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Genesis 2:18-25

Eighth Message

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TOGETHER

SERIES: OUR STORY OF ORIGINS

Among the most bitterly contested issues today are those relating to marriage, sex and gender, both within the church and in wider society. There is much confusion over what constitutes marriage and gender. For the past seven weeks gay marriage has been legal here in California; in November the state will vote on Proposition 8, the proposed constitutional amendment to define marriage as between a man and a woman. The very notion of sex and gender is breaking down as progressives distinguish sex which is biologically defined from gender which is socially defined; society should therefore affirm the transgendered. A high school in Thailand was in the news this past week because it opened a separate bathroom for transgender males, for boys who consider themselves female.

This confusion about sex, gender and marriage extends to the church. As I noted last week the Anglican church is in turmoil over gay ordination. Within the evangelical church the role of women is a hot-button issue. We can dismiss the behavior of San Francisco and of the mainline churches as the inevitable result of liberal godlessness. But we are part of the evangelical community and the confusion over the role of men and women within families and the church touches us more directly. I think ourselves fortunate that this has generally not been a divisive issue within our body, but it has in many. We are greatly blessed by the many capable women in our body. In nearly every newcomers' class we are asked about our position on the role of women. There is no more sensitive issue within the evangelical church today. Both sides are convinced they are right, but on each side are godly believers whom I respect. I am therefore well aware that I am venturing out into a minefield more treacherous than the six days of creation or the millennium, both of which I've traversed in the past 18 months.

In the first creation account God created humans as his final creative act.

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule..."

**So God created human beings in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.**

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it..." (Gen 1:26-28 TNIV)

That is how TNIV renders these verses. The NIV reads,

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule..."

**So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (1:26-27 NIV)**

The TNIV, published in 2005, is a major upgrade of the NIV whose last major revision was in 1984. Any translation is from a source language into a target language. In the past twenty years the translators'

understanding of the source material has developed considerably, but the target language has also changed. English is a language in constant flux. Among the most significant changes have been those dealing with sex and gender. It is unfortunate that the flexibility and ambiguity of "man" have been lost; it can be used with or without the article, as a singular or a collective, and to refer to males specifically or to humans generically. No other word has that flexibility. But for many, especially the younger generation, "man" no longer conveys this range of meanings; it has become gender-specific. I therefore support the revisions of the TNIV, and am grieved by those who have disparaged the integrity of its translators, several of whom I know. For the past 15 years I have tried to be sensitive about gender language, not because I've gone liberal but because I'm trying to be a good steward of language and facilitate hearing. Perhaps you've noticed my struggles with language these past few weeks; someone remarked on it last Sunday.

In creating a human in his own image, God created both male and female. They were equally in his image and likeness. These are biological terms. God has so designed it that it would take male and female together, with their complementary anatomy, to fulfill the command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Now in chapter 2 we are given a second complementary account of the creation of the man and woman. We have seen that the Lord God formed the human out of the dust of the ground and placed him in paradise, there to enjoy the bounty he provided. Here he was to serve and to guard, keeping a single command. Given this idyllic environment, our text opens in a surprising manner,

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (2:18 TNIV)

Something was not good in paradise. God did not intend the human to live in isolation; he intended him to be in community, in relationship with others. He would therefore make him "a helper suitable for him." This term has generated much discussion. A helper (*ezer*) is someone who comes alongside to help, not someone who serves under. The term is most frequently used of God himself who comes to the aid of his people. There is no hint of hierarchy; if God had intended such he would have used the word "serve" as in v 15. The human serves under God, but the helper will help alongside. The term "suitable for him" or "corresponding to him" (*kenegdo*) has at its heart a preposition meaning "in front of one's face." When the helper is brought in front of the human he will recognize a face-to-face match because the other is either identical or complementary. In no manner is this a demeaning term, nor is there any hint of hierarchy.

