

## Male and Female

[Jesus] answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?”

- Matthew 19:25

Our series through Genesis takes us to a topic which we mentioned only in passing a few weeks ago, when dealing with Genesis 1:27. Now we are at a point where we can't take another step in this series without giving it the attention it demands. The topic is *maleness and femaleness*.<sup>1</sup>

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

Let's begin by acknowledging the obvious: this topic is controversial, sensitive, and personal. But it is also *inescapable*—not only because of the many debates about it in sports, politics, grammar, and public school curricula, but also because a faithful exposition of Genesis 1-2 demands that we deal with it. The goal of this study is to take a careful look the way these first two chapters of Genesis present our maleness and femaleness. When we do this, we will see that it presents maleness and femaleness as something that is *bestowed, beautiful, and balanced*.

### 1. Maleness and femaleness is bestowed.

Maleness and femaleness is a gift from God, and like everything else God created, it is *very good*. This is not to say that all cultural expressions of gender are a gift from God: these must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Rather the fact that God made each human being as either a male or a female is a manifestation of God's goodness to us. Thus, we may stand in gratitude for maleness and femaleness. This posture of gratitude is very different from ancient mythologies that viewed maleness and femaleness with suspicion, as a hindrance to flourishing. Ultimately, recognizing maleness and femaleness as a divine bestowal allows for a better recognition of its beauty.

### 2. Maleness and femaleness is beautiful.

It is true that there is beauty in humans' physical appearance, but the beauty of our maleness and femaleness goes beyond the physical. It is beautiful in that humans' being male or female answers to God's good purposes for the human race.

- *First*, God wants humans to reflect his image, and we do not do so as males only, nor as females only, nor as androgynous beings, but rather as individuals who are either male or female. Qualities of females, no less than of males, help us understand God's nature (Isaiah 66:13; Matthew 23:37; Isaiah 49:15).
- *Second*, maleness and femaleness provides the possibility for human reproduction, which answers to God's purpose that the earth be full of people.
- *Third*, maleness and femaleness provides the possibility for human society, and God is most glorified by individuals in community.

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<sup>1</sup>By “maleness and femaleness” I mean the fact of one's biological sex. To avoid confusion, however, instead of using the word “sex,” I will usually use the more cumbersome but less distracting “maleness and femaleness.” This also explains why I will use the singular verb (e.g., “Maleness and femaleness is bestowed”) instead of the plural (e.g., “Maleness and femaleness are bestowed”).

### 3. Maleness and femaleness is balanced.

God created both male and female, and both are beautiful gifts from Him. Anyone who denies this divine bestowal robs it of its beauty and balance. In our world today, we see various imbalances in how people view maleness and femaleness.

- *First*, there is the imbalance of making maleness and femaleness *less* than what it is. This approach says, “What matters is not so much whether you are male or female, but in whether you follow your feelings as to how you identify—whether as male, female, or any other variation. This approach makes the body a prisoner to one’s feelings and denies the goodness of maleness or femaleness.
- *Second*, there is the imbalance of making maleness and femaleness *more* than what it is. This approach says, “What matters *most* about you is your maleness or femaleness.” This approach typically takes a cultural stereotype of masculinity and femininity, and judges people’s worth by how closely they come to achieving it. It despises the other sex (“Who needs *men*?” or “Who needs *women*?”), turning differences into a competition instead of companionship.
- *Third*, there is the imbalance of making maleness or femaleness about one thing, such as sex, family, or power.

The Bible’s presentation of maleness and femaleness avoids the self-destructive tendencies of these imbalances. By presenting maleness and femaleness as a beautiful blessing from God, it does not allow us to use it as a reason to elevate ourselves above others, or despise ourselves in comparison with others, but rather as a way in which we can joyfully and gratefully glorify God.

The Apostle Paul writes, “For *from* him and *through* him and *to* him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” It is helpful to see our maleness and femaleness as one of the “all things.” First, it is *from* God. Second, though marred by our sinful inclinations, it can be redeemed *through* God. Third, having been redeemed, it can be presented *to* God, so that God gets all the glory.

### Discussion

1. What are some common ways in which men and women tend to despise the other sex? What are some common ways in which men and women can despise *themselves* for being men or women?
2. How does recognizing maleness and femaleness as a gift from God affect the way we view it? What role does gratitude play in our view of maleness and femaleness?
3. What are some cultural expressions of gender that may *not* be a gift from God?
4. What are some ways in which the Christian view on maleness and femaleness have been distorted by Christians themselves, or maligned by people who reject the Bible’s teaching on this?
5. How does the Bible’s presentation of maleness and femaleness differ from ancient mythologies?
6. How is being male or female an essential part of what it means to bear God’s image?
7. How does maleness and femaleness answer to God’s purposes for humanity?
8. What happens when we make maleness and femaleness *less* than what it is? *more* than what it is?
9. What are some ways in which we as a church can encourage each other in a right view of maleness and femaleness?