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Women and the Image of God

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If the image of God concept is particularly associated with men, what about women? Follow up to this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbz7buWNIIY>

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today I'm going to do a follow-up video from yesterday's video in which I discussed the image of God in Genesis 1, verse 26, and the connection of the image of God and the angels. Within that video I talked about the way that the image of God is particularly associated with the connection of father and sonship.

So the father-sonship model helps us to understand what image means, but that, in turn, leaves the image concept particularly focused upon men. As we look through scripture, this is something that we'll see in various ways, that men in particular are associated with that concept of image and sonship, naturally. Now that doesn't mean that women have no participation in that concept.

There are ways in which, for instance, Israel is the firstborn son of God, and women within Israel participate in that. We can talk about we're all sons of God in Jesus Christ.

We participate in his sonship, and that includes women too.

But yet there's something lacking here. If this is all that we have to say, then it would seem that women are excluded from the picture. What are we to say about this? Well, at the outset we need to understand that scripture works in a rather different way from our thinking.

When we think about understanding human dignity, we tend to think about universal concepts, equality, some general category that everyone can be placed in terms of. But that's not how scripture operates for the most part. Scripture, like most other ancient works, has a very different way of looking at the world, one that's a lot more particular, a lot more focused upon symbolism and the significance of different aspects of symbolism.

So, for instance, when you look at the heavens, it's not just generic bodies or matter in motion and these sorts of concepts, fungible concepts. It's more about the particular entities and the charge significance that they have. So, for instance, the sun and the moon have a relationship with an order of time.

They have a relationship with different aspects of reality, and they're connected analogously and in other respects to a vast array of different concepts and realities. In the same way, human life and society can be mapped onto animal life and animals can be connected with different people groups. Different parts of the world order can be connected together.

So the sea is connected with certain concepts and the land with others. As we look through the account of Genesis, there's this symbolic order that's being established. And it's like a great cosmic dance where there are partners that naturally fit together.

So, for instance, the affinity of women with the moon is something that can be explored in a great many ways. And many societies have recognized this across history and across different cultures and different backgrounds. People have recognized this affinity that these two parts of reality can dance together.

Now, that doesn't mean that the moon tells us everything that we need to know about women. Far from it. But rather, it means that these concepts, these realities are mutually illuminating and that there is a way in which the dignity of the one can be seen in the dignity of the other.

When we look at the concept of the image of God, the image of God is not just a generic concept for humanity. Although it does serve to an extent like that. Israel is God's first born son.

And in a broader sense, humanity is related to God as in this father-son relationship. But there's more to it than that. As we look through the creation account, for instance, what we see are two different modes of creation.

There are six days of creation followed by a day of rest. And those first three days are days of forming, naming, taming, structuring, ordering, dividing, that sort of thing. So the first day divide the day from the night.

The creation of light, which is fundamentally a temporal division that's established between the daylight hours and the nighttime. And so there's this alternation, this beat that God strikes up. The second day is the division of the waters above from the waters beneath.

That's the vertical division between the heaven and the earth. And then the next day is this further division within the waters beneath, a horizontal division between the land and the sea. And so the land is divided from the sea on the third day.

Then plants are placed upon the land to start to grow up in the land as a second part of day three. And then the second three days, set of three days, correspond to the first. So the creation of light on the first day.

Fourth day, the lights in the heavens to rule the day and the night, sun, moon and stars. Second day, the creation of the division between the heavens and the earth and the waters above and the waters beneath. The fifth day is the creation of birds to fly across the face of the waters above the firmament and then creation of fish to fill the waters beneath.

The third day is the creation of the land divided from the sea. And on the sixth day is the creation of the land animals. And then it's the second act.

It's the creation of humanity. Now, within this, we see a number of analogies. So there's a number of analogies between, first of all, those correspondences that we've seen already.

There's an analogy between the light of creating on the first day and then the lights in the heavens and then the lights on the earth. Humanity is the light on the earth. That light on the earth is a ruling light, something that gives order and structure, that gives illumination to reality.

It divides and it structures reality. So humanity has part of that calling just as the stars rule in the heavens and set apart order time and give us a sense of temporal structure. So humanity rules on the earth and they rule over the sea as well.

There are other parallels. The second stage of day three is the creation of plants. And that's compared to the creation of the animal of humanity is the second act on day six.

So we are like plants that cover the face of the earth. We're those that we cultivate the earth. And we're also those that grow up on the earth.

We spring up on the earth. So human beings are like plants. Then we have a second creation account.

