

Wynkoop Center Bible Studies on Women in Ministry

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Credits and Notices

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The Crown of Creation—Exposition

Scripture Focus
Genesis 1:26-31

Exposition by David Rainey
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It has been pointed out in the textual commentary that the monotheistic pronouncement that creation was ‘good’, in Genesis 1–2, challenged the culture of the ancient Near Eastern world. We become aware that the biblical challenge can still continue in our current context, although it may be harder for us to see such a challenge since we assume our sophisticated modern or postmodern culture has delivered us from the confines of ancient Near Eastern thought patterns. However, we may too easily project our culture into Scripture, especially male/female roles and their relation to creation, thereby failing to hear what Scripture is saying to us.

Equality in Relationship

Genesis 1–2 firmly insist God takes the initiative by directing all the action. We, therefore, begin to discover who God is prior to the realization of who we are. Though not directly stated, the Trinitarian formulation may be hinted at here. This means the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in an eternal relationship of equality. Then we discover that humanity, male and female, is created in relationship, in the image of God. It is the idea of creation ‘in the image of God’ that is so crucial here. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit function with equality within the creative event, so humanity functions with equality. In fact, at this point, no specific social roles are even identified.

So-called ‘biblical support’ for hierarchical roles can only be found following the account of the introduction of sin in chapter 3. This has

strong implications for the doctrine of holiness, which can be understood as cutting through sinful behavior, sinful patterns, and sinful systems. This cutting through leads to a biblical understanding of the equality of male and female, and consequently, the equality of women in ministry. It is not a massive jump in coherent biblical thought to arrive at this conclusion. Equality in human relations is an integral part of the language of creation in Genesis 1:26-31.

Responsible Equal Relationship

We have established a controversial position distinctive to Christianity: humanity, as male and female, was created in equality based on the image of God. This now leads us into another important idea revealed in the biblical account, and the textual commentary has brought this out rather effectively. Both male and female live in responsible, equal relationship. The first area of responsibility lies in the relationship to creation. A common word to denote this is ‘dominion.’ It refers to an attitude of action, of care, cooperation, and development, not exploitation. God’s creation has not been placed into the hands of humanity to be treated carelessly. Male and female live in a cooperative relation to creation according to God’s order. The brevity of the narrative account allows for an imaginative understanding that creation is still in the process of development. It is not a finished product. Humanity will reap the benefits of

creation as long as a proper dominion is exercised.

Significantly, the creation that surrounds humanity is given for care both to male and female. Once again, no hierarchy of roles is indicated. That begins only with the introduction of sin into creation. Yet we believe holiness overcomes the terrifying effects of sin.

A final comment can now be made from the text. In subsequent scriptural revelation, God will be depicted in both male and female roles. Perhaps one of the most familiar images is the picture of being 'born again.' Of course it is God who creates and recreates humanity, but in humanity only the female gives birth. One is struck by how quickly Nicodemus understood the imagery in John 3 and yet found it difficult to apply to his setting. The concept of being 'born again' is taken from female action and is certainly one of the most captivating pictures of conversion. John 3 is a return to the creation

motif which allows us again to read God's initiative in creation and re-creation.

We may too easily project our culture into Scripture, especially male/female roles and their relation to creation, thereby failing to hear what Scripture is saying to us.

Importantly, for our part, we must try to avoid using human categories to interpret God, but rather allow God to interpret human roles

and conduct. Sometimes this is difficult to assimilate into our thinking, for we are such culturally-conditioned people. But being responsible to Scripture gives us the freedom to hear Scripture and adjust to its various forms of renewal and re-creation in us.

Conclusion

From the foundation of the creation narrative and based on the account of the creation of humanity as male and female, the model of equality, full partnership, and responsibility is presented. We are compelled to see that God, in the origin of creation, saw this model as very good.

The Crown of Creation—Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson
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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Starting Thoughts

It is helpful to remember that many people's views on this issue are very much *culturally defined*. We are perhaps dealing more here with cultural issues than sin issues. As we seek to live out God's intention for gender equality, we must resist the temptation to adopt an "us vs. them" mentality that demonizes the opposition, turning "them" into the enemy.

Discussion Questions

1. How does society define the word "equality" as it relates to people? How has that definition changed over time? For example, does "equality" mean the same thing in the Slave States in 1830 or in 1920s pre-suffrage politics as it does today?
2. How do the cultural values of a particular time and place affect the language of that culture? (For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of a very different kind of "equality" than was socially accepted in his time, yet as the culture is changing, the socially acceptable definition of "equality" is changing.)
3. According to the passage from Genesis 1:26-31, how would the text define "equality?"
4. How does our own cultural context affect our reading of Scripture? (For example, if the cultural values of the day promote *inequality* between the genders, passages such as this are easily overlooked or explained away.)
5. In what ways, then, are the words of this passage *counter-cultural*?
6. If we were to allow Genesis 1:26-31 to form our definition of "equality," how would it affect the way we live in our families? Our workplaces? In the marketplace? In the church?
7. What would it mean for men and women to be true, equal *partners* in life and ministry?
8. What opposition exists, both inside and outside of the church, to this kind of worldview?
9. In the presence of such opposition, how can we live as faithful witnesses to this kind of equality? What would it mean to love our neighbors, even when they oppose equality as it is defined by this passage?

The Crown of Creation—Commentary

Commentary by Joseph Coleson
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Genesis 1 is an overview account of God's creation, dealing mainly with creation issues on this earth. It is arranged into six creation days, three pairs of two. Day one records the making of light; day four, the placement and functions of the lightbearers, *from the perspective of the earth*. Day two records the division of the waters above (the atmosphere with its abundant water vapor) from the waters beneath (the still primeval ocean covering the surface of the globe); day five reports the creation of the sea and sky creatures. Day three reports the gathering of the waters beneath so the dry land could appear; day six, the making of the land creatures, of whom the culmination is 'adam (ah-DAHM), the human race. On the seventh day—Genesis 2:1-4a, which really belongs with chapter 1—God rested.

The original purpose of Genesis 1—2 is to provide an account of the creation as it was done by Yahweh-Elohim, as a corrective to the polytheistic creation narratives of Israel's neighbors. This corrective was done with the Sumerian/Babylonian account, the *Enuma Elish*, especially in mind.

The land creatures were the last to be made, on day six, and the last of the land creatures was 'adam. In this session we will look at the summary paragraph reporting our creation. It comprises more lines than the other paragraphs of this account and, literarily, occupies the climactic position of the narrative. It is also the theological climax of this chapter,

as it deals with God's creative work. This paragraph, however, only introduces the creation of the 'adam. Much more needed to be said, that did not fit this chapter's purposes or literary structures. Genesis 2 is that "much more."

Then God (Elohim) said, "Let us make 'adam in our image, according to our likeness, and let them exercise stewardship dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of the skies, and over the land creatures, and over all the earth—even over every moving thing that moves upon the earth." (v. 26¹)

The importance of God's last creative act of this chapter is highlighted a number of ways in this paragraph. First, this statement represents a heavenly council—a heavenly planning session, as it were—something which had not been done before any of God's other creative activities. To be sure, God had spoken before, but only by way of creative commands or directives, "Let there be." Here, the word is, "Let us."²

Here is the first occurrence in the Scripture of the word 'adam, human race, or human being. It is a collective noun; that is, it can be either singular or plural, depending on the context in which it occurs. Here it refers to the human race, rather than an individual human, since the first purpose proposed for them/us is, "Let them rule." This is not man alone, or woman alone, but humanity together, including all its members. The proposal is that

this new species of animal (land) creatures will exercise God-given dominion over all the rest of the earth, not as owners, but as stewards over God's creation, answerable to God for the way we discharge this responsibility.

So God (Elohim) created the 'adam in his image; in the image of God (Elohim) he created him; male and female he created them. (v. 27)

The Hebrew verb *bara'* (bar-AH) means "he created." It is used fewer than 50 times in the Hebrew Bible; all but once, its subject is God. One-seventh of its occurrences are in this chapter, if we include the Seventh Day, as we ought. It occurs in 1:1, the second word and first verb in the Bible, referring to the creation of what we may call the entire universe. It occurs next in 1:21, indicating the creation of the first animate life on the earth, a major step in the complexity of the biological order of the earth. Its sixth and seventh occurrences are in 2:3-4, in the summary statement of God's creative work, and God's rest from that work.

This leaves the middle three of the seven occurrences for this verse—an extraordinary literary and theological statement of the importance of the creation of the human race. *Bara'* does not mean to create something out of nothing; that teaching can be learned from Genesis 1, but not from this verb. *Bara'* simply refers to a very special creative act of God, not simply as making, or crafting, but as creating. *Bara'* says, "Listen up; pay attention; *this* work is *important*."

Three times *bara'* occurs in this verse. The second is a repetition of the first; we are

created in God's image. It wouldn't be accurate to say that when one sees a human being one sees God, but it would be appropriate to say that when one sees a human being one sees a reflection, an image, a likeness of God. That is what we were created to be; saying it twice is a common Hebrew way of emphasizing the point.

The third clause, "male and female He created them," should be enough by itself to settle the issue of gender equality as a foundational principle of Judeo-Christian theology and practice. It is a clear statement that both male and female, female and male, are human, and both are created in the image of God—a point that has been made in this verse twice, for emphasis. If human males are created in God's image, it must follow that

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over God's creation upon this earth
to both the man and the woman,
equally and in partnership together.**

human females are created in God's image. If human females are created in God's image, it must follow that human

males are created in God's image. No other conclusion is possible from this verse, and its implications may not be ignored or evaded.

