



Finding Our Way with Gender

Summary and Goal

Culture continues to try to redefine a “true” man, woman, and everything in between. The Bible is clear. The issue is about who we believe is behind it all and whether or not we trust God’s wisdom in how He created every human. Scripture is clear regarding God’s plan and sovereign design of every human ever made.

Main Passages

Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:13-16

Session Outline

1. Let’s Start at the Beginning (Genesis 1:27)
2. The Wonder of Creation (Psalm 139:13-14)
3. God’s Wisdom Before the Beginning (Psalm 139:15-16)

Theological Theme

God’s divine wisdom and love are displayed in human creation.

Christ Connection

Demonstrating God’s love for humanity, Jesus came as a man to free humanity from sin and restore them to fellowship with the Father.

Missional Application

Believers can serve as agents of truth and hope in the world when equipped with a biblical understanding of gender and God’s creation of humanity.

Historical Context of Genesis

Purpose

Genesis lays the groundwork for everything else we read and experience in Scripture. Through Genesis we understand where we came from, how we got in the fallen state we are in, and the beginnings of God's gracious work on our behalf. Genesis unfolds God's original purpose for humanity.

Author

Since pre-Christian times authorship of the Torah, the five books that include the book of Genesis, has been attributed to Moses, an enormously influential Israelite leader from the second millennium b.c. with an aristocratic Egyptian background. Even though Genesis is technically anonymous, both the Old and New Testaments unanimously recognize Moses as the Torah's author (Jos 8:35; 23:6; 1Ki 2:3; 8:9; 2Ki 14:6; 23:25; 2Ch 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 34:14; 35:12; Ezr 3:2; 6:18; Neh 8:1; 9:14; Dan 9:11,13; Mal 4:4; Mk 12:19,26; Lk 2:22; 20:28; 24:44; Jn 1:17,45; 7:19; Ac 13:39; 15:21; 28:23; Rm 10:5; 1Co 9:9; Heb 10:28). At the same time, evidence in Genesis suggests that minor editorial changes dating to ancient times have been inserted into the text. Examples include the mention of "Dan" (Gen 14:14), a city that was not named until the days of the judges (Jdg 18:29), and the use of a phrase that assumed the existence of Israelite kings (Gen 36:31).

Background

The Torah (a Hebrew term for law) was seen as one unit until at least the second century b.c. Sometime prior to the birth of Christ, the Torah was divided into five separate books, later referred to as the Pentateuch (literally, five vessels). Genesis, the first book of the Torah, provides both the universal history of humankind and the patriarchal history of the nation of Israel. The first section (chaps. 1-11) is a general history commonly called the "primeval history," showing how all humanity descended from one couple and became sinners. The second section (chaps. 12-50) is a more specific history commonly referred to as the "patriarchal history," focusing on the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants: Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's 12 sons. Genesis unfolds God's plan to bless and redeem humanity through Abraham's descendants. The book concludes with the events that led to the Israelites being in the land of Egypt.

Special Features

The book of Genesis is the great book of beginnings in the Bible. True to the meanings of its Hebrew and Greek names (Hb bere'shith, "In Beginning" [based on 1:1]; Gk Geneseos, "Of Birth" [based on 2:4]), Genesis permits us to view the beginning of a multitude of realities that shape our daily existence: the creation of the universe and the planet earth; the origins of plant and animal life; and the origins of human beings, marriage, families, nations, industry, artistic expression, religious ritual, prophecy, sin, law, crime, conflict, punishment, and death.

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Session Plan

Finding Our Way with Gender

? For Further Discussion

Why do you think people respond differently to difficult, even confrontational, discussions when they are sure the other person genuinely cares for them? How is that indicative of how believers should speak truth to those that have other viewpoints?

Introduction

- ? How can we balance truth and love when talking to people who experience gender questions/confusion? What are some warning signs that you might anticipate if that balance starts to fade?
- ? How confident are you currently in your ability to biblically substantiate your views on this issue? What texts would be most important for you?

In this week's session, we will see that the biblical foundation of gender has been in place from the beginning. By examining not only the details of God's creation of humanity, but also the purpose for His doing so, believers can confidently voice their doctrinal stance on gender.

1. Let's Start at the Beginning (Genesis 1:27)

From the beginning, then, it was God's plan for a man and a woman to join together and fulfill His design for creation. The differences between the two genders were intentionally designed by God to enable the faithful following of His will and the blessing of His creation.

- ? Why is it important to connect being made "in the image of God" with fulfilling God's design for creation? How does this impact a person's understanding of his or her purpose?
- ? What is the significance of the narrator specifically pointing out that God created them "male and female" in connection with being made in God's image?

