

Advent Blocks

All-In Commitment Card

Sex/Gender & Spiritual Renewal Series Slide

Today we're headed back into the year long quest in which we're looking at the Scriptures every 4-6 weeks to understand what God says about Sex & Gender- and how that relates to the work of the Holy Spirit in our church...and in our City.

A few weeks ago, when I taught on this- I reminded you that according to Scripture-

Every person is valuable.

because we are all created in the image of God.

I also said that

Everything we do is worship.

There is not a single thing we do as human beings created in the image of God that isn't intended by God to give him glory. To remind us and others that he is the King of the universe and he's made us to enjoy him now and forever.

Because we are created in God's image, unlike the animals- Sex is MUCH more than an instinctual physical act intended to produce offspring. It is that...but is much much more. Our bodies and spirits are not disconnected- we are not some dichotomous being- with the real spiritual me trapped in this physical prison- and neither is it true that my physical body is all of me- And any thoughts and feelings I have are just the neurons firing in my brain. I am my body and my spirit together. That is what makes a soul. And what we do with our bodies matters to God...and to each other.

So today, we're going to go back to the same passages we covered last time, at the very first of the Scripture- the opening of the book of Genesis. And we're going to talk about Gender.

Today, I want you show you what God created male and female humanity to be- why its important.

Genesis 1:1-4

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1:24-31

24 Then God said, “Let the earth produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that crawl, and the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. 25 So God made the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that crawl on the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image;

he created him in the image of God;

he created them male and female.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.” 29 God also said, “Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you, 30 for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth — everything having the breath of life in it — I have given every green plant for food.” And it

was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day.

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:18-25

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him." 19 The Lord God formed out of the ground every wild animal and every bird of the sky, and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal; but for the man no helper was found corresponding to him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. 22 Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said:

This one, at last, is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh;
this one will be called "woman,"
for she was taken from man.

24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.

The passage from Genesis we just read is the Bible. The inerrant Word of God. It is true....And its also a part of an ancient genre of literature called "Myth".

Now- you need to understand that the word “myth” does not mean “untrue”. Anymore than the word “poem” means that something is not true. It simply means a story that explains the world as it is. Ancient near-Eastern myths were not really concerned with HOW the world came into existence. Which is why these early chapters of Genesis are so often misunderstood or misapplied. People end up arguing about how old the earth is, or where dinosaurs fit in, or whatever.

But ancient myths aren’t trying to get at that at all. Ancient myths are not trying to explain HOW we got here...as much as WHO we are. What identity and purpose do we have as humans?

So with that in mind- I want to draw your attention to one of the competing origin myths that would have originated about the same time as the Biblical one in Genesis 1-2.

Title Slide: “Not Today, Marduk: What Gender Is & Why It Matters”- Genesis 1-2

Because one of the best ways to understand- particularly the OT- is to compare it to similar literature of its day. So let me tell you the Babylonian creation myth called the Enuma Elish.

In the beginning, the the turbulent female ocean and the docile masculine river came together to form a pool...saltwater & freshwater intermingling. It was from that pool- that all sorts of gods were born One of these gods arises as more powerful than the others- filled with a conquering spirit. So he gathers an army of monsters to do battle with his mother- the sea. He wins. Kills her...and as a sort of an afterthought- he decides to use her corpse. So he splits her in half, guts her like a fish, and from her dead flesh forms the dome of the heavens and the terra firms of the earth.

He then kills his father, the river- and uses his blood to make a multitude of tiny slaves whose purpose is to serve the gods, to keep them fed and happy.

Those tiny slaves- that’s me & you. That’s humanity. The violent creator god- his name is Marduk.

And now you can see- the stark contrast between the Genesis myth, and the Babylonian myth. For Marduk, creation is a violent afterthought. But with YHWH, in the Hebrew Scriptures- creation is an intentional end. And at the center of this myth that communicates our identity and meaning as human beings- are male & female.

From this story in Genesis- inspired by the Holy Spirit, God shows us what Gender is & why it matters to who we are as humans.

1) **Male & Female correspond to create, not compete to dominate.**

In both the Enuma Elish and in the Genesis story, there is Chaos. The difference is that in the Babylonian myth- the chaos is created from conflict, from violence. In Genesis- the chaos is a void. A tranquil sort of nothingness.

In the Enuma Elish, Marduk- a male- raises an army to fight against his mother- a female. and creation is an afterthought of male destroying and using the female body. You see something completely different in Genesis. YHWH- who has no creator, but is eternally pre-existent- has nothing to conquer. No one to fight. So creation doesn't occur as an afterthought of dominance of male over female- rather it occurs as the intentional overflow of a trinitarian God who is sharing himself in kindness.

