

Manhood and Womanhood Before Sin

John Piper

Genesis 2:18-25

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Last week we focused on the mess that men and women are in because of sin. We saw that sinful men use their unique powers to exploit women for their evil purposes. And we saw that sinful women use their unique powers to exploit men for their evil purposes. There is at least one muscle that is probably equally strong in both men and women - the tongue. And you can hear sinful men and sinful women in their little pockets of derision wielding this weapon to tear each other down.

But we have seen for two weeks now that this is not the way God created the world. And so we asked, How were man and woman supposed to relate to each other before sin ruined things. What did manhood and womanhood look like before sin distorted them into what we see today?

Part of the answer we said was that man and woman were created in the image of God as male and female. And we stressed that this means at least that they are to enjoy equality of personhood, equality of dignity, mutual respect, harmony, complementarity, and a unified destiny. But we stressed that this is only part of the answer.

It leaves open this question: Within the equality of personhood and the equality of dignity might there not be some special responsibilities that man has because he is man and that woman has because she is woman? In showing mutual respect and care might there not be some special ways that a man is to respect a woman and special ways that a woman is to respect a man? Does equality of personhood and mutuality of respect demand sameness of responsibilities or even equal access to all responsibilities? Or did God intend from the beginning that our equality be expressed differently in the way we relate to each other as man and woman?

That is the question we take up today. And we will stay with it for several weeks as we try to find what the Bible teaches about this matter of diversity and complementarity. Today we will look at the Biblical description of manhood and womanhood as God intended them to be before sin ruined things.

I think this is a good question to ask for two reasons. One is that Genesis chapter 2 calls for this kind of question. In Genesis 1 Moses tells us how God sovereignly created all things out of nothing and put them together in an orderly way so that everything serves man. Then God creates man as male and female in His own image, and declares that everything is very good.

But in Genesis 2 Moses puts the zoom lens on his camera and comes in for a close up on that sixth day of creation. And as you come to the end of the chapter you realize that one of the reasons he has done this is to say something tremendously important about the relationship of man and woman. In Genesis 1 he had said something very important: both are created in the image of God. Now in chapter 2 he says something more specific. So chapter 2 calls for the question: how are manhood and womanhood different?

The other reason I think this is a good question (i.e. God's intention for manhood and womanhood before sin) is that in the New Testament Jesus and Paul, when they use the Old Testament to answer questions about how man and woman should relate to each other, go back to what things were supposed to be like before the fall. They don't take the messed up relationships of Genesis 3 and make them normative. They come back to Genesis 2 and talk about how it should have been from the beginning.

So what I want to do is make four observations that begin to answer the question of whether man and woman, in their equality of personhood, are supposed to have some different responsibilities. Does Genesis teach that there are special responsibilities that come with being male and special responsibilities that come with being female?

1. The first thing chapter 2 makes clear is that man was created first and then after some intervening events woman was created. Verse 7: "Then 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." Verses 21f: "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man."

In 1 Timothy 2:13 the apostle Paul simply says, "Adam was formed first, then Eve."

Now why did God create man and woman in this way? Why did He not create them both simultaneously from the same lump of clay. Would that not have established their equality of personhood more clearly? The answer is that he had already established that beyond all doubt in Genesis 1:27 where it says that both were created in His image.

Now God wants to say something more about the relationship between man and woman. And what He wants to say is that when it comes to their differing responsibilities there is a "firstness" of responsibility that falls to the man. This is not an issue of superior value. That issue has been settled in Genesis 1:27. It's an issue of a sinless man, in childlike dependence on God, being given a special role or responsibility. God makes him the initial half of the pair to say something about his responsibility in initiating. God makes him lead the way into being to say something about his responsibility of leadership.

Some teachers have said that the order of creation means nothing because in Genesis 1, for example, the animals were created first and then man. So if order implies responsibility for leadership then the animals should lead man.

There are two answers to that objection. One is this: When the Hebrew people gave a special responsibility to the "firstborn" in the family it never entered their minds that this responsibility would be nullified if the father happened to own cattle before he had sons. In other words when Moses wrote this he knew that the first readers would not lump animals and humans together as equal candidates for the responsibilities of the "firstborn" .And we shouldn't either.

The other answer to this objection is that the apostle Paul, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit in his handling of the Scripture did see significance in the man being created first (1 Timothy 2:13). We will

talk about that in a couple weeks. We do well not to say there is no meaning in something where an inspired apostle finds significant meaning.

So the first observation is very significant: man was created first, then the woman. And this points to a leadership responsibility for the man, especially in view of the other observations that follow.

2. The second observation to make is this: One of the responsibilities that came with being there first was the primary responsibility (not the only, but the primary responsibility) to receive and teach and be accountable for the moral pattern of life in the garden of Eden.

Before woman was created God came to man in verse 16 and said, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 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 die."

After the woman was created there is no record that this pattern of moral life for the garden was repeated by God to the woman. I think that Moses, as he writes, expects us to conclude that Adam is entrusted with the moral pattern of the garden and with the primary responsibility of sharing it with Eve and being accountable for it.

