



Created for What?

Genesis 1-3

- 1. We Were Created to Rule (chapter 1)**
- 2. We Were Created with Roles (chapter 2)**
- 3. Why is God's Plan Rejected? (chapter 3)**

As many of you know, this past week, I spent a good deal of time in California. I departed from Rockford last Sunday afternoon. Perhaps you remember what the weather was like when I left. It was snowing outside. In fact, my wife told me that our children were outside enjoying the snow! Well, I went to Los Angeles. Needless to say, the weather was a bit different! Let me put it gently: "I'm glad I packed some short-sleeved shirts." I went to California to take a course at the Master's Seminary entitled, "Biblical Manhood and Womanhood." This course was taught by Dr. Wayne Grudem, who is a research professor at Phoenix Seminary. The Master's Seminary invited him to come and lecture on this topic this week, because of his expertise on these matters. He has written various books and papers on the topic. He has taught this topic on various occasions. It was truly a privilege for me to be with him this week. My schedule each day was packed! I had class every morning. I often went out to lunch with those whom I knew in seminary 10 years ago. I had several dinners in homes of people. I stayed up late into the night talking about life with those whom I was staying with. It was exhausting, but it was pure joy. It was a thrill for me to give an update to others of what God is doing here in Rockford, as many asked me.

This course that I took covered a topic which has been the focus of much controversy in the evangelical world over the past 30 years: "Manhood and Womanhood." This controversy basically revolves around the question of what it means to be a man or a woman in the world, in the church and in the home. It is a fundamental debate that addresses every area of life! It addresses how you, as a man or a woman, should act in our world. It prompts us to ask questions like the following: "How should we act in an unbelieving world? How are we to interact among the believing within the church? How are we to act at home?" This debate has been forced upon the church of Jesus Christ as a result of the rise of feminism in our country, and the influence of feminism within the church itself. This debate has not been a bad thing for the church. In fact, it has been quite healthy as many people have been forced to evaluate their understanding of what the Scriptures teach in regards to what it means to be a man or a woman in the world that God has created. The church has been driven back to the Scriptures to examine what they teach in these areas. As truth has been discerned, it has forced the church to examine its traditions. I believe that it has been good for the church to evaluate such things. I believe that much good has come from the controversy. The teaching of the Bible in these matters has become clearer, as many people have directed their attention to these matters. It has exposed much sin, even abuse, in the lives of many men who have wrongly exerted unbiblical male-dominance in their home to the point that they have oppressed their wives. As a result, husbands who have recognized and applied what the Bible teaches in this area have become better husbands. The debate of manhood and womanhood has helped to clarify the role of women in churches and in homes. This in turn has led to greater happiness on behalf of many women as they carry out God's design for their lives. Children have benefited as well, since they have the opportunity to see marriages operate in accordance with Biblical principles.

Unfortunately, the question of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood has become an issue that has divided the church across America. Friendships have been dissolved. Entire churches have been torn asunder over these issues. Denominations of churches have been split due to disagreements in this area. My desire is that this issue will not divide us here at Rock Valley Bible Church. Rather, we need to be united in these fundamental issues. Beginning this Saturday, we will be examining this issue of manhood and womanhood in our Men's Equippers Bible study. If you are a man and do not yet have plans to come to this important study, I would encourage you to come. I know that many of you work all week long, and another few hours on Saturday is a sacrifice for you. I am simply asking you to make that sacrifice. Not only would it be good for your soul, but it would also be good for our unity as men, as we work through these things together. Wives, it will be good for you to do whatever you can do to have your husband come. As a church, I believe that we are already united in these things. However, the study we will go through on Saturday mornings will help to solidify our unity all the more. This morning, I would like to lay the groundwork for this study.

