

Chapter 9.

Woman in Eden (Part 1)

As we noted earlier, the first mention of a male/female creation in the Scriptures confirms that, (1) both were created in the image and likeness of God; (2) both were given dominion over the earth and every living thing on the earth; (3) both were given the command to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it"; and (4) God provided sustenance for all of his creation.

Since both male and female were made in the image and likeness of God, each was equipped for spiritual autonomy, under their Creator, and within the purpose of God. He vested in each the faculty for making moral choices; this differentiated humanity from beast. Genesis 1:1 through 2:4 is the summary of creation. In it there is no suggestion of differences between man and woman.

Genesis 2:4b through 25 is the detailed account of the creation of man and woman, and this passage is critical to the understanding of our sexuality. Jesus and Paul both derive their teaching on sexual relationships in marriage, the church, and society from this body of truth. A careful and reverent (submissive) scrutiny of it is imperative. The following is offered in the hope it will serve as a catalyst to a more profound investigation, by and for both men and women. It will be an attempt to ferret out some of the subjective truth of the passage, to complement the usual more objective teaching of this and other related passages.

The opening chapters of Genesis are archetypal; that is, they are the predecessor of future events. Thus we find ourselves continually involved in the creative process, constantly confronted with the issue of sexuality, besieged with satanic efforts to delude us, preying on our own yen to play God. As it was in the beginning, so it continues to be.

God must be the Initiator of every act, of every thought, of Life and Love and Truth. The Book of Revelation tells us that he is the alpha and the omega. Revelation 21:5 says,

"And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

And Paul states:

"Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God..."

As in the beginning, God brings order out of chaos, gives beauty for ashes, frees us for creative adventure.

Who is your first-love?
the one who makes you feel really honestly you,
with whom time spent is quality time,
who brings to your life renewal and dimension,
beauty and wholeness
who recognizes the uniqueness of your potential
and fully respects your humanity
who is willing to share your joys and distresses
and forgive your failures

with undaunted acceptance
whose love holds you captive, yet sets you free
who would die for you or live for you,
and who evokes the same response from you
who thus teaches you to love and to be loved.
Is anything less than this really love?
Is there really anything more
than Agape Himself?
Who alone has earned the right to be our
First-love!

In the first chapter of Genesis our mutual identity is defined. Since God is both sovereign and immutable, I believe it is not only possible but necessary to see the harmony in his creative intent in both chapters two and three. When God's prescribed order seems dysfunctional, it is never due to a flaw in his design, but to our faulty understanding and consequent misuse of his workmanship. Cultural conditioning includes both cumulative error and a racial memory of God's directive for our humanity and our sexuality. Our minds and hearts are cluttered with inherited and personally acquired debris. The integrity of God's character and of the Scriptures themselves assures to us the only source of pure truth. It is appropriate to approach the Scriptures with awe and humility, so that our "faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:5).

I believe the order in which the creation story is told is significant in delineating the difference between identity and function; that is, it seems evident that Chapter One is the summary of our human identity, while Chapters two and three detail our sexual function. The dignity and precision of these passages must not be questioned. As I once heard Dr. Arthur Custance remark, "This is a child's story only if a child is reading it." We will want childlike faith in the God who made us, and a mature understanding of his intent, both of which are gifts of his Spirit.

We will first need to observe, as does the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:8, that man was created before woman. And now we must ask ourselves some serious questions. I believe they are questions which need to be considered individually, as men and as women, and corporately, as society in general and the church specifically.

Unique to our humanity is our need to worship, which is designed to be directed to God. When it is misdirected, to ourselves or another human, we involve ourselves with feelings of superiority and inferiority (whereas prior to the fall, the original pair might be said to have a "simplex"!) In their original, sinless state, the first man and woman were unthreatened by the order of their creation. There was harmony, openness, and unbroken fellowship between them and with God. This was to last as long as the order of worship was not violated.

Women react defensively to the order of creation because men, acting out of self-worship, have assumed that priority means preeminence. This is threatening to a woman who has a self-worship program of her own. We will need to examine together the reasons for our emotional responses to the sequence in creation.

