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Male and Female in Christ

Discover what the Bible really says about women –
and about men

Bible studies
for use with groups or for personal reflection

African Edition 2006

Male and Female in Christ

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Introduction

The question of what the Bible says about men and women is a touchy subject. Many people believe they already know what the Bible says: that God wills that men be the rulers in family, church, and society, and that women willingly subordinate themselves to men. Such a model for the relationship between the sexes, however, is no longer compatible with either contemporary political thought or the practical realities of modern life. This incompatibility between this perception of “what the Bible says” and modern moral sensibilities seems to demand that Christians choose: do they believe in the continuing relevance of the Bible, or do they believe in the full dignity of each individual in Christ? No wonder many avoid the subject all together.

This conflict, however, is a false dilemma. A biblically sound middle ground exists, and is actually a solid and honest way of looking at scripture. Using this approach, we find that rather than being against women, the Bible urges that they be treated as men’s equals. That we might believe it to be otherwise is because we have only seen the Bible from the perspective of a conflict that is as old as human history; the struggle over who should hold power. For certainly all of the disputes about what men *must* do and what women *must not* are arguments about who is to have the right to control the family (and the family’s money), the workplace, society, and the church. Even when God’s name is invoked in this controversy, it is to debate who best represents God’s authority.

In many ways, this struggle is inevitable. In this less-than-perfect world, people need control over themselves, their environment, and the other people in it. From this basic survival need comes a tendency to see all relationships in terms of control, power, and authority. We cannot help but read the Bible through a thick lens of assumptions about hierarchy. But because we do not understand what the Bible says about the use of authority, we do not understand what the Bible says about the relationship between women and men. A good example of the effects of this authority-bias can be seen in traditional understandings of a passage in the Bible in which the apostle Paul refers to woman as the glory of man (I Corinthians 11:7). To be something’s glory is to be the thing that magnifies it, that which makes it great. What a wonderful, affirming thing to say about women! Who would not want to be called the glory of one’s country, profession, or family? Ironically, however, because of the tendency to read worldly concerns about hierarchy into the scriptures, this verse has been used as “proof” that God created woman to be subordinate to man. When concerns about hierarchy dominate Biblical understanding, even positive statements about women are used against them.

These studies approach the Bible with the assumption that Christianity is not about holding power and authority over other people. When we try to understand what the Bible is saying about women and men in terms of authority, we miss the point entirely. Read without presumptions about power, these “problem” passages – the very passages used to argue for the rule of one particular elite group or another – turn out to be about something else entirely. Although it is sometimes difficult to penetrate hundreds of years of authority-biased translations and interpretations, it is only by cutting through these

assumptions that we can see what the scriptures are saying about female roles – and just as significantly, what the Bible says about men. In the process, Biblical theology of gender, human relationships, sin, and redemption emerges in a clearer light. Learning better what the Bible says about men, women, and the relationship between the two will make one a better Christian as well.

About the Authors

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How to Use this Guide



This Bible study is designed for use with groups – a Sunday School class, a young couples gathering, community/small group, and so forth. It can also be used for individual study. **THIS IS NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY** – please don't think of it as a guide just for use in the women's ministry. The Christian message freeing us from the obligations and limitations of sex roles is just as important for men as it is for women. In fact, Jesus probably spent more of his teachings trying to pry men from their beliefs about what made a "real man" than he did in freeing women from the limitations placed upon them. The questions raised in the studies apply equally to men as to women, and this guide has been most successfully used in groups which included both sexes.

Each study contains an introduction, the lesson, a personal application section, and references. The lessons consist of Bible readings and then questions about the readings. Relevant commentary and historical information are given. If your group is large, you may want to select certain questions to be discussed in groups of two or three. The personal application questions are especially good for small group discussion. If you think of application questions that are more relevant for your particular group or in general, by all means use them instead.

We have worked hard to make *Male and Female in Christ* self-contained and user-friendly. We suggest that the person leading the group review the material before class time, but no outside reading is required. The guide contains "comment" boxes following the questions which give possible answers to the questions, additional insights and information, and suggestions about how to handle particular issues. You may want to cover up the comment box and think of your own answer before reading the comment. Each study takes about one hour to present.

This guide assumes that each participant has access to a Bible while in the study. Please don't fail to look up scriptural passages when directed to do so. Although it would be easy enough to print the relevant passages in the guide, we feel that Bible lessons are best learned when the participants are actually handling the Bible!

