

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Back to the beginning: Adam and Eve in Eden

Good morning! Today we continue our series on “Back to the beginning” looking at the very beginning of our Bibles. Many of the most important lessons we learn in the Bible have their origins in these early chapters of Genesis. If we were just to read the New Testament, many of the lessons we learn there would make little sense were we not to have the reasons for them laid out for us in Genesis. Little wonder, then, that the Devil is so busy today trying to discredit the Bible, and particularly the book of Genesis. This is especially true for the things that we shall be considering today.

However, before we read parts Genesis 1 and 2, it is necessary to make a couple of general points:

1. There are some admittedly strange things spoken of in Genesis. However, when I do not understand what is being said, that only confirms my limited intellect. When Jesus spoke to the two on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13-27) about things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27), He began with Moses, stamping His authority on these early books of the Bible. If we were to reject the authority of Genesis, then we logically must reject the whole of the Bible and the authority of God Himself. I am quite happy intellectually to confess that I can't explain all I read, in Genesis, and elsewhere, and yet accept it to be true, in just the same way that I can't explain how my memory works, and yet I use it every day.

2. Genesis was written as part of the Bible, given to us so that God could reveal Himself to us. It is not a scientific textbook. That is not to say that it is unscientific. It is just to say that the purpose of Genesis is not to explain how we came into being etc., but rather to explain how we stand in relation to God. To try to use it as a textbook of biology is to place a role on it that it is not intended for. So for example, we cannot use it to say that on just such and such a date in history God said, “*Let there be light*”, but we can, with absolute confidence, say that God created light, for He is the source of all light. He is light (see 1 John 1:5)!

So to today's subject - Adam and Eve in Eden. Let us begin by reading parts of the first two chapters in Genesis, starting at Genesis 1:26: “*Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ And God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food’; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. ... And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. ... And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’ Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’” (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:7, 2:18-24).*

We have here the very beginning of human history, and we need to begin by noting that the creation of humanity was special. For six days God had been working in creation, speaking the universe into being (see Genesis 1:3-25). And yet here He pauses to make an announcement, to the myriad angelic host, “*Let Us make man in Our image*” (Genesis 1:26). Something uniquely different from the rest of creation was about to happen, and the angels would do well to note. Again and again throughout the Bible we have glimpses into the angelic realm and recognise that part of the reason that humanity was made was to display the wisdom of God to the angelic realms. So in Genesis 1:27 we

read: *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* In Genesis 2 we get the detail filled in, but the important point to notice here is that uniquely amongst the rest of creation mankind was made in the image of God. The mighty mountains of Snowdonia, or the vastness of space, or the intricacies of the humming bird’s flight all say much about the greatness of God, but none of these reflect His image. Only humanity bears the imprint of the nature of God. We are not just a collection of hydrocarbon molecules. Mankind has a soul, or as Solomon puts it, *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts”*, Ecclesiastes 3:11.

If you are looking for fulfilment and lasting happiness in the bottom of a bottle, another legal high, a career or material possessions, you will be disappointed. These can never fill the nature in us that responds to eternity, and needs a relationship with God. For this is the second great lesson from these verses. However, just before we move on, we must point out, and will return to later, that in creating mankind in His image clear statement is made of the fact that it was male and female that God made them. Now this can either mean that males and females both in like manner reflect the image of God. Or it can mean that both male and female are required for the full image of God to be gained. The point to just make here is that any thought of males being better than females is utterly rejected right at the beginning of the Bible.

Anyway, to our second lesson. Having made man on the sixth day in His image, for the first time God views His work as very good (Genesis 1:31). Now, on the seventh day, God rests. Can you picture the scene? Now God did not rest because He was tired - creation only reveals to us the smallest whisper of His power. And I can almost hear Adam saying to God, as God tells him that today was to be a day of rest, “No thanks, I’m not tired; let’s go and explore” just like a little boy racing downstairs on Christmas Day morning! No, this day of rest was to be a day when Adam would stop and stare at all that God had done and say “Wow!” and worship the greatness of God. Society is becoming more and more a 24 hour, 7 day a week life. It is not to our good! We need time to rest, not in idle sloth, but in refreshing our sense of His worth. This can be done in so many ways - time in church, walking in the park, spending time on the relationships that he has placed us in, but at the heart of any and all of these, is the recognition that in all things God has made us for His own pleasure.

