

Intro:

I have the privilege this evening of getting us started on our topic for this conference: Vocation and Recreation to the Glory of God. What is assumed in that title, and what we will be talking about, is how our male and femaleness shape our work and our play. And my task is the set-up to that. Before we get into the practical out-working’s in these areas of our God given design as Male and Female, we need to first lay out a basic sketch of what our male and femaleness was designed for.

Some of you might feel like there is no need to go back to the basics on this sort of thing. But going back to the basics is always a good exercise. And especially so with this because of the spirit of our age.

You know, ever since the triumph of feminism in our society, men and women have been singing that silly song to each other: “*Anything you can do, I can do better. I can do anything better than you.*” (1946 Musical “Annie Get Your Gun”)

Really? Anything? **The truth is that there are some things** that men are made to do, and can do better. And some things that women are made to do, and can do better.

In fact, [surprise, surprise] there are some things men can do that women can’t do at all. And there are some things that women can do that man can’t do at all. And that doesn’t make one better than the other. It just means that they are different and for good reason. One sings the melody and the other harmony. And that makes the song that they sing all the more beautiful.

“If I set the sun beside the moon, and if I set the land beside the sea, and if I set the flower beside the fruit 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

So we are going to talk about those glorious difference between men and women. But first, a quick word on how they are the same.

I. The Same but Different

Genesis 1:27-28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

A. Made in God’s Image

Men and women, male and female are both made in the likeness of God. And because of this they are like one another in many ways.

They share in what it means to be human. They both have bodies and souls. They think, feel, will, and act as image bearers of God. They have Agency. Volition. The capacity for love, intimacy, creativity, communication, self-reflection and so forth.

In this way, male and female are perfect equals. They both are body and soul; rational and relational, creatures made in the image of God. They both are made to glorify God and enjoy Him forever without one being made to give more glory to God than the other, or designed to enjoy God more than the other.

In addition to this, we see in these verses that the dominion mandate is given to the man and the woman together. They are equal partners in their God-given mission to be fruitful and fill the earth; and to subdue and have dominion over it. *[And I say, “equal partners” meaning they both are equally necessary for accomplish-ing the task.]* They were given a job to do and in order to do that job, they would need each other.

Male and female, both made in God’s image. Male and female, equal participants and partners in the mission of God for man; to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue and exercise dominion over the earth.

But for all of these equalities, there are also disparities and differences. For if men and women were equal in every way then there would be no meaning to ‘male’ and ‘female’ at all. The two terms necessarily imply that there was a difference between them; between Adam and Eve, between what it means to be male or female.

B. Differences revealed by Nature

Now, when you look at Genesis 1:27 and think about it, while it establishes God’s creation of male and female in his image, it at the very same time assumes the reader knows what a man and a woman is.

And we should make note of this. Because this is a good example of Scripture working alongside what God has revealed through nature. Nature reveals distinctions between men and women. The Bible doesn’t need to spell out for us the biological differences of men and women. It doesn’t have to tell us that only women can have babies, because God has revealed that to us in our common experience in this world. And you don’t need to be a doctor or biologist to know it.

So when it comes to the basic differences of male and female, the Bible assumes and builds upon what nature clearly reveals to man.

To ask then what nature teaches about the realities of male and female is a Christian endeavor. What we observe in nature must be interpreted through the lens of Scripture, but we should not fail to remember that both revelations (natural and supernatural) come from God.

The most obvious differences between men and women are seen in **their physical constitution.** Our bodies are clearly different in a number of ways. And those biological differences have certain consequences. **For example,** men are generally larger, stronger and faster than women. They are physically more powerful than women. And women, unlike men, have the potential for bearing children and feeding them with their bodies.

But nature testifies to more than just these biological and physical differences between us. And it shouldn’t surprise us that being male or female is more than skin deep; more than differing bodies.

Since our bodies and souls are integrated together then it follows that our bodies (male or female) would correspond with our souls. That we would think and feel differently than one another. That our temperaments would be different. That the way we interact with each other and the world would be different. And that we would have varying strengths and weaknesses. Being male or female is more than just wearing different body parts.

Now one of the things we are about to see is that God made Adam and Eve in such a way that they, in their differences, were made to complement one another. **But central to that notion, is that God did not arbitrarily assign them roles,** it is rather that their God-given complementary roles were in accordance with their natures.

The God-ordained function of the man and woman matches their masculine and feminine natures. It is biology, but it’s more. The man has a male body and constitution fit for his masculine calling. The woman has a female body and constitution fit for her feminine calling.

Men are designed then to carry out masculine duties and a masculine role.

Women are designed to carry out feminine duties and a feminine role.

Each play their part according to their nature and calling, working together to fulfill the mission that God gave to them.

