

# Marriage & Gender Roles

## *"From the Beginning of the Creation"*

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### **Original Intent**

When Jesus was questioned about His thoughts on marriage, He reminded His inquisitors what God originally intended *"from the beginning of the creation."*<sup>1</sup> This was the overriding principle, the highest ideal, to which all regulations in the Law were subordinate. Following Jesus' example, we ought to hold God's original intention first and foremost when interpreting and applying any commands that deal with marriage and gender roles. God does not change.

So, what was God's original intent? At the close of each of the six days of creation God pronounced his handiwork "good." Yet, after creating Adam on the sixth day, He said: *"It is not good that man should be alone."* Adam's aloneness was a blight on God's creation which was in every other respect, "very good." Even in the perfect paradise of Eden, with no sin or death, God's creation was not wholly "good" until man's aloneness was remedied. Without the intimacy of marriage, the man could never be whole. He was defective. Eve was created to complete Adam, and to remedy this deficiency. After Eve was created, and joined to Adam, God pronounced His entire creative work "very good."<sup>2</sup>

### **Temporary Unintended Reality**

While it is true that God does not change, He has made allowances for man's sinful condition and its devastating effects. God's original intention for marriage was quickly marred by sin and the curse. The consequences of Adam's sin altered the original "very good" relationship between man and wife. The curse affected all of creation. Adam was required to toil by the sweat of his face to provide for his wife.<sup>3</sup> Eve was placed in a subordinate role to Adam; *"Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."*<sup>4</sup> Finally, the beautiful union that God had created with marriage was destined to end in death: *"you [will] return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:6

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1:31

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 3:17-19

<sup>4</sup> Gen 3:16

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 3:19

## Each Partner's Unique Relationship to God

The Genesis account shows a unique relationship between God and Adam which was different from His relationship with Eve. As Adam's 'helper,' Eve was not created to be an independent agent responsible directly to God. Adam was responsible to obey God's commands and to educate his wife regarding what God required of her. God did not command Eve directly to abstain from the tree of knowledge. He commanded Adam, who relayed God's command to Eve.

*"Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded **the man**, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'."*<sup>6</sup>

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God did not call out for Eve, but for Adam. *"Then the LORD God called **to Adam** and said to him, 'Where are you?'"*<sup>7</sup> God held the man responsible for the actions of both he and his wife because he was responsible for fully communicating God's commands to his wife. The KJV renders this best: *"Hast **thou** [singular] eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded **thee** [singular] that **thou** [singular] shouldst not eat?"*<sup>8</sup> When speaking generally about food, God told both Adam and Eve what they could eat.

*"And God said, Behold, I have given **you** [plural] every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to **you** [plural] it shall be for meat."*<sup>9</sup>

Both occurrences of "you" are plural in the Hebrew text. But, when God called Adam to give an account of their sin, He used only the singular.

When Adam was approached by God about his sin, he blamed Eve. *"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."*<sup>10</sup> But, God was not impressed with Adam's excuse. As far as God was concerned, Adam was ultimately responsible, and he was punished accordingly. Husbands are responsible for communicating God's commands to their wives, and will be held responsible for their wives' disobedience if they fail to do so, or fail to do what is right even if their wives will not.

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<sup>6</sup> Gen. 2:15-17

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 3:9

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 3:11 KJV

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 1:29 KJV

<sup>10</sup> vs. 12

This concept may seem strange to modern “westernized” Christians. But, our pop culture’s thinking regarding gender roles, equality, a 50-50 partnership, etc., is an anomaly in world history. The role of the man as head and priest of his wife and family has been unquestioned tradition among God’s covenant people from the creation until recent times. Only within the last several decades has this concept been overturned by our modern society. And this is part of the apostasy of the last days.

Under the Law of Moses, all adult males were commanded to appear before the Lord at the Temple three times a year.<sup>11</sup> The husband was the representative of his wife and children before God. Women were not permitted to approach God in the Temple’s “Court of Israel.”

Under the New Covenant, which is a major progressive step in God’s plan to restore His creation, women were given a much greater role than permitted under the Law of Moses. They clearly took part in the public worship of the early churches and partook of the Lord’s table along with the men. Yet, restrictions were placed on women that were not placed on men with regard to public speaking, particularly teaching, and holding the highest office in the local church, that of elder.

The Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian congregation of the husband’s role as head of his wife. *“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”*<sup>12</sup> Notice that this order not only includes the wife’s subordination to her husband, but also Christ’s subordinate relationship to the Father. This raises a critical question: Was Jesus always subordinate to the Father? The answer is no! Jesus, *“in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*<sup>13</sup> Jesus took on a subordinate role voluntarily. Why did Jesus do this? It was because of man’s sin, and the resulting curse. This is why the relationship between the Father and the Word changed from one of equality to one of voluntary subordination of the Son, by means of the incarnation and atonement. We conclude, therefore, that the subordinate role of the wife expressed by Paul above, and pronounced to Eve, is a temporary one until the curse is removed from the earth. This will occur at the resurrection of the just.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Deut. 16:16

<sup>12</sup> 1 Cor. 11:3

<sup>13</sup> Phil. 2:6-8

<sup>14</sup> Rom. 8:15-25

The Apostle Paul repeated the same temporary principle in his letter to the Ephesians, but also expressed how this relationship should play out in marriage. *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, **as** to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, **just as** the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”*<sup>15</sup>

The word “as” is translated from the Greek word “ὡς.” This word expresses a kind of equivalence between two different things or actions. It means “in this way” or “just as.” It appears twice in the above quote. Paul wrote that the wife is to submit to her husband as though her husband were Christ himself!<sup>16</sup> That is, he stands in the place of Christ for her. She is not to try to bypass him any more than one can bypass Christ to get to the Father. Jesus said, *“No one comes to the Father except through me.”*<sup>17</sup> It should be as inconceivable for the Christian wife to approach God while not submitting to her husband as it would be for a man to approach the Father while refusing to submit to Jesus Christ. This is the teaching of the New Testament.

Yet a feminized view has replaced the biblical teaching in modern western Christianity. Do we really think that our “progressive” thinking somehow changes God Himself? Insubordinate Christian wives may think they are pleasing God, but they are only deceiving themselves. Christian men who seek to please their wives by shirking their responsibility as head and priest of their wives do not please God.

The man is responsible before God to represent Christ faithfully to his wife. As her priest, if his character is far from God’s character she will grow to hate the ‘God’ he claims to represent. We know and love the Father because the Son came as a personal representative of His character, revealing His true nature.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, the wife is supposed to know Christ and love Him by seeing His character modeled in her husband. The relationships between the Father and Son, and Christ and the Church, are indeed the model for the married couple in the New Testament. But, how can a husband expect his wife to submit to an authority figure that does not portray Christ accurately? Must a wife submit to a tyrant? Must she submit to someone who does not love her and cherish her as Christ does the church? These are questions we ought to seriously consider.

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<sup>15</sup> Eph 5:22-24

<sup>16</sup> Nowhere does Scripture teach that “women” as a class are to be subject to “men” as a class. The subordination is limited to the marriage covenant, the wife submitting to her own husband not to other men. There is no biblical reason to suppose that in society women are inferior to men, or must submit to any man but her own husband.

<sup>17</sup> John 14:6

<sup>18</sup> John 1:18

Peter wrote that a Christian woman married to an unbeliever ought to model the same kind of submission that Jesus had to the Father. In doing so, she may be able to win her husband.

*1 Peter 3:1-6*

*1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.*

*3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel —*

*4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.*

*5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.*

The Scriptures urge wives to voluntarily submit to their husbands, just as Jesus voluntarily submitted to the Father. Jesus willingly subjected Himself to ridicule and abuse. And when we follow His example, we reflect His character. And we have the potential to change hearts by modeling Him. This principle applies to both husbands and wives. When a husband loves and cherishes his insubordinate wife, he also may win her.

### **Gender Roles in the Churches**

The Genesis story is not given to merely satisfy our curiosity about our origins. It was meant to convey certain principles by which all men and women who are in a covenant relationship with God are to live. This extends to modern Christian husbands and wives, as well as the gender roles in the local churches. As we saw above, the Apostle Paul taught that in marriage the Christian man is the head of his wife in the same way Christ is the head of the Church. Yet, the New Testament points us back to the first couple even when defining the roles of the genders in local church order. When Paul wrote to Timothy regarding local church order, he said, *“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”*<sup>19</sup>

Many claim Paul had purely cultural concerns in mind that no longer apply. Yet, he immediately gave the reason for his instructions. It had nothing to do with culture and everything to do with God’s intended order with the first couple. *“For Adam was formed*

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Tim. 2:11-12

*first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.*"<sup>20</sup> Paul provided two reasons for his restriction on women in the local church. Both are theological reasons involving God's intent drawn from Genesis. None are cultural.

