

Sessions 2 & 3 – The Created Order and the Role of Women in the Church (Genesis 1 – 3)

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

“Then God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.” Genesis 2:22

I. The two accounts of creation.

A. Genesis 1.

1. God commands and creation is executed for most of creation. Yet God addresses humankind directly (for they are created in his image – two creatures, one image, no mention of subordination). (1:26 - 28)
2. Both man and woman were created in the image of God. The image carries the sense of relationship (just as God says, “Let us..”, indicating the mysterious relationship of the triune God). (1:26, 27)
3. The image of God is not lost after the fall. (Genesis 9:6)
4. Humankind is not inherently sovereign but enjoys dominion by the grace of God. (1:28-39) Man and woman stand in community with a common commission and function.
5. The setting is one of peace and harmony (no conflict between male and female). (Isaiah 11:6-9)

B. Genesis 2.

1. God creates man to complete the creation. Initially the creation was barren (2:4, 5) and God sends up fountains to water the earth and creates a garden in which to place man. Man was to work the garden. (2:15) Despite some stretched interpretations, the man initially set in the garden (2:7) is clearly male (not an amalgamated male/female who is later divided [2:21]).
2. In the middle of the garden God placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (2:9)
3. Man is given permission and prohibition. This prohibition is clearly spoken to the male initially. (2:16, 17)
4. The creation of woman is given more attention than the creation of man. She is the only creature which does not derive directly from the earth. (2:21, 22)
5. Man’s initial response to woman appears to be one of mutuality and equality, that is, one flesh. (2:23 – 25) Given this mutuality, can we assume an hierarchical concept of spiritual leadership?

- a. Some suggest we cannot easily conclude a hierarchical spiritual relationship from Genesis 2. Woman is created as a companion (neither subordinate nor superior). The structure is similar to that of a “ring” narrative (familiar in ancient writings), not an “hierarchical” narrative. God is first and supreme. Man and woman are connected to God directly and to one another equally. The creation of woman completes creation and man rejoices in the culmination of creation by simultaneously naming woman and himself. (2:23) On this view the man naming the woman should not be taken in the same sense as man naming the animals. In other words, the act of man naming woman is an exclamation of pleasure and praise rather than a sign of male priority and leadership.
- b. Others suggest that the hierarchical nature of creation is self-evident. God created man first and woman was created as a helper for man. The family structure in Israel was linear, not circular. First born males maintained the family line (a patriarchy).
- c. The best reading is probably the linear reading and this certainly coincides with I Timothy 2:13. Nevertheless, the jump from a linear order in creation to male spiritual leadership is less clear from the text.
6. Woman was created as a suitable “helper”. According to some, woman was created to help man, not visa versa. Nevertheless, “helper” in itself does not imply subordinate, for the Psalmist, using the same Hebrew word, writes “Surely God is my help” (Psalm 54:4). Differences in the interpretation of Genesis 2 regarding the roles of men and women in large part involves whether woman as “helper” refers to:
 - a. Woman as complementary to man (woman as completing man and bringing wholeness to God’s creation). On this view, a mutual, helping relationship is established by God at creation between man and woman which does not necessarily imply a differentiation of roles. or
 - b. Woman as created for man. On this view, the roles of man and woman must be different. (Again, recognize those who hold this view typically do not devalue the spiritual worth of woman.) or
 - c. Woman as created superior to man, i.e. a helper superior to man. (This view is proposed by some feminist scholars yet in no reasonable way can it be supported by the text, by the old law, nor by Christian doctrine.)
7. Some suggest that male spiritual leadership is inherent from the outset, for man was “first-born”, a different concept from born first, but more related to the rights of the first born in Israel (e.g. Genesis 27:1 – 45) and Christ as the first born of God (Colossians 1:15 – 20). On this view, God’s first command (2:16) was given to man before woman was created. Man is the spiritual head. God possessed the status to name Adam. Adam, as first-born and ruler over the animals, could name them. Adam names “woman” (taken out of man). Woman and man therefore have different spiritual responsibilities because man is first born (though there is no difference in spiritual value). The pattern of the relationship between man and woman is

set from the beginning with the creation of the woman from man and after man. Man was first-born, first created, and therefore tied to Christ (the first-born of God) as the sacrificial spiritual leader (Ephesians 5) from the beginning.

