

Male and Female He Created Them

Created pure

As we have seen, the whole problem around the Song of Songs is that it is difficult for us as sinful human beings in a sinful world to approach the beauty of this Song. It is beautiful in the sense of being both pure and lovely.

But what is beautiful in the sense of being lovely, and who is beautiful in the sense of being pure? “To the pure, all things are pure” Paul wrote to Titus. May we simply apply this to ourselves? Is it always true of us?

Some of us may sigh, saying that we are absolutely not pure – and that is true – and leave it at that. But this does not help us get any closer to the purpose of this book, toward understanding the book and dealing with it. That is a pity.

Surely we have the Bible in order to understand and use it! The third commandment states, “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God,” that is, to use it for an insignificant, senseless purpose. Phrased in a positive manner, that means we have to use it meaningfully. How are we to do this? To determine that, we must go back to the creation of all things, to the creation of the man and his wife. Genesis 1:27 tells us literally, “Male and female he created them.”

Do we realize what is said here, and what deep thoughts of God are laid down here in so few words? God, whose thinking is incomprehensible and whose power is without limit, saw a multitude of possibilities when he thought about creating. After special deliberation and an announcement, he created a creature after his likeness. No robot or science fiction character appeared. Rather, the result was human, just as we know humans today. They were not hermaphrodites (bisexual beings), nor without sex; rather, they were human beings formed as male or female, to remain such for life. They were human beings who could become father or mother, but only through intercourse with a member of the opposite sex. Through intercourse, two people who feel attracted to each other with body *and soul* give themselves to each other in such a way that new life can be born. That is how we may describe the indescribable, with reverence and praise to God the Creator, who thought this out and made it so.

The fall into sin

Through abstract reasoning we could perhaps find other possibilities. For instance, God could have maintained the population by continuing to create. This is speculation about something that did not happen but could have happened. We just mention the possibility here, to be all the more convinced that it pleased the Lord to take the course of Genesis 1:27 and 28. Some people, thinking of the fall into sin, might comment that God could have followed another way, to forego all misery in the area of sexuality. Against that we declare that the LORD, who is pleased with his creatures just as he made them, would not have seen the enjoyment of his creatures as they gave themselves to each other. And that is not only true of the time before the fall, but also after.

For, regardless of how disastrous the fall and how serious the situation, the LORD did not, on that dark day, retreat from his creation ordinance. He did not say, "What a pity - this cannot go on. Intercourse is a gateway for all kinds of misuse and perversity. From now on I, myself, will keep the number of people stable..." No, he remained with his original resolve. And why not? Did he not see that "it was very good"?

Adam's song of songs

Adam, the first man, agreed that it was good. When he first saw a woman, she who would become his wife and go through life with him, he acknowledged that she was good, that she was as she should be. That is no sober, matter-of-fact statement. No, on seeing his wife, his reflection, his other half which fit him perfectly, the first man expressed his feelings in a song, which has been preserved in the Bible. It is the first song of songs. It is only one stanza, and is not much in comparison with the 117 verses of the book Song of Songs; but those 117 verses are the expression of the one verse from the second chapter of Genesis. These are the first words, the first communication of man in the Bible. They are also the only words recorded from the state of innocence, when everything was still good.

Are we going too far, if we conclude from this the extraordinarily great significance of the woman for her man? The Lord surprised Adam. The Bible does not record a song by Eve about Adam. This is not to say that she did not spontaneously compose and sing a song. The word of the man must have drawn forth an answer from the heart of the woman. The Bible esteems the man's words of appreciation, which show how important his wife was to him.

It has been said that the Hebrew word *isj* (man) is etymologically derived from a root which means "strong," but that has not been proven. As well, *isjsja* (woman) is said to be derived from a root word that means "weak." That is possible. Apart from etymology the thought is biblical. The strong honors the weak, "gives honor to the weaker vessel." With that witness from the mouth of the first man, the first marriage began: the only marriage that no human ever witnessed.

Here is the germination of the history of their descendants (fruit of this marriage) who would fill the earth and subdue it. The man did not show himself to be the stronger one over against his wife, in the sense of: "I must rule; I am the boss and you must submit." No, he was delighted when he saw her, becoming weak by seeing her who was weak. That is how it is with a man who loves his wife. In her appearance she is too mighty for him. She is irresistible. The man leaves his father and mother, to be one flesh with her. That is the conclusion of the author of Genesis 2.

Becoming one flesh

Eve was already acknowledged by her husband as flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones. This indicates their relationship. Together, bones and flesh form the body. As we see it, flesh makes up the outward appearance, while the bones indicate the more inward parts, which give the body its strength. That is how the man can love his wife and they become one flesh. Even though the word "flesh" primarily refers to the body in this

expression, the flesh is more than something physical. It refers just as much to the entire being. When the Israelites called someone “flesh of their flesh and bone of their bones,” this indicated their entire being.

