



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

“The Biblical Design of Gender, Part 3”

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Informed. Insightful. Intelligent.



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Luke 1:23-25:

23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that [Zacharias] departed to his own house.

24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying,

25 “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

The takeaway point from our first lesson on the biblical design of gender was that God has designed man as the cooperative coalition of husband and wife so that man can successfully achieve the objective that God has given us to exercise dominion over the earth, developing wisdom and knowledge in preparation for further responsibility in heaven. **Genesis 2:24** makes it absolutely clear that the marital relationship is the primary relationship in life as it says:

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Our Christmas lessons this year are going to contrast the gender relationships in the story of the birth of Jesus with relationships of our day. The story starts with a married couple, Zacharias and Elizabeth. Zacharias was a priest who served periodically in the Jewish Temple. His wife Elizabeth had a physical problem of some description that made her unable to bear children.

Because death exists, the foundational characteristic of everything that God created is that it must reproduce itself. In **Genesis 3:22-23:**

22 Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—

23 therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.

The result of the man and woman eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that they were sent out of the garden of Eden so that they would not eat the fruit of the tree of life. Thus, death came into the world. Because of sin, every form of life that God created exists on a cycle of birth, mature



development, reproduction, deterioration and death. Since deterioration and death are inevitable, reproduction is essential, because if there was no reproduction, God's creation would cease to exist.

God's first instruction to man, in **Genesis 1:27-28**, alludes to this reality as it says:

27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Fruitful multiplication is the first thing that God commanded. Of course, it is important for us to recognize that God ordained reproduction for man differently than He did for the animals. God ordained that men and women reproduce within a nuclear family structure rather than at random, which is that which **Genesis 2:24** is telling us:

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

An exclusive sexual relationship between husband and wife is also ordained the Ten Commandments which God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. The seventh commandment, given in **Exodus 20:14**, says:

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

The definition of adultery is to have sexual relations with someone other than your spouse, and adultery is strictly prohibited by God.

Now, you may remember our last lesson in which we talked about the influence of the devil. God told the man and the woman that the penalty of eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was death, and the devil contradicted God, telling the man and the woman that eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would not kill them, but would make them like God. The woman chose to believe the devil. She ate the fruit and found out, to her dismay, that the devil, not God, was the liar.

God is the designer of the world. He made the world and knows exactly how it works. God built certain pitfalls into the world that He warns us about. The only way that we can avoid the pitfalls is to listen to God's warnings and heed them.

The devil is our enemy. He wants to see us fail in meeting our objective of preparing for responsibility in heaven by exercising dominion over the earth as the cooperative coalition of husband and wife. To do so, the devil tries to entice us into disregarding God's design of the world. The devil uses our arrogance against us; the devil uses our desire for immediate gratification against us, the devil uses every one of our sinful impulses against us. In the garden, the devil enticed the woman into arrogantly thinking that she had received some inside



knowledge about God that allowed her to disobey God and reap the immediate gratification that God was denying her.

But the devil can only tempt us. He cannot make us disobey. He tries to convince us that immediate gratification is the highest benefit and planning for our next life is unnecessary.

This week, my wife and I went out dancing at a club to which we have never gone before. But although the club was new to us, I still saw the usual phenomenon of disappointed women. The event was a Christmas concert performed by a popular jazz band, and although other couples danced beside us, most of the single women sat in the rear of the club, listened to the band, snapped their fingers and swayed in their seats, but never actually got the chance to dance, because they did not have a partner.

God's design for both men and women is that we have a permanent partner. In **Matthew 19:4-6**:

4 And [Jesus] answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'

5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' ?

6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

God says that we ought not separate, but the devil's design for us is that we obtain partners, but then that we find some reason to be dissatisfied with the partners that we have so that we break up. Then, we are left without a partner. Being without a partner does not seem to be an immediate problem for most people, because we fantasize that we can easily replace our partner.

But that's the devil's trick. If the devil can make us dissatisfied with our original partner, he can also make us dissatisfied with any subsequent partners that we have. The first temptation shows us that dissatisfaction with the design of God comes from the devil, and that we should try to avoid it at all costs.

The real victims of marital dissatisfaction are generally women more so than men. Men usually initiate relationships, so a man can generally find a new partner. Women much less so, because men generally initiate relationships with younger women rather than older ones. Not only that, but there are more women than men. So women are left without a partner, and most women find that to be without a partner is unsatisfying. And I would expect that, because the design of God is that man is the cooperative coalition of husband and wife. Both men and women are designed to have partners, and when we don't have them, we are missing something.