In making a suitable helper for the human, God adopted a two-stage approach, first showing what is not a match, then what is a match. His first approach is to bring the animals before the human:

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. (2:19-20)

There is no need to put the forming of these animals into the pluperfect as TNIV has done, presumably to harmonize with chapter 1. The Lord made the animals and the birds in exactly the same way he had made the human: he formed them out of the ground, as a potter forms clay. He then brought them to the human for naming. God had named all he made on the first three days, but he delegated to the human the naming of the living creatures. The human thereby exercised his rule over the animal kingdom. Since this naming is referred to three times, we can assume God took delight in what the human was doing, for he was doing what he was created for. But, though the birds and animals had the same origin as the human, formed from the ground and filled with the breath of life, no suitable match was found. Each time the human looked into the face of an animal only to be disappointed.

The Lord knew that the human would find no helper. He did this both to allow the human to exercise his rule and to build his appreciation for the helper the Lord had in mind.

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (2:21-22)

The Lord dropped a deep sleep onto the man. This was a supernaturally induced sleep, similar to what he dropped on Abram and Saul (Gen 15:12; 1 Sam 26:12). It rendered the man non-active; the provision of the helper would be entirely the Lord's doing. A different verb is used for the making of this helper. Removing a rib from the human, the Lord built this part into a woman. The woman has a different origin than the first human and the living creatures.

Just as God had brought the animals, so now he brought the woman. The man's response was instantaneous recognition of a match, as he erupted into poetic exclamation:

The man said,

**"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man." (2:23)**

Here is the man's first recorded speech. Its climactic nature is indicated by poetry, as elsewhere in Genesis. The man's excitement is expressed in his three-fold use of the demonstrative pronoun "this," including both the first and the last words. Most translations obscure this; a more literal translation is,

**"This time!
bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
of this it will be said 'woman,' (ishab)
for out of man (ish)
was taken this."**

The first words out of his mouth are, "This time!" After all the other times when he had looked each animal in the face he knew

that this time was different. He immediately recognized that the woman was of the same stuff as himself: "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." This identity is expressed in her name: she would be called *ishab*—woman because she has come from *ish*—man; a word-play that works as well in English as in Hebrew. Many have said that the man showed his authority over the woman by naming her. This is not so. Rather than naming her as he named each animal (v 20), he announced what the world would say of her, and indirectly of himself. Not only is this the first instance of *ishab*—woman, it's the first instance of *ish*—man. He proclaimed universal recognition of the complementarity of the man and the woman as different but the same. The human had now been differentiated into man and woman and the man couldn't be happier. He began and ended by drawing attention to "this one." We can picture him showing her off to the world, immensely delighted and proud, thereby showering her with glory.

The section concludes with a dual epilogue. The first is a timeless principle; the second a statement about the happy state of the first couple.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (2:24-25)

The differentiation of the human into man and woman, male and female, forms the basis for marriage. The human has been differentiated not so he can be apart, but so he can be together. The two become so together that they become one again. To this end, a man will leave and cleave. These are strong verbs, covenantal verbs, which God will later use of Israel, calling it to forsake false gods and cling to him. Forsaking his identity as his parents' son, each man establishes a new identity with his wife. The two become one flesh through intercourse, whereby the man knows his wife. It takes male and female acting together to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.

Here we have several principles of marriage. Marriage is heterosexual: the union of a man and a woman who forsake their prior identity and cling together as a couple. Marriage is life-long: the strong covenantal language of leaving and cleaving implies a permanent bond. The Law will later allow divorce for human sin, but this is not the original intent of marriage. It is a deep tragedy that the divorce rate among Christians is as high as among non-Christians. Marriage is the environment for sex: it is only after leaving and cleaving that the two become one flesh.

Thus joined together the man and the woman were naked and unashamed. They were together in harmony with one another, with creation, with God. All was well.

This text portrays man and woman in the garden as fully equal. The woman was not subservient to the man. She was a helper alongside him rather than a servant under him. He did not exert ownership or authority over her by naming her. Nevertheless there was an order: the man preceded the woman; three times it is stated that the rib or woman was taken from the man. The woman was made to help alongside the man. She helped the man not be alone. I think she was also to help him work and keep, serve and guard. Matthew Henry beautifully described the togetherness of the woman with the man:

Not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with

him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.¹

In all things the man and the woman were together.

Unfortunately we don't get to see the man and the woman live life together. So many arguments could be avoided if we now had a chapter describing their daily life in the garden. Instead we immediately see their togetherness unravel. Chapter 3 shows them oscillating back and forth between being together and not together. Physically they were together the whole time, but relationally they were not.

