

Week 2

CREATION'S ORDER

SEX, GENDER, NATURE, AND MARRIAGE

Individual Experience

Read this section before your group meets

As we saw in the first chapter of our study, the Bible teaches us that God's creation work in Genesis 1 and 2 should inform our understanding of what God made, how He made it, and why He made it to be so. In other words, the creation order gives way to a creation purpose.

God's original design of the world gives us an idea of what God intends for His creation, including His creation of humanity as male and female.

A Christian understanding of human sexuality begins where the Bible begins, in Genesis 1 and 2. These chapters not only explain that God created humanity male and female but also why—and one of the central reasons is marriage.

Human nature comes in two complementary forms. We refer to these forms as the sexes: male and female, man and woman. God created humanity this way with a specific design and function in mind. Even if we didn't have God's special revelation in Scripture, God's design for male and female would still be visible to us. Our very bodies bear witness to God's purpose in making us male and female: it is built into our nature. Without the complementary design and function of male and female, the human race would cease to exist, as we would no longer procreate.

DEFINITION OF NATURE: In this study, the word 'nature' refers to God's original design and purposes in creation. This is the word's traditional sense and the sense we see used in the Bible (e.g., Romans 1:26-27).

God's Word helps us interpret nature according to God's design and purpose. Through God's Word, we learn more about God's design for marriage.

After providing an overview of God's creation of the world, Genesis 1 concludes with the creation of the first human couple. Genesis 1:26-28 explains that God created Adam and Eve in His own image and tasked them with the responsibility to 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.' Together, the first human pair reflect God to the rest of creation in a unique way and are responsible for exercising dominion and filling the earth.

Genesis 2 develops the teaching about God's creation of male and female in His image. Although everything was declared 'good' in Genesis 1, God says in Genesis 2:18 that it is not good for Adam to be alone and declares His intention to create a helper fit for Adam. After Adam is unable to find a suitable companion in the process of naming the animals, God causes a deep sleep to fall over the man and creates the first woman out of Adam's own flesh (Gen. 2:21-22). When God presents Eve to Adam, the man proclaims:

'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.'

GENESIS 2:23

Immediately after Adam's pronouncement, the author pauses the narrative and provides an editorial note that frames and informs all subsequent biblical reflections on marriage:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

GENESIS 2:24-25

When understood in context, this passage teaches several important truths about human sexuality. Although some are called to a life of singleness—and this is God's good design and plan for these individuals—still, marriage is the norm throughout human history and still today.

God's original design for male and female includes the sexual potential for procreation within marriage. Even if that potential is never realized and marriage or having children is not part of an individual's life experience—and we must acknowledge this is the case for many, even some that desire otherwise—one's bodily constitution is nevertheless the product of male-female union and points toward God's design for marriage.

Genesis 1 and 2 teach us the important truth that we must first understand God's design for marriage in order to understand God's design for human sexuality. We could say the creation order gives us our 'orders.'

What is marriage?

We can define marriage in two ways. First, we can define marriage in terms of the bare minimum requirements that must be in place for a union to be called a marriage. Second, we can define marriage in terms of what God designed marriage to be, even though some of those purposes may be thwarted in a fallen world. For example, while procreation is not necessary for the formation of a bona fide marriage covenant, procreation is nevertheless God's design for marriage. In defining marriage, it is important that we give careful attention to both ways of defining the term.

First, sexual differentiation is part of God's design for marriage. God created two, complementary, biologically (and genetically) sexed individuals, not two androgynous beings. In other words, God built the complementarity of the sexes into the very fabric of creation. God's creation of male and female is not accidental or incidental; it is central to God's design of human beings created in His image. In Genesis 1, the mandate to be 'fruitful and multiply' is given to both the man and the woman; neither could fulfill this charge alone. Thus, what is referred to today as the 'gender binary' is rooted in the order of creation.

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Second, marriage is exclusive. The 'one flesh' union between a husband and wife is a bond that joins spouses to each other in a profound way. This new union is a powerful force that needs to be safeguarded. This intimate bond requires exclusive devotion to the marriage partner; union with another violates that bond. For this reason, Scripture treats adultery and other forms of sexual immorality very seriously (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:12-20). Even lustful thoughts directed toward another person who is not one's spouse are a violation of the exclusive devotion and faithfulness that belong in marriage (Matt. 5:28).