Then God (Elohim) blessed them, and God (Elohim) said to them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and exercise stewardship dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of the skies, and over every living creature that moves upon the earth." (v. 28)

This verse reports God's blessing upon the first pair, but a blessing expressed in the form of a series of five verbs of instruction. God already had pronounced the first part of this blessing/command upon the animal kingdom

on day five, when God told the animal creation to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth—the same verbs used here. This promised blessing upon the animal kingdom, and now including its human members, is a direct challenge to the fertility theology of many of ancient Israel's pagan neighbors. They thought they had to plead, beg, cajole, remind, and bribe the gods to ensure the fertility of the land—of its fields, its fruit trees, its flocks, and the females of their own homes. But here, before ever the human race began to worship nature and nature's processes as gods, the true and transcendent God granted universal fertility as a blessing, a gift, even a procreative command. The natural right of living things to reproduce is simply in their/our nature as God's blessed creatures.

For our purposes in this session, our primary interest in this verse is its two pronouns and five verbs. First, the pronouns: "God blessed *them*"; "God said to *them*." These are clearly and unmistakably *plural* pronouns. The man cannot receive this blessing, cannot fulfill these commands, without the woman, nor the woman without the man. This blessing/command is to *both* the woman *and* the man, or it is nonsense.

Secondly, the verbs: All five verbs are plural imperatives; they cannot be carried out by one person alone. As the first humans were a pair, both must share the blessing and share in the carrying out of the instructions, which to fulfill *is* the blessing. The first three verbs are a building sequence intended for the human race itself. "You (both, and your descendents) be fruitful"; it is possible to be fruitful by having only one or a couple of children, but that would not be the entire blessing God intended.

"You (both, and your descendents) multiply"; again, it would be possible to multiply from two, and still have a fairly limited population upon the earth. But the culmination of this part of the blessing/instruction is, "You (both, and your descendents) fill the earth." The human race has, in recent centuries, managed to do this part of God's instruction pretty well!

But the point of this three-fold instruction to blessed procreation is mutual partnership of both genders, male and female, female and male. When (as it usually happens when this blessing is perverted) men take it upon themselves for economic, social/cultural, or even theological reasons, to force women into "excessive" procreation, it is not a true fulfillment of this blessing/instruction. One woman bearing many children at her husband's behest, or several women bearing the children of one man, are equally sinful aberrations, equally a man exercising power over his woman/women and their children because his culture grants him the power to do so. God's intention, in procreation as in all things, was and is the equal exercise of power by women and men alike.

Speaking of power, God granted power over God's creation upon this earth to both the man and the woman, equally and in partnership together. The final two verbs in this verse instruct the first pair, "You (both, and your descendents) *bring* [the earth] *under your control*, and you (both, and your descendents) *exercise stewardship dominion* over its other inhabitants." The earth prospers, or it suffers, under its human stewardship; God intended it to prosper under the joint management of female and male, as both bring

our talents, gifts, insights, and strength to “serve it and protect it” (2:15).

Moreover, God (Elohim) said, “Behold, I have given you every plant bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree which has the fruit of a tree bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth; to you it [all] shall be for food. And to every living creature of the earth, and to every flying creature of the skies, and to everything that moves upon the earth which has in it the breath of life, every green plant [I have given] for food.” And it was so. (vv. 29-30)

The most obvious point of these two verses is that plant life was God’s gift of food to the entire animal kingdom, including humans. The implication, though not the clear statement, is that animals were not to be eaten. Later, following the Flood, Noah and his descendents were given permission to eat animal flesh, also (9:3).

We note the pronouns still are plural. Both the male and the female continue to be included in God’s blessing and instruction. Both female and male are fully human, and full partners in the enterprise of stewardship dominion over this earth upon which God set them/us.

Then God (Elohim) saw all he had made and, behold, it was very good. And it was evening, and it was morning, the sixth day. (v. 31)

This chapter sometimes is called “the first Genesis account of creation.” Such a title is misleading on several counts. First, it is not a complete account of creation—it would take more words than Genesis 1 includes, just to name all the species of mammals, and

mammalia contains fewer species than any other class within the animal kingdom. The most we can say is Genesis 1 is a coherent theological *overview* of the creation of this earth.

The point is much more needs to be said about God’s creation of the human species, but that “much more” does not belong in Genesis 1, either literarily or theologically. Thus, the bare outline of the human creation which serves, rightfully, as the climax of Genesis 1, is picked up again and expanded significantly in Genesis 2, where we learn much more about God’s creation purposes for ‘*adam*, especially in God’s creation of us as a gendered species comprised of gendered individuals. To understand the “Genesis account of creation,” we must study chapters 1 and 2 together.

Yet, this “coherent theological overview” of creation, as we have called it, does have a conclusion, before moving on to the added detail of Genesis 2. With respect to God’s creative activity, this verse is that conclusion.

To understand the “Genesis account of creation,” we must study chapters 1 and 2 together.

God evaluated as “good” the individual creative works of the successive creation

days (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Here, at the climax of it all, God said the whole creation, upon all the earth, was “very good.” This, of course, included God’s climactic work of creation on the sixth day, the creation of ‘*adam* in God’s image, of ‘*adam* as both male and female. Many significant details of how God created ‘*adam* as “very good” await our study of Genesis 2, in our next two sessions. Let me leave you with one tantalizing hint: there will be a significant “not good” at a critical juncture in that process,

before the benedictory “very good” of Genesis 1:31 could be pronounced.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations in the Commentary section are the author’s own translation from the original languages.

² It is tempting for Christians to see here an early reference to the Trinity, with “us” being God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. When all things are revealed, that may turn out to be the case. However, it is too early to use this verse as evidence or proof, as though the Hebrew Scriptures clearly teach the doctrine of the Trinity. This verse simply cannot be made to carry that much theological freight.

For Further Reading

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The First Human, Almost—Exposition and Commentary

Scripture Focus
Genesis 2:1-17

Exposition and Commentary by Christi-An and Stephen Bennett
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So the heavens and earth and everything in them were finished. ²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done and on that day he ceased from all the work that he had done. ³So he blessed the seventh day and made it holy because in it he ceased from all his work which he had created and made. ⁴These are the origins of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that Yahweh God was making the earth and the heavens, ⁵no plant of the field was yet on the ground and no herb of the field had yet sprung up for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth and there was no human to work the ground. ⁶And a mist came up from the ground and watered all the surface of the ground. ⁷Then Yahweh God formed the human using dust from the ground and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the human came to life. ⁸And Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put the human there whom he had formed. ⁹And Yahweh God made every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food to grow from the ground and the Tree of Life within the garden and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. ¹⁰A river flowed from Eden to water the garden and there it divided into four rivers. ¹¹The name of the first was Pishon which goes around the whole land of the Havilah where there is gold. ¹²That gold is good and there is also bdellium resin and onyx stone. ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon and it goes around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is the Tigris and it goes to the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵Yahweh God took the human and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it.

¹⁶And Yahweh God commanded the human saying, "From every tree of the garden you are welcome to eat. ¹⁷But from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you must never eat for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:1-17¹)

Genesis 2 begins with the end of God's creating, but then quickly moves to give a different version of the same events. There is no competition between chapters 1 and 2 to give the correct historical and scientific version of the origin of the world. Neither are the two accounts historically and scientifically complementary. Their purpose is more in the realm of theology, and they are theologically complementary, although the focus of each is different. Genesis 2:1-4a actually finishes the creation account of chapter 1 while at the same time providing a transition to chapter 2.

Sabbath

The creation account of Genesis 1 has carefully arranged the origin of the created order into six days. It is not so much the origin of the earth that is described, because it is already there, although covered with water. What God accomplishes in those six days is to remove the water to its appointed places, and establish order in the universe. Day seven shows the climax of this created order is Sabbath. Sabbath is not just an afterthought or something arbitrary. Rather it is an integral part of the way God created the universe. We often think of Sabbath as "rest," but in Hebrew the more literal meaning is "stop." So Genesis 2:2 says God finished the work, and then

stopped working. Day seven then becomes a blessed and holy day, and an integral part of the Hebrew cycle of work and worship. God's orderly creation activity becomes more than a means to satisfy our curiosity about the origin of the world, but a pattern for everyday life.

This view of life, work, and worship is different from the other cultures of the ancient Near East. To cease work would have been unheard of. The Canaanite culture was materialistic and focused on fertility and increasing production. In ancient Near Eastern creation myths the gods desire to rest, but this occurs at the expense of

human labor. Humanity must work to provide for the gods so the gods

don't have to work. The human in Gen. 2 is not created to serve the physical needs of the gods, but for meaningful relationship with God.

The human in Gen. 2 is not created to serve the physical needs of the gods, but for meaningful relationship with God.

An Immanent and Relational God

The image of God in Genesis 1 is of an all-powerful God not in physical contact with the creation. God is far above the earth somewhere, calling worlds into being. In Genesis 2 the imagery changes to a God with human-like characteristics, intimately involved with the creation. God is no longer far away but is now, as it were, down on hands and knees in the mud, forming a human like a potter. God is now talking to the creation, and will walk with it in the garden.

Even the name for God has changed. In Genesis 1 it is "*Elohim*," the generic word for God often used in international settings. *Elohim* is the God of all nations. Beginning in Genesis 2:4b the personal name of God, "*Yahweh*," is used. This name is often used

when the nation of Israel is in focus and/or when God's close relationship with humans is in view. In Genesis 2 it is clear God desires a meaningful relationship with the human creation, and the human depends on this God for existence.

