

From Original Creation to the New Creation: Understanding God's Intent for Relationships Between Women and Men

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Introduction

There are several foundational themes in the Bible that are the key to understanding God's desire for relationships between women and men. In the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 we see that both women and men are created in the image of God and are declared good. They are both told to "be fruitful and multiply" and to have dominion over the earth.

Genesis 2 makes clear that this human dominion is to be in the form of tending and caring for God's creation and for each other. Man and woman are created as partners in this vocation. They have total equality and mutual trust. But sin disrupts God's intentions; mutuality, trust and harmony are broken. Women now suffer in childbirth and are dominated by men. Men must work hard to provide life's necessities. This is the result of sin and a distortion of God's original intentions.

But God does not give up on humans and sends Jesus to teach and model a way of renewing the equality and mutuality God intends. Jesus models for us what is possible and desired: a **New Creation!**

Original Creation, Sin, and the New Creation

While the Bible is made up of 66 books written in different times and circumstances, we find a unifying theme of God's purpose in creation, the frustration of that purpose by human sin, and God's action to redeem and heal through Christ Jesus. The writers of the New Testament describe God's redeeming purpose as the New Creation. (See 2 Corinthians 5:14-19, Romans 8:18-25) God's intention in creation is presented in two accounts in the book of Genesis. (See Genesis 1:1 – 2:4 and 2:5-25)

- Genesis 1:1-2:4
 - Both male and female are created equally in the image of God.
 - There is no hint of hierarchy or superiority of one gender over the other.
 - Human beings are blessed with both ability and authority. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:28)
 - Along with all that God creates, human beings – both women and men-- are declared to be good. (Genesis 1:31)
- Genesis 2:5 – 25
 - Here creation is presented as a more intimate story of God's action.
 - The first human being is formed by God from "the dust of the earth." This intimate connection with the earth suggests that whatever promotes the welfare of the earth will positively affect the human being and whatever harms the earth will harm the human being. This human is given life by God's breath and a vocation to "till and to tend" the garden God has created. This garden is to provide the means of sustaining human life. This vocation to "tend the garden" gives clarity regarding the nature of dominion given to humans that is spoken of in chapter 1 of Genesis.

- A partner for the human is created. There is a relationship of trust between them. The Bible tells us that there is no shame in their relationship, their bodies are not evil, nor is there any hint of domination or fear in their relationship.

Dominating Hierarchy is a Result of Sin

- The world that is described in Genesis 1-2 only faintly resembles the world as we know it. The harmony that existed between human beings, the rest of creation and God who has made them all has been disrupted and as a result, all these relationships have been harmed and distorted.
- We find in Genesis 3 the cause of this disruption. It is the result of human disobedience and the temptation to become “like God”.
 - This sinful disobedience results in shame, struggle, domination, alienation, jealousy and ultimately murder.
 - Once this pattern starts, it keeps becoming more intense. (Genesis 6:5-6)
 - Rather than living in the mutual trust and harmony that God intended, humans struggle for power over one another.
 - This desire for domination has a direct and sinful impact on the relationship between men and women.

God’s Vision for Communities of Shalom

- God does not give up on the original divine vision for humanity but instead calls a people who are to make God’s steadfast love visible in the world. This is to be demonstrated by being a people who do not live just for themselves but who are a blessing to the whole world. (Genesis 12:3) These people are to be formed by God’s covenant of peace and practices of godly justice which lead to communities of shalom where all of creation is one and all people and living things dwell in harmony and peace. (See Ezekiel 34:25-31)
- The basic measurement of God’s justice is the treatment of those who are most vulnerable in a society – “the widow, the orphan and the stranger”. (See Deuteronomy 10:17-18)
 - God’s standard for a just ruler/king follows has the same emphasis. (Psalm 17:12-14)
 - The means of setting right what has gone wrong is not by domination, but by remembering God’s covenant, remembering that God hears the cry of the oppressed and following God’s pattern for just relationships.
 - When God’s people forget God’s plan and return to patterns of domination and control, God sends prophets to call the people back to God’s covenant and God’s vision of justice.

In Christ – A New Creation

- Throughout Jesus’ ministry we have repeated examples of how Jesus’ acted and taught his followers
 - To not misuse authority and power. (Luke 9:51-56)
 - To understand leadership as service and that relationships among God’s people are to be mutual. (Matthew 20:25-27)
- Jesus’ own relationships with women demonstrated a liberating break with male domination, a counter-cultural respect for women, and a reflection of God’s original plan.
 - He accepted and blessed the challenge of a woman. (Mark 7:24-30, Matthew 15:21-28)

- <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/lightbox-bible-passage.aspx?passage=Mark+7%3a24-30> Jesus liberated a woman who was looked down upon as unrighteous and lifted her up as an example of faithful love and service. (Luke 7:36-50)
- Jesus reveals his Messianic identity to a woman who was a triple outsider – a woman, wife of multiple husbands and a Samaritan. (John 4:1-26)
- Women became the first witnesses to and proclaimers of the resurrection. (Matthew 27:6-8)
- The ministry of the followers of Jesus was to be witnessing by their shared life, by their actions, and by their testimony as participation in “the ministry of reconciliation.” This ministry begins with God’s purpose in creation and is affected by Jesus’ death and resurrection. (2 Corinthians 5:14-21)
- This new creation is seen in the transformation of relationships that were formerly characterized by domination, animosity, and exclusion but are now relationships of equality and mutuality where all are respected and accepted as equal heirs of Christ’s love and salvation.
 - “23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (See Galatians 3: 23-29)

How might we be changed if we allowed God’s Spirit to shape and form our understanding and patterns of the relationships between men and women as was intended by God in creation, by what Jesus modeled and is made possible by the New Creation in Christ? This would indeed be Good News!

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