



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

“The Biblical Design of Gender, Part 86”

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Informed. Insightful. Intelligent.



The Biblical Design of Gender, Part 86

Matthew 20:20 and Mark 10:35

Then the mother of James and John (Zebedee’s sons) came to Jesus with her sons and knelt in front of Him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want You to do for us whatever we ask.”

Thank you for listening and thinking with me as we study God’s Word to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so 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.

Our takeaway point in this series on the Biblical Design of Gender is, God has designed man as the cooperative coalition of husband and wife so 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 our eternal life.

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Have you ever heard of a “stage mother”? The term generally has a negative connotation, because a stage mother is known to obnoxiously demand special treatment for her child, or place inappropriate pressure on her child to succeed. A “stage mother” may be vicariously living out her own dreams through her child.

On the other hand, in professional performing situations in which children participate, children can’t speak for themselves. Stage mothers represent their children. My mother was a stage mother when my brothers and I were little, but she didn’t demand special treatment for us and was never obnoxious. Mom was a stage mother because we needed someone to supervise us when we went to performances. Mom did not spend her time berating the judges, but rather making sure that we behaved properly.

We will use the information about “stage mothers” later in our discussion.

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Now, our episode for this week begins on the boat of a Galilean fisherman named Zebedee who had his two sons working with him when Jesus happened by. **Matthew 4:18–22** tells us:



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18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

19 Then [Jesus] said to them, **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”**

20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

21 Going on from there, [Jesus] saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. [Jesus] called them,

22 and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Sort of an abrupt exit, wouldn't you say? James and John stopped in the middle of fixing a net string and left their father in the boat, just because Jesus called them. Why would they leave their dad like that? Because Jesus has an interesting reputation around Galilee. **John 4:46–54** tells us:

46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.

47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to [Jesus] and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

48 Then Jesus said to [the nobleman], **“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”**

49 The nobleman said to [Jesus], “Sir, come down before my child dies!”

50 Jesus said to [the nobleman], **“Go your way; your son lives.”** So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

51 And as [the nobleman] was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, “Your son lives!”

52 Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.”

53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, **“Your son lives.”** And he himself believed, and his whole household.

54 This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

Jesus' first sign to the Galileans was turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and I'm sure that Jesus' ability to liven up a party was discussed all around Galilee. But this second miracle, healing of the nobleman's son without even seeing the boy or going to the nobleman's house, was the kind of thing that would make young men, working with their father in the family business, decide to leave the family business to go into business with Jesus, the healer. Turning water into wine is one thing, but healing with just a word, without even being there, is another.



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So James and John left their father to follow Jesus, and became Jesus' close associates.

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Matthew 17 records Jesus' episode on the Mountain of Transfiguration, in which Jesus was transformed into a figure of light and held an audible conversation with the visible spirits of the lawgiver Moses and the prophet Elijah. Now, all the apostles did not observe these appearances. **Matthew 17:1** says: **1 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, [and] led them up on a high mountain by themselves;**

Zebedee's sons, James and John, along with Simon Peter, were Jesus' inner circle. They were able to observe this great miracle and hear Jesus talking to the patriarchs of old. And you may remember that we talked about the resurrection of the Jairus' daughter last week. The Bible gives this detail about Jesus' entry into the house in which the girl's body was lying, in **Luke 8:50-51**: **50 But when Jesus heard it, He answered [Jairus], saying, "Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well."**

51 When [Jesus] came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl.

Once again, we see James and John on the inside along with Simon Peter, while the other nine apostles cool their heels on the outside.

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And our text for today tells us that James and John's mother Salome is travelling with the group. Zebedee was probably pretty lonely back at the boat, because his two sons left him to follow Jesus, and his wife left him to follow his two sons.

The relationship that should be primary between husband and wife is often fractured as the vicissitudes of family life impinge on the marriage. The Bible tells us, in **Genesis 2:24**:

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

But children almost always have the ability to come between a husband and a wife. At the birth of the first son recorded in Scripture, the woman to whom this verse originally applied made an interesting statement. **Genesis 4:1** tells us: **1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD."**

What? I thought that Adam was the man that Eve acquired from the Lord. But God has so designed women that when they bring a child into the world, the biological bond that forms between the woman and the child is often stronger



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than the volitional bond that the woman has with her husband. And this difference is biological; the bonding relationship that a woman has with her child through childbearing can stimulate a woman’s oxytocin response more strongly than does the sexual relationship that the woman has with her husband. And that is a reasonable situation.

