

## Sex - Gender Relationships

### Genesis 3:1-20

#### Preamble

It probably does not need to be said, but it should be said.

Men, throughout history, have dominated women in every aspect of life.

Whether is through political systems of patriarchy, social traditions or religious practice.

As a man, I fully acknowledge the advantage I have in life over women.

The problem, however, is that a privileged group is often unaware of its advantage

whether it be in class, economics, ethnicity, geography or gender.

I often take my position and advantages as a man for granted.

Not because I am wicked but because I am ignorant and unaware.

It is easy for me as a man to deny that I have any such advantage,  
especially if I know of and see women who are above me in status.

And, so, when I speak about sex and gender relationships, I am very aware of my physical sex and en-cultured gender.

But also it behooves the members of any privileged group to be willing to create space and serve as advocates of those who are not.

And so an apology on behalf of my sex and gender,

fathers, brothers, boyfriends, husbands, acquaintances, strangers

men in general who have ever demeaned, abused in any way or objectified you as a woman.

Know that not all men are like this and we who follow Christ need to call one another to his way.

But let us examine where how this is understood in Scripture and where it comes from.

Last week, Diana, spoke from creation of humanity a men and women.

She touched on the differences of physical identifiers as well as cultural ones  
through which we talk about both sex and gender.

This week, we will talk about the source of friction, oppression, fear and dominance  
as well as the paths to equality, mutuality, uniqueness, peace and respect.

Anyways, let's start with the bad news.

#### The Curse

*Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*

(Gen 3:16b)

This is where it begins.

The word for desire here has often been interpreted as love or affection.

That a woman will love her husband even though he dominates her.

But this is not the only understanding of this word.

Due to the parallelism of Hebrew poetry and writing, the word desire here leans not towards affection, but dominance.

"Your desire will be to dominate/control your husband and he will rule over you."

This then is not the masochistic or co-dependent loving someone who rules you,

but an indication of the conflict between the sexes.

The explicit cause of this is the fall, of sin, which is the throwing off of God's Lordship.

They who once saw each other's nakedness without shame, now cover themselves from each other and from God.

This breaking of trust is at the heart of all human insecurity, leading to a desire for control and dominance.

Whether understood literally or figuratively, Scripture is very clear as to breaking of male and female relationship.

Extrapolate this forward and we have the world as we see it today.

This is not entirely about men's dominance over women, but an ongoing struggle between the sexes against one another.

For whatever historical, political, social reasons, men have been "winning."

In reality, however, everyone loses.

[Pantene Commercial re. labelling]

[Discussion]

### **The Cure**

*<sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

(Galatians 3:26-29)

A new kingdom, a new identity.

A life of non-domination.

Only one King with whom we are heirs and co-heirs of heaven.

This involves ethnicity, class and sexuality.

It removes the discrepancies of power base in normal fallen human society.

In Christ is found not so much a new way of relating but a recovered manner of relationship back in Eden.

[Dove Commercial]

[Discussion]

### **The Confusion**

*<sup>8</sup> Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. <sup>9</sup> I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup> but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

*<sup>11</sup> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup> But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

(1 Timothy 2:8-15)

It is unwise to create a sweeping theology from just a few passages of Scripture.

Take into account the breadth of Scriptural understanding.

### Understanding of Context

The early Christians were having a mess of a time in worship.

There was obviously a lot of disputing in service.

There was chaos and shouting as well as displays of ecstatic expressions that were both confusing and disturbing.

Much of the teaching regarding gifts of the Spirit, including the love passage would be missing from the Bible

If Paul did not find the need to correct the Corinthians.

A part of this reality was that certain women, finding a form of equality taught by the apostles used the opportunity to overturn their oppressive culture and take out their frustration.

Perhaps what we are seeing is the beginning of not a feminist movement but a feminist revolt.

And this form of feminism is very understandable!

After long oppression, there is an opportunity for justice and it is taken with gusto.

Just perhaps more than was helpful.

Feminism has a spectrum of expressions ranging from peaceful dialog to outrage and misandry.

v.11 - "Quietness" is the word for calm and peaceable.

"Full Submission" does not mean exclusively to men but to Christ!

v.12 - "To teach or assume authority over" contains overtones of domination.

Also note the public setting and context of this.

One translation of this is "A woman shouldn't tell off or boss a men around. She has got to observe propriety."

v.13 - Adam was created first, then Eve.