As always, our textbook is the Bible. As always, we will submit to its teaching, not to the pull and sway of our culture. I have entitled my sermon this morning, "Created for What?" I want to seek to answer the question of our purpose for being this morning. I want to give you an answer for such profound questions as these: Why are you here? What were you created for? What are you supposed to do in this world? How are you supposed to act with others around you? The One who created us has given us instructions on how we are to live.

Periodically, my son will come up to me and show me a creation that he has made from Lego toys. He will say, "Here dad, look at this" and he will hand it to me. I will often take it and look at it for a few moments, and then say, "Wow, SR, that's pretty nice." He will ask, "Do you know what it is?" Often, this is not an easy question to answer. I usually try a guess at what it is. I might say, "Well, it looks like it's a airplane." Or if it looks anything remotely like a car, I might say it looks like a car. Sometimes, I am right. Sometimes, I am wrong. If I am wrong, my son will usually correct me, "It's a soccerball machine!" Then, he shows me how it works! When God created us, He also described His creation to us. We are greatly blessed this morning, because our God has told us (1) what we are, and (2) what we are supposed to do.

My first point this morning is that ...

1. We Were Created to Rule (chapter 1)

Genesis, chapter 1 records for us what took place on each of the first six days of creation. On the first day, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1-5). On the second day, God created the expanse to divide the waters (Gen. 1:6-8). On the third day, God created the vegetation (Gen. 1:9-13). On the fourth day, God created the sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14-19). On the fifth day, God created the creatures who flew in the air and swam in the seas (Gen. 1:20-24). On the sixth day, God created the land animals, as well as the first human beings (Gen. 1:24-31). I believe that these days were in fact 24 hour days. The God who was powerful enough to create the world was certainly powerful enough to do it in the time of 6 days. I want to pick up the story in verse 26. This is just after God creates everything upon the earth, with the exception of man and woman. We read in verse 26,

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
(Gen. 1:26)

At this point in the narrative, we discover that mankind is radically different than any other portion of creation. We are ...

a. We are Unique in Our Being (i.e. we are unique in what we are).

We are different than everything else that God created! Look again at the first part of verse 26. We have the first recorded instance of communication within the three persons of the Godhead. God is pondering what it is that He will do. He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to our likeness;" (verse 26). The implication here is clear. Up to this point, nothing that had been created was created in the image of God. The earth was not created in the image of God. The plants were not created in the image of God. The stars were not created in the image of God. Neither were the birds, nor the fish, nor any other animal created in the image of God. **It was the man and the woman alone who were in the image of God.** In verse 26, we see God's intention of creating image-bearers. In verse 27, we see God's creation of these image-bearers: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." In these verses Moses labors to make the point abundantly clear that the man and the woman were created in the image of God. Notice how repetitive the language has been. Four times are we told that the first two humans were created in the image of God. In verse 26, God repeats Himself to show His burden to create these unique creatures in His universe that will bear His image (or likeness). These words in verse 26 are essentially synonyms: image and likeness. It is difficult to see any variation in meaning between these two words; they are used for emphasis. Also, in verse 27, we see Moses mentioning two more times the fact that the man and woman were created in the image of God.

God did not share His image with any other creature in the universe. Flowers, as beautiful as they may be, are not made in the image of God. Eagles, as graceful as they may be, are not made in the image of God. Puppies, as cute as they may be, are not made in the image of God. Angels, as majestic as they may be, are not made in the image of God. God, however, did share His image with men and with women. There is something about being human that sets you all apart from the rest of creation.

