

## Risky Business: Revealing the True Nature of God

### *An Introduction*

#### Daniel 11:32

When I was a young Christian I was handed a book written by J.I. Packer entitled, *Knowing God*. I devoured that book. Packard's book along with Steven Charnock's classic work, *The Existence and Attributes of God* formed the foundation in my mind and heart on who God is and I haven't changed over the last three and a half decades in terms of my view of the attributes of God.

One of the verses that Packard built upon when he wrote his book was our text. Listen to it: Daniel is speaking and he says, "The people who know their God will display strength and take action.

If I am successful in this five week series, I believe on the other side of it, if you have come to faith in Jesus Christ; you're a child of God; you're a believer- a Christian; you will be stronger and you will take action because you know your God as He really is.

You see I'm going to show you in this series that the Scripture plainly declares that God possesses feminine attributes.

Now, for those of you who were raised in a religious tradition where when you heard the noun God or the pronoun Him or one of the names of God, like Father, you immediately saw God and see Him today as a man and only a man.

This series may come as a shock to you and so fasten your seatbelts, hold on tight, and realize that the standard for truth here at Emmanuel for me and for you, people who love Jesus Christ and love our Creator, who loved the Word of God; the standard of truth is the Word of God, not the traditions of men.

It's a little risky for me because some of you may say, "I just don't know about that"; you may even take some shots at me saying, "Well, Pastor Wade—he's not orthodox." I want to assure you not only am I orthodox; this is the view of Christians for centuries. Now in recent years in Western culture it may be a little different than what you are familiar with, but again our standard is the Word of God.

I've been reading the biography of Walter Cronkite and when he was a young man he was a UPI reporter embedded with the United States Army during WWII and he got lost in the forests of Belgium around the time of *The Battle of the Bulge* and it took him several hours to find his Company. He was in very dangerous territory and he was very upset.

When he eventually found his way out of the forest he saw the men that he was with—he said to them, "Why didn't you yell out my name? Why didn't you look for me—call out 'Cronkite'?" And they said, "Because Cronkite is a German name and if we would have hollered your name in that forest we would have been shot."

Well, there are some times when it is good for people to keep their mouth shut. Particularly when folks have a tendency to take shots at what you say.

## Risky Business: Revealing the True Nature of God

I've come to the place in my life and in my ministry where I believe in my heart that though this may be risky business for me, it is necessary for you because you will only be strong and do what needs to be done when you know God. Now, let's begin.

I want you to see that according to the Bible, God is spirit and is not gendered. In John 4, verse 24, the Scripture says God is spirit.

Now, as you grew up as a believer in Jesus Christ, knowing that God the Father gave His son to die at Calvary, and you came to faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ as I have; you came into an intimate relationship with God.

And there are times when you pray, "Our Father Who Art in Heaven," or you hear the words of Jesus as they are recorded for us in the book of Matthew, chapter six, where He says, "Your Heavenly Father knows what you need."

When we call God Father we do not mean that He is male. What we mean is He is spirit and in our relationship with the Creator of the Universe we sometimes view Him, because He reveals Himself to us, as a human father.

We see Him like our earthly fathers but we have to be careful. He is not a man. In fact, the Scripture says this specifically—God is not a man, but what He does for us is He provides for us; He protects us; He leads us; He even disciplines us like our human fathers do—only better.

In the same manner, when the Bible speaks of our God as a husband, it is not claiming that God is male, but that God, in His relationship with us, is like a good husband who loves and protects His wife.

In fact, when the Scripture speaks in Hosea, chapter two, in verse 16, "There is coming a day when you will call me 'my husband'." This doesn't mean that He is male. It means that you will know Him as protector and He provides all the attributes that a good husband has.

Why is this important to understand? Because the Bible also portrays God as possessing both male and female attributes. For example, Isaiah 66 verse 13, "God comforts His people like a mother comforts her children."

The Scripture says in Isaiah 49, verse 15, "Like a woman never forgets her nursing child, God never forgets His children."

In the same manner, when we see the word father; the Bible is not saying that God is a man. When we see that God is like a mother or a woman; it does not mean that He is a woman. He is spirit, but what He has are the attributes that we would consider both feminine and masculine.

