

Week 3 “God made them male and female: A Fresh Look at Biblical Personhood”

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Word of the year (4): By, or, “standing beside” ἐκ (ek) 'out from' of, out of; from, away from. Spatially: extension from a space to a goal outer in reference, separation; logically: the means or source of an activity, disassociation or separation

This 6-week sermon series will explore the concept of personhood as God designed it in the Bible, examining how it relates to sex and gender, race, roles and responsibilities, marriage, family, and the various pursuits and passions that shape our lives. Each week will build upon the foundation of God’s creation of humanity, focusing on specific aspects of biblical personhood in a holistic, culturally relevant way.

(SLIDE 1)

Opening

Over the past two weeks we have considered the Biblical roots of human personhood. We have learned that according to **Genesis 1:26-27** that, “*Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*”

In other words, humans are a unique creation of God who possess something of the divine nature—from the humblest saint, to the vilest sinner. But because of the entrance of sin into the world, our humanity has been corrupted and in need of redemption. This is not just expressed through the corruption of flesh, such as in disability, or the mind, such as dysphoria, but in every aspect of our lives. In the way we treat one another, in the way we express prejudice, in our cruel treatment of those who may not look like us or align with our beliefs. So it becomes crucially important for us to align ourselves with a Just God who can help us see His Image, or the *Imago Dei*, in each person.

In week two we learned that there is an order to creation in the way that God made humans male and female. But this order has also been corrupted as humans do not fall neatly into those two categories either in their biology or their expression of self in society. The call of God in these circumstances is to not over emphasize the physical, but more importantly to be Identified with Christ as we develop our spiritual lives.

In week three we now turn to marriage and the covenant of this important union.

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If you have your bibles this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Matthew 19:4-6. Once you have found the scripture, I want to invite you to stand with me as we read the word of God

"He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"

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So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Prayer

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Week 3 "Marriage: A Covenant of Love and Unity"

Scripture: Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6, Ephesians 5:22-33

1. Changing Views on Marriage in America

In the past century, views on marriage in America have shifted dramatically. Throughout the early 20th century, marriage was primarily understood as a lifelong union between a man and a woman, often centered around family and religious communities. According to a Pew Research Center study, in 1960, 72% of adults in the United States were married, but by 2020, that number had dropped to 50%. Similarly, Gallup polling shows an increase in approval of cohabitation and acceptance of diverse family forms, reflecting evolving cultural attitudes on traditional marriage and gender roles within marriage.

According to the Pew Research Center Firm, and other research entities, young people are having a difficult time finding a life partner or spouse:

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- 1. Increased Difficulty in Dating:** About 47% of young adults report that dating has become harder over the past decade. Reasons cited include technology's role, social shifts, and complications from the **#MeToo** movement, which has created additional hesitations around dating, especially among men .

2. **Preference for Staying Single:** Over half (56%) of single adults in the U.S. aren't actively seeking a partner, partly because they prioritize career or personal growth over relationships. This trend has shifted traditional priorities and diminished the active dating pool for young adults .
3. **Financial Concerns and Economic Instability:** Economic factors like student debt and high living costs also impact young people's ability to commit to long-term relationships or marriage, with many delaying partnerships until they feel financially secure .
4. **Changing Life Goals:** Only 16% of young men and 17% of young women now view marriage as essential to a fulfilling life. Many prioritize career satisfaction and individual independence, which has reduced the pressure to settle down early .
5. **Pandemic-Related Shifts:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, 63% of singles reported that dating became even more difficult, with limited social opportunities, heightened anxiety, and other pandemic-driven factors further complicating the dating landscape for young adults .
6. **LGBTQ+ young people** seek marriage at lower rates than hetero normative young people.

These changes reveal societal movement toward individualism and away from the structured family roles that were once a cornerstone of American life. While modern society offers diverse perspectives on relationships, Christians are called to anchor their understanding of marriage in God's Word, which provides a blueprint for a covenant relationship reflective of His love and unity.

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2. **Traditional Christian Marriage: A Design Rooted in Creation**

The traditional concept of marriage between a man and a woman is rooted in the creation narrative found in Genesis 2. When God created man and woman, He did so with intentionality and purpose. Genesis 2:24 says, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* This "one flesh" relationship is more than a partnership; it is a covenant reflecting God's desire for unity in diversity, companionship, and complementarity.