- They were *not together* in facing temptation: the woman faced the serpent alone, though the man was with her (3:1-6).
- *Together* they immediately felt shame and fear after eating (3:7-10).
- *Not together* as God interrogated them, they passed the blame (3:11-13).
- *Together* they received judgment (3:16-19).

Though the man and woman were together in receiving judgment, God drove a wedge between them. He inflicted each with pain but in different arenas: the woman in child-rearing, the man in working the ground to get food. The harmony between the two was upset, as God said to the woman,

**“Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.” (3:16)**

This is best understood with reference to God's rebuke of Cain's anger, which uses the same vocabulary and syntax.

“[sin] desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” (4:7)

Just as sin's desire was to master Cain, so the woman's desire would be to master her man; just as Cain must exercise dominion over sin, so the man would exercise dominion over the woman. This is not the ideal state; this is human relationship in a fallen state under judgment. The togetherness of the man and the woman has been fractured by assertiveness and male dominance. This male dominance was immediately exercised when the man named his woman Eve (3:20), using the same conventional naming formula as for the animals (2:20).

Expelled from the garden, the man toiled at wresting food from the ground, and the woman in pain bore children. Together in sin, shame, fear and judgment, they were no longer together relationally. How would God heal their relationship?

Much of the debate about the role of women today in the church is prefaced by discussion of women's role in Israel and in the ministry of Jesus. The great honor that Jesus gave women is a worthy study, but neither Israel nor the ministry of Jesus form the paradigm for the role of women in the church today. We need to turn directly to the NT documents about the church. It is here that we find the controversial texts about the relationship between men and women. These texts are of two types. Some are within what are known as household codes governing reciprocal behavior between pairs of individuals within church households. Others are found within passages dealing with corporate gatherings of churches.

Twenty years ago evangelicals aligned into two major groups in their interpretation of these texts. On one side is the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), for which Wayne Grudem and John Piper are the major spokesmen. It argues a complementarian position: men and women are equal before God, but have different and complementary roles within families and within

the church. In both arenas male headship is the norm, and certain roles within the church are excluded to women.

On the other side is the group called Christians for Biblical Equality, founded by Catherine Kroeger. It argues the egalitarian position: men and women are equal not only in value but also in gifting and ability. Their roles are interchangeable, and no role within the church is denied a woman simply because she is a woman.

CBMW generally favors the ESV and decries the TNIV; CBE favors the TNIV. This puts me in an awkward position for I use both!

Let me again say that both sides are evangelical, both sides have people whom I highly respect. For the past few weeks I have been reading the books of both sides. Both have good things to say, but I've also been appalled by some of the arguments on both sides. Both can be guilty of trying to make Scripture fit their preconceived ideas. I take this as a warning to myself.

First a general observation: all these texts are addressed to churches—not to individuals, not even to couples or families, but to church communities. The egalitarians frequently start with this verse:

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

But the context is often forgotten. This verse is about membership in God's family, not about roles within that family. In Abraham God began to call out a people that was ethnically defined. But now in Christ he has opened up membership in that family to all who belong to Christ through faith, irrespective of ethnicity, economic status or gender. This is his new society in which he is healing fractured relationships. The church is the society in which each member lives in healthy relationship with everyone else: Jew with Gentile, master with slave, parent with children, male with female. It is a society which transcends these pairings, even those between parent and child, and between husband and wife. The true locus for healed relationships, then, is the church: the individual members one with the other, and the whole body with Christ. It doesn't matter who you are: whether you're married or single, male or female. Husband and wife belong together, but there is a greater level of belonging beyond their togetherness. If both are in Christ, then both belong within the church. The church together belongs in Christ.

Three months ago Lauren Winner spoke at PBC Palo Alto about “What is Real Sex?” What I most appreciated about her talk was her insistence that our sexual behavior does not occur within a vacuum but within the community of God's people, whom it impacts. We are so prone to forget that we belong in the community of faith. Thinking in community terms is especially foreign to rugged American individualism. Unfortunately much of the debate about the role of women within the church is influenced by this individualistic thinking: what do I have the right to do? what does she not have the right to do? But all the controversial NT texts are about what is seemly for and beneficial to the community.