8. Though the concept of “first-born” among humans as having special significance is inherent the scriptures (e.g. Reuben, the first-born of Jacob, took responsibility in Genesis 37:22), applying this concept to Adam is problematic.
 - a. Adam is obviously the first to be mentioned in the genealogies, such as Luke 3:37, yet key persons in these genealogies were not necessarily the first-born in their families (e.g. David and Jacob). The term “first-born” is not used specifically in reference to Adam. (In I Timothy 3:13, Paul refers to Adam as first formed, the Greek word used is not *prototokos*, the word used to refer to Christ as first born.)
 - b. The concept of first-born among humans is almost always applied to sons in relation to other sons. In other words, there is no other place in scripture where first-born applies to a man being born into a family before a woman and he is “first born” because of this birth order.
 - c. Adam was born of God, not man. Christ was first-born of God (e.g. Hebrews 1:6), the new Adam. The first born of God was Christ, not Adam.
 - d. When Paul compares Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12 – 21 the term first-born is not used of either. In other instances in the New Testament, of course, Christ is referred to as the first-born of God.
 - e. The consecration of the first-born was a spiritual consecration, yet this consecration was under the old law (Exodus 13:1, 2). The rights of the firstborn Christ do not apply to humankind.
9. Regardless, it appears that man and woman were not so conscious of gender initially (2:25) though gender was a reality. They certainly did not concentrate on the differences in gender nor the potential for conflict between genders.
10. Man and woman were created primarily to relate to God (they were created in His own image so they were the only creatures who could relate to God). Genesis 2, whatever one’s interpretation of gender relationship, is God’s ideal unspoiled by sin. In this way, Genesis 2 complements and expands Genesis 1, the reason for two creation narratives. These are not conflicting accounts of the creation.

II. The temptation and fall. (Genesis 3:1 - 13)

- A. The scene shifts and God is initially absent. Rather the serpent challenges the harmony of the created order and the intent of the Creator. (3:1)
- B. The serpent speaks to Eve, but there is no indication that Adam was not present. The serpent consistently uses the plural address and the woman uses the plural response.

1. Some believe that the serpent spoke to Eve because Eve (woman) was more open and trusting and therefore more susceptible to being deceived. (3:1, 2)
 2. Some suggest that the serpent spoke to Eve because she was more attracted to the “dark side” of life. (3:5)
 3. We do not know why the serpent spoke to her. We only know of her response.
- C. The woman assumes responsibility and initiative when the serpent speaks to her, of this we can be certain. We also can be certain that she understands what God has willed. (3:2, 3). It is unclear whether God spoke his promise and prohibition directly to Eve or whether Adam conveyed God’s will to Eve. Once Eve had fallen to temptation, we know that God spoke to her directly. (3:13) Some suggest she should have looked to Adam for guidance when tempted and in this she disobeyed God’s divine ordinance of male spiritual leadership. We do not have a clear statement that this was the case (or that it was not the case).
- D. The serpent challenges whether it is necessary for humans to live in relationship with God and obey His command. (3:4, 5) The temptation is to rise above conformity. He tempts her with wisdom (remember the Greek deity for wisdom was Athena), the knowledge of good and evil. He tempts her to be on par with God. In this way, she is clearly tempted to rise above her station in life. She falls to this temptation. She attempts to usurp spiritual authority, the authority of God!
- E. The woman does not “tempt” the man in that she coaxes him or persuades him to eat the fruit (which suggests to some that Adam must have been there and tempted by the serpent as well as by the fruit handed to him by the woman). She simply gives him the fruit and he eats it. (3:6)
- F. After Adam eats the fruit the man and woman realize differences they did not realize previously, the difference between them and God (3:8) and the difference between themselves (3:7).
- G. When God challenges them, both the man and the woman try to displace the responsibility. (3:12, 13)
- H. Some suggest that Adam was guilty of two sins, first the sin of being deceived (as was Eve) and second the sin of abandoning his role as spiritual leader and protector. On this view, Adam was the first addressed by God after the fall (3:9) even though Eve was the first addressed by the serpent.

