

Male and Female

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on October 6, 1991, the 20th Sunday after Pentecost, at Oxford High School. Scripture Lessons: **Genesis 2:18-24**; Psalm 128; Hebrews 1:1-14; 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16.

women
IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

A real revolution has taken place in the last 20 years. Since about 1944...

Women today make choices which faced few women just decades ago.

Educational opportunities. Job opportunities. Decisions about careers, marriage, having and raising children. Over half the people in college are women. Women make up half the work force today. For the first time in our nations history more women than men voted in the 1984 presidential elections.

The changes that have affected women in the last several decades frighten some Christians. Some Christians turn to their Bibles and say that this is all wrong. It's a sign of moral decadence. A woman's place is in the home. Women were created by God to be subordinate to men. But within the Presbyterian Church USA there's remarkable agreement that "God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people." Today I want us to take a look at a story in Genesis 2 which shows us what God's intention is for men and women.

1. We read: "The LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone.'" *This was really true of me before I was married ... sound ...* This is a really unexpected and surprising statement. After all, Adam hasn't been alone. God talks with Adam on a regular basis. But God makes the unexpected observation that their relationship is not enough. God looks at Adam and sees that he's incomplete without human companionship.

Notice that God doesn't say, "It is not good that you don't have a wife" but it is not good that you are alone." The passage teaches that human beings need the companionship of other persons. We become authentic human beings only in relationship with others.

In the Christian church we haven't made it easy for men and women who aren't married, or who are no longer married, or for those whose marriages are more struggle than joy. One of the things we need to recover within the Christian community is the beauty and value of friendships - both between the sexes and between members of the same sex. Our churches should be communities of friendship - to stand against all the ways in which our modern patterns of life and thinking push us into individualism and loneliness. We're made for fellowship, and we need to find ways of dealing with the fact that it's not good to be alone.

2. We hear the Lord saying in our Old Testament lesson, "I will make him a helper as his partner."¹ *Savethe. A man often to find support for a dominance here.* The word, "helper" is used several times in the OT with reference to God. The Psalmist wrote, "The Lord is our helper" (Ps 33:20). Those who would try to impose their views of male domination on the Scripture won't find any support in this passage. "Helper" is not a term of subordination. Rather it's a word that indicates the human beings need not only companionship but help. It's not good to deceive ourselves into thinking that we don't need help. Men especially deceive themselves with the false and damaging notion that we don't need any help. Men are

more likely than women to be loners. They're less likely than women to seek help.

Maybe this is why men are more likely than women to ignore their parental responsibilities, to get drunk, to abandon their children, to gamble compulsively, to sexually molest children, to commit arson, to kill one another and to die prematurely.⁴ *men are less likely to seek help, to admit need for help* We all need help. We need God as our helper. But we also need the help of flesh and blood men and women.

3. Notice, thirdly, how this story describes the creation of the first woman. While Adam is in a very deep sleep, God removes one of his ribs and makes it into a woman. Man had no active part in this creation. Then God himself, like a proud father at his daughter's wedding, leads the woman to Adam as a gracious gift from God's hand. The groom cries out, "This at last! is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

Now, I don't believe that the intention of the Biblical writer was to give us a scientific description of the process by which human beings were created but to show us the relationships that God intended men and women to have with one another. St. Augustine and many other Biblical scholars throughout the ages have pointed out that God made the woman, not out of the man's head to lord it over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but from his side, nearest his heart, to be his companion, his helper, to be equal with him. This needs to be reasserted today, in contrast to those

who assert male supremacy.

4. Finally, we read, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." *Jesus adds, "what therefore God has joined together, let us not put asunder."* Why is sexual attraction such a powerful force? The Biblical writer answers, "Because God took the woman from the man and there's a natural longing for the two to be made one again."

There are several implications we can draw from this.

a. The sexual attraction that we feel isn't sinful or wrong. That's the way that God created us. Many of us carry heavy burdens of guilt with respect to our sexual desires.

b. The Christian tradition has always reserved sexual intercourse for a lifelong commitment within marriage between one man and one woman. Sex needs the context of permanence to deepen the relationship of faithful love. Sex without relationship, as in pornography, or sex in transient relationships, falls short of the meaning God intends sexual relationships to have.

To summarize what I've been saying in this sermon:

1. Human beings need the companionship of other persons.
2. Human beings need help from one another that not even God can give.
3. God created men and women as equals.
4. Sexual desire is a good gift of God who intends for it to be

experienced within the marriage covenant where two become one.

Let me just say, in conclusion, that none of us measures up to God's intentions. We're all fallen creatures in need of redemption. But there's one verse in our Epistle lesson which I find so encouraging in the light of our sexuality. There we read that the Lord Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. Whether you are single, married, divorced, gay or straight... when we know God as our heavenly Father and ^{trust} Christ as the one who died to sanctify us, we know, on the authority of God's own Word, that Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. *That he intends to restore in us his image and make us known,*

Let us pray: God of creation: you made men and women to find in love fulfillment as your creatures. We pray for those who deny love between man and woman, who are repelled by flesh, or frightened by their daydreams. Straighten us all out, O Lord, and show us who we are, so that we may affirm each other bodily-in-covenants of love, approved by Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.