A Dependent Humanity

Then Yahweh God formed the human using the dust from the ground" (v. 7). The word used here for "human" will later become a personal name, "Adam." But it is not a male word used generically; it is a generic

word. It means "human," not "male" or "man." The feminine form of the word does

not mean "woman," but "ground." This play on words says Yahweh formed the '*adam*' (human) from the '*adamah*' (ground). It becomes clear later in chapter 2 that there is not yet a specified gender for this new species, and what happens at the beginning of chapter 2 applies to male and female. This is the creation of the first human, with little regard to gender. This is also true for the creation of the first humans in Genesis 1:27, where the human is created and it is specified that both male and female are created.

This new human is, from the beginning, dependent on God. It is created from dust, to which it will return after death (3:19).² It did not call itself into being, but had to be formed by Yahweh. Once formed, it still could not breathe. God had to give breath and life. The human is not self-existent or immortal. When God breathed into its nostrils, it *came to life*, or more literally "became a living soul." The Hebrew word for "soul" (*nephesh*) has a broad

range of meaning including “life” or “self” and can even be used as a pronoun (see Amos 2:15).

The human is also dependent on the garden God planted. The garden in which God placed the human provides a home, food from trees, and a vocation in cultivating and keeping the garden. This vocation is positive and enjoyable as implied by the meaning of *Eden*, “delight.” Although water is a threat in Genesis 1, the rivers of Genesis 2 are a blessing because they provide the water necessary for life. This was important to the original audience, who struggled to find adequate water supply in an arid land.

A Limited Humanity

Thus the human is limited, made from dust, not divine. It relies on God for the very breath of life. Its soul is not immortal or independent. The human relies on the grace of God for a livable environment with air, food, and water. The human is also limited by God’s command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The human has been given a choice in this matter, but the God who gave the choice also sets the consequences. The prohibition is emphatic. The grammatical construction of this prohibition is the same used in the Ten Commandments. The consequence is then emphasized by another grammatical construction that repeats the verb ‘die’. “You will certainly die” is literally, “dying you will die.”

This prohibition is part of God’s desire for meaningful relationship with human creation. The relationship should be reciprocal. God will not impose divine will on the human. Neither will God be manipulated by a human who can make choices without consequence, or who can

say a magical formula which forces the hand of God.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is concerned with more than just knowledge. In Hebrew, knowledge is not only something known in the head, but also something experienced in life. This tree could be called The Tree of the Experience of Good and Evil. The human knows intellectually it is wrong to disobey God, or else the prohibition is meaningless. But it will *experience* the evil of disobedience if it eats the fruit. In this way the human will *know* evil.

A Responsible Humanity

The human’s meaningful relationship with God is matched by a meaningful relationship to creation. God gave the humans dominion over the rest of creation in 1:26, which is not the same as a self-serving domination of creation. Here in chapter 2 the human is likewise charged to cultivate and keep the garden, and not simply to exploit it for selfish purposes. This is a positive responsibility and not arduous toil. Work is a privilege and a pleasure.

The relationship with the land is connected with the relationship with God. God has given the employment of cultivating and keeping, and also the prohibition from eating of the one tree. Failure to honor the relationship with the land upsets the relationship with God, and vice versa. Worship and environment are closely connected.

Connections

The dependence, limitation, and responsibility of the human in 2:4b-17 applies also to the female of the species, who

will be introduced in the next section of Genesis 2. This new development will emphasize these same characteristics, as it will be clear the human is also interdependent. The 'adam cannot reproduce autonomously but needs a counterpart. It is not self-existent, but needs God. Neither is it self-perpetuating. The soon-male human needs the soon-differentiated female to complete the creation, and to complete the connection. The result is a creation where God, the earth, and humanity (male and female) are closely connected and related. None is complete without the other. Any action denying this interdependence is in danger of seriously upsetting the balance. This is the way God created the heavens and the earth. And what God did was good.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations in the Exposition and Commentary section are the authors' own translation from the original languages.

² Using 'it' to refer to the first human may seem a bit odd, but will help to emphasize one of the points of our lesson, that the first human was not specifically gendered until differentiated while asleep in the garden.

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The First Human, Almost—Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson
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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the biblical understanding of Sabbath influence your understanding of relationships?
2. Why change God's name from Elohim to Yahweh? What is the significance of a name?
3. Does understanding the word 'adam as meaning "human" change your understanding of human relationships and roles? Why or why not?
4. How does reading 'adam translated "human" and not "male human name" in the beginning of the creation account

- challenge your understanding of the creation, and thus value of humans?
5. What does this mean for the creation of the second human?
 6. Power often indicates control of oneself and others. Humans were created dependent on God for shelter, food, and life. Is this still true today? How do your life and relationships reflect God's power, and not your own control?
 7. The boundaries set by God (such as mortality) are a part of being human. What other boundaries do you think God has set for us? Are these helpful? Why or why not?
 8. Define "dominion." What does it mean to have dominion over something? How does this relate to the power and control God has over all creation?
 9. What does God's creation of one human and then another say about human nature?
 10. How is society addressing this need for community? How is the church fostering community? How do both of these, secular society and the church, fail to foster community?
 11. Define "community." How does your understanding of creation, the creation of male and female humans, influence your understanding of community?
 12. As Christians we are called to follow Christ, living as God graces us—redeemed. Do we fail to live as the redeemed, practicing relationships and community outside of God's grace? Why or why not? What does it look like to live "redeemed"?

Wynkoop Center Bible Studies on Women in Ministry

UNIT 1: The Creation Mandate		UNIT 3: New Testament Women in Public Leadership	
The Crown of Creation	Gen. 1:26-31	Anna	Luke 2:22, 36-40
The First Human, Almost	Gen. 2:1-17	Woman at the Well	John 4:1-42
The Human Race Completed	Gen. 2:18-25	Jesus' Women Associates	Luke 8:1-3; 23:55–24:11;
Broken Fellowship	Gen. 3:1-13		John 20:1-2, 11-18
Facing the Consequences	Gen. 3:14-24	Lydia	Acts 16:11-15, 40
		Priscilla	Acts 18:1-3, 18, 24-26; Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19
		Paul's Women Associates	Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3; Col. 4:15
UNIT 2: Old Testament Women in Public Leadership		UNIT 4: Difficult Passages in the New Testament	
Miriam	Exod. 2:1-10; 15:19-21; Num. 12:1-16; 20:1; Mic. 6:4	The Creation Order Understood	1 Cor. 11:2-16
Deborah	Judg. 4:1-10, 14; 5:1-3	Keeping Order in Public Worship	1 Cor. 14:26-36
Huldah	2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28	Mutual Submission among Christians	Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7
Esther	Esther 2:5-11, 16-23; 4:13–5:8; 7:1–8:6; 9:29-32	I Suffer Not a Woman	1 Tim. 2:8-15
Jehosheba	2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chron. 22:10-12	The New Testament Understanding of Women	Gal. 3:23-29

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The Human Race Completed—Exposition

Scripture Focus
Genesis 2:18-25

Exposition by Clinton Branscombe
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Solitary confinement is frequently used in prison as punishment for bad behavior. Extended periods of such treatment often result in hallucinations and memory loss. While the picture of the single human in the early part of Genesis 2 could not be described as a place of confinement, it does confirm people were never meant to be completely solitary.

In this section an ideal is developed. Ideals are a strong motivating force for attitudes and behavior. While Genesis 2:18-25 culminates with a description of marriage, it also says something both simple and profound about the very nature of human beings. This passage will be examined in three sections: Problem of Loneliness (2:18-20), Solution of Companionship (2:21-23), and Ideal Marriage (2:24-25).

Problem of Loneliness (2:18-20)

The first human was made from “the dust of the ground” (2:7, TNIV). But God observed a simple difficulty: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (2:18, TNIV). From the beginning human beings were meant to be interactive creatures, not solitary hermits. But even this solitary human was busy. God brought the animals for them to receive names. After observing and naming all the other creatures, no companion for the human was found. It is important to understand this problem was not news to God, but rather now the human knows. The solution only comes after the human recognized the problem. We rarely

appreciate a solution until we know there is a problem.

Solution of Companionship (2:21-23)

This portion begins with the word “so.” In other words, the problem of loneliness prompts God to act. Earlier in this chapter the human was created “from the dust of the ground” (2:7, TNIV). Now that human would be divided. God put the human into a sleep, removed part of a side (not “rib”) and created the companion. Then God brought the two together. The first recorded human speech stresses their mutual suitability: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken” (2:23, NRSV). The actual sound of the Hebrew terms confirms their closeness: “man” (*ish*), “woman” (*ishshah*). Clearly they are meant for each other.

Earlier in the chapter animals were brought before the human and given names. This formal name giving showed mastery over them, reflecting God’s words in Genesis 1:28, “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (NRSV). When the second human is here called ‘woman,’ there is no hint of mastery or domination, but simply an exclamation of delight. It is not until 3:20, in the aftermath of the expulsion from Eden, that the woman has a personal name imposed upon her, “Eve.”

About three centuries ago the commentator Matthew Henry quoted a rabbinic saying: the

woman was “not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.” The two are companions drawn together because of the way they were made.

Ideal Marriage (2:24-25)

After the problem is recognized and resolved comes a description of marriage. The description in Genesis 2:24 is repeated in full three times in the New Testament: twice in parallel accounts in the Gospels (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7), and once by Paul (Eph. 5:31). First Corinthians 6:16 also quotes part of it. Only Genesis 15:6 is quoted more in the New Testament. This provides a good clue that maybe it is important!

