women must begin: with men and women both created with equal dignity before God and each other. Men and women both share in the inexpressible worth of creatures formed in the image of God himself. In this way, God speaks loudly from the start of Scripture against any sort of male or female superiority or dominance. Near the end of Scripture, God refers to men and women as fellow “heirs . . . of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7). According to God’s design, men are never to be perceived as better than women, and women are never to be perceived as better than men. God abhors any treatment of men or women as inferior objects to be used or abused. For all of eternity, no gender will be greater than the other. No one should feel superior or inferior by nature of being a man or a woman. Both are beautifully—and equally—created in the image of God.

But not identically. Equal dignity does not eliminate distinction. Genesis 1 makes clear that God creates humans uniquely male and female, and he does it for a reason. Right after he blesses them, he commands them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). This command is only possible when there is male and female. Multiplication would

have been impossible if God had created humans male and male, or female and female. God's unique design enables them to carry out his command.

Moreover, this divine design involves far more than the capacity to reproduce (as important as that is). There is something greater than mere biological accident or evolutionary adaptation going on here. God creates man and woman to cherish their shared equality while complementing their various differences.

Genesis 2 provides a more close-up picture of how God initially creates man. God forms him from the dust, breathes life into his nostrils, and places him in the Garden of Eden. God parades animals before him, tasking him with assigning names to each of them. The point of this procession is to make clear to man that he is alone—that there is no one else like him. As man looks at each animal, and he realizes that none of them match his nature. He sinks back in solitude, and for the first time in the Bible, we read, "It is not good" (Genesis 2:18).

Keep in mind that this is before sin has entered the world. Throughout Genesis 1, there is a constant interchange between earthly creation and heavenly declaration. God creates light, and he declares it good. God creates the land and the water, and he declares them good. God creates the sky and the planets, the animals and the plants, and he declares them all good. But one thing is not good. Man is alone.

So God says, "I will make him a helper fit for him." When man falls asleep, God performs the first surgery, taking a rib from man. Obviously, God doesn't need to do this. Just as he has created man from dust, he can create woman the same way. But he doesn't. Instead, God takes a rib from man's side, and he forms a woman. When the man opens his eyes, he is stunned, to say the least. The first recorded human words are poetry, as the man sings,

This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

GENESIS 2:23

Don't miss the magnificence of this scene. God brings man to realize that he needs someone equal to him, made with the same nature that he possesses but different from him, in order to help him do things he could never do on his own. This is precisely what God gives to man in woman, and the stage is thus set for the institution of marriage. In the very next verse, we read,

"Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

Behold the beauty of God's design for man, woman, and marriage. Two dignified people, both molded in the image of their Maker. Two diverse people, uniquely designed to complement each other.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

"as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands" (Ephesians 5:24).

As soon as we hear the word submission, we immediately think in terms of inferiority and superiority, subordination and domination. But that's nowhere close to what the Bible means with these terms. God made clear from the start that men and women are equal in dignity, value, and worth. Submission is not about denigrating the value of another's life. Instead, this biblical word means to yield to another in love. Such submission throughout Scripture is a wonderful, if not inevitable, component of human relationships.

Activities

1. Read Ephesians 5:21-33. Explain in your own words the true meaning of submission in these verses.
2. Men and women are equal but different. Explain the meaning of this.
3. What are the roles in marriage that God has intended for men?
4. What are the roles in marriage that God has intended for women?
5. How can the male quality of physical strength be misused?
6. How can the female quality of physical beauty be misused?
7. Read 1 Timothy 2:9-10 ...

And I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves by the way they fix their hair or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes. For women who claim to be devoted to God should make themselves attractive by the good things they do.

Note that these verses are saying that women should not *only* make themselves beautiful in their appearance, but more importantly, in their behaviour. (The passage is not actually condemning the wearing of jewelry and hair braiding, unless it is done out of vanity.)

How should a woman present herself in appearance?

8. Read 1 Timothy 2:11-13 ...

Women should learn quietly and submissively. I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly. For God made Adam first, and afterward he made Eve.

This is a very controversial passage in the church today.

In your opinion, what should the role of women be in ministry?

9. Read Mark 10: 1-10 and Matthew 5:31 - 32. What does Jesus say about marriage? Compare Mark 10: 11 with Matthew 5:32. What are the grounds for divorce?