

Sermon #1 “Equal and Different” 14SEP25

Genesis 1:27 (p4) *“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”.*

- “Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus”¹,
 - so wrote John Gray in what became the best-selling non-fiction book of the 1990s
 - emphasising the differences between men and women and
 - explaining why men and women so often misunderstand each other.
- But since that time there has been a massive shift in culture and in its understanding of sexuality and gender.
 - According to Dot Brauer of Vermont University each of us should “imagine the most feminine expression you have ever seen and most masculine you have ever seen and just sort of imagine where you are on that spectrum”².
 - Facebook now has over 70 options for you to choose your gender³
 - And many of our friends use the pronouns ‘they’, considering gender to be fluid, and some even considering reassignment surgery.
- Well we start today a three part series on “Men and Women”
 - And you can tell straight away that we are walking on controversial ground.
 - We’ve already seen that in culture there are strong (and at times contradictory) opinions about this area, sometimes emphasising the differences between the sexes, sometimes pointing to the commonality or (as many see it) interchangeability of gender.
 - And then **in the church** there has also been huge debate, with last year being the 30 year anniversary of ordinations of women in the CofE.
 - Even amongst those like most of us who believe that God speaks through the Bible there may still be significant divergence on what we believe God is telling us in this area.
- So why spend 3 sermons, 2 lifegroup sessions, and 1 Q&A discussion evening upsetting people and walking on landmines?!
- Well as I shared in my [5 minute introductory video](#) to this series, I’m actually feeling very positive about this series.
- We’ve called it “positive complementarianism”.

¹ <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Mars-Women-Venus-Communication-Relationships/dp/0007152590>

² <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/13/living/gender-fluid-feat/index.html>

³ <https://www.the-independent.com/tech/facebook-introduces-more-than-70-new-gender-options-to-the-uk-we-want-to-reflect-society-9567261.html>

- The God who made men and women, who loves us so much he's sent his son to die for us, has spoken clearly in the Bible about who we are and how individually and together we fit together in his purposes.
 - (hence the complementary root word there)
 - This series is going to be hugely positive.
 - Yes there are bound to be differences in how we understand this, and even if I don't persuade you of what I believe to be biblical and therefore good teaching, I hope that by the end of the series we'll understand and respect where one another is coming from on this 'secondary issue'.
- Now if you want a summary sentence, it's the title of our sermon today "equal and different". I'm going to suggest we *can* have our cake and eat it, with the Bible from start to finish emphasising both the *differences* of the sexes (which we thought about at the start), and yet their common *unity* in God's purposes to bring all things under Jesus.
 - So without further ado, let's **pray** for God's help as we turn to what God's never changing Word says to God's ever changing world.

Heavenly Father, please as generations of Christians have prayed, would you "inspire your church with the spirit of truth, unity and concord"⁴... may we "agree in the truth of your holy word and live in unity and godly love" as we come to this topic. Please speak to us. Help me to say what is true, help all of us to submit to your good plans. We ask this in Jesus name and for his Glory. Amen.

- OK for this first sermon we're going to step back and take a bit of a wide angle view of what the Bible in overview says about Men and Women.
 - We'll cover lots of ground quite fast, and you are welcome to pick up questions in lifegroups and in personal conversation.
 - Then in the next 2 sermons we'll zoom in a bit more on a couple of passages on men and women in the church.
- As ever, the Bible will be our guide, because even though the Bible was written in history, to various cultures, going back several millenia, we believe that God still speaks today through his written word including principles that transcend culture.
- So here are 4 phases of the Bible's story (which you could use to examine any theme in Scripture) and as we look at them I think we'll see throughout, that **men and women are equal in dignity and worth** in God's eyes, yet with a **rich complementarity together**.

⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/the-book-of-common-prayer-1662.pdf>

1) CREATION: Men and Women are equal in dignity yet different in design.