There are three parts to this marriage description: first the man is to leave his parents, second he is to cling to his wife, and third the couple becomes one flesh. We may think of the three as leave, cleave, and weave. They are like the legs of an old-fashioned stool. Three legs were necessary in order for the stool to be stable. This description is clearly added for the benefit of a later audience. In ancient cultures, marriages were usually arranged by the couple’s families. At the wedding the woman left her parents and moved in with her husband’s family. This verse describes something quite different.

The first aspect is to leave. A healthy marriage requires the couple to break the ties of loyalty to parents. The Hebrew word is very strong and could be translated “forsake” or

even “reject.” This important aspect is a public action. The whole community knew when the leaving took place. This is not disrespect toward their individual families, nor does it mean the couple would have nothing to do with their parents, but that former loyalty will no longer be the most important.

The second aspect is to cleave. This is a personal aspect of marriage. Simply leaving parents does not make a marriage. A new loyalty replaces the earlier one. The first loyalty of married couples is to each other. This Hebrew term is the same one used to describe loyalty to God sometimes translated “hold fast” (Deut. 10:20; 11:22). The two are stuck together like two sheets of paper with glue. To separate them damages both.

**From the beginning human beings
were meant to be interactive creatures,
not solitary hermits.**

The third aspect is to weave. This is the physical aspect. Earlier in this chapter, we saw the physical division of the human into man and woman; now we see them back together. God created human beings in two genders that are attracted to each other. That attraction culminates in physical union described as “one flesh.”

All three of these aspects, the public “leave,” the personal “cleave,” and the physical “weave,” are vital for a healthy marriage. They must be kept in balance. If any one of them is neglected the result is an unstable marriage.

One more observation is made of this couple: “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Gen. 2:25, TNIV). Shame comes after the couple eats the forbidden fruit. Intimate human relationships are an important part of God’s design.

In this description of the ideal marriage one thing is conspicuously absent. No children are mentioned. This is not to say children are unimportant to a marriage, but they are not essential to it. Certainly they are a normal outcome of such a relationship, and God had already said in Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply” (NRSV). The point is children do not make a marriage, but they are a blessing added

to it. A simple analogy: icing does not make a cake, but is added to it.

This short passage gives us many insights into human relationships. Human beings were never meant to be solitary hermits. God’s original design was a mutual equality between the sexes. Marriage is a divine institution between a man and woman and is worthy of honor and respect.

The Human Race Completed—Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson
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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. How are Genesis 1 and 2 different than modern history books?
2. How does the view that Genesis 1 and 2 should be regarded as complementary, rather than as contradictory, creation narratives affect our reading of the text? What new perspective can we gain by reading Scripture as theologically structured rather than as pure history (as the Modern era defines it)?
3. How does the translation of *'ezer cenegdo* as “a power equal to it” affect the way we view this passage? What would it mean for the woman to be “a power equal to it” instead of merely a “helpmate” or “helper”? How is this view consistent with what we have seen in Genesis thus far in Lessons 1 and 2?
4. How does our culture view marriage? How has that view changed in recent years?
5. Within the bounds of male-female marriage (the definition of marriage in this passage), what are the usual (and unusual) roles assigned to the different genders?
6. How do those roles reflect equality between men and women? How do they reflect inequality?
7. Does anything exist in this passage that would suggest the idea of gender inequality in marriage? From where does the idea of gender inequality come?

8. In our day, sex is put to many uses. It is used to sell cars, generate website hits, and promote music. Within marriages, it is sometimes used as a weapon or method of control. How would the view of sex presented in this passage critique the way society uses sex?

9. What effect could this passage have on our view of sexual intimacy? In view of the creation of woman by dividing the man's flesh (vv. 21-22), what does it mean for the man and the woman to join back together and become "one flesh" (v. 24)?

The Human Race Completed—Commentary

Commentary by Joseph Coleson
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We have noted already in Session One of this unit that Genesis 1 and 2 should be regarded as complementary, rather than as contradictory, creation narratives. The more detailed report of God's making of the 'adam, which we find in Genesis 2, would ruin the literary beauty of Genesis 1, were it shoved in chronologically after 1:27. Furthermore, the theology and the anthropology of the two chapters have differing content and emphases; to conflate them would muddy and confuse them both.

The first part of Genesis 2 (Session Two of this Unit) reports some of the details of the first in God's two-stage process of the creation of 'adam, the human species. It then notes the planting of the Garden in Eden, and God's placing the single 'adam in that garden, where God would complete the creation of the 'adam. This God did by building the woman from the bone and the flesh of one side of the first 'adam, whom we can then begin to call 'ish, man.

As you study these comments, you will note I have left *Yahweh Elohim* untranslated. This is to remind us that Genesis 1 uses the title *Elohim*, "The Mighty One," throughout, while Genesis 2 uses a compound title—the divine name *Yahweh* together with this title *Elohim*—to impress upon us that *Yahweh*, the God of Israel, is the same God, *Elohim*, who created all else that exists, as Genesis 1 reports.

Also, I have left 'adam untranslated throughout, to emphasize that when God's creation of the human species was still in

process and there was only one, that one was 'adam, human, and when the creation of the human species was completed and there were two, male and female (here, 'ish and 'ishshah, v. 23), both were 'adam, as 1:27 already discloses. Another important point to keep in mind here is that physically we are of the earth. The first 'adam was formed from the 'adamah; we will understand this if we render it, "from the earth, earthling."

Finally, I translate the third person masculine/neuter singular pronoun usually as "it," rather than "he," to keep before us the important fact that this account says *absolutely nothing* about human gender until God's building of the woman taken from the first 'adam; this action is not recorded until verse 22.

Keeping all this at least in the back of our minds, let's begin.

Then Yahweh Elohim said, "It is not good for the 'adam to be alone; I will make for it a power equal to it." (v. 18¹)

As recorded in 1:31, at the end of the initial creation week on this earth, God had pronounced all God had made as "very good." Now here we find the assessment, "It is not good." This should be enough to demonstrate that the events of this chapter belong, chronologically, before God's blessing of the human male and female together (1:28-30) and the final benediction upon *all* God's earthly creation (1:31), "And, Behold! It was very good!"

How would the “not good” become “very good”? Many have impugned God’s intelligence and foresight here by imagining God’s “It is not good” is a statement of God’s first discovery that He had overlooked something, had left out a critical component in the creation blueprint, and now would have to improvise. That idea can be shown for the rubbish it is by reflecting that the God who already had the experience (whether by evolution or by individual special creation matters not a whit on this point) of creating hundreds of thousands of earthly species, most of them gendered and sexual creatures, would hardly “forget” now that He had intended, or needed, to make the highest primate gendered and sexual, also. Such a god as that would not be worthy of ordinary respect, let alone of human worship.

No, God’s intended work was not yet finished. The culmination of this earth’s entire creative process would be the “power equal to it” that would complete the creation of the human species, not as an afterthought, but as the crowning achievement, already designed in exquisite detail before the entire project ever was launched.

“A power equal to it” translates two Hebrew words, *‘ezer cenegdo* (A-zer keh-neg-DOE). Both require explanation and comment.

English versions translate *‘ezer*, “helper,” “helpmate,” “helpmeet,” and the like. This is incorrect. Another related root spelled with the same three consonants occurs in the Hebrew Bible; it means “strength,” “power.” Another example is the two names of the same Judean

king, Uzziah and Azariah. Both names mean the same, “God (Yahweh) is my strength.” Azariah is formed from the same root we find in the phrase *‘ezer cenegdo*, here and in verse 20.

How do we know we have *this* root here, and *not* the root meaning “help,” “helper”? The second word in this phrase tells us. Actually, in Hebrew it is three words spelled together as one, two prepositions and a pronoun. The first

The culmination . . . would be the “power equal to it” that would complete the creation of the human species, not as an afterthought, but as the crowning achievement.

preposition, *ce* (keh), means “like,” “as,” “corresponding to,” i.e., the same thing, another individual of the same

class or species. The one individual was *‘adam*, human; thus, another creature “like” it, “corresponding to” it, also would be another *‘adam*, another human.

The second preposition, *neged* (NEH-ged) means “facing,” “in front of.” When these two prepositions occur together, they emphasize the equality of the two parties. In many cultures, in many social situations, when two parties stand or sit fully facing each other, or when several or many persons stand or sit in the same way (e.g., around a table that has no obvious “head” or “foot”), they interact as equals. A man and a woman lying in bed together, facing each other, should face each other as equals.

The pronoun suffix that ends this form means “it” or “him.” In this context, the pronoun refers to the first (so far, the only) *‘adam*.

Putting it altogether, we may translate this clause (with a bit of clarifying expansion), “I will make for it a[nother] power, like/corresponding to it [i.e., of the same

species, also *'adam*, also human], facing it as equal [because it *is* equal]."

Now *Yahweh Elohim* had formed from the earth every living creature of the field and every flying creature of the skies. So now He brought [each one] to the *'adam* to see what he would call it; so whatever the *'adam* named [each] living creature, that was its name. (v. 19)

It is not necessary to postulate here a duplicate account of the creation of the earth's animal species. Biblical Hebrew does not feature a separate form for what in English is called the "past perfect." The same Hebrew verb form may be translated either, "formed," or "had formed." The translator must make this decision routinely throughout the Hebrew Bible. Here, the context requires, "had formed."

God brought (literally, "caused to come") the larger animal species (at least) to the *'adam*, so the *'adam* could give them species names. In the cultural context of the ancient Near East, to name something or someone was to claim and to exercise authority over it/them. As part of the stewardship mandate bestowed upon the human species, God gave the *'adam* responsibility for naming the other creatures.