The studies are cumulative, each section building on the insights of the section before it. We suggest you teach them in order if possible. Of course, no one ever shows up for all the sessions, so we try to review critical points in the "review and introduction" section at the beginning of each study.

Be sure and take time to let people get acquainted, to talk with each other, and to learn from each others' experiences. The facilitator's guide includes a section on community building questions or inclusion activities that can be used as warm up exercises at the beginning of class. We also recommend that you begin and end each session with prayer.

Building Community

The way you begin a group experience has a big impact on how the rest of the time together flows. Whatever you do in the first several minutes will set participants' expectations for what is expected of them. If you start out by lecturing, they will assume that the whole class will be a lecture and that they won't be expected to participate. If you start out with a group hug or asking a question that requires participants to disclose intimate thoughts and feelings to strangers, you will send some people (like the authors) fleeing in terror. We have had good luck with asking the group a question that is provocative enough to catch their interest without requiring too much self-revelation. Beginning the class with a group discussion sets the expectation that the whole class will be expected to participate. It helps "warm up" the group and, if you go around the room calling on each person, makes everyone feel involved. A carefully chosen question also introduces the day's topic. Finally, an introductory discussion helps people get to know each other better. For many of us, the connections we make in classes and meetings are as important as the material being taught.

Suggested format

Greetings from the facilitator

Briefly introduce yourself and express your enthusiasm for this opportunity to lead a class on men and women in scripture. Pose a question to the group.

Possible questions for each study are listed in the next section. Tell them they have a minute to think about their answer, then you will go around the room, asking each person for his or her response. Ask them to introduce themselves at the same time.

At each following meeting, continue to ask the group to introduce themselves until attendance settles down enough for you to tell when there is a newcomer. After that, be sure to welcome and introduce anyone who is new to the group.

At later meetings, it will probably not be necessary to go around the room asking each person for a response. Just pose the question and let people answer freely. **Use this method as well if the group is large.** If you do this, however, keep an eye open for people who may not volunteer to say anything, but who would like to be asked.

Ask participants for their responses

Summarize their answers on a flip chart or chalkboard if you have access to one. If you don't have ready access to a writing surface or the group is very small, don't worry about this step. Make encouraging comments. Be careful not to be negative or critical.

Let group discussion arise

Use their comments to introduce the topic for the day. At the first class (and perhaps for a few more classes until attendance settled down) the facilitator should use this time to state his or her own interest in this subject. You might also introduce the central theme of this study guide (see the Introduction for more detail): That disputes about appropriate roles for man and woman in the church, family and society are questions about who should hold power and authority. Christianity, however, is not about holding power and authority over other people. Only when we understand what the Bible says about the appropriate use of power can we understand what the Bible says about the roles of men and women.

Try to keep this warm-up discussion in bounds! They will have more, and more informed, things to say at the end of the study, so don't spend all your time up front.

Ask someone to offer a prayer

Begin the study.

Close in prayer

Try conversational prayer if the group isn't too large and you have time.

Suggested Opening Questions

Below you will find one or two warm-up questions listed for each study. These questions are suggestions only – if you come up with better ones, please use them (and let us know what they are!)

Study One: Man and Woman in the Beginning

The first question is a warm-up for the entire topic of gender and the Bible, rather than a specific question for this study.

“What is the BIG issue for you regarding what the Bible says about the roles of men and women?”

Study Two: God’s Full Image

“If you were to close your eyes and visualize God, what does God look like?”

Study Three: The Ideal Relationship

“What are the characteristics of an ideal marriage in African culture?”

Write down their responses, then ask:

“What aspects of this ideal are you comfortable with? Are there any that concern you?”

Study Four: The End of Unity

“What are common ideas or beliefs about what girls and women are like?”

After they have answered that question, ask:

“What are the common ideas or beliefs about what boys and men are like?”

Study Five: Redemption and the Curse

“What is the last (or current) thing about which you felt anxious or worried?”

Study Six: Jesus and Women: The Suffering Daughter

“What kind of people in African society are considered ‘unclean’ or contaminating (i.e., you would want to wash afterward if you shook hands with them, you wouldn’t want to eat food prepared by them, etc.)?”

Study Seven: Jesus and Woman as Domestic Goddess

“What qualities do you value most in the people closest to you?”

Study Eight: Jesus and Woman as Temptress

“Evangelist Billy Graham has said that he decided early in his career that he must never be alone in a room with a woman other than his wife. In what ways do you limit your interactions with the other sex in order to avoid accusations of sexual impropriety, or to avoid temptation?”

