

# Sexual Complementarity - Lesson 2b

by John Piper

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*The sermon argues that the leadership of men in marriage is a pre-fall, pre-sin ordinance of God, and that the curse of desire and rule in Genesis 3:16 refers to the futility of role corruption and the desire to master and control, which is a result of the fall.*

**Duration:** 47:18

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:15-19, Ephesians 5:21-23, 1 Peter 3:1

**Topics:** "Biblical Manhood", "Gender Roles"

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## Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper discusses the topic of manhood and womanhood based on biblical principles. He shares an anecdote about a men's seminar and their vision of gender roles, which was not well received by his team due to their flawed interpretation of Genesis 3:16. Pastor Piper then delves into the curse of desire and rule in Genesis 3:16, explaining how it reveals the futility of role corruption. He emphasizes the need for biblical truth to shape our understanding of gender roles, leading to transformed hearts, lives, marriages, and relationships.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). Let's pray as we begin. Father in heaven, we need your help now tonight because we are fragile and frail and fallible and sinful.

And we need you to protect us from all those things in our hearts and override them by your Spirit. And in spite of them, make truth to hold sway here. So may your word be exalted.

And then, Lord, we need hearts and minds that are attentive and supple that can be molded by your Spirit so that hearts are changed and lives are changed and marriages are changed and church structures are made conformable to the biblical image so that single people grasp their sexual identity with greater clarity and know how to relate to one another in their singleness. And across all the many varied relationships of life, we would know what our manhood or our womanhood means and grow through all the imperfections of this life toward a greater ideal realization of what you portray in your word. So come and help us now, I pray.

Guard us from error. Guard us from evil. In Jesus' name, Amen.

This is our third week. And last week, I undertook to present from Genesis 1 through 3 nine evidences or pointers toward the thesis that the leadership of men in marriage is not a post-fall curse or reality but a pre-fall, pre-sin ordinance of God which then was distorted and corrupted and ruined by the fall. So I want to finish that tonight by looking at the last two of the nine and then go and look at the two texts in the New Testament which describe most fully the restoration of the thing that collapsed so badly with the fall.

So our aim tonight is to finish making the case for the intention of God to relate man and woman as a loving leader for the man and a creative, articulate, gifted, willing supporter of that leadership are the women. So this is argument number eight. And it's an unusual one because you can't see it so well in English.

And so I won't build too much on it lest I pull rank and that doesn't help any in persuasion. The curse of desire and rule in Genesis 3.16 show the futility of role corruption. So let me try to show you what I mean here.

Here's what verse 16 of chapter 3 says. Now this is God's... He comes to man and says, What have you done? And he says, The woman made me do it. And he says, What did you do, woman? And she says, The snake made me do it.

And then he says to the snake, Cursed are you. You're going to go on your belly all your life. And there's enmity between you and the seed.

One day he's going to crush your head and you're going to crush his heel. So already he's picturing bigger things at issue in this serpent than just an animal that talks like Balaam's ass. It's really Satan in the garden here and his head is going to be crushed, which it was indeed at the cross decisively.

But then he goes to the woman and pronounces her judgment. And it goes like this. To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth.

In pain you will bring forth children. Yet your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. Now, a few years ago, there came to the Twin Cities a big men's seminar.

This is way before promise keepers ever existed because they didn't make this mistake. And there was an attempt to get us on board as a church. So I invited the leader of it to come and he volunteered to come and talk about his ministry.

So I invited him to come and meet with a team of five or six guys that are at my house. And I just said, well, just sum up in five or ten minutes what your vision of manhood and womanhood is and your basic biblical arguments. And he started with this verse.

And he took this as a mandate and a call to their credit. He spent an hour with us or so and then we let him go. And I looked at these guys and I said, well, what do you think? Are we on board or not? And everybody said, not with exegesis like that we're not.

So we didn't participate because this is not a call. This is a curse. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you is the fall as part of the result of the fall.