Both the man and his wife were naked but not ashamed. This too was written from the state of innocence. That is important for us to know. It still has its significance for us today, even though we read it with eyes dimmed by sin. Today we are not able to bear the sight of nakedness. The only exceptions to this are in certain situations, such as very intimate relationships, or those necessary from a medical viewpoint or from artistic considerations - but then it must be art that answers to good norms, which must be deemed admissible with a good conscience. We must be very precise here. One must be fully convinced by his own conscience.

Intervening sin

In any case we choose against naturalism. Genesis 3, when compared to chapter 2, teaches that things changed instantly on the day of the fall. On that day, sin was first seen in its disastrous, embarrassing character, which no man can reverse. The fact that sin intervened cannot be denied, not even by the most idealistic human being. What is “idealistic”? In paradise both the man and his wife were naked. Then such an idealistic situation *was* possible. The first people were beautiful and good; they stood sinless before each other – as God had made them – as long as they were right with the Lord, their Maker. Only in perfect mutual love was there no shame due to their nakedness.

From Genesis 3, we know that this original situation was totally disrupted. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked.” They were embarrassed. “They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” Nakedness was experienced as lack of protection. In the Garden of Eden they were naked yet *clothed*. Directly after the fall they discovered that this was no longer possible. We do not dress ourselves only for protection from the cold, but just as much for protection from the glances of other people, which are now experienced as annoying, penetrating and troublesome. Much that was beautiful has been distorted by sin. Anyone who acts as though nothing serious happened in Genesis 3 is wrong and headed for trouble.

Even husbands and wives, who live side by side, experience that alienation has entered in.

Is harmony gone forever?

Since the fall into sin, people move and live in a broken world, with sinful hearts. That is the great difficulty: “unable to do any good and inclined to all evil.” Now the question is, does sin cause the good that there was before the fall to be so obscured that today we can do nothing with the gifts of God’s revelation (Genesis 1, 2), but lay them aside?

Following that line of reasoning, we could conclude that in public one cannot be seen naked anymore. Even between husband and wife it would create problems, because the original harmony is gone. As for the love that one owes the other, both remain hopelessly lacking. In other words, every marriage begins as a tottering building. But it remains the

appointed way for procreation. A necessary evil. That says it all. Then we must also say: do not expect too much of it. It is not all that nice. Since original love has now changed into self-love (or egotism), a husband and wife seek only to fulfill their own lusts and pleasures, and that usually at the expense of the other. Intercourse within wedlock is wallowing in a pool of mud and dirt. The minister solemnizing the marriage can only warn: it would be better to keep oneself removed from the whole carnal aspect of marriage, except when absolutely necessary.

That is how it used to be for many ages, until the 20th century. But we should seriously consider whether this is the intention of the Bible, the book which also contains Genesis 1 and 2. Is marriage a channeling of passions and lusts, of which we can say nothing good and of which we must be ashamed?

Restoration

Against this very pessimistic view we say “no!” The world is miserable and man is sinful, but we see that the Lord denounced and opposed sin right from the beginning, in all his words and laws, and in all the goodness he reveals. Salvation is *not* a new concept but is essentially the restoration of creation. Redemption is re-creation, the re-creation of life that rises anew from the ruins of the old, the re-creation of hearts so that they, delivered from miserable egotism, may open in love for each other.

We do not have to wait until the next life for this re-creation, but can already see something of it here and now. This is where eternal life begins, albeit only a small beginning. More specifically, it is for those who fear the Lord that new life becomes apparent. For God’s children, living together in marriage can again be attractive and beautiful. Husbands and wives who give their hearts to the Lord can also give themselves to each other. True giving is taught to us by him who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.

As we will discuss later, God’s love in Jesus Christ must be properly distinguished from sexual love. For that reason we reject spiritualizing. But there is a connection, for the unconditional love of God in Christ Jesus is the fountain and origin of all love. For Christ’s sake there is again a panorama of beauty over married life. Two people can be happy together.

Panorama of beauty

We have already noted that Adam was delighted when he first saw Eve. Eve must have been a beautiful woman. Have you ever taken notice of the fact that the Old Testament repeatedly makes mention of the beauty of the wives of believers? The Bible could have been silent about the fact, but it was not. It was a significant factor in that history. We read in Genesis 12:11, “I [Abraham] know what a beautiful woman you are.” More about this can be read in Genesis 12:14 and 20:2. In Genesis 24:16, it is written of Rebekah: “the girl was very beautiful.” This was confirmed by Isaac in Genesis 24: “he loved her.” Genesis 29:17 tells us: “Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.” Then there is in Genesis 34 the story of Dinah, the daughter of Leah. We can also refer to Deuteronomy 21:10-14: “if you notice among the captives a beautiful

woman..." In 1 Samuel 25:1-3 we read of Abigail that "she was an intelligent and beautiful woman." We do not read the same of all the "holy women", but the Old Testament mentions it too often for this to slip by us unnoticed.

