

Male and Female He Created Them

A Bible study on God's loving gift of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female

Lesson #4A: Selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper) partnering in the World

Introduction

Imagine that the chairman of your congregation's board of elders is also an elected judge. One day he realizes that the first case in his courtroom is a man from his congregation who is suing his wife for divorce, claiming irreconcilable differences. As the suit is presented, much to the dismay of the man's believing wife, it becomes clear that the irreconcilable differences are that he's unwilling to continue as her husband despite her evident faithfulness to him. However, because the petition has been handled according to the law of the land, the judge grants the divorce.

But at the end of that day, that judge removes his judge's robe and heads to church to preside over the elders' meeting. With sadness he informs the other elders about the divorce proceedings that their brother in Christ had kept hidden but had now become public record. Now, not as judge, but as elder, he offers to be the first one to approach that man, one on one, to call him to repentance for separating what God had joined together.

How do you explain what seems to be such utter inconsistency? In the morning the judge bangs his gavel and declares the man legally divorced. By evening the judge prepares to knock on the man's door and call him to repentance for a divorce granted in his own courtroom. Does he or does he not respect God's principle of marriage as a lifetime union between one man and one woman?

Yes, he does. And he is not being inconsistent, either. No more than was Moses (really the LORD through Moses) when, because of the stubbornness of sinful hearts (Matthew 19:8), he permitted Israelite husbands to write a bill of divorce and send their wives away (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

The key to the matter is to consider the different callings from God that man has as judge and as elder. As God's representative in government, his sworn duty is to uphold the constitution and the law of the land (even laws he may personally dislike). For the judge to disregard the law in his courtroom would undermine the very purpose of maintaining order in his world for which God instituted government.

However, as God's representative in his church, as an elder, his calling from God is quite different. As a brother in Christ to the man who sued for an unbiblical divorce, his calling is to be God's tool to lead that man to repentance, forgiveness, and a new direction that honors his Savior's will for his life. God's principle did not change in either calling, but as judge or as elder (or as husband) the application made of that principle in the unique setting of each of his God-given callings was different.

God's principles, written into our hearts and woven into our very creation, define for us what it means to love him and our neighbor as ourselves. God's principles in themselves never truly contradict each other. Consider the following:

- **Deuteronomy 32:4** [The LORD] is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.
- **Isaiah 55:8-9** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Yet as we live and work in the midst of the mess of a fallen world, that world is often neglecting or ignoring many of God's principles at the same time. And the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female may be suffering from some of the greatest abuse and neglect.

That's why, as we live out our God-given callings in a fallen world, the responsibilities of our various callings can present us with challenging situations where it may seem impossible to honor outwardly all God's good principles simultaneously. While the new heart the Spirit has planted in us honors all God's good principles, much like that judge, the responsibilities of our callings may make it hard to act in the world in such a way that honors all God's principles simultaneously.

As we seek to honor God's principles and love our neighbor, what should never be our goal?

- **Matthew 23:27-28** "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."
- **Matthew 9:13** "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'"

The coming lessons presents us with the most challenging area in which to apply the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

LIVING AS CITIZENS OF TWO KINGDOMS

Part of what may help us walk through the many challenging situations in life is to grasp the biblical doctrine of the two kingdoms, or two realms, both of which are under the rule of our triune God. Sadly, this doctrine is rarely taught clearly (or at all) outside of Lutheran circles, and all too frequently it is not even taught or understood well by Lutherans. Failing to grasp what is meant by these two kingdoms can cause us confusion as we live our callings out in the world and can, in fact, unintentionally do harm to the cause of the gospel we long to further.

What is meant by these two kingdoms? We speak of God's ruling in his world by his almighty power as he keeps his universe and its natural laws operating as he created them. In particular, just as he worked from formlessness and emptiness to a well ordered creation during the six days of creation, so even in a now fallen world God still is at work to preserve outward peace and order and to provide for the outward earthly needs of all who live on the earth, both believer and unbeliever (Matthew 5:44,45).

Sometimes this work of God to maintain the outward order and provision for his world and his creatures is referred to as God's kingdom of power. As we noted in lesson 1, ever since creation God partners through human beings as he gives us an important part in promoting outward peace and providing for the outward needs of those in this world. We see God's kingdom of power at work through human beings most evidently as God works through his representatives in government. In addition to government, we would also see God at work in his kingdom of power in other focused-on-this-life institutions such as the workplace. Martin Luther was fond of calling God's kingdom of power "the kingdom of God's left hand."

What are God's agents and good goal for his "kingdom of power"? What tools does he use?

Romans 13:1-4 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Colossians 3:22,25-4:1 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ... Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

This leads us directly to God's other kingdom (or realm). God's other kingdom is his kingdom of grace. This is what is meant when we read in Scripture about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven.

What is God's goal and focus in "the kingdom of grace"? What are the means/tools that God employs in this kingdom?

Mark 1:14-15 Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

2 Peter 3:9 He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Matthew 28:19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Once God has accomplished conversion (i.e. repentance of sins and faith in Christ) by his gospel that change of heart from unbelief to faith, he then also works to renew that heart day by day so that the believer lives and reflects his saving grace in the midst of an unbelieving world. Luther was fond of calling this "the kingdom of God's right hand."