This is not a call for husbands to rule over their wives. This is a statement for what sinners do after the fall as part of the messed up relationship. Of marriage, this is the way it's going to be, he said, unless

redemption fixes it.

But what does desire mean? That's the question here. What does desire mean? Does that mean a woman who wants to have sexual relations is bad for that? Or a woman who just desires companionship is evil for that? That's part of the fall. She should not want a man.

She should not want to be married or not want to spend an evening with her husband. Well, there's a very remarkable clue as to what that means. I even put the Hebrew up here so you can even maybe see it.

Can't read it. There's a parallel between this verse here. Your desire will be for your husband will be your desire and he will rule over you.

I translated it literally. El is sheik for husband, your desire, your he will rule book over you. Yes, that is.

Now, this very similar wording occurs in Genesis 47b. The situation here is that Cain and Abel are offering very gifts. And the Lord is very displeased with Cain's gifts and very pleased with Abel's gift.

And Cain's upset about that. And God warns him that Satan or the is crouching at the door waiting for you. And for you will be its desire.

And you shall rule over it. Most of the translations don't get it that literal. And so you can't see El, El or you.

Same word here and we're here. And you shall rule. We're there over it.

And we're there just over it instead of her or you. So that parallel, which is so surprising and so remarkable, I think is a strong warrant for letting this supply the meaning for this. Because this is more clear.

You got a lion. He's crouching. I could go back and crouching like a lion.

Satan's crouching. You can trace that word through. He's ready to pounce on you.

And it's desire. And for you will be its desire. Desire for what? What does Satan want to do? Have sex with you? Hardly.

He wants to master you. He wants to rule you. He wants to get you to do what he wants you to do here.

This is a desire for being an overlord or ruler or getting them to do what you want to do. And you shall rule over it. You're going to resist that.

You're going to stop that. You're not going to let him succeed. Don't let Satan succeed in desiring or mastering you.

So here's my interpretation then of the curse that's on the woman. Part of it. Your desire will be for your husband means ever since the fall.

One expression of the fall is the dominance of women over men. Aggressive desire to control or to rule men. And you can do it in several ways.

You can do it in the old fashioned way. Drop your hinky. Or you can do it in the more modern way of just be a glorious Steinem type aggressive feminist.

There's different ways to do it. But the desire to master your man and control him is part of the fall. And the counterpart with men is they hate it and they love it.

And so they can be passive for a little while and then abuse. So it explodes in all different kinds of ways. A very complex thing the way the ugliness between men and women manifests itself today.

And so I don't want you to come away thinking a couple of things here. I want to disabuse you that a woman's sexual desire is a part of the fall. I don't think that's here.

Or I don't want you to see he will rule over her as part of a man's calling. This is a desire to do what Satan wanted to do here. I think master.

And this is the fallen counterpart to what happens. Namely men say a prostitute for example. That's a good form of a corrupt way of ruling.

It's a sad, sad vocation. And it is an unbelievable mingling of mastery and slavery. Isn't it? Maybe some of you have been there or have sisters or pimps that you know.

It's an unbelievable mingling of I have power here over this jerk. And then he overpowers her. And she is a winner and a loser.

She thinks it's just it's an awful kind of thing that happens. That's just one form of it. And the form is he he wins and he loses.

Well, the point there. Point number eight is simply to get rid of this argument for men's ruling. I don't want you to think that the leadership of men that I'm talking about is called for or described in that verse.

The last argument in Genesis before we jump over to Ephesians and first Peter and see it redeemed is this one. Remember, we're arguing for God's willed, godly, loving leadership for men and a woman's joyful support of that leadership as they partner together to rule the world. God named man and woman, man.

This is the book of the generation. Genesis five, one to three. This is the book of the generations of Adam.

Adam is the generic Hebrew word for man, similar to our word for man. At least it used to be generic. There's a great, great effort to try to make it not generic today.

And it may succeed. I mean, language is that way. It may work.

But I don't think it succeeded quite yet. And I don't think it should. But that's another issue.