Study Nine: Jesus and Men: Honor, Patriarchy, and Dominance

“What does society expect a ‘successful’ man to do or be?”

Study Ten: What Does it Mean to be Lord?

“How comfortable are you when people look to you to tell them what to do? Are there some situations in which you are more comfortable than in others?”

Study Eleven: Becoming Transparent to Christ

“What kind of authority did Jesus have?”

Study Twelve: St. Paul and Women

“What are the important teachings of the Christian faith?”

Point out that the concepts of faith, being justified in Christ, salvation by faith, the resurrection, the Eucharist (Communion), the meaning of baptism, Christian freedom, the relationship of Christ to God the Father, Christian (agape) love, the Church as a body, and gifts of the spirit all come from the writings of Paul. We can't just dismiss him as a “woman hater.” (This material is in the introduction to the study)

Study Thirteen: Paul and the Use of Authority

“What is the common perception of Paul's teachings on slavery? On the role of women?”

Study Fourteen: The Concept of Submission in the Writing of Paul

Use question 2 of the study (and refer to their responses when you get to #2, rather than ask them the question again.)

“What does the word ‘submit’ mean to you? What is a ‘submissive’ person like?”

Study Fifteen: Paul and Headship

Use question 2 of the study (and refer to their responses when you get to #2, rather than ask them the question again.)

“What are some of the meanings of the word ‘head’?”

Study Sixteen: Paul and the Problem Passages: "Let the Women be Silent"

"Christian churches traditionally limited the role of women in church and family. What scriptures and arguments were urged to justify women's low position?"

(write down the responses to this question and bring it to the next two classes)

Study Seventeen: Authority Over Her Head

(Refer to the responses to the introductory question to Study 16 above)

"Where are the scriptures that are used to argue for a low position for women?"

Creation order arguments come from Genesis 2, 1 Cor. 11, 1 Timothy 2. Arguments about submission and headship come from Ephesians 5:22 and Colossians 3:18.

Study Eighteen: Women Shouldn't Usurp Authority (Either)

(Refer to the responses to question 16 again.)

"Which of the arguments for the low position of women have we seen to be based on misunderstanding of scripture?"

Study Nineteen: The Mystery of Marriage

"What does African culture say are the responsibilities of husband and wife to each other?"

Man and Woman in the Beginning

A Fresh Look at the Bible's Approach to Relationships

Jesus on Marriage

Read Matthew 19:3-10

1. The Pharisees ask Jesus about what circumstances a man may divorce his wife. Does Jesus answer their question? What issue does Jesus address instead?

The question these Pharisees ask Jesus is part of a larger debate over the meaning of Deut. 24:1, which says that a man may divorce his wife if he finds some "uncleanness" or "indecency" in her. One school of Pharisees said that this meant that a man could divorce his wife only because of sexual infidelity. Another school said that "indecency" meant any number of things that might displease her husband, including ruining the food for dinner.

Jesus refuses to be drawn into this debate. Rather than arguing over the grounds for divorce, he points out that the truly godly are more interested in the basis of marriage.

2. According to Jesus, what is the ideal marriage relationship?

"The two become one."

3. What accounts for deviations from this ideal?

The "hardness of their hearts" – lack of love, or even compassion. Few women in the ancient world had independent means of support. Divorced women had little choice but to marry again. This is what Jesus means by divorce causing women to "commit adultery."

4. How do Jesus' disciples react to his statement? To which part of what he said are they reacting?

They say, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." As righteous men, it is unlikely that they were planning to divorce their wives. The "hard thing" that Jesus is saying is that they should be "one flesh" with their wives.

This "incident in Jesus' ministry ...clearly indicates that the investigation of God's will for the sexes must 'begin in the beginning' with the divine arrangements that preceded the advent of sin and legalism." Jesus "stated that God's ideal was found not in tradition, or even in the letter of the law, but in the order established 'from the beginning'....He further stated that the law actually contradicted this ideal. It constituted a concession to sin." (Iannaccone 1980)

The "beginning" to which Jesus directs us is found in Genesis 1 and 2.

In The Beginning ...

Read Genesis 1:26-31

5. This is the first reference in the Creation account to human beings. Who is created in God's image, the man or the woman?

Humanity shares some essential characteristic with God. We are the "image," but not the real thing, i.e., we are not God, but we are like God in some undefined way.