When questioned about marriage and divorce, Jesus reiterated the Genesis covenant in Matthew 19:4-6, *"He answered, 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?'"* But he takes it further by invoking God's power and sovereignty over marriage, *"So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

We see that while both man and woman are created equally in God's image (Genesis 1:27), they are given distinct roles in creation. Additional scriptures emphasize this balance of equality and function:

in Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul urges mutual submission in marriage, with specific responsibilities, as husbands are called to love sacrificially and wives to respect. This distinction in roles, however, does not imply inferiority but rather reflects God's design for unity and harmony within distinct functions.

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Ephesians 5:21-33

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

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3. Husbands as Servant-Leaders and Wives as Respectful Partners

Paul's teaching in **Ephesians 5** can often be misunderstood in modern contexts. When Paul says, "wives, submit to your own husbands," it is crucial to understand the cultural background of the time. Submission in this passage is not about subordination but about mutual respect and support. Paul's teaching that husbands should "love their wives as Christ loved the Church" elevates this relationship far beyond any patriarchal notion of power.

In Christ's model of leadership, we see a servant-leader who washed the feet of His disciples. Husbands are called to embody this sacrificial love and to lead with humility, service, and care. Their role is not to dominate but to serve their wives, protecting and nurturing them spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Wives, in turn, are called to respect their husbands, fostering a partnership of mutual honor.

This partnership, much like the **equal partnership of the Trinity**, is not a hierarchy of power but a cooperative dynamic where each partner fulfills their God-given roles. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct but equally divine, so too do husbands and wives have distinct but equal roles within the covenant of marriage.

Deeper Dive

Equality within the trinity

Equality in the Trinity is essential because it maintains the unity and co-essential nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within Christian doctrine. Each person of the Trinity possesses the full essence of divinity and is not subordinate in nature to the others, meaning that they are co-equal and co-eternal. This equality underscores the monotheistic foundation of Christianity, affirming that God is one in essence, even as three distinct persons. It also prevents misunderstandings that could imply polytheism or inequality, which would contradict the biblical witness of God's unified nature (Deuteronomy 6:4, John 1:1, and John 10:30).

1. **Karl Barth:** Emphasizes relational equality, viewing the Trinity as co-equal and co-eternal, with no hierarchy in their essence.
2. **Jürgen Moltmann:** His “social Trinitarianism” stresses mutual love and equality among the three persons, portraying the Trinity as a community of divine fellowship.
3. **Catherine Mowry LaCugna:** Focuses on the Trinity's relational aspect, suggesting that the divine persons' equality models unity and community for human relationships, particularly regarding gender equality.
4. **Leonardo Boff:** Emphasizes a democratic, egalitarian view, using the Trinity as a model for social and political equality, especially in liberation theology.
5. **William Lane Craig:** Craig does not fully endorse EFS, as he is concerned it risks implying an ontological hierarchy within the Trinity that could be mistaken as subordinationism—a heretical view suggesting an inequality in divinity among the Persons of the Trinity.

Hierarchy within the Trinity

Hierarchy within the Trinity is seen as essential by some theologians to explain the distinct roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit without implying inequality. This perspective, often called *eternal functional subordination*, suggests that the Son and Spirit submit to the Father's authority while remaining equal in essence. This structure maintains unity in their divine essence while allowing for the distinct relational roles each person fulfills. For instance, the Father sends the Son, and the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, reflecting an ordered yet equal relationship. This hierarchy is believed to mirror relationships in creation, such as human authority structures, while upholding the unity of God's nature.

1. **Thomas Aquinas:** Aquinas emphasized that while each person shares the divine essence, the Son and Spirit eternally proceed from the Father, signifying an ordered relationship.
2. **Wayne Grudem:** In his work on systematic theology, Grudem argues for an eternal relationship

in which the Son and Spirit function in submission to the Father, particularly as a model for authority and submission in human relationships.