In fact, this is one of the reasons why Christians in Africa, when they pray—Evangelical Bible believing Christians— will pray, "Father, Mother God."

## Risky Business: Revealing the True Nature of God

In Deuteronomy 32, verse 11, the Scripture portrays God as a mother eagle hovering over her young. In Luke 15, verses 8-10, the Scripture says that God is like a housekeeper looking for her lost coin. In Psalms 22, God cares for us, His people, like a midwife cares for a child she has just delivered.

In Hosea 13 in verse 8, God experiences the fury of a mother who has her cubs robbed from her and she goes after the robber. Jesus, in Luke 13, says that He longs for the people of Jerusalem like a mother hen longs for her chicks.

With that in mind, let me propose to you that according to Scripture; it is only in the man and the woman both that God is fully imaged. In other words, the idea that God is a man and men are created in His image, and that women are helpers of men and created in the image of man and not God—which is what some conservative Bible believing Christians are being taught—is totally foreign to the Word of God.

When God created man, He created male and female and both of them portray His image. Genesis chapter 1, verse 27, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them.”

The word man in this verse is the Hebrew word Adam. Notice that male and female fall within Adam— within man. It’s a little bit like in English when we use the phrase mankind or man in general. We are speaking of both men and women.

Here’s the point: When you understand what the Scripture teaches about the image of God—who He is—He is spirit, and He possesses both masculine and feminine attributes. When He created man (men includes both male and female) both are created in the image of God. In the Garden there was an equality.

For example, as a husband and a wife relate to each other, in terms of equality, this is what the Bible teaches: They image how the Father and the Son and the Spirit in the Trinity relate to one another, because we are both men and women created in God’s image.

What happened at *The Fall*, when sin entered the world, is that men seek to dominate women; women seek to dominate men; and rather than the New Covenant principle of grace where God’s people serve one another, and we get a taste of what heaven will be like, this world is full of gender wars.

I propose to you that when you really know God, you will take action. Let me explain.

I’ve written on this subject for a long time and because of that people across the United States have heard me teach or have read what I’ve written and people, strangers that I don’t know, call me and ask me what I think.

A few years ago there was a young lady, who called me, she was in tears. She was a student at a seminary in the United States (a Southern Baptist Seminary) and she had just completed her finals in either preaching or theology – I forget which class, but through her tears; she shared with me this story:

## Risky Business: Revealing the True Nature of God

That morning, she was to teach from the book of Matthew with her professor and class listening, but when she got up to teach, the professor stopped and said, “If there are men in here who do not wish to be subjected to the teaching of a woman, you may leave.” In her tears she said the entire classroom left and she taught to the walls. I don’t understand that.

I was president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. The last year of being president I was moderating the last business session, and as I was moderating, I was up on a platform and I could see many of my friends, people from the state of Oklahoma, pastors and others who were voting on the new officers of our state.

For the first time in the history of our convention there was a woman who was being nominated as an officer of the BGCO. A delightful lady in her fifties from Quail Springs Baptist Church.

I will never forget the image that is implanted and seared in my mind when I asked for all those in favor of voting, and I named her as vice president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma; would you please lift your hand?

When I said that; there were some men—preachers, men that I love; friends of mine —were in the audience who stood up, turned their chairs around, and put their backs toward the platform as a visual protest of a woman leading men. I don’t understand that.

You see, let me give you some application based upon understanding that God is spirit and not gendered. And that men and women created in the image of God give to us the full-orbed personality of our Creator.

Ladies, you are as much the image of your Creator as any man with whom you have relationship. This is one of the reasons why Jesus, when He told his disciples, He was very specific and said, “In heaven there is neither marriage nor the giving of marriage.”

Now contrary to what Mormons and Muslims and others teach—that men will have multiple wives in heaven, probably because in those religions which are often contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ; women are seen as objects of desire or helpers to the man who is in the image of God.

And they have lost sight of the very clear teaching of the revealed and inspired Word of God that men and women are created in God’s image. These religions will tell you that marriage lasts for eternity. It doesn’t. Jesus says it’s over.

Now, what you have on this earth, when you have a marriage where the man and the woman see themselves as equals it is a slice of heaven.