Although theologians later argued that woman was a lesser creation, not truly God's image the way the man is, the Bible says clearly that women are God's reflection as fully as men are. This statement also tells us that God is not, as some people might argue, "really" male.

6. What does it mean, "male and female he created them"?

Either that male and femaleness, together, reflect some essential quality of God; or that we are created in God's image, except for being male and female.

This statement suggests that there is no reason for women to feel left out, or that they need a goddess to represent them – God is either both male and female, or God is (more likely) greater than gender.

7. To whom does God give the blessing of dominion over the earth, the man or the woman?

Both

8. To whom does God give the blessing and responsibility for procreation, the man or the woman?

Both

9. What else does God give the man and the woman? (verse 29. As you read this, note that the “you” throughout is plural.)

The abundance of the earth.

“Every inch of the created world has been deeded to (woman) as much as to man! Such is God’s order from the beginning, and beholding this arrangement – long before any trace of male domination – (God) proclaimed it ‘very good’. He did not pronounce this benediction over the man’s exclusive dominion. On the contrary, it was ‘not good’ that the man should be alone. Only when woman stood by his side, did God place the scepter in their hands and proclaim the work complete and very good.” (Iannaccone 1980, paraphrasing Bushnell)

10. What are the implications so far for the relationship between men and women? Is there any indication in these verses that God intended to treat woman differently from man?

No.

11. Jesus’ response to the Pharisees suggested that God’s ideal is not to be found in their traditions. Do your answers to questions 8-10 suggest that African traditions about the relationship between men and women are also incorrect?

Some people believe that the Bible teaches that men alone are responsible for “ruling” and that women alone are responsible for bearing and rearing children. But these differences were not there in the beginning.

Applications

12. What implications do these observations from the “beginning” have for your own self-image? For your relationships?

References

Laurence R. Iannaccone, *Women and the Word of God*. Unpublished manuscript, 1980.

Katherine Bushnell, *God's Word to Women*, Oakland, CA: published by the author, 1923.

Study
2

God's Full Image

Images of God as Parent

with Linda Ikeda

Introduction

Genesis 1:26-27 makes it clear that women as well as men are made in the image of God. It is difficult, however, to accept woman as fully in God's image when so much of *our* image of God is only as "Father," that is, as male and only male. Fortunately, the Bible's perception of God is not as limited as we may believe. The Bible not only tells us that God is not literally a male (Hosea 11:9, Numbers 23:19), but it is rich in other images and metaphors for God – and some of these images are feminine. Examining this broader range of metaphors for what God is like provides a wonderfully rich picture of God and God's love for us.

God as Father

Read some or all of the following verses: Psalm 103:13; Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 2:10; 2 Samuel 7:14-15; Psalm 68:5; Isaiah 64:8-9

1. What do these verses calling God "father" tell us about the nature of God?

Class leader – For questions 3 through 9, write the participants' answers to the questions of "What does this image tell us about God?" on a flip chart or chalk board.

Interestingly, some of the images of God as father in old translations turn out to be images of God as mother:

Deuteronomy 32:18 in the King James Version of the Bible reads:

“Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten the God that formed thee.”

A better translation is:

“You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the god who gave you birth (literally ‘writhed in labor pains with you’).” (NRSV, Swidler)

“Begating” is the act of fathering; “bearing” and “giving birth” are the acts of a mother.

2. What does the image of God “writhing in labor pains with” us tell us about the nature of God?

God as Mother

Other passages that refer to God as a mother:

“Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him (literally, “my womb trembles for him”); I will surely have mercy (literally “motherly-womb-love”) upon him, saith the Lord.” (Jeremiah 31:20, KJV. Smith, p. 56, citing Swidler)

“For thus says the LORD:

*I will extend prosperity to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;
and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm,
and dandled on her knees.*

*As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”
(Isaiah 66:12-13, NRSV)*

*“Listen to me, O house of Jacob,
all the remnants of the house of Israel,
who have been borne by me from your birth
carried from the womb;
even to your old age I am he;
even when you turn gray I will carry you.
I have made, and I will bear;
I will carry and will save.”
(Isaiah 46:3-4)*

*“Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the
child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.”
(Isaiah 49:15)*

3. What do these verses tell us about the nature of God?

Read Hosea 11:1-4

4. One translation of this verse tells us that God's love for us is “like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek” (verse 4, Swidler, p. 30). Think of a time when you held an infant close against your cheek. What feelings does this memory invoke for you? What does it mean to know that God feels this way about you?

