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Adam named her Eve.

Author(s): Martens, Elmer A.

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Elmer A. Martens

The Importance of Creation Order

*Adam: "Sole Eve, associate sole, to me beyond
Compare above all living creatures dear!
Well hast thou motioned, well thy thoughts employed
How we might best fulfill the work which here
God hath assigned us, nor of me shalt pass
Unpraised; for nothing lovelier can be found
In a woman than to study household good,
And good works in her husband to promote.
Yet not so strictly hath our Lord imposed
Labor as to debar us when we need
Refreshment, whether food or talk between,
Food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse
Of looks and smiles . . . — John Milton, Paradise Lost*

The critical issue in the biblical interpretation of women in church ministry is the starting point. Anabaptists give major weight to Jesus and the gospels. The departure point for the discussion about women and

men in ministry must be Jesus' practice and teaching. His teaching harked back to the creation order.

Jesus broke with the customs of his day, which regarded women as second-class citizens or worse (Mk. 7:24-30; Jn. 4; Matt. 27:55-56; Lk. 10:38-42; Jn. 20:1-18). It follows that the depreciation of women relatively common in some church and family circles is contrary to the model set by Jesus. Men in leadership have ample reason to apologize to the women in our churches for attitudes and actions not in the spirit of Christ.

Jesus' practice must be balanced with his teaching. A striking feature of that teaching was his stress on the creation pattern as normative. When the opponents query Jesus about divorce, Jesus quickly makes clear that, while he acknowledges the Mosaic teaching on divorce, the intended pattern was set in Eden: one husband, one wife (Matt. 19:1-12). Paul, like Jesus, grounds his position in the creation (1 Cor. 11:8; 1 Tim. 2:13). It is only reasonable then, when seeking light on the question of men, women and ministry, that attention be given to the opening chapters of Genesis.

THE ORDERING AT CREATION

Ordering is a chief concern of Genesis 1—2. The arrangement of the acts of creation in six days presents a carefully laid-out sequence. The celestial bodies of sun and moon were set in place in order to rule over day and night; human beings were to rule over the earth. The great sin reported in Genesis 3 is that human beings were taken in by the tempter who promised them that by eating of the tree human beings could be like God. Eve succumbed to the temptation and trespassed the appointed order.

The first and highly significant statement made about men and women is “and God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). The initial word is a word about equality. Both women and men are created in God's image. There is no hint here of superiority or inferiority. While the gender distinction is noted, each has identical dignity. Humans are not, as in the ancient Near-East myths, slaves of the gods, but beings who are “a little lower than God” (Ps. 8:5). In whatever way that “image” is to be understood, there is no argument that both women and men share worth and dignity equally.

They share equally also in another respect. God gives both man and woman the command to have dominion over the earth and to rule over it: “And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it . . .’” (Gen. 1:28). So Genesis 1 places women equal with men as to position before God, and equal with men in environmental stewardship.

The so-called second creation account (Gen. 2:4b-24) speaks again to the question of environment and also addresses the man/woman relationship. How these two accounts of creation are to be understood has received different answers. One view is that they stem from different sources and have been combined. A more likely view is that the first (1:1—2:3) is general; the second, particular. The move is from the cosmos to the garden. In the second account, humanity (not botany or astrology) is selected for further treatment. Just as in the first account there was mention of humankind in relation to God, humankind in relation to each other, and humankind in relation to the environment, so each of these

themes now appears in the second account, with the elaboration of certain details and qualifications.

Each of the three relationships is further defined (and limited). As to the relationship between God and humankind, we hear of a new factor: obedience. Moreover, we hear a new note about the environment. While in the first account, God expressly stated that "every plant . . . and every tree which has fruit . . . shall be food for you" (Gen. 1:29), that mandate is now curtailed: they are not to eat the fruit from one tree (2:16-17). These two examples introduce other qualifications to the first account. We should be prepared for some refinement also in elaboration of the man/woman relationships. The account of the beginning of the family is given in the second half of the second creation account (2:18-24). Five observations/conclusions can be made from that treatment of man and woman.

First, man is given a lead responsibility for the environment. In Genesis 2 the subject of the environment is discussed solely in terms of Adam. Eve has not yet been formed. The garden is planted, and then "God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). From the first account of creation we understand that the custody of the environment is a joint custody. But in the second account the responsibility is handed to the man in particular. Confirmation of such a conclusion comes from the Lord's word to Adam after the fall. The Lord tells Adam that the ground is cursed and that in toil shall he wrest food from the earth, for "both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you" (2:19). To Adam, more than to Eve, is the connection with the stewardship of the environment made. While the woman cannot escape responsibility for

the environment, the man is responsible for “cultivating and keeping” the earth more particularly.

