

GOD & WOMEN

LESSON ONE

Ice Breakers –

~ Name something related to God, Scripture, or the Church about which you've changed your mind in the past twenty years. Who or what caused you to shift your understanding? How difficult was it to change your mind? How did changing your mind impact your day to day walk?

~ Is it possible to read the Bible perfectly free of any bias? What influences the way we read and interpret the Scriptures? (worldview, upbringing, CofC traditions, family, personal experiences, what we've been taught, comfort zones, etc.; you might use a personal illustration here).

~ What does it mean for the Word of God to be "living and active?" (Hebrews 4:12)

~ What are the differences between reading and interpreting the Bible as a book of rules and laws versus reading it as a story about God and his people? Where do the two different ways lead a person? Where do they take a church? How might the two ways form a Christian or a congregation?

Introduction –

We believe the way we read and interpret the Bible must be consistent with the character of God, the Gospel of Jesus, and the works of the Holy Spirit. The things we believe and practice as a church family must reflect God's will, Christ's mission, and the Spirit's leading.

~ What do we mean by the "character of God?"
(who God is, what God is made of, the way he acts in a given situation, his nature, his default)

~ What do we know about the "character of God?"
(gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, loving, faithful, forgiving, relational, just, kind, impartial, jealous, dependable, consistent)

Our reading and interpretation of the Bible must agree with this character of God and with the Gospel of Jesus. By that, we mean it must be congruent with why Jesus came, the way Jesus lived and died, what Jesus believed and the way he behaved, and what Jesus came to accomplish. Does our reading of the Bible lead us to join Jesus? Do our interpretations match the life and teachings of our Lord? And do they agree with the Holy Spirit? Remember, we are not guided by the Law, but by God's Spirit. We live by his leading, his guiding, his gifting, his reminding, his encouraging. Not laws --- we follow the Spirit's lead.

Genesis 1-2

Several of the important New Testament passages we're going to look at refer to the Creation accounts in Genesis (1 Cor. 6:16, 7:4, 11:8-9, 14:34; Eph. 5:31; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). Our belief is that we can't understand Paul until we first understand Genesis. The creation stories form the foundation of not only our view of God's power and sovereignty over all things, but also his divine will for his people and his world for all time. Creation is revelation.

Read Genesis 1:26-31. These first two chapters of the Bible describe the world God created before sin entered the scene. No sin. Perfect people in a perfect world living in perfect relationship with one another and with God. Please notice:

- ~ both man and woman are created by God in the image of God
- ~ both man and woman are commanded to be fruitful and multiply
- ~ both man and woman have authority and command to subdue and rule creation
- ~ man is not given authority or command to rule the woman

In God's perfect world, before sin has a chance to corrupt anything, there are no distinctions between men and women. The female is not inferior to nor less than the male. Both are declared to be created in God's holy image.

Read Genesis 2:15-25. Again, this is a description of the world God created before sin entered the picture. Notice:

- ~ man is incomplete and inadequate by himself; "not good" (v.18)
- ~ neither God (superior) nor the animals (inferior) make a suitable partner for man
- ~ the woman is the perfect partner, complement, "helper," (*e'zer* = suitable helper)
- ~ woman is made from man's side; same material; same flesh
 - God could have made her from scratch, but he used Adam's identical material
 - Woman is not made from Adam's head that she should rule over him,
 - not from Adam's feet that she should be in subjection to him,
 - she is made from his side, to be close to him; to be his equal partner.
 - We use this in weddings because it's right!
- ~ the creation order is from incompleteness to completeness; from "good" to "very good"

One flesh – the woman is made from literally the same flesh as the man. The husband is required by God's arrangement to recognize his wife as part of himself. He must love her and treat her as his own body. He cannot treat her as inferior or as part of his domain.

People will sometimes argue that woman is subordinate to man because God created man first. Well, God made the cows and birds before he made man, yet the male and female both have rule and authority over all the animals. Being made second does not in and of itself indicate subordination. The lesson here is that the male is incomplete, he's "not good," until the female completed the creation. The creation order goes from incompleteness to completeness, not superior to inferior.

Word of the Day: e'zer (helper)

Some consider Genesis 2:18-20 the linchpin of their position that women are subordinate to men. If God labels woman as man's helper, she must be under him. She must be his subordinate for all time. This must be God's eternal order for men and women.

This word actually means "comrade" or "partner" or "ally." And this word is mostly used in Scripture to describe God himself. Over and over in the Old Testament, God is called Israel's "helper" (*e'zer*). The enemies of God's people are criticized in Old Testament Hebrew for not being the "helper" (*e'zer*) that God is. This word in no way describes an inferior status nor a subordinate position. The word is used to describe the central element of God's relationship to his people.

