

GOD, Is Your Word (are You?) fair to Women?
Genesis 1-2, Proverbs 31, Romans 16, others

I return this morning from a funhouse of grandchildren growing up in Longhorn Land--Austin, Texas. A week in the zoo where Nona feels compelled to remind grandchildren how to act when we in a store...and where the Friday morning breakfast menu is DONUT PALACE donuts! And, where numbered among the critical questions of each morning is this one: “***I get candy if my diaper is dry. Is my diaper dry?***” (Ryder, Tuesday morning, May 8, 2018).

Just around the corner from where our kids live, I couldn't help but notice this unique front yard celebration:



I've never something seen quite so cool like this before. It seems that Emma came rocketing into the world at 6 lbs 15 oz with the wind of the enthusiasm of her excited parents at her back. I guess they really do do things bigger in Texas! Yellow and pink stars, balloons, smiley face, big red heart. Shucks, her parents even had to borrow a portion of the neighbor's yard to get the word out!

Every conceived child deserves a welcome out of the womb and into the world like this—every boy and every girl. But humanity is not so kind to children, even today. Especially if you're conceived in a womb that does not want you. The WHOⁱ estimates 45 million abortions worldwide each year, 125,000 each day. In some countries, it is female infants who bear the brunt of the brutality. In one, each day at least 2,000 small girls are aborted or killed just after birthⁱⁱ, while the infant boys survive. In our own country, 76,000 children are aborted each month, 2600 each day, just over half of these small, beautiful Emma-like girls.

So...in one sense, when the world-at-large wants to criticize the Bible or Christianity for its

view or treatment of women, it has very little ground to stand on. The truth? Whenever OT Moral Law and Biblical Christianity has impacted the cultures of the world, the value of life and status/treatment of women rises. Amy Alsup in *Is the Bible Good for Women?*

During the twentieth century, the first wave of feminism gave voice to women whom society had long marginalized. In 1920, women finally won the right to vote in the United States, due in large part to the efforts of Christians. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union led this movement, seeking to apply biblical principles of social justice to larger society. Based in part on their understanding of Jesus and the Bible, men and women of faith fought together for women to have the right to vote. This first wave of feminism resulted in women's right to vote and inherit land, along with subsequent benefits to both women and children as women gained a voice in legislation.ⁱⁱⁱ

When Biblical Christianity impacts a culture, the value of life and women rises.^{iv}

But there is another (internal) aspect about Jesus' church – when it comes to women – that needs admitting, confessing, and correcting. At various stages in the church's 2,000 year history, and even in portions of the body of Christ today, God's people have not fully affirmed nor eagerly celebrated God's high view of women as revealed in the Scriptures. Clearly, some early Christian Church "Fathers" harbored deep prejudice against women.

- Tertullian likened all women to Eve calling them "the devil's gateway" for males to sin^v
- Ambrose argued in writing that it was a fact of nature that men are superior to women
- Augustine argued that, outside of procreation, a woman offered no recognizable help to men at all.

Times in the history of the church and voices in the tradition of the church had it wrong.

- But, as Dr. Sarah Sumner^{vi} wisely notes, "Traditional Christian thinking is not the same thing as Biblical thinking about women."^{vii}

So what is Biblical thinking about women? Today's tough question: **God...is your Word fair to women?"** That question seems to have two parts: (1) What has God himself revealed; what does God say about women...(2) are we in Jesus' body listening? Without hesitation, I offer this:

**Our Creator is crystal clear: He creates women
to be equal in value and yet wonderfully distinct.
Without godly women, our world would be desperately incomplete.
Through them, we all have a chance to flourish in God's will.**

Today if you are a woman intent on becoming all God created you to be, I invite you to hear what God thinks, and what we should applaud. We begin in Genesis 1, because here

1st – You should experience God's affirmation in your special creation
Genesis 1

Genesis 1:26 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.”

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

28 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.”