A formal naming, of which this occasion required many, records three elements in the biblical text; otherwise, it is not a formal naming. (This is important, and will become even more so.) First, a specific verb must be used; in this context, of course, it will be translated, "named [it/him/her]" or, "called [its/his/her] name." Secondly, the common noun "name" must be present, so our second translation will reflect the Hebrew a bit more closely, "called [her/his/its] name." We could

also translate "gave [him/her/it] [the] name." The third element usually is the proper noun, the name actually given. Here, since the *'adam* bestowed many names, a pronoun stands in for them, "whatever the *'adam* named [each] living creature, that was its name."

So the *'adam* gave names—to every domestic creature, and to the flying creatures of the skies, and to all the wild creatures of the field, but as for the *'adam* itself, it did not find a power equal to it. (v. 20)

With this verse, we have the reason God set the task of naming the other creatures at this particular juncture, before God's second and final creative act in the process of creating *'adam*. By studying the other creatures enough to be able to bestow upon them names reflective of their natures, the *'adam* came to understand that none of them was, or ever could be, an *'ezer cenegdo* for it. It realized none of God's other creatures was of its own species. Furthermore, it had seen that the other creatures are gendered, that their males and females had a relationship the *'adam* itself did not have, and could not have with any of the other creatures. What God had known by design from the beginning of the process, the *'adam* now discovered by investigation. Now the *'adam* itself was ready for God's final creative act.

So *Yahweh Elohim* caused a deep sleep to fall upon the *'adam*, and it slept. Then He took a portion of its side [or, one of its sides], and He closed up the flesh in its place. (v. 21)

The word I have translated here as "side" occurs about 40 times in the Hebrew Bible. Nowhere else does it refer to a single human

“rib”; in the context of the first ‘*adam*’s statement of verse 23, it should not be translated “rib” here, either. Whatever God took from the first ‘*adam* to make another ‘*adam*, and thus—**only now**—to make ‘*adam* into a gendered species, it was not just one bone. It would not be out of order to think here of God dividing the one ‘*adam* more or less in half, then constituting one half a man, the other half a woman. The language of this verse at least allows us to visualize it that way. (Whether this account is intended literally in all aspects is another question, not affecting its theological/anthropological/relational teachings, whichever way we decide.)

God immediately closed up the flesh of the first ‘*adam* so it would be whole and well as soon as possible. Now, and not before now, we may begin to call it ‘*ish*, man, as well as ‘*adam*, human. Some commentators even have suggested he regained consciousness in time to watch God build the woman. It cannot be proven, of course, but it would explain the confidence of the man’s statement of verse 23.

Every woman since born is her daughter; therefore, every woman is entitled to think of herself, at least potentially, as a “woman of excellence.”

Then Yahweh Elohim built the side which He had taken from the ‘adam into a woman, and He brought her to the ‘adam. (v. 22)

For God’s making of the first ‘*adam*, when it was only one, the author used the verb *yatsar*, “He formed” or even “He sculpted” (v. 7). The first step was a careful crafting, much as a sculptor would form a life-size statue of clay in his/her studio today.

Here, the verb is “built,” again denoting a careful, thoughtful, planned-out making, with

an excellent-in-every-way result in mind from the start, namely, the first human woman. Every woman since born is her daughter; therefore, every woman is entitled to think of herself, at least potentially, as a “woman of excellence,” a biblical phrase reflecting God’s assessment of woman as God’s creation (e.g., Prov. 31:10; Ruth 3:11).

God brought her to the man with joy, anticipating that the man would recognize the greatness of this gift, and accept with joy, also. From the man’s statement in the next verse, we recognize that he did see and accept with joy, and also that he understood this was not a gift to him alone, but to and for both of them together.

Then the ‘adam said, “This one, this time [even: at last! or, finally!], is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called ‘woman,’ because from man she was taken.” (v. 23)

The ‘*adam* had named the other creatures, and in so doing had recognized that none of them was ‘*adam*. Finally, this new creature was ‘*adam*, also. He recognized her immediately as human; that is the meaning of the expression “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh,” i.e., of the same species as I, ‘*adam* as I am ‘*adam*. These two phrases together carry the same meaning in that regard as the earlier phrase ‘*ezer cenegdo* (vv. 18, 20).

Remember from our discussion of verse 19 that three elements must be present in order for a text to report a formal naming? Here we have two of them, the verb “called,” and the noun referring to the woman, *ishshah*. But the third element is missing. The common noun

“name” is not present here; therefore, this cannot be a formal naming. The man did not “name” her “woman,” but indicated the common-noun classification, “woman,” to which she and all her female descendents would belong. As “man” is not the man’s name here, so “woman” is not the woman’s name here, either.

The man did not have authority to name the woman, since she was of the same species as he, “a power like him, of the same species, facing and interacting with him as equal” (*because equal*). He understood that here, and so did not name her. After they both had transgressed the one prohibition, fracturing their relationships with God, with the earth, and with each other, the man did *usurp to himself* the right to name her Eve. There (3:20) all three elements of a formal naming are present. At that moment, he snatched for himself the name ‘*adam*, “human,” and relegated her to less-than-human status, in the process sinning once again against God, against the woman, against himself, and not least, against all their future daughters and sons.

But here it was not so. This is not a naming, but a joyful “Thank you” to God for fashioning an ‘*ezer cenegdo*, of his own bone and flesh, no less. Furthermore, the initial creative work was now well and truly finished. The position of the solitary ‘*adam* had been “not good,” but now God’s glowing praise recorded in 1:31, which belongs here in the chronology of the whole narrative, is entirely appropriate, “Then God saw everything He had made and, behold, it was very good.”

Therefore, a man shall forsake his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (v. 24)

These are not the words of the man in Eden, but of the later author/editor of this narrative, which make them all the more remarkable. Whenever they first were recorded, it was in a patriarchal age, when the usual practice was for fathers to negotiate marriages between their children, and for sons to bring their wives into the household and under the authority of their fathers, until such time as the father would die.

Here, the mandate is the opposite. A man is to “forsake” his parents’ home and authority; “forsake” is a verb of great force and power. He is to “cleave” to his wife; “cleave” also is a very powerful verb, conceptually. Having been until his marriage a part of his father’s household, the married son now was to leave and set up his own household with his new wife; likewise, the married woman with her new husband. All humans are under the authority of God as our Creator, but the only God-ordained authority of any humans over other humans recorded before Genesis 3 is the authority of parents over their children. Even that authority is for the specific purpose of bringing them, and until such time as they shall come, to their own full maturity, when they assume responsibility under God for their own household, one man and one woman, one woman and one man, together.

This chapter is entirely about relationship—the relationship of humans to God, to the rest of this earthly creation, and to each other. It follows that the phrase *one flesh* refers, but is not limited, to sexual congress. It includes every aspect of the marital union God envisioned when God gave us this great gift. It

continues through all the subsequent generations of many families, as the sexual union of one man and one woman, followed by many like unions, results in the conception of new daughters and sons, each uniquely “one flesh” from their parents in a different sense.

Now the two of them were naked, the ‘adam and his wife, but they were not ashamed of themselves. (v. 25)

“Naked” refers, of course, to being without clothes, not needing clothing in the perfect environment of Eden. But it also includes emotional, psychological, and perhaps even mental and spiritual, transparency, when these two innocents had no need to conceal themselves in any way from each other or from God. To be naked and *entirely* without shame or embarrassment is presently not possible for adults, apart from the active grace of God and, probably, a lengthy period of love and trust within a good marriage.

This is a short but extremely important account of what God intended in creating the human species and placing us upon this earth. How we forfeited Paradise, and God’s first promise to redeem and restore, are the subject of the next two sessions.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations in the Commentary section are the author’s own translation from the original languages.

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Wynkoop Center Bible Studies on Women in Ministry

UNIT 1: The Creation Mandate		UNIT 3: New Testament Women in Public Leadership	
The Crown of Creation	Gen. 1:26-31	Anna	Luke 2:22, 36-40
The First Human, Almost	Gen. 2:1-17	Woman at the Well	John 4:1-42
The Human Race Completed	Gen. 2:18-25	Jesus' Women Associates	Luke 8:1-3; 23:55–24:11;
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Jehosheba	2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chron. 22:10-12	The New Testament Understanding of Women	Gal. 3:23-29

Credits and Notices

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Broken Fellowship—Exposition

Scripture Focus
Genesis 3:1-13

Exposition by Brian Russell
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This passage comes with much baggage. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul traces the entrance of sin into the world through Adam's disobedience in Genesis 3. This makes our text crucial for a Christian understanding of human sinfulness. Moreover, our text has also been used to lay blame on the actions of Eve and thereby to justify the subordination of women in church and society.

Our commentary section has clearly demonstrated the biblical author did not intend to blame the woman alone, but rather paints a picture of a disobedient humanity—male and female—who refused to trust and follow the God who created them. This invites us to read the text in a way which addresses women and men equally.

Our passage challenges us in two ways. First, it does serve to report the “original sin” that fundamentally altered the idyllic world God crafted, and thus serves as the backdrop for the good news about God's actions through Jesus to bring salvation. But secondly, it serves as a profound witness to all who follow Adam and Eve, lest we also become entangled in a never-ending cycle of disobedience in our own lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

Backdrop

Chapter 2 paints a picture of a paradise in which God and humanity interacted freely and naturally. Humanity enjoyed an unfettered and perfect relationship with God, with the environment, and between the sexes. There was an abundance of food which is “pleasing

to the eye and good for food” (v. 9, NIV). Humanity enjoyed a blissful existence in a garden where there was only one explicit curb on behavior: the humans were simply not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (v. 17). Even this prohibition is couched in terms of protection and concern. They were to avoid consuming the fruit of this tree because if they did so, they would die. Thus, even the Creator's rule served not as an infringement on their freedom, but as a safeguard for their own well-being.