2. The Wonder of Creation (Psalm 139:13-14)

If Genesis 1:27 shows the reader the broad view of God's good plan for humanity in creation, the writings of the psalmist in Psalm 139 underscore the personal reflection of wonder on his own creation. In a beautiful psalm attributed to David, God was praised for His personal attention to the psalmist while being omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. It was the contrast of God's limitless eternity with His

intimate shepherding of the individual that evoked the writer's praise. David had already spoken of his inability to conceal anything from God, regardless of the extreme distance of the location or even the lack of light. Despite the scope of God's magnitude, He is immediately and constantly present and observant of each of His creations.

- ❓ Psalm 139 offers a model of sorts for contemplating one's own body. When you consider how the same God wove you together, what specific aspects are the most amazing to you? How does this view of one's body contrast the cultural view of "body"?
- ❓ How does the uniqueness with which God created you inform your understanding of God's intimate nature? How does that help you understand what it means to have a relationship with Him?

3. God's Wisdom Before the Beginning (Psalm 139:15-16)

In verse 15, David returned to the idea of God's omnipresence, but at a level of intimacy that may not generally be considered when speaking of God being everywhere. The psalmist spoke of God being present even in the microscopic reality of his mother's womb, even before he was being formed. Even that was not hidden from the all-knowing gaze of his loving God. So astounded by such divine attention was David that he continued to express his wonder of God's knowledge of the humanly unknowable. He referred to his mother's womb as "in the secret" and "in the depths of the earth."

- ❓ Have you ever been in a place that caused you to think that God had forgotten you or lost sight of your situation? How does verse 15 speak to such feelings?
- ❓ How did the psalmist give voice to his understanding of when God was mindful of him and his life? What words in particular give you the sense that God had an intention for the design of his body?

Conclusion

- ❓ How does attaching God's purpose to creating the two genders strengthen your ability to stand on biblical views of gender and personhood?
- ❓ Why is it important to differentiate between "everyone is unique" and "everyone is created uniquely by God to accomplish His purpose"? How do these parameters help in the discussion of gender?

❓ For Further Discussion

Which of the world's ways to convince people the Bible is incorrect have you witnessed most prominently or repeatedly? What would be your answer to those tactics?



Expanded Session Content

Finding Our Way with Gender

Introduction

The matter of how the church responds in the conversation regarding gender and personhood is one of the most potentially divisive topics that the church must equip itself to handle with grace and truth.

Unfortunately, those two responses are sometimes divorced from one another, leaving a detrimental imbalance in the wake. For those that respond with only biblical truth, refusing to acknowledge the internal pain or personal suffering that may be in place for the person experiencing gender identity questions, there is a strong likelihood that only more damage will be done due to callousness and condescension. For those that respond with acceptance and love with no effort at accountability or encouragement toward holiness, the danger is high that the gospel is diluted and Christianity is errantly understood to be a celebration of professed brokenness with no inclination or intention toward becoming like Jesus.

Dr. Russell Moore, President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, offers some important insights on how the church can and should respond as witnesses for Christ's truth:

Christian congregations that seek to be faithful to the gospel must teach what's been handed down to us, that our maleness and femaleness points us to an even deeper reality, to the unity and complementarity of Christ and the church. A rejection of the goodness of those creational realities then is a revolt against God's lordship, and against the picture of the gospel that God had embedded in the creation.

But this also means that we will love and be patient with those who feel alienated from their created identities. We must recognize that some in our churches will face a long road of learning what it means to live as God created them to be, as male or female. That sort of long, slow, plodding and sometimes painful obedience is part of what Jesus said would be true of every believer: the bearing of a cross. That cross-bearing reminds us that God doesn't receive us because of our own effort but because God reconciled us to himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.¹

- ❓ How can we balance truth and love when talking to people who experience gender questions/confusion? What are some warning signs that you might anticipate if that balance starts to fade?
- ❓ How confident are you currently in your ability to biblically substantiate your views on this issue? What texts would be most important for you?
- ❓ Why do you think people respond differently to difficult, even confrontational, discussions when they are sure the other person genuinely cares for them? How is that indicative of how believers should speak truth to those that have other viewpoints?

Session Summary

In this week's session, we will see that the biblical foundation of gender has been in place from the beginning. By examining not only the details of God's creation of humanity, but also the purpose for His doing so, believers can confidently voice their doctrinal stance on gender.

