

God, Man, and Woman: The Divine Experiment

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A Short Course on God's Plan for Men and Women

Purpose

This document is meant to give definition to the biblical convictions of Berean Baptist Church regarding the questions of gender, sexuality, and marriage. In the midst of a culture in which values in these areas are rapidly shifting, we believe that it is our responsibility to put forth a coherent statement of our understanding of the relevant Scriptural truths. It is our understanding that these realms are not merely matters of morality but rather stand at the center of what it means to be human and therefore pertain to faithfully bearing God's image. Our goal as a church is to help our members steward their lives more effectively for the gospel.

Gender & Identity

According to Genesis 1 and 2, God created humanity originally as male and female as a reflection of His image. Following the creation of Adam, Eve is said to have been created as his "*ezer kenegdo*" (Hebrew) or "ally who is his equal." This term richly communicates that only by working in unified harmony could these two effectively bear God's image, that is, stewarding his creation on his behalf. Each one performs their role in such a way that supplies what the other lacks and enables the other to perform their role. This mirrors the nature of God, who exists as three equal yet distinct persons sharing a single unified essence. Thus there is complementary equality in the design.

The fall distorts these roles and designs, and Genesis 3 suggests that dysfunction between men and women will be at the core of the effects of humanity's rebellion. To varying degrees, every man and woman struggles to understand and express authentic masculinity or femininity consistent with God's design. This can be at merely a cultural or behavioral level or it can be at a deeper psychological or biological level. Though medical sciences can aid our understanding of God's design for gender and how it has been frustrated, Scripture teaches that gender is the design of God. It is not a construct of culture; it is a core part of the identity of each human person endowed by God. It is our contention that the gospel, among the many things it does, serves to reverse the distortions to God's design. It restores the sacred alliance established in creation through marriages submitted to Christ. Even more it provides the foundation for sanctified dynamic partnerships within the context of the local church and its ministry.

Sexuality & Ethics

Consistent with God's design of gender in creation is the design of human sexuality. Sexual union in marriage mirrors in the physical realm the spiritual and relational unity that is to be exhibited between human beings as they bear the

image of God. Sexual union, being a joyful, pleasurable expression of loving intimacy is also the means of giving birth to new life. This design demonstrates that life, love, and service are an intimate part of our community with God and each other as believers. Thus, sexual desire is a good and intrinsic component of what it means to be human and to bear God's image. As with gender, our sexuality and desires have been corrupted by the fall and the gospel calls us to steward our sexuality by resisting those distortions in thought and behavior to bring our lives in line with God's good design. In the wake of the fall, sexual desires become problematic when they are either elevated or repressed in ways inconsistent with God's design or when they are directed towards ends that are inconsistent with God's design.

In surveying much of what we see at present in the culture regarding sexual attraction, desires and orientation, we maintain the following positions based on Scripture:

1. Scripture consistently sets a boundary that sexual activity is appropriate only within a marriage between a man and woman. All other sexual behaviors are considered "sexual immorality." Sexual activity is not a strictly private behavior, as is often maintained. Sexual intimacy is an expression of a relational commitment by God's design and sexuality is intrinsic to who we are as humans (see above). As such, to engage in sexual behavior outside of marriage damages us both relationally and internally. Thus, even where both parties are willing, there is not a guarantee that no one is harmed. More than that, it presents a faulty view of God as it fails to bear His image of faithful loving commitment to His people (Ephesians 5:20-33). This is why Scripture consistently speaks in the most severe ways about sexual immorality and why it regularly heads "vice lists" in the NT (Mark 7:21; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19; Colossians 3:5).
2. It is clear that sexual sin is of a serious sort with far-reaching consequences, and yet should not be viewed as putting people further out of reach from God's grace. We lament that too often in the church, sexual sin has been treated in a way that shames the offender, discourages confession, and rejects repentance and restoration.
3. Simply being attracted to another person sexually does not permit us to act on that attraction in thought or behavior.
4. Attractions are not immediately subject to our wills and so are something we experience rather than choose. Given that, one's sexual attractions qualify as potential temptations rather than outright sins.
5. Our identity is found in our status as image-bearers redeemed by Christ. We therefore reject the false narrative that only our sexuality and experiences of sexual attractions and desires form the basis of our

identity as humans.

6. We affirm that all of us are broken to greater or lesser degrees in this area and experience different struggles. We therefore refuse to succumb to the temptation to label people based on their orientations in a way that implies that people who struggle with same-sex attraction are out of the reach of God's grace. Nonetheless, we all need to pursue holiness as followers of Jesus by the power of His Spirit in accordance to His word and such blanket categorizations unnecessarily put up barriers to the healing power of the gospel.

Marriage & The Church

Any discussion of marriage must begin with a biblical definition of the institution. As has already been maintained, our gender and sexuality are good creations of God that predate our fall into sinful rebellion. The same is true of marriage, based on Genesis 2:18-25. God instituted marriage in this passage as a necessary good and as an extension of the joint image-bearing responsibilities articulated in Genesis 1:27. The definition we derive from that passage is permanent monogamous male-female unions. This definition, based on the plan and design of God, must be viewed as the normative ideal for us to operate by. This is confirmed by both Jesus and Paul, who cite this passage in their teachings on marriage in the New Testament (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31-32).

The fall, as in the case of gender and sexuality, distorts and disrupts the design, and so any definition that is to be useful must take into account the effects of those distortions. The most obvious is that though marriage in Genesis is viewed as permanent, yet death does end a marriage. Also, and not quite as obvious, is that marriage is viewed in Genesis 2:24-25 as integral to the pursuit of God's purposes and design. However, Christ's ministry creates a new human family in the church, so marriage is not a universal calling. Thus, the natural family is no longer an eternal institution but has been replaced by the church, thus God's people are related spiritually rather than biologically. As such, singleness is an equally godly state for a follower of Christ (1 Corinthians 7). The church needs to affirm this and organize itself in such a way as to recognize the unique contributions and needs of single people in its membership.

Scripture also affirms that in a post-fall situation, divorce is a necessary remedy for protection from unrepentant, hard-hearted spouses. It is our contention that divorce and remarriage are specifically allowed for sexual immorality, desertion, physical or emotional abuse, or serious and extreme neglect.¹ In stating the above, we need to guard against a legalistic approach to the question that is concerned only with the particular boundaries around an institution and not the condition of the human heart. This is the call in Hebrews

¹ See Divorce and Remarriage Document

13:4 that marriage be held in honor by everyone. Thus while divorce and remarriage are allowed in the cases above, it is still a tragic reminder of the fall and not to be viewed as a positive good. Our priority should be to see grace prevail and marriages saved, but we must acknowledge that when unrepentant hard-heartedness on the part of one or both spouses is evident, divorce and remarriage are valid. We cannot ostracize the wronged party (where it is not mutual) or fail to appropriately deal with the offending party in loving discipline.

Conclusion

We must never settle for a Pharisaic approach that uses the law to mask our sinful hearts with hypocritical rule-following and judges those who come up short. We must instead strive for a heart righteousness that relentlessly pursues the creation ideals as we develop our identity as men and women, steward our sexuality to God's glory, and work to see that marriage is honored by all. We must do this with a grace that extends to everyone, understanding that our righteousness is not our own but produced in us by the Holy Spirit, based on Christ's death and resurrection.