There exists a need to consider the related issue of the Creator's prerogative, to ask ourselves the penetrating questions: Am I willing to allow God to be God? Do I really believe that God made me to be loved and to be loving? Do I view the sequence of creation as a threat to human equality? Am I committed to finding God's intention, setting aside personal and social prejudices, believing that the will of God is good and acceptable and perfect? Do I understand that deteriorated relationships are not a result of God's design, but a result of mankind's refusal to follow that design?

I believe the order of creation for man and woman suggests God's intended order of government for the family unit, and that this order has extended implications in the church and society as a whole. This is clearly evidenced in the contemporary fragmentation and confusion.

The freedom to make choices is a basic element of our humanity, this element affects all of our relationships. It also involves an individual responsibility for the implications of choices we make. In the ultimate, however, God himself assumes the responsibility for our choices, both individually and for all humanity. The cross of Christ is proof that God has taken on himself the ultimate responsibility for our malignant choices.

Implicit in every social structure is the need for both the individual freedom to choose and to assume responsibility for the results of choosing. The essential difference between anarchy and government is that in the latter responsibility for certain corporate choices is sustained by a select few. This necessitates trust, and a willingness to relinquish some amount of personal autonomy. Here again we find the conflict of interest, the inferiority-superiority struggle, the power plays, the identity crises, and always for the same reason: the misdirected use of the freedom to choose--focused on self-centered interests rather than the common good. Or, to put it the other way, self-worship rather than God-worship, since he is the one who can best determine and define the common good.

On the whole, society recognizes the necessity for government in every social unit, as an arbiter of choices and a focus for responsibility. The teaching of the Apostle Paul is that "there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1). I believe Genesis 1-3 records the earliest governmental forms instituted by God, defining the basic principles for all authority structure.

This authority structure begins with God who creates and orders his creation. Man and woman, as spiritual beings, are equally responsible to God. It might be seen as an isosceles triangle, with God at the apex. Our equality as persons established in Genesis, chapter one, is reaffirmed in chapter two, where we see that God formed each as a unique creation, giving each time to relate to him alone. Adam was anesthetized during Eve's creation!

And to make certain that Adam would understand the equal status of the woman, God gave him the demanding task of naming the beasts and birds. This necessitated a complete familiarity with the character of these creatures. What an ingenious method for distinguishing his own humanity and establishing his need for a suitable counterpart, "a helper fit for him." A helper sharing his bone and his flesh, and above all the image of God!

Clearly, Adam recognized his dependence upon the Lord God, who had given him life and everything needed to sustain it. God had put him in the garden, in Eden, and there had planted for him "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:8, 9). In denying him access to the latter, God was providing him opportunity to validate his humanity by freely choosing to submit to God's authority. Adam owed his life and sustenance to God's initiative and design, and God gave him the purpose for which to live. He was to cultivate, possess and enjoy the resources which God had provided, expressing in his activity the character of God. He was a man under orders. He was also a man on whom God had lavished tender, loving care, a man designed to be, under God, the head of the race.

But there was no counterpart to his humanity, no complement to his maleness. There was no one with whom he could interact, with whom he could express the potential godlikeness for which he had been created.

Then the Lord God said:

"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him"(Genesis 2:18).

In Hebrews 13:6 we are told:

"We can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.'"

By what strange twist of perspective can women on one hand joyfully claim the Lord as our helper and

disclaim as though it were a dishonor her position of helper to man? I think we do have here a case of cultural conditioning! Ought we not rather be awed that God has chosen for us to relate to man in the same way he does? I suggest this is a test of a godly versus worldly perspective of the woman's function. It also tests whether we function as God's woman, secure in our spiritual identity, or in dependence upon human approval.

Following each stage of creation we read "and God saw that it was good." Everything but Adam was in its own way appropriate to God's workmanship. But man was made in God's image, and God is a union of three Persons in One.

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26).

It was God's plan to reveal himself to his creation through relationships! God was initiating a family, named Man (note, this is the name God gave us, Genesis 5:2). It was "not good" that man should be alone because God's will, by which "good" is defined, could not be consummated without the woman. And, to state it tirelessly, God's will was to express his character through the male-female humanity, to whom he gave authority to have dominion over the earth and every living thing on the earth and to be fruitful and multiply, filling and subduing the earth. Multiplied relationships, expanded opportunity for adventure and loving conquest of a richly endowed environment!