- Back to the verse we started our service with... *“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”*. Gen 1:²⁷.
- Now we did a series on Genesis which is still on our [website](#) if you want a fuller treatment of Genesis 1-4.
- But please note the following from this foundational verse in Gen 1.
 - As God creates the world which is “good”, and as he builds up to humanity, the pinnacle of creation which is “very good”,
 - **#1) God made humanity as a whole** (“mankind”)
 - We were his idea, fearfully and wonderfully made in his image to represent him.
 - **And #2) God made us male and female.**
 - Every cell of our body is wired XX or XY.
 - It’s interesting that it says “male and female he created them”, because presumably male and female he created the animals too.
 - But there is something about our male and femaleness that is related to being in the image of God.
- There has been huge debate about what being in the image of God means⁵.
 - But when we read Genesis 1 & 2, we see two key emphases.
 - Humanity represents him in RULE and RELATIONSHIP.
- God has given humans above all other animals a place of incredible privilege and power as his stewards or vice-regents. Look at the next verse.
 - ^{V28} *“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*
- But that RULE is to be done in RELATIONSHIP...
 - In Chapter 2 where we zoom in on the creation of Adam who is created first, we see that he is alone v18 and it’s not good.
 - That’s not so much that he’s lonely, but more than he can’t do the job of ruling over God’s creation under God on his own.
 - He needs a helper. And just in case any of the women feel a bit affronted by Eve being called a helper- it’s actually a word used of God⁶.
 - So humanity is incomplete without woman!
- That is partly so that together they can fulfil the command to multiply which will make more little helpers to work the garden, and partly because they have different strengths that come together so well.

⁵ , with some thinking that it’s about our ability to communicate, or that we resemble God in physical appearance.

⁶ Eg Psalms 33:20; 70:5.

- Man and Woman are not interchangeable.
 - It's not just that they have different body parts.
 - Man is created first (and that is picked up in the NT),
 - Man is given the command not to eat of the tree
 - Man is given the authority to name the animals and Eve
 - Man is to leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife
 - Yes I believe there is a male "headship" hinted at in the garden already which is unpacked more as the Bible goes on.
 - NOT "*men and women are equal but men are "more equal" than women!*" Not the "tradwife movement". Equal but different.
 - Man to take a lead, but not in domination or oppression but as the captain of the team with his wife in absolute partnership with him, working the creation together.
- As Al Stewart puts it in "The Manual"⁷ a book on "getting masculinity right" which the men's group have been reading, "a husband never makes a wife submit, never", but submission is the voluntary yielding to another's loving leadership.
- If anyone fears that you can't submit to someone and still be equal to them, you only need to look at God in whose image we are made.
 - Within God there is diversity (three persons) in unity (one Godhead).
 - Within Humanity there is diversity (male and female) in unity.
 - Within God, Jesus himself submits to his Father, yet is equally divine,
 - Within Humanity, Eve is to submit to Adam, and yet is equally precious.
 - Yes there are huge dangers here, and we'll come onto them, but
- **Men and Women are equal in dignity and yet different in design⁸.**
 - ▲ Think of a musical chord. Can everyone please sing **this** note? !!
 - OK now can all the men sing **this** note and the women **this** note!
 - There's a beauty about harmony, it's what makes music delightful.
 - And there should be a godly harmony between the sexes as we work together to fulfil God's plan in his world.
- Well while questions remain, I hope this makes you feel good about yourself!
 - You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Whether you are single or married, divorced or widowed, each of us, young and old, male and female, black and white is an incredibly precious image bearer of God.
 - Our masculinity or femininity will be show itself in different ways in different individuals and cultures, but it's something to be celebrated!
 - Your body also, for all its wrinkles or acne or aches and pains is a precious gift of God- look after it! You have a deep dignity and beauty.
 - And the creation... well we have together been put in charge of to rule over the world together. We need each other.

⁷ "The Manual, Getting masculinity right"- Al Stewart.