1. Let's Start at the Beginning (Genesis 1:27)

In the account of creation found in Genesis 1, the height of God's creation was humanity. The creation of humanity included elements not present in other aspects of creation; namely, an intra-Trinitarian conversation. At the opening of Genesis 1:26, the narrator stated, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.'" Mankind is not made in the image of angels or any other celestial beings other than God Himself. Therefore, the us and our is an early glimpse at the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This privileged glimpse into the inner working of eternity past bears witness to God's design for humanity—that it would be in His image or likeness. The gravity of that statement is hard to state briefly. It means, in part, that humanity's creation enables them to reflect God's character and likeness, which includes living in intimate community and carrying out God's divine design for creation.

This set the stage for what happened in verse 27. Because God saw fit to include this privileged glimpse in the Bible, it must be inextricably linked to living in accordance with His will and design. How does the manner in which man would be created include God's design? The answer resides in the job description humanity was given: be fruitful and multiply and steward/shepherd creation. Therefore, in verse 27, "God created man in His own image."

Made in God's Image

Verse 27 exists in poetic form that included three lines. The first two lines are written "in chiasmic agreement (inverted repetition)."² Repetition was used to increase emphasis on a particular section of writing. To elevate that emphasis, the artistic chiasm was used to communicate great importance. In this case, it was to firmly assert man's creation being exclusively in God's image.

- ❓ Why is it important to connect being made “in the image of God” with fulfilling God’s design for creation? How does this impact a person’s understanding of his or her purpose?
- ❓ What is the significance of the narrator specifically pointing out that God created them “male and female” in connection with being made in God’s image?

Created as God’s People

The dynamics at work during the creation of the humanity began a theme that runs the course of the Bible. God was creating a people for Himself to fill the land that He would gift them, in which He would dwell with them. This theme can be traced through the promise to Abraham, Moses and Joshua combining to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land, and ultimately in Revelation 21 with the New Heaven and New Earth where God’s people would dwell with Him in New Jerusalem.

After inversely repeating the man was created in God’s image, the text makes a noticeable and significant shift from singular nouns and verbs to plural. While this may seem like a dispensable fact that only grammarians would care about, nothing could be further from the truth. The shift to plural in the last line of the three-line poem focused the attention of the creation of humanity on the sexual distinctiveness of the male and the female. The Hebrew narrative does not use the customary words for man and woman here. Instead the Hebrew text uses the words “zakar” (male) and “neqeba” (female) to “particularly express human sexuality... Male and female human members are image-bearers who both are responsible for governing the world. Although the man and woman complete each other making the full complement of ‘man,’ it can be said that an individual alone bears the ‘image,’” according to Kenneth Mathews.³ In other words, the greatest fulfillment of the image of God that humanity could experience would be when a man and woman (in the context of marital commitment, as would be shown at the end of Genesis 2) jointly fulfilled the divine design for which they were created – “be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.” (Gen. 1:28)

From the beginning, then, it was God’s plan for a man and a woman to join together and fulfill His design for creation. The differences between the two genders were intentionally designed by God to enable the faithful following of His will and the blessing of His creation.

2. The Wonder of Creation (Psalm 139:13-14)

If Genesis 1:27 shows the reader the broad view of God’s good plan for humanity in creation, the writings of the psalmist in Psalm 139 underscore the personal reflection of wonder on his own creation. In a beautiful psalm attributed to David, God was praised for His personal attention to the psalmist while being omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. It was the contrast of God’s limitless eternity with His intimate shepherding of the individual that evoked the writer’s praise. David had already spoken of his inability to conceal anything from God, regardless of the extreme distance of the location or even the lack of light. Despite the scope of God’s magnitude, He is immediately and constantly present and observant of each of His creations.

Considering the might and presence of God, then, the writer continued reflecting on his own creation in verse 13. In doing so, he referenced the Lord's work in creating body and soul, as the verse contains two halves. The creation of his inmost being literally referred to my kidneys because kidneys was "commonly used for the internal emotional being, the soul or spirit. It was understood that a person was formed in the womb by natural reproductive processes; but the believer emphasizes that God is the cause of it all," according to Allen Ross.⁴ The second half of verse 13 addresses the creation of the writer's physical body, as God "knit me together in my mother's womb." The visual metaphor is of holy artwork meticulously woven together with divine dexterity.

-  Psalm 139 offers a model of sorts for contemplating one's own body. When you consider how the same God wove you together, what specific aspects are the most amazing to you? How does this view of one's body contrast the cultural view of "body"?

-  How does the uniqueness with which God created you inform your understanding of God's intimate nature? How does that help you understand what it means to have a relationship with Him?

