



1.25.26...Is God Sexist or Affirming? | Genesis 1:26-28 NRSV, Genesis 2:19-23

Last week we dove into a new sermon series, God Behaving Badly and our challenge to see God more clearly through the lens of Scripture. I'm still giggling about Gayle and Robin's willingness to wear them.

So wonderful how they kicked off our series, emphasizing that it is only through God's Word we will see God's character more clearly. That God's character is rich, complex, angry, loving, and patient...ultimately trustworthy.

How God longs to be into deeper more vibrant relationship with each of us, calling us to respect and honor God.

It can maybe feel like we are trying to learn about God by drinking from a fire hydrant...a lot to take in. Today is no different, sorry. As we pivot and ask,

“Is God sexist or affirming?”

One day while serving the Methodist church in Dent, MN, I visited a 86 year old saint of a woman who had gone into the hospital. But when I arrived, she was sleeping.

“I guess I can just go home, Lord?” It was as if Jesus smirked and I felt an immediate and strong impression to take a seat. So, I began praying for her. And just as I thought my duty was done and was ready to leave, she woke up.

We chatted a little bit. And then she fixed me with a such a stare, all became still. She asked, **“Do you think women should be allowed to have opinions?”** My reply, **“That's why God gave you a brain.”**

She blinked a couple of times, processing. I was a little nervous.

And then her face broke into a huge grin, eyes sparkling, we began to talk in earnest about how she is a fully functioning person of God's family, equal, loved and needed.

Here are three quotes Lamb found on sexism for the third chapter of his book, God Behaving Badly.

From a barbaric Bronze Age text known as the Old Testament, three anti-human religions have evolved, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They are literally patriarchal. God is the omnipotent Father, hence the loathing of women for 2000 years.

Any honest thinking person reading through the Bible cannot ignore the blatant misogyny and barbarity toward women.

The place where God's absurdity becomes completely clear is when you look at God's sexism.

Where might one get such notions of God being sexist and anti-women? Well, in the very beginning of our Bibles.

It shouldn't surprise you, I will be siding with those who affirm that God is not sexist at all. I am passionate about this topic because I am fully convinced the Bible supports women in ministry at all levels.

The first thing the Bible says about women in Genesis 1 and 2 is amazingly positive. It is hard to imagine how women could be portrayed better. The Bible tells us that women are made in the image of God.

From Genesis 1:26-28 NRSV, ²⁶Then God said, **'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over...everything.** ²⁷**So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.** ²⁸**God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over...everything.'**

Four times in two verses God says that women are made in God's image. The first time God talks about women they are described as god-like. Lamb adds, "Men are also god-like, but most men think that already."

Women are created in God's image to reflect God, extremely favorable.

But then we come to Genesis 2:18,

¹⁸**Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone."** God puts Adam into a deep sleep, took one of his ribs, and made woman.

Many argue that because woman was created second she is inferior to man. That sounds sexist to me. Second as in "second-class citizen".

Lamb contends using a writing analogy that the second draft is typically better than the first. But that is weak and unsatisfying, implying God learned and improved as he went along creating.

Genesis chapter 1 might seem to support order of creation theory too because humans were created on the sixth day, at the end of all of God's creating, as the pinnacle of all God created.

And then what often happens is that women contend women are actually superior, “Hey, we were made last...the better version!” Which is just sexism coming from the other side, also not God’s will for us.

One rabbi, in the Talmud, speaking of Eve’s creation mused, **“The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved”.**

The rib connoting equality and mutual dependence and support, mutual sheltering, and mutual cherishing.

Yes, that works for me.

But even better, let’s remember God’s first commission of humans in Genesis 1 is the stronger Biblical argument. God made male and female, in his image. God blessed them and then co-commissioned them to be fruitful and be good stewards over God’s creation.

Both are to reflect God’s image equally, both are equally blessed, both equally commissioned to fulfill God’s mandate. Both made on the sixth day. No sexism.

