

Part 5: Good Distinctions

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I wonder if you ever heard this phrase on the playground growing up: “Girls are from Mars and get more candy bars, Men are from Jupiter and get more stupider.”

Or maybe your one of the 50 million people who have purchased John Gray’s book, “Boys are from Mars, Girls are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Relationships.”

The premise of the childish rhyme and the academic book are the same: Men and women are different—and that’s a problem. For some, it seems the opposite sex is a creature from a different planet—foreign, perhaps fascinating, but impossible to fully integrate into our lives. From the other perspective, the opposite sex is a threat to our wants—how can we still relate to such a different person and get what we want in life?

While the language, “gender wars,” and the “gender debate,” may be new—the tension is not. Plato’s philosophies wrestled with it—and even the Barbie movie tried to take a stab at it. But it seems that differences always divide.

While our sinful world often preys on differences either in their abuse of them, or in their attempt to remove them—the book of Genesis begins with a totally different thought on gender. In God’s perfect paradise in Eden—the creation of male and female was not a difference that divided. Instead, it was a distinction which united.

That’s why the title of our sermon today “Good Distinctions.” And our big idea is this: **Male and Female is God’s gift for his glory and our joy.** We will see this today in three ways. First, we will see gender as **A Good Display**, then **A Good Distinction** and lastly **A Good Union**.

Moses wrote Genesis not as an instruction manual, or arbitrary history book to be shoved in a drawer. This book was written to God’s people as they looked out over the new world of the Promised Land. A world filled with competing views of personhood, sexual preferences, twisted marriages and ultimately false gods. It was a world not too far from our own. This book was Moses’ reminder that if we want to live wisely and happily in God’s world—we’ve got to know God’s world according to God’s word.

This passage isn’t an apologetic of something unfortunate—it’s a blueprint of something glorious and deeply human. In simpler times this might have been the easiest sermon in Genesis: God made males and females, with different roles, and with the possibility of marriage between a man and a woman. But we’ve seen that simpler times were not smarter times. Simpler times understood the ideas of a thing—but smarter times demand an awareness of the reality of a thing. The Bible doesn’t give us the false comfort of common sense—but it gives us something better—the deep utility of God’s divine sense: life as it is. It makes wise the simple.

And that’s because gender itself begins not with our wisdom—but with God’s wisdom. Read with me: **Genesis 2:18-20**, “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him

a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 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.”

At first reading, this passage might display a problem: God’s creation wasn’t as good as it could have been, and despite all the other animals God made, Adam was alone. But this passage doesn’t display a problem—but a provision of a wise and gracious God. This is our first point: **A Good Display**.

Gender displays the glory and goodness of God.

We have seen already God’s unique relationship to man in that while God is lord and ruler over all things—he talks and walks specifically with humans. God could have created male and female without any other comment or explanation—but here God talks for our benefit. He wants us to know why there will be male and female because he wants us to understand his creative grace in making us that way. What we think about gender, of ourselves and about others, is meant to frame how we think about God.

The creation of Eve is tied to God’s ability to create a perfectly good creation. If you’ve been with us, Genesis gives two accounts of creation: one high level one in Genesis 1, another low level one in Genesis 2. Just like you would rewatch your favorite movie growing up and pick out new things each time—God is giving us a guided re-watch party on creation and pointing out things we might have missed the first time.

In chapter 1 we saw the phrase, “it was good” on repeat. But here, in Genesis 2 we read a stark contrast: “It was not good.” We also see why it wasn’t good: 1. Adam was alone, 2. Adam needed a helper.

This frames not only the solution God was going to fix—relational and occupational help—but it frames the significance of it. Whatever was about to happen wasn’t going to introduce a problem—it was going to solve it. It wasn’t going to complicate goodness—it was going to complete it.

God opened up two things in the passage we just read. He opened up his mind and heart to us so that we might see his concern for creation. And then he opened up all of creation to Adam so that Adam would see God’s concern for a special companion.

