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### The Creation Order for Man-Woman Relationships: Genesis 1-2

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# Memory, Meaning & Faith

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May 10, 2013

## The Creation Order for Man-Woman Relationships: Genesis 1-2

By Richard M. Davidson

Genesis 1-2 constitutes the foundational biblical passage both for those who support and those who oppose women's ordination. Does this passage uphold God's ideal of the full equality of men and women, both in value before God and in egalitarian (non-hierarchical) male-female interrelationships, as those who support women's ordination claim? Or does this passage present a creation order of ontological equality (in value before God) but of functional hierarchy (different roles involving female submission to male headship), as opponents of women's ordination insist? In this blog, distilling some 30 years of personal research on this passage, I argue that Genesis 1-2 presents Adam and Eve not only as equal in worth before God (ontologically), but as equal partners without hierarchy (functionally).[1]

**A. Genesis 1 teaches us that male and female participate equally in the image of God, both ontologically and functionally.** "So God *created* man [Heb. *ha'adam* 'humankind'] in His own image, in the image of God created he Him; male and female created He them" (Gen 1:27).

This foundational passage (and its surrounding context) gives no hint of a divine creation hierarchical order in the relation of man and woman. Here man and woman are fully equal, with no subordination of one to the other. Both man and woman together are blessed and given the mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth; both together are given dominion over the earth, not the man dominion over the woman (Gen 1:28).

Contrary to those who claim that God's naming of the human race "man" hints at male headship, the word *'adam*, often translated "man," is the generic term for humankind, and never means "man" in the sense of male gender in Scripture. Genesis 1 proclaims the fundamental equality of man and woman, in both value (made in God's image/likeness, in outward resemblance and in character) and function or "role" (both together to procreate, subdue the earth, and have dominion over other created beings on earth).[2]

The functional as well as ontological equality of male and female as part of the *imago Dei* is further highlighted by the analogy made with God's own differentiation and relationship in contemplating the creation of humanity. It is hardly coincidental that only once in the creation account of Genesis—only in Genesis 1:26 with regard to the creation of humanity—does God speak of the divinity in the plural: "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness." The explanation most consonant with both the immediate context and the analogy of Scripture identifies this usage as a "plural of fullness,"[3] also termed a "plural of fellowship or community within the Godhead." [4] This plural "expresses "an intra-divine deliberation among 'persons' within the divine Being." [5] In describing the divine interrelationships ("let Us") that form an analogy with human relationships ("male and female"), there is no indication of a hierarchy in the Godhead, no reference to the submission of one Person to the Other. Rather, the emphasis is upon the functional relationship of equality, in the deliberation and fellowship of equals.

**B. Genesis 2 reinforces Genesis 1.** Those who argue for a creation headship of man over woman use five main arguments to build their case:

1. The order of creation (man first and then woman)
2. The derived nature of woman's creation (from Adam's rib)
3. God's speaking to the man and not to the woman
4. Woman created for the sake of man, to be his "helper"

5. The naming of the woman by the man, indicating his authority over her.

Upon closer examination, none of these points proves a creation hierarchy of man over woman; in fact these very points serve to establish the functional equality, without hierarchy, between man and woman in creation. (1) In the narrative flow of Genesis 2, woman is created last as the climax, the crowning work of creation. (2) Her creation from Adam's "rib" (literally "side"), not from his head (to dominate) or foot (to be ruled over), does not indicate her derived and thus subordinate role, but rather that she is "to stand by his side as an equal" (Gen 2:21-22; PP 46).[6]

(3) God speaks to Adam as the one-time "head of the human family" (6T 236), "the father and representative of the whole human family" (PP 48). Adam's personal name, 'adam, never again held by another named individual in Scripture, is the same word as "humankind". This *representative* (not *hierarchical*) headship of the "first Adam" (1 Cor 15:45) was usurped by Satan (John 12:31) and was restored by the second ("last") Adam (1 Cor 15:45). It does not serve to model male headship in general.

