

Genesis 2:18-25

The Creation of Woman

About seven centuries before Christ, Hesiod, an ancient Greek writer, told the story of Pandora, the first woman. She was fashioned by the gods and sent to man to punish mankind for having acquired fire. Each of the gods gave Pandora a gift designed to make her particularly alluring and irresistible to men. But she was also given a jar into which all the evils of the world were placed. When she appeared among men, she opened the jar and released all of the evils into the world. Only one thing, hope, remained caught under the lid of the jar.

This story, which has become a staple of western culture, is often compared with the creation story of Eve and the Fall of man in the garden of Eden. In both cases, it is argued, it was through woman that evil entered the world. Yet, even if that is the case, I believe the differences in the two narratives are more significant than their similarities. For in Hesiod, woman is sent as a punishment; in Genesis she is intended as a blessing.

As we conclude the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2, we continue to witness the theme of God's provision for all things. All had been made; all was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). But as Genesis 2 gives us more detail and insight into the creation narrative of Genesis 1, we have the opportunity to study an important element of the creation narrative that was unmentioned in the broader telling of the story.

The Problem

For the first time in creation, God saw that something was wrong. "The Lord God said, 'it is not good for the man to be alone'" (v. 18). Incredibly, something was "not good." Something was not as it should be. Man was incomplete. But God was not caught unawares. It was not as though His plan had an unintended flaw. He simply had not yet finished His creation. In fact, He had already planned the remedy. God surveyed all that He had made and said, "I will make him a helper suitable for him (v. 18). Let us note two things. First, there is no mention in Scripture that Adam complained, or that he even knew that he was alone. Only the divine viewpoint is given by the author. God clearly knew what was best for His creation. Second, the word for 'suitable' suggests a being different enough to contribute in a distinctive way to his quality of life, yet similar enough to be relatable in every possible idea of the concept.

As a part of this process, ¹⁹out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him" (v. 19-20).

Such an event can seem to have an almost magical quality to it - and it has often been depicted so in art. But we are told neither the extent of this naming process nor what names Adam gave the animals. These animals were divided into three classifications - cattle, birds, and beasts. The implication is that there were those animals which were to be domesticated and those that were not.

Also, there is no reason to assume that every animal was brought before Adam. Only that special group of animals required to fulfill God's intention were brought before him. It was perhaps, only those animals that lived in the garden.

The animals came to Adam not by a rational free choice of their own wills, but rather according to the plan by which God ordains all that is in nature to move and act according to His good purposes. The intent was not to have Adam create a vocabulary, but rather to demonstrate that none of the other creatures God had made was perfectly suited to be his helper.

The heavens without stars, the skies without birds, the land without animals and vegetation were all incomplete. That had been rectified. But man was still not complete. Adam, by himself, could not function as intended. That man searched the animals for a companion is not as strange as it may appear. Animals and humans are very similar in skeletal, muscular, nervous, and circulatory systems. The cause, however, is not a common ancestor, but rather a common Designer.

We must also not miss the importance of Adam naming the animals. In ancient cultures, naming implied power. It implied superiority. It implied dominion. God had named the elements of His creation. He had called things light or darkness, the heavens or dry land. And so Adam was called to name the animals as a sign of dominion. For Adam to confer a name signified authority and power. It was a sign of sovereignty. He was to be God's regent on earth, and as such, he had the prerogative to name the animals over which he had dominion.

A helper need not be inferior. For example, the concept was often used in the Old Testament when referring to God as the helper of Israel. He was their aid and support.

“Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah,
And bring him to his people.
With his hands he contended for them,
And may You be a help against his adversaries” (Deuteronomy 33:7).

“Our soul waits for the Lord;
He is our help and our shield” (Psalm 33:20).

“¹May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!
²May He send you help from the sanctuary
And support you from Zion!” (Psalm 20:1-2).

As the Lord helped His people Israel, so woman would help man. The woman saved man from solitude. She was indispensable. She was no mere afterthought, she was an integral part of the divine construction of the universe. Only the woman could allow the man to not be alone.

The Solution

“²¹So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. ²²The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man” (v. 21-22). Notice first that Adam was not even a conscious spectator to the creation of Eve. The creation of Eve was entirely God’s handiwork.

There are two interesting elements that have evolved from the creation of Eve. The first has to do with what this might imply about Adam. Since none of the other ANE cultures possess a separate creation story for woman, this had led some scholars throughout history to conclude that the first human as depicted in Genesis was an androgynous creature. That is to say, Adam possessed the sexual qualities of both male and female in himself (itself).

This is not some peculiar idea held by a fringe group of thinkers, but rather can be traced back to no less a figure than Plato. Furthermore, the idea was cultivated as well by ancient Jewish traditions as well. For example, *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1 argues that this is what was intended by stating that God made humans male and female. That is, as first created, Adam was both male and female combined into one creature. Later God separated them into two different genders. However Scripture clearly states that “male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27). Note that it is God created *them*, not *him*.

Another interesting item of speculation, has been the fact that God created Eve from Adam’s side (a better translation than rib). First, let us remember that Eve was not taken from Adam’s side, simply the raw material which God used to create her was taken. That is, just as Adam was not dirt, he was formed of the dust of the earth, so too, Eve was formed from the material taken from Adam’s side. Woman was the first creation to come from a living being.