Read Isaiah 42:13-14 and Hosea 13:6-8

5. These verses give us a slightly different view of motherhood. What do they tell us about the nature of God?

El Shaddai

Read Genesis 17:1

6. What image do you have of “God Almighty”? In what is God mighty?

For me, the image of “God Almighty” is of God as a fierce, mighty warrior or general, frightening like the mother bear.

The Hebrew name God used to introduce himself to Abraham is *El Shaddai*. In the Bible, it is translated as God (El) Almighty (Shaddai) or sometimes elsewhere as “God of the Mountain.” But the idea of mountain here is the shape of the mountain: It refers to the shape of the female breast. The word *shaddai* is derived from the word *shadu*, “breast” in Hebrew. A literal translation of El Shaddai would be *the breasted one*. (*Scofield Bible*, 1917; Jukes, 1967 [1888]; Parkhurst; *The Companion Bible*.)

Besides revealing himself to Abraham as El Shaddai, God is referred to by this name in the stories of Job and Ruth and in numerous other places in the Bible.

7. What does the image of God as El Shaddai tell us about the nature of God?

The most accurate rendering of El Shaddai may be one that conveys the image of God as the nourisher; the all sufficient one; the satisfier: The God who was everything to Abraham, Ruth and Naomi, and Job. (*Scofield Bible*, 1917; Jukes, 1967 [1888]; *The Companion Bible*)

8. For each of the following verses, substitute *the all sufficient one*, *the satisfier*, or *the nourisher* for “God Almighty”. Do these substitutes fit the passages better than our normal idea of “God Almighty”?

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am _____; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between men and you, and will multiply you exceedingly. (Genesis 17:1)

_____ bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. (Isaac’s blessing to Jacob as he sends him off to find a wife.) (Genesis 28:3)

And Jacob said to Joseph, ‘_____ appeared to me a Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, ‘Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.’ (Genesis 48:3)

By the God of your father who will help you, by _____ who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep

*that couches beneath, blessings of the breast and of the womb.
(Jacob's blessing to Joseph, Genesis 49:25)*

9. If the image invoked by the name El Shaddai ("God Almighty") is that of a nursing mother, not a fierce general, how does that enrich your understanding of God's might?

Applications

10. Some people have difficulty with the image of God as father because of problems they had with their own fathers. We shy away from the image of God as mother because of the contemporary pagan practices of goddess worship. What affect does the Biblical image of God as a loving parent – neither male nor female but both father and mother – have on you?

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Companion Bible, appendix.

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The Ideal Relationship

Man and Woman in Genesis 2

Review and Introduction

In the first study, we saw how Jesus taught that the ideal relationship between man and woman was not to be found in tradition, or even in the Law of Moses. Rather, God's true intent for us is found in how he created us. In Genesis 1, God creates both man and woman in his own image, and gives them both responsibility for ruling the earth and for child rearing.

Hebrew literature often presents a "big picture" version of a story, followed by a more detailed account of the same event. Genesis 2 is such a "close up" version of the creation of man and woman. Verses 4-7 tell us where the story that follows is going to fit in the larger narrative given in Genesis 1.

Read Genesis 2: 4-9, 15-25

1. Following each act of Creation in Genesis 1, God pronounced his creation "good." What is the significance of verse 18 in Genesis 2?

For the first time, something is not good. God says it is "not good" that the man should be alone.

2. Verse 19 notes that God created the animals. He brought them to man to name. In searching through the animals for a mate, what does Adam learn about himself? About his yet uncreated mate?

Just as we learned in Genesis 1 that man and woman are the image of God, not God, in Genesis 2 we learn that Adam and the animals are separate creations. Spiritually, Adam is not an animal. Only someone like Adam will be a suitable mate for him. And that mate, like Adam, will not be an animal.

3. What are the words used by God to describe what Adam needs (v. 18)? How have these words been used traditionally to define woman's role relative to man?

Adam needs a "helper suitable" (NRSV) or a "help meet" (KJV) for him. Traditionally the KJV "help meet," ("meet" meaning "suitable," "appropriate," "fit") was corrupted into "helpmate." This understanding of "helper suitable" gives the impression that woman was to be an assistant, a junior partner rather than a full one.

Dr. Joy Elasky Fleming writes:

"John Calvin developed his theology of womanhood based on the idea that woman was only a helper, and therefore inferior and subordinate....This is unfortunate because the Hebrew text implies nothing of the sort." In Hebrew, the words are 'ezer kenegdo.