- ~ Exodus 18:4 – God was my "helper" who saved me from the sword of Pharaoh
- ~ Deuteronomy 33:7 – a prayer to God to be Judah's "helper" against his foes
- ~ Psalm 70:5 – You are my "helper" and my deliverer
- ~ Psalm 115:9-11 – The Lord is our "helper" and shield (3x)
- ~ Psalm 121:1-2 – My help comes from the Lord
- ~ Deut. 33:26-29; Ps. 20:2, 33:20, 89:19, 124:8, 146:5; Is. 30:5; Ez. 12:14; Dan.11:34; Hos. 13:9

This word *e'zer* gets us in trouble because "helper" in American English usually means someone smaller, weaker, or less than. Mother's little helper, he's a good helper, plumber's helper --- we typically understand this to refer to a subordinate.

If you were drowning, you would holler "Help!" That's appropriate. But when the lifeguard saves you, you don't call him your helper when you're speaking to the TV reporters. You would say, "He's not my helper! He's my rescuer, he's my deliverer, he's my savior!" You'd be right. And that's what "e'zer/helper" means in the Old Testament. It means rescuer, liberator, someone who fights alongside his or her partner.

E'zer / helper does not mean Eve is subordinate to Adam or that woman is somehow subordinate to man. If so, then God is subordinate to Israel! God is lower than his people! No, Eve is Adam's partner. She's his ally, his comrade.

The Curse

- ~ How do you eliminate sweat?
- ~ How do you prevent weeds?
- ~ How do you fight back against labor pains?

The subordination of women to men doesn't begin in Genesis 1-2, it starts with sin in Genesis 3.

Read Genesis 3:14-19. This passage describes the “curse,” the world after sin enters the scene. Please notice:

- ~ the serpent is cursed with enmity between it and humanity, ultimate destruction
- ~ man is cursed with hard work, weeds, sweat, and death
- ~ woman is cursed with increased pains in childbirth
- ~ wife is cursed by being ruled by her husband
- ~ wife is cursed by a desire to rule her husband but being unable to do so

These are all consequences of sin. These curses represent the result of sin, not the divine eternal order of God. These things are not God’s will and we know it. We fight against the heat and the sweat by turning on the air conditioner and applying deodorant. We battle the weeds by spraying chemicals. We avoid working hard by going to college and seeking indoor employment in an office. We say “No!” to labor pains by taking Lamaze classes and signing the waivers for epidurals and pain medications. And we stave off death for as long as we can by eating right, exercising, not smoking, and staying away from bungee jumps.

Sweating, working hard, labor pains, and death are not God’s will. That’s why we put so much time, energy, and money into reversing those things. If Genesis 3 were describing God’s intended order, then using Right Guard and Round Up and Advil would be a sin!

So why would we treat all of Genesis 3:14-19 as a consequence of sin we must fight, a result of sin we must not give in to, proof that sin still exists in this world, except for that one sentence at the end of verse 16?

“Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

This is not God’s created order. This is a drastic change from God’s intent. This is a horrible result of Eve’s sin. It is a proof of sin in the world. And we must not give in to it.

Important Side Note: the word for “desire” in Genesis 3:16 is the same word used in Genesis 4:7 to describe sin crouching at your door: It “desires” to have you. It wants to rule over you, dominate you, control you. This line in Genesis 3:16 is not about sexual desire. Sex is not a curse or a consequence of sin; it is part of God’s eternal design, part of the creation command from the very beginning. This is about control. Because of sin, both the man and the woman want to control the other, both want to be in charge. But the husband will succeed in ruling over his wife. Thousands of years of history have proven this to be true.

Genesis 3 chronicles the first sin, it marks the beginning of the separation of humans from God. We sinned, corruption and decay entered the world, and we’re now estranged from our loving Creator. It is exactly this separation that our Lord Jesus came to fix. Jesus was sent from heaven to reverse the curse. Romans 5:12-21 tells us Jesus came to reverse what Adam had brought, to fix what Adam broke. Adam’s sin brings death; the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ bring grace, righteousness, and eternal life.

The entire creation is corrupted by sin (Romans 8:20-23). We are in bondage to decay. Corruption, decay, sin, and death impact everything (Eph. 4:22-24, 1 Pet. 1:22-23, 2 Pet. 1:4). But we can escape this corruption that's caused by our evil desires.

"No longer will there be any curse!" ~Revelation 22:3

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were in order for us to escape the curse. We do not live under it any longer. We certainly do not impose it on others. The curses in Genesis 3 are consequences, not commands. They are evidence of the decay and corruption produced by sin. These results of sin are evil. We are not called to obey this order of the curse brought about by sin but to work against it, escape it, help others to escape it, through a relationship in Christ Jesus. It is God's will to undo the curse or the consequences of sin. And it is our call.

Conclusions –

- ~ When the New Testament refers to Creation, it's talking about Genesis 1-2, not Genesis 3
- ~ Men ruling women is not God's original Creation design or intent; it is sin's distortion
- ~ Jesus came to rescue people from the curse, not to impose the curse on people
- ~ We, too, are in the business of rescuing people from the curse, not imposing it
- ~ We can't compel women to obey a command that's not a command, but a consequence of sin

Adam and Eve corrupted the world, not God. As children of God and followers of Jesus, we're charged with working to undo the curse. We do this by bringing others to Jesus to escape the curse of death, by alleviating suffering, by struggling against the corruption of the world any way we can.