That’s why we see this animal parade. God brings all the other created animals before Adam—he named all of them—but by the end none of them are “fit for him.”

Just as God made the whole of creation and yet entered into a special and unique relationship with mankind—so too man stands in the same created category as the rest of the world and yet God made man with the need for a unique relationship which is not found in any other created species.

We should love and enjoy animals—but those relationships are not designed to fill what God made us for. There’s something more. Here, it will be the creation of Eve.

God is not attempting to distract us from male and female relationships—he’s drawing us to understand them in connection to himself, his broader creation, and humanity itself. Some of the world’s best artists used to be map makers. If you’ve ever seen an old map, you’ve probably seen drawings on the maps of fantastical beasts or creatures. That’s because when a cartographer didn’t know what was actually in

that part of the world—he drew a painting, sometimes magical, sometimes ominous, to distract us from what we didn’t know.

Our world has done this with gender for millennia. They draw up fanciful or fearful images to distract us from the truth: they don’t know what to do with gender. In many creation myths, gender was an afterthought or footnote. But in God’s account it was the crowning jewel of God’s goodness. It was a feature that brought that goodness of God’s completed creation in Genesis 1 into the ongoing life of Genesis 2.

God designed it this way, withholding Eve like the last and greatest gift at a party, because gender displays something about our God. He doesn’t wait because women are better, nor because men deserve gifts. He waits because our gender, and our lives as males and females displays the beauty and glory of God in a unique way.

Do you remember that in **Genesis 1:27**, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Our understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God has grown as Moses as told the story of creation—but in a special and unique way—the glory of our God demands not one gender in his image but two.

Now, being spirit, God doesn’t have a biology to be gendered. And while he presents himself with male pronouns in scripture—apart from the incarnation of Jesus Christ—that language describes God but doesn’t define him.

But the God who made us in his image, is so incredibly diverse, so relationally deep in Trinitarian love, relationships and distinctions, that it demands a humanity which is co-equal, yet beautifully diverse.

There’s something about the essence of man which glorifies God in a wonderful way. There’s something about the essence of females which glorifies God in a wonderful way. And there’s something about a diverse humanity created as male and female which glorify God in such a way that all of God’s other diverse flora and fauna could not.

The Genesis of gender is set up in the midst of what is “not good,” so that we might see how God is the source of everything good. Our gender is part of that. Your gender is not arbitrary, nor is it something you get to create. You might wish that you were a man, or you might wish that you were a woman. But God created in in a specific way because he knows what’s good for you—and he wants you to see his goodness in the midst of it.

Gender not only leads us to see God’s distinct goodness—but it’s a good and gracious gift for us too. This leads us to our second point: **A Good Distinction**. Gender reveals the beauty of humanity.

We see the glory of these distinctions in what follows: **Genesis 2:21-23**, "So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

Adam named all the animals—but not like this. Here, Adam explodes in poetic beauty when Eve is presented to him. And Adam’s song points out two distinctions about Eve: she was distinctly human, and she was distinctly woman.

Both her similarity to him, and her difference from him lead to this song of joy and goodness.

She was, “bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh,” and yet she was taken, “out of Man.”

It’s this beautiful tension of similarity and dissimilarity that the Bible holds so easily, and one which the rest of the world struggles to find at all.

God “made” Eve. That’s the first time that verb showed up in all of Genesis 1 and 2. Gender wasn’t a construct imposed on them. Nor was it a mere biological manifestation. God made Eve, and Eve was made fully human—as a woman. That’s the first good distinction: ***distinctly human***.

Men, women do not belong to you. They belong to God. We don’t define what it means to be female—God does. We don’t get to make women in our image—God has made women in his image.

Women, men are not unfortunate realities to live with. They are too are part of God’s good creation. Man doesn’t make you, nor does he complete you. We are each made for and by God, and yet that God has made and designed relationships to form between the two—relationships which are necessary for two things: companionship and cooperation.

Remember, this was what God defined as the problem in verse 18. And we see this task that man was called into in **Genesis 1:28**, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.”

