**Man and Woman in Christ Core Seminar**

**Week 1 – Man and Woman in Creation: Equality, Fertility, and Complementarity**

**I. Introduction**

Today we begin a 13-week study of the Bible’s teaching on men and women. Why did God create humanity in two sexes? What does it mean to be a woman or a man? How should our differences play out in the church, the home, and the workplace? We’ll consider all these questions and more over the next thirteen weeks. You can see an overview of the class on the back of your handout. [Comment on who’s teaching.]

This whole course has two main goals.[[1]](#footnote-1) The first is to show not only *what* the Bible teaches about men and women, but something of *why*, and why the Bible’s teaching is *good*.

The second goal, which is related, is to show how the Bible’s teaching is rooted in, and maps onto, reality. The Bible’s commands that give men and women complementary *roles* are rooted in God creating us with complementary *natures*. God’s commands are not arbitrary; instead, they’re rooted in his creation.

So, in this class we want to engage in some “reality therapy.” We want to stare at realities that should be obvious, but aren’t always obvious to modern people. We want to discern and describe natural differences between men and women. Seeing how the Bible’s teaching is rooted in those natural differences helps us to extend deep roots of understanding. And the deeper our understanding of created reality, the more wisely flexible we can be about how these differences play out in different cultures and circumstances. Deep roots make for wide branches.

This week, we’re laying foundations, so there will not be a ton of practical application. More and more of that will come in layers throughout the 13 weeks of our class.

In this class, we’ll focus on Genesis 1–2. We’ll see that sexual difference is God’s good design for humanity from the very beginning. And we’ll see something of how the relationships of men and women involve both equality and complementarity, unity and difference, partnership and authority.

**II. Four Key Concepts: Equality, Complementarity, Fertility, and Diversity**

But first, we want to introduce four key biblical concepts that bear on the reality of sexual difference: equality, complementarity, fertility, and diversity. You’ll see them on your handout.

Throughout this class, we’ll use the term “sexual difference,” rather than “gender,” for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons is that the definition of “gender” is, well, fluid!

*Concept number one: equality.* As we’ll see today in Genesis 1:26–28, God created all of humanity in his image. That means all men and all women, all boys and all girls, bear his image. The image of God is the source of humanity’s unique dignity. In this crucial and fundamental sense, men and women are equal. Man and woman are each fully human. No one is more or less human. However a human being deserves to be treated is how both a man and a woman should be treated.

*Number two: complementarity.* Man and woman *complement* each other. The word we’re using here is not the one that means saying positive things about someone (though that’s always nice). Instead, it’s the word that means to make up a whole or bring to perfection. Being different from each other in a way that combines into something greater. This complementarity is seen most obviously in the potential for a man and a woman’s bodies to come together to generate new life. But it also applies to our bodies more broadly, and to characteristic ways of thinking, speaking, relating, and acting.

Men and women are different by design—by God’s design. And our differences are meant to serve and strengthen each other. Men and women are *equal*, not *identical*. That distinction is basic to all that Christianity teaches about men and women.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Another aspect of complementarity is this: in a way that is rooted in and reflects these differences, God has ordained a clear pattern of male authority and leadership in the church and in the home. This does not in any way contradict men and women’s equal dignity. Nor does it imply that women are intrinsically inferior. Instead, think of the complementary differences between men and women, in both our natures and our roles, like music or dancing. Everyone dances; someone takes the lead. Everyone plays, but someone is setting the pace. More on this soon.

Much of the modern world’s confusion about sexual difference comes from setting these principles against each other, especially equality and complementarity. Much modern feminist thought is built on the assumption that men and women can only be equal if they are functionally identical and interchangeable. Often the result is that women are measured by a male standard, or forced to conform to a male pattern, rather than differences between men and women being a cause for celebration.

*Number three: fertility.* The fundamental purpose of God’s creation of men and women is that husband and wife would, together, be God’s means of generating new life. The fullest fruition and fulfillment of sexual difference is the procreation and nurture of children. It is in the family that you see most clearly what the differences between men and women are for. The purpose of our sexual difference is seen most clearly from a long-term, generational point of view. If you reduce men and women to atomized individuals, as if we sprung into existence out of nothing and have no connection to past or future generations, you miss the most basic point of our creation as men and women.