In the Biblical episode that comprises our text for today, Zacharias has a reason to be dissatisfied with Elizabeth. Elizabeth had not given Zacharias any children. **Luke 1:5-7** records:



5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

Luke, from the perspective of history, came to the conclusion that both Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous and blameless before God, but Zacharias may not have been so sure. The Mosaic law, as recorded in **Deuteronomy 7:12-14** told him:

12 “Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers.

13 And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you.

14 You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock.

Barrenness was not an anticipated characteristic of those who were righteous before God, but Elizabeth was barren. Either she was involved with some secret sin, or God was withholding His blessing of children for some reason. Zacharias prayed to God for offspring, but his prayer appeared to be falling on deaf ears.

Now, Zacharias had some potential solutions for the problem of Elizabeth's barrenness. Elizabeth was past the age of childbearing, and Zacharias could have divorced Elizabeth because her barrenness could have been caused by some uncleanness, as **Deuteronomy 7:12-14** told Zacharias that Elizabeth would not have been barren had she kept God's judgments.

Deuteronomy 24:1 says:

1 “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,

So Zacharias could have sent Elizabeth out of his house. Zacharias could also taken a younger wife to bear a child without divorcing Elizabeth, as his forefather Abraham married Hagar to bear Ishmael while remaining married to Sarah.

Although Zacharias had these possible solutions to the problem of not having children by Elizabeth, Zacharias also had the maturity that God had given him over years of being a priest. Zacharias knew that exercising either of his



solutions would cause emotional and possible physical distress for Elizabeth, and although she hadn't given him any children, Elizabeth had been a good wife to him. The tenth commandment tells us, in **Deuteronomy 5:21**:

21 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.'

Zacharias decided to not covet that which his neighbors had, specifically children, and to be satisfied with that which the Lord had given him. This tenth commandment is the great key to happiness in marriage, as most dissatisfaction in marriage is caused by our breaking this commandment. The number one cause for dissatisfaction in marriage is that we want something that we see that someone else has. We see that some other person has material possessions in greater abundance than we, or is more physically well endowed than we are, or is more intellectually advanced than we are, and we covet their success in some area that we have not achieved. But we must always keep in mind that even as we are looking with a covetous eye on something that someone else has, someone with less than we have is looking with a covetous eye on that which we have.

I remember that when I first took up dancing, I was a pretty poor dancer. As a matter of fact, I was probably one of the worst that the teacher had to teach, because I just didn't get it. Occasionally, I look back at an old tape that my mother-in-law recorded of Marie and I dancing in one of our early classes, and I shudder when I see what I looked like. But, Marie and I persevered through the ugly times and have reached the point that we can dance well enough that people enjoy watching us dancing. Improvement is the opposite of covetousness. But there is a single fellow in our class that has turned off almost all of the female teachers, because he doesn't have a partner with which to practice, and he is not learning the steps and combinations quickly enough to suit himself. Rather than practicing, he berates the female instructors for his inability to learn, and they are getting tired of him. He wants to dance as well as which he sees other people can, but since he does practice enough to develop the skill, he simply covets that which others have and criticizes those that have it.

Zacharias, however, has chosen prayer, rather than covetousness, as the route to accomplish his objective. There is nothing that Zacharias can do about his wife's barrenness, and he doesn't want to hurt her by rejecting her for a condition that may be beyond her control, so Zacharias simply appeals to God for a resolution to the problem and continues to love his wife as the Bible commands. He and she do not seem to be able to produce offspring, but they can produce love for one another, which is the real point of marriage.

To operate in the next world, we will need to have learned "agapao" love in this one. The Holy Spirit teaches us, through the pen of the Apostle Paul, in **Philippians 2:3-4**:



3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

In the design of God, arguments and fights in marriage are not normal. In our time, marital arguments and fights are common, but in God's design, they are not normal. The best marriage in the world is the one in which each partner has the objective of helping their spouse have the best day that they can. People should not marry until they understand that the purpose of marriage is to make life better for your spouse every day. Marriage is not designed to be a power struggle. If you have unresolved personal issues that make you want to dominate in your marriage, you have completely missed the point of marriage. Marriage is not designed to be a zero-sum game in which there is a winner and a loser; marriage is designed to have both partners on the same team.

I remember that when my wife and I started on Weight-Watchers, she proposed a competition for us. "When we weigh in every week", she said, "the one that loses the least amount of weight will have to pay the other one five dollars." She thought that a little friendly competition would motivate each of us to try harder, but I rejected her suggestion, because I have learned that there is not supposed to be any competition in marriage, but that we are to cooperate with one another, as we are both on the same team.

