

Genesis as the Basis for Biblical Gender Equality

Empower International Ministries

New Man, New Woman, New Life,

by Dr. Carrie A. Miles

Presentation by

Wayne A. Pelly

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1

Traditional Misunderstandings of Genesis

- Women were not created fully in God's image – as men were
- Created for a subordinate role to men: A "Helper"
 - Her "role" is to serve men
 - To provide children, food & sex for men
- Women were cursed by God
 - Their life is a punishment by God

2

Impact of Traditional Misunderstandings on African Women

“As a Christian African woman, I seek to understand what (African women) are experiencing today and where they are going. I seek the quality of life that frees African women to respond to the fullness for which God created them. It is my experience that Christianity as manifested in the Western churches in Africa does little to challenge sexism, whether in church or in society. I believe that the experience of women today in the church in Africa contradicts the Christian claim to promote the worth (equal value) of every person.” --Mercy Amba Oduyoye

3

Impact of Traditional Misunderstandings on African Women

--Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, p. 9

- Reinforces the cultural conditioning of women's compliance and submission
- Leads to the depersonalization of women
- A negative effect on women's self-image
- Undermines “equal worth of every person”

4

Challenging Traditional misunderstandings

- Bible Study guide used by Empower International Ministries
- *New Man, New Woman, New Life*
- Gives us an accurate biblical framework for understanding
- Author: Dr. Carrie A. Miles, founder and Director of Empower

5

The Bible's Story of Redemption

- Biblical Framework:
 - Creation
 - Fall
 - Redemption
 - Teachings of Jesus Christ
 - Writings of the Apostle Paul
- The restoration of relationships as God intended

6

*The Genesis Foundation for
Biblical Gender Equality*

- The origin of gender equality is in Genesis chapters 1-3:
- Creation: Genesis 1 & 2 (God's ideal)
 - Man & Woman in the Beginning
 - The Ideal Relationship
- The Fall: Genesis 3 (what went wrong?)
 - Man & Woman's Position with God (not cursed!)
 - The End of Unity – and Why

7

Study 1: Genesis 1

Man and Woman in the Beginning

- Creation of Humanity in God's image
- Matthew 19:3-8
- Genesis 1:26-29
- God's creation ideal / intent

8

Study 1: Matthew 19:3-8

Some Pharisees came to [Jesus], and to test him they asked “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. . .

9

Study 1: Matthew 19:3-8 (Cont'd)

. . . Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”

10

Study 1: Start with Jesus!

- It is Jesus Himself who directs us to the creation account
 - Matthew 19:3-8 “. . . from the beginning”
- God’s ideal – “one flesh”
 - The Law (and culture) contradicted God’s ideal
- Jesus’ diagnosis: Hard hearts

11

Study 1: Genesis 1

- Vs. 26 – Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping things that creeps upon the earth.”
- Vs. 27 – So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

12

Study 1: Genesis 1

- Vs. 28 – God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”
- Vs. 29 – God said, “See, I have given you [the form of “you” is plural] every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you [plural] shall have them for food.”

13

Study 1: Back to the Beginning

- Genesis 1:26-29
 - Creation of humankind: men and women
 - Both created in God’s image
 - Both given blessing & responsibility for dominion over the earth
 - Both given blessing & responsibility for filling the earth (children)
 - Both given every form of food

14

Study 1: Application

- Jesus: “God’s plan for the sexes is found in creation, not culture”
- Both are created in God’s image
- Children are a blessing – not a commandment
- Children and property belong to women together with men
- No food taboos: “My wife eats what I eat, when I eat it!”

15

Study 2: Genesis 2

The Ideal Relationship

- Creation of the first man and the first woman
- Genesis 2:7, 18-25
- God’s creation ideal / intent
 - Specifics regarding their relationship

16

Study 2: Genesis 2 – Key Verses

- Vs. 7 – Then the Lord God formed the man (ha Adam) from the dust of the ground (ha adamah), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.
- Vs. 18 – Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”

17

Study 2: Genesis 2 – Key Verses

- Vs. 22 – And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.
- Vs. 23 – Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”
- Vs. 24 – Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

18

Study 2: Summary

- “Ha ‘Adam” – “the earth creature”
- God: “It is not good that the human should be alone”
- God creates a “helper as his partner”
- “Therefore, a man leaves his father & mother, and clings to his wife”
 - Quoted by both Jesus & Paul

19

Study 2: Where is Authority?