In fact, the simplest way to define manhood and womanhood is this: a man is a human being who is potentially a father; a woman is a human being who is potentially a mother.[[3]](#footnote-3) [REPEAT]

But natural fertility, or procreation, is not the only way that our manhood and womanhood bear fruit. As we’ll consider in later weeks, making disciples involves being a spiritual father or spiritual mother. In the church, those without natural children can have many spiritual children.

*Number four: diversity.* There are wonderfully diverse ways in which manhood and womanhood can flourish in ways that please God and build up others. Biblical teaching on manhood and womanhood should never be used to narrow acceptable behavior down to stereotypes or caricatures. Further, the point of biblical teaching is not to create men who are utterly unlike women or women who are utterly unlike men. A godly father not only protects and provides; he also nurtures. A godly mother not only cares and supports; she also defends. The apostle Paul himself compared his apostolic labor to that of a woman delivering a child (in Galatians 4:19) and nursing an infant (in 1 Thessalonians 2:7).

*And here’s a fifth, bonus concept: mystery.* By “mystery” we mean that the reality of sexual difference is a sign of something far greater. It’s a hint to the riddle of the meaning of our entire existence. Paul says this in Ephesians 5:32. Sexual difference is a signpost built into creation that points to creation’s ultimate fulfillment. Here’s a hint: the act of total self-giving, union, and communion that sexual difference enables points to a far greater self-giving, union, and communion to come.

Sexual difference means that all of us exist *from* and *for* others.[[4]](#footnote-4) We receive life *from* our parents, and we can be instruments of giving life when we give ourselves in marital union. But this existence from and for others is also a picture of the fact that we not exist not only *from* God, but *for God.* That is, we exist for *all-fulfilling communion with him through Christ*.

With these lenses in place, let’s turn to the Scriptures. We’ll study Genesis 1 and 2, where the equality and complementarity of men and women are taught especially clearly, as is the principle of fertility.

**III. Rule and Fill: Men and Women’s Equality (and Fertility) in Genesis 1**

Please turn with me to Genesis 1, verses 26 to 28. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. On the first three days of creation, he *formed* the habitable world, giving it structure and order. And on the second three days of creation, he *filled* that world with a rich variety of living creatures in the sea, the sky, and the land. On the sixth day, after God created creatures to live on the land, we read:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,

in the image of God he created him;

male and female he created them.  
And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Notice that verse 27 explicitly says God created humanity in his image, and then specifies that this humanity is of two kinds, male and female. Man and woman both bear God’s image. Humanity is one race in two kinds: male and female. To use the technical term, we are sexually dimorphic. You cannot speak of a human being without also saying “male or female,” “man or woman.” As one scholar puts it, “The sexual distinction between male and female is fundamental to what it means to be human.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

And being made in God’s image is the source of our worth, our dignity, even, one could say, our rights. Why is it wrong to kill someone? Genesis 9:6 tells us, “Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” In other words, all human lives deserve to be protected and cherished, because each human is made in God’s image.

So, since man and woman are each created in God’s image, they have the same humanity, the same dignity, and the same fundamental office.

That office is imaging God on earth. What does that mean? There are clues in verses 26 and 28. In verse 26, right after saying, “Let us make man in our image,” God says, “And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and so on.” First notice the plural, “Let them.” When the ESV translates “man” in verse 26 it means that word in a gender-inclusive sense: “humanity.” In verse 26’s “let them,” humanity is already viewed as a race, a collective, a multitude. All of humanity is to rule over God’s creation.

And then verse 28 adds that this dominion will be accomplished through humanity being fruitful and multiplying. There’s a progression evident in verse 28: from fertility, to population growth, to spreading out over the earth, to taming and subduing wilderness, to humanity ruling all creatures on earth as God’s appointed stewards.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Meaning, God intends for the human population to expand until they fill the earth. Why? To spread his image over all the earth. All humans are to serve God as servant-kings. We are to procreate, and cultivate creation, so that God’s glory is shown all over the earth. Man and woman are both made in God’s image and authorized to rule the world under God’s rule.