"No, dear", I replied, "We are not going to compete with one another. I am going to support you in losing the most weight that you can every week, and I want you to support me in doing the same. If we compete, the devil will tempt us to undermine one another so that we can win, and I don't want to open the door for his intervention in our lives. Friendly competition often breaks up friendships when winning becomes more important than friendship, so we are not going to compete."

Zacharias and Elizabeth did not compete, they did not lay blame, and they did not develop unilateral solutions to solve their problem of barrenness outside of their marriage. They understood that God designed man as the cooperative coalition of husband and wife so that man can successfully achieve the objective that God gave us to exercise dominion over the earth, developing wisdom and knowledge in preparation for further responsibility in heaven.

So they prayed together and cooperated with one another. And God smiled on them, as **Luke 1:8-16** tells us:

8 So it was, that while [Zacharias] was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,

9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.



11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.

16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

God decided to use the faithful Zacharias and Elizabeth in the further extension of the great work of Kingdom building business. John the Baptist, the reincarnation was Elijah, was to come through the barren womb of Elizabeth. Everything about God’s intervention into human history for the salvation of mankind through the ministry of Jesus Christ had to be miraculous, because God’s *modus operandi* is to do things on earth in such a way that there can be no earthly explanation for His work. So God chose to make the priest’s wife barren throughout her child bearing years so that all of her friend and neighbors would know that she could not bear a child, and then, after she was past the age of bearing children, miraculously bring a child through her womb.

Once the angel gave Zacharias the news, the angel then gave him an Old Testament prophecy with which Zacharias should have been familiar, as a priest of God. **Luke 1:17** records that the angel said:

17 [The child] will also go before [the Lord their God] in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Why should Zacharias have recognized this saying? **Malachi 4:2-3, 5-6** prophecies of the Messiah as it says:

2 But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; And you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.

3 You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,” Says the LORD of hosts.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

That of which the angel spoke was prophesied in Malachi, and Zacharias should have recognized the prophecy. But Zacharias was hung up on the barrenness of his wife. His reaction was similar to that of the early church when



Peter was imprisoned. The church held an all night vigil for Peter, and was in prayer as the Lord sent an angel to release Peter from prison. Peter walked out of the jail unmolested, and went to the place where the church was in prayer and knocked on the door. **Acts 12:13-17** records:

13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer.

14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.

15 But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel."

16 Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

17 But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

We ask God to answer prayer and when God does so, we often can't believe that God actually answered us. Zacharias felt like the people praying for Peter. He was in the Holy Place in the Temple, a place in which none but the consecrated priests could go, and an angel appeared and spoke to him. The angel materialized out of thin air, quoted prophetic Scripture, and announced a miracle to Zacharias. But Zacharias, as devout as he was, was not ready for a miracle in his own life. He questioned the angel, in **Luke 1:18**:

18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

If you have a problem in your life, take it to the Lord in prayer, but then be ready for the Lord to actually do something about it. When your problem is resolved, either naturally or supernaturally, give glory to God and thanks to the Lord for His gracious gift. If we do that which Jesus commands us to do and love one another, we should live in expectation of the Lord moving heaven and earth on our behalf. If we are grateful to God for that which we have and not covetous of that which others have, the Lord will conquer, change or control our condition. And if He does neither one of the three, He still expects us to continue contributing and celebrating in our circumstance, because I declare that the Lord is alert, aware and able to handle anything of which we ask Him.

Zacharias was not quite ready to have his prayer answered, but he still received the blessing, with a penalty. **Luke 1:19-25** records:

19 And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.

20 But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these



things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.”

21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple.

22 But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.

24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying,

25 “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

Elizabeth hid herself until her pregnancy was obvious, because she recognized that her friends and relatives would not believe her report of such a miraculous pregnancy, but that they would only believe it after they saw it.

There was quite a change in their lives. Zacharias the priest couldn't talk, and Elizabeth the barren woman was pregnant. When the child was born, the relatives wanted Elizabeth to name the child after his father, as was the tradition among the Jews, but the angel told Zacharias that the child would be named John. When Elizabeth announced that the child's name would be John, the relatives decided that it would be better to ask Zacharias to write down the name that he would give the child, because Zacharias was unable to speak. **Luke 1:61-66** records:

61 But [the relatives] said to [Elizabeth], “There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name.”

62 So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called.

63 And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, “His name is John.” So they all marveled.

64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God.

65 Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea.

66 And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, “What kind of child will this be?” And the hand of the Lord was with him.

The miraculous earthly ministry of Jesus Christ started with the relationship between a husband and wife that were frustrated with their situation but turned to prayer to God and love for one another rather than turning on one another. The message of the beginning of the Christmas story is the same as the message at the end, which is, as **John 13:34-35** tells us:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.



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35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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