And we see these roles illustrated for us in Adam and Eve who serve as a paradigm for the rest of humanity, made in God's image as male and female.

II. Man's Calling Demonstrated in Adam

Genesis 2:8-9 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. **v. 15-17** The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Chapter 2 fills in a lot of details that Chapter 1 did not give to us. And one of those things we find out in chapter 2 is that God created Adam before He created Eve. And when he created Adam from the dust of the ground, He put him in the garden of Eden and charged him to work it and keep it.

It's easy for us to read that and not think much of it. To our ears it sounds like Adam was to do the work of a gardener. And that is true. But there is more to it than that. The words we have translated 'to work' and 'to keep' are actually both used in Numbers and Deuteronomy for the work of the priests and Levites in the Tabernacle.

1. Work = Serve & Provide (serve on behalf of God or don't 'serve other gods')

The task God gives to Adam is, first, like the priests in the Tabernacle, one of rendering service to the Lord.

The word for 'work' there can actually be translated 'serve'. In the garden-Temple, Adam would render service to the Lord by tending to the ground, the trees, and the plants of the garden. As the Levites and Priests served in the Tabernacle, Adam would do his service to God in Eden. This was his responsibility.

It was given to him before Eve came on the scene, and it was not only work done in service to the Lord, but it would also be work done for the provision of food for himself and his wife.

And you see this in the text. Right after God tells Adam he is to work and keep the garden, He goes on to tell him that he is to eat of the trees of the garden, except of course, the one tree that is prohibited. And in verse 9 we are told that God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

In other words, **Adam's work in the garden had two purposes.** One, it was his service unto the Lord as the garden was God's sanctuary where He met with man. And two, it was the means by which Adam was to provide food for himself and for the woman. As the man, Adam was to be the provider of his home.

2. Keep = Guard or Protect (Garden as Tabernacle/Home)

But along with 'working' the garden, Adam was also called to 'keep it'. And this word too is used to describe the work of the Priests in the Tabernacle.

In Numbers 18:5, Aaron is charged with 'keeping guard' over the sanctuary and over the altar. **Numbers 18:5-6** And you shall **keep guard** over the sanctuary and over the altar, that there may never again be wrath on the people of Israel.

The wrath that Moses is referring to was when Nadab and Abihu offered un-authorized fire in the Tabernacle and were put to death by the Lord. It was the priest's job to 'keep' or 'guard' the sanctuary and the altar so that there would be no such unlawful activity in the Lord's house.

This same word, 'keep' is also used in Genesis 3:24, when we are told that God placed an angel with a flaming sword **to guard** the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve had sinned.

The same word is likewise used in the blessing that Aaron spoke over the people of Israel saying, *"The Lord bless you and keep you"* That was to say, *"May the Lord protect you from evil or harm."*

Now in all of this what we are to see is that the role God gave to Adam, in accordance with his masculine nature, **was that of provider and protector** of his God-given home. **He was built for this.**

To 'keep' the garden, was to protect the garden from evil. In service to the Lord, Adam was to provide for himself and his wife and protect their garden home from transgressing God's command.

And if we wonder what that meant, all we have to do is read on to chapter 3 where the serpent comes in and deceives Eve while Adam stands by as it happens and then follows his wife; instead of ridding the garden of the Deceiver and leading his wife in obedience to God.

And who did God call on when that happened? Adam. Why Adam? Why in Genesis 3:9 are we told that God called for him and not them? Because it was Adam's role to protect the garden and lead his wife in obedience to God.

So the role of the man, according to God's design, is illustrated for us in Adam. The Biblical teaching that men are to lead their homes by providing and protecting is laid out for us in the first couple chapters of Genesis.

[This is why, by the way, only men served as soldiers throughout the Old Testament. It was in accordance with the nature of a man, not of a woman, to go to battle for the safety of the households of Israel. Likewise, Israel was led by Kings, not Queens. Why? Because it was in accordance with the nature of a man to lead in this way.]

III. Woman's Calling Demonstrated in Eve

Genesis 2:18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." v. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

What the Scripture tells us here is that the purpose for which God made Eve was that she would be a 'helper fit for Adam'. And therefore, being **'a helper fit for the man'** is central to God's design and role for the woman.

Now when some people hear this they think it is demeaning to women.

For one, some wrongly assume that being 'a helper fit' for the man implies that she is inferior to him in dignity or value. *[That can't be true because there are times when God is spoken of as the 'helper' of his people. Of course, there is a difference in that the woman was created to be 'a helper fit for man', so she is bound and defined by this in a way that God is not.]*

But you see, this is still distasteful to our modern sensibilities, because even though we can say that being a helper fit for the man doesn't imply that she is less than him, it does imply that the woman was made for the man; that her vocation was for the purpose of supporting him in his vocation.