A second observation follows. In the story, the command to refrain from eating from the designated tree is given to the man even before the woman is formed (2:16). He is responsible for obedience. When Eve transgresses, with Adam close behind, the text notes that both hide themselves (3:11). In the story, God calls for the man, “Where are you?” (3:9). When Adam explains his fear and the reason for hiding, God addresses the man, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (2:11). Only later in the conversation does God address himself to the woman. God fixes responsibility in Eden first on the man. The story makes clear that both are responsible, and both bear the consequences of their deed, but God gives the man primary responsibility.

Thirdly, the lead role for Adam is indicated by his task to assign names. The point of the passage is that by assigning names to the animals, Adam discerned distinctions among them, and in the process it became clear that no suitable helper for Adam was to be found among the animal species. A subsidiary point would not be missed by the Hebrews, for the responsibility of naming was held by someone with authority (Gen. 1:5, 8, 10; 17:5; 32:28; 2 Ki. 24:17). To name someone was indicative of authority.

In that garden setting, when the person formed by God was brought to him, Adam exclaimed, “She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23). The woman's name is *Issah* because she was taken from *Ish* (man). The joyous welcome accorded the woman is a comment on her importance; the designation of the name is in keeping with his position of lead responsibility.

A fourth observation turns around the expression "helper suitable for him" (2:18). As in English, so in Hebrew, the word "helper" signifies someone who comes along to assist. Some commentators have observed that the word in the Hebrew is often used of God, and have hinted that, using hierarchical language, this would mean that Eve, in this case, was to be over the man in importance. First, such a conclusion is quite out of keeping with the tenor of the passage. In the narrative, not so much as a statement or even any action is attributed to her. More important is the observation that Eve's role is in some way dependent upon Adam's. A woman writer is blunt: "She is made to be a cooperator as he is made to be an operator." To be sure God is a helper, but unlike Eve, his identity is not derived in terms of another.

Further, the "helper" was to be a complementary partner to Adam. The result of God's formative act of making woman out of man, was, judging by Adam's exclamation, totally satisfactory. Woman was indeed a complementary partner to man. Woman, so the apostle Paul asserts, was created for the sake of man (1 Cor. 11:9). Such a statement gives no license to chauvinists; both men and women exist from God and for God. Men have a primary responsibility; however, it is in view of this responsibility that woman is called alongside.

And that introduces a fifth observation. Adam is made first, then Eve. For moderns the order is decidedly less important than it was for ancient Israel. However, the laws of primogeniture, namely regulations governing the privileges and responsibilities of the firstborn, were carefully honored. In the genealogies of Genesis 5 the firstborn of each (except for Adam) is singled out and named.

Singular importance was given to the chronological priority of birth. That Ishmael, by virtue of being first, is entitled to the birthright is assumed. In an interesting complication with twins, Zerah, the first to appear, in the end is the last to be born, yet it is understood that Perez, the firstborn will be head of the clan (Gen. 38:27-30; cf. Gen. 46:12; Ruth 4:12, 18). So when Paul argues for male headship based on temporal priority ("For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man," 1 Cor. 11:8), he is consistent with the intention of the author of Genesis.

All five observations combined lead to the conclusion that a role differentiation between man and woman is imbedded in the creation order. The man has a lead position. Significant in the argument for this contention is Paul's emphasis on the man's temporal priority (cf. 1 Tim. 2:13). The man cannot abdicate responsibility, even when it involves Eve. He has her for a helper; her identity is dependent on his vocation. This understanding of levels of responsibility—an understanding which cannot be detached from authority and accountability—has been the understanding for nearly two millennia of the church's teaching. If it needs correction, one can at least understand on what basis a preferred place was given to the man in the home and in the church.

The creation account ordering leads to two assertions. First, the conclusion, derived from the creation account in Genesis 1:1—2:3, is that man and woman are equal as persons. Secondly, the creation account of Genesis 2:4-24, while not subtracting in the least from the first assertion, points to a role differentiation, giving to the man a lead role. The two accounts must be taken together, otherwise distortion results. Those who seize

on Genesis 2:4-24 to advocate male dominance over women are in error. Those who quote the passage about equality from Genesis 1 and fail to observe role differentiation as outlined in Genesis 2 are also in error. Indeed, the equality dimension is stressed first and last in the two accounts, perhaps so that the role differentiation found in the second account will not be overplayed. Male and female are in the image of God (1:27). "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:24), says Adam. This "bracketing" of the material about man and woman is instructive because it asserts, first, the equality of the two; and given the story in Genesis 2, also the role differentiation that is to mark the two.

