

Genesis 1:27-28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Today is the second installment of a monthly series that we are doing throughout 2018. We've titled the series "Perspicacity," which isn't a familiar term to most of us:

perspicacity \ pər-spə-'ka-sə-tē \ noun \ the ability to understand somebody/something very quickly and accurately.¹

Perspicacity – Sexual Harassment

This second installment deals with one of the most volatile and yet unsettled issues in our culture today - the issue of sexual harassment.

A number of sociopolitical issues coalesced in 2017 to shed light upon an aspect of our society that had been tragically overlooked and aggressively covered-up by those in powerful positions. Nonetheless, the searing allegations against Harvey Weinstein, Roy Moore, Matt Lauer, and a host of others in positions of power refused to let us merely turn our heads away in order to reengage with our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter fantasy worlds.

While mainstream media outlets cautiously began to report allegations against men in some of the most powerful and influential positions, the #MeToo movement on social media codified the severity of this issue in our consciences as it enabled women and men from virtually every facet of our society to share their own experiences of sexual harassment and misconduct.

As evidenced by the recent trial of U.S. Olympic Gymnastics doctor, Larry Nassar, convicted of sexual molesting female athletes where 156 accusers gave "gut-wrenching statements" of his perverse abuse of a position of trust and power,² it seems that we are a long way from finding the full scope and horrific extent to which this problem infects our society.

¹ "perspicacity" - *Oxfords Learner's Dictionary*, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/perspicacity>, accessed 1/19/18.

² Tracy Connor, "Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar gets 40 to 175 years for sex abuse", *NBC News*, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/gymnastics-doctor-larry-nassar-sentenced-175-years-sex-abuse-n840341>, accessed 2/20/18.

Understandably, this issue is rocking corporate America. According to a recent article in *The Washington Post*,³ the “deluge of sexual harassment allegations and reports of workplace misconduct” has struck “fear and panic” into the hearts of human resource managers across the country:

Those are the three words CEB human resource consultant Brian Kropp used to describe what he’s seeing and hearing from clients as they navigate a flood of complaints and a growing sense of unease that their company could be next in the headlines... “They’re worried these meteorites could be coming,” he said, “but they have no idea how to protect their house.”⁴

So, how are we to think about an issue that has such a destructive and pervasive impact on our culture? How do we discuss it amongst our coworkers, friends, and families? What actions should we take and from which ones should we refrain?

Those questions are not easily answered. Nonetheless, there are some basic issues upon which we must all agree if there is any need or hope of finding a solution:

Have women been and are they still being sexually harassed? Yes.
Should women be protected from sexual harassment? Yes.

As obvious as those answers may seem, they appear to represent the extent to which our agreement with one another goes. And beyond those basic elements, there is literally a sea of suggestions and demands to choose from in regard to actually solving the problem.

While we certainly can’t solve a systemic problem of this scope in one sitting, I think it is possible to lay a foundation for our own thinking, talking, and action from which we can construct an effective and sustainable solution. To do that, I invite you to consider two things - identifying the real problem and posing/answering the right questions.

1. Identifying the Real Problem

As repulsive, challenging, and painful as it might be, we must acknowledge the obvious fact that sexual harassment and workplace misconduct are merely symptoms of a much deeper and pervasive problem.

³ Jena McGregor, “Fear and panic in the H.R. department as sexual harassment allegations multiply”, *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2017/11/30/fear-and-panic-in-the-h-r-department-as-sexual-harassment-allegations-multiply/?utm_term=.24af5a0f70aa, accessed 2/20/18.

⁴ Ibid.

Like taking aspirin to dull the pain of a brain tumor, if we merely treat the symptoms of a problem and fail to identify and treat the actual cause, we not only mask the underlying issue, we oftentimes cause it to develop into a more serious condition.

The real problem of sexual harassment and workplace misconduct is the very same problem at the root of all discrimination - a sense of superiority that causes us to feel that we are better, more deserving of fair and equitable treatment than others. Whether it's white to black, black to white, male to female, or nationality to nationality. Whenever one human being perceives himself or herself better than others, there is going to be a deep sense of entitlement, discrimination, and eventual abuses of power and position.

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In regard to the issue of male and female dignity and equality, there are few passages in the Bible that speak more clearly than these found in the very first chapter.