Verse 14 continues the psalmist's praise of God for His intimacy and creativity in creating him. There was nothing theoretical or general about the psalmist's praise. He was speaking specifically regarding his observations about his own person. To miss the note of personal connection between his own body and person and the God who fashioned his being would be to misunderstand the passage entirely. David made a subtle but important transition, however, from his own person being "remarkably and wondrously made" to all of God's works being equally wondrous because of the nature of the One who created them. In other words, as David considered his own body as God created it, he both worshiped God in His marvelous creativity and realized that God extended the same attention, detail, and marvelous creativity to all of His creation. All of humanity, then, is equally and completely unique.

3. God's Wisdom Before the Beginning (Psalm 139:15-16)

In verse 15, David returned to the idea of God's omnipresence, but at a level of intimacy that may not generally be considered when speaking of God being everywhere. The psalmist spoke of God being present even in the microscopic reality of his mother's womb, even before he was being formed. Even that was not hidden from the all-knowing gaze of his loving God. So astounded by such divine attention was David that he continued to express his wonder of God's knowledge of the humanly unknowable. He referred to his mother's womb as "in the secret" and "in the depths of the earth."

God's Sovereignty and Omniscience

Psalm 139 consists of 4 sections or strophes, each containing six verses. According to Allen Ross, "In each of the first three strophes a clear pattern emerges: a summary statement, then a development of this theme with examples, and then a conclusion."⁵ The flow of the psalm intentionally and poetically emphasizes the sovereignty and omniscience of God.

- ❓ Have you ever been in a place that caused you to think that God had forgotten you or lost sight of your situation? How does verse 15 speak to such feelings?
- ❓ How did the psalmist give voice to his understanding of when God was mindful of him and his life? What words in particular give you the sense that God had an intention for the design of his body?

Even in the secret of his mother's womb David confessed, "Your eyes saw me when I was formless..." Ross explains, "The verb 'saw' in this context has the nuance of 'to oversee, superintend.' And what was being superintended was the fetus, the unformed body."⁶ The fact that God was superintending before there was even a form of a body meant that God was orchestrating David's formation according to His purposes. As if describing God as a superintendent weren't clear enough, David continued by proclaiming that all of his days were planned by God long before he was even formed in his mother's womb.

Conclusion

There is great comfort to be had in the conversation regarding gender because God has not been silent on the matter. Quite to the contrary, He spoke of it from the very beginning. In doing so, in Genesis, Psalms, and numerous other texts, God gives clear direction and application for His people.

First, God created them male and female for a reason. Genesis made clear that in God's design there are two genders. The fact that there are two genders, however, is not based on random occurrence or God randomly deciding that there would be two. Rather, God created them male and female so that they were uniquely able to carry out His design for creation faithfully—namely, to be fruitful and multiply and exercise dominion over the earth.

Second, God cares about each person individually and specifically. One of the powerful aspects of reading David's reflections on his own creation is that it underscores the fact that God cared about David's body and person specifically. The application that is inherent in David's wording is that, because God was that intimately knowledgeable about David's personal creation, He is equally mindful of everyone's physical body, gender, personality, etc. There is nothing happenstance about how a person's body is formed, what gender they are, or how long they will live on the earth. All such details are known and superintended by God.

Third, every human being that has ever lived was uniquely created by God for the specific ways He will accomplish His purposes in and through that person. David speaking of being formed gave the picture of tapestries being intricately woven into masterpieces. He used such lavish metaphors because that is how God treasures His creation. God carefully works to form each person down to the last hair, fingernail, and taste bud. In so doing, the unique aspects of each person indicate how God might use that person to continue His redemptive work in the world.

Fourth, the world constantly tries to convince people that everything in these passages is a lie. The world seeks to strip away divine purpose. Secular wisdom seeks to convince people that their bodies are random, happenstance, or even wrong. The biblical truth is that God knew them when no one else could, loved them before anyone knew they were there, and planned for them before time began.

- ❓ How does attaching God's purpose to creating the two genders strengthen your ability to stand on biblical views of gender and personhood?
- ❓ Why is it important to differentiate between "everyone is unique" and "everyone is created uniquely by God to accomplish His purpose"? How do these parameters help in the discussion of gender?
- ❓ Which of the world's ways to convince people the Bible is incorrect have you witnessed most prominently or repeatedly? What would be your answer to those tactics?

Prayer of Response

Pray and thank God for His design in the creation of men and women. Thank Him for His intimate care in the creation of each person and the certainty that He will accomplish His purposes through humanity. Pray to be a person who upholds the truth of God's design with grace and truth.