Are we on track here or are we reading too much into Adam's being given the moral instruction? The third observation is to me a very strong indication that we are on track.

3. After the moral pattern had been broken by both Adam and Eve, God came to call them to account in chapter three. And even though the woman had eaten the forbidden fruit first God came to Adam first, not Eve, to hold him accountable for the failure to live by the pattern He had given.

Verse 9: "But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' Adam where are you? Verse 11 (still interrogating Adam first): "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

Why would God come to the man first, and call him to give and account instead of going to the woman first, especially since she ate the fruit first? The most natural answer is that God gave to the man a primary responsibility for the moral life of the garden and therefore man has a primary accountability for the failure to live by it.

Make no mistake: God does hold the woman accountable for her actions. She is a personal, morally accountable being in the very image of God. And what man does or fails to do relieves her of no personal, individual responsibility to know and to obey God. But in their relationship to each other God looks to the man and says, "Have you been the moral and spiritual leader you ought to have been?"

James Dobson (of "Focus on the Family") has seen the tremendous importance of this truth very clearly and the terrible effects when a husband and father abdicates his responsibility. Here is what he said,

A Christian man is obligated to lead his family to the best of his ability . . . If his family has purchased too many items on credit, then the financial crunch is ultimately his fault. If the family never reads the Bible or seldom goes to church on Sunday, God holds the man to blame. If the children are disrespectful and disobedient, the primary responsibility lies with the father . . . not his wife . . . In my view (says Dobson), America's greatest need is for husbands to begin guiding their families, rather than pouring every physical and emotional resource into the mere acquisition of money. (Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives, Word Books, 1980, pp. 64f.)

I agree with Dobson because I think that is what is being taught in these chapters. God brought man onto the scene first as the leader. He entrusted him first with the moral pattern of the garden. And He called him to account first for the failure of disobedience. Therefore even though man and woman bear equal individual responsibility before God for their own obedience (that's what it means to be created in His image), nevertheless in relationship to each other man bears a greater responsibility for leadership than woman does.

This is the way God meant it to be before there was any sin in the world: sinless man, full of love, in his tender, strong, moral leadership in relation to woman; and sinless woman, full of love, in her joyful, responsive support for man leadership. No belittling from the man, no groveling from the woman. Two intelligent, humble, God-entranced beings living out, in beautiful harmony, their unique and different responsibilities.

Now Satan knows that this is a beautiful arrangement. He knows that God's pattern of life is designed for man's good. But Satan hates God and he hates man. He is a liar and a killer from the beginning. And so what does he do? This is the fourth observation.

4. Satan assaults God's pattern by attacking the woman instead of the man. If God means for man to bear special responsibility for leadership in the garden then Satan will do what he can to destroy that pattern.

Why did he approach the woman in Genesis 3:1? Why did he draw her into discussion first and make her the spokesman for the couple? Why did he lure her into being the moral guardian of the garden? Was it because she was easier prey? Is woman more gullible than man? Or could the answer be: Satan drew the woman in first, and made her the spokesman and the moral guardian because that is exactly what should not have been done?

In other words Satan spurns the order that God has established and simply ignores the man and takes up his subtle battle with the woman. And in doing that he makes man into exactly what he wants him to be: a silent, withdrawn, weak, fearful, passive, wimp. And a masculine wimp is a very dangerous person. One moment he's passive and follows his woman; and the next moment he's angry and blames her for all of his problems.

And Satan laughs to himself and says, "Now I have created such a confusion of roles they will never sort this out. They will look at the abusive man and tell him to be more passive with women. And they will look at the abused woman and tell her to be more assertive with men. And they will never get to the root of the problem.

But in Genesis 3:17 God goes right to the root of the problem. He says to the man, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you." In other words, "Adam, you were listening when you should have been leading. God is not confused about what Satan did.

And he doesn't want us to be confused either. He created man first; He gave him the moral pattern of the garden first; He held him accountable for failure first; and He punished him for falling right in line with God's arch enemy when Satan lured man and woman into a great role reversal at the fall.

So what should we do? Well, men, we should humble ourselves before God for our failures. All of us. This is not a call to exalt yourself over any woman. This is not a call to domineer, or belittle or to put woman in her place. She is, after all, a fellow heir of God and destined for a glory that will blind us some day. This is a call to stoop down and to take the responsibility to be a leader - a servant leader in the various ways that are appropriate to every different relationship to women.

It's a call to us men

- that we should take the risk of getting egg on our faces;
- that we should pray like we've never prayed for help in this tremendous responsibility;
- that we should be in the word more than we ever have been to know what God expects of us;
- that we should plan things more than we do, and be intentional and thoughtful and less carried along by the mood of the moment;
- that we should be disciplined and ordered in our lives;
- that we should be tender-hearted and sensitive;
- that we should take the initiative to make sure that there is a time and a place to talk to her about what needs to be talked about - this "her" could be a friend, a date, a colleague, a wife, a sister;
- that we should be ready to lay down our lives in discharging this responsibility to be the leaders God is calling us to be.

May God continue to teach us and humble us and heal us in all our relationship for His great glory and for our joy.