Also unbelievers

It is true that there are also examples of beauty outside of the circle of believers. We think of Genesis 4:22, where the sister of Tubal Cain, the daughter of Lamech, is mentioned. Naamah means: the lovely one, the charming one. In distinction from her famous brothers, nothing special is said of her. Yet she is thought worthy of mention. It is possible that she did play a role in her heathen religion. From the oldest traces of religiosity, as far as we know, it seems that adoration of the mother-goddess, the female, took an important place. In Lamech's family an atmosphere of heathen religiosity can be observed.

It is the same in Genesis 6:1-4. "The sons of God" were not, as is often thought, boys from the church who sought contact with "daughters of men," that is, girls from the world. We know this because "men" in verse 6:1 refers to all of humanity, descendants of both Cain and Seth. Verse 2 must also refer to all people. "Sons of God" is a standard Old Testament expression for angels or supernatural powers. But since they do not need women, this must refer instead to extraordinary people, "supermen" who wielded power over other people and took the girls they liked, not just one but many. From tradition we know of people like that who lived in Babylon. They exercised a real reign of terror, and no woman or girl was safe from them. Genesis 6:4 tells us that these men were violent and notorious.

Other examples of beauty among unbelievers are the wife of Potiphar and the Moabite and Midianite women of Numbers 25. These stories teach us how beauty can be misused when people are tempted. But it is important to see that Scripture also shows how outward beauty can serve inner evil and become one with it. In contrast to this, Sarah's beauty was accompanied by a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:4).

The Bible shows us that female beauty is not great in itself. Today we say "Beauty is only skin deep." The soul, the inner self, is expressed in the appearance and bearing. This is what makes a woman attractive to a certain man.

The choice of a partner of the opposite sex is always a personal choice.

The wedding: a feast

The relationship of men with women has been stained by sin and curse. Yet, the institution of marriage, which dates back to the time of creation, is maintained by God. Basically, marriage reminds us of this time. In principle it was good, and it remains good. The Creator is pleased to give many good things to those who will live in a relationship created by him. Even now there is much good in married life. That is why Scripture tells us about wedding feasts. When the covenant is sealed between a man and his wife, there is reason for celebration. It is a festive occasion. Compare Genesis 29:21ff. following with Judges 14:10.

The fruit of intercourse, that is, “knowing” in love, can be gladly appreciated in marriage. In the laws of the country in which a marriage takes place, the marriage is surrounded by necessary guarantees. New life will be born within protecting walls, with a roof overhead. Such a birth is occasion for great rejoicing, as the Old Testament repeatedly tells us.

Let no one say that is just the Old Testament, earthly and temporal, destined to pass. In the Old Testament we find the course and pattern for a normal, that is, a norm-bound life. A Christian is not exalted above such an integral element of the Bible. Christ himself, who fulfilled the ceremonial law, honoured that Word, which was his guiding word, throughout his life. He graced a wedding with his presence and a miracle.

The characters in the Song of Songs

It was during the Old Testament era that the scenes of the Song took place. The characters are ordinary people who can be met on the street: a lovely young woman and a handsome young man, her beloved.

Besides these main characters are the others: her mother, with whom she still lives; her angry, or rather, strict brothers; the shepherd friends of her beloved, whom we encounter at the beginning and shortly before the end; and “the daughters of Jerusalem”, a group of young ladies who are familiar with the city and with whom the young woman continuously talks. (Can we call the charges to these ladies a discussion? They indicate the transitions in the book, and also finally receive a response.) Beyond this there are the watchmen in the city, who also play their part, be it far from sympathetic. Then, in the background, we see King Solomon, the great king in a chariot with a bodyguard (3:6-11), a harem (6:8), and a vineyard in Baal Hamon, part of the royal domain, for which he has watchmen..., as is customary with kings.

People as we are

These are the characters set before us by the author of the book. They are his workmanship. That is the liberty of the author who is in the service of the Author, the Holy Spirit. We must be thankful for what this man has entrusted to Holy Writ, with the wisdom and liberty given him. For is not this the beauty of the book, *that it moves within the limits of the reality created by God?* Male and female he created them. Here on earth he placed them, Adam and Eve, people like us, though for a time without sin.

The young man and woman from the Song of Songs knew each other on a sinful earth. We see something of sin in the book: “the little foxes” (2:15), the abuse from the watchmen (5:7), the daughters of Jerusalem with their lofty ideas about love. Was there perhaps also sin in the expressions of the young couple? That would be an interesting topic to discuss sometime, for they were not without sin.

They were much like us, who are now going to work with this fine little book. Most of all, they were like our young people of today. All of us, whether married or single, must stand beside them, with one accord as their fellow humans, brothers and sisters, with a true conviction regarding the rules of the One who created all of this so beautiful and good. It is he alone who knows what is good for us, who lets us know what we can and cannot

do. It is God who, through this book, builds a bridge from paradise to today, that we can know how it was in the beginning and how it can be today. As the Lord Jesus repeatedly says in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, we should not lose sight of all that is still good, in spite of all afflictions and disappointments.

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