But if you ever get this old, religious, traditional, environment where the man is *the boss* – he is God and everyone else serves him; you have departed from the teaching of Scripture and the Spirit of God is probably not within that family.

## Risky Business: Revealing the True Nature of God

For example, a delightful couple who were in the first of our four services this morning told me in their small group that they invited some missionaries over to their home. They said they'd never forget when the man with his wife and kids were seated around the table and the man was ordering everyone in the family to serve him. "Sweetheart would you go get me a piece of pie? Hey, sweetheart would you do this?" He sat there while everyone served him and in his mind that was the way a Christian family was supposed to be. Not on your life!

There is equality in the image of God within a marriage in both the man and the woman. It is wonderful if the wife wishes to serve her husband. In fact, we'll see and we'll talk about this next week—how Jesus, in Him, all the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelt—He served. If you want to know what it is like to be a real man, look at Jesus. There's nothing wrong with a woman serving her husband. What's wrong is when the husband demands it from the woman or vice versa.

In that same small group this morning a family gave me permission to share this story. Their daughter, her name is Sarah – gifted, gifted Bible teacher; she's been gifted by the Spirit to teach the Word of God.

Every Easter at her church in California, she has taken my series – one of my favorites "The Feasts and Festivals of Israel" where I show that these feasts and festivals portray Jesus Christ and what He did for us at Calvary and she has taught this series for ten years in her church.

Every Easter her class gets bigger, and bigger, and bigger. This past Easter it was overflowing with men and women standing within that classroom as she taught the Word of God.

The men of her church came to her class last Easter and said, "You can no longer teach this. There are men in this classroom." They took the outlines-*my outlines*. They took them from her, handed them to a man, and said, "You teach the class," and made her sit in the front row.

I hope the leaders of that church find out about this message and listen to what I'm about to say. When you take from a God-called, spirit-filled, gifted woman, the ability to minister to men and women as God has enabled and gifted her to minister, you basically open the door of your church and invite the Holy Spirit to leave.

Why? Because when God created us, He created us in His image and the man and the woman, the male and the female are in the image of God.

Second, men whatever you do to women you're doing to God. Do you want to know why pornography is so awful? The world doesn't understand this; they can't comprehend it. They have no understanding of who God is and how He created man.

And so what you have in the world, and even within the church, are men who see women as objects of desire and you have men who see that God gave women to men; to serve men, to help men, and because of that; we have lost the teaching of Scripture that we only know God in the fullness of both men and women.

## Risky Business: Revealing the True Nature of God

Men treat women as objects of desire—God forbid! Oh, but let's not go even into the extremes of men dominating women in pornography; let's just talk about the casual Christian ways that men put their thumb over women.

I'll give you an example. I renewed acquaintance with my cousin this Thanksgiving—delightful man. He was a stock broker in New York, very, very, successful and made a lot of money. 9-11 occurred, he decided that he was going to quit being a stock broker and move his family out of New York City. His wife was an executive for Nike and they moved to Portland, Oregon.

They came to Thanksgiving; I visited with them—haven't seen them in years. They have three beautiful kids, kids who have an understanding of personhood, who have an understanding of what it means to relate to adults, who look you in the eye and you see the spirit within them. You sense where they are as human beings.

But my cousin has not worked, bringing in income for decades; he's been at home caring for the kids. His wife is now the head of the billion and a half dollar division of Nike, called "Air Jordan."

They both love Jesus Christ, they both invest their lives in their children, but their roles are a little bit different than what the traditional conservative might say their roles should be.

Oh, but if they ever come to Emmanuel they will be set free to understand that there is nothing wrong with what they are doing. What becomes wrong is if they demanded that everyone else be like them in like manner.

My wife cared for our children—didn't work for many years until our children were grown – just about out of the home. Then she went back and got her bachelor's degree and is working on her doctorate. That was the choice that we made.

It's wrong if we tell you that your family has got to look like ours. God is more interested in the functionality of the individual in the family than He is the form of the family in which the individual resides.

My encouragement to you is to realize that men and women both are in the image of God which leads me to the last thing.