This is the book of the generations of Adam, man. In the day when God created Adam, he made him masculine pronoun in the likeness of God. He created them.

It's also masculine them. Because there isn't there isn't any pronoun in Hebrew and there isn't any in. I mean, English has a has an up on Hebrew here because the word them in English is neither masculine or feminine.

Whereas you've got to choose in Hebrew them feminine or them masculine. And he chose masculine. Just all you could say that's just a that's a historical linguistic fluke.

Or you could say in his providence, God is speaking the masculine word for the generic Adam. And he's choosing masculine pronouns only to say there is from the beginning in God's mind a representative function for the man in the relationship. He created them male and female, and he blessed them and named them Adam.

And that's remarkable. He named them Adam. In view of verse three, especially in the day when they were created, when Adam had lived 130 years, he became the father of a son.

Now, do you see what's happened? If you didn't have verse three, you probably could make a plausible case that nothing should be made of this because we're stuck with the generic masculine word Adam. Like man in English, but when you when you see that Adam is the name of this man, this individual who has sons, he's not talking about Adam and Eve anymore. Adam is the name of the husband.

And then you read back and you say, and he named man and woman Adam. So when Aaron and Betsy, a couple of weeks ago, stood here and and they stood right there and I stood here and we did this glorious thing called a wedding. They asked me to introduce them as Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Young.

Now, I don't usually do that. I usually say, may I present to you, Aaron and Betsy Young, because that feels like a compromise that most women can live with. Use their first name, at least, you know.

But but these folks and many of you have come to embrace a beautiful picture of representative headship that is not oppressive to the woman. This is Betsy's. Yes.

Yes. Say it that way. A beautiful thing here of trust and love and leadership that I hope as the years go by, Bethlehem, all you younger folks who are hearing this kind of teaching and I hope you're hearing it as a positive alternative to maybe some ugly caricatures that you've seen or heard.

We'll grow up into it and model for the culture and model for the nations and for the churches that there is a way to be male and female. That's right here and involves not male dominance, but male representation and male leadership, male burden bearing. OK, that's the end of my my argument from Genesis.

So now I'm going to direct your attention to the New Testament. I'm tempted to stop and take questions. And I'm tempted not to, not because I'm afraid of the questions.

There's one already got his hand up. I will take one or two. But if I let if I let it loose here, we will never, ever see this other side.

But go ahead. I'm almost sure. There it is.

It's just book. And there's no yet. That's an interpretation.

You got any other versions out there? Give me some other versions. Give me the N.I.V. Or the N.I.V. say. Say yet.

Nothing. What? Read it out loud. OK, he doesn't.

This little this little line right there is that is the is the Hebrew and and it can mean anything. You know, it just it's just a connector. They occur by the thousands.

So this is the interpretation that you're hearing here. And it may be right. It may be wrong.

If if what I'm saying that that should not give the impression that something positive is following something negative. That was the observation case. You didn't hear.

The question was, does the word yet here signify that in view of something negative here, something positive is to follow? And so I would be wrong to interpret this as part of the fall. And I'm arguing now that word yet should not connote that because it's not in the Hebrew. There are 50 of your questions answered in the book, 50 questions.

And I really encourage you. Get the little blue book or by the big blue book and look at chapter three, which is the same thing as the little blue book. And it's 50 of the hardest questions I could think of to ask.

And my attempt at an answer. So they're there. All right.

Ephesians five is the most extended and beautiful description of the redeemed wreckage. Of chapter three of Genesis in the Bible. So I'm going to take it and I'm going to read that plus first Peter three, which is another long and important one.

And we'll we'll be on this tonight and part of next week because there's so much to see here and to draw out by way of implication and application that we couldn't begin to do it all tonight. Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Now, that's addressed to everybody in the church.

Wives. Be subject to your husbands. As to the Lord.

For the husband is the head that this subject, which is really a carryover from this. It's not in the text. It's just assumed to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Wives to your husbands. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church. He himself being the savior of the body.

But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. That he might represent that he might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she would be holy and blameless.

So husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies, which is a form of Jesus commandment. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. He who loves his own wife loves himself.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. Just as Christ also does the church because we're members of his body. For this reason, the man is capitalized because the quote from Genesis 2, 24.

For this reason, a man shall be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I'm speaking with reference to Christ and the church when I speak of this mystery. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife, even as himself and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

Let's start with the word mystery. Why does he call it a mystery? You know, the word mystery is what the usual meaning of mystery is in Paul's language. Usually, mystery does not connote something unintelligible, but something hidden for a long time and now revealed.

So what's been hidden and what's revealed? And sometimes the hiddenness is only partial. And sometimes it's more full. Well, he's referring to this text where a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall be joined, the man to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

So the one flesh union of a man and a woman, he says, is a mystery. So what's been hidden about that? What didn't they know in the Old Testament about that? Well, they had a dim idea when the prophets came along and revealed that God treated Israel like a wife. Language all over the prophets to the fact that this is his wife, Ezekiel 16.

I found you floundering in your blood and I wooed you. You were young and we made love together. These are unbelievable images of God taking Israel to be his wife.

So there were pointers that the people of God were to relate to him as wife to husband. But very little, if anything, in the Old Testament to the effect that Messiah and a new people of God, including the nations, would be husband and wife. That's new.

And he says this mystery, looking back here of the union of wife and husband, this mystery is great. Many interprets. I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

So my interpretation of this is that from the beginning, man is male and female in one flesh union were intended to portray either prophetically in the Old Testament or in reality today. Portray, dramatize, be a parable of Christ's relationship to the church and the church's relationship to Christ, which is exactly what we find here developed. That's an awesome calling for husbands and wives.

That's a meaning of marriage that nobody on the street would give who's not a Christian. He walked up and did a survey on the street. Or you said, why did God create man, male and female and ordained marriage? You wouldn't get this answer.

Namely, he did it so that there would be millions of parables of the Messiah and his love affair with his church. You just wouldn't get that answer. But that's the answer.

The answer of why there are marriages in the world, pagan marriages and Christian marriages, is that Christ, God, means to strew the world with images of his relationship to his people. That's the meaning of marriage. And so go home and become that would be the message of tonight if you're married.

And if you're not married, support that, pray for that, envision that. And if it's God's will, move toward that. But if it's not God's will, as a single person, you can believe in that with all your heart.

Let me put in a parenthesis for single people here now. Oh, this could be a long parenthesis. Because I'll tell you, with my view of divorce and remarriage, I believe in singleness with a vengeance.

I really believe in singleness. That it's a high calling. And I'll tell you why I regard it as a high calling.

You know the main reason? Tell me my main reason. Just tell me. Jesus was single.

That's my main reason. Jesus was the most fulfilled and completely human person that ever walked planet Earth. Or ever will walk planet Earth.

And he never had sexual intercourse. And I say it like that because back when I was dealing with these things some years ago. When condoms were being advertised on TV and there was this big ruckus in the

Twin Cities.

And I was going public and the TV stations were over here filming John Piper up in his study. Getting me to say things about this. And I was going ballistic because I thought this was awful.

And I don't do that stuff anymore. Because it just, you know, to use half your day to get a two second sound bite at night is not a useful economy of scale. But anyway, I got letters that showed me where people were at when they read these editorials that I and a Catholic and a Lutheran teamed up on to write.

And one guy said, how dare you presume to tell me that I shouldn't experience the fullness of my humanity by living with my girlfriend and having sex all we want. Because that's what we're made for. He was good enough to give me his return address.

So, I did write back to him and my main response was, listen, I do believe sex is a gift of God. I believe it's a beautiful and good thing. And I believe God has created a beautiful velvet shrine where there's diamonds to be kept called marriage.

And I do believe that you are diminishing your humanity because Jesus was the greatest of all humans and he never had sex. It's been in my mind ever since those days to say to single people, when you go to bed at night and you say, you know, you're chaste right now. You go to bed and you say, you know, I may live 75 years and never know what sexual intercourse is really like.

