



Chapter One

Diversity in God's Image

Both men and women possess and display some aspect of being created in the likeness of God.

In any case it is the male and the female together who constitute the image of God, in a more profound sense than either of them standing alone — Mike Mason (Mason 2005, 143)

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:17 — NIV

One of the main struggles that couples often face at some point, in their relationship, has to do with seeing the unique way that God has made each of them. Often time couples observe their spouse acting in ways that are different than how they would do so. Without having the ability to verbalize and work through these differences, husbands and wives are forced to draw conclusions about the intentions behind their spouse's behaviors. When our spouse does behave in ways opposite how we would act, often the behavior gets judged as irrational and maybe even harmful.

Ultimately, the accumulation of those negative judgments might lead us to develop a negative attitude toward our spouse altogether. It is not too difficult then, for us to see how negative attitudes about one another might have destructive ramifications for the relationship. To illustrate, I once counseled a wife who complained that her husband Tom was overly "harsh" with her because, he once commented that the amount of heat she was using to cook the green beans would have scorched them. According to Carol, it was the right amount. Who was correct? Who's to say? Counselors face these kinds of situations with couples constantly.

After interviewing Tom we discovered that his intention was to *prevent* Carol from experiencing a cooking failure that might have caused her to feel bad about herself. It was *not* intended to point out that she was a failure even though that was how she was interpreting his comment. Deep down he was really trying to help her, and was not really attacking her ability to cook green beans. Hopefully, you can see that Tom's intentions had loving designs even though, Carol saw it quite differently.

The straightforwardness he demonstrated with her was different than the more *indirect* method she would have

taken with him. How do you view directness? Is there any value in using it ever? Most of us would agree that it can be appropriate at times, especially if someone you love is about to step out in front of a speeding bus. In a situation like that we must act quickly and with clarity. Indeed there is value in straightforwardness just as there is merit in less confrontational approaches at times. In the green bean incident, perhaps Tom's directness *may have been* out of place.

One thing is for certain, Carol was unable to appreciate this aspect of Tom's character. I fully recognize that this is an exaggeration but, what if the couple was barely scraping by and this was their last can of green beans? Tom's imperativeness may not have been so out of place under those circumstances, especially if the beans became unfit to eat. Besides helping them to see value in the two opposing approaches, there was one other thing that this conflict brought to light.

Simply seeing each other's differing methods of voicing concern showed Tom and Carol something about themselves and each other. It highlighted their different natures. They came to recognize that they were different and that the different ways they each approached life was not necessarily right or wrong but were really just different ways of accomplishing the same thing. The real problem between Tom and Carol was that their individual approaches were so drastically different from one another. This brought them to another reality.

If we do not become biased in our opinions, and dogmatic in our ways then, recognizing the different approaches that other people take can help us to find merit in our diversity rather than building resentment over our differences. If we *are* dogmatic, and have to have things done our way, then

we will not embrace the value that comes from diversity but will resist it instead. I think you would agree that diversity is generally good. After all, if we were all identical, all but one of us would be redundant and unnecessary. As it is we each bring something unique to the table. Therefore every difference has the potential of bearing a positive influence on how we think and behave. No better example of this is our relationship with God.

By embracing a relationship with Him we become more like Christ in the process. Ephesians 4:15 tells us that this is something that He wants to happen. As we discovered in the introduction, the Bible aims to change us also. Influencing each other in positive ways is precisely what God intends for your marriage to do as well. This is what is behind Paul's thinking in Ephesians 5:21 where he writes to husbands and wives that they should "*Submit to each other out of reverence for Christ.*" Our different attitudes, ideas and ways of doing things can be either a source for conflict or they can be valued for the positive things that they can contribute.

Our Nature Revealed