Men do need their wives help, as **Genesis 2:18** tells us:

18 And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

But while it is good for men to have wives to help them, men can survive without wives. Infants, however, are totally dependent upon their mothers. In fact, without sufficient physical human contact, infants have been known to literally fail to develop, even when given sufficient nourishment.

Infants contract a condition known as “Deprivation Dwarfism”, or “Failure to Thrive” because of a lack of tactile stimulation during their very early development stages after birth. A lack of physical contact can inhibit the activation of an infant’s pituitary gland and cause the infant to fail to grow normally.

The normative contact activity for infants is breastfeeding. Even if a woman uses a bottle to feed her child, the baby needs the mother or caregiver to hold him or her close to her chest to receive the needed physical stimulation. Thus, the differences in male and female anatomy and endocrinology exist by design, specifically for the nurture of children.

Thus, God created a reciprocal emotional and hormonal relationship between women and their children; just as children need their mothers to cuddle them in order for them to thrive, God designed women, hormonally, with a physical need to bond to children.

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When Moses was lying in the basket floating down the Nile River, and the Pharaoh’s daughter looked at him and heard him cry, her endocrinological system was stimulated. She immediately felt the desire to care for the child, although she intellectually recognized that the child was not hers, was not even an Egyptian as was she, but was a Hebrew. **Exodus 2:5–6** tells us:

5 Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it.

6 And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.”

Moses’ sister was watching to see that which would come of Moses, and when she saw the compassion of the Pharaoh’s daughter for her little brother,



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Moses' sister offered to help the Pharaoh's daughter find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for her. The Pharaoh's daughter agreed, and actually paid Moses' own mother to nurse and take care of him until Moses was weaned from the breast and could be adopted. The Pharaoh's daughter had the opportunity to adopt Moses in the first place because that her father, the Pharaoh, was hostile to Israelite male babies, commanding that they all be drowned.

So, you see the biological difference in the bonding with infants between male and female. And it is easier, more intuitive, probably more stimulating, and certainly less argumentative, in the normative case, for a woman to bond with an infant than with a husband. And the intuitive ease of the bond between mother and child often deteriorates the marital bond between the mother and the father, as the wife/mother can allow the bond with the infant to expand to take up her complete capacity to bond.

Even when the child is no longer breastfeeding and the woman's endocrine system is no longer being physically stimulated by the child directly, the memory of the stimulation remains, as does the bond. My wife has announced to me that when she retires, we are moving to North Carolina. Now, the climate is nice in North Carolina, but it is equally pleasant in West Virginia, South Carolina and the northern part of Georgia. Why the fixation on North Carolina? Simple. Our son and his wife live there. He is thirty years of age and married, but the memory of the bond between mother and son lasts for life. And I appreciate my wife for planning to take me along with her to her new place of residence.

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When James and John decided to leave Zebedee and Salome to go on the road with Jesus, Salome was concerned and conflicted. Where exactly were the boys going? Who would be taking care of them? Salome recognized that Jesus was pretty good at duplicating fish and bread, but Salome was concerned that someone would have to cook the fish in the first place. James and John were going on the road with Jesus and a group of men, and Salome knew, as we have already read, that it is not good for men to be without a suitable helper.

Of course, James and John were with Jesus, and it was not good for Zebedee to be alone either, but Salome had to make a choice. So Salome chose to leave her husband and follow her sons. I did not say that Salome and her husband divorced, but it is clear, from Biblical episodes, that Salome chose to be with her sons rather than her husband from at least this point in Jesus' ministry to Resurrection Sunday. **Mark 16:1** tells us:

1 Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.



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And this situation is the cause of many divorces in our society. When the children become the focal point of the marriage, the marriage may only last eighteen years after the birth of the last child. After that, the husband and wife may recognize that they have “grown apart”.

The sociological phenomena known as the “mid-life crisis” or the “empty nest syndrome” may cause the dissolution of the marriage, just as Salome felt the pull to be a “stage mother” to her sons rather than a wife to her husband.

