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We Believe in

God's Design for Man and Woman in Marriage

by Robert G. Parr

Confusion and even rebellion about matters of sexuality and gender roles are so pervasive in America that we hardly notice it anymore. Politicians running for public office address the economy, terrorism, poverty, education, immigration, and a host of other concerns without ever suggesting that the collapse of marriage and the family might have something to do with our national problems.



In this vexing and disturbing climate, the temptation to disengage is strong. But that is why Cedarville is equipping the next generation of believers to engage culture with a perspective that is thoroughly biblical, reasonable, and compassionate. Not only should we speak about God's plan for men and women because it is right, but by doing so we offer a redemptive picture of marriage that reveals true love to our neighbors, friends, and family.

MANKIND DESIGNED

Both Jesus and Paul go back to Creation when discussing marriage (Matt. 19:4–6; Eph. 5:28–32) and gender roles (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:12–14). The Bible is clear that a person is made whole by a relationship with God through Christ, and a single person may experience this as well as a married person. However, God's original crafting of mankind included both male and female, and marriage was given as a way for man and woman to experience oneness with another. There are discoveries made about being male and female that are unique to the one-flesh marital union.

God created man and placed him in the garden to cultivate it, but it was not good that the man was alone. He was designed to be connected to a helper. So God took from the man, fashioned the woman, and put her alongside the man so she was related to him bodily, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). Although she was different from him, she was a refashioning of him, and she was defined in unity with him. And so the man was realized in his fullness in relation to woman. They were united as "one flesh," the biblical description of marriage.

GOD GLORIFIED

God created man to live in a plurality-unity relationship because God at His level lives this way.

The Triune God exists in the intimacy of a three-in-one relationship, so male and female are created in God's image as the "two become one." The word "one" means complex unity and is also used in Deuteronomy 6:4, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." As the Cedarville Doctrinal Statement notes, paraphrasing Genesis 1:27, "God created humans, male and female, in His image."

The Creation account ends by declaring, "The man and his wife were both naked and unashamed," a

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discrete way of describing their physical intimacy. In marital intimacy, the couple images the one God who is plural in personhood. By embracing each other, Adam and Eve are embracing God's purposes for them to be fruitful and exercise dominion. This sexual oneness is more than physical. God provided human sexuality not only for procreation, but as the intimacy that reflects the type of unity that exists within the Godhead.

The oneness of marital union is a joining of heart, soul, and mind — all we are in our humanity. This is the language Jesus uses to describe His relationship with His Father. "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

ROLES FULFILLED

The opening chapters of Genesis show God creating man and woman with similarities and differences. At Cedarville, we teach that man and woman are both the image of God. Both man and woman are given dominion over the earth and mandated to procreate. That same responsibility results in different roles and

responsibilities. As noted in Cedarville's doctrinal position, "Human life, sexual identity, and roles are aspects of God's creative design."

Likewise, in the Fall, there are similarities and differences as both Adam and Eve become sinners. Both of them break God's law, they both eat the forbidden fruit, and they both are guilty before God. The eyes of both of them were opened, they both were aware of their nakedness, and they both covered themselves with fig leaves.

The structure and responsibilities of human beings did not change after the Fall. God's human creatures are still to rule the earth and to reproduce. But now it will be with difficulty that men and women carry out God's original creation purposes. Adam will continue to till the ground to provide for his family, and Eve will give birth to their offspring. But these tasks will now be painful and burdensome.

Both the man and the woman are judged as God addresses each one individually. Here we see differences as their punishment is specific to their gender. The woman's punishment is tailored to her role (childbirth) while the man's punishment is tailored to his role (provider).

PROBLEM DEFINED

Our problem is not the way God has made us. He made all things good. The problem is that now both the man and the woman are sinners. Our problem is not

that some of us were put in the wrong bodies. Psalm 139 clearly notes that God crafted each person in his or her mother's womb exactly as He intended, and He set the number of days for each of our lives (Ps. 139:15–16).

Sin is a moral issue. God didn't get it "wrong" when He made us male or female, and our sexual attraction does not define us. In the resurrection, we will still be male or female, but we will not be tempted by sexual attraction. Allowing sexual orientation to define a person is focusing on the temporal and not the eternal. All have sinful temptation in this life, but this life is not the end. We have a future hope when Jesus will make all things new.

We are not to reconstruct our gender identity but be reconciled to our Creator. We are guilty of violating God's law and rebelling against His authority. Our sin is not our sexuality; it is our disobedience to the commandment of God.

REDEMPTION EXPLAINED

The redemption provided in the work of Christ relates to sin and judgment, not to our sexuality and gender. For those who cite the Bible to argue for sameness of roles and functions, God's message is about equal need of salvation. When Paul asserts in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ "there is neither male nor female," he is saying that sexual differences are irrelevant to becoming a Christian, not to how men and women were to function together. The issue is faith, not gender.

EQUALITY DISTORTED

The Western democratic value of "equality" today is applied to society in such a way as to polarize Americans by race, sex, class, and in almost every other way imaginable. Such an understanding of equality is divisive and conflicting, the opposite of what would be represented in the terms "oneness" and "unity."

The current use of the concept of equality assumes two separate entities to be compared and contrasted as disconnected from one another, not as enhancing and complementing one another. In that sense, equality is something that emerges after the Fall when the couple and the genders are separated in sin and death.

As soon as equality is incorporated into a discussion of marriage, the two genders are set up to compete with one another rather than complement each other and complete one another. Oneness of the genders in biblical marriage does not put the husband and wife at odds with one another.



ONENESS DEFENDED

Oneness in marriage is rooted in something greater than mere biological mechanics. Evolution views partnering as a mating relationship that is instinctive and casual, leaving us with the explanation that we gravitate toward the other gender as an expression of a male instinct to dominate. However, women are never safer than when men are trying to exhibit the self-sacrificial love of Christ (Eph. 5:25–29).

God is love, and everything God does is the expression of His compassion, functioning for the benefit of His human creatures. To practice and promote God's design for marriage provides society with the best possible arrangement for human flourishing. Undermining God's design for marriage is to spread the damaging effects to all members of society, especially to children.

COMPASSION EXTENDED

The most compassionate position we can take is to affirm each individual as created good, whether male or female, regardless if they live as single or married. In reference to marriage and sexuality, we need to uphold marriage between one man and one woman for life, followed by the parenting of children who are prepared to establish their own one-flesh, lifelong marital commitment to a person of the opposite sex. Equipping each student with these truths, then supporting those truths with programs such as Fit To Be Tied, featured

in this section, is one of the most significant ways Cedarville prepares students to influence culture.

Any other marital or sexual arrangement violates the design of the Creator, harms future generations, and falls short of a loving, caring interpersonal relationship with the other parties involved. It represents a failure

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to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). This is why Cedarville gives priority to biblical teaching about the created complementarity of man and woman in marriage. Both are needed for the completeness of humankind.

At Cedarville, we stand for this position and do not shrink from it. We strive to honor God and see His kingdom advanced in all areas of life, and that includes through the institution of marriage.

Robert G. Parr is Senior Professor of Sociology at Cedarville University. He earned his Ph.D. in sociology.



To watch Thomas White's chapel messages on this topic, visit cedarville.edu/maleandfemale or cedarville.edu/biblicalmarriage.

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