Third, marriage is permanent. A man and woman leave their families of origin and unite in a life-long relationship. When questioned about marriage in Matthew 19, Jesus cites Genesis 2:24 and emphasizes the permanence of marriage: 'So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate' (Matt. 19:6; cf. Mark 10:9).

Finally, marriage is a sacred covenant. Whereas most contracts between adults may be entered and severed at will without severe consequences, a sacred covenant is a permanent agreement established before God. God is personally involved in marriage, which is why it is sacred. Jesus explains this in Matthew 19 by reiterating that God joins couples in marriage. Because of the sacred nature of marriage, a man and woman should enter it reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

As our lesson has shown, the Bible provides God's vision for marriage. Scripture teaches that marriage is exclusive, permanent, and a sacred covenant. Moreover, sexual differentiation is part of God's design for marriage.

What stood out to you about the Bible's definition of marriage?

Which part do you think our culture has an especially hard time understanding?

Life Application

We all encounter rival concepts of God and the world when we interact with people outside of the Christian faith—and sometimes even with people who confess Christ. So, how should we talk about God’s original design with them?

We should be willing to be upfront with our own fundamental faith commitments, such as our belief that God created the world and designed it with a purpose. But we can also seek to establish common ground with non-believers by appealing to what theologians have called ‘general revelation.’

General revelation is knowledge about God’s character and purposes that can be recognized by anyone via natural means (e.g., reason, observing nature), without the help of ‘special revelation’ (e.g., Scripture, prophets, miracles). The Bible tells us that God’s creation testifies about its Designer.

Consider Romans 1:20:

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

ROMANS 1:20

And Psalm 19:1-2:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

PSALM 19:1-2

Evolutionary biologists will occasionally use the language of ‘design’ or ‘purpose’ to describe features of the created world, a world that they believe is the result of a cosmic accident. Although evolutionary biologists attribute any apparent ‘design’ to millions of years of natural selection, they nonetheless recognize a utility or a function to a creature. For example, during his field studies in 1862, Charles Darwin came across an orchid flower from Madagascar that had an extremely long nectar tube. Because he knew how these kinds of flowers were pollinated, he knew there must be a large, moth-like insect with a massive tongue as long as the nectar tube that could pollinate this species. The problem was, no one had ever seen such a creature in Madagascar. But Darwin predicted its existence by his understanding of design and function. It wasn’t until 1903, over fifty years later, that this moth was discovered and cataloged, proving Darwin’s prediction right. The point of this story is not to prove Darwin right in every respect (we think his theories about macro-evolution are wrong) but to show that an intellectually honest observer of nature and creation will see that there is an underlying design to the world. The incredibly intricate design elements we see play out with respect to male and female across the animal kingdom give us common ground to talk about form and function.

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Ultimately, the Bible helps us make total sense of God's creation in general revelation. Still, God's world acts as a kind of tutor in the ways of God and can help us have conversations about the creation order with our neighbors about our Creator God.

Watch

Follow along as you watch the video for Session 2.

This page is provided for you to take notes as you watch the video.

Group Experience

When Jesus is asked a question about sexuality and sin, He directs His listeners back to the first chapters of the Bible in Genesis 1 and 2 to remind them of God's original design for human sexuality. In these two chapters, we saw that God designed male and female sexuality with marriage and procreation in mind.

A proper understanding of marriage grounds sexual morality. God designed our sexuality to have a proper aim: marriage. The implication is that any sexual activity that is not within the bounds of God's design for marriage is sin. In other words, a proper understanding of the design can help us see why going against that design is harmful, or what the Bible calls sinful.

When we understand the creation order and God's design for marriage, we can better understand what the Bible teaches to be disorder, or sin. An analogy would be studying a genuine \$100 bill—its characteristics, qualities, and unique attributes—in order to be able to detect counterfeit bills.

What does the creation order tell us about God's desire for humanity?

One way to think about the relationship between the creation order and human sexuality is to consider how and why certain tools are designed the way they are. For instance, you don't use a hammer to paint your room, and you don't use your toothbrush to dig a hole. Technically, you could do these things, but there is an obvious, designed function that you are ignoring when you paint with a hammer or dig with a toothbrush, and there is a much better aim, or telos (purpose, fulfillment), for these tools that you would be ignoring.

Similarly, when we act against our nature, our design, and our purpose given to us by our Maker as male or female, we not only harm ourselves but also disrespect the One who made us.

How does studying nature and the creation order help us better understand and appreciate God's design and purposes for humanity?

