



# GENDER BASHING

*Revealing our perspective on God's plan*

*"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 NIV*

**Y**OU HEAR IT ON TV. It comes across in conversations at the water cooler. You may even feel it yourself at times. It seems "gender bashing" may be one of the favorite national pastimes. This bashing involves negative stereotypes that depict one or the other sex in derogatory

ways. It might go something like: "Men are all alike," "Crazy women drivers," "Men only want one thing," or "Women are only good for one thing." It may seem like an innocent expression of frustration, but when we consistently take part in this kind of talk, we are actually devaluing an entire population of people God created with purpose and meaning and perhaps are even criticizing God Himself. In the very least, we're not living out His call to clothe ourselves "with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" as we live in relation to one another (Colossians 3:12).

Sure the sexes are as different as can be. It can be helpful to learn about how those differences affect or even frustrate us, but the truth is that God created men and women in His image. Knowing that, we can be assured that He has both distinctly male and distinctly female qualities in the essence of who He is. It appears that bringing them together can wonderfully reflect the awesome image of God. It's no wonder marriage is so sacred to Him!

Blame it on the sexual revolution or the changing perspectives on marriage since "no-fault" divorce. Maybe it's the self-focused ideology that permeates our society, or the affects of pornography. It could even be related to the homosexual movement and the feminists' agenda to "de-genderize" our culture. Chances are it has to do with all these things, but most likely it has ties back to the Garden of Eden itself. Think about it. We started human history with God proclaiming that it was not good for man to be alone and subsequently man recognizing that woman was the answer to that need. At this point, man and woman were, at their cores, completely at peace with one another. As different as they were, there was no shame between them and they unselfishly embraced one another's differences. (See Genesis 2:18-25.)

## **Sin Enters the Picture**

Then we watch the effects of sin unfold. Adam and Eve invited one another into their own sinful desires. For the first time they act on selfish motives rather than seeking what is truly best for the other. The next thing you know, blame, deceit, insecurity,

fear and shame enter the picture. Out of that, women desire control over men and men seek to dominate women. God's beautiful plan for men and women loving and enjoying one another and reflecting His image is tainted forever—except for His redemptive plan of grace. It's no wonder Paul calls us out of that self-focus and to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). When we submit to others in this way, we acknowledge the qualities of Christ within one another.

Today we see those same selfish desires undermine the original intent God had in creating both male and female. The aftermath has led to men being confused about what it means to be a man and disappointed women working hard to find in themselves what they really want from a man. The real problem is that what both men and women really want at the core can only truly be found in an intimate and meaningful relationship with their Creator God. It's out of that relationship that all other satisfying relationships and life flows. Not understanding that, we often place unrealistic expectations on others to "fill" us. When they don't comply, we react in a variety of ungodly ways.

***Christ is the source of all goodness and godly relationships.***

*"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." —John 7:37-38*

Granted, respect and protection for all people makes sense. Even in His days on earth, Jesus' ministry radically challenged the demeaning attitudes many had toward women. (See "How to be a Godly Man Toward Women" on page 12.) However, we have listened too long to the cries of our culture that have taken equal rights beyond this measure and calls for an erasure of God's purpose-filled plan in uniquely creating both male and female.

Sure, there are men and women who are ungodly. We all encounter those who are just plain disrespectful or worse, but when we truly live out the God-given essence of being male or female, there is a wonderful dynamic that takes place as we interact. This can happen in a marriage, as well as in other relationships between men and women. It's out of living the fulfilling essence of who we truly are that our relationships with God and others can be deeply satisfying and whole.

This problem in relating to the genders may reveal one aspect of God's opposition to homosexuality. At its core, the lifestyle is essentially a focus on self. Bypassing the need to look outside ourselves and our own needs to understand and be in relationship with the other gender and gratefully accepting the gifts found there, the deception of homosexuality instead seeks personal fulfillment in the same sex. Ultimately, of course, this seeking is in vain. There is no authentically unselfish or long-term fulfillment available there. It is simply not God's design.