Verse 27 explains that God created man in his own image which simply means that every human being is an image bearer of God himself. "In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them," is significant as it tells us that neither masculinity or femininity can fully convey the image of God that he intended to portray in us. In other words, there's an aspect of God's image that is conveyed in masculinity that isn't in femininity just as there's an aspect of God's image that is conveyed in femininity that isn't conveyed in masculinity. To favor either one over the other is to deny or overlook what he intended us to understand about himself. This single verse establishes a complete and necessary equality of the sexes and all people.

Verse 28 explains God's bestowment of blessing upon them both as he said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." *To both men as well as women*, he granted a supreme position in the created order in which they were to exercise their talent, industry, and creativity in causing the creation to honor God more because they were in it than if they weren't.

That doesn't infer that their maleness or femaleness was insignificant or arbitrary. Nor does it infer that the gifts, talents, intelligence, and ability would be the same as they most certainly differ. Rather, it establishes the basis of mutual dignity and respect - in their uniqueness - working together to accomplish all that God intended.

Only two chapters later we are given the reason it hasn't been that way throughout human history. When the man and the woman rebelled against God's design, it brought about a curse from God that explains not only the distortion of the beauty and function of our genders, but also the basis of all discrimination - including the issue of sexual harassment.

Thankfully, that third chapter of Genesis also explains God's promise to restore what we lost by one day making it once again what he intended. That first promise of the gospel, not only gives us hope but it also enables us to find ourselves on the timeline of that redemptive process. Therefore, bringing us back to where we find ourselves today as we face the ugly realities of literally centuries of men viewing themselves as superior to women and therefore finding little difficulty in abusing their power and influence.

Perhaps in that, there's a bit of a silver lining. Certainly not in the fact that so many have suffered. But in the fact that the historical moment in which we are living is finally bringing the issue to full light and allowing so many to overcome their fear and find the courage to come forth, requiring each of us to face these realities and think more deeply about what we believe is right. And more importantly, what we will do about them.

There are a few ideas that we can all consider moving forward. But before I discuss those, I want to address a question that is probably already in the minds of many of you, "If the answer to this is as simple as recognizing the necessity and dignity of men and women, then why has it alluded us?"

The answer to that question necessarily varies from culture to culture. However, at least here in the United States, these three factors have aggravated the problem and significantly hindered us from finding a solution:

1. We Live in a HIGHLY Sexualized Culture

America is not the most sexualized society in human history. Even a brief study of Greek or Roman culture will expose the fact that those cultures were far more perverse and cruel than American culture in their social, political, and even religious practices. Nonetheless, technological development and the internet have given rise to a culture that has easy access to an incessant sexual bombardment.

2. We Are Continually Influenced by Secularism & Materialism

The prevailing influences of secularism and materialism in our culture have caused many of us to diminish the importance of who we truly are as human beings. The emphasis on our experience and what we possess has caused literally millions of people to disregard the importance of character, integrity, and responsibility. As a result, we are willing to sacrifice the most sacred parts of ourselves on the altars of sex, power, and money.

3. We Live in a Culture of "Victimhood"

Just two weeks ago, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas said he has become exhausted with how everyone seems to consider themselves a victim these days - "At some point, we're going to be fatigued with everybody being the victim."⁵

He wasn't insinuating that there aren't true victims - in this issue of sexual harassment, there most certainly are victims and perpetrators. However, we now live in a culture where we are prone to see ourselves as victims and thereby exonerate ourselves from any aspect of personal responsibility that oftentimes diminishes our resolve to overcome the situation.

I believe that each of these issues, our highly accessible and sexualized culture, our exposure to secularism and materialism, and our growing culture of victimhood are preventing us from seeing that the root of the problem of sexual harassment lies in our deep sense of superiority that is the result of our lack of dignity and respect of our individual humanity.

2. Posing/Answering the Right Questions

Jordan Peterson, Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, recently did an interview with Vice News in which he expressed his concern that we are not even posing the right questions when it comes the issue of sexual harassment.⁶

⁵ Alex Pappas, "Justice Clarence Thomas says he's 'worn down' with victimhood culture", *Fox News*, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/02/16/justice-clarence-thomas-says-hes-worn-down-with-victimhood-culture.html>, accessed 2/20/18.

