



+ This Sunday at MRC we continued our series in thinking what it means to be created in God's image. This week we thought a little about what it means to be created as male and female. We spent quite a significant time looking at how society currently views gender (and some inconsistencies) and then thought a bit about how the bible views gender.

We began by thinking about 4 'steps' to try and get to grips with as we examine our culture

1. my self and desire are king. Ever since Genesis 3 we want to be in charge, to call the shots, to be the captain of our own ship. Which means our desires are crucial - we do what we want to do.

2. which means society is constantly shifting and changing because our desires constantly shift and change. Which leads us to phrases like this:

3. "gender is in your head". Chaz Bono has famously encapsulated much of modern thinking by claiming that "gender is between your ears, not between your legs" - i.e. nothing really to do with your physical body but only what you feel or desire.

4. But there's confusion out there...

- a) Rachel Dolezal is an American Black activist who identifies as black and yet recently it turns out is not and thus has been rejected by the black community. Yet her desire and identity is black.

- a) Stefanknee Wolscht is a 51 year old Canadian man who wants to live and be identified as a 6 year old girl. As you can imagine Stefanknee divides opinion. Is desire sufficient for us to 'be' a particular person / gender etc? Who gets to decide what a legitimate desire is?

We also considered 3 general points before getting into the text

1. Much of the gender confusion seems to come from either overplaying (surely this is what a male or female is like) or underplaying our differences (surely we're all the same really)

2. It's true that studies have shown there are differences between the sexes but they are on average. Just because people lie at each end of the bell shaped curve, it doesn't mean there's something wrong - that's how averages work!

3. There aren't many texts within the bible that outline (especially outside of marriage / church) what the genders mean, or what different gender roles should be.

The Pattern of Creation : Genesis 1v26-28

At this point we reach the pinnacle of a good creation with God making man and woman in his image. Together imaging him, together fulfil the creation mandate of (re)forming and filling the world.

We noted that God, in his creation (and throughout the bible) cares about the physical, he makes us physical beings with physical bodies (Gen 2v7), he sends his son with a physical body who dies a physical death and is raised again with a new creation physical body. To say that the physical does not matter and that gender is only in the mind doesn't quite work from a biblical perspective (in his definition sex = physical characteristics that we have, gender = an individuals / or societies understanding of that persons sexual identity). The physical does matter hugely - though we need to note that there may be some biological exceptions and also that it may not only be about the physical.

What the bible is also clear about is that God made the genders for a reason - together in complementary service of him we image him. The world has no ultimate reason for gender (in that it has done away with God, and thus has no ultimate meaning or purpose for humanity, and thus has no ultimate meaning or purpose for gender).

The Shattering of the Fall : Genesis 3v14-20

As God addresses Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 we see something of their gendered roles clarified as the curse hits them in different ways. Adam's labour as he works the ground is to be hard, Eve's labour as she bares children is also now to be hard (nb as scripture unfolds we also see 'Adam' involved in childrearing and 'Eve' involved in working). 3v16 is also a key verse as we consider gender because here we get a first glimpse of the gendered unity being challenged as there's a desire for power, manipulation and control. Where God had given them unity and their role was to image him, now we see a potential for disunity and so 'dis-imaging' him.

Here are some questions for your groups, as always feel free to adapt as needed.

(Where) have you encountered this 'gender agenda' that we talked about on Sunday? Why do you think it's prevalent (both good and bad reasons)?

Why are desires so crucial in our understanding of today's society? How do we see the liquidness of society in action?

Do you think it's possible to separate sex and gender (see definitions above)? Is gender is 'in your head'? Is it only physical?

Do you agree that many of our issues come from overplaying or underplaying gender differences?

From Gen 1v26-28 what role do the man and the woman take on? What role has God performed in Gen 1? Why are they both needed?

From Gen 3v14-20 how do we see the roles of the man and the woman being cursed? Does this help us see more of how their imaging works in 1 v26-27?

What's happening in Gen 3v16 - why does this have relevance as we consider this topic?