So if you see the first creation account as being like a satellite view from above, the second creation account in Genesis 2 is like the street view. And that gives the account around the creation of humanity and the sanctuary. So, first of all, humanity is created, but it's the man that is created first.

The man is created from the earth, the Adamah. The Adamah gives birth to the Adam. And so the Adam and the Adamah are connected.

The earth is the mother of the man. And then the man comes forth and the man is established with formed by God out of the dust and then breathed into him. The breath, the breath of life is breathed into him, the spirit placed upon him.

Now, at that point, the earth is without cultivation. There's no man to till the earth. There's a surge or a flow of water that covers the whole face of the earth.

We see this at the beginning of the original creation account that the whole water is covered by the deep. The whole earth is covered by the deep. And then the spirit hovers over the water.

There's a sort of sense of this pregnant deep that is about to give birth to something. And here we see this corresponding thing in the next account. The creation of humanity is like the creation of light.

Then we have the second day, the division of the waters above from the waters beneath. This firmament that's established is the heaven. And on earth, we see this establishment of this realm that's distinct from all the other parts of the world.

This garden, which is a special sanctuary where God will dwell. The third day, we see waters going out from the garden to divide out the different lands. So whereas the waters were originally covering the land as this undifferentiated surge of water that covered the whole face of the earth.

Now we see the waters divided into rivers and those rivers divide out the land so that the lands can be named. Then the next stage, we see plants growing up in the garden. That's the second stage of day three.

Day four, the light is placed in the firmament. Adam is placed in the garden. Days five and he's told to divide between good and evil.

He's given specific instructions. He's supposed to guard and keep and to serve the garden. That's his responsibility.

And then in the next stage, we see the animals being formed, brought to the man,

named and all these sorts of things. Now, the second set of three days of the creation, which I didn't discuss earlier, there are different set of actions. So with the first three days, it's naming, taming, structuring, ordering, dividing, etc.

The next three days, it's giving life, establishing communion, delegating, establishing children. So the children to rule over the heavens above and the earth beneath the sons and the daughters that are supposed to order the world, establishing life, communion and the future to perfect, to glorify, to fill. And all of these different works are associated particularly with the spirit.

And so the spirit is the one who glorifies, who gives life. The spirit is the one who establishes communion. Now, the man is created first and the man is created and given the task of establishing the order and the structure he's created to till the soil.

He's created with this particular set of responsibilities. He's supposed to give order to the world. But there's something missing.

The second stage of the creation is incomplete and he can't do that. He can't multiply. He's been given, they've been given the task to multiply and be fruitful, to be fruitful, to multiply, to fill the earth, to subdue it and to exercise dominion over it.

Now, he can't do that by himself. He can't fill. He can't give life.

And so he needs a companion. And what we see in the creation of the woman is something that fulfills what was lacking in the man by himself and brings a new order. The man changes when he comes in contact with the woman.

He's called the Ish for the first time. She's called the Ishah and he's the Ish. She's called Ishah because she's taken from the Ish.

Now, Ish is associated with fire. He's set on fire by this woman. That there's something that has changed and there's a glory that's added to the world.

So we see that the man responds with the first human recorded words, which are words of poetry or song, which are a response to the woman's being created. This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She should be called woman because she was taken out of man.

So there are different relationships here. First of all, the man is taken from the earth and he's given the task of forming and structuring and ordering the world, tilling the earth that he was taken from. And the woman is taken from the side of the man.

And she's there to bring life, communion, glory, beauty, all these sorts of things that complete the task of creation. And between them, they are both ordered out into the larger creation. Now, many people can read the creation account as if it's the man being

created with all the things being given to the man's control.

And then the woman is a sort of sidekick that's created for the man. Yet the man is originally created to serve the earth. There is the need for someone to till the soil.

And so the man is created for that service, for that service, to serve the earth and to guard the earth and to fulfill the greater work of calling within the world. There's this father-son relationship too. God trains Adam like a son.

As a father would train his son in his trade, so God trains Adam in his trade. And he gives Adam the task that he has not yet finished. The creation isn't yet done.

The creation is started, but it needs to be completed. It needs to still, there's still many things to be named. The only naming events occur on the first three days.

All the things on the second set of three days have yet to be named. And so Adam continues the task that his father has started. And then he finds out that he does not have a suitable counterpart or companion to work with.

And so the woman is brought to him finally after he's seen that none of the animals are suited for him. And then the woman is brought to him and she brings something different. She brings glory, life, communion.