As the commentary section explains, 2:4-25 serves as the introduction to the story of the entrance of human disobedience into the world. The juxtaposition of the idyllic harmony of the world in Genesis 2 with the fractured world in Genesis 3–4 is striking. Yet, even more striking is the realization that temptation came and carried the day in the midst of a perfect world. It did not strike at a moment of weakness or stress. Chapter 3 opens following the scene in Genesis 2 in which husband and wife enjoy perfect intimacy with one another.

This then stands as a warning to future generations. The Apostle Paul's caution to the Corinthian church is an apt one for us as well: “So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall” (1 Cor. 10:12, NRSV). As followers of Jesus Christ, we no longer live in paradise. How much more at risk are we? This text can teach us much about temptation.

The Danger of God-Talk (3:1-3)

Our text opens with the entrance of the serpent and the beginnings of an episode known as “The Fall of Humanity.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer has aptly labeled this scene as the “first conversation about God.”¹ The serpent began innocently with a question, “Did God indeed say . . . ?” When we look at these words carefully, it is evident the serpent was subtly pressing Eve (and the silent Adam—see v. 6) to turn God into an object rather than rightfully treating God as the subject of a genuine relationship. In Genesis 2, Adam and Eve had complete access to God. They lived in a vital relationship with God. God walked daily through the garden with them. Thus, the beginning of this temptation scene is the abandonment of a proven relationship. The serpent invited Eve and Adam to talk *about* God rather than to speak *to* or *with* God.

It remains crucial for us as disciples of Jesus to maintain a relationship with God and to resist the temptation of substituting God-talk for a moment-by-moment relationship with God through prayer, meditation on Scripture, and faithful obedience. When temptations to question God’s words come, we need to be confident in our understanding of what God has indeed spoken and in our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Questioning God’s Motives (3:4-5)

After subtly causing Eve to question the words of God, the Serpent pressed her boldly by questioning the integrity and trustworthiness of God. At moments when a

person has to decide between obedience and disobedience, it is crucial how one answers this question: *Do I fundamentally trust that God has my best interests at heart?*

The serpent clearly implied God could not be trusted, and in fact was selfishly holding onto a special *knowledge*—the knowledge of good and evil. If humanity could attain this knowledge, humanity would suddenly become like God. God’s graciousness in providing a prohibition to protect humanity was spun by the serpent as an act of selfishness that was actually keeping the woman and the man from achieving their full potential.

If we are to live daring lives that achieve God’s will, we have to settle in our hearts the

trust issue—God can be trusted. We simply cannot achieve God’s will in the world apart from living in a moment-by-moment relationship with God,

built on the belief that God has our best interests at heart. Eve (and Adam) did not have this trust and the results were tragic.

Acting on Impulse (3:6-8)

Once God moves from being a subject with whom we live in vital relationship to being an object about whom we talk, and once we begin to question God’s motives, we are left simply to live by our own cunning, intellect, and resolve. When trust in God diminishes, we are reduced to acting on impulse. We simply do what seems right. The problem is apart from a vital relationship with God, we lack the ability to discern good and bad, right and wrong. Don’t ever think for a minute Eve knew the end results of her actions. In the moment,

Once we begin to question God’s motives, we are left simply to live by our own cunning, intellect, and resolve. When trust in God diminishes, we are reduced to acting on impulse.

she believed she was taking the correct course. Proverbs 14:12 reminds us, “There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death” (NRSV).

The tragedy of all of this is God had indeed provided bountiful food. Sometimes we think the temptation was based on the appearance of the fruit. Look back at 2:9; this verse tells us all of the food in the garden was “pleasing to the eye and good for food” (NIV). The key then was its promise of wisdom. In a context when one’s relationship with God has deteriorated—when we no longer know God and worse yet when we no longer trust God truly has our best interests at heart—we resort to self-trust and self-reliance, or as Paul would say, we live by the flesh.

What was the end result of this for Adam and Eve and what is it for us today? Paradise lost. Trust is the key to living faithfully and courageously for God in the world today. Apart from it, humanity remains trapped in endless cycles of disobedience and alienation from God.

The Response (3:9-13)

The response of God and the humans is striking. God responded by looking for

God’s prized creations; this is both tragic and hopeful. It is tragic because it summarizes the results of disobedience—separation and alienation from God. In our text, we see the classic human response—blaming others and hiding from God. Yet in the midst of this tragedy, the Creator came looking to restore the relationship. There would be repercussions for humanity’s action, but there was hope. God’s mission of saving love that culminates in the cross of Jesus Christ begins here with God reaching out to humanity in the aftermath of humanity’s original sin.

As we seek to live faithfully for God, do we have a vital relationship with God? Do we trust God has our best interests at heart? Or do we live our lives trusting fundamentally in ourselves? God offers us God’s best. Have we reached that point in our lives when we hand over all we are to God so we may live fully as followers of Jesus Christ? This text warns us about the dangers of the alternative.

Notes

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, trans. and ed. Martin Rüter and Ilse Tödt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 111.

Broken Fellowship—Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson
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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and

exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you were blamed or accused of something you didn't do. How did it make you feel to be blamed unfairly?
2. Does our society tend to blame others for misfortunes and bad choices? Why do you think this is? How would life look differently if we did blame someone else for everything?
3. How does trust affect a relationship? Can you think of a time trust was broken in one of your relationships? Did this change your relationship with that person? Why or why not?
4. After reading the passage we see that both humans, male and female were present. Does this challenge your understanding of this scene in the Bible? Why or why not?
5. Does the assignment of responsibility change the effect of the sin in this passage? If the male human had eaten the fruit first, would the consequences have been different? Would God have acted differently? Why or why not?
6. How does your understanding of this text affect how you relate to God? To others? To fellow Christians?
7. God asks what happened after the serpent's visit. Who gets "blamed" first? Why do you think the first reaction is to blame others?
8. How does blaming others affect our lives?
9. What happens to relationships that suffer from "finger pointing" and the "blame game"? How can this be changed?
10. If you were able to apply the truth of responsibility and God's grace to your life and relationships, what would it look like?
11. What would your church look like if members didn't play the "blame game"? How would your community be changed? How would lives and relationships be transformed?

Broken Fellowship—Commentary

Commentary by Robert Branson
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If the woman had not been deceived, we wouldn't be in this mess." So goes a statement of conventional wisdom. Is that what God's Word states? Who is responsible for this originating sin? Maybe we need to read more carefully before we assign blame.

The snake was more cunning than all of the wild animals which Yahweh Elohim¹ had made. And he said to the woman, "Did Elohim indeed say, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees of the garden?'"² And the woman answered the snake, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³but from the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden Elohim said, 'You shall not eat from it and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴The snake said to the woman, "You will most certainly not die. ⁵For Elohim knows that in the day you eat from it then your eyes will be opened and you will be like Elohim knowing good and evil." ⁶And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes and the tree was desirable to make wise, then she took from it fruit and ate, and gave also to her husband with her and he ate. ⁷And the eyes of the two of them were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed together leaves of the fig tree and made for themselves loin cloths. ⁸And they heard the voice of Yahweh Elohim walking in the garden at the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid from the presence of Yahweh Elohim in the midst of the trees of the garden. ⁹And Yahweh Elohim called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰And he said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was

afraid for I am naked and I hide myself." ¹¹And He said, "Who revealed to you that you are naked? Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from it?" ¹²And the man said, "The woman whom you placed beside me, she gave to me from the tree and I ate." ¹³And Yahweh Elohim said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" And the woman said, "The snake deceived me and I ate." (3:1-13²)

Our passage (Gen. 3:1-13) continues the creation narrative which begins in 2:4 and extends to 3:24. This material has been woven together with the Creation Hymn (1:1-2:3) in a sequential manner to deal with a variety of theological issues, one of them being the breach of relationships between humanity and God. Whatever the literary history of the materials found in the opening chapters of Genesis (1–11), they now stand as a synthetic whole, an interwoven narrative that reflects Israel's understanding of humanity's dysfunctional place in God's created order.

The snake was one of Yahweh Elohim's created creatures; not domesticated, but one of the *wild animals*. It is described as *cunning* (*'arum*), a word which, like in English, can have both positive and negative overtones. The Hebrew word sounds similar to "naked" (*'arummim*) in 2:25 and 3:7. By the use of paronomasia, or punning, a literary bridge between the previous scene and this one is forged. The scenes change, but the story continues.

The snake spoke to the not-yet-named woman (see v. 20) inquiring about Elohim's prohibition concerning what could not be eaten. Two questions arise about this dialog. Why does the snake speak only to the woman, and why to the woman instead of the man? Claus Westermann supplies an answer to the first question. He notes that ". . . conversation in ancient narratives are [sic] always conducted by two people, only."³ Thus the literary style did not allow for three-way, or multiple conversations. When Yahweh Elohim addressed the man and woman later (vv. 9-13), the conversations were sequential, not simultaneous. The second question will be addressed later.

The woman responded that only one tree was prohibited. In good rabbinic fashion, her answer expanded on Elohim's original statement (2:16) to include touching it, thus building a fence around the prohibition (see Jesus' "fence building" in Matt. 5:21-28). The text does not say how the woman learned of the prohibition. We are left to assume the man told her about it. Thus we do not know if the man himself added the expansion, or if it was her idea.