Look down for a moment at Genesis 1:31, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”

The creation of humanity is good. The reality of sexual difference between men and women is good. Our potential for procreation, for filling the earth, is good. Sexual difference is not an illusion to be overcome, or a shackle to be thrown off. Sexual difference is not something personally chosen or arbitrarily “assigned.” You are male or female before you ever choose anything. And sexual union is not a divine ecstasy or a demonic degradation but a gift proper to creatures.

All of creation is a gift, life itself is a gift, and sexual difference is a gift. Our creation as male and female is a gift from the hand of a wise, loving, and generous God.

***Any questions about anything we’ve covered so far?***

**IV. Formed from Earth, Built from Adam: Men and Women’s Complementarity in Genesis 2**

We turn now to Genesis 2. And we’re going to see that, just as Genesis 2 narrates the same events as Genesis 1 from a complementary perspective, so also it gives us a complementary perspective on God’s creation of humanity as male and female.

That perspective is that *man and woman are complementary*. Not only do we have complementary bodies, but we have complementary primary callings, and we have a complementary way of relating to one another within marriage.

Please turn with me to Genesis 2. I’ll walk through eight contrasts between the man and the woman in this chapter. Here I’m very closely following Alastair Roberts’ article, “The Music and the Meaning of Male and Female,” which you’ll see on the back of the handout.[[7]](#footnote-7) I’d highly recommend reading it. I’m often paraphrasing his wording.

First, the man is created before the woman. In verse 5 we read that there was no man to work the ground, and then in verse 7, “then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” The woman is not created until after the man is placed in the garden, given a command, and charged with naming the animals. Then, in verses 21 and 22, God creates her by building out a portion of Adam’s body. The apostle Paul notes this order and draws implications for how men and women should relate to each other in 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 and 1 Timothy 2:13.

Second, the man on his own represents humanity as a whole. We see this in Genesis 2:15–17 and its aftermath. Look at those verses:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Before creating the woman, God gives the man the task of working and protecting the garden. And he gives him the commandment to observe. Adam was then responsible to transmit God’s instruction to Eve. And when they both disobeyed God, God held Adam responsible. In Genesis 3:9, God calls to Adam. In 3:11, he questions Adam. Only then does he turn to Eve. In 3:17, God reminds Adam of what he commanded *him*.

Adam is the representative head of the human race. Adam is held responsible for his and Eve’s failures. Though Adam and Eve both sinned, God counts *Adam’s* sin to all humanity, as Paul teaches in Romans 5:12–21.

Third, the man especially images God’s dominion and transcendence. We see this in the same verses, Genesis 2:15 to 17. As the one personally charged to keep and guard the garden, and personally installed by God in the garden, Adam represents and symbolizes God’s dominion in the world in a special way. Paul picks up on this when he says in 1 Corinthians 11:7 that “man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.” Paul is not denying that woman is also created in God’s image. Instead, he is indicating a relational order, a distinction of role and responsibility. Adam is personally charged with upholding the divisions God has established, before the woman is created.

Fourth, the man is created to be a cultivator and guardian of the earth, while the woman is created to be the helper of the man. God creates the woman to address the multifaceted problem of the man’s aloneness. In verse 5 we’re told that the man would be created to work the ground. In verse 15 God installs Adam in the garden “to work it and keep it.” His primary calling is to cultivate the earth, develop its potential, and provide the necessary, outward conditions for human flourishing. Eve, by contrast, is created to assist and complement Adam in his commission. Look at verses 18 to 24.