***Gender Bashing continued...***

# Bashing...

## Mutual Love and Respect

*"In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself... however each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."* —Ephesians 5:28, 33

These commands are not only helpful in understanding how to have a satisfying, godly marriage, but they tell us something about being created man or woman. They reveal how the genders bring balance to one another. A man is created to love sacrificially and a woman is created to extend reverence and respect. These qualities may not flow out of our "natural" selves, but God pours them out from us as Christ lives through us and we lay down our lives and our desires for one another.

## Created Male and Female

The fact remains that God chose to make us male and female. He loves both genders and created them distinctly with purpose. When we minimize, devalue or even hold hatred toward one gender we basically minimize, devalue and hold hatred toward God's purpose. Instead of jumping on the culture's "bash the other gender bandwagon," ask for the mind of Christ in how you perceive the opposite sex, or your own gender for that matter. Ask yourself these questions as you pray for God's perspective.

## Men

As a man, do you embrace a righteous value for womanhood? Do you love and respect women, as different as they may be from you? Are you able to see what is distinctly beautiful and worthwhile in them, grateful for those unique qualities God expresses through them? Do you welcome the gifts expressed through the women around you? Do you allow those qualities to enhance your life? In ways appropriate to your relationship with them individually, do you uphold women by:

- Prayer, and words and gestures of affirmation toward them and about them?
- Defending their honor, character and purity?
- Protecting them physically and celebrating the strengths they possess?

*A sign of maturing masculinity is evidenced as these areas are in a process of growth.*

In many ways, God designed women to experience His love through others. A woman's husband is called to love her as Christ loves the Church, separating from his mother and father to do so. Many women seek that love through, among other things, relationships (sexual and otherwise) and maintaining beauty. They, however, are most powerfully transformed as they receive godly love for who they are simply as women created by God. He longs to bestow a taste of this affirmation through those around her. Still, this is merely a glimpse of what God offers us. Ultimately, it's only in a deep connection with Him that she will experience the full affirmation of her womanhood.

## Women

As a woman, do you embrace a righteous value for manhood? Do you love and respect men, as different as they may be from

you? Are you able to see what is distinctly admirable and worthwhile in them, grateful for those unique qualities God expresses through them? With a grateful heart, do you accept the protection God provides through the masculine way of responding to life? Do you admire the balance a man can bring to your way of thinking? Do you seek to allow those qualities to enhance your life? In ways appropriate to your relationship with them individually, do you uphold men by:

- Prayer, and words and gestures of affirmation toward them and about them?
- Defending their honor, character and purity?
- Having respect for who they are as men and celebrating the strengths they possess?

*A sign of maturing femininity is evidenced as these areas are in a process of growth.*

Here it is helpful to recognize that God designed men to be built up and esteemed through the respect of others. A man's wife is called to respect her husband in ways similar to how she reveres the Lord ("respect" in Ephesians 5:33 is translated "reverence"). Although many men attempt to find that respect through, among other things, financial gain, sexual or athletic prowess, or philanthropic endeavors, they are most powerfully transformed by receiving respect for who they are simply as men created by God. He longs

to bestow a taste of this kind of affirmation through those around him. Ultimately, it is only in a deep connection with God Himself that he will experience full affirmation of his manhood.

*"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."* —1 John 4:7-8

It is likely that some may recognize at this point that they have negative feelings, or even hatred, toward their own gender. You, too, will want to pray about why that is and ask God to transform your heart in this area. Don't allow the enemy to deceive you into devaluing God's purposes for you. We are clearly to love one another, but it is essential to recognize that kind of authentic love comes from God. It is impossible to love ourselves and others in this way until we humbly seek to experience His perfect love.

## Prayerful Reflection and Gratitude

Consider spending time recognizing the unique gifts and attributes that come with being a man or a woman. We desperately need one another to bring godly balance to life. This is true not only in marriage, but in the church and in each of our relationships. The fact is that we are unable to fully reflect all of God's character or completely fulfill our calling without including male and female input in the equation. Thank the Lord for both genders' attributes, including those in yourself. They are gifts from a loving Creator. Thank Him for His creation of men and women and His wonderful purpose in making them as a complementary reflection of Himself. ☮

*God's beautiful plan for men and women loving and enjoying one another and reflecting His grace is tainted forever—except for His redemptive plan of grace.*