The divinely-ordained arrangement is a delicate balance. Men and women are equal ontologically (as things are in and of themselves), but God gave the man a primary responsibility. The roles of men and women are differentiated. That balance was upset in the fall. The differing roles now became a problem; there follows the so-called "battle of the sexes." The outcome of Eve's transgression was that the man would pervert his lead position and become arbitrary, harsh, and sometimes even tyrannical: "He shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Likewise the woman, instead of acknowledging the husband's lead position, would seek to usurp his position: "Your desire shall be for your husband" (Gen. 3:16). This interpretation of "desire" as "desire to master" is defended, as scholars have noted, from the subsequent chapter where God addresses Cain, "Its [sin] desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7). The entrance of sin into the human race means that the appointed ordering would be abused and challenged.

TESTING THE PATTERN OF ORDERING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The remainder of the Old Testament concurs with this kind of ordering—an ordering in which men and women are equal in worth, but in which functions are differentiated so that to men is given a lead role.

The strand of material in the Old Testament that asserts women's dignity is impressive. One can easily document examples of women's involvement and leadership. God makes a covenant with his people, men and women (Deut. 29:1-11). Women pray to God directly (Gen. 25:22-23) and minister before the Lord (Ex. 38:8). Miriam is part of the leadership team together with Aaron and Moses (Ex. 15:20-21); Deborah is a military commander (Judg. 4-5); Huldah a prophetess (2 Ki. 22:14); and Esther a queen. Wisdom, said to be with God at creation, is personified as a woman (Prov. 8). Such texts dare not be muffled; they proclaim the dignity that is accorded women. But to argue from these examples for role interchangeability is to ignore other texts—texts which are reminiscent of the creation ordering.

Old Testament texts that surface the lead position of men are so frequent that the patriarchy model is a large stumbling block to feminists. God's call is to Abram (Gen. 12); when he obeys he takes Sarai with him. The Torah stipulated that when women made vows, these were under the jurisdiction of fathers and husbands (Num. 30). However, for widows and divorced persons, every vow "shall stand" (Num. 30:9). Further evidence of the lead position of men is in the priesthood; there is no record that women were priests. The teaching and official cultic leadership function was denied them. A reason is not given. For that matter priesthood re-

sponsibilities were denied to all but the Levitical tribe, and even so only those over the age of thirty were eligible to be priests. It might be remembered that Miriam, chafing (along with Aaron) at Moses' leadership was not only rebuked but disciplined (Num. 12:9ff.). If one listens carefully to the Old Testament on this question of the role of women, one is impressed with the great latitude extended to women, but, consistent with Genesis 1—2, also with certain responsibilities deferred to men.

TESTING THE PATTERN OF ORDERING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Is the creation order which assigns a lead position to men overturned in the New Testament? Some argue that Christ's redemptive work effected a change in the fundamental ordering. They cite Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ." In this passage which discusses the benefits of salvation, Paul insists that the barriers of gender and social class have tumbled down for those "in Christ." Such a statement is reminiscent of Genesis 1:27 which insists that as persons, both men and women are to be given full worth. To use this text as determinative for roles in ministry, however, is unwarranted because of the context. That question Paul addresses elsewhere.

In the early church the ministry of women was wide-ranging, to be sure. Women were among the disciples in the upper room (Acts 1:14). Lydia is mentioned (Acts 16:15), as are Philip's daughters who prophesy (Acts 21:8). Priscilla, along with her husband, instructs Apollos (Acts 18:26). Phoebe is listed as a servant-

minister (Rom. 16:1). In that same chapter Paul acknowledges the services of several women. Those who urge these instances as reasons for role interchangeability, neglect another strand of texts, the so-called restrictive texts.

These “restrictive texts” cannot here be exegeted in detail; sketchy comments must suffice. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul addresses worship. He says, “Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (v. 3). Debate continues as to whether “head” signifies authority, and is therefore hierarchical, or whether it can also mean source. Those who have argued from Greek literature that “head” means “source” are now being strongly challenged. The term “head” is used for the source of a river, for example, but also for its mouth. The conclusion is that head may also mean “extremity.” Though the word could mean “source,” it can hardly do so in this text for God is hardly the source of Christ. But that there is a structure—call it hierarchical—is the plain sense of the text. Without qualification, it is allowed by all Christians that “Christ is the head of every man”—the first statement. Without qualification it is allowed by all believers that “God is the head of Christ”—the third statement. Why then is the in-between statement, “man is the head of the woman,” qualified and made to mean something other than “hierarchical?”