The snake's response (vv. 4-5) begins by contradicting Elohim, "You will most certainly not die," a subtle promise of life, not death. The next statement casts doubt on the motives of Elohim. He did not want them to become like himself. To attain the forbidden knowledge

was to become like Elohim. Thus the possibility of attaining power was dangled before them while implying Elohim had not been fully truthful. He had held something back from them.

The temptation came through Yahweh Elohim's created world, a creature formed by Him. It focused on His handiwork, the fruit of a tree. The couple was enticed by their own desire, which could be satisfied by the exercise of their inherent freedom. Doubt rode on the words of the snake. Had Elohim been less than fully truthful, more self-serving with "divine interests more at heart than interest in humans? The issue of knowledge thus becomes at its deepest level an issue of *trust*. Is the giver of the prohibition one who can be trusted with their best interests?"⁴

While the speech of the snake was directed toward the woman, it included the man. Hebrew distinguishes between second person singular and plural, like old English "thee" and "ye." The words "you" or "your" which occur in these verses are all plural. In addition, v. 6

notes her husband was *with her*. To suggest the snake spoke to the woman because the man was absent is inconsistent with the text itself. He was included in the conversation but literary convention, as noted above, kept him silent.

The turning point in the drama is v. 6, which reads closely to 2:9. Elohim had made each tree desirable to the sight and good for food. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food . . .

Where was the man while the snake tempted the woman? According to v. 6, there with her. Why then was he silent? Cultures develop different literary methods for telling stories; in ancient Israel conversations recorded in narratives were between two persons only. The writers did not record three-way conversations. The conversation was between the woman and the snake, so only their words were recorded. This is just the way they wrote.

and the tree was desirable to make wise.” The woman viewed Elohim’s creation correctly, but drew the wrong conclusion. To eat was not to gain, but to lose. Both ate and both sinned.

This brings us back to the question, why did the serpent speak to the woman and not to the man? From ancient to modern times commentators have suggested the woman was somehow mentally weak or spiritually deficient compared to the man. The text does not confirm these assertions. Rather than supposing Elohim’s creation was somehow defective, it is more fruitful to understand how the story would have been heard by its original audience, ancient Israel, which was a strongly patriarchal society (see Num. 30). If the serpent had tempted the man, who then in turn gave to the woman, who would have been responsible for breaching Elohim’s prohibition? In that culture the man was

always responsible for his actions, but not necessarily the woman. She was subservient to her husband and could claim she was simply doing what he told her to do. The only way to make both responsible for their actions was to tell the story so the woman made an independent decision with which her husband concurred. The style of the conversation was thus dictated by social and literary convention, not some supposed lack or weakness in the woman.

Events unfolded rapidly. Their eyes indeed were open, but not with wisdom. Their

nakedness had to be covered (v. 7). The voice of Yahweh Elohim was heard (v. 8), but instead of a bold openness in His presence, fear gripped them (v. 10). The trees in the midst of the garden became a place to hide (v. 8), not a source of food and immortality (2:9).

When the man was confronted by Yahweh Elohim and asked if he had eaten from the forbidden tree (v. 11), he blamed the woman, and thus indirectly Yahweh Elohim himself (v. 12). After all, it was Yahweh Elohim who had created the woman from his side. The man subtly implied Yahweh Elohim was at fault in final analysis.

In v. 13 Yahweh Elohim spoke for the first

time to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” It was the same question He would later ask of Cain (4:10). Her defense was that the serpent deceived her. She too tried to shift the blame by implying the fault was Yahweh Elohim’s. After all, had

Did the snake tempt the woman because she was somehow weaker than the man and thus more susceptible to temptation? The story nowhere states or implies this. In Israel’s patriarchal culture the woman was subservient to the man. She could hardly be blamed if she followed his orders. However, if she decided first then she would be at fault. This was the only way in that culture to tell the story so both were guilty.

He not created the serpent? Both stood before Yahweh Elohim, equally His creation, equally responsible, equally guilty, equally trying to shift the blame. Next Yahweh Elohim will respond. Will it be in judgment alone, or will mercy also be present?

Notes

¹ While the translation is literal, the names of God are transliterated, rather than using the standard translation “LORD” for Yahweh and “God” for Elohim. Yahweh was the name of God revealed to Moses at Sinai (Exod. 3:14),

projected back into this creation story. Elohim is the common word for God which is used in the first creation story (1:1-2:4).

² All Scripture quotations in the Commentary section are the author's own translation from the original languages.

³ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 239.

⁴ Terence E. Fretheim, *The Book of Genesis*, New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:361.

For Further Reading

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Facing the Consequences—Exposition

Scripture Focus
Genesis 3:14-24

Exposition by Deanna Hayden
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Just a couple of weeks into our dating relationship, Ben (now my husband) and I sat down to have a very serious conversation. “What fears do I have about this relationship?” We were asking ourselves this question because we wanted to know what kinds of obstacles we might be dealing with in the future. And ultimately, by naming those fears, we hoped to learn how better to deal with them. One of the fears that came up was that the other person would leave us. In other words, we feared being rejected or abandoned. We feared a broken relationship.

Relationships are important to every person. We were created to be in relationship with God and with each other. What relationship is most important to you on this earth? Maybe it’s one with your friend, or your cousin, or your husband or wife. Think about that person, and then think what incredible grief and loss you would feel if that relationship were somehow broken.

We witness the breaking of that kind of close and intimate relationship in Genesis 3. God created the earth and all that was in it, including humanity—especially humanity—that God might have relationship with this beautiful creation. It’s a stretch for our minds to grasp what love and joy God felt during that journey of untainted friendship with Adam and Eve, how ever short-lived it was. What peace and sweet harmony there must have been between God and this man and woman, and all of creation!

Perhaps we can understand a little of the extreme pain and grief resulting from the disobedience and betrayal committed by Adam and Eve toward God. When Ben or I act or speak selfishly toward one another, our marriage takes a hit. There is hurt felt, and many times the desire to lash out and get even is strong. Praise and thanks be to the Lord God for not lashing out like we do! If we take at face value the warning God gave in Genesis 2:17, of death being the result of disobedience, we can see God’s love shown through mercy toward Adam and Eve.

Instead, God acknowledged the consequences that would take place naturally, as creation struggled through the process of experiencing the results of the knowledge of good and evil. In this process, we see the relationship between God and humanity was not the only one broken. The relationships within creation itself were broken as well. There would be strife between humanity and the earth, between humanity and animals, and between humans. It’s not hard to see that when our relationship with God is not right, all of our other relationships seem to go wrong, too.

Perhaps, of all the earthly relationships affected by sin, the most serious consequences were described to Eve. As Dr. Gerald Miller has translated in the commentary section, God said to the woman, “Your longing will be for your husband, and he will lord it over you” (v. 16). What kind of relationship does this describe? Certainly not one created by God! This statement describes a longing, but it is not

part of a relationship of mutual love and respect. It is a longing answered with a twisted use of power. When God said to Eve that her longing would be for her husband, and he would lord it over her, God was not saying, "So there! That's what you get for disobeying me. You hurt me, and I'm going to hurt you back." That is not the God we know. What sorrow must have been in God's voice as *all* of these consequences were revealed! God doesn't desire for a husband to dominate his wife. For that matter, God does not desire for any human being to dominate another. But this domination is a result of sin. This is what happens as we take these selves God created to be in loving relationship, and instead live selfishly.

We are never the only ones hurt when we live selfishly. Our actions affect others. It is

It's not hard to see, when our relationship with God is not right, all of our other relationships seem to go wrong, too.

interesting to see the way God worded the consequences for Adam, "Because you have . . . eaten from the tree . . ., cursed will be the ground in regard to you."¹ God didn't curse Adam. God said the ground is cursed! The earth itself faces consequences as a result of the actions of humanity. How far-reaching are the 'tsunamiic' waves created by sin.

More devastating than any of the broken relationships on earth, is the relationship broken between God and humanity. When such a vital relationship, like the one Adam and Eve had with God, is broken, there is a huge loss experienced. It hurts so much that there is a kind of death felt. This is something that happens in human relationships as well. But the depth of the schism created by humanity's sin toward God opens a way to a

death that is more horrific than any grief brought by a loss on earth. Humanity's relationship with God was forever affected by the consequences of sin. Being expelled from the Garden of Eden was the beginning of a threat of separation from God with which every human being would, and will, struggle.

But something seems to be missing in all of this. What are we forgetting? This gloomy thought can't be the end of the discussion when a God of such incredible love is involved. If we look back, in the middle of all the mess of God recounting the consequences of sin, and of Adam and Eve being driven from the Garden of Eden, we find a jewel of hope.

Verse 21 says, "And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them."²

Right in the middle of the disappointment and pain God must have experienced through humanity's sin, God did something profound for the very people who had caused that pain. God clothed them. God looked past the sin and saw a need. And mercifully, God provided.

Isn't that exactly what God has done for us in Christ? In Christ's life, God reached right past our separation and came to live with us. In Christ's death and resurrection, God filled the schism between us caused by sin and made a way for us to be together again with God, in loving relationship. Praise God, the fall of humanity is not the end of the story! And though we live, day in and day out, struggling with the consequences of sin, we may know ultimate deliverance from a God who loves us more selflessly than we could ever imagine.

Notes

¹Genesis 3:17, Commentary section.

²*Ibid.*, v. 21.

