



THEMATIC OVERVIEW

A time of learning, discussion, and prayer as we explore Scriptural teaching about gender and leadership in the church.

As a Grace Group, we will explore together how to embody God's grace in our practice given the historic harms and contention in church and culture around how gender and leadership are held together.

RESOURCES

Find more resources for further reading and listening on our website:
allsoulsseattle.org/resources/collections/gender-and-leadership

Welcome + Opening Prayer + Commitments

*Show me your ways, Lord,
teach me your paths.*

*Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long. —Psalm 25:4-5*

*But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults. —Psalm 19:12*

Commitments:

- 1/ Is this Scriptural?
- 2/ How do we graciously *see* one another?
- 3/ How do we image God as we work this out for His glory and the world's good?

Beginning at the Beginning: A Study of Genesis 1-4

See the back side of this page.

Story, R.J. March

Reflection

- How have you experienced the image of God being minimized because of your gender especially when compared to the opposite sex?
- When have you heard a woman say the same thing as a man but differently? How does the different, yet corresponding perspective held out to us in Genesis shape our appreciation for hearing male and female perspectives?
- What is one thing you want to remember from today's discussion?
- What is one thing you want to do or do differently because of today's discussion?

Beginning at the Beginning: A Study of Genesis 1-3

What can we learn about God's original intention in creating human beings as male and female?

What does Genesis 1-3 teach about the relation between men and women? Does Genesis teach that the subordination of women that was presupposed in the ancient Near East and most (all?) ancient cultures until the rise of the modern era is part of God's intention for humanity in creation, or rather is such subordination a consequence of human sin?

*Genesis 1:26-28 "God created **ha'adam** in his image; in the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them."*

Much has been made over the gender of this Hebrew word commonly translated "Adam" or "the man," or "him" but in Hebrew the gender of words is unpredictable since there is only male and female, and sometimes gender neutral words like "earth" have male or female genders in Hebrew. In French, table is a feminine noun, for example. So when we read Genesis, the word *ha'adam* could be understood as "the human being" or even better, to honor the built-in pun, "the earth creature." The main point: the first human being (*ha'adam*) had been taken from the earth (*ha'adamah*). Gender is not the point here. The point is on humanity's special relationship to God and the earth from which the human being was made.

*Genesis 1:26-28 "God created **ha'adam** in his image; in the image of God he created **humanity**. Male and female he created them."*

What does it mean to image God? At least two things here:

- **Diversity and yet unity.** As is made clearer throughout Scripture which pulls more and more of the curtain back in how Jesus fulfills Scripture and sends "the helper." God is three in one. And humanity images God as two in one.
- **Participating in the creative endeavor of God.** v.28 "be fruitful and multiply" and "have dominion" over the earth described here as cosmic gardening toward flourishing, thus when we do this we bear God's image.
- At this point in the narrative, there is no evident gender role distinction. Genesis 2 offers a different telling of creation with more detail about the emergence of gender.

*Genesis 2:18 "It is not good that the **ha'adam** should be alone."*

- No emphatic mention of gender beyond that the word happens to be male grammatically.
- In an attempt to find the human being a suitable companion, God first brings him the animals who are also made from the ground, each of whom the human names. But none is suitable. So who will be suitable? Someone made from the human being. NOW we see the emergence of gender:

*Genesis 2:18 "I will make an **ezer** to the **human being**."*

- Often translated "helper" but in the context, the emphasis is on suitable compatibility. I will make "a companion corresponding to" the human being. With the introduction of the woman, the human begin finally has a corresponding companion, and so greets her with excitement and maybe exhaustion after the animal name game didn't produce the desired result: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh she shall be called **'issa** (woman) because she was taken out of **'is** (man)." This is the first time the Hebrew word for man is used when he recognizes his corresponding companion.

Genesis 2:23 "She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man."

Is man "naming" the woman an argument for subordination of women or elevated hierarchy of men?

- Phyllis Trible: "The verb call by itself does not mean naming; only when joined to the noun name does it become part of the naming formula... The noun *name* is striking absent from the poetry. Hence in calling the woman, the man is not establishing power over her but rejoicing in their mutuality."
- Genesis 2 goes on to talk about marriage and how the two that had been separated from the one, become one again in marriage emphasizing not hierarchy or subordination, but the need for corresponding companionship.
- Genesis 2 ends with a situation of harmony and mutuality. But Genesis 3 is about the undoing of this harmony as a result of sin.

Genesis 3:16 "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you."

- It is significant that this is a reversal of the situation in Genesis 2. The unity of Genesis 2 is longed for, but there is now a hierarchy of division, and rather than living together, the man 'rules over' the woman.
- The original bearing of God's image is now made more difficult, too: being fruitful and multiplying is complicated by the labor pain and the earth's cultivation now is marked by painfully hard labor.
- NOTE: the snake and the ground are cursed, but man and woman are not. These are instead descriptions of the situation in which men and women find themselves in a fallen world.

In the Bible, ideas about women and gender are conveyed in stories about human women living in a sinful world. We see a situation in which women are indeed subordinated to men in the household, but we also see men who have power over other men and women. But what if the Bible is simply capturing life as it was and not necessarily endorsing it as 'life as it ought to be'? This is why Genesis is so important. We get a window into God's intention in Genesis and also in the laws of the Old Testament which seek to correct abuses of power in relationships in an agricultural society divided along gender lines and never speak of women in any way as significantly different from men: women are portrayed as capable of exercising rationality, and they provide wise counsel, as do men— this, to the contrary of the historic arguments made against women's involvement in leadership (from Chrysostom to Augustine to Aquinas). Thankfully, these are no longer the arguments made today as they do not line up with Genesis.

Modern Roman Catholic arguments for hierarchy among women and men: Sacraments (Vatican II)

Modern Protestant arguments for hierarchy among women and men: Authority (Wayne Grudem)

1. The Order: Adam was Created First, Then Eve
 2. The Representation: Adam's Special Role in Representing the Human Race
 3. The Naming of Woman by Man
 4. The Naming of Human Race as "mankind"
 5. The Primary Accountability: God spoke to Adam first after the Fall
 6. The Purpose: Eve was created as a helper to Adam, not vice versa
 7. The Conflict: The Curse Brought a Distortion of Roles, but not New Roles
- Helpful responses to these arguments in *Icons of Christ* by William Witt on pp. 60-64.

While Genesis 3 recognizes the subordination of women to men, the text presents this not as part of God's intention for humanity in creation, but as a symptom of disharmony in human relationships that exists in a sinful world.