



Male and female he created them

A Bible study on God's loving gift of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female

Lesson #2: Unique gifts belonging to male and female in creation

Introduction

“You can be anything you set your mind to being!” That is an encouragement that some parents might give to their children. It sounds so affirming and empowering. And there is a grain of truth there when it comes to being careful not to discourage children from developing as fully as possible their God-given gifts.

But might there also be more than a bit of the hiss of the ancient serpent at work to deceive in those words? The goal of this life is not to make ourselves into whatever our hearts want to be. The goal of life is to discover how God has uniquely shaped and fashioned and gifted each one of us and to discover how we can best live that out to the glory of his loving name and for the benefit of those he puts around us.

We spent lesson #1 noting what male and female have in common (created in his image, gifted with fellowship with God, privileged to be his representatives in the world—all gifts given back to us also in Jesus). But now we turn our attention to what is unique about us as male and female. We will seek to explore the gift God had in mind when from eternity he determined to shape and fashion those he created in his image into two unique genders, male and female.

So, having reveled in the glory of the gifts shared by male and female in lesson one, we now turn back to Genesis 1 and 2 to delight also in our unique gifts. Here too we will find gifts no less wise and loving!

Part 1: The gift of complementarity not duplication

It is fascinating to note that the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 makes no mention of any of God's other living creatures being created male and female. While that is certainly true, the inspired text does not call attention to that created reality until the account of the flood when having both male and female along on the ark was necessary for the preserving of each kind of animal (Genesis 7:2,3,9). Contrast that with this reality in that same creation account: no sooner has God announced his intention of creating human beings (1:26) than he immediately makes it

clear that part of his eternal delight was to craft us this way: “male and female he created them” (1:27).

What conclusions might we draw as we notice this immediate and prominent mention of human beings being created “male and female”?

Remember, as we read Genesis 1 and 2, that these are the foundational narratives in which God is revealing patterns woven into his creation that will impact this world and his human beings for as long as this world exists.

➤ ***Read Genesis 2:7-9,15-25***

In Genesis 2, God gives us the equivalent of a slow-motion replay of his creation of human beings that was handled more quickly in chapter 1.

What inspired-for-our-pondering-and-learning details in these verses from Genesis 2 are begging us to notice and learn about the uniqueness of male and female in God’s created design?

We have the strongest and most authoritative confirmation possible that God intended us to notice and learn from the unique facets of his creation of male and female. Two of those unique features in particular are highlighted for us by New Testament inspired Scripture.

➤ ***Read 1 Corinthians 11:8,9***

What two features of the creation of male and female does the Apostle Paul tell us were intended to help us begin to understand our uniqueness as male and female?

It is important to note that it misses the point to underline the word “helper” in Genesis 2:18 as if that word alone tells us of the unique calling God had in mind for the female. The uniqueness of her calling is marked instead by the whole concept that Moses lays out for us and that the apostle Paul underlines for us to notice in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14). From the very moment of her design, the Creator uniquely shaped and crafted the female “*from*” and “*for*” the male to be a perfect partner and complement to his creation. God wasn’t just arbitrarily doubling the population of his newly-minted world when he created the female. He was crafting something beautifully unique from the male he had created.

As evidenced by both God’s words and actions, we see how deeply God wove into us our uniqueness as males and females. What does that reality say to us as we consider where this unique aspect of our creation will impact our lives?

Part 2: The gift of interdependence not independence

➤ Read Genesis 2:18

It is critically important for our whole understanding of what is unique about how God designed male and female to notice this verse that stands out in big, bold, red letters in Genesis 2. Consider what God said repeatedly in Genesis 1 about the goodness of his creation. That makes this stark statement in verse 18 stand out so powerfully. Suddenly we find that something is “*not good*”! Obviously, God is not pointing out a flaw in his creation.

In what sense, then, is something “*not good*” here?

Certainly, the most obvious application of what God says about it being “*not good*” for the man to be alone is fulfilled when God brings one male and one female together in the lifelong union of marriage. However, what God says here has a broader application to our very existence in this world as male and female.

What is the broader point for every male and every female to consider that God is making here?

➤ Read 1 Corinthians 11:11,12

In Paul’s inspired words, we have confirmation that we are not drawing too large a point from the “*not good*” of Genesis 2:18. And just as our study is doing, Paul makes this point right after pointing out the complementarity, not duplication, of God’s intention in creating male and female as he did.