Additional Resources

- *Designed for Joy* by Jonathan Parnell and Owen Strachan
- *God's Design for Man and Woman* by Andreas Kostenberger
- *What's the Difference?* by John Piper

For Next Week

Session Title

- Finding Our Way With Sexuality

Main Passages

- Romans 1:18-32

Session Outline

1. God's Wrath on Wrongful Worship (Romans 1:18-23)
2. Stubborn Hearts Given Over (Romans 1:24-31)
3. Volitional Rebellion (Romans 1:32)

Memorize

¹⁴ For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well.

-Psalm 139:13-14

Daily Readings

- Monday - Hebrews 13:4
- Tuesday - 1 Corinthians 6:18-20
- Wednesday - 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5
- Thursday - Leviticus 18:22
- Friday - Proverbs 6:32
- Saturday - 1 Thessalonians 4:7

Extended Commentary

Genesis 1:27

1:24-31. Life-forms that live primarily on the land were created on the sixth day. This day paralleled the third day when dry land appeared. Again the creation was according to various kinds.

The life that animals possessed was a conscious life in comparison to the unconscious life of vegetation. All sorts of animals were created. This is noted by various terms (livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals) which relate to those that man was able to tame and use and those that remained wild. The fact that certain animals such as dinosaurs have become extinct—a situation that continues to occur—does not conflict with the original creation. The creation of animals is dealt with first, but on the same day mankind was also created.

Special attention is paid to one creature who, although he could be confused with other land animals, was significantly different. Mankind became the highlight of this day and, except for the Creator himself, became the most powerful, authoritative being in all creation. His creation is treated separately from the other land creatures.

Only of this creature is it said that he was created in the image of God. The creation of “man” in the image of God refers to all mankind, not just Adam, as the pronoun them and the reference to male and female in verse 27 indicates. God and mankind share a likeness (the Hebrew terms for image and likeness are essentially synonymous terms) that is not shared by the other creatures. This likeness probably involves the personality, aesthetic appreciation, authority, moral, and spiritual qualities that both God and humans share, unlike the animals. Since God and humans share such likeness, it should not be surprising that a relationship between God and humans is a focus in the rest of Scripture. Mankind possesses a self-conscious life in which he is able to thank and worship the Creator.

Mankind’s function included the subduing of the earth and all that was created and placed on it. Man found himself accountable to God from the beginning. The restriction on eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would come later. But even here in Genesis 1, he was told to be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. The command to be fruitful and increase in number is generally recognized as a command to the heads of the human race (here to Adam and Eve and again later to Noah in Gen.

9:1). It is not usually interpreted as something required of every person. This seems clear from the fact that some humans are incapable of reproducing and others can please God by not getting married (1 Cor. 7:8).

To demand that everyone should bear as many children as he or she possibly can is unscriptural. The fact that children are produced from a divinely designed sexual union affirms that this type of sexual activity is good with no hint of evil. In God's plan both a father and mother are needed to produce children. Both are also needed to raise children. Those who are forced to raise children as single parents often struggle and need special support.

God was both gracious and generous in his provision of food for man: I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. Man was originally created as a vegetarian. Only after the flood was he given animals to eat (Gen. 9:3). There is no indication in the New Testament that Christians are required to return to this pre-flood lifestyle of vegetarianism.⁷

Psalm 139:13-16

139:13. Moreover, David knows that God is all-powerful. This is proven in that the Lord has made him skillfully in his mother's womb. God created his inmost being (i.e., his kidneys, symbolic of his vital organs, his heart, liver, lungs, even his innermost emotions and moral sensitivities). God knit him like a skilled artisan would weave a beautiful tapestry. This work of creation was done in his mother's womb, beginning nine months before he was born.

139:14. David could only praise God for this display of wonderful omnipotence. He understood he was fearfully and wonderfully made, producing awe and astonishment within him toward God who created him so perfectly.

139:15. My frame (i.e., bones and skeleton) was not hidden from God but in full view to divine eyes. God made David in the secret place, a euphemism for the womb, that unseen place concealed from human eyes. There he was woven together like a multicolored piece of cloth or fine needlepoint. All these threads picture his veins, arteries, muscles, and tendons.

139:16. God saw his unformed body before he was made. All his days were sovereignly ordained for David before he came into the world. The span of his life was written by God in his divine book containing his eternal decree. The precise length of his life was determined by God before he was born. There could be no changing the number of his days (Job 14:5).⁸

References

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