⁸ For an thought provoking article on Genesis 1-2 see <https://www.9marks.org/article/man-and-woman-in-creation-genesis-1-and-2/>. While at times I wonder if he reads a little too much in, he clearly shows how our differences are "more than merely random and unstable assortments of contrasts between two classes of persons. Far from it. Our differences are musical and meaningful, inseparably intertwined".

- But not everything stayed rosy in the garden as we know...

2) CRISIS: Men & Women are equally fallen yet show that brokenness in different ways

- In chapter 3 of Genesis, the God given order of things has been totally upended.
- Instead of
 - (No1) God
 - Looking (No2) to man
 - To (No3) lead his wife
 - As they both rule (no4) over creation
- Now, the creation (Satan the snake4) rises up
 - to tempt the woman3 to usurp the authority of the man2 in order to
 - distrust, doubt and disobey God's (1) good loving protection and care.
 - If you want to know what's gone wrong with the world with your own life and with your workplace and your relationships, Genesis 3 explains so much.
- But something to notice here is while they are both full of blame and guilt, spoiling (though not destroying) the divine image, they've sinned in different ways.
 - The man who should have been lovingly leading his wife has failed miserably and has totally abdicated responsibility when Satan comes.
 - And the Woman who should have been respecting her husband's lead has bypassed him to disobey God and take the fruit.
- As a result sin & death come rushing into the world for both man & woman.
- And if you read on & look closely at the text you'll see the curse and the outworking of sin is emphasized in slightly different ways for man and woman.
 - Verse 16 *"To the woman he said, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe, with painful labour you will give birth to children'".* So there's the pain of childbirth.
 - ▲ I heard of one woman who when she went to the hospital for her 4th child, her contractions having already started, was told, do you have preferences for pain relief, she said *"Yes give me everything now"*! Light hearted moments aside, childbearing is marred by sin and pain, just like work is.
 - But also we see the battle of the sexes *"Your desire (that's the same kind of sinful desire we see in Cain and Abel in the next chapter) will be for your husband and he will rule over you"*.
 - Now that "ruling over you", isn't the godly headship of sacrificially taking a lead in the Ephesians passage that we'll come onto, it's a harsh and authoritarian subjugation, he wants to master her.
 - Distrust, domination even abuse have tragically entered the world.
- It's carnage: *Not only has sin affected humanity's **relationship with God**,*
 - *Not only has sin affected humanity's **relationship with the creation**,*
 - *It's now affected humanity's **internal relationships** battle of the sexes.*
- This brokenness and disordering affects and explains so much especially in the area of the relationships between men and women.

- I chatted to a someone at the school gate and she said “*it’s not easy being a woman in a man’s world*”. How tragic. What’s happened that God’s world to her now feels like a man’s world.
- The battle of the sexes.
 - We misunderstand, manipulate, blame, one another, particularly within marriage.
 - Both men and women want what they want and everything is spoiled:
 - A godly headship can darkly morph from loving leadership into a cover for abuse, something which should have absolutely no place in our church.
 - A good desire for women’s rights can grow into a militant feminism
 - A godly manliness can metastasize into a toxic masculinity
 - And into the world has come an unsafe place characterized by sexual sin, confusion about identity, manipulation, coercive behaviour, domestic violence.
- Our fractured relationship with God has led to fractured relationships within humanity.
 - If anything I’ve mentioned affects you or those you love, we’d love to walk with you through that. Please talk to someone, you are not alone.
- But there is hope.
 - God didn’t leave us there.
 - The rest of the Bible tells the story of God’s rescue plan in Christ.

(we don’t have time to look at men and women in the Old Testament- that would be an interesting but a very long sermon, let’s instead jump to)

3) CHRIST: Men & women are equal in the church yet Christ has different roles for us

- CHRIST the perfect human has come. Praise God!
- Just pause to marvel to at the Incarnation. John 1:14 “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us*”.
 - God himself came on a rescue plan for his fallen **men** and **women**.
 - God the **Son** who existed before the creation he made entered into the world as the Word made flesh within a young **woman’s** womb.
 - He lived as a boy, a male teenager, a **man**.
 - He modelled godly brother-sister relationships with his **female** disciples, some of whom had key roles supporting him financially (Luke 8:3).
 - Pilate mockingly said “behold the **man**”, as he pointed to Jesus covered in blood dripping from a crown of thorns onto a purple robe, nevertheless, humanity’s King was indeed boldly and sacrificially going forward to conquer Satan and to redeem men and women from the curse that our rebellion has brought us.

