

Gender Equality and the Image of God

Introduction:

“Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better...” (<https://youtu.be/q2mQGpu9lAQ>)

There has always been a competition between the sexes, and not just in musicals. There are lots of examples of men competing with women to do both the ordinary, and the extraordinary. Answer the following...

Who’s the best driver, men or women?

Who’s more likely to get lost while driving?

Who’s the better sportscaster?

Who’s more likely to be a pilot?

See how divided we can get, all of a sudden?

Many of you are very aware of how divisive this last election cycle proved to be for our country. The final two candidates were about as polarizing as two leaders could be, and most people in the United States were quite willing to share with you exactly in which camp they stood.

Hillary Clinton first campaigned for President in 2007-2008. Her campaign brought issues of gender equality to the forefront, and the question of whether or not a woman could ever be the Commander in Chief. She ran a gritty campaign, hard fought against the Senator from Illinois, but in the days leading up to the Democratic national convention, it was Barack Obama who was positioned to receive the nod from his party. In her now-famous concession speech to then-Senator Obama, she attempted to encourage women and girls alike with these words;

“Now, on a personal note, when I was asked what it means to be a woman running for president, I always gave the same answer, that I was proud to be running as a woman, but I was running because I thought I’d be the best president.

But I am a woman and, like millions of women, I know there are still barriers and biases out there, often unconscious, and I want to build an America that respects and embraces the potential of every last one of us... Although we weren’t able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it’s got about 18 million cracks in it, and the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time.”¹

That would not be her last speech of its’ kind. In November of 2016, Hillary Clinton was once again a candidate for the highest office in the land. After an all-out war against the Republican party, and even against members of her own party, Hillary clinched the Democratic nomination and ran a second national campaign, that one even grittier than the first. Convinced (by all accounts) she would win the election by

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jun/07/hillaryclinton.uselections20081>; accessed January 16, 2018.

a landslide, she and her team were poised to celebrate her Presidential election victory. In a nod to her previous speech of 2008, the team arranged for her acceptance speech to be delivered from the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan, New York—a towering fortress of a building made of glass.

Her hopes of being the first female to work from the Oval Office, however, were not fulfilled. In a stunning defeat, Hillary conceded the election to business-mogul Donald Trump, and offered these words to her supporters, again, by way of concession.

“...to all the women, and especially the young women, who put their faith in this campaign and in me, I want you to know that nothing has made me prouder than to be your champion.

Now, I – I know – I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but someday someone will and hopefully sooner than we might think right now.

And to all the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.”²

The desire to shatter the glass ceiling—an invisible, impenetrable barrier made of prejudice and discrimination—has been the driving force behind women and minorities since the passage of the 13th Amendment in the late 1800’s and the Women’s Suffrage movement of the early 1920’s. As you can see, prejudice and discrimination have been part of our world for a long time.

We’ve talked some about the issue of race, and color, and prejudice—but what about gender? How does the image of God in us shape our understanding and interaction with the opposite sex?

Primary Scriptures:

Genesis 1:26-28 ²⁶ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 2:18-25 ¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” ¹⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. ²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. ²² The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ²³ The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones,

² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/09/hillary-clinton-concession-speech-full-transcript>; accessed January 16, 2018.

And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”

²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Genesis 3:6-10, 16 ⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” ...

¹⁶ To the woman He said,
“I will greatly multiply
Your pain in childbirth,
In pain you will bring forth children;
Yet your desire will be for your husband,
And he will rule over you.”

Romans 12:3-5 ³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Secondary Studies:

Ephesians 5:21, 22-33 ²¹ ... be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

²² Wives, be *subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church,³⁰ because we are members of His body. ³¹ For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.³² This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.³³ Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband.

1 Peter 4:10-11 ¹⁰ As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Central Truth:

- It takes both genders, male and female, for mankind to reflect God's image.

Practical Applications ("Take-Away" Truths):

- God's purpose for us is not based on our gender, but rather by His Grand Design.

Main Ideas from the Texts:

1. The Image of God is Reflected Across Two Genders. (Gen 1:26-28)
 - a. The man was the only part of Creation that was not good from the start. (Gen 2:18)
 - b. The Woman was created as a Suitable *helper*. (Gen 2:18-24)
2. The Instructions from God are thus the Responsibility of Both Genders
 - a. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..." (Gen 1:28a)
 - b. "...subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:28b)
3. The Incident of Disobedience Disrupted the Created Order, Not the Equality established in Creation.
 - a. The Fall tarnished the image of God in humanity.
 - b. Dominion was not issued to a gender; the "desire for one's husband/dominion over one's spouse," came after the fall.
 - c. The Divine Design in mankind (both genders) is still evident across the length and breadth of redemption history.
 - d. According to Scripture, the highest value in relationships still remains mutual servanthood and submission. (Eph 5:21, 22-33)

Background and Contextual Considerations:

- Adam, created in God's image, did not (could not) fully reflect God's image alone.
- God exists as three Persons, yet one Substance.³
- God in His essence is communal, relational, plural.
- God speaks of Himself to Himself in plurality, yet He addresses Creation singularly.
- Consider the Hymn-writer who penned "Holy, Holy, Holy" and his description of the "Blessed Trinity.")
 - "Let *US* make man in *OUR* image, according to *OUR* likeness..." (Gen 1:26)
 - "I have given you every plant..." (Gen 1:29)

³ We are *Trinitarian*. We believe there are "three persons, of one substance, of eternal being, and equal in holiness, justice, wisdom, power, and dignity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Not three Gods, but one God, subsisting in three persons, the Trinity in unity (Matthew 3:16, 17; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 5:7).