God’s Spirit in Genesis 1 (and more fully explained in Genesis 2) could not be more clear. Human beings are not animals, nor did humans emerge from nor were we created by God from the animal kingdom. While humans share similar DNA with the animal kingdom, we are by specific, Divine design something “other.” And what makes us “other,” what makes us the very crown of all creation, is the “image of God.”

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image...
male and female he created them.

This is the first and most important fact about you. Both genders, fully and equally, bear and express the very image of God.^{viii} Constitutionally, undeniably, personally, by our very natures and capabilities – we manifest, we show, we display what God Himself is like. 5 ways: We



“Personhood” (Genesis 1), notes Amy Alsup, “precedes womanhood” (Genesis 2).

2nd – You should understand **God’s calling** in your unique gender
Genesis 2 and 3

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 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.”

18 Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit^x for him.”

It is here we must stop, observe, and ask two questions, (1) When and why is God saying this? and (2) What is He going to do about it?

The “when” and “why” question is as plain as the words on the page. Just after God charges the alone-man with managing and developing the Garden, and *immediately after* giving the alone-man a moral command to obey (to develop his trusting obedience), it is THEN God declares, “His aloneness is not good. **He needs help** to manage and develop My gift to him...and especially help to eagerly trust and consistently obey my command to truly & fully experience all the life I can give him.”

What will make this *incomplete scenario* GOOD is a “helper who corresponds to him” (God concludes). Simply put, man needs a helper who corresponds, a helper who fits with him, a helper who can become one with him – a GENDER who provides essential help to do the will of God in this new world.

Admittedly, with this Amy Alsup confesses her initial disappointment:

For many years, even as an earnest Christian girl, hoping to grow up to be a faithful Christian woman, I chafed at this concept. The word **help** didn’t inspire me. An image of a 1950’s female secretary and her sexist, chain-smoking boss came to mind. Or worse. I grew up in rural South Carolina...I knew what it meant to be “the help.”

Yet God says in perfection that He created the woman **to be a helper**...a word we easily misinterpret. With some simple study [we discover the Hebrew word **ezer** is not a generic term...] The Bible uses this Hebrew word in a sober, strong way that reflects deeper meaning than traditionally inferred in our culture. The Hebrew word means to *give succor, to support and aid, to those in distress*. It is used 21 times in the Old Testament, sixteen of them which are descriptions of God himself. Consider *ezer* in

Deuteronomy 33:29 “*Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? The shield of your help (ezer) and the sword of your triumph. Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs.*”^x

God did not design woman to be a glorified maid, butler, or cook waiting on an order to perform for a master. This is not His relational vision for woman. Instead He created woman to show compassion, to support, to defend and protect those in her care, to deliver from distress, and to comfort. Women were designed to be conduits of God’s grace and strength in their homes, churches, communities, and places of work. Women were designed to be like God himself.^{xi}

Derek Kidner (2:21-23): **The NT draws much of its teaching from this crowning paragraph of this chapter...Man will not live until he loves, giving himself away (24) to another on his own level. The woman is presented [to him by God] wholly as his partner and counterpart; nothing is yet said of her as childbearer. She is valued for herself alone. Genesis (InterVarsity Press 1967, 1975),**

In Genesis 1,2,3, I find the Holy Spirit laying out three remarkable ways the woman was God's best gift to man – ways that continue to be God's design and will today.

#1 As a **co-bearer of God's image**, she is capable and gifted to glorify God by managing well and creatively developing (ruling and subduing) the resources of creation (Gen. 1:27)

#2 As a **"corresponding" helper** in the likeness of God's own strong help, she is capable and gifted to glorify God by promoting obedience to the commands and will of God. (Gen. 2:15-25)

#3 As the **gender-instrument of nurturing life**, she is capable and gifted to glorify God by bearing and nurturing life and all the relationships that make it fulfilling. (Gen. 3:20 - "The man called his wife's name *Eve because she was the mother of all the living.*")

Alsop: "The giftings of womanhood fit the needs of manhood. In Christ, the woman gifts her male counterpart with appropriate help. She is particularly gifted in ways he particularly needs."^{xii}

The truth is that a godly woman can be God's chosen instrument in our lives for us to be obedient and grow in obedience to the Word of God, in a world that needs to be managed well and developed creatively. In most cases...unless the Spirit calls either a male or a female to a period of dedicated-to-God singleness (cf. 1 Corinthians 7), a man cannot fulfill God's call in his life without the essential relationship with a godly, prepared wife--without the strong help and support that God has created her to provide in his life. And, that flows both ways. Neither can a woman fulfill God's call in her life without the sacrificial love and care of a godly man.