"The noun, 'ezer, is found 21 times in the Old Testament. It means 'help'...someone who will succor another, e.g. to help them or aid them. The word is found twice in Genesis 2. In 16 of the other 19 occurrences of the word, the 'help' spoken of refers to help which comes from one who is superior. In most cases, the 'help' is God Himself....In those instances where 'ezer does not refer to God it is used of such people as kings, who come to the help of another.

"What is clear from the usage of this Hebrew term is that there is no connotation of inferiority or subordination attached to the word 'help.' Two problems occur in translation. The first is that the word 'help' is expanded into 'helper' in modern versions....The second is that the English word 'helper' does carry a connotation of subordination...." (Man and Woman in Biblical Unity, pp. 8-9.)

*The adjective, kenegdo, means **corresponding to him** or **like him**. "What is emphasized is the common nature and essence of the two beings, as well as their equality." (Fleming, p. 9: "Even Calvin called kenegdo a 'particle of similitude,' saying that Moses wanted to note their equality.")*

Semitic language scholar David Freedman: "When God creates Eve from Adam's rib, His intent is that she will be – unlike the animals – 'a power (or strength) equal to him.'" Woman is someone strong enough to help carry men's burdens.

4. What does Adam say when he sees the woman for the first time (vs 23)? Does his response suggest that he regards the woman as a servant, or as an equal?

"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man." (NRSV)

Traditionalists sometimes argue that the naming of woman in v. 23 is an acknowledgment of Adam's dominion over her. But "woman" is not

a true name, and what Adam says does not follow a naming convention. "Woman" is just a feminine form of "man". They share a name as well as everything else at this point. What Adam is saying in his joyful proclamation is "Here is someone like me!" (Fleming)

5. Does the idea that the woman was created to be a "help **like**" the man, rather than a "helpmate" **for** the man, affect your understanding of the intended relationship between men and women?

As we discovered in Genesis 1, there is nothing in the creation story that implies that either the man or the woman should have power over the other. The first two books of the Bible stress the ways in which man and woman are alike, not different – and their joint uniqueness and superiority to the rest of creation. Gilbert Bilezikian: "Indeed, there is nothing in Genesis 1 and 2 that suggests the headship of men or that indicates the existence of a hierarchy of authority between men and women. God gave rulership to both men and women over everything in creation but He did not give to men rulership over the women. Instead of rulership He gave them both **oneness**."

6. What does it mean to be "naked and unashamed" (v. 25)?

A complete physical and psychological honesty. There are no barriers, pretenses, or defensiveness between the man, woman, and God.

7. In the modern world, outside the Garden, what causes us to be "ashamed" in our close personal relationships?

People might give a number of different answers here: guilt, self-doubt, anger, the judgments of others, lack of trust, etc. Let the group explore their own feelings on this issue.

8. What are the characteristics of a relationship in which one can be so completely safe and open?

Again, let the group explore this question. This is what one class said:

The relationship would be open and honest. One would have no fear of being vulnerable.

Neither partner would make negative judgments about the other. Each is loved despite his or her “warts.” Mistakes and weaknesses are forgiven, accepted, and not held against the other person. This is hard to do, as it requires that each person think about what he or she says.

The partners are able to compensate for each other’s weaknesses. They don’t exploit the other’s weaknesses, or use them to hurt the other person. As a result, the partners can trust each other.

People are able to let go of social expectations and be themselves.

Each partner wants the other to be the best he or she can be – there is no envy of the other’s achievements, and no sense that one person’s call is more important than the other person’s. There is no jockeying for power or advantage over the other.

The partners are not trying to “change” the other person to fit their own needs.

Such a relationship must be grounded in God. The partners understand God’s love, and work to demonstrate it to each other. Such a relationship has a prayerful focus. And in fact, in Genesis 2, God is a partner to the relationship. Such a relationship describes not only the ideal for marriage, but also for relationships within the body of Christ.

It is difficult to imagine how a relationship such as this would be possible without God as a partner – as he was in Genesis 2.

9. Rather than being a blueprint for woman’s subordination, the first two chapters of the Old Testament are all about the equality between the man and the woman. What implications does this have beyond the marital relationship?

The first man and woman’s ideal relationship may be more than the model for marriage. They are not only the first husband and wife, but the first people in any kind of relationship. We will see in the New Testament that all Christians are called to a similar relationship with each other. (1 Cor. 13.)