This is the context in which God sets in complement the headship responsibility of the male and the sensitive-support responsibility of the female. Each is supportive of the other in a unique way. The man takes the governmental responsibility ("the buck stops on his desk"), the woman supports him, with wisdom and trust. Or, as the Apostle Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 11:11,12:

"Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God."

It is not, then, a matter of comparing "rights," but of seeing the privilege and responsibility of functioning in the uniqueness of our individuality according to God's design. Outside of this design we all are misfits.

Genesis 2:22-25 records the first union of a man and woman in a marriage ceremony performed by God. Suppose it could be said of every marriage, "the Lord God...made...a woman and brought her to the man!" Suppose the prerequisite to marriage were a woman made whole and beautiful by her encounter with the living God, led by him to a man "under orders" and equipped for life because of his communion with his Creator! It would have a profound effect upon the joy and spiritual equality of that union. And I dare say it would challenge considerably the common mode of courtship which we as a society have taught our young. Well might such a man respond to such a woman with the words of Adam, "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." (One student of Hebrew tells me the words "at last" are the equivalent to the modern term, "Wow".) The equality of such a God-ordained union would form the prospectus for a three-dimensional unity which would glorify the God who united them. The isosceles triangle is completed in the union of man and woman equal in identity, complementary in function, in harmony with one another because God is preeminent in their lives.

Interestingly, to this point the words "Adam" and "man" are used interchangeably, taken from the Hebrew root which simply refers to the earth from which the man was created, a common non-specific reference to a man. In verses 23 and 24 the Hebrew idiom changes to indicate a special nobility, power of will, individuality, the name "Ish" of which the feminine "Ishah" is the diminutive. And so "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good!"

In his article, "The Suicide of the Sexes," George Gilder describes what he refers to as "a man's predicament" from his earliest years to manhood, affirming his sexuality first through his mother, then his father, to then become, without the "civilizing effect" of marriage and family, predatory in sexual exploits and economics. Can it be that God anticipated the problem in the "simple" solution of Genesis 2: 24:

"Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh"?

Therefore, supported by this new "thou" relationship, with new validation and strength for his personal authority, the man leaves his old authority structure, his old system for social security, to establish a stronger union in which his headship is affirmed in the context of spiritual equality.

They were both naked, and were not ashamed They had both self-awareness and other-awareness, but without self-centeredness The crux of their commitment was God himself, and in the pristine beauty of that three-fold relationship they were secure, unthreatened and unthreatening. Having studied neither Freud nor Skinner, they knew who they were and why they were there. God had taught them their life philosophy and given them their life-message. He synthesized their psycho-sexual behavior and harmonized their polarities. There were no hidden subtleties or programmed strategies, no vying for rights or dominance, because God was the resolution to their identity, the motivation for their function "for such a harmony could not exist, except they all consented to some one end" (George Macdonald in *Phantastes*).

A transparent, open, and guileless relationship was the result of their submission to God's loving authority, under which they were totally free to be fully human. There was neither exploitation nor intimidation in the God-ordained authority structure: God, the First Cause, to whom each was individually responsible--the man for loving headship, the woman for supportive submission. Man, to convey the glory of God to woman, woman to display the glory of God for man.

Thus marriage, instituted by God from creation, becomes the spool from which is woven the fabric of all relationships. From it we are to learn the principal examples of unity, fidelity, commitment, authority, submission, and love as an expression of worship to God. Marriage is not the end in itself, but a means by which we demonstrate the strong and tender love of the Creator-God, a God fiercely jealous for the true good which brings delight and fulfillment to every facet of our humanity. A God of law and order by which he channels to us "the sweet air blowing from the land of righteousness," in whose garden we may freely eat of every tree that delights and satisfies our deepest needs.

In marriage we are to see God relating to his people, Christ relating to his church, and in it all how humanity functions in terms of the indwelling life of Jesus Christ, who is the express image of the Father. In this way marriage sets the principles, the pattern, for all human relationships, for in them all we relate as sexual beings, according to our God-assigned function.

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