

Male Leadership in the church

(Part 2)

Creation Order

In language both sublime and sombre, the opening chapters of *Genesis* unfold the account of humanity's origin and Fall. The details of this narrative play a foundational role in shaping our understanding of male leadership within the local church. As Restorationists, we hold that certain critical New Testament passages addressing the rationale behind gender-specific leadership roles contain instructions for both men and women that are grounded in the creation event recorded in *Genesis*. This event establishes a pattern that, among other things, governs the relationship between the sexes according to God's eternal design. In short, the opening chapters of *Genesis* reveal that the Lord instituted both male-female equality and role differentiation between the sexes. With this in mind, we shall examine several key details in the Bible's opening chapters

Man's Origin

Genesis 1:26, 27 records the creation of man in the following words:

“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over everything that creeps on the earth.' And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Cf. Gen 5:1)

Significantly, prior to Genesis 1:26, God's creative power is described in impersonal terms, as in the commands: “Let there be light...” (Gen 1:3), “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters” (Gen 1:6), and “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place” (Gen 1:9). However, with the creation of man, this pattern is broken. The impersonal command (“Let there be”) is now replaced by what appears to be a divine consultation within the triune Godhead (“Let Us make...”), indicating that in the creation of man something new, unique, and climactic has occurred. One commentator put it this way:

The three words, *Let us make*, make up one Hebrew word, *naaseh*, which is a change from the jussive form, “let there be,” to the cohortative form, “Let us.” This change from the jussive to the cohortative form shows that what is about to be described is indeed a momentous event.

Arnold G Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis*

The *momentous event* is this: animals are made after their kind, but man is created in God's image and likeness (vv. 26–27). Three times we are told that man is made in the image of God, and in all creation this is unique to humanity, both male and female. Moreover, man is given dominion over the rest of creation. Volumes have been written on the meaning and implications

of man's bearing the image of God. We cannot here explore the various views of church fathers such as Irenaeus and Augustine, or Reformers like Luther and Calvin. Exactly what is involved in man's being created in the "image" of God is difficult to determine, but presumably it includes all that is unique to humanity—moral consciousness, free will, abstract reasoning, aesthetic sense, capacity for spiritual reflection, and the like. The important point is that man alone bears the image of God. In his *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem observes:

When God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26), the meaning is that God plans to make a creature similar to himself. Both the Hebrew word for 'image' (tselem) and the Hebrew word for 'likeness' (demût) refer to something that is similar but not identical to the thing it represents or is an 'image' of.

Also worthy of note is the fact that, although other creatures exist as male and female, only in the case of humanity is this distinction mentioned as significant ("male and female He created them"). Emphasized here is the truth that both male and female bear the image of God. Their shared dominion over the rest of creation attests to their uniquely privileged position within the divine order. Thus, the creation account reveals the essential equality of the sexes. Nevertheless, "God did not name the human race 'woman.' If 'woman' had been the more appropriate and illuminating designation, no doubt God would have used it. He does not even devise a neutral term like 'persons.' He called us 'man,' which anticipates the male headship brought out clearly in chapter two, just as 'male and female' in verse 27 foreshadows marriage in chapter two" (Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*).

It is because the woman, along with the man, stands at the pinnacle of creation and bears the image of the divine that Scripture everywhere speaks of her dignity and worth. In a word, creation law demands that the woman be accorded honour and respect. Unfortunately, false beliefs about the origin of humanity have frequently led to the devaluation of women. In his *Timaeus*, Plato opines:

On the subject of animals, then, the following remarks may be offered. Of the men who came into the world, those who were cowards or led unrighteous lives may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation.

[*Timaeus* by Plato, Internet Classics Archive](#)

Because she bears the image of God, the woman is to be honoured as "a fellow heir of the grace of life" (1 Pet 3:7). It is therefore not surprising that, throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated deep concern and genuine regard for women. He spoke to women in public (e.g., Jn 4:7–26; 8:10–11; Lk 23:27–31), showing His compassion toward them. He healed them (e.g., Lk 8:48; 13:12), raised their dead (Lk 7:12–13; Jn 11:43–44), and commended them for their faith (Matt 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30) and for their willingness to learn (Lk 10:38–42). He held them up as examples for imitation (Lk 21:1–4; cf. Mk 12:41–44) and used them as

exemplary figures in several parables (e.g., Lk 18:1 ff.). The Gospels tell of women who anointed Jesus (Matt 26:6–13; Lk 7:36–50), contributed to His needs (Lk 8:1–3), and bore witness to His resurrection (Matt 28:5–8; Mk 16:5–8; Lk 24:2–9; Jn 20:1–2). In a word, throughout His ministry Jesus accorded women the honour due to those who bear the image of the Creator—and in doing so, He stood apart from many religious leaders of His day.