But then further into Genesis 2:18 we read, ¹⁸ **“It is not good for man to be alone.” I will make a helper suitable for him.**

Another version, **“a helper fit for him.”**

King James, **“help meet for him.”**

English Standard version, **“helper fit for him”.**

Translators struggle to translate a couple of Hebrew words “ezer kenegdo”. Which launches us off in the wrong direction. Initially it sounds like woman is made FOR the man. That is sexist to the core.

Like the man was a traditional businessman needing a secretary. And God created one for the man. He now has a divinely created and appointed helper.

She was created to be like a servant to support him as he fulfills his important work. She would serve in a support role, attending to the details like ironing his shirts, making his meals, and fetching the paper for him.

That does not sound affirming.

Until we dig deeper. Until we look at how the Hebrew word “Ezer” for the word “helper” is used elsewhere in the Old Testament. Which is how words are always meant to be given their meaning...through context.

Ezer is used 21 times in the Old Testament with 20 times referring to God as Israel's helper. God is doing the helping. The Hebrew word "ezer" has a far deeper meaning than the English usage; denoting strength, support and necessary aid.

God is the one who helps his people. So instead of women being in a subservient helper, in an inferior position, the woman in Genesis 2 is acting like God. That is some strong affirmation of women.

The word "ezer" also highlights the importance of partnership and mutual support. The wife was to work WITH her husband, women working WITH men, not FOR men.

The other Hebrew word, "kenegdo" translates as suitable, literally means like opposite him, almost a mirror image.

There's a connotation of difference as well as sameness, but nothing suggesting inferiority of either gender.

Lamb concludes saying that women as helper is, therefore, not a pawn but a partner, not a flunky, but a friend, not a slave, but a soulmate.

I wrote a paper on "ezer kenegdo" in seminary and my profession was complementarian. He believed men and women were created equal but with different roles in fulfilling God's vision, only men lead.

Which is more sexism and unbiblical, just wrapped up differently.

I shared in my paper 1 Corinthians 11:11, **"Nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God."**

Eve came from Adam, but every man after Adam came from the womb of a woman. In essence, let's stop arguing about who is better...both are equally needed equally.

It is God who sustains all things, men do not sustain all things.

And we need to remember that Genesis is painting a highly favorable image of women, one that would have been shockingly progressive within its ancient Near Eastern context.

And I believe is still shockingly progressing even today.

One of my biggest issues with sexism in Christianity is the lack of seeing reality clearly.

That to be sexist and anti-full integration of women at all levels of society, in the home and in the church, really means you are not seeing the real needs in our world.

I grew up on a lake. In maybe 2nd grade, still wearing one of those orange horse collar life vests, we used to go out in a wooden rowboat with the neighbor kids.

Five of us would head out on the lake on a calm sunny summer day. My brother Mark and their brother Mark, would row.

Cher would row at times and encourage us two younger girls to bail (the boat had a leak in the bow and stern). And Cher would navigate the boat back to shore.

Everyone had a task, each of us were fully interdependent on the others to do their parts. Without us girls, that boat would of sank and never reached the shore.

Sexism in the world and in the church isn't just wrong—it ignores reality. The church cannot stay afloat if we tell capable women to just sit in the boat.

God never designed the church to waste gifts or sideline people the Spirit has equipped. We need everyone helping, because the work of the gospel is bigger than what just men can do or just women can do on their own.

Both genders are needed, all are needed to get the boat safely to the other side.

A church that refuses the full participation of women will not make it, fail to reach the shore, or in other words fail to reach and fulfill God's purpose for it.

Thank God, the United Methodists and this church know that. Grateful we understand God's mission requires every gifted person serving...rowing or bailing, teaching, leading, and serving. Amen.

As we move into a Time of Reflection and Prayer:

1. As you think about Scripture and God's character, where might you still be carrying assumptions—about God, about women, or about yourself—that need to be re-examined through the fuller witness of God's Word?
2. God has handed every one of us gifts, abilities, influence, and calling. In what ways are you actively serving to help the church get to the other side of our challenges, to THRIVE? And where might you be tempted to expect someone else to do the work?