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But just as my mother came to my piano lessons when I was little to make sure that I was paying attention, Salome was with James and John listening to Jesus’ teaching along with them. She heard a very wealthy man come up to Jesus to question him. **Luke 18:18** tells us:

18 Now a certain ruler asked [Jesus], saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus was such a revolutionary teacher that the rich and powerful wanted to question Him. In our last lesson, a lawyer questioned Jesus. This week it is a political leader. But in both cases, Jesus referred them to the Law of God. **Luke 18:20** records that Jesus told the ruler:

20 You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ ”

Within the Law of Moses, God gives us the moral guidelines for correct living. The answer to the question, “what should I do”, is always, “follow the commandments in the Law of God.

But the ruler postulated that his adherence to the Law was complete.

Luke 18:21 records:

21 And [the ruler] said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.”

The ruler was sure that he had fulfilled his obligation to God. But Jesus perceived in his Spirit that the ruler’s devotion to God was inhibited by the ruler’s standard of living. So Jesus gave the ruler a prescription that would solve a problem that the ruler didn’t even know that he had. In **Luke 18:22**:

22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to [the ruler], “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Jesus said to the ruler, “Divest yourself of your standard of living, come live the life of an evangelist, and your eternal future will be bright.

Now, Jesus’ command to the ruler is not meant to be universal. Jesus does not call everyone; out of all of the disciples that were following Him, Jesus called twelve apostles. As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He selected Peter, Andrew, James and John, although there were others by the sea.



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But Jesus did call the ruler. Unfortunately, the ruler was not interested in a commitment of that magnitude. The ruler was used to the types of solutions that the scribes and Pharisees, who loved money, proposed, which absolved the ruler of sin as long as he tithed according to the Law of Moses. Jesus' solution was too radical for the ruler, as **Luke 18:23** tells us:

23 But when [the ruler] heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

Jesus tells us, in **Mark 4:19**:

19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

And that was the case with the ruler. I'm reminded of the chicken that walked up to the pig and said, "I know how we can make some money. We can start a breakfast restaurant."

The pig replied, "Yeah, we could, but what are we going to serve?"

The chicken said, "Ham and eggs, of course."

The pig said, "My friend, you have a good idea, but I will have to decline. For you, ham and eggs just requires a contribution, but for me, it requires a total commitment."

And the ruler was willing to make a contribution, even a substantial contribution, to Jesus' program, but the ruler had no intention of making a total commitment.

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Now, the ruler was not unique in his reticence, as Jesus told us in **Luke 18:25**:

25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

And when the apostles asked Jesus how a rich man could turn away from his possessions and give his all to be saved, Jesus responded, in **Luke 18:27**:

27 But [Jesus] said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

Jesus described how God could make such a commitment possible, in **John 14:16-17**:

16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

And were it not for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Truth, all of us would be in the same boat as the ruler, sorrowfully deciding to not fulfill the requirements of Jesus.



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But Salome’s ears perked up when Peter asked Jesus about the sacrifice that the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to make, in **Matthew 19:27–29: 27 Then Peter answered and said to [Jesus], “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?”**

28 So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

Being with Jesus in life leads to a special reward in the Resurrection. The apostles will be judges in places of honor in the kingdom. Of course, at this point in their ministry, they were under the tutelage and protection of Jesus. But the day was coming in which they would be on their own. They would be faced with the challenges of following the admonition of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel to hostile pagan nations.

But Salome, being a stage mother, did not concern herself with the challenges, but only with getting her sons in those top two spots on the roster. She heard Jesus say that the Holy Spirit would empower the apostles to do that which was necessary to successfully complete their assigned mission, but that there were twelve thrones to be had. Now, twelve thrones were sufficient for the twelve apostles, but Salome, the stage mother, knowing that her sons were the best among the apostles, wanted the best thrones for them. After all, when Jesus did a miracle privately, as in raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead, Jesus took Salome’s sons James and John into the room, along with Simon Peter.

But Salome was concerned that Peter was in the mix. Peter had become the leader of the apostles. Peter spoke up, asked the questions, and generally demonstrated more leadership than James and John. So, in Salome’s mind, one of the top two spots was in danger. Just as, last week, we read that Martha did not want to see Mary sitting next to Jesus when Mary could be helping her, Salome did not want to see Peter sitting next to Jesus when her son James or her son John could be sitting there.

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And that is to be expected of a stage mother. Salome had that hormonal bond with James and John that made her decided to go on the road with them rather than stay at home with her own husband. Salome was not going to stand around and let anyone, including Peter, get the one of the best seats while one of her boys had to sit farther away from Jesus.