Marduk creates through violence. YHWH creates through speaking a word.

With Marduk in the Enuma Elish- humans are the afterthought of the afterthought of creation- merely slaves to the gods.

For YHWH in Genesis- humans are the crown of creation- the apex- the only creatures that are intended to represent God to the world, and work with him to create more life outside of the garden they are created in.

Likewise, in the Enuma Elish- there is almost no significance given to women- only to the male. But in Genesis male and female are presented as equals- both needing one another to complete their mission with YHWH- to create more life.

Gender is absolutely essential in the Genesis story. For Marduk, it's an afterthought in the Babylonian myth.

Gen 1:26-27

Genesis chapter 1 is a high level look at God creating. It has a very transcendent feel to it. It's from 10,000 ft up. It's like a God's eye view of creation.

And you'll notice a pattern when you read it. Things are created in corresponding pairs.

Light & dark. Day & Night. Sun & Moon. Water & Dry Land. Sky & Earth.

Additionally, you'll notice that living things are created "according to their kind".

So when you get to Humans you have something interesting happen. First of all, humans are not created according to a new "kind". Instead they are created according to God's Kind. They are created In God's Image. In other words- they are LIKE GOD in ways none of the plants or animals- or any thing else in creation is.

Then, within humanity- you have the corresponding pattern- male and female.

Male & Female are created as corresponding pair- not to compete with one another- but to work together as the same kind.

Gen 1:28

and notice their task- is to be creative. Generative.

They are together- in this new GOD-like kind- to, in essence, do the work of God with him. They are to rule over creation- exercising careful authority for the good of creation...and they are to be fruitful and multiply.

Essentially, this means they are to take what God has created in the garden- and oversee it covering the entire world.

They do that by using their maleness and femaleness together.

First- to have babies, but also- this is going to require them raising children- teaching them about WHO they are and what their purpose is- and tasking them with the same thing.

Its going to require groups of people, families and groups of families- to travel outside of the garden and into the world. That is going to require at least 2 things.

One- it is going to require an outward focus. Because if you are going to push out to generate more societies more life- you can't just stay at home. You have to go out and face challenges.

Two- its going to require an inward focus. Because as humanity goes out to generate life- they have to make new homes. They have to have strong relational bonds. They have to have people and places where they can rest- and feel safe, and loved.

The english word "Gender" sounds a lot like the word "Genesis" and "Generate" doesn't it?

That's because the word comes from the same root. Genesis- meaning "Beginning" and "Generate" meaning- to create.

So our gender has always been associated primarily with humanities ability to "Create Beginnings" if you will.

Which is the cultural mandate from YHWH in Genesis chapter 1. Create new beginnings. Go from here- and create life. The life i have given you, like i created this life of flourishing here- go create more humans and more homes.

Villages, cities, gatherings of the image of God in a place who understand their responsibility to think outside of themselves and create life for others.

So have babies, and teach them to go and create life- to do what is good for life all over the world.

There are 2 genders- because gender is the way God created us to generate life. Unlike the Enuma Elish- male and female is not an afterthought to our God, it is essential- at the heart of what it means to be human- and what it means for humans to image God.

Now let's look at Chapter 2. Chapter 2 is the close up view of creation. If chapter 1 was about God's transcendence- chapter 2 is about his immanence. His intimacy. His closeness to his creation. We get God closely interacting with the humans.

Gen 2:18

Here- after multiple instances in Chapter 1 of God noting that his creation is good- we find something finally- not good.

It is the human's aloneness.

So YHWH says, "I will make a helper that corresponds to him."

Now- a couple of things here. The word "helper" can sound pejorative in our context. Like a parent asking a kid if they want to be the helper. Or "Hamburger Helper" (I grew up on that stuff- and wow- what was that animated glove doing to us all?)

But helper here is not negative. In fact, its a word that is used for God in other context. God is my Helper. my Ezer.

Second- there is a theory- I'm not saying its necessarily correct- but I am saying that its one to consider- and makes sense in the context here- that the first being was non-sexed. And when God puts the first human to sleep, from it come 2 sexed beings.

Genesis 2:22-23

Mainly that centers on what happens in v 23. Where suddenly we get two new terms. man is not "ADAM" here- rather- the Hebrew word for man shifts to "ish" to correspond to the hebrew word "Ishshah". In other words- there was human- and then there was "male and female" created as a pair to work together at the heart of this life bringing project for the world.

Notice- that the woman is made from the man's side. The very same material as the man- equal. At the same time, a corresponding difference. She is Fit for him, he is fit for her.

Each literally fits the other one like a puzzle piece. Their physical bodies each point to the other one. Think about a light socket and a light bulb. Physically- I can look at a light bulb and see that it has threads on the end. It is created for something that it doesn't have in itself.