Why is it so important to hold on to both our unique complementary creation as male and female as well as the interdependence that God had in mind for this partnership?

Since God wove deeply into us our maleness and femaleness, we never leave that behind wherever we go in life and in whatever we are doing. Yet, what does this parallel truth of our interdependence indicate we should expect to see wherever we go in life and in whatever we do?

Part 3: Allowing Scripture to define selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper)

We struggle to find adequate terms and language as we seek to name and define what Scripture is holding before us in how our Creator lovingly and wisely fashioned us uniquely as male and female. No matter what terms and language we use, Satan is quick to exploit human sinfulness to distort the terms and language in order to make God's beautiful unique creation look and sound like something wholly different from what God created it to be.

Words such as "submit" and "submission" and "authority" and "headship" are all good words that have unjustly suffered greatly from such distortions and misunderstanding. This Bible study seeks to lead us to confess the same biblical truths those words sought to confess but in a way that helps us to wrestle anew with the concept rather than getting stuck arguing about individual words.

This study does this knowing full well that no matter what words or phrases are used, Satan's work of distorting their meaning will begin immediately. This is why in doctrine after doctrine every generation must wrestle anew with Scripture so that we are grounded firmly in each biblical concept and not just parroting words generations before us chose to use!

Here are the terms this study will now ask us to ponder as we seek terms to describe God's unique callings of male and female in this beautiful interdependent and complementary partnership our loving Creator designed. For the gift of the unique calling *in this interdependent and complementary partnership* that God has designed for the male, this study asks us to ponder the usefulness of the phrase *selfless leading*. For the gift of the unique calling *in this interdependent and complementary partnership* that God has designed for the female, this study asks us to ponder the usefulness of the phrase *selfless yielding*.

Defining selfless leading (leadership, headship, oversight) from Scripture

As with every teaching of Scripture, in order to hold a biblical middle ground, we need to speak the truth while guarding errors on two sides. That often means speaking two things since grasping only half of the concept quickly leads sinful human beings to distort the biblical concept. That's why, after all, we are intentionally repeating the double-emphasis phrase: the *complementary and interdependent* partnership of male and female.

A careful study of all the various leadership terms in Scripture confirms that they all carry with them the concept of authority.

How does each of these passages help us understand Scripture's definition of what this thing called "authority" is?

- **Matthew 28:18,19**
- **Matthew 8:9**
- **1 Corinthians 12:28**

But we can easily get a distorted picture of authority unless we also note equally that Scripture repeatedly points out that authority from God always comes with responsibility before God.

How does each of these passages help us understand that element of responsibility before God that is always in play in the biblical concept of leadership?

- **Philippians 2:5-8**
- **Ephesians 1:22**
- **Matthew 20:25-28**
- **2 Corinthians 10:8**
- **2 Corinthians 6:3-10**
- **Hebrews 13:17**

Since selfless leading is done in the context of an interdependent and complementary partnership, what does that suggest for how selfless leaders will view the gifts and wisdom of those under their care?

For what multiple reasons is it critical that selfless leading honor the God-given gifts and wisdom of those being led?

Go back to the “it’s not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). How does that verse confirm the wisdom of selfless leaders valuing the gifts and influence of those they lead?

In summary, what are the errors on either side of biblical truth that we are seeking to avoid when we speak with Scripture about authority from God along with responsibility before God to exercise that authority with a humble servant’s heart?

Here’s how the proposed restatement of our synod’s doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to draw together these scriptural insights to define selfless leading:

- When God calls someone to reflect his protecting love by serving in a calling of selfless leading (head), God entrusts that person with authority to be exercised in humble service. As seen preeminently in Jesus (Philippians 2:5-8), leading in humility means serving for the benefit of those under the leader’s care and not for self. Leaders distort God’s design when they lead with a domineering spirit or to the harm of those under their care (Matthew 20:25-28).
- The authority that leaders exercise is pictured in Scripture as the responsibility for determining direction to be followed (Matthew 8:9) for the benefit of those they lead (Luke 12:42). Exercising authority does not give the leader a higher status before God but rather a greater responsibility. That responsibility includes encouraging those he leads to use their God-given wisdom and gifts.
- Only God has ultimate authority. The authority he entrusts to any leader is limited since it is exercised always under God’s own authority. The scope of entrusted authority varies greatly from calling to calling. When God calls someone to reflect his protecting love by serving in a calling of selfless leading (head), God entrusts that person with authority to be exercised in humble service.