Eve’s humanity is affirmed in that she too is part of the image of God, she is not a subspecies of Adam but is from Adam himself, and Eve is called to be a helper into the very creation mandate that God gave Adam.

This is where we see the beauty of God’s second gender distinction: ***distinctly man and woman***.

Eve’s creation by God was meant to fulfill both Adam’s need for companionship in life and his necessary co-laborer in life. What a beautiful reality. When you see a male or a female, what you see is someone made by God to remind us that God doesn’t make anyone or anything alone—he is a God who desires us to be in relationship with someone who is like us—and yet not us. This draws us up into a wonderful reminder that we are made in his image—to enjoy God himself.

But secondly, every person you see of another gender is a reminder that you can’t do the work God called you to do alone. God’s work for both procreation, and cultivation, demanded men and women. If Adam just needed strength in the field—the ox was better. If Eve just needed help reaching tall things—a chimp was more able.

But God’s created realities of male and female are tied to God’s unique capacity he built into each, each of which is to live out God’s commands in a distinct and beautiful way. Our world often preys on these distinctions through abuse, or it tries to diminish these distinctions into forced sameness. But when we look at each other in this room, as male and female, we see potentials for relationships, and for faithful God glorifying living that are otherwise entirely impossible in a room of just men, or just women.

Try to make a masterpiece with only one color. Try to enjoy a symphony of just one note. Try to enjoy a meal where salt is the only flavor. God's distinctions of male and female beautify this world and our lives in ways we cannot imagine.

This is why the body of Christ is such a powerful witness to God. It's why our visible gathering together is part of God's visible evangelistic and beautifying witness to the world. No room of men or women in the whole world does what redeemed men and women gathered together and worshipping together could ever do.

Here's why this is an immensely freeing reality in a totally confused world today. The biological differences and the essential differences between men and women, which we can call gender realities and gender roles, free us from the cultural oppression that so often makes us hate our own bodies and hate the bodies of those around us.

Eve's distinctions before Adam were biological, and they were visible. He saw her, he knew she was a woman, just by looking—and that's the way God intended it. And yet, her femaleness was not just in her biological differences. There was an essential difference to: she was taken out of man.

Even if her breasts were too small to be seen at first. Even if Adam's apple was disguised—those biological realities and markers coexisted inside of God's essential realities of maleness and femaleness.

Eve was taken out of Adam, and made by God to be a fitting helper in God's plan. Adam was made first, and Eve was made second. We see these roles in the garden, and these will be defined as we learn more about a husband's leadership in the home, and the leadership of elders in the church.

Our world hates the idea of different roles. But remember, we are made in the image of God. Inside of God is the Trinitarian outworking of one God in three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. Each are distinct from one another and yet none are less than another. The Father will never experience what it's like to be the Son—but he's not less than the Son. The Spirit will never experience what it's like to be the Father—but he's not less than the Father. This begetting and proceeding of distinction and unity shapes the every blueprint of Gender.

And you might say: well there's three in the Trinity, but only two genders. I think that's because just as God's fullness is Father, Son and Spirit—humanities fullness is male, female, and the God who made them in his image. To understand each, we must understand him.

So, here's that bit of freedom we need today. Our gender identity has visible and biological expressions. But if those expressions are lacking, by natural development, disease, or whatever—you are not any less male or female. If my gender requires me to meet the stereotype of a man with a beard—I'll never match up, and I'll hate my body, I'll hate your body because it condemns me, and I'll hate the God who made me. But if our gender is biologically made by God, then the fullest of our gender identity is realizing that God made us in his image to labor for him. Your gender doesn't serve stereotypes that change—your gender is meant to serve God in obedience to who God made you. That's real maleness and femaleness.

And as sweet as it is that I get to pursue God alongside my sisters in faith, God's design for gender has the capacity to go beyond mere friendship. And that's what we see lastly in our final point: **A Good**

Union. God's glory in gender shows how males and females are capable of a unique sort of love and relationship: marriage.