(4) The woman was created as man's 'ezer *kenegdo* ("helper comparable to him," Genesis 2:18 NKJV), which in the original does *not* denote a subordinate helper or assistant; elsewhere in Scripture it is most often *God Himself* who is called 'ezer ("helper"): Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26; Ps 33:20; 70:5; 115:9, 10, 11. The word *kenegdo* in Gen 2:18 means no less than an equal counterpart, a "partner" (Gen 2:18, 22 NRSV).

(5) Finally, contrary to common assumption, Adam does not name the woman (and thereby exercise authority over her) before the Fall in Genesis 2:23. The "divine passives" in this verse imply in Hebrew thought that the designation "woman" comes from God, not from man.[7] Adam does not name Eve till after the Fall (Gen 3:20), and even this "naming" does not exercise headship, but predicts the role of Eve as the mother of all living climaxing ultimately in her Messianic seed.

In short, Genesis 2, like Genesis 1, contains no creation order subordinating woman to man or restricting her from entering into full and equal participation with man in any ministry to which God may call her. Genesis 1-2 present Adam and Eve as fully equal, both ontologically (in worth before God) and functionally (in their egalitarian partnership without hierarchy).

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[1] For further detailed analysis, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 24-35; idem, "Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture," in *Women in Ministry* (ed. Nancy Vyhmeister; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998), 260-264.

[2] For discussion of the various aspects of what the "image of God" includes, see Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Anthropology and the Old Testament" (Third International Bible Conference, Jerusalem, Israel, June 16, 2012), 2-18.

[3] Gerhard Hasel, "The Meaning of 'Let Us' in Gen 1:26," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 58-66; the quotation is from p. 64.

[4] Jiří Moskala, "Toward Trinitarian Thinking in the Hebrew Scriptures," *JATS* 21 (2010): 258; see his critique of the various other views, 249-259.

[5] Hasel, "The Meaning of 'Let Us,'" 65.

[6] Some have taken Ellen White's statement that the Eve was "to be loved and protected by him [Adam]" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46) as indicating male hierarchical headship, but protection here implies greater physical strength, not hierarchy! A government leader's body guards are protectors, but that does not make the leader subordinate to them.

[7] See Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1978), 46-47.



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Posted by [David Hamstra](#) on May 10, 2013 in [Adventist Ministry and Ordination](#), [History of Interpretation](#) | [Permalink](#)  
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## Comments

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Some might argue that your interpretation ignores Paul's statements about the creation order in 1 Cor 11. I realize your specialty is Old rather than New Testament interpretation, but surely in your studies you must have considered that passage. How do you harmonize Paul with what you have convincingly laid out here?

Posted by: [David Hamstra](#) | [May 10, 2013 at 08:16 PM](#)

There is no question that both men and women have equal value in God's eyes and should have equal value in our eyes also. However I point you to Romans 5:12 which states that by one man sin entered the world. We know that Eve ate of the fruit first. Why doesn't the verse say, "by one woman sin entered"? I believe that God created Adam and Eve with equal value but with different roles as noted. I believe that Adam's role was to be the spiritual leader, therefore it was his sin that counted against mankind. However, we also know that Israel was called to be the spiritual leaders of this world and to lead their neighbors to Christ. When they failed to do what they were called to do then God gave that role to others. Using this logic, is it possible that God intended men to be the spiritual leaders but where men have failed in fulfilling that role, God has called women to step up in their place? We do refer to Christ as "the second Adam" and not as "the second Eve" again following that same logic.

It is clear throughout history and the Bible that God has called certain women to help spread the Gospel. It is my observation that this happened when the men were either not willing or not able. Who am I to question who God has called?

Just my personal thoughts on a subject that I personally do not feel is a salvation issue.