As Christians, while our true citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven (Philippians 3:20), yet as long as we live in this world, we will always hold a dual citizenship. In God's earthly kingdom, the kingdom of his left hand, we live under the God-established authorities in a particular country, and within that country we participate in other institutions of this world such as the workplace. As we live out our callings in the kingdom of this world, we work for the outward peace and bodily welfare of our neighbors. In the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of his right hand, we live under Christ as our head and seek to advance the cause of his saving kingdom.

And God has given us unique tools fashioned in his wisdom for the work of each of his realms. In the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of his right hand, the tools we use to operate are God's law and gospel, his revealed Word and sacraments. Our focus—like God's—is primarily on people's hearts and how God changes such hearts by the power of his gospel. Then, once God has won a heart to faith through the gospel, we also seek to direct believers with God's law and empower them with his gospel to walk worthy of our high calling to faith as sons and daughters of God (Ephesians 4:1).

But we have different tools from God to carry out his different purpose in our callings that are part of the kingdom of his left hand (government, workplace, etc.). When we are operating in our callings within God's kingdom of power—where God is at work to promote outward peace and provide for people's earthly needs—there we operate according to conscience and reason. Reason and conscience are the tools God has given us when we are serving in a calling where he is seeking to bless people with earthly peace, order, and provision.

It is very important that we do not confuse the tools God has given us by failing to ask ourselves in which kingdom which we are serving as we carry out a particular calling in life. While it is true that the Christian's conscience and reason have a huge advantage because they are instructed by God's revealed Word and empowered by his gospel, yet, when we are carrying out the duties of our callings in the kingdom of his world, the kingdom of his left hand, we operate by reason and conscience (which even the heathen have dimly imprinted on their consciences – cf. Romans 2), not by quoting chapter and verse of the Bible (which the unbelieving can only oppose as foolishness – cf. 1 Cor. 2:7-8,11,14).

Why is it dangerous for Christians to use the Word of God as a tool of outward coercion when we are operating in the kingdom of God's left hand (i.e. using legislation or elections to promote Christian conduct)? What message does that send?

However, we do hope that as we model love for God and Christ-like selfless love for neighbor in our kingdom of this world's callings, the unbelievers around us will take note and ask us about "the reason for the hope that [we] have" (1 Peter 3:15). But as we speak of that hope, it's important to note that we are then carrying out our calling as royal priests of God—a task of his kingdom of grace. But that doesn't mean that suddenly the revealed Word of God has become the tool we wield in our assigned tasks in the kingdom of power callings God has permitted us to have. Since God is at work through our kingdom of power callings to provide outward peace and earthly provision, we use the tools God designed for our duties in our for-this-life callings: we use reason and appeal to conscience.

That's also why, as we carry out our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we will often need to swallow hard as we serve in the midst of institutions that have turned much of God's will upside down. It is a confused, sinful world. As Christians, we know in our hearts that things are vastly different in many ways from what God designed this world to be. And we know that the structures of this world that deal only with the outward things of this life never will get to the heart of what

truly troubles us. Yet, that doesn't mean we retreat from taking part in government or the other structures of this world just because they are messy. God has called us to be salt and light in the midst of the darkness and decay of the world. When we involve ourselves in callings from God in the kingdom of his left hand, we are doing godly work as his representatives by preserving as best as possible in a sinful world a semblance of order and seeing to it that greed and corruption don't rob people of having their earthly needs met. And through it all, Christians know something else: we know we are preserving peoples' time of grace and enabling a climate in which we can carry out the even more important work of the kingdom of God's right hand.

So, if we love God and our neighbor, we do not hide from the messiness of taking part in the callings of this world in the kingdom of God's left hand. We take part, even though we know it will often be very difficult to know how to do that wisely and well. It will not always be easily or immediately clear to us in those difficult situations what the most loving course of action would be. (In a perfect world, there would be no such challenges brought on by sin.) In fact, part of the messiness may mean that, in our responsibilities in our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we may seem for a time for our neighbors' good to be acting in a way that is in violation of a particular principle of God's will. We do that even though in our hearts our Spirit-created new self still delights in that principle.

In regard to the topic of our Bible study, that means when living out the responsibilities of our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we may find ourselves wondering precisely how we can best honor the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. In fact, we may at times act in a way that seems to work counter to that principle. When we are in the Christian home and our Christian churches, where the Word of God has already won other hearts to faith, we know even there it can be difficult to know precisely how to honor the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. But at least there we have brothers and sisters in Christ who are partnering with us and whose hearts have been won to treasure the saving Word of God. But in the world, we may often find that few around us care about this aspect (or any aspect) of God's will for their lives or ours.

When it comes to wrestling with every part of what it means to love God and neighbor, not just the principle that is the focus of our study, we will often find ourselves praying for sanctified wisdom, seeking wise counsel from others, and then acting in faith in the way that best seems both to honor God and, in that situation, love the specific neighbors he himself has put around us in the responsibilities of that calling. We do this knowing that God delights for us to be salt and light in this messy world. As mentioned above, the goal is never merely to look outwardly pristine and pious (the Pharisees were good at that), but to actually discern in every setting and situation what it truly means to love as ourselves the neighbors whom our callings impact.

Any remaining questions on the two kingdoms, their respective purpose, goals, or our citizenship and roles in them?