We find that it is impossible to rightly know God and find real spiritual strength apart from gender equality. The fact of the matter is ... you can be a man and you can display maternal, tender, compassionate attributes to your children and there is nothing wrong with that. You're an image of God.

Ladies, you can be a woman, a mother, a wife, and you can display characteristics of leadership. You can lead in ways, because of your gifts, that people marvel and there's nothing wrong with that. You are imaging God. He is Spirit and He has both male and female attributes—masculine and feminine characteristics.

## Risky Business: Revealing the True Nature of God

You say, “Well, Pastor, how can you spend five weeks on this? Why is it that important for us?” Well, I think by the time we’re done, you’ll understand that your view of this will touch every area of your life.

I cannot tell you how many young women with children whose husbands broke covenant with them, violated their agreement with God, and abused the trust of their wives and abandoned their wives with young kids—the courts decided that the kids would be with mom. And those young ladies have said to me ‘I can’t do it—I have to have a man in my life.’ No. You have all you need. You have God.

It would work vice versa as well. When you enter into relationship with someone from the opposite gender you treat them, out of the security of who you are in Christ, you treat them with dignity and respect and equality as a human being in the image of God. When you begin to understand that—all of your relationships change.

I close with this story and this is very personal to some of you. My friend, Paul Young, who wrote, *The Shack*—18 million copies sold.

Paul is coming back in April to speak at Emmanuel on his new book *Cross Roads*.

When he was here to speak to Emmanuel about his book *The Shack* Paul was ambushed by mutual friends of ours; conservative, evangelical Bible believing Christians who really despised the fact that in his book, *The Shack*, Paul Young portrayed God as a large African American woman. They called him a heretic. They called him all kinds of names because this is the way he viewed God.

I defended him and still do because when people know the back story of Paul Young; it makes sense. He was the son of missionaries, taken into the South Pacific by his parents to minister to cannibals on an isolated island. His father preached the Gospel; his mother ministered to the people there as a doctor, giving medicine and giving treatment.

They developed relationships and when Paul was very young, between one and two years of age; they entrusted their son to some of the natives that they had developed relationships with.

For the next six years what Paul’s parents did not know is that the men of that island took their son and ritualistically and sexually abused him. The only moments of safety, the only moments of comfort, the only moments of inner peace he had was when the large African American black women interrupted the rituals; pushed the men back and rescued the white child.

Paul Young went to college as an evangelical believer in Christ, he had a hard time viewing God as a man and everybody around him said, “You’ve got to view God as a man—that’s who God is.”

And Paul Young began to study the scriptures and he saw that God is spirit and when the Scripture calls Him Father we are to see Him like our earthly father; except even better. And when the Scripture calls Him Mother we are to see Him like our earthly mother; even better.

## Risky Business: Revealing the True Nature of God

He has both the attributes of the male and the female and so when Paul wrote the book, *The Shack*, for his kids and printed it at *Kinko's* for Christmas for his kids; God was portrayed as a woman because that was the only safety the sexually molested Paul Young had.

I'll never forget when he stood at the back of the church and you filed by to get the book signed and I saw the breaking in the hearts of many women and men in our church because they began to understand that their image of God has always been like the image of an earthly father and the book helped them be freed from that image.

Listen to me ladies. Your God is spirit and He is as much to you a mother as He is a Father. When you begin to understand the truth that He has both masculine and feminine attributes then when you blush at those experiences that you have not shared with many people about a male who violated you; you can just relax and be at peace because your God is not like any earthy man you have ever known.

Next Sunday, I'm going to show you Emmanuel, when God came to earth, He came as a physical man; but in Him all the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelt. And I will show you men that if you ever want to be a true man don't follow after the garbage you are hearing in evangelical Christian circles where you've got to be a certain way to prove your manhood. No. Be like Christ who, in Him, had the power to take a whip and drive the Pharisees from the temple but He also had the intimacy and the compassion to sit beside a prostitute and treat her with dignity.

By the time we're done this Christmas I pray you men will never look at women the same again.

For those of you who say, "Pastor, that's just political liberalism—that's nonsense, that's feminism." No, it's not. I don't like feminism. I don't like patriarchy. This is the biblical teaching of the nature of God and when we're done I believe we will be a church who respects the dignity of both sexes.