Through natural revelation and the fact that God's design is built into our very bodily structures, humanity has been able to approximate the Bible's teaching on human sexuality throughout history and across societies, even while falling far short of it.

Think about it. A simple understanding of marriage and procreation helps us to see that societies will quite literally cease to exist without some form of this institution being preserved. This is why God's design for marriage is not only the bedrock for a right understanding of human sexuality, but it is a bedrock for the family and human society as well.

Should we be surprised to see a biblical understanding of human sexuality and marriage under such attack today?

A right understanding of marriage is important for the church for two indispensable reasons:

- 1) Marriage is the measure of sexual morality. But there is another, perhaps even more important reason why a right understanding of marriage is so important for the life and health of the church.
- 2) Marriage is the central picture God gives us to understand the gospel.

Why is it important to ground sexual morality in God's design for marriage?

Marriage is central to the Bible's story. The Bible begins with a marriage between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, with God presiding as officiant and witness, and the Bible ends in the book of Revelation with the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Why do you think marriage is central to the Bible's story?

The Bible teaches that marriage illustrates and reflects the relationship between God and His people. Paul explains this in Ephesians 5:22-33 while giving instructions to Christian husbands and wives. After describing Christ's sacrificial love for His church, Paul addresses husbands in verse 28, saying:

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

EPHESIANS 5:28

Here, Paul charges husbands to imitate Christ by sacrificially loving their wives. Then, in verses 29-30, Paul explains that human marriage is to be patterned after Christ's relationship with the church:

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

EPHESIANS 5:29-30

In verse 31, Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, drawing a parallel between the 'one-flesh' union of human marriage and the union of believers to Christ. By making this connection, Paul makes it clear that God intends marriage to point beyond itself to the relationship between Christ and the church. He states this explicitly in verse 32:

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

EPHESIANS 5:32

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In context, the word 'mystery' refers to something previously hidden but now revealed (Eph. 1:9, 3:3; cf. Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7, 10). The 'profound mystery' is that God intended marriage to image the gospel and Christ's redemptive love for His bride from the very beginning. To the degree that our marriages are what God intends them to be, they provide a picture (however imperfect) of the union between Christ and the church, which displays God to the watching world.

How does marriage point to Christ and the church?

The connection between marriage and the gospel is why getting the Bible's testimony wrong on human sexuality is a 'gospel issue.' To get this wrong is to get the gospel wrong.

We are going to revisit this text in the coming weeks, but 1 Timothy 1:8–11 is clear that practicing sexual behavior that is contrary to God's law, and teaching others that it is okay to engage in these behaviors, goes against sound doctrine and the gospel itself:

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

1 TIMOTHY 1:8-11

If heterosexual, monogamous, lifelong marriage is the picture that images the gospel, when we distort that image by deviating from God's original design, we distort the gospel itself.

Weekly Reflection

Main Points from Lesson 2:

In our second lesson, we looked at Genesis 1 and 2. As we've discussed, these chapters help us understand God's original plan for marriage. Consider these main points from our lesson and discuss the application questions with your group.

1. God's original design of the world gives us an idea of what God intends for His creation, including His creation of humanity as male and female.
2. Genesis 1 and 2 teach us that we must first understand God's design for marriage in order to understand God's design for human sexuality.
3. The Bible teaches that marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman. Marriage is exclusive, permanent, and a sacred covenant. Moreover, sexual differentiation is part of God's design for marriage.

If someone at church or a friend asked you to define marriage, how would you respond?

In light of the high view with which the Bible presents marriage, why is sexual sin so serious?

In this lesson, we've said that marriage is the central picture God gives us to understand the gospel. Do you agree? If marriage is this important, why is it crucial that we get it right?

This Week's Memory Verse

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.'

GENESIS 1:28

Conversation Guide Session 2

DEFINITION OF NATURE: In this study, the word 'nature' refers to God's original design and purposes in creation. This is the word's traditional sense and the sense we see used in the Bible (e.g., Romans 1:26–27).

A quick note on our definition of nature: Some other theological definitions of 'nature' differ from the one we are using in this study. Some people use the word 'nature' when talking about our fallen nature. We think it is most helpful to talk about this kind of nature as 'sin nature.' Our sin nature results from our being children of Adam, whose fall into sin affects the whole human race (Rom. 5:12–14; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). This sin nature is referred to in the Bible as 'the flesh' (cf. Rom. 8:13) and the 'old self' (Eph. 4:20–24).

