



Missing the Point of Gender

I have been saddened with all the discussion of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's homemaking degree. It seems such a waste of energy and resources that have once more distracted Baptists from the mission of Christ Jesus—to be the hands, voice, and presence of God in a needy world. It is sad that Baptists will allow this digression of resources from preparing leaders for ministry. It is also sad that Baptists will dismiss the issue as just one more event in gender wars.

Gender is not the point. In all the hoopla over Southwestern Seminary's attempt to paint a picture of women as ideally suited to homemaking, we have all missed the boat. Southwestern has taken the stand that the Bible portrays women as created by God for the role of homemaker, overlooking the obvious fact that Dorothy Patterson is no longer employed in that role. Now Al Mohler declares that men are just not equipped for relationship and nurture. Critics argue for a gender equality which focuses the value center of life on the workplace. In both cases, we argue over task-oriented roles that place the highest value on tasks of economic advancement. As a whole, we miss the importance of gender equity and design.

The Bible does not clearly delineate life in terms of tasks or spheres of action for male and female. God's purposes for human life are not so task-oriented as that. The two creation accounts in Genesis 1-3 cast human life as relational from its outset. God created humanity in the plural wholeness of male and female (Gen. 1:26). It is in this joint completeness that we are human. The second account places male and female as co-equal helpers. Humanity (*Adam*, Hebrew for human) is not complete until transformed into male and female (*Ish* and *Ishah*). It is in this state of male and female that Humanity (Adam) is joined with Life (Eve). It is in relationship (becoming one flesh) that they fulfill God's creative purpose and become whole.

In these creation accounts, there is no sense of workplace versus home. Life flows more along the lines of the homestead of our American westward push. Life in family is a joint partnership. It is in relationship and interdependence that living is accomplished, given purpose, and finds fulfillment. It is in mutual relationship that humanity reflects God's image and responds to the relational initiative of the Creator.

The nurturing of children is not a single-sided task that should be relegated to either party of this partnership. The nurturing of children in the home is a somewhat time-limited task dependent on the various issues of changing needs and the children's very presence. The functions of homemaking vary with the changing needs and technologies of society. A family's work functions also vary in light of economic structures and industrialization. The vast array of workplaces stretches from one's home into varying marketplace concepts. Work and occupation categories, however, do not define human identity. We were not created for work, but for relationship.

The nurturing of children is a relational task for the family. It is not for mother or father alone. It is not a role to be relegated to a day-care or scholastic institution to allow us escape from its demands. Economic advancement is not a value of higher order than relationship, discipleship, and nurture in a

gospel perspective. In the chaotic turmoil of drastic social change over the last century, we have lost touch with how to value and respond to the changing demands on family resources.

Our labor saving home devices introduced a couple generations ago gave families freedom from the tedium of many household tasks. The value we attributed to those functions decreased. Rather than use the time for investment in relationships, we have taken on more projects at an ever-increasing pace. Men previously occupied in farming had time for non-farm employment. Women previously occupied in cooking and cleaning tasks had opportunities for non-household employment. We shifted our sense of value to those efforts that yielded greater financial benefit, relegating relationship and nurture to a sphere of lesser importance.

We no longer have time for relationship. This is the real problem that Southwestern is seeking to address through misguided efforts. We have devalued the home, nurture, and relationship to such an extent that we are losing touch with one another. Critics bemoan the inequality of value these efforts attribute to men and women, yet fail to consider that workplace production is not a higher value in the gospel of Christ Jesus. The higher value is relational.

We have little to no information about how Jesus “made a living.” While we know that Paul had a trade at which he was sometimes employed, it was the process of discipling others in the gospel that gave his life value. Jesus preached about redemption, rescue, and giving away one’s acquisitions to help others in need. He spoke to Mary and Martha about giving priority to the things of God than the tasks we associate with living.

We were not created for work. We were not designed as corporate employees, worker bees for an industrialized marketplace, or technicians to run a global economy. Work is a part of life, but it is not as central as we would like to believe. Genesis introduces labor as a burden growing in relation to faithlessness. We were created to walk with God in relationship and dependence.

Relationship is not about baking cookies, cleaning, and sewing. It is about recognizing that people are more important than the tasks with which we so often occupy ourselves. It is more important than economic advancement. We lose out on God’s blessings due to our misplaced values. Our gender issue wars have just increased our loss of focus. Perhaps God is the most saddened of all. Along the way we have forgotten we were primarily created to walk together with God in the garden of God’s creation.

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September 2007*