Equal but Different

Genesis chapter one provides an overall account of the six days of creation. Martin Luther notes that in chapter two, “Moses ... describes the work of the sixth day, of which he briefly spoke in 1:26–27. Now he enlarges on this report, devoting a whole chapter to man’s creation” (*Genesis*). Thus, chapters one and two do not offer two distinct creation accounts; rather, chapter two expands upon the narrative introduced in the previous chapter. Gleason Archer makes this helpful observation:

The technique of recapitulation was widely practiced in ancient Semitic literature. The author would first introduce his account with a short statement summarizing the whole transaction, and then he would follow it up with a more detailed and circumstantial account when dealing with matters of special importance.

—A Survey of Old Testament Introduction

Of special importance here are the details of man’s creation that are not revealed in chapter one. These additional insights into man’s origin are significant, for they provide the foundation for the gender-specific provisions that appear later in God’s Word. We will seek to summarize the main points and demonstrate their relevance to the subject at hand—male leadership in the church.

Genesis 2:4 is widely recognized as a transitional verse, bridging the broad, universal narrative of chapter one with the more focused account of chapter two, which centres on humanity. The verse reads:

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created—when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

It is clearly by design that the first part of the verse speaks of “the heavens and the earth,” while the second reverses the order to “the earth and the heavens.” Earth—man’s abode—is now the focal point. It is also significant that here, for the first time, we encounter the combined divine name “*Lord God*” (Yahweh Elohim). Up to this point in Genesis, the term *Elohim* has appeared more than two dozen times; now the personal covenant name *Yahweh* (or *Jehovah*) is introduced. In chapters two and three, this personal name occurs some twenty times as God engages directly with humanity.

In Genesis 2 we note the important fact that Adam was created before Eve. I find the NIV rendering of Genesis 2:5–6 particularly clear:

Now no shrub **had** yet appeared on the earth and no plant **had** yet sprung up, for the Lord God **had** not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.

The use of the pluperfect here reflects the fact that these verses refer back to the earlier creation event in Genesis 1. The narrative continues:

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Here we have further evidence of man's favoured position. Both man and the animals possess the breath of life, yet only in the case of the former is God said to have breathed that life directly into him. The account then reveals a previously unrecorded detail: "The Lord God **had** planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed" (v. 8 NIV). At this point, "man" does not include Eve. In the midst of the garden stood two trees—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was to the man alone that these words were spoken by the Creator:

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Gen 2:16–17).

The narrative continues with the Lord's declaration, "It is not good for the man to be alone," followed by His statement, "I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18). Immediately thereafter, we read that "the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky" (Gen 2:19 NIV), and that He tasked the man with naming them (Gen 2:20). (Once again, the use of the pluperfect here eliminates any apparent contradiction with Genesis 1, where the animals are described as created before man.)

The naming of the animals reinforces the truth that man is essentially distinct from the rest of creation—a point underscored by the statement, "But for Adam no suitable helper was found" (Gen 2:20). Adam's nature thus set him apart from every other living creature.

Having permitted the man to see his great need for companionship, the Lord then acts to meet that need:

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man (Gen 2:21–22).

Adam immediately understands—without further revelation—his relationship to the woman:

*The man said,
“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man” (Gen 2:23).*

Keil and Delitzsch capture Adam’s delight upon seeing Eve for the first time:

“The words, ‘This is now [lit., this time] bone of my bones,’ etc., are expressive of joyous astonishment at the suitable helpmate, whose relation to himself he describes in the words, ‘She shall be called Woman, for she is taken out of man.’”

Adam recognises immediately that Eve shares his nature yet differs from him in her expression of their shared humanity.