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. 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.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Verse 18 tells us that God created Eve to be a “helper fit for” Adam. The Hebrew phrase is *ezer kenegdo*. The notion of “help” is in no way demeaning or belittling. In Scripture, God himself is often called the helper of his people. But while the phrase implies no inferiority or lesser dignity, it does imply a relational order. Eve is created to be Adam’s helper, not vice versa. That’s what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:9, “Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

The phrase “helper fit for” or “suitable helper” implies both equality and distinction, shared dignity and a complementary calling. It implies that Eve is Adam’s equal and partner, and at the same time that she is differently built and differently oriented.

The fundamental problem of Adam’s that Eve’s creation solves is not *loneliness* but *aloneness*. In other words, it is only by the union of two complementary individuals that the human race can be fruitful and multiply. Adam can’t fill the earth and subdue it alone. Both Adam and Eve are necessary to fulfill that commission, and *within the fulfillment of that commission they have distinct primary callings*.

Fifth, the man was created from clods of earth, and the woman was created with flesh and bone from the man’s side. The man’s being derives from the earth; the woman’s being derives from the man.

Sixth, the man was created outside the garden, prior to its creation, then brought to it. The woman was created within the garden, when both it and the man already existed, then brought to the man. Adam has a special relationship with the world outside the Garden; Eve has a special relationship to the inner world of the Garden.

Seventh, Adam is given the task of naming the animals, as a sign of and preparation for his rule over the world, while the woman is not. This does not imply that Eve *doesn’t rule*, but that her primary calling within the dominion mandate complements that of Adam. Further, Adam names Eve twice: first, in 2:23, according to her nature as “woman,” and then, in 3:20, giving her the personal name “Eve.” By contrast, Eve does not name Adam.

Eighth, Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” In other words, marriage is established *asymmetrically*. A man leaves his father and mother in order to hold fast to his wife. The bonds of human relationship and community are formed *by and in women*.

In summary, we can say that Adam’s task corresponds to God’s work in the first three days of creation, and Eve’s corresponds to God’s work in days four through six.

* Man’s primary calling, described in Genesis 2, matches God’s work of structuring, ordering, naming, dividing, and governing, described in Genesis 1:1–13.
* Woman’s primary calling, described in Genesis 2, matches God’s work of generating, bringing forth new life, filling, glorifying, and establishing communion, described in Genesis 1:14–25.

As we’ve seen, our creation in two kinds, male and female, is a fundamental fact of our humanity. And our sexual difference gives rise to a difference in primary vocation. In our original creation, man is formed from the earth to serve and rule the earth. Woman is built from the man’s side to bring life and communion through union.

These different primary callings fit with, and make sense in light of, the pervasive natural differences that exist between men and women. We’ll consider those next week.

These focal points of men and women’s callings, rooted in creation, are not the full measure or scope of what any individual man or woman can or should do. Instead, they are the seeds from which a variety of paths in life can develop and flourish. They are trajectories, not straitjackets.

**V. Application**

Let’s conclude with four brief points of application.

*First, sexual difference is a gift to be received*. It’s not a burden to be refused, or a hurdle to be overcome. Sexual difference doesn’t threaten the equality of men and women; instead, it enriches and deepens that equality.

Sexual difference is created and therefore natural, not invented and therefore arbitrary. To be a man is a gift. To be a woman is a gift. To be a man should be a joy, and to be a woman should be a joy! When we define what makes human life unique and valuable, we should include and highlight men and women’s sexual difference, rather than trying to erase it. For example, a woman’s capacity to bear new life within herself is not an obstacle to some other, greater good. Instead, it’s a superpower to be celebrated and cherished.

*Second,* *sexual difference aims at complementary collaboration and unified partnership, not competition or division*. We should view the differences between men and women not so much as differences *from* each other, but differences *for* each other.[[8]](#footnote-8) And the differences between men and women create complementary strengths in our shared work, especially within the family. Just think of the different ways mom and dad typically relate to children on the playground. Dads generally push and challenge them; moms are who they run to when they hurt themselves!