Having established the principle of God first, on the day of rest, we then return to the creation account and have established for us the special roles and relationships that exist for men and women. In Genesis 2:18 we have the declaration of God that *“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper comparable to him.”* In the mind of God, He always had in mind that His own Son, the man Jesus, would not be alone in heaven, but rather be *“all of one”* linked to His bride, the church. So, here in Eden, He establishes a picture that would remain a mystery for countless centuries, until the full teaching relating to the church was given, and the picture suddenly made sense. First of all, God brings before Adam the animals, that he might name them (Genesis 2:19-20). I think this means more than calling a giraffe a giraffe. In primitive cultures, knowing the true name of someone, or something, indicated an authority or power over them. So Adam is given dominion over the rest of God’s creation. This speaks very much to today’s society with its environmental movement and its rampant consumerism. God had established the authority of mankind over the rest of creation.

This is why, although it is only man that sins, in Genesis 3:1-7, the whole of creation is subject to judgement, as God maintains His godly order. A sheep and I are not of equal moral worth to God. I have dominion over it. The sheep does not have a right to this planet that is equal to mine! That said, the authority I have is delegated to me by no lesser One than God Himself. I must exercise that authority as responsible to God, so the Christian should be truly environmentally friendly. Put bluntly, we all consume too much, and this leads to us wasting too much of what God has provided for us. Certainly in Western culture, we eat too much, we have far too many clothes, we travel too much, we have too many unnecessary gadgets, all of which uses up the resources of creation, and wastes that which we have been given for our good. I do not advocate for one minute trying to turn back the clock to the stone ages, but we ought to be more thoughtful as to our lifestyles. If we all consumed a little less, then those that truly have not might have and the planet would not be spoilt at the rate we seem to be damaging it.

So we learn from Genesis 2:19 that it is out of the ground that the animal kingdom had been made, but from Genesis 2:21-22 we learn that it is from Adam himself that God forms Eve. The final great lesson from these chapters is that men and women are not the same, and that God has made them uniquely different, but suitable for each other. In the New Testament, this is described under the terms of headship and submission. I want to spend the rest of our time this morning discussing how this is the right and biblical perspective for considering the roles of men and women.

Much is made today about the equality of the sexes. Certainly, as regards our moral and spiritual state, we were all *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Ephesians 2:1); we all needed to exercise *“like precious faith”* (2 Peter 1:1). We all stand before God, and receive from God His blessings on the same basis, for *“there is neither Jew, nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28). However, God has not made us all identical in function, and these differences are not just anatomical. God made man first. He could have made woman first, or He could have made them both at the same time, but He did not.

In doing so, God established a principle based upon creation, that man is to exercise a position of headship. Within marriage, this means that a man has the responsibility to lead and provide for the spiritual and physical needs of his family, ensuring their well being above his own. Within the church, the men are to exercise spiritual leadership, to ensure that all are being spiritually fed and an environment is created where all can exercise their gifts in a God honouring way. For a woman, within marriage, she is to encourage and support her husband to lead the family to fulfil a positive witness to the world, and within the church, she is active in service, within the guidelines laid out in the New Testament epistles. It is worth noting that this principle is established in creation, before the fall. The gender differences are not as a result of the fall, so that the redeeming work of Christ has overcome these. No! God has set them out here, right from the beginning, for the good of His creation. All the fall has done is lead us to doubt the wisdom of God, and so to rebel against His guidelines.

We need now to answer two crucial questions:

1. What is involved in headship and submission to this?
2. Are there examples of this at work in the Bible?

Unfortunately, as soon as we speak about headship and submission we immediately become defensive because we have misunderstood what is involved. Nowhere is a man given absolute authority to dominate a woman. That is a devilish corruption that man's sin feeds upon. We all stand before Christ as ultimately responsible to Him. But in the practical operation of relationships on earth, the man has been placed by God in a position of responsibility.