III. Curses and Punishments. (Genesis 3:14 – 24)

A. The serpent. (14, 15)

1. The created order is disrupted, the order where the creatures live in harmony. (Isaiah 11:6 – 9).
2. The serpent, who tried to rise above his station in life, who challenged God, now must crawl on its stomach and “eat dust”.

3. There is discord between the serpent and woman. They strike at one another (though woman is in a superior position). Most Christians believe the discord is between Satan and Christ (born of a woman).
4. The serpent's natural role in the future, therefore, would be that of tempter and antagonist (he strikes at the "Achilles heel" of humankind).

B. The woman. (16,)

1. The woman is the only one of the three who is not directly "cursed."
2. Just as man will suffer pain in labor, the woman will suffer pain in her own "labor". The pain free, toil free life in the garden has ended. Some suggest that her natural role (wife and mother) will now be accompanied by pain.
3. The second aspect of the punishment of the woman is that the original relationship she had with the man will be changed. Man will have dominion over woman (which has been more or less true throughout history), but is this part of the consequence of sin or is this rather a more painful playing out of the original pattern God created? What is clear is that the former peaceable and loving relationship will be replaced with conflict.
4. Some suggest that in the unspoiled created order man practices "servant leadership" whereas after the Fall, man dominates woman (which leads to conflict).

C. The man. (17 - 19)

1. Man receives the longest address.
2. He loses his joyful working of the garden. According to some, now he must continue his natural role as "breadwinner" with pain and the sweat of his brow.
3. He loses his life (this curse clearly is upon both the man and the woman).

D. The ultimate curse and punishment. (21 – 24)

1. The vital relationship of man/woman with God (the availability of the tree of life) has been destroyed.
2. Man and woman are not self-sufficient, on friendly terms with God (walking in the garden together). Helpless creatures, their lives shattered by strife, discord, enmity and shame, man and woman are hardly worthy of the divinity they desired.
3. Man and woman are driven out of the garden.
4. Strife and conflict arise at virtually every turn thereafter (e.g. Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, the tower of Babel).

E. A reprieve? (20)

1. This verse appears to be out of place. Can there be hope in the midst of this curse?
2. Since life eternal has been destroyed and man must return to death, is there hope?
3. Yes, for women (and man for that matter) become a wellspring for new life. Woman becomes the mother of all the living (Eve means “living”).
4. Ultimately, through Mary, the author of Life (Jesus) is brought forth in childbirth.

IV. Conclusions from the creation narratives and the narrative of the fall.

- A. God’s initial creation was an harmonious creation.
- B. It is debated whether there was a divine order inherent in creation from Genesis 2. Man was born first yet the privileges and responsibilities of this birth order are not entirely clear from reviewing this passage alone. Nevertheless, on the basis of other texts, some order is implied (and certainly Paul refers back to this order). The significance of this order in terms of male-female relationships is uncertain. Areas of debate revolve around:
 1. The concept of “first-born”.
 2. The meaning of “helper”.
 3. The nature of the changes in the relationship between man and woman between the end of Genesis 2 and Genesis 3.
 4. The interpretation of Genesis 1 – 3 in light of New Testament passages, such as I Timothy 2:13 – 15.
- C. The sense of hierarchy and gender differences were much less apparent in Genesis 2 compared to Genesis 3. .
- D. Both the man and the woman sinned. Later in scripture, the sins of the man as well as the woman are noted (Romans 5:12; I Timothy 2:14).
- E. The relationship of man and woman to God and to one another changes drastically from Genesis 2 to Genesis 3 (it is not whether this relationship changes that is debated but rather in what ways).
- F. Even with the tragedy of the Fall, hope comes by man (Christ) through woman (3:15, 20). We are not given a glimpse of that hope in the Genesis 1 – 3 yet only a few chapters further along, the hope becomes more apparent (12:1 – 3). A key factor in understanding the role of the woman in the church is to what extent this hope (such as Paul’s exclamation in Galatians 3:28) establishes a new creation in the Kingdom of God where gender barriers are broken down.

References

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