When you look around at other people, you will see something that is more like God than anything else in the universe. All of us have been created in the image of God. If you are a man here today, you have been created in the image of God. If you are a woman here today, you have been created in the image of God. If you are a child here today, you have been created in the image of God. Nowhere in the Bible does it speak about the image of God as being greater in the male or in the female. There ought never to be an attitude among any of us that thinks you are superior in any way to anyone else. Such an attitude is contrary to Christianity. Sadly, this attitude of superiority has manifested itself in our world. You can find this attitude in culture groups. In the 1700's many white people thought themselves to be superior to their black slaves. In the 1930's the Nazis in Germany thought themselves to be superior to everybody else. You can also find this attitude in gender groups. In China, families are limited to one child per family. So, Chinese families often abort their babies if they find out that they are girls. In fact, I heard that in China alone, there are 50,000,000 women, "missing" from the population as boys now far outnumber girls in China, due to China's "one child per family" policy (see www.gendercide.org for details). Fifty million image-bearers are gone! Not too long ago, the Taliban government in Afghanistan had barred Afghan women from leaving their houses. Women could not work, attend school or receive treatment from a male doctor. These are disturbing facts, but do not think that our country has escaped these types of things. There are plenty of men in America who believe that men are better than women. However, the very first page of the Bible tells us that this is not the case.

If you think that you are superior to another person, I call you to repent from such an attitude! Husbands, you are not superior to your wives. Wives, you are not inferior to your husbands. Both husbands and wives are made in the image of God. In actuality, none of us deserved to be created. Neither Adam, nor Eve deserved to be put into a lavish garden where all of their needs were abundantly supplied by their loving Father who would walk and talk with them. The fact that we are created in the image of God is a fact of God's grace to us. Let us dispose of any attitude of superiority over anybody else. Men and women both possess the image of God equally. As such, we are unique to all of creation.

b. We are Unique in Our Purpose (i.e. we are unique in what we were created for).

Look back again at verse 26. We read,

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
(Gen. 1:26)

This is the purpose for which men and women have been created. We have been created to rule over all of the animals in the creation. The

text says, "let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." We have been created to rule over all of the matters upon the earth. That is what the text means when it says, "let them rule ... over all the earth." When God created the earth, He had a plan. This plan called for men and women to rule over the earth. Notice further, that it was God's plan for them to do this together! "Let them rule." **The man and the woman were intended to rule together.** What God intended in verse 26, he brought to pass in verse 28:

And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:28)

To paraphrase, God said, "Adam and Eve, here's the plan: I have blessed both of you. You both are needed to accomplish this task. I want you to make lots of little Adams and Eves, so that you can cover the whole earth. In the process, I want you to manage My affairs on the earth. Put the animals in subjection under your feet and rule over them. Become kings and queens on the face of the earth." Both Adam and Eve are needed together for this task of ruling. This is God's plan. He created us to rule! He gave to Adam and to Eve a stewardship and a responsibility over the earth. Together, they were to accomplish this task.

I simply note for you that this task of ruling was not a solo effort for either of them. They were to accomplish this as a team, working and ruling together. It was to be a united effort. They were both image-bearers. They were to be vice-rulers on the earth. Both of them were to play key roles in the process.

This leads me to my second point:

2. We Were Created with Roles (chapter 2)

Though Adam and Eve were created equally in the image of God and were assigned the same task, they were each to play a different role in ruling the earth. Genesis chapter 1 gives us the big picture as it describes how God created the world and everything in it. Beginning in chapter 2, verse 4, God gives us a detailed account of how the man and woman were created. In verse 7, we see the LORD God forming the man out of "dust from the ground." In verse 15, the LORD God put him in the garden "to cultivate it and keep it." These words help to further this aspect of rulership that the man was intended to have (Gen. 1:26, 28). The man had responsibility over the matters of the garden. He was to "cultivate it and keep it." God gave him a stewardship over the garden. Adam had authority over the garden and was to manage its affairs. In Genesis 2:19, Adam began to express his authority over all of the animals (Gen. 1:26,28) by naming the animals. Our text reads,

And out of the ground the LORD God [had] formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. (Gen. 2:19)

If Adam was to rule over all of these animals, the first task he had to do was to familiarize himself with these animals. - He had to take inventory. Perhaps you have been in the situation where you changed jobs or moved into a new city or came into some other type of new environment. When this happens, you begin by orienting yourself to your surroundings. You begin to find out where the bathrooms and water fountains are. You begin to figure out where your supplies are. You begin to figure out what types of tools are available to you. You learn how to obtain the accessories you need to have in order to accomplish your job. If your surroundings are not quite so organized, your first challenge is to inventory everything, to see what you have available to accomplish your job. This is precisely what Adam was doing. He was taking inventory and familiarizing himself with all of the animals.