And this actually says something about Adam too. It says that the man needed help. When God made Adam and put him in the garden to work it and keep it, he said, *"it is not good that the man should be alone."*

Adam could not fulfill God's purposes for mankind without a suitable helper. He was insufficient in himself to carry out the mission God had for his image bearers.

And he didn't need another man. Creation itself didn't need more masculine strength. What was needed for Adam and for the world that God had made was feminine strength. What was needed was that which could only be carried out by one who was female in body and feminine in nature.

Her being Adam's helper speaks to Adam's need and the woman's unique strength and value.

In order to be a 'helper' who was 'fit for him', Adam needed one who supplied what he lacked, who was his perfect fit or counterpart, and also was his equal in terms of her dignity as an image bearer of God.

So how does she help him? She helps him by being his companion and partner in fulfilling God's mandate given to them. She plays a role in subduing and exercising dominion with him in accordance with her feminine strength. **And particularly**, unlike Adam, she has the unique potential to bear children and be a mother.

This is shown to us in the name that Adam gives to the woman at the end of chapter 3. He calls her "Eve" because she is the "mother of all living".

Her name literally means 'life-giver'.

Adam is taken from the ground, named after the ground, and is to work the ground for the provision of his home. And Eve is taken from Adam, named after him in her title 'woman' and therefore oriented toward him. She is then given the name 'Eve'; for in union with the man she fills the home with their offspring; bearing and then nurturing their children.

He is the provider and protector of the home.

She is the helper of her husband and life-giver of the home.

We see an indication of their primary masculine and feminine vocations in the curses as well.

When it comes to the man, *what does God say?* He says, *"Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life."*

And to the Eve he says, *"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children."*

Of course, there is more to being a man than working to provide for the home and **there is more to being a woman** than bearing and raising children.

But what we might say is this. That her potential to bear and nurture children indicates the heart of her feminine calling. And his responsibility to work to provide for the home indicates the heart of his masculine calling.

They both work together to fill and subdue the earth. But the man is primarily oriented in a more outward manner. His responsibility to provide for the home takes him outside the home and into the fields. And the woman is primarily oriented in a more inward manner: toward her husband and children. It is not that she can't do work outside the home, but that her primary work is in the home.

She takes what her husband gives to her and gives it life. She nurtures that life and sustains it. She makes the home a place of refuge for her children, a place of love and beauty, a place of hospitality and community. Her very presence in the home is life-giving to both her husband and children.

"If the husband is the head, then the wife is the heart of the family. The husband brings in the fruits of his labor, the wife distributes them according to each one's need; the husband gives, the wife receives; the husband establishes the family, the wife preserves the family; the husband conceives the child, but the life of the child is

intimately developed along with that of the mother far more than with that of the father...” -Herman Bavinck [19th Century Reformed Theologian], “The Christian Family”

According to her feminine design, the woman is a ‘fit helper’ to the man. She is a life-giver. Her femininity is most tangibly expressed in motherhood. **And so to borrow the phrase from Bavinck**, we could say that the ‘helper’ of the man becomes the ‘heart of the home’. Being united to a man in marriage and bearing children comes with all the work of a wife, mother, and homemaker.

Her work in the home supports her husband as he seeks to provide for the home. **Her work in the home** caring for her children is the continuation of her expression of her life-giving nature.

Now a wife and mother’s role is not just a list of house chores that could be outsourced by a maid and nanny. It is her loving presence that makes the house a home. And in all that she does in the home, it is the expression of her love for her people that in many ways binds the family together.

Contrary to what the feminist movement would have us believe; **her calling is not** to stand in solidarity with all women. **It is to pour herself out** in all her feminine strength for the flourishing of her home.

“The vocation of motherhood is an embodied reality. It cannot be reduced to a set of household chores. It is a way of being that most fully represents her life-giving feminine nature. Further, the homeward orientation of women is not an imposition of patriarchal society, but rather a design feature of her own body. For example, when a woman conceives a child, her own body immediately becomes a home. During gestation, the child cannot survive apart from the sustenance of her body. He and his mother are one. At this stage, ‘mother’ and ‘home’ are the same thing. When he is born into the world, ‘home’ is wherever mother is. He is comforted in her arms and nourished at her breast.” -Michael Clary, “God’s Good Design”

“Life-giver” was an appropriate name for Eve, not only in the sense that she bore children, but that in her feminine nature the woman embodies a life-giving presence in the home. She is the heart of the home. She is the glory of her husband. The object of her children’s greatest affection and trust.

There is a reason why mom is generally the favorite of most children when they are young. Often even boys when they are young, look first to mom for help, mom for comfort, mom for security. She is their lighthouse. She is their home. **And this is her glory.** The fruit of her feminine nature and calling in its fullest expression.