True. But what tone is this in?

And why say something so obvious?

There is something to the primacy to men, but it isn't what we often make it out to be.

We'll get to this.

v.14 - "Adam wasn't the one deceived, Eve was."

Again the tone is determined by context.

Do you hear a misogynistic man or a man who is trying to get someone to thoughtfully back down?

Compared to what we know now, it certainly isn't a good exegesis of Genesis.

Can we say that about Paul? Actually, yes.

Because it isn't exegesis - that science did not yet exist in his age, nor would it have been understood.

He was simply doing what he could to reason someone off the edge.

Maybe it worked and maybe it didn't.

It is all about context.

What I do know is that these words were used for centuries against women.

Not just unpleasant belligerent women, but unfortunately, all women to our shame.

v.15 - "Salvation through Childbirth"

There are three older interpretations of this.

1. The focus on the definite article which makes it "The birth," referring to the birth of Christ.

2. A reference to Genesis and the seed of Eve who would crush the serpent's head.

3. Domestication through being a wife and mother.

All have some legitimate consideration.

In light of our modern egalitarian society, the last seems most offensive.

But that is to modern ears.

It is understandable, here even in our community how certain mothers do indeed enjoy being mothers.

But we must also in our context, unlike Paul's,

take into consideration the gauntlet marriage is for men and women today.

Singleness has not outmatched married people in our world.

It is also a deep tragedy that these words, meant to be of reason and comfort in a past age

is now used as a weapon against women and their participation in honourable work among men.

I must make comment here that in our day, men must take a greater share of domestic work.

In fact, the Bible explicitly places the training of children in the hands of fathers.

With the industrial revolution not only does everyone become a commodity,  
families are pigeonholed.

Men can be and should be nurturing as much as women can be culture makers.

There is a fourth understanding as well.

Since the New Testament doesn't come with punctuation, it may be that the words,

"If they continue in faith, love, holiness and propriety" may indeed refer to both Adam and Eve.

This is not going to settle all our struggles and doubts about this passage.

It is, however, an invitation to understand both context and meaning in Scripture.

To even understand it's limits and abuses.

Out of this single passage, we have kept some women from exercising the gifts they are given.

We have kept them from leadership and teaching.

We relegate them to Children's work.

Well, our church stands to change this.

Women and men will preach in our pulpit.

Men and women will teach and nurture children.

When either Adam or Eve is missing in any endeavor in the Kingdom of God, we will always miss half the picture.

But is there more?

Does the Bible truly support this way of relating to one another?

## The Challenge

<sup>21</sup> Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— <sup>30</sup> for we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

(Ephesians 5:21-32)

This is taken from a Christian version of the common Roman Household Codes.

It speaks about husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves.

In all instances, the rules are clear.

Slaves, you are the property of your masters.

Masters, feed and care for your slaves because they are useful.

Children, obey your parents.

Parents, teach your children with a strong hand.

Wives, obey your husbands.

Husbands, feed, house and rule your wives.

So the Paul, the same one who writes to Timothy in Ephesus, sneaks Christian values into the household rules.

Yes, Wives obey your husbands. That's standard.

But does he go on to say feed and house your wife

so she can serve you well because she is your property?

Nope.

Love her to the point of dying for her.

In other words, she is worth more than your own life.

Surprise!

You see, the Christian life is about mutuality, not dominance.

But it is more than that.

The Christian life, the Christ-like life is about selflessness.

Men do indeed have primacy in their duty.

They are always to be first.

But first to what? Get everything like respect and money and honor?

Nope.

What does Jesus teach about leadership and headship?

The one who wants to be the greatest, the first,

must become the last, the servant, the slave of all.

Men and women were meant to serve one another.

To understand one another.

To lift each other up.

Our challenge is this.

What is our attitude when we look at the opposite sex?

Do we wish to serve or to be served?

Are we afraid or are we trusting?

Are we caring or are we using?

As yourself what you think of your

If you are a man, how do you think of your

mother, sister, wife, girlfriend, friend, acquaintance, or stranger who is a woman?

If you are a woman, how do you think of your

father, brother, husband, boyfriend, friend, acquaintance or stranger who is a man?

How far do we have to go to bridge the gaps?

This is the begging of friendship, of partnership, of affection, of love - but that is another sermon...