Applications

10. How does this reading of Genesis 2 affect your understanding of Jesus' statement (Matt. 19:6) that man and woman were intended to be "one"? How does this challenge your own relationships?

11. Is there anything about this kind of relationship that would be frightening or "too" intimate? How would it be possible to relate to someone else this way?

Many people would not want this kind of relationship. We often need our own space, somewhere to hide. Let the group explore their own examples.

Some people don't want to let someone else, even God, determine what their intimate relationships will be like.

References

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The End of Unity

From Oneness to Separation

Review and Introduction

The final words in Genesis 2 describe the first man and his wife as “naked and unashamed.” In the last study we saw that such a relationship, in which each partner is completely safe and open, must be grounded in God. Now, in Genesis 3, we see what happens when God is ejected from the relationship.

Deception, Disobedience, and Division

Read Genesis 3:1-13

1. Who is present during the events recorded in verses 1 to 6?

Both the woman and the man. The “you” used throughout is plural. Also note verse 6: “She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” Adam was standing by silently during the conversation with the serpent.

2. What happens to the couple’s relationship after sinning? To their relationship with God?

When God questions them about what they have done, Adam’s first response is to blame both the woman and God: “You put her here, and it’s her fault” (verse 12). The oneness and trust between husband and wife is broken, and they now have to hide from each other. Similarly the relationship with God is damaged. God’s question to them is “Where are you? Where did you go?”

Sorrowful Toil

Read Genesis 3:14-24

3. Genesis 3:14-19 is often referred to as “the Curse.” How many curses does God pronounce in these verses?

You might have class members answer without looking at their Bibles. Usually we think of the curses corresponding to the three individuals cursed: the serpent, the woman, and the man. According to the Genesis account, however, God does not curse the people. Rather, he curses the serpent (v. 14) and the ground (v.17)

4. How do the circumstances of the man and woman change as a result of God cursing the *ground*?

Adam and Eve have to leave the garden. They go from riches – “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.” (Genesis 1:29) to poverty – “It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.”

From Riches to Poverty: An Economic Perspective

In their original state, the first couple enjoyed not only an ideal relationship with each other and an ideal relationship with God, but also an ideal relationship with God’s creation, in a garden that met their every need.

Sin forced them out of the garden and into a world of thorns and thistles. Scarcity and deprivation become the dominant realities of life.

In a world of poverty, child labor is critical resource: People producing everything they use or eat need children to help in the endless work with “the ground.” In addition, children are sometimes the only source of support for parents in their old age. In such a world, men value women mostly for their ability to bear children.

But in world of scarcity, women must do more than just bear children. Eve, like Adam, is condemned to “painful toil.” Eve’s toils are obscured by modern translations, but Joy Elasky Flemings points out that the first part of 3:16 should read, “I will greatly multiply your sorrowful (or painful) toil and your conceptions,” not “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing.” (NIV) Eve will have to work to eat just like Adam.

5. If women must bear children *and* toil at other work, the most efficient family arrangements are ones that divide up tasks so that women have those that can be done while pregnant or caring for children. What kind of work do women usually do?

Grow food, prepare food, keep dairy animals, do laundry, make clothing, etc. If a woman does very heavy work while pregnant, she might lose the baby. She cannot do things that take her far away from her children.

6. What kind of work have men traditionally done?

Some anthropologists tell us that “men’s work” is usually whatever work the women did not do. Men do the heavy work like preparing the soil, hunt, going to war and other the work that takes them far from home.

Economist Gary Becker writes:

As a result of this “sexual division of labor,” woman becomes “domestically specialized.” Her work is valuable mostly to one particular man, her husband and the father of her children. In contrast, what men produce is of value to a wider number of potential employers. The man will therefore have more power in the relationship, as it is easier for him to replace the woman than it is for the woman to replace him.

Personal and Spiritual Impact

7. What personal characteristics will be encouraged in little boys who must grow up competing with other men for scarce resources?

Strength, intelligence, ambition, competitiveness, etc.

8. What personal characteristics will be important for little girls who must find their best job, i.e., the best husband?

Beauty, interest in children, cooperation, gentleness, patience, good worker, etc.

Sin not only damages the relationships we have with each other and with God, it creates obligations (women must be attractive; men must earn a lot of money) and limits our personal freedom and potential for wholeness.