The first reason Paul listed dealt with God's original intent in creating man and woman. God created Adam first; Eve was created from Adam's flesh as his helper. This showed the man's purpose was primary in God's order, and the wife's purpose was secondary. The second dealt with the vulnerability of the genders that led to the fall. Eve was the one who was deceived by Satan's whispering in her ear, not Adam. Paul's point was not that Eve was the first or worst sinner. Rather, it was the nature of her vulnerability – feelings of inferiority – which Satan exploited. Paul's point was that the woman is more vulnerable to Satan's temptation. And for these reasons women were forbidden from holding the highest position of elder, or teaching in public meetings where men were present. Almost the same vulnerability was given as a reason for Paul's forbidding a novice from being an elder, *"lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil."*<sup>21</sup> The devil's sin was in his striving for self-glory. And anyone who is in a subordinate role can be very vulnerable to self-promotion as well, and may compromise God's principles to get it.

While God held Adam ultimately responsible for Eve, she too had to bear her punishment. Eve's excuse was, *"the Serpent made me do it."* Indeed, Satan is a very clever foe. From the very beginning he saw the potential to ruin God's plan by using His most beautiful creation, the woman. He saw vulnerability in her "helper" role, and exploited it. No doubt he saw Adam's vulnerability as well, his fondness for Eve above his loyalty to God.

Deception for Eve was subtle, but deadly. Eve knew only what Adam had relayed to her, God's command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge under penalty of death. Satan approached Eve when she was alone with a new twist on what Adam had told her. He pretended to give her additional knowledge of God and His motives, knowledge even beyond what Adam had told her. The Serpent told her that God was trying to hold her back from reaching her full potential. She and Adam could be "as gods" if they ate of that tree. "Equality," not only with Adam but with God Himself was the bait Satan used. Indeed, if knowing both good and evil is equivalent to being "as gods," then Satan was telling the truth. Once they ate, they indeed gained knowledge. Formerly, they knew only "good" from the Creator. Now, Satan had introduced them to "evil." Its

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Tim. 2:13-14

<sup>21</sup> 1 Tim 3:6

consequences were immediate. They knew they were naked and they knew sin. From that instant the process of aging and death began. Yes, God had kept this knowledge from them, just as Satan said. But He did so for their good. Perhaps knowing evil was not such a good idea after all! But it was too late. The mistake could not be undone.

Satan lied to Eve, however, regarding the consequences of sin. He contradicted God's warning. God said *"You shall surely die."* Satan told her, *"You shall not surely die."* The deception Eve embraced ultimately meant the death penalty for herself, Adam, their children, and every descendant of the first couple.

Lest we think Eve committed the ultimate sin, we need to remember that the Apostle Paul placed the blame squarely at Adam's feet alone. Yes, Eve sinned first. But, the sequence in which they sinned was not the criterion by which God judged responsibility. *"Through **one man** sin entered the world, and death through sin, ... by **the one man's offense** death reigned through the one."*<sup>22</sup> God held Adam, as the priest of his wife, responsible for both of their sins. And if God does not change, why would we expect anything different in our modern world?

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote this: *"That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, 'See, this is new?' It has already been in ancient times before us."*<sup>23</sup> Solomon's point was simply that the wise learn from history. Fools ignore history and repeat it.

Winston Churchill understood Solomon's wise words. He used this philosophy to help defeat the Nazis and lead England to victory over the forces of darkness. Churchill wrote, *"The further you look back, the farther you can see ahead."* These are wise words, indeed. The first few chapters of Genesis are as far back as we are permitted to see. Christian men and women could spare themselves a lifetime of suffering and loneliness by learning the lessons provided by the first couple. Fully embracing the roles God has given to the genders, and joyfully submitting to the safeguards He has put into place, constitute the only path to true happiness and reaching one's full potential in marriage and in the local church. This is true for both men and women.

Our modern society has rejected God, and the Genesis creation account. They have willfully blinded themselves to history. Satan is therefore free to whisper in the ears of the modern Eve, *"you can be as gods!"* Men are following the example of Adam,

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<sup>22</sup> Rom 5:12,17

<sup>23</sup> Eccl. 1:9-10

relinquishing their role and following their wives. And we are reaping the results today in our society. What's worse, the western Church has largely embraced the world's thinking. We will reap what we sow. If there is any hope for western Christianity, it will come when Christian men and women understand their roles in God's plan, reject the pressures of our society, and fully and joyfully embrace God's plan. There is no way to please God outside of His design.