In verse 20, we find that Adam "gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field". And then we read those sad words, "but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him." For Adam to accomplish his task of ruling the earth, he needed a helper. None of the animals would be suited to help him. He needed one to come along side him and help him in every way. This helper is described slightly differently in various translations. The NAS and NIV say that this helper needs to be "suitable" for him. The KJV refers to this helper as a "help meet" (and further described in the margin, "as before him"). The NKJV says, "comparable" for him. The ESV says, "fit" for him (further described in the margin as "corresponding to"). The Amplified version describes this helper as suitable, adapted, or complementary to the man. All of these translations will give you a good idea of God's intention in these matters. God knew that Adam did not need another Adam. He did not need someone who would be just like him. Rather, he needed someone who would be suitable as a help. He needed a helper, who would be adapted to help. He needed a helper, who could be complementary to him. Adam was the quarterback. He did not need another quarterback. He needed a wide-receiver who would catch the ball. Adam had named the animals. He did not need anyone to name the animals also. He needed someone to help write down the names of the animals. I assume that you have put together a jigsaw puzzle before. The idea that we have here with Adam and Eve is like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fitting together. One piece has a round projection coming out of it. The other piece has an indent that is shaped in exactly the opposite way. When they come together, they fit perfectly together. Adam needed a helper to help him harmoniously rather than resisting him.

Now, there are some women who associate the word "helper" with the concept of a slave. They think of it as a demeaning term, but biblically, the word "helper" is not a demeaning term. There are even instances in the Bible where God is described as our Helper! We sang a song this morning from Psalm 121 that refers to the Lord as our help. Psalm 121:1-2 says, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains! From whence shall my help come. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." And in Psalm 115 we read, "O, Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield" (Psalm 115:9-11). The fact that the woman was created to be a help, does not mean that she is less dignified in any way for they both were created in the image of God. Neither does it mean that the husband ought never to "help" his wife. These are generalities of how things ought to work itself out in marriage. The man should assert his authority in the marriage, and he should be the leader. The woman should willingly help her husband as he leads.

In verse 15, we see that Adam had already begun to assert his authority over the earth in the garden. Adam had already begun to assert his authority over the animals by naming them (Gen 2:19-20). He needed a helper to come along side of him to help him rule the earth in

accordance with the stewardship that God had given to him. God saw this need, and desired to do something about it. He administered the first anesthetic and performed the first surgery. This is recorded beginning in verse 21,

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man (Gen. 2:21-22).

When Adam had awakened from his surgery, he saw the woman, and instantly knew that she was a helper suitable for him. He knew that she would not be his rival, but his partner. She was not going to threaten him, but rather, she would fulfill his desire and need for a helper. He expressed himself with these words,

This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (Gen. 2:23).

The woman was taken **from** the man. Consequently, there is a sameness or equality about both the man and the woman. Yet, the woman was formed **for** the man. Thus, they have different roles. Genesis chapter two finishes with Moses taking this pattern established by Adam and Eve and applying it to all future husbands and wives. He says,

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:24).

Notice also the harmony that exists between them: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen 2:25). Adam and Eve formed the pattern for the world to follow. Two complementary people would join together to form a perfect union, where all is harmonious. They rule the earth together, in accordance with the roles they were given: the husband leads and the wife helps. For the remainder of my message, I will focus primarily upon the marriage relationship.