The household codes (Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet 2:18-3:7) address relationships within the community. All are one in Christ, but the distinctions continue between individuals. The general principle is given at the beginning of the Ephesian code: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21). The nature of this mutual submission depends upon your position: husband or wife, parent or child, master or slave. But the general principle is the same: behave so as to promote the welfare of the other party, and do so because

of Christ. Thus the whole community will live together in a manner that is fitting to its status as renewed humanity.

The church community is the setting for the other difficult texts, but this time it's the church gathered for fellowship. There are three particularly controversial texts: two addressed to the church in Corinth (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:34-35), one to the church in Ephesus (1 Tim 2:8-15). In both churches their regular gatherings were disruptive and unseemly; and it wasn't just the women who were causing the problems. We don't fully understand the cultural specifics of each situation, but Paul's general principles are clear. When the church gathers together, both men and women should behave in such a way as to bring honor, not shame, not only upon themselves but upon others. For example, it wasn't about the head-coverings per se; it was about the message conveyed by the head-coverings or lack thereof (1 Cor 11:2-16). Men are to behave so as to bring glory to God; women are to behave so as to bring glory to men. It's not about yourself; it's about how your behavior enhances the community.

I'm quite prepared to say that this is culturally conditioned. What is considered fitting changes with the times. Paul urged the women in both Corinth and Ephesus to wear clothing that was modest and becoming. But clothing that would be considered very modest today would have shocked a Victorian. In the developing world public breast feeding is not shocking, but men wearing shorts is. In my early teens my mother explained to me in Thailand that the time for wearing shorts in public was over. I didn't like it at the time, but I respect it now, because I've come to understand that it's not about me, it's about how my behavior affects others. This respect for others now governs how I dress when I travel, especially to non-Western countries.

In each of these texts Paul maintains that there is still an order within relationships. The woman came from the man and to help the man, but God has so arranged it that all men have to be born of women (1 Cor 11:8-9, 12). We are therefore all interdependent, and all dependent upon God. We are all together.

Our real problem in determining the role of women is that we don't understand how the church should function as a community. Here, for example, is an egalitarian's argument for women leaders:

As women move into ministerial positions, they bring a renewed understanding of ministry. They tend to challenge the older hierarchical understanding of church leadership, and in its place promote a cooperative approach. Women leaders often emphasize a collaborative, mutually facilitating and participative style of leadership.

The more consensual style of female leadership finds its parallel in a more egalitarian understanding of the church. This stands in stark contrast to hierarchical models that focus on the distinctions between clergy and laity. Female ministers tend to view the primary task of clergy as empowering the laity for ministry. In addition they tend to see the church as a caring community of faith, which encourages character traits typically associated with the feminine, such as compassion, mercy and the giving of nurture.²

The problem here is not the lack of woman leaders, but the wrong understanding of the church. I agree with everything said here, but as a man. Our elders, as men, are committed to all these principles.

We are the family of God, reconciled to God and to one another. Our model for relationships is given by God himself. Restored parent-child relationships take as their model the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son delights to do the Father's will; the Father delights to say of his Son, "This is my Son, whom I love, in whom I am well pleased." Restored husband-wife relationships take as their model the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ has given himself for the church; he points to her and says, "This one! Isn't she glorious." The Father and the Son glorify one another. Christ and the Church glorify one another. The purpose of order within Christian relationships is to enhance the other within the community. All discussion about the role of women must take place within this understanding of relationships.

Together, as man and woman, we are God's family. We best express that togetherness, not by arguing over our rights, but by sharing a meal. Our Scripture reading (1 Cor 10:16-17, 23-24, 31-33; 11:1, 27-29) was a selection of verses in which Paul urged the Corinthians to see themselves as one body, especially in the context of eating the Lord's Supper. (The head covering passage is in the middle of this text!) He called them to eat and drink recognizing the Lord's body—that is the church. Let us eat and drink together in fellowship with God and with one another.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 15:5-6)

1. Matthew Henry, *Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1706).

2. Stanley J. Grenz & Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 25-26.