It ought to fill you with wonder, men, when you look upon the beauty of your wife in all her God-given glory. The bearer and nurturer of your children. The apple of your eye. The heart of your home. Just as you have a kind of strength and glory that she does not possess. So she has a strength and glory that you do not possess.

IV. Putting things together

Now at this point some of you may be thinking, *this is all fine and good, but you’ve just tied masculinity and femininity to marriage and having children. So are you saying that a man isn’t a man until he is a husband and a father? And woman isn’t a woman until she is a wife and a mother?* No. That is not what I am saying.

My point is actually that this is what our masculinity and femininity are aimed at.

Masculinity is found in the qualities and characteristics necessary for a man to carry out his calling as a husband. To provide man must exercise his physical strength and his orientation toward the created world to build, plant, invent, and so forth. To protect he must be physically, spiritually and mentally alert, to potential dangers to his family and home. Dangers that come from within and from without. To lead he must learn to take responsibility as the head of the home bearing that weight that God built him to bear.

For the boy or man who is not yet married, growing in manliness means pursuing those qualities and characteristics of providing, protecting and learning to take responsibility, not only for himself, but for the good of others.

Femininity, on the other hand, is found in the qualities and characteristics necessary for a wife and mother to carry out her calling.

To be a helper to her husband she must exercise her unique abilities to compliment her husband and be his faithful companion. She must be willing to make use of the body God has given her and the ability she has to conceive and bear children. And that not only requires her biological make-up but also a tender and motherly spirit to be the heart of the home for her husband and children.

What about single women or women who can't have children? Femininity still conforms to the calling of a wife and a mother. Her life-giving nature can still be exercised even outside the normal contours of marriage and child bearing, such that her feminine nature becomes a source of blessing to sons and daughters in the faith.

She can still pursue the qualities of a godly wife and mother by adorning herself with a submissive and peaceful spirit in the household of faith, and exercising a nurturing and caring heart for the Saints; especially those who are young in the faith.

In God's family, there is a place for those who are single and desire to be married, and those who are widows and those who are given the gift of celibacy and so forth.

But their maleness and femaleness is still played out in the church as they embrace and utilize the strengths that God has given them to serve the body of Christ.

In the end a single man redeemed in Christ will prove to be a man who provides, protects and leads. He will be in some ways like a father to younger men in the church, just as Paul was to Timothy.

In the end a woman who was been single all her life will prove to be like a mother to many. In her feminine strength she will serve as a life-giving presence in the house-hold of faith; Making that house a place of warmth and hospitality where no member, no matter how young or how old, goes unnoticed or unloved.

C.S. Lewis captures this masterfully in his book, 'That Hideous Strength' in the character of Mother Dimble; a woman who was married for many years but unable to have children. At first one wonders why she is called Mother Dimble, but then it becomes evident that though this godly wife is barren, she flourishes in a motherly role to the younger women in her community at Saint Ann's.

She earned the title Mother by utilizing her feminine strength for the good of the household of faith.

Lewis also gives us a vivid picture of this in his book called 'The Great Divorce'.

If you haven't read it, the book is an allegory which imagines ghostly souls coming up from hell to visit the valley that is the doorstep of heaven. From heaven then come these solid spirits, who are souls of the deceased as well. Each spirit comes down to the valley to talk to the souls that had come up from hell; people they had known in their past lives on earth. And Lewis is there watching these meetings between the spirits from heaven and the ghosts from hell. And the last conversation that the readers witness through Lewis, is one between a woman and her husband. Here is the scene when he first sees the woman and inquires his guide about her.

One of the things I love about this picture that Lewis gives us of this glorified female saint is that it captures something of the glory of our redemption in Christ.

Redeemed humanity in Christ is not androgynous. Yes, in the end marriage will be no more. However, there will still be male and female. Mankind will not be stripped of its feminine and masculine design, but raised up and glorified so that manhood and womanhood will be revealed in all their glory to the praise of the Triune God.
[Grace does not nullify nature after all, but redeems & completes it.]

Our redemption in Christ has just begun. And even now it makes men all the truer to their masculine nature and calling and women all the truer to theirs.

In many ways we are the same. We share in the image of God. And we share in the inheritance of eternal life in Christ Jesus. But there are wonderful differences that we not only maintain and submit to, but joyfully praise God for; because his design is good. He never writes a bad tune. And the songs he writes always seem to have various parts that fit together in both unity and harmony.

This teaching was written by Pastor Chuck Marshall. Chuck is the church planting pastor of Waukesha City Church in Waukesha, Wi. It was presented as the plenary message at a gathering of men from like churches. It is used with permission.