- God, “who is not alone, for in Himself He is the Fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, does not intend for man to be alone.”⁴
- Eve was a helper “suitable” for Adam, that is, in comparison to animals of the earth.
- Eve was a helper, that is, in the sense that she completed what was lacking in him, what was ‘*not good.*’
- The marriage of a man and woman is an earthly example of the unity that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; two individuals in a one-flesh union.
- Creation, as a theme across the breadth of Scripture, exists for the glory of God.
- The design across all creation was procreation and population, and those two genders, represented in the lowest varieties of animal life, all point to a God Who exists in community, and Who creates communities.
- Dominion over creation was given to mankind, the created one into whose nostrils God breathed life.
- The animals were brought to man to be named, a direct reflection of his authority and stewardship of them. (Gen 2:19)
- The command to subdue speaks to man’s privilege and responsibility to steward and allocate the resources of creation—earth, animals and vegetation alike.
- Both animals and man were given vegetation as food, but only humanity has the ability and the responsibility to cultivate it.
- Upon his disobedience, mankind became self-centered, self-preserving. (Gen 3:6-10)
- The relationship between man and woman became defined by a curse—the curse arranged the nature of their relationship—instead of the original command. (Gen 3:16)
- God used men and women both to accomplish His perfect purposes.
- Notable women in the Scriptures include
 - Eve
 - Sarah
 - Rebekah
 - Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah
 - Tamar
 - Caleb’s Daughters
 - Tamar
 - Rahab
 - Deborah
 - Jael
 - Ruth
 - Rizpah
 - Abigail
 - Bathsheba
 - Esther
 - Elizabeth
 - Mary, mother of Jesus
 - Mary Magdalene
 - Anna
 - The woman at the well
 - Junia
 - Eustice
 - Phoebe
 - Priscilla

⁴ Williams, J. Rodman. *Renewal Theology, Vol. 1.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: ZondervanPublishingHouse,1988), 204.

Teaching Hints and Applications:

- Traditional gender roles are not always Biblical; evolving ideas about gender in our society are not always correct.
- The Bible is the source for understanding who we are and how we were made.
- We were made with a purpose and a design from the beginning, and we were given gifts, talents, abilities, and experiences for the sole purpose of accomplishing God's plan in our lives.
- God's plan is not based on how He gendered us; it's based on His design for us.
- God's plan is not based on our emotions, or our fears, or our uncertainties, or the words others have spoken over us.
- Gender is a part of who we are, but it is not all we are!
- We are made in HIS IMAGE; His design, His purpose, His love for us defines us, and determines our course. (Acts 17)
- "Jesus purposefully leveled the cultural playing field in terms of class, unleashing a revolution through the Christian movement. How? He entrusted the news of His resurrection to one whose testimony would not even be accepted in a court of law: a woman."⁵

Illustrations/Multimedia:

Check out <https://www.downloadyouthministry.com/battle-of-the-sexes> for a screen-based game about how well your students know the opposite sex.

Small Group Questions and Prompts

⁵ White, James Emery. Twitter Post. January 17, 2018, 6:00 AM.
https://twitter.com/jamesemerywhite/status/953582915232980994?ref_src=twcamp%5Eshare%7Ctwsrc%5Eios%7Ctwgr%5Ecom.apple.UIKit.activity.Message.

1. Who was most responsible for the Fall of mankind, Adam or Eve? Why?
2. How did the Fall affect relationships between men and women? (think *lack of trust, passing blame, fear of vulnerability, competition*)
3. When it comes to your friendships, how are relationships with your same gender friends different than friendships with the opposite gender? What do you do differently? Do you change the way you act when someone of the opposite gender is around? Why, or why not?
4. GUYS ONLY: Let's figure out our stereotypes and ideas about traditional roles and responsibilities.
 - a. Make a list of ten things you should never do to a female, or around a female.
 - b. Make a list of ten things you are supposed to do for females, and around females.
 - c. Make a list of ten jobs/roles that ONLY men are supposed to fill.
 - d. Where did that list come from? What determines how we view the opposite sex?
5. GIRLS ONLY: Let's figure out our stereotypes, and ideas about traditional roles and responsibilities.
 - a. Make a list of ten things only guys are supposed to do.
 - b. Make a list of ten things only girls are supposed to do.
 - c. Where did that list come from? What determines how we view the opposite sex?
 - d. Who/what determines who or what we become?
6. Did God intend to create women to be less-than, or inferior to Adam? Did God intend to create Adam to be superior to Eve? What makes you think so?
7. How does God's image in us, and on us change the way we treat each other—male or female?
8. How does God's plan for our lives affect our decisions about our lives?