9. In this light, can this passage be seen as an expression of God's will? How does the prediction that the husband "will rule over" the wife (Genesis 3: 16) fit into the original, ideal relationship described in Genesis 1 and 2? What about the prediction that the husband would "toil," "sweat," and ultimately "return to the ground" (Genesis 3:17)?

Personal Application

10. Have you seen people pressured into sinful or inappropriate behaviors because of social expectations about how they should behave as men or women?
11. Identify some expectation you have about what you should or shouldn't do or be as a man or a woman. Does it limit your relationship with other people or with God? Can you do anything to overcome this limitation?

References

Gary S. Becker, *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Joy Elasky Fleming, *Man and Woman in Biblical Unity*. Minneapolis, MN: Christians for Biblical Equality.

Economics and the Curse

Genesis 3

Verse 16 (to the woman)

I will greatly multiply your sorrowful toil.

in pain will you give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband.

and he will rule over you.

Verse 17 (to the man)

Cursed is the ground because of you

through painful toil you will eat of it

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food

until you return to the ground

Economic Reality

- Woman must work to survive.
- Sexual division of labor.
- Woman's value is in childbearing.
- Children are valued as resources, not individuals.
- Mothers are financially dependent.
- Girls raised to be dependent on and concerned about attracting men.
- All of the "feminine charms."
- Male dominance of social institutions.
- Husbands have more power in marriage.
- Scarcity, poverty.
- Decision-making is based on economics—"the allocation of scarce goods among competing ends"
- Men must work to survive.
- Anxiety, concern about competition, pressure to be best.
- Mortality, death.

Study
5

Redemption and the Curse

Introduction

Once man and woman left God's rich provision, marriage patterns appeared that were based on the struggle to survive, not on God's original intent in creation. Women "specialize" in childbearing and domestic production, leaving them dependent upon men, who in turn have to worry about earning a living. It is difficult to be "one flesh, naked and unashamed" in this kind of world.

The "New Economics" of God's Kingdom

Read Matt. 19:16-25

1. What does society expect men who are successful in a worldly sense to do or be? What anxieties and obligations does this create?

Society requires a man who wants to succeed by its standards to be dominant, masterful, to crave power, to maintain his honor, to have a lot of money, to marry a beautiful woman, and to be a sexual conqueror as well. This creates a great many anxieties and pressures, as it is impossible for anyone to always win, always be right, always be on top, and to never be wrong.

These obligations are the extreme (but all too common) results of the competitive pressures of living in the world of thorns.

2. How does the obligation to be successful in a material sense affect Christians?

Don't get into a big discussion about whether God prefers us to be rich or poor here. The point is that even Christians believe on some level that they are obliged to meet worldly criteria for success. Some symptoms of our confusion are: greed, envy, judgment, defensiveness, resentment, competition, comparisons and anxiety. These feelings divide us and keep us from being truly concerned for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In this passage, the disciples reacted with shock to Jesus' statement that it would be difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In Jesus' day, the rich were the main supporters of the temple and Jewish religious life. The poor were rarely had the time and money needed to obey the Jewish laws and so could not be considered really righteous. It was probably also believed that people were rich because they had been blessed by God. The idea that the rich would have a hard time entering the Kingdom of Heaven was very surprising – If they couldn't make it, "who then could be saved?"

Read Matthew 6:25-34 (also Matthew 7:7-11 and Luke 12:4-7 if time permits)

3. What is the basic point Jesus is making in these passages?

4. Contrast Jesus' statements with God's word to Adam in Genesis 3:17-19:

Gen 3: 17-19. "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground. ... for dust you are and to dust you will return."

On numerous occasions, Jesus assures those who follow him that they have returned to God's abundance. Instead of thorns, those who come back to God can expect the life of the lilies. We no longer have to worry about things like food, clothing, how long we will live, etc.

5. For each of the following verses, list the aspects of the Fall that are reversed by Christ:

I Cor. 15:22, 26

II Tim 1:10

Rev. 7:16,17

Rev. 21:3-4

Rev. 22:2-3

Personal Application

6. What do we have to do to experience this redemption from worldly cares? Are there areas of your life in which you are still suffering from the Curse on the ground?

7. Is our redemption from the Curse purely spiritual? Are the things that Jesus promises us for heaven only?

Jesus was talking about the here and now. We are redeemed – bought back from the effects of sin. Those who wait until they are ready to die before they repent will have missed the freedom from anxieties and fears that come with a living faith.

8. How can Christians be “in” but not “of” a world that is still full of thorns?