Does that mean that I can make all the decisions and my wife just has to go along with it? Again no, this is misunderstanding headship. What does my physical head do? Well it feeds the rest of my body through the mouth and it protects my body through the work of my eyes and ears. To a large measure it is my body that makes the decisions about what I do!

I have decided that I am going to enter the 100 metres at the next Olympics! I have pictured the race a thousand times in my head, a flying start from the blocks and then absolute focus all the way to the finish line. Unfortunately, my body will overrule my head, as the muscles just aren't there. You see, it is my legs that decide how fast I run, not my head. Except, if I was being chased by a lion, my head might overrule my legs' natural desire to pause for a breather, knowing that if I did, I would end up as the lion's dinner! Normally, the parts of my body and my head work together, to arrive at a mutually supportive arrangement. Only in extremis does my head overrule my body.

This illustration from my own body shows me what God has in mind. In normal circumstances my wife and I communicate and discuss to arrive at what we both agree on. Frequently, I will defer to her wiser less impulsive counsel. As a rule of thumb, if God does not call us both to a new activity, then He has not called. There really does need to be a very good reason why I should make a decision that has not been mutually agreed upon. Usually, if we do not agree, it is my responsibility to put my family's happiness before my own. That is what headship means - taking responsibility to ensure the well-being of my family or my local assembly. Submission involves accepting the decisions once they are made, but fully supporting the husband or elders in the local church, so that they make the right decisions. It means working so that the headship exercised by the man is honouring to God, and leads the family or the assembly to a greater degree of commitment to Jesus. So do we get an example of this in the Bible? Actually yes - in the very next chapter, Genesis 3!

You see, the real failure of Adam and Eve in the garden was one of rejecting the roles that God had established for their good. Adam failed to provide the headship required, so Eve was alone and hungry. So Eve then starts making decisions with no reference to her husband's wishes (Genesis 3:6), and the rest, as they say, is history. Now when God comes down to Eden to commune with them and finds them hiding for shame (Genesis 3:8), it is instructive to see how He behaves.

Firstly, it is Adam He calls (Genesis 3:9). You see, God still holds the man responsible for the actions of his family. For those of us who are married and have families, this should cause us to stop and reflect. We need to recognise that we will one day stand before our Lord and give an account of how we have led our family spiritually, and also physically. Have we pushed them in the pursuit of education and material things so that they have been shipwrecked spiritually? Do we so little prepare for the meetings of the local church that they become dull and boring, so that the rest of our family no longer yearn to be there? As men, we need to man-up and accept this God given responsibility. God does then speak to Eve (Genesis 3:13), for each individual is responsible to Him, for his or her own sin.

Though we have said so already, it is worth just reemphasising. Headship in no way indicates superiority of person, just as submission in no way indicates inferiority of person. They are always positional rather than personal. That is why God made the woman from the very substance of the man, rather than from the ground, as with the rest of creation. That Jesus has taken a position where God the Father is His head, in no way diminishes His person to

being less divine than the Father. But in the active roles they take, the Son willingly takes a position of obedience to His Father. As a boy, Jesus returned to Nazareth and was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51). In no way does that mean that Mary and Joseph were better than Jesus. He was always perfect and wholly God, whilst they were neither of these. But even as a child, Jesus honoured the position that God has put parents in as those who exercise authority over children. In being subject to them, He did not diminish His person one iota, but rather displayed His personal excellence. In fulfilling the roles that God has established for men and women, we affirm that God knows best, and in doing so we will find personal happiness. Headship is not the same as dominion, nor is submission the same as weak inferiority. Both speak of responsibilities to God, rather than rights for people.

Well, if you thought that these early chapter of Genesis had little to say to us today, think again! We have seen this morning how God made both men and women in His image, equal in person. We have seen how we were made to worship Him, as the day of rest was instituted. We have seen how we are to be stewards of the earth's resources, enjoying the good of this world for our benefit, but not abusing this position, as all creation belongs to Him. And finally, we have seen that though equal personally, God has created man and woman different positionally. Only by living true to these lessons can we expect to see the blessing of God within our families, our churches and in society at large.

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