In the next verse, we have Moses’ editorial comment:

For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Later, various spokesmen for God appeal to the more detailed creation account in Genesis 2 to explain why certain divine laws governing the relationship between male and female are of permanent significance. For example, when Jesus affirms that divorce “for any cause at all” is unlawful, He explains that “from the beginning” (i.e., creation) it was God’s plan for one man and one woman to be united in a permanent “one flesh” union (Matt 19:4 ff.; cf. Gen 2:24 ff.). The marriage bond, then, derives its binding force not from culture, custom, or human legislation, but from the fact that it manifests the divine pattern and purpose for the male and the female. Although we cannot explore the subject here, Paul later presents the marriage union as a profound “mystery,” a picture of Christ’s relationship with the church (Eph 5:31–32).

God’s plan for the sexes also explains why Paul uses the terms “natural” (*phusis*) and “unnatural” with reference to heterosexual and homosexual relationships respectively (Rom 1:26–27). *Phusis* denotes “the nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature; as opposed to what is monstrous, abnormal, perverse” (Thayer). What makes heterosexuality “natural” is the fact that it conforms to creation order. Homosexuality is “unnatural” (“monstrous, abnormal, perverse”) because it violates creation order.

Relevant observations

Genesis chapter two unveils an important fact about humanity's origin: in God's plan the male was created first. There was nothing arbitrary about this; it was by divine design that Adam preceded Eve in creation. Later, when the apostle Paul reminds us that "it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve" (1 Tim 2:13), he is not merely recounting an interesting historical fact but rather explaining the ground and basis of male leadership in worship. According to Paul,

it is precisely because of Adam's priority in creation that leadership in the assembly is male (1 Tim 2:13; cf. 1 Cor 11:8–9). We will consider these verses in more detail in a future article.

Also noteworthy—and theologically significant—is the fact that the Lord formed Adam from the dust of the earth, whereas He formed Eve from Adam's rib. There is a deliberate distinction here. Eve was formed not from dust, but from the very flesh and bone of the man. As Adam himself declares:

"She shall be called Woman (*'ishshah*), because she was taken out of Man (*'ish*)" (Gen 2:23).

Thus the woman comes from the very flesh and bone of the man, indicating that she shares his nature while also deriving that nature from him. Paul will later cite this fact in 1 Corinthians 11, where he discusses gender-specific roles: "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man" (1 Cor 11:8). The preposition *ek* ("from/out of") serves to emphasize that the woman has her source in the man, not vice versa.

Given these facts, it comes as no surprise that God created Eve as "a help (*'ezer*) meet for him." Modern translations typically render this as "a helper suitable for him" (NASB) or "a helper fit for him" (ESV). *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* makes this helpful observation:

With so many references to God as our helper, it is obvious that an *'ēzer* is in no way inferior to the one who receives help. This is important because this is the word that God uses in Gen. 2:18, when he says about Adam, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

But while this is true, we cannot ignore the fact that Adam was not created as a helper for Eve. Once again Paul alludes to this distinction when discussing male and female roles in the assembly: "Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man" (1 Cor 11:9). Paul is not addressing the essential nature of male and female, but rather their God-ordained roles in the context of worship.

There are other aspects of the creation account that reinforce the doctrine of male leadership, even though they are not explicitly invoked by Paul or other inspired writers. First, the fact that Adam names the woman is surely significant. Adam's right to name the animals (Gen 2:19–20) derives from his dominion over them; similarly, his naming of the woman speaks of his headship over her. Evidently, both Adam and Eve recognize his authority in this matter.

Finally, the prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was given directly to the man before the woman was formed (Gen 2:16–17). This raises the question: did Eve receive knowledge of the divine command from Adam? In any case, the fact that Adam—not Eve—is held responsible for the entrance of sin and death into the world (e.g., Rom 5:12 ff.) makes clear that it was the man who bore ultimate accountability for obeying the Lord's command.

Conclusion

From the Genesis cosmology, it is clear that men and women share a common nature, and their spiritual equality is affirmed by the fact that in Christ “there is neither male nor female” (Gal 3:28). However, the creation account also reveals humanity's natural duality and explains the reasons for the differentiated roles set forth in Scripture.

In our next article, we will consider the Fall and its relevance to our discussion of male and female roles in the assembly.

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