⁶ To listen to the interview and a candid assessment of the exchange, please see, Joe Quinn, "Jordan Peterson's Vice News Interview: Another Cathy Newman Moment", *Sott: Signs of the Times*, <https://www.sott.net/article/376898-Jordan-Petersons-Vice-News-Interview-Another-Cathy-Newman-Moment>, accessed 2/20/18.

During the interview, Peterson asks a question that he believes should be asked, yet no one is asking: "Can men and women work together?" Perhaps, like many of us, the Vice reporter thought the question was ludicrous: "Of course men and women can work together!"

Peterson gives the example of the recent changes at NBC following the dismissal of Matt Lauer that regulate hugging: employees wishing to hug one another "have to do a quick hug, then an immediate release, and step away to avoid body contact."⁷

Peterson's point was that "if employers have to resort to regulating hugging between workers, then the fundamental question of whether or not men and women can work together SHOULD be asked, because that is what is implied by taking the step of regulating hugging."⁸

On the surface, NBC's new policy seems to be "a step in the right direction by regulating hugging between coworkers in an effort to prevent lecherous men from exploiting women. Is that going to work? Maybe, maybe not. But if the goal is to sexually sanitize the workplace, we need to look at all the possible factors contributing to the problem."

The issue that we are forced to reckon with here is whether the solution to this problem or other related problems in our society can be dealt with by regulating people's conduct externally? If so, where do we draw the line? Peterson then poses the question of regulating women's use of make-up, high heels, or other articles of clothing that are intended to increase their sexual attractiveness. He is not suggesting that those should be regulated. But merely the absurdity of starting down the path of expecting others to regulate those matters for us rather than taking responsibility for them ourselves.

A free and virtuous society has to be built on those very things - freedom and virtue. Therefore, if our dependence is upon external regulations to govern us so that we mindlessly stumble through life rather than doing the hard and challenging work of determining what we truly believe and understanding the consequences of those beliefs, we will never be able to overcome problems like sexual harassment. And our society will neither be free or virtuous.

⁷ Emily Jashinsky, "In wake of Matt Lauer's firing, NBC reportedly cracks down on hugging, asks employees to tell on each other", *Washington Examiner*, <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/in-wake-of-matt-lauers-firing-nbc-reportedly-cracks-down-on-hugging-asks-employees-to-tell-on-each-other/article/2644410>, accessed 2/20/18.

⁸ Joe Quinn, *ibid.*

To be practical, given the current state of our culture, it should seem obvious that some sort of balance has to be drawn between external versus internal regulation. Nonetheless, I believe that it is vital for each of us to understand these issues in order to move us toward one and not the other.

Joe Quinn, who wrote an insightful assessment of the interview, perceives that Peterson's main objective is to demonstrate that "ideas and ideologies can and will lead a society for better or worse." Oftentimes, they are innocuous steps like a policy regulating hugging that seem to make sense but are soon applied in ways that no one envisioned because they are dealing with topical symptoms rather than addressing the real problem. "No one can be 100% sure about the end result of an ideology, but only a fool would disregard the lessons of history, particularly those of the 20th century, when in a very short period of time, major ideologies swept human societies down the road to massive death and suffering."⁹

Quinn closes his assessment of the interview with this warning that only seems alarming due to the fact that we simply don't understand the consequences of the ideologies we subscribe to or the beliefs we hold to be true:

[The massive death and suffering in other societies] didn't just come out of nowhere. Each step was preceded by a smaller step that made tragedy just a tad more possible than it was before. Often those steps took the form of new, vaguely defined "crimes" that seemed to make sense at the time and address a real issue, but which were then applied in fashions that even their supporters didn't see coming. That is what is happening today, and that is what Peterson is bringing attention to...

For example, no one disagrees that rape is abhorrent, but rape has been steadily stripped of its semantic content to the point that it can now apply to consensual sex that the woman decides she didn't want at any time after the act, whether the next day, or weeks or months later. The same goes for "harassment," which can now be applied to any behavior the "victim" finds offensive, including any form of unwanted sexual attention. That can be a well-intentioned hug, and awkwardly phrased request for a date, or a look that lingers for a second too long.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.