Likewise- I can look at light socket- and I see it has grooves. Then when I put them together- I can see they work together to create something. Light!

Not only that, their physical bodies- their generative physical parts- resemble what it will take together to follow God's good command to bring life a flourishing and life to the world.

The ish- the male- has a vulnerable outward facing part that contains the seed of life. It must push out to create life- just like humanity will need to push out from the garden to create life. This task will be a vulnerable risk- to leave home and go out to create.

the Ishshah- has had inward facing physical part- that protects. it creates a home base for life- and feeding, nurturing and safety. Which is also required to fill the cultural mandate. As humans go into the world- they can't overextend their vulnerability- there also needs to be interdependent reliance on one another. A way they huddle around a fire together and have home...community.

A nurturing family, a tribe, a village.

The Physical body reveals the person. There is something about our physical bodies- that cannot and should not be ignored or treated as if they don't matter.

Gen 2:19-20

Notice that after God says, "Its not good the man is alone"- he parades animals in front of the ADAM for him to name them. Here is what's happening. ADAM is noticing the physical essence of each animal- and he is giving them a corresponding name.

At the end of noticing all this physical essence- he has not yet found the physical identifier that says- "THis one is like me, but also different than me in a way I won't be alone."

Gen 2:23

But then notice- that when he merely looks at the woman- he overflows with joy. The world's first R&B song.

AT LAST- the one I have waited for.

First he notes her sameness- You are like me. Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh. Created in God's image like me.

Then he notices her corresponding difference. She is like me- but also different than me. So like me she will have Ish in her name. Different- she will be Ishshah.

Also- remember- that there is more here than just a task to accomplish. This is a song. A poem. Its more than an instruction manual that the Ish sings about the Ishshah. Remember- they are created not merely to perform a task- but to have communion. To know and be known. Humanity- for both of the genders- is created to commune with each other and with God.

So just like the creative act of creating the universe came from the overflow of the communion of a trinitarian God- so the creative act of bringing life and flourishing to the world comes from the communion of humanity as male and female.

Back to 1)

Unlike the Enuma Elish- Humans are merely given a task as slaves- to be accomplished with violence and domination.

No they are invited into the creative act with a personal God that loves them- and wants to go with them- as they image him together all over the world.

Male and Female are corresponding creators of life together. That's what gender is. (and by the way- there is a lot more to say about that in future messages in this series- because this doesn't only refer to married people making babies. Single people. People who are unable to have children. You are not eliminated from using your gender to glorify God and create life and communion. I just can't say everything in one sermon).

Listen to this poem by GK Chesterton.

If I set the sun beside the moon,

And if I set the land beside the sea,

And if I set the town beside the country,

And if I set the man beside the woman.

I suppose some fool would talk about one being better.

- G.K. Chesterton

Male and Female are equal image bearers of God- designed to point to God by pointing to one another. they are different- but in that difference we find life- not strife.

Ok- a much shorter point now.

2) Gods word creates reality. Our words describe it. When we get it backwards, we break.

I hope you noted that God created by speaking.

But when Adam names the animals- he looks at what is there- and describes it.

Constructionist view of language over Correspondence is bad- gender theorists rely on this.

Do we create new things with language? Or is the truth about getting our language to correspond with the truth?

Humans in the fall use language to manipulate & blame.

3) The Church is the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ- A vulnerable outgoing producer of life & and safe nurturing home.

Matthew 28:18-20

Communion (Baptism & I am with you) & Procreation (GO-making disciples)

Note how he comes near. Intimacy. to start...intimacy at the end. Communion.

1 Cor 12:27

We as the body of Christ- together both male and female- we are to spiritually reproduce physical human beings that follow Jesus. Not just as some robotic following of instruction. But we are to go out vulnerably- we could get hurt- it costs us something. And we are to make a nurturing home for all humanity- even our enemies. A home where people can know and experience the love of Christ.

As the church- we are both an outward going spreader of the seed of the gospel, and an inward nurturing place for vulnerable people to find safety and grow.

Back to 3)

This is one of 1 million reasons why it doesn't correspond to who God makes the church to be- to look at anyone struggling with their gender identity, or sexuality and say "Get it together- or get out!" Rather- we should be a people that as we embrace what the Scripture says about gender- we should also embrace what that means for who we are as a church.

Is that easy? Absolutely not. Its difficult. Its messy. There are lots of conversations and situations to navigate. But I can tell you- don't on one hand embrace the Biblical idea of 2 corresponding genders in the name of Christ- while we also ignore the mission and intimacy- the cultivating and providing a loving safe home- that the church is called to do for the world.