Read with me: **Genesis 2:22-25**, "And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

Isn't it ironic that it is in this oversexualized world that we seem gender confused? Part of this is because we have lost the natural beauty of gender which is expressed in a unique way through a very special human relationship: marriage.

You might be familiar with Etta Jame's song, "At last, my love has come along. My lonely days are over. And life is like a song." God's first song came in Genesis 1:27 when he sang in poetic form about the creation of man. Man's first song came in Genesis 2:23 when he sang in poetic form about the special connection he had with Eve.

Eve didn't just have Adam's rib—she had his heart.

We've got a lot of growing kids in here, and a lot of young adults, and you might be at a point in your life where you're starting to see boys or girls differently too. You might feel your heart wanting or desiring a special kind of friendship with someone else. And God is so gracious to us—he tells us why we feel that way: **Genesis 2:24-25**, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

God designed one man and one woman to fall in love in such a way where we want to move away from our old family units and create a new family. This is not only a natural longing—but it's rooted in God's supernatural reality. God's inter-Trinitarian love is the seedbed out of which creation came—it is the source of our own life. And this relationship that is made is a recreative act that mimics God's. In marriage, one man and one woman become one flesh.

And that sexual union, and all the joy and pleasure it brings with it, is the only place in the whole world that new life is made. What a testament to our God. Life isn't lifeless. Life is the result of the loving pleasure of God—and so too is sexual intimacy between one man and one woman in marriage.

Notice how Eve didn't become a woman when she got married. Adam didn't become a man when he had sex. Adam's gender had the capacity for sex—but he wasn't defined by it. Having sex doesn't confirm our gender—sex is instead the apologetic of gender. It shows that men and women were made for one another in a unique way and that the only way we are to be together in that way is in a committed lifelong union of marriage.

The language Moses uses of "hold fast" is a legal term. It's a covenant. It's built to last. It's both passion and pledge. And it's only here where our gender can be fully revealed and we don't feel vulnerable. They were both naked and not ashamed. Marriage is caring, loving, life giving, and it is designed to be the safest and most secure space wherein a man can be a man and a woman can be a woman.

It's no wonder that we have lost our grip on gender only after we've lost our grip on marriage. Sex reveals gender and its life-giving potential. But we have gone to great lengths not only to dissolve marriage, but to bottle up and restrict the body's natural ability to create life.

Sin has certainly stained marriages, and our bodies. But our world is using sex, gender, and relationships to try and find a redemption for our brokenness outside of end God made it for.

God made us to want relational wholeness—he made us to want marriage between a man and a woman. And we shouldn't try to stifle that. It is, what we were made for.

But now having said that, I want to say this: That while marriage is the human ideal, marriage is not the human identity.

For Moses, marriage was presented as the capstone to God's good creation. But it is not marriage which makes us human. God makes us human. It is not marriage for which we live--it is God for whom we live.

Just as a man's companion wasn't another man—but a woman. So too, humanity's savior is not the restoration of humans to humans, but humans to God.

And whether we are single or we are married, the only salvation we will find from our true loneliness is finding Christ as our true bridegroom. The diversity Adam saw and needed in Eve is the diversity we must see if we are to realize our need for Jesus. He is like us--but he is distinct from us.

We are alone not because we were created alone--we are alone because our sin has isolated us. But God has sent another--not from our side, but in our flesh. And he has come to redeem us through his faithful love.

Paul reminds us that husbands are to love their wives (**Ephesians 5:25**) as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

And so here, through the metaphor of marriage, we all find love--love not merely of another, but love from God himself. A love that cleanses us from our sin, and wins us into perfect intimacy with him.

And that love places us back in his church. A place where, Lord willing, we might find marriages that honor God. But a place where, as the body of Christ, as males and females, we live together in loving friendship and harmony as a gift of God and as a source of our own joy.

This distinction--is a good distinction. This distinction--even in human marriage--is meant to draw us to the greater distinction: A God who saves us through Jesus.