Later in the Bible this role of the husband is further expanded. The role of the wife is also further expanded. Perhaps the most explicit place where this is explained is Ephesians 5, where Paul clearly instructs wives to submit to the authority of their husbands. He writes, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). In marriage, God has given the authority and the burden of leadership to the husband. The wife is to be willingly submissive to his leadership. She is to help him. But, God, in His wisdom does not end the discussion there. He gives us more detail about the husband's role in order to make sure that the husband expresses his leadership in a loving, others-centered way. Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (verse 25). Men, in your leadership in your marriage, if you are not sacrificially giving of yourself in service to your wife, then you are failing to live up to the biblical pattern that God has established in the home. Paul writes, "Husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies" (Eph. 5:28). Men, if you are more interested in your own bodily comforts than those of your wife, then you are failing in your leadership of the home. The man who sits in front of a television and believes that his role consists of ordering his wife to get a drink for him, is failing miserably in his servant-leadership of the home. The man who never helps his wife (whether it be in the kitchen, cleaning the house, or other areas, ...) is a man who is failing to be a servant-leader.

Adam and Eve were given as prototypes of all marriages to come. They rule the earth together, with the husband leading and the wife helping. Or, to say it in terms of our outline this morning: (1) We were Created to Rule (chapter 1), and (2) We were Created with Roles (chapter 2).

At this point, let me ask you what you think of God's plan. God's plan is that the man and woman were created to rule the earth. Each of them had their own, unique roles in this work. The man would lead. The woman would help. Is this a good plan? Or is it a bad plan? God comments on what He had done in Genesis 1:31, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, **it was very good.**" This ought to be a plan that all of us willingly embrace. If God whole-heartedly embraced it, so should we. And I believe that when God's perfect plan is followed, then God is most glorified as we trust Him in everything. When this happens, men and women are most satisfied since they are fulfilling God's plan for their life. I believe that the happiest wife is one who is married to a man who lovingly leads her in their marriage and in the home. Likewise, I believe that the happiest husband is the one who is married to a woman who joyfully submits herself to the leadership of her husband. The happiest marriages are those marriages in which the God-given roles are lived out in practice.

Sadly, in the church today, there are many who have rejected this plan. As a result, there have been marriages that have been affected for the worse, because the marriage is outside of God's plan. The influence of feminism in our culture today has persuaded many to believe that men and women are equal in the sense that they are the same and ought to be treated as the same. Feminism teaches that whatever a man does, a woman should be able to do also since there is no difference between a man and a woman. In terms of roles, this means that men and women should have the same role in everything. In other words, those who hold to feminist beliefs embrace what is written in Genesis 1 where it says that men and women are equally created in the image of God. But they reject what is written in Genesis 2, that men and women have different roles in their ruling of the world. They want everybody to have the same role in the world, in the church, and in marriages. The end result of rejecting God's plan is bad news. It is no surprise that many women who have opted to follow the world's plan instead of God's plan are now finding life empty and meaningless.

Let us turn our attention now to examine the reasons why people reject God's plan.

3. Why is God's Plan Rejected? (chapter 3)

When I think of why it is that people reject God's plan, several reasons come to mind. The first reason is:

a. The Fall

You remember what happened to Adam and Eve after they were placed in the garden? They fell into sin. Satan, in the form of a serpent, came and tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. Eve ate and Adam followed in her disobedience. As a result, God cursed the serpent. He then cursed Eve. And finally, He cursed the ground on account of Adam. I want you to look closely at the curse that was placed upon the woman. In Genesis 3:16 we read: "To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children.'" The woman has been cursed in her primary area of responsibility which is the home. (Likewise, the man will be cursed in his primary area of responsibility - providing for his family, Gen. 3:17-19). The curse to the woman continues, "Yet your desire shall be for (or against) your husband, and he shall rule over you"(Gen. 3:16b). As a result of the sin of the man and the woman, a tension was created in their relationship. The woman was going to have this sinful desire toward her husband. She is going to desire to rule him. But God says, "He shall rule over you." The picture of the wife's desire is found in Genesis 4:7, where we see Cain's battle with sin in enmity against his brother. Sin is pictured as "crouching at the door" like a lion, waiting to pounce on its prey. We read, "and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Sin wanted to have the dominance in Cain's life. Sin was attempting to overtake Cain. This picture is similar to what the woman experiences with her own sinful desire that wants to dominate her husband. She will want to lead. She will want to have the authority. She will want to be the ruler in the home. But, alas, her efforts will end in frustration as we read, "And he shall rule over you." I believe that this verse explains the years and years of oppression that women have been subjected to down through the centuries. You do not need to look very far to see its effect in society.