- The issue of male authority:
 - Patriarchy claims Genesis 2 teaches man’s authority over woman
 - Depends on three perspectives:
- “Helper” as a subordinate role
- Adam names the woman
- Adam was created first

20

Study 2: "Helper"

Genesis 2:7, 18

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

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the human should be alone; I will make him a helper (Hebrew 'ezer) as his partner."

21

Study 2: "Helper"

- Hebrew *'ezer*
- We usually think of a subordinate
 - Supplementary roles!
- Hebrew Bible uses this term for God
 - A superior!
- A king or army who comes to the aid of another king in battle - military image
- No connotation of inferiority or subordination!

22

Study 2: "Helper"

- Hebrew *'ezer* – *"Helper" Used for God*
- 1 Samuel 7:12 – "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer (*'ezer* [this one should be obvious]), saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped (*'ezer*) us."
- Psalm 30:10 - "Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me; O LORD, be my helper (*'ezer*)."
- Psalm 46:1 – "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help (*'ezer*) in trouble."
- Psalm 54:4 – "Behold, God is my helper (*'ezer*); the Lord is the upholder of my life."

23

Study 2: "Helper"

- Hebrew *'ezer* – *"Helper" Used in military contexts*
- Joshua 1:14 (To the Israelites that settled east of the Jordan) – Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help (*'ezer*) your brothers.
- 2 Samuel 8:5 - When the Arameans of Damascus came to help (*'ezer*) Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand of them.

24

Study 2: "Partner"

- Another term for woman– *Kenegdo*
- "Suitable" or "like" = a partner
- 'Ezer Kenegdo: A "strong partner"
 - Not like the animals
- Some translations: "Help meet"
 - NOT "Help mate" (popular but wrong)
- Literally: "Facing"
 - To meet face to face

25

Study 2: Identification

- Adam "names" the woman
 - Or does he? (Genesis 2:23)
 - And - does this indicate authority?
- Not a "naming convention" for a proper name
 - "Woman" is only a feminine form of "man"
 - They share a name!
- No indication of authority

26

Study 2: Creation Order

- Why the woman was created
 - God's own statement in 2:18
- Not good for the man to be alone
- The man needs a strong partner – an 'ezer kenegdo
- No indication of man's authority

27

Study 2: Application

- Woman a strong partner, not a housemaid/subordinate
 - As a "face to face" or "side by side" help – not a "worker"
- God's intent for the husband & wife relationship:
 - One flesh, naked and unashamed
 - Primary loyalty to each other – not parents or clan
 - Created for a "face to face" relationship
- No authority in the relationship

28

Study 3: Genesis 3 (part 1)

Man and Woman's Position with God

- The "Fall" and its impact
- Genesis 3:1-20
- A change in their "position" with God
 - Human rebellion
 - God's explanation of the consequences

29

Study 3: The Temptation

Genesis 3:6-7

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

30

Study 3: The Temptation

Genesis 3:9-13

“But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

31

Study 3: The Temptation

- Who is present when the serpent tempts Eve? (Genesis 3:6)
 - “She gave some to her husband, *who was with her*”
- What happens to their relationship?
 - Eyes opened; aware of own nakedness (shame)
 - Blaming – “She made me do it”
- The impact of sin
 - Sin: Replacing God’s will with ours
 - Impact: The Consequences

32

Study 3: The Temptation

Genesis 3:14, 17

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. . . ."

¹⁷ And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and ate from the tree of which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life"

33

Study 3: The Curse

- Who or what is cursed?
- Traditional mis-interpretation: Eve (vs. 16)
- Only two curses mentioned:
 - The serpent: vs. 14
 - The ground: vs. 17
- The consequences of their actions
 - Genesis 3:14-19

34

Study 3: Application

- The fall is the fault of both Adam and Eve
- God did not curse people but the serpent and the ground
- The description in 3:16-19 is the *consequences* of living outside of faith in God

35

Study 4: Genesis 3 (part 2)

The End of Unity

- The impact of the fall on people and their relationships
- Genesis 3:1-7; 16-20
- The curse on the ground affects both men and women
- “Patriarchy” results from the fall – not from God’s ideal!