But still, this has not dissuaded scholars throughout the centuries of wondering at the implications. For example, Jewish tradition teaches that God said,

“I will not create her from the head, lest she be haughty; I will not create her from the eye, lest she be coquettish; I will not create her from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; I will not create her from the mouth, lest she be a chatterbox; I will not create her from the heart, lest she be jealous; I will not create her from the hand, lest she be a thief; I will not create her from the leg, lest she be a run-about; rather, I will create her from the most modest place on a person, as even when a person stands naked this place is covered” (*Genesis Rabbah* 18:2).

An eighth century Irish manuscript states that,

“Why was the woman formed from the rib? For if she was formed from his foot or hand or some other part she would stand in shame before him. Another interpretation is that it shows the greatest love, for the rib is, after all, closest to the heart.”

And no less a theologian than Thomas Aquinas wrote in *Summa Theologiae*,

“since the woman should not have authority over the man it would not have been fitting for her to have been formed from his head, nor since she is not to be despised by the man, as if she were a servile subject, would it have been fitting for her to have been formed from his feet.”

All of this might be interesting to the historian, but it matters little theologically. Scripture gives no details as to why God chose to take the material from which He created Eve from the side of Adam rather than somewhere else. The important point is that the material came from Adam himself, to demonstrate that she was of his kind. This was a fact that Adam recognized immediately upon meeting her.

After Adam awoke, the woman was then brought before Adam, as had been the animals, to complete the cycle and manifest that she was to be man's perfect partner. "The man 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'" (v. 23).

Here we see that man speaks for the first time. Until now, Scripture has recorded only the voice of the narrator and of God, Himself. And Adam's response is perfect. He recognized immediately that Eve was not an animal. He saw that she was distinct. He saw that she was the suitable helper he required.

But sameness does not mean exactness. The roles were to be different. Man was not the helper for the woman, she was the helper for him. This understanding of the relationship between the genders is fundamental to a correct biblical view of the roles of men and women. To take but one example,

"¹²But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.
¹³For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. ¹⁴And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. ¹⁵But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint"
(1 Timothy 2:12-15).

As we have discussed previously, if the accounts of creation given in Genesis 1-2 are not true, real, historical accounts, then what are we to make of the theological teachings which used them as their foundation? That is, if Adam, Eve, and the narratives surrounding them in the first chapters of Genesis did not really happen, then can we be expected to consider the doctrines which base themselves on those events to have any real meaning or validity?

The Expectation

After recording Adam's response to his suitable helper, the narrator of the event inserted his own commentary, "for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (v. 24).

That "a man shall leave his father and his mother" (v. 24) need not presume a matriarchal society. In the ancient world, marriages were often arranged, and usually at some expense. Rather, the text might speak to the reality that some parents still believed that they had a right of control or authority over the married couple, since they had financed the relationship. But clearly the Bible is teaching differently. There is the breaking of one established line of authority and the inauguration of another. It assures that the fifth commandment cannot be used by a parent to usurp an authority that is not theirs.

Again we see that Christian doctrine also takes particular note of the reality of the events in Genesis. Regarding the importance of being one flesh, Paul wrote,

“¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! ¹⁶Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, ‘the two shall become one flesh’” (1 Corinthians 6:15-16).

Such an illustration speaks to the idea of sexual union, while only one aspect of married life, as designed to be distinct to it. Casual sexual encounters or indeed any sexual relationship outside of the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman, is clearly and simply unsupported in Scripture.

Monogamous heterosexual marriage has, from the beginning, been viewed as the God ordained norm for sexual union.

Consider also,

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31)

As a model for marriage, two things are taught in the passage in Genesis. First, there is a leaving. Second there is a joining. To ‘leave’ (forsake) is a word regularly describes Israel’s rejection of the covenant relationship with Yahweh. To take but two of far too many examples which might be given,

“²⁷Zion will be redeemed with justice

And her repentant ones with righteousness.

²⁸But transgressors and sinners will be crushed together,

And those who forsake the Lord will come to an end” (Isaiah 1:27-28).

“I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands” (Jeremiah 1:16).

Likewise, the word used for “joined’ (cling, hold fast) describes the way Israel ought to relate to Yahweh.

“²⁰You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. ²¹He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen” (Deuteronomy 10:20-21)

“²²For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him, ²³then the Lord will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you’ (Deuteronomy 11:22-23).

“You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.” (Deuteronomy 13:4).

Jesus appealed to this mandate in His teaching.

“³Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, ‘is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?’ ⁴And He answered and said, ‘have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and 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”? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’ ⁷They said to Him, ‘why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?’ ⁸He said to them, ‘because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. ⁹And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery”” (Matthew 19:3-9).

Our purpose here is not to analyze this argument in all of its details. Rather, it is to point out that Jesus took the narrative of the account of the creation of Adam and Eve as historical fact and the mandate given them as the expectation for the biblical norm of marriage.

“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (v. 25). They felt no shame. That was perfectly natural. After all, shame is the primary appropriate response to guilt. Adam and Eve felt no guilt since they had not yet sinned. As Milton described the scene at this moment, Satan, sitting in a tree,

“Saw undelighted all delight, all kind
Of living Creatures new to sight and strange:
Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native Honour clad
In naked Majestie seemed Lords of all,
And worthie seemed, for in their looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shon,
Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe, but in true filial freedom placed;
Whence true authority in men; though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation hee and valour formed,
For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
He for God only, she for God in him” *Paradise Lost*, Book IV

That would soon change.

Takeaways

To dishonor the gift is to dishonor the Giver. Woman was specifically created by God to be the perfect partner for man. This prescribes the relationship between the genders in marriage. Though the world has changed significantly since the Fall, there is no biblical evidence that the standards established in Eden for the proper relationship between man and woman have been fundamentally altered. May God give us grace to live accordingly in this fallen world.