- And then risen from the dead, (*interestingly and counter culturally first witnessed by women Matt 28:1*), proving their central place in God's purposes), Jesus ascends to rule over a new humanity of men and women, the **Church**, being remade in his image.
- A people scarred and marred by sin, but each day being transformed to become like him in gentleness, kindness, love and patience.
- And in the church all kinds of different people come together equally united to him by faith (Galatians 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*).
- There's much more we'll see about the church in sessions 2 and 3 but I do want to touch on **Ephesians 5**, our second reading today (please turn to it on p1176), which is a passage about marriage, but it's also a passage about Jesus.
 - There's a [whole sermon](#) on our website on this passage,
 - and several of you have had it at your weddings.
 - Paul talks to married couples to insist that wives submit (v22) to their own husbands (by the way they don't submit to everyone else's husband) and they show a deep respect (v33) for their husband.
 - Is that outdated misogyny? No.
 - If you've only seen horribly distorted versions of it, look at this.
 - Listen carefully to how the husbands are to treat their wives:
 - V25. "Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her".
 - This is astonishing and beautiful,
 - Husbands put their preferences on one side, laying down their lives.
 - Husbands should be daily sacrificing themselves in a Christlike way for their wives.
 - As one of my friends puts it "it's a tough gig!"
 - Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 (as Jesus does) showing that marriage is a public, permanent, heterosexual, intimate covenant, and Paul says it points to **Jesus and the church**.
 - You see men and women not only point to the Trinity- unity in diversity.
 - But marriage points to Jesus and the church.
 - As we saw in the series on the church, Jesus is the bridegroom who has come to love us as his bride.
 - V33, Wives respect yr husbands, Husbands, love yr wives.
 - What that will look like will differ in different households and different marriages, and I'll let you think it through and if you are married discuss it thinking about what submission and sacrifice⁹ will mean today.

⁹ Though there are some ideas on page 2 of <https://christchurchhuntingdon.co.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=234563>

- But what about those who aren't married? Well earthly marriage isn't the be all and end all. Like singleness, it's a training ground for the ultimate marriage, and that brings us onto...

4) NEW CREATION: Men and women though different will one day be praising Christ as his bride!

- I'm walking tentatively here, because the Bible doesn't say a huge amount about what we are like in the new heaven and the new earth.
 - It does say that there is continuity between our earthly bodies and our heavenly bodies (as Jesus' resurrection body showed) as well as discontinuity as Paul talks about in 1 Cor 15¹⁰.
 - It says that we won't be married in the new creation (Matt 22:30)
 - That may come as a surprise
 - But though it's hard to get our head around this, particularly for the men,
 - We will all (as the church) be married to Christ.
 - We look forward to the marriage supper of the lamb where we celebrate and rejoice in being with Jesus the perfect spouse face to face.
 - It does say, as we saw at our weekend away with Robin Sydserff, that Jesus is gathering a worldwide people from every nation, tribe, tongue to worship him for eternity.
 - There will be a massive diversity in unity taken from across the
 - Nations and ethnicities
 - Classes and backgrounds
 - And from the different sexes
 - Men and Women in the new Creation
 - Perhaps different voices praising the Lamb in harmony.
- **Men and women** from different backgrounds who have blown it in so many ways are ransomed, healed, restored forgiven and come to be with one another with Jesus singing **one song with different voices** all because of his grace and love.
- Now that is good news. Let's pray.

¹⁰ See page 232 of "Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood" for a discussion of "will we be male and female in heaven" where John Frame says he is inclined towards an affirmative answer, and gives his rationale.