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So Salome went to work. From the harmony of the gospels, Our text, **Matthew 20:20** and **Mark 10:35** says:

Then the mother of James and John (Zebedee’s sons) came to Jesus with her sons and knelt in front of Him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want You to do for us whatever we ask.”

When getting her sons in the first positions is on the line, Salome is willing to be as sweet and submissive to Jesus as she can be. And Jesus acknowledged Salome’s sweetness by asking her for her request, as **Matthew 20:21** records:

21 And [Jesus] said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to [Jesus], “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.”

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Now, this is a presumptuous request. Salome has no knowledge of the evaluation method that is going to be used to fill the seats, and she just wants her sons to have them. She is analogous to the man who was speeding down the street at 90 miles per hour when the police officer pulled him over. “Sir, what is your hurry?” asked the police officer.

“My wife is having about to have a baby”, replied the man.

The police officer looked into the car and saw the obviously pregnant woman, and found out the name of the hospital to which they were going. After taking the man’s license and registration, the police officer said, “Okay, follow me.” The police officer then turned on his siren and provided the man and his wife an escort to the hospital.

The police officer called ahead, and when they reached the hospital, there was an orderly with a wheelchair waiting outside for the woman. As they were wheeling her inside, the police officer told the man, “Sir, here is your license, your registration and your ticket for speeding.”

“Why do I get a ticket?” said the man. “My wife was about to have a baby!”

“But that’s no excuse for endangering the public”, said the police officer.

“You could have called an ambulance or you could have called the police department to escort you to the hospital as I did. But you didn’t have a siren on your car, or any way to alert other drivers to get out of your way, and you could have caused a serious accident. So this is to remind you to think about something other than your own personal situation when you decide to speed.”

Salome’s request is as presumptuous as was the man who was speeding. She had no idea how God intended that those seats next to Jesus were to be allocated; all she was concerned about was that she wanted her sons in them.

So Jesus gave Salome, James and John some information, in **Matthew 20:22–23**:



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22 But Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” [James and John] said to Him, “We are able.”

23 So [Jesus] said to them, “You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.”

The cup that Jesus is about to drink is that of the Crucifixion, and the baptism is the burial in death that will be the result. And Salome was certainly not aware that she was asking for a painful, horrible death sentence for her sons.

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But that is a function of the lack of perspective that people have. As I mentioned earlier, some mothers get so caught up in their feelings for their child that they ignore or forsake their husband, as Salome was doing in this case. But the bond between mother and child is not intended to infringe on the marriage of either the mother or the child, as **Matthew 19:4–6** tells us:

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 has ordained that a person’s primary relationship is supposed to be between themselves and their own spouse, not with a mother or with a child. A child is supposed to bond to their own spouse and create their own family, hopefully, without interference from their mother.

Mothers with grown children have had their turn raising their children; after their child is grown and married, it is the child’s turn to raise their own children. And while it is always good to pass wisdom down from generation to generation, the passing down of wisdom ought not be perceived as too intrusive, and the interaction to pass down wisdom ought not come at the expense of the primary relationship between husband and wife, which God ordains as sacrosanct.

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This episode also tells us that we are not the ultimate judges. Salome can not decide, or even influence, the decision as to who gets what seat, because God makes that decision. I find it extremely interesting that the only person in the Bible that Jesus tells us is definitely saved is the criminal on the Cross next to



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Him, who is not the person that most people would pick as the holiest fellow around.

But we can rest assured of our heavenly status. John tells us, in **1John 5:13**:

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

And Jesus tells us, in **John 3:16–17**:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Let us be assured of the historical truth of the Bible, of the accounts of Jesus Christ, how he suffered, bled and died on Calvary's Cross, and then rose, physically, from the dead. We have eternal life because we continue to believe in that which the historical Jesus Christ has done for us.

Our conduct is not worthy to assure us a place in heaven. In fact, our sinfulness makes us ineligible to be in heaven at all. But **Titus 3:3–7** tells us: **3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.**

4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

So we are saved by Jesus' kindness, God's love, and the Lord's grace. Let us be grateful for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and resolve to do all that we can to serve His purposes by living lives of love that will display the influence of the Holy Spirit upon us, as Jesus tells us, in **John 13:34–35**:

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

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

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