

Marriage & Gender Roles

"From the Beginning of the Creation"

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The story of the creation is a magnificent testimony to the glory and greatness of God. One cannot help but marvel at a God who formed a lump of clay into a creature in His own image, and animated it with the "breath of life" from His own mouth. And who can fathom the love God showed to this man? He created from Adam's own flesh a helper for him. "Woman," formed from the man's own tissue, was given back to Him. In every way she was designed by God to complete the man, and to be the object of his affection. *"It is not good that man should be alone,"* God said. Without her, the man could never be whole. Neither can she be whole without him.

When Jesus was questioned about His thoughts on marriage, His answer was not based on the Law of Moses, contemporary customs, or new revelation from God. He reminded His inquisitors what God originally intended *"from the beginning of the creation"* (Mark 10:6). He appealed to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve as the standard for what is right and wrong in marriage. Therefore, we begin our study of marriage by following Jesus' example.

The creation account shows a unique relationship between God and Adam which was different from His relationship with Eve. As Adam's 'helper,' Eve was not created to be an independent agent responsible directly to God. Adam was responsible to obey God's commands, and to educate his wife regarding what God required of her. God did not command Eve directly to abstain from the tree of knowledge. He commanded Adam, who relayed God's command to Eve.

*"Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded **the man**, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'."* (Gen. 2:15-17).

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God did not call out for Eve, but for Adam.

"Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:9).

God held the man responsible for the actions of both he and his wife because he was responsible for fully communicating God's commands to his wife. The KJV renders this best: "*Hast **thou** [singular] eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded **thee** [singular] that **thou** [singular] shouldst not eat?*" (Gen. 3:11 KJV). When speaking generally about food, God told both Adam and Eve what they could eat.

*"And God said, Behold, I have given **you** every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to **you** it shall be for meat."* (Gen. 1:29 KJV).

Both occurrences of "you" are plural. But, when God called Adam to give an account of their sin, He used only the singular.

When Adam was approached by God about his sin, he blamed Eve. "*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate*" (verse 12). But, God was not impressed with Adam's excuse. As far as God was concerned, Adam was ultimately responsible, and he was punished accordingly. Why should modern Christian men expect a different reaction from God today if they shirk their responsibility and bow to pressure from their wives to deviate from God's commands? Husbands are responsible for communicating God's commands to their wives, and will be held responsible for their wives' disobedience if they fail to do so, or fail to do what is right even if their wives will not.

This concept may seem strange to modern "westernized" Christians. But, our pop culture's thinking regarding gender roles, equality, a 50-50 partnership, etc., is an anomaly in world history. The role of the man as head and priest of his wife and family has been unquestioned tradition in Jewish and Christian societies from the creation until recent times.

The Law of Moses commanded all males to appear before the Lord at the Temple three times a year (Deut. 16:16). The husband was the representative of his wife and children before God. Women were not permitted to approach God in the Temple's "Court of Israel."

Under the New Covenant, women were given a much greater role than permitted under the Law of Moses. They clearly took part in the public worship of the early churches and partook of the Lord's table along with the men. But, restrictions were placed on women that were not placed on men with regard to public speaking, particularly teaching. The restrictions were intended to preserve the roles originated by God at the creation.

The Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian congregation of the husband's role as head of his wife. *"But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God"*(1 Cor. 11:3). He repeated the same principle in his letter to the Ephesians. *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, **as** to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, **just as** the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything"* (Eph 5:22-24).

The word "as" is translated from the Greek word "ὡς." It expresses some kind of equivalence between two different things or actions, meaning "in this way" or "just as." This word appears twice in the above quote. In essence, Paul wrote that the wife is to submit to her husband as though her husband were Christ himself! That is, he stands in the place of Christ for her. She is not to try to bypass him any more than one can bypass Christ to get to the Father. Jesus said, *"No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6). Paul went on to write that the husband is the head of his wife in the same way that Christ is the head of the Church. It should be as inconceivable for the Christian wife to approach God while not submitting to her husband as it would be for a man to approach the Father while refusing to submit to Jesus Christ. This is the teaching of the New Testament. Yet a feminized view has replaced the biblical teaching in modern western Christianity. Do we really think that our "progressive" thinking somehow changes God Himself? Insubordinate Christian wives may think they are pleasing God, but they are only deceiving themselves. Similarly, Christian men who seek to please their wives by shirking their responsibility to be the head and priest of their wives do not please God.

We should point out that nowhere does Scripture teach that "women" as a class are to be subject to "men" as a class. The subordination is related only within the marriage covenant, the wife submitting to her own husband, not to other men. There is no biblical reason to suppose that in society women are inferior to men, or must submit to any man but her own husband.

