

INTRODUCTION

I read an article that identified some of the differences between men and women. They include the following. #1 – A man will pay \$10 for a \$5 item he needs. A woman will pay \$5 for a \$10 item she doesn't need because it's on sale. #2 – A man has six items in his bathroom: toothbrush, razor, shaving cream, bar of soap, deodorant, and a towel from Motel 6. A woman has an average of 328 items in her bathroom most of which a man wouldn't be able to identify. #3 – A woman worries about the future – until she gets a husband. A man never worries about the future – until he gets a wife. And #4 – A woman marries a man expecting that he will change, but he doesn't. A man marries a woman expecting that she won't change, and she does. The author was being facetious of course but his article does make the obvious point. Men and women, by their natures, are different.

That raises a question. God made human beings in His image. Why in that regard did He create two genders, male and female? It's because, He Himself has two sides and that's what I'm going to preach about today, focusing on the less familiar of those.

The Masculine Side

Consider a fact. The Bible consistently presents a male image of God. First, His names are generally masculine nouns. Second, the Bible's supreme revelation of Him is as "**our Father.**" And third, He came in the flesh as a man. Jesus is the Son not the Daughter of God. There are at least two reasons that the Bible presents God as male.

One is that maleness generally and Fatherhood particularly, by default, best express His defining attribute, self-existence. He has the power of being within Himself so that He always was. Everything else that exists, in contrast, was created and is sustained – by Him. That's why the Bible doesn't picture Him as "**Mother.**" Motherhood depends on an outside source in order to conceive. A woman conceives only when an

outside action is imposed on her body. But God depends on no outside source in order to conceive. He conceives or creates, and sustains, from the power of His own being. The Bible presenting Him as Mother would suggest otherwise, that He depends on an outside source.

The Bible presents Him as a male for a second reason. It's to emphasize His power. Men are generally bigger and stronger than women are. That explains the Bible's masculine image of God. It suggests that He is powerful and He is, limitlessly so.

Take one aspect of his power, energy, as an example of what I mean. In November of 2013, orbiting telescopes detected the most powerful burst of energy ever recorded. It was a supernova, an exploding star in another galaxy. It emitted more energy in several seconds than our sun would emit in 10 billion years. Compare that energy with the energy this match emits when I light it. Now consider this. The difference between the energy of the supernova and the energy of the match is less than the difference between the energy of God and the energy of the supernova. His energy, in fact, is infinitely greater than the supernova's, which illustrates that He's all-powerful.

That then is why the Bible presents a masculine image of God. It's to express His self-existence and limitless power.

The Feminine Side

But there's a second side to Him and our text, Isaiah 49:14-18, reveals it. Isaiah had prophesied that God would exile the people of Judah into Babylon because of their sins. He then further prophesied that God would deliver them from exile and bring them back to Judah. Verse 14 records what the people of Judah thought when they were in exile – that He had forgotten them. But He responds to that thought of theirs in verse 15. He tells them, by way of comparison, that He hasn't forgotten them. He says that what He thinks and feels about them is like what a mother thinks and feels about her nursing child. He's like the mother and they're like the mother's nursing child.

We see a similar idea in Luke 13:34-35 in conjunction with Luke 19:41. In those verses, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. He had gone to the city, offered His love, and was spurned. Now, broken hearted, He weeps and laments, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem how often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”** Jesus uses a fascinating simile here. We’ve heard someone say to a nurturing woman, **“you’re like a mother hen.”** These verses show us that is what Jesus was like. According to His own words, He was like a mother hen.

Our two texts teach us a vital truth about God. He has a feminine side. I’m not being a liberal in saying that. The Bible teaches that He is spirit not flesh, blood, and bones. The fact is that He doesn’t have a gender. He isn’t a male or a female, a Father or a Mother. But there are several things about Him that we associate with women more than men.

Isaiah 49:15 and Luke 13:34 reveal one of those. It’s nurturing love. Let me ask you a question. What is the greatest of all human loves? In my opinion, it’s the love of a mother for her nursing child. Think about it. It’s unique. This child has come from inside the mother herself. He has been part of her very existence and being for nine months. He has drawn his very life from her and continues to do so after birth. Those dynamics create in the mother a tender, sensitive, emotional, nurturing love that exists in no other human relationship.