3. **John Piper:** Piper sees the Trinity as having an ordered relationship in which the Son and Spirit joyfully submit to the Father's will, emphasizing that authority and submission exist without inequality in nature.
4. **Bruce Ware:** Ware has written extensively on the concept of eternal relational roles within the Trinity, arguing that these roles reflect a structure of authority and submission that is foundational to God's nature.

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5. **Countering Cultural Views of Marriage**

In today's society, marriage is often viewed as a contract—an agreement that can be easily dissolved if personal happiness or convenience is no longer served. This perspective sees marriage as temporary, conditional, and transactional. But the **biblical vision of marriage** is profoundly different. In **Matthew 19:4-6**, Jesus reinforces the sacredness of marriage, declaring that *"what God has joined together, let no man separate."*

Others want to make marriage a relationship that prioritizes sameness, rather than diversity. The scriptural affirmation requires marriage to be a unity of diversity where male and female, man and woman come together under God. The hetero sexual marriage is the only relationship which most profoundly emphasizes this desire for unity in diversity. It is all the only arrangement where the union can reproduce, fulfilling God's command to Adam and Eve to be *"fruitful and multiply to fill the whole earth."*

This means that marriage is not simply a social or legal arrangement; it is a **covenant**—a lifelong commitment before God. A covenant is unbreakable, requiring endurance, forgiveness, and deep sacrifice. By viewing marriage as a covenant, we acknowledge that it is more than just about personal fulfillment. It's about honoring God's design, striving for unity, and embracing the refining process of growing together in love.

Culturally, we are pressured to view relationships as transactional, focused on individual needs and desires. Yet God's design counters this, showing that true fulfillment in marriage comes through **mutual sacrifice** and an unwavering commitment to unity, just as Christ sacrificed Himself for the Church.

But what happens if we abandon God's design for humans as relational creatures? The movement away from traditional Christian faith appears closely linked to trends in declining marriage rates, lower

birthrates, and shifts in family structure, all of which pose challenges for America's future. Research indicates that traditional faith-based values, such as commitment to marriage and family life, have historically bolstered societal stability and intergenerational continuity. With these values now less emphasized, marriage is increasingly seen as optional, leading to fewer long-term partnerships and delayed or reduced childbirth rates. This trend has a ripple effect: fewer young people may mean a reduced workforce and greater economic burdens as the population ages. Thus, fostering a society that values commitment, family, and faith might be crucial for a sustainable and prosperous future.

Closing 1

So far, I have presented a pretty lofty, exclusive view of marriage. Most people today will find this approach very difficult. It leaves very little wiggle room for a society which doesn't draw as definitive lines as what I presented.

So as a church, what are we to do?

How do we respond to those who choose singleness?

How are we to respond to those who have difficulty finding a partner or spouse?

How do we respond to people who live together but are not married?

How do we respond to divorce?

How are we to respond to people who live in same sex relationships?

How are we to respond to alternative marital arrangements?

What sort of place is the church to be in our community?

Let me tell you a story...

A husband and wife are enjoying a picnic by the river.

They hear a child yelling for help, being carried downstream by the water towards them.

Instinctively, they jump in the river and save the child.

They return to the bank, but hear another child coming, crying for help. They save the second child, only for another to come, and another...

The pair are exhausted, but children keep coming. Suddenly, the wife jumps out of the water and starts running up the bank.

"What are you doing?" The husband yells, "I need your help!"

"We can't keep doing this," she yells, "I have to stop whatever is causing this upstream!"

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Closing 2

In Matthew 22:29-32 Jesus offers this advice to us:

"But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in

heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.”

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Additional Resources

Week 3

1. Aimee Bird: [Inside the Word. Outside the Box.](#)
2. Richard Reeves on men and boys: [Home](#)
3. Pew Research Dating Statistics [Nearly Half of U.S. Adults Say Dating Has Gotten Harder for Most People in the Last 10 Years](#)
4. Lyman Stone, Institute for Family Studies: [Author: Lyman Stone | Institute for Family Studies](#)
5. The Gospel Coalition: [A Biblical View of Marriage](#)
6. Alternative Relationships: [Jonathan Merritt](#)
7. Marriage and Family: The Gottman Institute [Home](#)