And he is then told that, it's then said that the man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh. Once again, what we're seeing here is that this is a great choreography of creation. And these different partners are dancing out.

So the man is particularly related to the angels in a particular way. He's also related to the forming work of the first three days of creation. He's particularly responsible for those sorts of tasks.

He leads the way in that. Whereas he cannot perform the tasks of the second three days. And those tasks are especially associated with the spirit.

If the first three days are tasks particularly associated with the sun, the next three days are days associated with the work of the spirit. We see the work of the spirit often associated especially with women in scripture. The spirit and the bride say come.

The spirit is the one who comes as the helper who completes the work that Christ has started. The spirit is the one who fills. The spirit is the one who gives life.

The spirit is the one who begets. The spirit is the one who groans within us with birth pangs. The spirit is the one who performs the work of communion, establishes God's life with us.

The spirit is the one who establishes God's home with his people. The spirit is the one who stands with the bride and calls us to come. And so in all these respects what we're seeing is different partners playing out within this grand cosmic dance.

And it helps us to understand the different partners when we see the different connections that take place. So for instance sun and moon are related to man and woman. We see the earth is related to the woman.

The man is brought forth from the earth. And then the woman is the one who in the future every single human being will come forth from a woman. And so we see that relationship being explored.

When we see the judgment upon Adam and Eve later on it will be expressed in a way that parallels the woman and the earth. And this is a significant parallel. It's not intended to be demeaning or anything at all.

Rather everyone finds their source of life in the woman. She is the one that gives matter. She is the one who gives source of being and substance.

Now we see it elsewhere in scripture poetically. The person is knit together in the lowest parts of the earth. It's associated with the womb.

Or Job can say naked I came from my mother's womb. Naked I will return there. The womb of the woman is the heart of reality.

And the woman is also the centre of communion. The centre of society. She's the heart of society.

Society is formed and orbits around her. Now in Genesis we see this order established. And the woman comes as the pinnacle of creation.

If we see the creation building up to ever more advanced and more beautiful forms we see the man created and then the man is not enough. The woman has to be created as the pinnacle, the great capstone of creation. She's the one that completes the work.

And there's an order there. There's an order that works from forming to filling. And there's an order that works from the man to the woman.

As we look through scripture more generally this is something that we see. It starts with primarily Adam in the garden and it ends with the revelation of the bride at the end of Revelation. In a passage that has many of the same themes.

Instead of garden now we have a garden city. It's been glorified. We have waters flowing out from the garden giving life to the nations.

We have a man and a woman, a bride and a bridegroom in the garden being joined

together. And we have the trees that are in the garden. We have the gold that's been brought into the garden.

And in all these different ways we're seeing the fulfilment of what was started in Genesis. But it's doing so in a way that recognises that there is a gendered movement that's taking place here. The woman plays a different role within the drama of creation, within that great choreography than the man does.

And that is not the way that we tend to think about things. We're trying to look for a lowest common denominator that holds together all human beings. And there are many ways in which we can properly think of those.

We have far more in common than we have that divides or differs, that differences from each other. But those differences in scripture are the important things. Those are the things that enable us to dance together rather than just dancing as indistinguishable individuals.

What's interesting in scripture is the way that we work together to be part of something much greater than ourselves. And so as you look through scripture you see this developed. You'll look through the story of scripture and you'll see at various key points it's the women that come to the fore.

So it's the women that come to the fore at the beginning of the story of the Exodus. It's the women that come to the fore in the story that begins the story of the kingdom, whether that's Ruth or whether it's Hannah. And it's the women that come to the fore in the story of the gospel.

Now in these, in the beginning of the gospel, at the birth of John the Baptist and Christ, and this is key point. And we see also this parallel between the women come to the fore at the new birth of the death and resurrection of Christ as he is reborn from the earth. And in these sorts of parallels, what we're seeing is a deeper symbolic order that comes to the surface.

There's so much more that can be said about this, but it is something that helps us to understand part of what's going on in a place like 1 Corinthians 11. In 1 Corinthians 11 it says the man is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man. And that sounds pretty demeaning.

It sounds like the woman is an afterthought. But that's not what's taking place. What does it mean that the woman is the glory of the man? What it means is the woman is the one that glorifies and she's the one that the man is supposed to work towards.

She's the one who is the capstone of creation. She's the true glory of creation. This is something that we see as we read a book like Proverbs.