Posted by: [Darry Campbell](#) | [May 10, 2013 at 10:09 PM](#)

Regarding 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, the Greek word translated "head" by Paul in verse 3, in the context of the passage probably should be translated as "source." (This word does not mean "authority over" in the first-century Greek of Paul's day.) Paul is speaking of three chronological sources in creation and redemption: Christ was the source in creating the first man (Genesis 2:7), then the first woman came from man (from his rib/side, Genesis 2:22), and then in the incarnation the source of (the one who sent) Christ is the God (head) (John 12:44, 49). The principle Paul lays down is that man should respect his source by not having his hair long in a way that in Paul's time was considered effeminate (verse 4), and a woman should respect her source by not having her hair hanging down in a way that in Paul's time indicated infidelity to her husband (verse 5). Lest anyone get the idea that by such instruction regarding "wild hair" Paul is affirming a male headship over women, Paul continues by adding that "in the Lord" men and women are not set apart from each other (verse 11), and just as woman was from the man, so man is also through the woman (verse 12). Paul counterbalances woman's creation from man (from Adam's rib) with the fact that every man is born through woman; thus he asserts the equal rights and privileges of women and men in the Lord, both to be welcomed into ministry as called and gifted by God.

Posted by: [Richard Davidson](#) | [May 11, 2013 at 10:25 AM](#)

Dick, you do a good job in setting out why most of us view the pre-creation order as one of both ontological and functional equality. But you do not address the very real actuality of differing roles prior to the fall. Even you use the phrase functional "equality," not functional "sameness." The roles of Adam and Eve prior to sin were of equal value and worth, with no sense of hierarchy, but they were not the same roles. I would not use the term "headship" to describe Adam's role, but I might use the phrase spokesperson or representative of

both the human race and the family, as you do above.

But I'm puzzled by your denial that this representative role does not continue generally in family units, as not only 1 Cor. 11 references this (I think "source" is hard to maintain, as it would imply a heretical notion of God being the source of Christ, which we reject), but also Eph. 5:23. Ephesians is especially instructive, as the use of kephaly there is clearly in the context of authority over, and not source, as it is simply not true that the husband is the "source" of the wife. This continuing concept of representative role is the only thing that makes sense of Paul's reference in 1 Timothy 2 to both the order of creation and the fall in justification for male leadership.

I think all the points you list above help describe a role for Adam of coordinator of the family unit in relation to the larger world, with Eve being the mistress of the domestic sphere. Neither of them have authority over the other, because in the pre-sin condition, all decisions could be arrived at mutually. The fall, of course, adds the element of hierarchy to these relationships that did not exist prior to the fall. This then creates a different set of ideals about gender roles of leadership that are recognized in the appointment of male priests and male disciples. Whether that distinction continues on in the office of elder is of course what we are trying to understand. But let's get to that understanding by being as clear as possible about the gender roles that the Bible does pretty evidently set out.

Thank you for causing us all to think more deeply about these important topics.

Posted by: Nicholas Miller | [May 17, 2013 at 03:20 PM](#)

God being the source of Christ does not need to be understood ontologically in 1 Cor 11. Jesus on more than one occasion mentioned having come from the Father. But he also came to do the will of the Father.

It is not necessary to impose an either/or dichotomy on the meaning of "head," which may indicate both source and authority or "representative role." Man as head of woman (1 Cor 11:3) is most likely a reference to the creation account, mentioned also in verses 8-9, and 12. Adam was the source of Eve, which could indicate a representative role.

So "head" may mean authority as well as source; Paul could have both dimensions in mind in Eph 5:23.

1 Tim 2 does not refer to headship. A more complete treatment of Paul's view of the order of creation as it applies to male/female relationships is found in 1 Cor 11, where verses 11-12 provide the balance 1 Tim 2 lacks. "For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God."

In 1 Tim 2 Paul is dealing with women in Ephesus who had apparently forgotten to respect that aspect of the creation order that spoke of the man being the source of the woman. For this reason, he does not mention the balancing aspect, mentioned in 1 Cor 11:11-12.

When we consider Paul's more complete statement on the creation order in 1 Cor 11:11-12, we cannot use his partial statement in 1 Tim 2:13-14 to exclusively determine our theology of women in leadership.

If there is a connection between women in church leadership and the creation order, let us remember that Paul's creation order is not limited to the idea that Adam was formed first (1 Tim 2:13). It also includes the ideas that man is not independent of woman (1 Cor 11:11) and "man is now born of woman" (1 Cor 11:12).

Since "man is now born of woman," it may be appropriate to appoint women as church leaders along side the men, whose ancestor, Adam, was formed first.

Posted by: Doug Matacio | [November 01, 2013 at 02:21 PM](#)

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