Where do these paragraphs help you understand selfless leading? What further questions do these words raise for you?

Defining selfless yielding (functioning as a helper) from Scripture

By working through the passages about selfless leading, we have really already gone a long way toward defining selfless yielding since it is almost impossible to talk about one side of the partnership without talking about the other (so tightly has God intentionally woven the two sides of this partnership together).

But there are a couple challenges still needing to be addressed. Just as with the concept of leadership, so also with the concept of yielding (often translated in English Bible translations with the word “submission”), human sinfulness has caused error and misunderstanding on every side to cloud the beauty of what God designed. So, once again, we will seek to walk a careful biblical middle ground between distortions that either overstate or understate what Scripture means by selfless yielding.

➤ ***Read Psalm 27:9***

How does it help us to see the beauty of serving in a calling of selfless yielding—often referred to as being a “helper”—when we find that God himself is the one most often referenced in Scripture in terms of offering “help” or being a “helper”?

➤ *Read Galatians 3:26-29*

What is the beauty of Paul's words in Galatians 3:26-29 as we live in the midst of a world so confused about what gives any of us our status (worth, value) in life?

➤ *Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-17*

How do Paul's words here provide gospel power to overcome our sinful nature's tendency to play favorites?

➤ *Read Acts 5:29*

One of the greatest challenges for believers who take seriously honoring those in positions of God-given authority is knowing when to say, "I'm sorry, I cannot follow your leadership here." At times those who abuse others prey on the tender conscience of those they seek to control and harm.

In Acts 5, the Jewish Sanhedrin, a clear authority in Jewish culture, was forbidding the apostles to speak about Jesus.

What does the apostles' response teach us about when we would refuse to follow the direction of a God-given leader?

What misunderstanding does this answer regarding what selfless yielding is all about?

Here's how the proposed restatement of our synod's doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to draw together these scriptural insights to define selfless yielding:

- When God calls someone to reflect his supporting love by serving in a calling of selfless yielding (helper), he entrusts that person with the responsibility to submit to the authority of a God-given leader. Helpers are to use all their wisdom and gifts to support their leaders in a way that calls to mind how God is helper to us all (Psalm 121). Since God designed head and helper to function interdependently and not independently (1 Corinthians 11:11), God intends helpers to have a beneficial influence on those leading them.
- Selfless yielding to a God-given leader does not indicate a lesser status in God's eyes. Scripture affirms an equality of status before God by proclaiming that all believers are one in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

Where do these paragraphs help you understand selfless yielding? What further questions do these words raise for you?

Here are some additional useful points to keep in mind about selfless leading and selfless yielding:

- All people, male and female, are under God's authority. It is interesting to note that one way to define the sinfulness of human beings by nature is to say that they refuse to recognize the great blessing it is to be under God's authority in their life (Romans 8:7). All sinners, male and female, are by nature predisposed to look on all authority with skeptical eyes. Since our sinful human nature does not trust God; it therefore does not trust him to lead wisely and well.
- Because some try to paint this interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in the most negative light possible by making it an absurd caricature of itself, it needs to be stated that every female does not need to consider every adult male to be her God-given authority. Selfless leading and selfless yielding do not function as free-floating abstractions divorced from specific earthly callings and settings. God designed the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female to function in his world wherever women and men partner together in concrete relationships in the midst of their callings in life. They form these relationships to find God's blessing in those relationships for themselves and others. Male and female often find themselves entering these partnering relationships such as when they decide to get married or when choosing a particular place to work. Our next two lessons will seek to lead us to apply such selfless leading and selfless yielding in just such concrete relationships at home, in church, and out in the world.
- God does not entrust all males with specific callings of leadership. Also, all males, almost without exception, will find themselves under the authority of God-given leaders at work, at church, or in government.
- Women will also find themselves serving in callings as selfless leaders, for example, when entrusted with leadership over other women or over children. Callings in the world where females find themselves in authority over both adult males and females will be discussed in the final lesson of this Bible study.