In Proverbs, it begins with the man, the young man that's learning with his father and mother. And then the book is about the choice between women, the choice between a wife and an unfaithful woman who will lead him astray. And it's the choice between lady wisdom and the woman folly.

And so we see this twofold choice occurring for the young man. Is he going to pursue wisdom? Is he going to pursue the good wife? And as we see at the end of the book, there's this acrostic poem that follows the letters of the Hebrew alphabet that presents this perfect woman that is the consummation of wisdom. But she's also the perfect wife.

Now, she's the one who has filled out the world and filled out her world in a way that is associated with wisdom. Wisdom is a feminine image that we see in Proverbs 8, who is described as this creative force alongside God. Who is this, as it were, this divine daughter who works with the world and takes delight in the sons of men and forming this reality and filling this great reality.

And at the end of the book of Proverbs, that's what we see. That the glory that is found at the end of wisdom is the woman who has filled her house. The woman who has filled out the society around her and made it glorious.

Now, that is what the glory of the man means. It's not that the woman is just there to look nice as a sort of arm candy or something like eye candy or something to look nice on his arm. That is not the purpose.

Rather, the point is that the glorious goal is seen in the woman's filling in her perfection. And it's something that we see in the story of Christ and the church, that the work of the spirit, which is associated more with the work of women, is that which perfects and brings to its glorious climax the work of Christ. And Christ's work is to the end that the spirit might be given and the spirit's work completed.

It's something that we see within the vision of Paul when he talks about Christ in the church. Christ as one who has, who seeks to glorify and beautify the church. It speaks about Christ in some very surprising ways.

When we read about the relationship between Christ and the church, it might surprise us if we listen carefully to it. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself, but no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. Just as the Lord does the church, for we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the

two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Now the point of this is that as we see with Christ, Christ is the one who gives himself to beautifying his church. And this is a surprising thing, that this is the sort of thing we might expect a woman's attendance to be responsible for. For washing and for preparing her and dressing her and glorifying her, but this is described as the work of Christ within this passage.

And the point in many respects is that the glory of the man is the woman. She is the one in whom his work comes to its climax. As she is, her world fills out as she makes that realm glorious.

Now this is not something that denies the dignity of the man and his efforts at all. No, the whole point is that this is what it's supposed to lead to. That this is its fruit, that he has created and formed a realm in which the woman can fill out and give life to and have a realm of communion and glory and beauty.

And as we look through scripture, we can see this picture being developed. The angels do not have wives. The angels do not have this glory for themselves.

Rather, they are servants who serve the people of God. And men are very much like the angels they describe. Now that is significant.

The humanity is described in many points as like a bride for Christ, as a bride that's being prepared. This church that's being prepared for Christ is primarily feminine. And that includes all parties within it.

They're shaped by the fact that they belong to this feminine body. Now, this is, of course, the church is our mother. And so there are ways in which we can be sons of a mother or daughters of a mother.

But there are different ways in which we're characterized by this relationship with a party that is fundamentally feminine. And this can help us to fill out a picture in which man and woman are working alongside each other as partners in this great cosmic dance. Not in competition with each other, not on some great scale of hierarchy where one might be lesser than the other.

That's not the point at all. Rather, the point is that each party has their different part to play in this great dance. Not one being less dignified than the other, but each party part of something greater than themselves.

And as they're caught up into something greater than themselves, each party glorifies the other. So the woman is the glory of the man. As the glory of the man, she is the one

who serves as his glory.

And so the more that he builds her up, the more that he establishes her, the more that he is glorified. It's not a zero sum game. That's quite the opposite.

In the same way, the man's strength is supposed to be for the sake of the woman, for building her up. And for building up this broader world, for establishing his mother, his earth, the earth that he came from. And also establishing this greater realm of humanity that God has created.

Now, there's an awful lot more that can be said about this, about all the different relationships that are involved and the different way that this symbolism is explored in scripture. And there are much, you could elaborate this symbolism much more and talk about how it plays out in different stories. But this is a very basic symbolism that can help us to understand what's taking place.

It can help us to understand the relationship between the woman and the earth, the man and the heaven. It can help us to understand the relationship between the angels and the man. It can help us to understand the relationship between Christ and the man, the spirit and the woman, between sun, moon and stars, men, women and children.

And to understand that these things are not necessarily in this great hierarchy where one is lesser than the other. But they're a part of this greater dance in which, as a whole human race, we are brought up into a more glorious form. Thank you very much for listening.

There's a lot more that I can say about this. If you'd like to ask any follow-up questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. And, Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow.

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