3rd – You should find encouragement to be fruitful in the Spirit's gifting/power

1 Peter 4, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12

Quite frankly, the baggage you as a woman may have brought in her today needs to be left outside the door. Too many women in too many churches--under the authority of men (and even other women) who have thought/acted traditionally but not necessarily Biblically--have felt like second class Christians. One gifted young woman shared with a group of us recently, "Growing up, I heard over and over again, 'If only you were a boy (a male), you could be used in these (key) ways'."

So let the Apostle Peter: *As each one ("of you elect exiles") has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks, as one who speaks the oracles of God; whoever serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."* (1 Peter 4:10-11)

The Spirit endows us with "giftings" – unique grace endowments which when used create fruitful,

spiritual impact for the glory of God. Scriptures name at least 20 or more grace-giftings, distributed by the Holy Spirit as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11).

1 Peter 4:10-11

to speak
to serve

Romans 12

to prophesy
to serve
to teach
to exhort
to give/contribute
to lead
to show mercy

1 Corin 12

to utter wisdom
to provide knowledge
to strongly believe
to heal affirmities
to work miracles
to prophesy
to discern spirits
to speak languages
to interpret languages

There is no indication that these giftings are gender based, none given exclusively to males or females. The Spirit distributes grace giftings; they are giftings to be recognized, developed (fanned into flame (2 Timothy 1:6), giftings to be used to serve, giftings to be encouraged. When they are, God is richly glorified, and people's lives are connected in life-defining relationships in Christ.

4th – You should willingly obey the Scriptures as Jesus' disciple

John 14:15-17, 15:7-11, 1 Cor 11:16

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

John 15:7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Dear sisters (young and older), the best thing you can bring to others...and to your husband...is your loving obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Creator

**He has endowed you to be a female, a woman...
equal in value and wonderfully distinct.
Without you, the world God calls you to would be
Woefully incomplete. Through you, those in
your world have a chance to flourish in God's will.**

Some finishing reflections...

In 1951, Elizabeth Howard met Jim Eliot at Wheaton College. Both were studying to serve the Lord in overseas missions, especially to translate Scripture into new, unknown languages. They would complete their training separately and individually travel to Quito, Ecuador to work among the Quechua Indians.^{xiii} Then, in Quito in 1953, they married to become one. Not long thereafter, their

firstborn came, and when the doctor said, “It’s a girl!” Jim beamed at Elizabeth and said, “Her name is Valerie.” He often held her close and said, “Little Dolly.”

Valerie would never truly know her father. With four friends attempting to contact the Waoroni Tribe on the Amazon, Jim was speared to death when his daughter was but 10 months old. Elizabeth would continue her work with the Quechua tribe for two more years.

Elizabeth would go on to become an author, speaker, and an effective and popular professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. But in 1976, her daughter Valerie was about to marry a godly young named Walt,^{xiv} himself heading to the ministry. Elizabeth and Valerie intentionally spent 5 weeks together 10 months before the wedding. Because she knew that “there will not be time to speak of all we would like to,”^{xv} Elizabeth wrote out a series of notes, reflections for her daughter, which would be collected in a book titled *Let Me Be A Woman*.

Two insights from this incredible book. The first from Chapter 2:

“Most [women] who try to find answers for [all the questions that swirl around womanhood] start at the wrong place. They start with themselves. They ask, “Who am I?” “How do I really feel?” and they assume that if enough people express their personal opinions on this subject we will all somehow arrive at the truth of the matter.