That's okay. You will be a great human being. You will be a great human being.

In our day especially. Because Jesus made it to age 33. You're pretty heavy duty wired between the age 13 and 33.

It's easy after 33 if you can make it to 33. And he made it. Now, let's see.

We're talking about single people here. Here's another thing. The greatest single people are people who are single people who don't resent married people.

And like to be around them and don't feel squashed and frustrated and incomplete. And I can name some in this church, some great single people that are full and complete. Oh, I'm tempted to.

But I won't. One of them emailed me the other day. It was so good.

But I better not. You'll know who it is if I tell you anymore. Another reason I want to say amen to singleness is because Paul was single and he wanted everybody to be single.

And he considered marriage to be a coping mechanism for those who couldn't hack it. Now, he didn't put that on us. He kind of backed off that in 1 Corinthians 7 and said, nevertheless, everyone has his own gift.

You do not sin. But you kind of feel like that's not real enthusiastic, Paul. But he did like this.

In other words, he was a single person. There was a theological reason for why he said that. Namely, he said, in view of the impending distress, that is, the kinds of crises that you get into if you're all out for Jesus.

He who desires to live a godly life will be persecuted. Well, which is harder? To watch your wife be persecuted or to be persecuted? To watch your wife be tortured or your kids be tortured or to be tortured?

Paul's not going to carry any woman around like Peter did. Now, Peter was probably already married when he got converted.

So he's going to carry this woman around and she must have been an amazing woman to go all over the Middle East with Peter like that. But Paul wouldn't do it because he said, the problem is, is hard enough to cope with the pressures of life as a single person. Then to have to divert your energies away from flat out mission to constantly thinking about what will make her happy.

So in view of this kind of post fall situation. So you might be sitting there thinking, wait a minute, wait a minute. What about Genesis 2 18? It is not good for man to be alone.

Doesn't Paul read his Bible? And the answer to that is that was spoken before the fall. It is still true as a word about nature. That's the way we're wired, the way we're made and it's not sin to be married.

Thank God. I am one. But after the fall, everything is different.

And there are redemptive factors that come in alongside nature factors. So nature and grace, the issue sometimes, this issue of nature and grace and how nature relates to grace. And part of life is now not just, oh, we're all created male and female and it's not good that they should be alone.

So everybody should be married. Well, that that is an oversimplification of the wreckage of humanity. The wreckage of humanity is there are the law people who want 300 missionaries.

And it may well be that a man senses a call and the one he's in love with doesn't sense it at all. And given the fact that we don't just live in Genesis 2 18, but we live in Matthew 28, 19 and 20. He says, I'm sorry.

I'm going. And he goes and he's single the rest of his life. Maybe.

In other words, it's just complex. That's all I'm saying. There's no easy answer to whether you should be single or married.

And I've dealt with a lot of you. I love your hearts. When you wrestle with this like this, you wonder, am I? I'll just be honest with you.

Nope. Can't say it. Good.

I got victory over that. I wanted to tell you a story about a concrete person in this church that just is, is, has been torn with. I was going to tell you who it was.

I won't just torn with whether to pursue a relationship as to whether he loves her too much. Too much in comparison with Jesus. I'm working through that with.

OK, close princess on singles. There's lots more to say there and you can send me your questions. I'll try to do more, but let me just spin out a few more of the implications of this.

And here's what we'll do next week. Here's where we'll start next week after I'm done tonight. I want to talk about a definition of headship and a definition of submission right off the bat next week.

So if you're wondering, women, OK, what's he going to say that submission really means? And you men are thinking, well, what in the world does my headship head subject mean? Those are the crucial issues. So that's where we'll start next week. But preparing for that, let me just make sure that you see something

here.

If I'm right down here, that the mystery of marriage is that it was designed by God in the beginning to be a reflector, a parable, a drama of Christ's relationship to the church. Then women are called by God not after the fall, but before the fall in their ideal condition to take their cues from the way the church should relate to Jesus. And men are called to take their cues from the way Jesus relates to the body, his church.