*Third,* *socially developed differences between men arise from and symbolically highlight our primary differences*. Every culture has different ways of shaping men and women’s appearance, dress, speech, relationships, work patterns, and more. But what is universal is that every culture channels men and women’s differences in certain directions. These socially influenced differences are real, and we should respect them wherever they do not contradict creation and Scripture. And we should also recognize that these differences are not created from nothing. Men and women are not interchangeable before human culture gets its hands onto them. Instead, cultural differences start from the raw material of our natural differences. At their best, culturally developed distinctions between men and women are ways of displaying the goodness and beauty of sexual difference.

*Fourth, how do we define the essence of man and woman’s complementary, primary callings?* In a nutshell: Every man is a potential father, and is called to cultivate fatherly responsibility. Every woman is a potential mother, and is called to cultivate motherly nurture.

To turn to men first, we can borrow a widely recognized, cross-cultural definition of manhood that fits with the accents of Genesis 1–2. *To be a man is to produce more than you consume*.[[9]](#footnote-9) To be a man is to give more than you take. To put a specifically Christian perspective on it, we can say that biblical masculinity is the glad assumption of sacrificial responsibility.[[10]](#footnote-10) More practically, manhood involves generating life, providing for life, and protecting life. Procreate, provide, protect. As we’ll see, there are both natural and spiritual applications of each of those.

To turn to women, we can summarize the essence of the task of womanhood as: *nurture life*. Conceive life, nurture life, sustain life, provide a home and dwelling for life, beautify and glorify life. We’ll flesh this out in more detail in future classes, and again, there are both natural and spiritual applications. A series of images might help us develop the point a little. In closing, then:

* A man builds a dwelling; a woman *is* a dwelling.[[11]](#footnote-11) As the Anglican theologian Matthew Mason has said, “Imagining the family, society, and nation as a house, men are the builders and guardians, while women take the shell that is constructed and turn it into a home, a place for a community to live together harmoniously. He offers strength and protection; she brings beauty and rest.”[[12]](#footnote-12)
* Or, to change images: “[I]n the tree of humanity he is the trunk, rooted in the ground to provide the foundation and make the tree strong; she is the fruit and foliage, which make the tree beautiful, whole, and useful.”[[13]](#footnote-13)
* In the family, the husband is the head; the wife is the heart.

***Any questions about anything we’ve discussed?*** [Close in prayer.]

1. Note to teachers at Capitol Hill Baptist Church and elsewhere: This course was originally written and taught in 2023–24 by two pastors of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. The membership of our church is roughly half married and half single. Roughly matching the ratios of the city we live in, our church has more single women than single men. So, without neglecting married people, or men in general, in this class we have a special burden to show how the Bible’s teaching about men and women is also good news for single people, especially single women. Also, some of the cultural realities we describe or presuppose throughout the class (and especially in weeks 5 and 11) may be less relevant to, or less pronounced in, the place where you minister, especially if you live somewhere less urban. Adjust material as needed! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Paraphrasing Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Drawing on J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014), 54, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We borrow the language of existing “from” and “for” others from Margaret H. McCarthy, “Gender Ideology and the Humanum,” *Communio* 43 (2016), at 274–98, at 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Richard M. Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1–2,” *AUSS* 26 (1988), 5–24, at 7. The previous sentence also draws on this page of Davidson’s work. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Alastair Roberts, “The Music and the Meaning of Male and Female,” *Primer* 3 (2016), 31. His discussion of this passage in the surrounding pages also informs our exposition here. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Roberts, “Music,” 36–37, which we cite liberally and paraphrase closely throughout this section. We subsume Roberts’ seventh point under his second. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. We owe this wording to the Alistair Roberts article cited above. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See, for instance, Roy Baumeister, *Is There Anything Good About Men? How Cultures Flourish by Exploiting Men* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Douglas Wilson, *Father Hunger: Why God Calls Men to Love and Lead Their Families* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 51. Note: by endorsing his wording of this point, we are not thereby endorsing everything Doug Wilson says in this book or elsewhere. That holds for all the authors we draw from in this class. With many of them, we would have serious, fundamental theological disagreements, yet find their teaching on sexual difference instructive and insightful. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Matthew Mason, “The Authority of the Body: Discovering Natural Manhood and Womanhood,” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 4 (2017): 39–57, at 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)