The word “hierarchical” has by now a negative meaning, no doubt because of the abuse by those who have exercised authority irresponsibly. Another word would be preferable. But the notion that in some sense the man takes the lead (not towers above) is evident from this text. Paul's teaching may not be reassuring either for men or for women, but to wiggle around the

text, or worse, to ignore it or even force an opposite meaning, is a procedure that cannot be condoned. To acknowledge a gradation of responsibility would be in keeping with the message of Genesis. Indeed in the same chapter, Paul, following the method of our Lord before him, appeals to the creation account. Paul argues his case noting that “man does not originate from woman, but woman from man” (1 Cor. 11:8).

Further insight into role differentiation comes from the same letter: “Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves just as the Law also says” (1 Cor. 14:34). Here Paul appeals to Scripture. To read this text in the absolutist sense, however, as has been done by some hard-liners, is to ignore Paul’s instructions in the same book for a woman who prays or prophesies (1 Cor. 11:5). Paul does not preclude the public ministry of women, but he circumscribes that ministry—corresponding with the creation ordering.

A similar explanation holds for the text in 1 Timothy 2. Paul instructs: “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man . . .” (1 Tim. 2:12). Yet women are to teach children (2 Tim. 1:5), teach other women (Tit. 2:3-4), and, in the case of Priscilla may on occasion teach men (Acts 18:26). The instructions to Timothy, some argue, pertain only to that situation in Ephesus and are not to be universalized to apply to all Christians. But that is questionable. Paul once more appeals to the creation order: “For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13).

In summary, in Galatians Paul scores the point for women’s equality with men. Such a position accords with Genesis 1. In 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 Paul sets limitations for women in public ministry. Such

a position agrees with the creation account in Genesis 2. There is a broad scope for ministry for women. However, the conclusion is virtually inescapable that for Paul some limitations are in effect.

Objections raised against this interpretation of the man in lead position, revolve around two points: (1) giftedness, and (2) gender discrimination. It is argued, for example, that it is irresponsible not to employ women's gifts of leadership. A blunt reply is that as important as women's gifts are, there are still parameters as to their use. At issue is not the full deployment of gifts; at issue is obedience to a divinely given pattern. Moreover it is claimed that limitation of ministries for women is discrimination according to gender and that this is unworthy of the gospel. In reply one should note that entry into the kingdom for everyone means coming under the lordship of Christ and that submission to him as Lord is a non-negotiable requirement. In principle, ordering curbs freedom, for it means that "not everything goes."

It must be underlined that submission, as the Bible envisages it, does not of itself imply inferiority. When, for example, an employee defers to his or her employer, the issue is not an issue of intrinsic worth; the issue is acknowledgement of role distinctions. The clincher for this line of reasoning is to point to Jesus, the Son of God. The Christian teaching is that Jesus is God and that both God and Jesus are equal in deity. Still, it is said of our Lord that he put himself at the service of God the Father, and submitted to his will. In essence, the two are equal; in function, one is submissive to the other. So also in the man/woman relationship both in the family and in church.

Does Christ reverse the results of the fall? Yes! As Paul explains, a husband's love is to be for his wife; a loving husband does not rule over his wife. Moreover, a Christian wife displays a submissive attitude to her husband. She is not about to usurp the role of her husband (cf. Gen. 3:16). The disharmony identified at the fall has been undone by Christ. Mutual submission is enjoined, and yet the role distinctions are observed. The creation order, which acknowledges levels of responsibility, remains. Otherwise, the statement that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church is a hollow paradigm. Carefully delineated symbols in Scripture should not be confounded.

CONCLUSION

To hold that in the creation pattern man and woman were accorded equal worth, but were assigned differentiated levels of responsibility, is to make sense of Paul's statements which, on the one hand, underscore the equality of the sexes, but on the other hand, delineate boundaries for roles. The practical application of such a theology needs further attention as to detail, but on the issue of women in ministry, the above exposition would mean a broad exercise of gifts for all—men and women. Clearly women, to whom dignity is to be accorded, have broad avenues for public ministry. At the same time it seems necessary that a respect for role differentiation be maintained. One might envision, for example, that women would preach, serve on boards, perhaps be ordained (given an understanding of ordination as affirmation, rather than entitlement to authority). But officially designated leadership roles, such as that of senior pastor, would be reserved for men. In what

way the details of the above position would be expressed, given current organizations, needs further attention. The goal would be to express in a practical way, both the equality taught in Genesis 1 and the role differentiation noted in Genesis 2.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

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