Facing the Consequences—Study Guide

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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. What were the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit for the woman? For the man?
2. How have these consequences changed the world from its created state? Do we still see the effects of these consequences today? Where and how?
3. Does the broken relationship between the woman and man challenge our relationships today? Why or why not?
4. Based on the biblical account of things before and after eating the fruit, do you think God wants us to live like the humans before or after the Fall? What would this look like in your life, church, community?
5. How do Christians live redeemed lives? Is it possible? Why or why not?
6. How does the popular understanding of Eve as a “temptress,” who caused Adam to sin, differ from the biblical account?
7. What effects do these two understandings of Eve (popular vs. biblical) have on our lives, relationships, and churches?
8. Review the definition of “dominion” in session two. Did God indicate the first human was to have dominion over the second?
9. Some see the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin as God’s curse instead of as the natural results of breaking the boundaries God set in creation. If God wasn’t cursing the humans, but pointing out the natural consequences, are we to assume Christians should have dominion over other people? Why or why not?
10. Define “subordination.” How does this concept play a part in the consequences of sin?
11. What consequences did Adam face? How have these consequences changed relationships and communities?

12. Perhaps the most broken relationship is the one between God and humans. What actions did God take to mend that relationship? Does this fixed relationship apply to all humans? Why or why not?

13. God's grace mends our broken relationship with God. How are we called to live differently than the world (those still living in the consequences of sin)? How has God's grace changed your life?

Facing the Consequences—Commentary

Commentary by Gerald Miller
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Why didn't God stop Adam and Eve from their sin? Surely God could sense their strong temptation as they headed toward the forbidden tree. God must have known the far-reaching consequences of human failure. Why didn't God intervene?

We find answers to such questions in the very nature of God and His purposes for creation. God exists in eternity as a personal, relational Being of infinite, self-giving love (1 John 4:8, 16). When He created man and woman, He designed them in His own image with special potential for intimate relationships and for sharing in His wondrous life. In other words, God created human persons capable of love. And truly fulfilling love requires the freedom to enter into relationships without manipulation or coercion. Neither God nor His human creatures would have found ultimate satisfaction with any alternative other than free will. Had God forced His will or inhibited their freedom, He would have rendered them incapable of love in the fullest sense.

As we study this passage, therefore, we need to understand sin in relational terms. In essence, sin destroys loving relationships between persons when they give in to distrust and self-interest. Chapter 3 thus vividly portrays the conflict and alienation sin brought for the man and woman. It spoiled their openness, their harmonious interaction with one another and with God. Certainly their function as earthly creatures remained unchanged; they were to till the soil (2:15) and

reproduce themselves (1:28). But their sin caused disruption in their relationships and hostility in their environment.

Consequences for the Serpent

And the LORD God said to the serpent: *"Because you have done this, you are more cursed than any other animal and any other living creature of the field. On your belly you will move about, and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵And I will establish hostility between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring; he will strike at your head, and you will strike at his heel."* (vv. 14-15¹)

The serpent would live in humiliation among the creatures of the field, with no other mobility than to slither in the dirt. "Cursed" is never directed at the man or the woman.

Humans and snakes would constantly distrust and fear one another. From the ground the snake could only strike at the heel of the woman's offspring, while human beings, who walk upright, could strike a deadly blow to the serpent's head. From New Testament times, Christian writers have seen a deeper meaning in this passage. One of the woman's descendants would someday fulfill God's redemptive plan by destroying the evil represented by this serpent. The New Testament brings to full light the work of the Son of God, "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4, NLT), who conquered sin and prepared the way for the ultimate triumph over evil.

Consequences for Eve

To the woman He said: "I will increase your toil and your childbearing, with hardship you will bear children. Your longing will be for your husband, and he will lord it over you." (v. 16)

This verse, especially the last line, has often suffered misunderstanding and misuse. Some have mistakenly suggested the man's domination over the woman reflects God's will, because she was the first to heed the temptation and thus supposedly bears the greater blame for human sin. Some treatments have even portrayed Eve as a "temptress" who brought down the nobler man. Genesis 3, of course, makes no such implication! The story does not tell us why the serpent tempted her first. It may have found her more perceptive, rather than more susceptible or naïve. What remains beyond dispute, however, is the man readily participated in the sin. She did not cajole, entice, or seduce him to sin. She shared the fruit, and he ate willingly (3:6). She was judged neither more nor less blameworthy than he; God held both equally accountable.

Among the consequences of sin, Eve would find her life filled with increasingly hard work as well as vulnerability in childbearing. And perhaps worse, the closeness and mutual love between her and her male counterpart would develop into miscommunication and strife. Revealing the self-serving motives of sin, the physically stronger would *lord it over* the one with the slighter frame. And male domination, sexism, and at times outright abuse would characterize much of human society. She would become more and more dependent on

Domination and subordination do not reflect God's original intention for male-female relationships. These are results of sin!

her husband for protection, and this very dependency (implied by the word "longing") would inevitably lead to subservience.

Domination and subordination, though, do not reflect God's original intention for male-female relationships. These are results of sin! God's sobering words to the woman were *predictive* rather than *prescriptive*. God undoubtedly knew what would happen when sin corrupted the very creatures who bore His image. Genesis 3:16 does not establish a God-ordained "chain of command." It rather depicts the stark reality of sin as self-centeredness, and its destructive consequences in human life.

In the same way our loving God approves our efforts to alleviate pain and danger in childbirth, His will also includes redeeming male-female dignity and equality in the human community (Gal. 3:28).

Consequences for Adam

To Adam He said: "Because you have heeded your wife and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, 'you shall not eat of it,' cursed will be the ground in regard to you; with hardship you will eat all the days of your life. ¹⁸It will bring forth thorns and thistles for you as you eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread until you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you will return." (vv. 17-19)

Adam also would find his physical life filled with hardship and frustration. The passage does not imply that before the fall humankind had lived in leisure with no productive work to do. God placed him in the

garden to labor in it and care for it (2:15). But when sin marred his relationship with the Creator, he found himself out of harmony with the created environment.

As a consequence, Adam's experience with the natural world grew hostile and wearisome. *Thorns and thistles* thus represent the hardship, pain, disease, pestilence, and sometimes overwhelming disasters humans encounter in an adverse and unpredictable universe. To be sure, God provided the means and capability for human society to discover ways of avoiding peril and improving its well-being. But the struggle would persist through the course of human life.

A telling pun emphasizes the despair confronting humankind apart from God. "Ground" in Hebrew is *'adamah*. God created *'adam* ("humankind") from the *'adamah*, from the substance of the physical world (see the same pun in 2:7). Now that Adam had sinned, his physical life would some day come to an end, with no further expectation than to *return to the ground*, to be absorbed as *dust* by the earth's natural cycles. Indeed, deliverance from such hopelessness will only come through God himself providing salvation as proclaimed in the New Testament gospel.

Alienation from God

And the man named his wife *Eve* because she was the mother of all (human) life. ²¹And the LORD God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them. ²²And the LORD God said, "The man has indeed become as one of us in knowing good and evil. So now, lest he reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever — " ²³So the LORD God expelled him from the Garden of Eden to till the ground from

which he was taken. ²⁴He drove the man out, and He stationed the cherubim at the east side of the Garden of Eden and a whirling flame (as) a sword to guard the way to the tree of life. (vv. 20-24)

The name *Eve* comes from a Hebrew word that means "life" or "life-bearer." Her name represents her function in bearing life within her body as she conceives, nurtures, and gives birth to children who bear God's image.²

Verse 21 provides one of many illustrations of God's loving care for His human creatures (Ps. 8:4). Even in the harshest environment, they would be able to find warmth and protection from the elements.

The first part of verse 22 refers to humankind's sinful choice in partaking of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:17). We should not assume they were childish naïve or lacked moral comprehension prior to eating the forbidden fruit. Otherwise, God's judgment would have been unfair and undeserved. The idea of "knowing" in the Hebrew language implies full participation and experience. God as creator, of course, understood the vast implications of moral and immoral choices. Before their sin, Adam and Eve "knew" only the goodness of God's perfectly designed creation (1:31). They understood even its natural dangers as harmonious in God's presence. With their transgression, however, they now experienced the impact of evil as the alternative to good. Estranged from God, they faced a human community capable of horrific crimes in a world with potential for catastrophic tragedy.

God's deliberation ends with no need to finish the sentence, suggesting perhaps sin's consequences were already established in the

kind of moral universe God had created. The *tree of life* represents life that is eternal, life that has its source in the very life of God. Alienation from God results in death in the ultimate sense. The Apostle Paul understood death in this way when he referred to all sinners as dead (Eph. 2:1). Physical death is obviously a natural part of the created world. All creatures live and die. Yet from the very beginning God established His great plan that humans uniquely created in His image might be drawn into His eternal life. Sin destroys that relationship with God to the extent we “die” in the deepest spiritual sense, and apart from full salvation we cannot share in God’s life in eternity. Partaking from the tree of life thus symbolizes God’s intention for humanity to commune eternally in His presence.

God’s expelling them from the garden represents their alienation from God and from eternal life. They could no longer “walk with God” in loving fellowship as they had previously enjoyed “in the cool of the day.” They would now find it difficult in their fallen condition even to recognize or perceive the true God.

The cherubim and the whirling flame guarding the entrance to Eden also portray humankind’s broken relationship with God. Cherubim are ancient symbols representing the holy presence of the Deity. In ancient Near Eastern art, cherubs appear as lion’s bodies with wings and human heads, and almost always come in pairs. The vivid image here unmistakably suggests humanity became lost without God, in need of redemption and reconciliation.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise marked, all Scripture quotations in the Commentary section are the author’s own translation from the original languages.

² The editors would like to recommend for further comment on this verse, Joseph E. Coleson, *‘Ezer Cenegdo: A Power Like Him, Facing Him as Equal* (Grantham, PA: Wesleyan/Holiness Women Clergy, 1996).

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