A mother’s testimony illustrates this: **“I have experienced love-at-first-sight my life only one time: the night my daughter was born. I remember them placing her slippery little body into my frail, shaky arms. And the moment I saw her, touched her; all at once, I loved her. All of me, loved all of her. This avalanche happened in my heart and never stopped flowing. A love so violent, so powerful—I did not even know I was capable of it. Like something burst; the floodgates broke open, and would never close again. She had done nothing to win or lose my affection, to prove her ability, to show her worth. It didn’t matter. I knew her worth.**

And I would love her forever. Simply because: *she was mine.*"

That's powerful and helps us grasp what Isaiah 49:15 teaches. That mother's love for her nursing daughter pales in comparison to God's love for us. Her love for her daughter is inferior to His for us. I wrote a note in my Bible beside verse 15, "**This is the strongest expression of God's love in the Bible,**" and it is. All of Him loves all of you, singular.

Those then are two sides of God. The first is His masculine side. He is self-existent and limitlessly powerful. The second is His feminine side. He has a tender, sensitive, emotional, and nurturing love for us.

Love God

Now, understanding the feminine side of God is crucial because it is the key to doing what we were made to do. It's what the Bible calls the greatest of all commandments – loving Him with our whole being.

Some years ago, the mother of two small children came to my office and shared a struggle of hers. "**Am I supposed to love God more than I do my children?**" she asked. "**Yes, you are,**" I answered. "**But I can't,**" she replied, "**They came from me and I see, hear, and feel them every day. I don't think it's possible for anyone to love God more than their children.**"

Her comments raise a valid issue. God commands us to love Him with our whole being. But is that possible? Can human beings stuck in time and space love a God they can't see that way, more than they do human beings they can see? Mother Teresa addressed that very issue. She said: "**This is the command of our great God, and He cannot command the impossible. Everyone can reach this love**" She was right. God never commands the impossible. He commands us to love Him with our whole being, more than we do anyone else, which means that we can.

There is empirical evidence of that, which is His friends down through the centuries who have done so. Madam Guyon called her love for Him "**a totally abandoned love to the Lord.**" Walter Hinton called

his “**love on fire with devotion.**” Richard Foster calls his “**a white hot love for God.**” The bottom line is this. God commands us to love Him with our whole being. And since He never commands what we can’t do, we can love Him that way.

But loving Him that way isn’t a direct freedom. We can’t just decide to do that and then instantaneously do it. It’s precisely there that pastors fail their congregations. They tell them to love God but nothing else. Loving Him, however, is an indirect freedom. There is a something else we have to do first, which then enables us to do that. That something else is two things.

Make Loving Him Our First Aim

First, we make loving God with our whole being the first aim of our lives. We do so for good reason. It’s because loving Him that way is the deepest need of human beings. He is the dominant reality of the universe, utterly lovely and competent. Because He is, we act *for* reality by loving Him with our whole being. Conversely, we act *against* it by not loving Him with our whole being.

Do you realize what that means? Nothing of ultimate importance in our persons and lives will go right if we don’t love God. But everything will go right if we do. Loving Him has what are called “tentacles of impact.” It reaches into every aspect of our persons and lives and sets things right – spiritually, psychologically, socially, and behaviorally. That makes it the deepest need of human beings.

Since it is, it logically follows that we should make loving God with our whole being the first aim, the overriding objective, of our lives. We should arrange all of our affairs around what it takes to do that.

Experience His Love

What it takes to do that is to experience His love. That’s the second thing we must do to love Him. It’s to experience His feminine side. Love for Him is awakened in us by experiencing His love for us. We feel its

call. Most of us have experienced this to one degree or another on the human level. Unless we're mentally ill or perverse, it's difficult for us not to love someone who deeply loves us. It's hard to resist such love and if we're functional, we don't seek to. We simply yield to loving in return. It's like that with God. We experience Him loving us, which in turn compels us to love Him in return.

But what does it take (what do we have to do) to experience His love? Mother Teresa tells us. Let me finish that quotation of hers that I gave you earlier: **"This is the command of our great God, and He cannot command the impossible. Everyone can reach this love through meditation, the spirit of prayer, and sacrifice, by an intense interior life."** That's how we experience God's love, by an intense interior life. We routinely direct our minds and bodies with intensity to acting on Him and to being acted on by Him. Acting on and being acted on are how we experience human love and it's the same with God. I've preached before about the practices or activities by which we act on Him: building a thorough vision of Him, solitude and silence, fasting, study, prayer, worship, thanksgiving, lectio divina, practicing the presence, and more. As we routinely and with intensity act on God in those ways, He acts on us in return and we experience His love. That in turn eventually cultivates a love for Him in us.

Conclusion

I leave you in closing with the refrain of the hymn we're about to sing, *In the Garden*: **"And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own; And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known."** Many think that refrain is mushy and sentimental. But we who love God know better. It captures instead the very essence of our existence, which is this. God has a feminine side, a love for us the quality of which is beyond description. Let's arrange our affairs around experiencing that side of Him. We'll then be able to do what we were made to do – love Him with our whole being.