Many in our church here have been reading through Genesis this last week, in accordance with our reading schedule. In Genesis, we have witnessed much of this oppression. Abraham did not do a very good job leading and protecting his wife. On several occasions, Abraham led Sarah into sin by forcing her to lie about their marriage to Pharaoh and to Abimelech (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-7). In each instance, Abraham failed to protect Sarah, as she was subjected to potential defilement from the ruler of the land. Abraham also failed to stand for righteousness, and instead conceived a child through Hagar, which later became cause for contention in their marriage (Gen. 16). Isaac followed the lead of his father (Gen. 26:7-11) and led Rebekah to lie to Abimelech. Leah was led by her father to deceive Jacob on his wedding night. Shechem lay with Dinah by force (Gen 34:2). Reuben defiled his father Jacob's concubine (Gen 35:22). Judah made use of a prostitute (Gen. 38:12-19).

Down through the centuries, men have oppressed women, even their own wives. You can trace it all back to the fall and the curse upon the woman. Praise be to God that in Christ Jesus, we can overcome these tendencies. Christian men are called to be loving leaders in the home, not dictatorial rulers. Christian women are called to be submissive helpers in the home, not usurpers of authority. Christian homes are the most joyous places on the planet, where genuine Christian unity is demonstrated. When Christ is central in marriage, both the husband and the wife are focussed on the good of the other. Each know their own distinct role to create this harmony. It is a glorious thing. I can testify to you today that my marriage is wonderful! My desire is to love Yvonne like Christ loved the church. My desire is to love Yvonne as my own body. I fail in these things, and I need to trust Christ more and more every day to supply the power to accomplish these things. But, I believe that Yvonne is patient with me as she sees this desire in my life. When I love her like this, it helps her to be my submissive helper, because she knows (and is convinced) that I have her good in mind in all we do together. She is wonderfully submissive to me. It is glorious. I could not be happier with our marriage. I cannot even dream of how it could be better. Such bliss can only occur as both the husband and the wife are servants of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ gives them power daily to overcome their own sin in loving and following the other, as they overcome the effects of the fall and the curse in their lives.

There is second reason why God's plan for men and women to rule the earth together is rejected. This reason is because of:

b. Examples of Abuse

As I have already mentioned, one of the results of sin is that men and women will each want to dominate each other, especially in the marriage relationship. And when a man and woman fight in the home, it is often the man who ends up prevailing simply because the man is usually physically stronger than the woman. If the woman in the home fights it, she is often frustrated in how her husband often prevails: "He rules over her." She is led to anger against her husband. If the woman in the home is passive, the man often takes great advantage of his wife and exerts an unbiblical male-dominance in the home. In both of these cases, some form of abuse is often the result. This happens often in the world. Sadly, it is also true among the professing church of Jesus Christ. People witness the effects of this abuse of authority. People witness the effects of the male-dominance that takes place. Consequently, they reject God's whole plan of husbands who are loving leaders, and wives who are submissive helpers. They reject it because the examples they have seen of it have been extremely poor. As the church of Jesus Christ, we ought to be against all forms of physical, sexual, and/or verbal abuse. Such abuse is sin, and is the hallmark of the devil. It ought not to be tolerated in the Christian community. The verses in the Bible that speak about a woman submitting to her husband are given in the context of a loving husband who leads and cares for his wife. I am referring to such verses as Ephesians 5:22, "wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord." There are men who demand that Ephesians 5:22 be carried out in their homes. They wield this verse like a big club that seeks to obtain the submission of their wives, while neglecting the equally clear commands of Ephesians 5:25, 28. Such men are in error and have missed the point of Ephesians 5:22-33.