While God held Adam ultimately responsible for Eve, she too had to bear her punishment. Eve's excuse was, *"the Serpent made me do it."* Indeed, Satan is a very clever foe. From the very beginning he saw the potential to ruin God's plan by using His most beautiful creation, the woman. He saw vulnerability in her subordinate position, and exploited it. No doubt he saw Adam's vulnerability as well, his fondness for Eve above his loyalty to God. Deception for Eve was subtle, but deadly. Eve knew only what Adam had relayed to her, God's command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge under penalty of death.

Satan approached Eve when she was alone with a new twist on what Adam had told her. He pretended to give her additional knowledge of God and His

motives, knowledge even beyond what Adam had told her. The Serpent told her that God was trying to hold her back from reaching her full potential. She and Adam could be “as gods” if they ate of that tree. “Equality,” not only with Adam but with God Himself, was the bait Satan used. Indeed, if knowing both good and evil is equivalent to being “as gods,” then Satan was telling the truth. Once they ate, they indeed gained knowledge. Formerly, they knew only “good” from the Creator. Now, Satan had introduced them to “evil.” Its consequences were immediate. They “knew” they were naked and they “knew” sin. From that instant the process of aging and death began. Yes, God had kept this experiential knowledge from them, just as Satan said. But He did so for their good. Perhaps “knowing” evil was not such a good idea after all! But it was too late. The mistake could not be undone.

Satan lied to Eve, however, regarding the consequences of sin. He contradicted God's warning. God said “*You shall surely die.*” Satan told her, “*You shall not surely die.*” The deception Eve embraced ultimately meant the death penalty for herself, Adam, their children, and every descendant of the first couple.

Lest we think Eve committed the ultimate sin, we need to remember that the Apostle Paul placed the blame squarely at Adam's feet alone. Yes, Eve sinned first. But, the sequence in which they sinned was not the criterion by which God judged responsibility.

“...[T]hrough **one man** sin entered the world, and death through sin, ... by **the one man's offense** death reigned through the one.” (Rom 5:12,17).

God held Adam, as the legal head of his wife, responsible for both of their sins.

The Genesis story is not given to merely satisfy our curiosity about our origins. It was meant to convey certain principles by which all men and women who are in subjection to God are to live. This extends to modern Christian husbands and wives, as well as the roles of the genders in the local churches. As we saw above, the Apostle Paul taught that in marriage the Christian man is the head of his wife in the same way Christ is the head of the Church. Yet, the New Testament points us back to the first couple even when defining the roles of the genders in local church order.

When Paul wrote to Timothy regarding local church order, he said, “*Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.*” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Many claim Paul had purely cultural concerns in mind that no longer apply. Yet, he immediately gave the reason for his instructions. It had nothing to do with culture and everything to do with the story of the first couple. “*For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being*

deceived, fell into transgression." (1 Tim. 2:13-14). There are two reasons here drawn from Genesis. The first is that God created Adam first, and Eve was created from Adam's flesh as his helper. This showed the wife's subordinate role in God's original design for marriage. Consequently, for her to teach publicly in the local church would mean she was publicly instructing her husband. Secondly, Eve was the one who was deceived, not Adam. Paul's point was not that Eve was the first or worst sinner. Rather, it was the nature of her vulnerability, which Satan exploited, that led to the fall of man and wreaked havoc on the first family. Adam was not deceived. He simply relinquished his authority to Eve, and followed her instead of God. Whether Paul meant that women are generally easier to deceive than men, or that all women must now suffer the consequences of Eve's deception, is really irrelevant. Either way, his instructions and reasons for them are clear.

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote this: *"That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, 'See, this is new?' It has already been in ancient times before us."* (Eccl. 1:9-10). Solomon's point was simply that the wise learn from history. Fools ignore history and repeat it. Winston Churchill understood Solomon's wise words. He used this philosophy to help defeat the Nazis and lead England to victory over the forces of darkness. Churchill wrote, *"The further you look back, the farther you can see ahead."* These are wise words, indeed.

The first few chapters of Genesis are as far back as we are permitted to see. Christian men and women could spare themselves a lifetime of suffering and loneliness by learning the lessons provided by the first couple. Fully embracing the roles God has given to the genders, and joyfully submitting to the safeguards He has put into place, constitute the only path to true happiness and reaching one's full potential in marriage and in the local church. This is true for both men and women.

Our modern society has a different idea. Satan is still whispering in the ears of modern "Eves." Men are following the example of Adam, relinquishing their role and following their wives. And we are reaping the results today in our society. What's worse, the western Church has largely embraced the world's thinking, and currently has about the same divorce rate as the ungodly. We will reap what we sow.

If there is any hope for western Christianity, it will come when Christian men and women understand their roles in God's plan, reject the pressures of our society, and fully and joyfully embrace God's plan. There is no way to please God outside of His design.