There is, no doubt, a superficial sort of consolation and reassurance to be gained from sitting around telling how you feel about things. You generally find several others who feel the same way, or (what is even more reassuring and consoling) they feel worse than you do. But it is no way to come at the truth.

In order to learn what it means to be a woman, we must start with the One who made her. Not with “Who am I?” but “Whose Am I?”^{xvi}

Then, from 2 later chapters

“Womanhood is a call. It is a vocation to which we respond under God.^{xvii} We are not required somehow to “overcome” our sexuality [i.e. gender]. We affirm it. We rejoice in it. We seek to be faithful to it as we seek to use it as a gift of God. Unfaithfulness to one’s gender is unfaithfulness to everybody.

“You are, Valerie, by the grace of God, a woman. This means you have responsibilities. You are fully a woman, and this means you have privileges. You are only a woman, which means you have limitations. Walt is a man, he is fully a man, and he is only a man. Thank God for this, and live it to the hilt.”^{xviii}

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ⁱ World Health Organization

ⁱⁱ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-girls-abortions/indian-minister-says-2000-girls-killed-every-day-idUSKBN0NC12320150421>

ⁱⁱⁱ Amy Alsup, *Is the Bible Good for Women: Seeking Clarity and Confidence through a Jesus-Centered Understanding of Scripture* (Multnomah Press, 2017), “Introduction.”

^{iv} Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton, in *Why Not Women? A Fresh look at Scripture on Women, in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle, WA: YWam Publishing, 2000), catalogue the world-wide attack on women in non-Biblically oriented cultures. Cf. pages 17-18.

^v In a 3rd century treatise titled “On the Dress of Women.” Interestingly, Tertullian is credited with coining for the Christian movement the term “Trinity” in describing the being of the 3 Persons of God. Cited in the source of endnote IV below.

^{vi} Sumner authored *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Christian Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

^{vii} Linda Hartz Rump, “Is Christianity Oppressive to Women?” www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/is-christianity-oppressive-to-women.html

^{viii} John Rendle Short, in “Man: The Image of God,” on March 1, 1981 Originally published in *Creation* 4, no 1 (March 1981): 21-29. suggests six qualities which express the image of God:

language, creativity, love, holiness, immortality and freedom. Dr T(yndale) John Rendle-Short was Foundation Professor and Head of the Department of Child Health in the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, a post he held for 24 years. <https://creation.com/professor-john-rendle-short>

^{ix} Allen Ross: "The word **ezer** essentially describes the one who provides what is lacking in the man, who can do what the man alone cannot do. The man was thus created in such a way that he needs the help of a partner. A second expression that the expositor must explain is..."corresponding to him." This word means "according to his opposite". It means that the woman would share the man's nature; that is, whatever the man received at creation, she too would have. As Delitzsch describes her, the woman by relative difference but essential equality would be man's fitting complement. What he lacked ("not good") she supplied; and it would be safe to say that what she lacked, he supplied, for life in common requires mutual help." *Creation and Blessing* (Baker Books, 1988), 126.

^x Exodus 18:4 "and the name of the other Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help (ezer) and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." Or Psalm 10:14 "to you [O Lord] the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper (ezer) of the fatherless. cf. Psalm 20:2, 33:20, 72:12-14.

^{xi} Alsup, p.49.

^{xii} Alsup, p.47.

^{xiii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth_Eliot

^{xiv} Elizabeth Eliot, "A New Perspective," in *Let Me Be a Woman* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1976, © renewed 2004). Valerie and Walt Shepherd Jr. would become the parents of 9 children, one (Joy) who died just before birth.

^{xv} Elizabeth Eliot, "Foreword 1976" in *Let Me Be a Woman*.

^{xvi} Eliot, from Chapter 2 "Not Who I am? But Whose I am?"

^{xvii} Eliot, from Chapter 17 "Masculine and Feminine."

^{xviii} Eliot, from Chapter 44, "Be a Real Woman."