Other ways the word 'nature' is used is related to what comes 'naturally' to a person. Sometimes this use of the concept of nature is used to try and justify homosexual behavior. For example, if someone feels naturally predisposed to be attracted to the same sex, then what is natural for them is to act according to their 'nature.' But this is where our definition of nature comes in, and we are using it in the technical sense of Romans 1:26–27. There Paul writes:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

ROMANS 1:26-27

What Paul calls contrary to nature is not contrary to their desires; it is contrary to God's original design. This is why understanding God's original creation, or nature, is important. Because we want to lean into God's design, not away from it. And when we have desires or inclinations that go against nature or the way God designed the world to be, we cannot simply cite our own 'natural' impulses as justification. This would be to side with our sin nature over God's design in nature.

What does the creation order tell us about God's desire for humanity?

The creation order reveals God's purpose for His creation. God created men and women, male and female, as complements of one another. In every detail of the design, down to our very reproductive organs, male and female have complementary features that fit with one another. This creational design points to a creational purpose: marriage and companionship between male and female, husband and wife. That there are two and only two sexes teaches us that marriage is to be between two people; that the two are complementary and not interchangeable teaches us that marriage is to be between a man and a woman, and that a man cannot marry another man, or a

woman another woman. That a male-female sexual union has the potential to procreate offspring teaches us that marriage is the foundation for the family and, in turn, society.

How does studying nature and the creation order help us better understand and appreciate God's design and purposes for humanity?

Studying the creation order attunes us not only to how God created the world but also the purposes He has for creating the way He did. We live in a post-Genesis 3 world, where sin has ravaged God's original design, even to the point of compromising our own thinking—what theologians call the noetic effects of the Fall. The result is that our perceptions and inclinations can be distorted, and we should assume that there are some things about our world today that are not original to God's design. What is original to God's design? Humanity created male and female for marriage, procreation, dominion, stewardship, etc. We see this when we go back to 'the beginning' (cf. Matt. 19:1-9).

Should we be surprised to see a biblical understanding of human sexuality and marriage under such attack today?

Human sexuality and marriage are all original and natural to God's creation in the beginning. Therefore, the constant attack on sexuality and marriage that we are witnessing today is an attack on God's plan and will for humanity. Moreover, God created us male and female to bear His image apart from all creation. The attempt to redefine sexuality and marriage proceeds on the faulty assumption that God is not deeply invested in these elements that are native to the creation order. To attack these is to attack the very fabric of the natural order, creation. The enemy wants nothing more than to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), and what better target is there than the very institution of marriage and family, the incubator of humanity and God's image-bearers, and structural support of this institution in sexuality.

What is more, where marriage is at stake, the gospel is at stake because God chose marriage to be the picture that would communicate Christ's love for His church (Eph. 5:31-32). We shouldn't be surprised when those who are opposed to God are opposed to God's prized institutions.

Why is it important to ground sexual morality in God's design for marriage?

God's design for marriage is the purpose of our sexuality. When we pursue sexuality outside of this aim and fulfillment, we are going against God's design. This is why sexual desires and acts outside of the covenant bond of marriage are forbidden in Christian morality, not only because God says they are sinful but also because He knows what is best for His creatures and does not want harm to come to them. Acting in ways that contradict the original design is like filling up your car's

gas tank with tomato juice and expecting it to run just fine because you know it gives you energy when you drink it. Cars are not designed to run on tomato juice but gasoline—just like we aren't designed to drink gasoline for energy. Ignoring God's original design for sex and marriage is not only sinful, but it is bad for you. And God loves you enough to tell you so.

Why do you think marriage is central to the Bible's story?

Marriage is central to the Bible's story because, from the very beginning, God had a plan to redeem humanity by sending His Son to die on the cross and rise again from the dead in order to ratify a permanent, unbreakable covenant with His people. The Bible also teaches us that God is love (1 John 4:8), which means that God in His nature is relational—not only Triune as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but also overflowing with love for His creation.

In this way, marriage is designed to teach us about God's love for his people in the gospel.

How does marriage point to Christ and the church?

Paul explains in Ephesians 5:22–32 how marriage points to Christ and the church:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Christ's marriage to His church is consummated at the marriage supper of the Lamb, which we read about in Revelation 19:6–9, when God's people are united to God for eternity:

MALE & FEMALE HE CREATED THEM

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

'Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure'—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.'