36

Study 4: Results of the Curse

- The result of the curse on the ground:
- “Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you”
- The key word: Scarcity
 - Instead of God’s abundance to live
 - Scarcity – the challenge to survive
 - Difficult choices will need to be made
 - Not “what to eat?” but “who gets to eat?”
- Impacts people and their relationships

37

Study 4: Impact of Scarcity on Man

- Genesis 3:17-19
 “And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and ate from the tree of which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'
 Cursed is the ground because of you;
 through painful (or sorrowful) toil you will eat of it
 all the days of your life;

38

Study 4: Impact of Scarcity on Man

- Genesis 3:17-19 (continued)
It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you will return."

39

Study 4: Impact of Scarcity on Man

- God's judgment in 3:17-19
- Man will suffer '*itsabon*' - sorrowful toil (Vs. 17)
 - Man must work hard to survive
- Man eats by the sweat of his brow
 - Anxiety and shame
 - Concern about competition, pressure to be the best, dominate others
 - Show no weakness
- Will return to the dust: Death

40

Study 4: Impact of Scarcity on Women

- Genesis 3:16

“Unto the woman he said, ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow (this word could also be translated sorrow, sorrowful labor, or painful toil) and your conceptions; in sorrow (or sorrowful labor or painful toil) you shall bring forth children, and your desire (or turning) shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” (based on the King James Translation)

41

Study 4: Impact of Scarcity on Women

An issue of translation accuracy of Genesis 3:16

- The popular English translation
 - “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing”
 - (Unanswered question: How did God do this? Implications of a curse.)
- A more accurate translation:
 - “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conceptions”
 - (More consistent with the original Hebrew, the impact of the curse on the ground, and human history!)

42

Study 4: Impact of Scarcity on Women

- We need to reassess our translations (v. 16)
 - What did God actually multiply?
- “I will multiply your ‘*itsabon*’ . . .”
 - Same word as used for man in vs. 17
 - Woman must also work hard to survive – “sorrowful toil”
- “. . . and your conceptions/pregnancies”
 - Most important resource in scarcity: Children
 - Therefore woman’s most important job: bearing & raising children
 - Her life now defined by this “role”!
 - Also results in polygamy and brideprice

43

Study 4: Sorrow & Children

- In *sorrow* you shall bring forth children
 - Same root as ‘*itsabon*’ (sorrowful toil)
 - In Genesis always used for grief or distress – emotional (not physical) pain (see Gen 6:6)
 - A world where children are valued as resources rather than as individuals
 - A world of high infant and childhood mortality
 - A world of conflict between her children (see Genesis 4 – Cain & Abel!)
- For more info: *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World*, by Carrie A. Miles, Brazos: 2006

44

Study 4: Sorrow & Children

- Gen. 3:16 – “In *sorrow (grief)* you shall bring forth children”
- Gen. 6:6 – “The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with *grief.*”
- Gen. 45:5 – (Joseph to his brothers) – “But now, do not therefore be *grieved* or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.”

Note: The same word!

45

Study 4: Woman’s Desire & Man’s Rule

- “Your desire shall be for your husband” (or “you will turn to”)
 - Women are dependent on men: financially, for status, for survival
 - Women want to marry dominant men
- “And he shall rule over you.”
 - Male dominance of social institutions
 - Husbands have more power in the marital relationship
 - Subordination of women to men

46

Study 4: Patriarchy

- The Rule of Men (Fathers):
 - Not men ruling over women
 - But a few men ruling over everyone else – men and women
- Men's drive to dominate each other and women . . .
 - Comes from sin and scarcity
 - Not from God's original intent!
- Women have not been cursed by God!
 - The consequences of the Fall can be addressed & redeemed!

47

We Now Need the Rest of the Story!

- Genesis is only the first part of the story
 - Creation: God's original intent for us
 - The Fall: How scarcity has impacted us
- Now we're ready to see how the teachings of Jesus and Paul . . .
 - Remove the impact of the curse on the ground
 - Restore man and woman to the relationship God intended
- I encourage you to study the rest of *New Man, New Woman, New Life!*
- Download from <http://empowerinternational.org/>

48