Men have great opportunity to abuse their wives. And indeed abuse often happens. It can happen in several ways:

Verbally - Psalm 52:2 describes the evil tongue that "devises destruction" and is "like a sharp razor" in its usage. Proverbs 12:18 compares the one who speaks rashly with the thrusts of a sword into another.

Spiritually - Proverbs 15:4 says that the perverted tongue can crush the spirit.

Sexually - Proverbs 5:4 says that sexual immorality is as sharp as any two-edged sword and is on the path to death. I have heard of men reading 1 Corinthians 7:4-5 out loud, slowly to their wives, "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does ... Stop depriving one another, except by agreement." And then proceeds to force sexual activity upon their wives in an abusive way.

Physically - Ephesians 5:28 gives the standard of love that husbands ought to have for their own wives. His love for her ought to be like his love for his own body. Surely, this speaks against physical abuse.

People see this type of abuse and naturally react against it! They say, "Is this what the Bible has to offer? Well, then, I want none of that! Forget this woman's submission thing. I'm going to fight for my rights!" I would say that this type of reaction is natural and ought to be expected from those who witness such abuse. It is exactly what Satan delights himself in. Let us not take some verses and deny others in the

Bible as well. Let me say this: if any of you women ever feel that there is abuse in your home, please know that his dominance over you is wrong. Consider what Jesus instructed us in Matthew 18:15, which says, "If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." This certainly applies to wives in marriages as well. "Wives, if your husband is sinning against you, by abusing his authority over you, talk to him in the privacy of your home. Lovingly explain and expose his sin. Call for him to repent. Pray for his repentance." If he does not repent of his wicked ways, please continue to observe our Lord's teaching in verse 16, "If he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed." Call me, if you want. I am willing to go and talk with your husband about these matters with you. I will call him to repent. The church is here for your protection. I am on your side in these matters.

I am amazed at how God so often stands up for the weak and helpless. As you continue in your Bible reading this week (or next week), notice how many laws are given to help the orphans and the widows and the poor and the oppressed. It is all over the place. This is the heart of God. This is the heart of the Christian church: abuse within marriage will simply not be tolerated. Such behavior is sinful and wrong and not consistent with those who profess to know the Lord. These examples of abuse often lead people to react against the Biblically balanced understanding of willing submission to loving leadership. I call on each of the families in our church, to make your marriage so sweet and so harmonious that the world cannot help but to look on and desire what you have. Do your job to put forth a God-centered marriage that eagerly desires to follow God's prescription for marriage.

Let me share a final reason why God's plan for marriage is often rejected:

3. Unbelief

When you closely examine the temptation and fall of Eve, you will quickly discover that the heart of the issue was Eve's unbelief. The serpent seduced her into eating from the fruit of the tree by attacking the trustworthiness of God's word. Though God had said that "in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17), the serpent said, "You surely shall not die!" It was only when Eve doubted the veracity of God's word that she finally took and ate of the fruit of the tree.

The Bible is very clear of the roles for men and women as I have described this morning. In the family, the men are to lead and the women are to help. In the church, the men are to lead and the rest are called to follow. Yet, there are times when the culture of the day can sway people away from the clear teaching of Scripture. In my recent reading, I have been astonished to learn how many people profess to believe the Bible, but are utterly blinded to its clear testimony. For instance, I read this week of authors who said that 1 Tim. 2:13 was difficult to understand: "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve." Is this difficult to understand? I think not! Rather, when it teaches something contrary to your cultural presuppositions, your lack of faith will blind your understanding of God's clear revelation.

As you have heard of God's plan for marriage and our lives, will you trust God or be influenced by your culture?

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