And Paul now draws out the implication, well, Jesus leads his church and he protects his church and he provides for his church. I'm going to draw those three things out in my definition next week of headship. And the church is not slavish and unwilling and oppressed in her relationship to King Jesus.

She's thrilled to belong to Jesus or something's wrong. She loves following Jesus. She loves making much of the leadership of Jesus.

And in a good marriage, a husband is taking his cues from Jesus and he's laying his wife down, life down for his wife. He's laying his life down for his wife in order to make her all that she can be. And he's taking responsibility for leadership and provision and protection.

And he's doing it in such a way that she's coming alive and flourishing and she can't say enough good about this man and his leadership. And she's pushing him and praising him forward all the time, which also is a flourishing kind of thing. They kind of compete in that wonderful way.

That's a great marriage when that happens. And it's all right here in who you take your cues from. Two observations quickly before we're done.

What about mutual submission? Because that if you say, OK, OK, well, what in the world do feminists and egalitarians do with this text? Well, frankly, massacre it, except for verse 21. It is amazing. You just get any book, get any book on the egalitarian side and read this text and see what they do with it.

What they'll do is they'll say, OK, verse 21 is the title be subject to one another. Therefore, nothing that is said here can contradict even Stephen, one another relationship. None of this over and under this hierarchical patriarchal stuff, because it's just this.

One another. That's that's that is all that's all the exegesis you're going to get just about. Here's the problem with that.

Does a description of how to submit to one another in the terms of Christ in the church nullify verse 21? No. Why not let the text tell us how a husband and wife submit to each other? Do they submit to each other in exactly the same ways? And the answer to this text is absolutely not. No more than Jesus and the church submit to each other in exactly the same ways.

Jesus submits to the church in that he lays down his life for her. He bounds, binds a towel around himself and gets down on his feet, washes her feet so that she might be clean. He protects her.

He dies for her sins. He makes her pure and holy. And she submits to him by praising his leadership and saying, this is the man I want to follow.

So very often. And I'll stop with this. Very often you'll you'll find a reference, say, to Piper.

You and these complementarian types, you and these hierarchical types, you don't understand servant leadership. Because in Luke 22, 26, it says the nations lord it over one another and desire to be called benefactors. But it shall not be so among you.

The leader among you shall be your servant. See, I say, see what? See what? Well, see, there's only there's no hierarchy. I said, well, wait a minute.

This is the Lord's Supper at the Lord's Supper. Jesus takes his off outer garment off. He puts a towel around.

He gets a bowl of water and kneels down and washes their feet. That's what husbands are supposed to do. Did anybody in that room at that moment doubt who the leader was? I mean, they trembled with the thought.

You're not going to wash my feet, Peter said. Jesus, if I don't wash your feet, you have no part in me. Wash my, wash me all over.

Go ahead, wash me all over. Peter was really, I love Peter. Don't you love his personality? You cannot play off servant leadership against leadership.

Servant leadership means servant leadership. Servant leadership, not servant. Subtract the leadership because now it's servant leadership.

That is nonsense. A man can lead as a servant. He leads in love.

He can lay down his wife as he, keep saying lay down his wife. There's a psychological name for that. But we don't believe in Freud around here.

He should lay down his life for her as a servant leader. Well, I'm trying to pack too much in these closing minutes. We'll pick it up right there.

Let me pray with you. Father in heaven, I know that as a husband I have much to become for Noel. And as a father for my children.

But I see a vision, Lord. A Christ-like, humble, servant, strong, loving, protecting, providing, leading husband in my Lord Jesus. Toward me.

Which I want to be toward Noel. And I see a church out there that loves Christ. Is freed by Christ.

Purified by Christ. Released by Christ. Fulfilled by Christ.

Finding their gifts in the service of Christ. Which wives can grow into. And that's what we're after.

Make it happen among us, I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

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