

Genesis 1:26-28

Women in the Kingdom: Priests & Kings (Co-Ruling in the Kingdom)

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / February 6th, 2022

As I was preparing for this message, I remembered James Brown and Betty Newsome's song, *It's a Man's Man's Man's World* (take on mad mad mad world). The first half of the song goes like this:

*You see, man made the cars to take us over the road
Man made the train to carry the heavy load
Man made electric light to take us out of the dark
Man made the boat for the water, like Noah made the ark*

*This is a man's, man's, man's world
But it wouldn't be nothing, nothing without a woman or a girl*

Is this how the world is? All about men? Are women and girls an afterthought? Newsome wrote this song as she observed how men and women relate.¹ Is this the Bible's vision of what God intended? In the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis one, God paints a radically different picture.

Genesis 1:26 (NIV)

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

In Genesis one, God makes humankind in his image, in his likeness, and gives us authority to rule over creation. And less we think only kings, rulers, Pharaohs, or men are made in God's image; we find that both sexes, equally and together, manifest the image of God in our world.

Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

This means God places men and women equally in charge of his creation. Humanity is the kings and queens, the co-royals of creation. And we're given a job to do.

Genesis 1:28 (NIV)

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

God calls men and women to rule creation together. The only way men and women can be "fruitful and increase in number" is as a team. Together they make up the image of God. Together they are to "steward"

¹ Wikipedia contributors. (2022, March 13). It's a Man's Man's Man's World. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 17:37, March 15, 2022, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=It%27s_a_Man%27s_Man%27s_Man%27s_World&oldid=1076797333

creation towards flourishing. Scripture emphasizes co-laboring in Genesis two. God creates man from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7); and places him in the garden to “work it and take care of it” (Gen 2:15).

Two sources, John Walton and Gordon Hugenberger taught me that Adam is not only a king, as seen in Genesis one, but a priest in Genesis two, and that the Garden of Eden is a temple, a sacred space where God dwells. The temple in Jerusalem had four walls. The garden has four rivers. The Jerusalem temple has garden imagery inside it, just like the actual Garden of Eden. The temple is guarded and cared for by priests, so is the Garden of Eden, not just by men but by man and woman. Adam, man alone, is an insufficient priest.

Genesis 2:18 (NIV)

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

This word for “helper” is often used of God when he helps his people.² Here, helper may be translated “fit for” as “corresponds to.” Eve was Adam’s fit and flourish. Together, they would guard and keep the garden as priests, Eve supplying something Adam cannot do without. So what does God do? Does God pick up a clump of clay and fashion woman like he did man? No, because God again wants to emphasize man and woman’s togetherness, their connection, their union:

Genesis 2:21-22 (NIV)

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

God doesn’t take a toe bone, which might have symbolized women’s inferiority. Neither does God take something that might have suggested superiority. An earlobe? Instead, God takes something that represents woman’s equality with man, their side-by-side nature—that together they will rule, reign, and act as kings in God’s world and priests in God’s temple.

Here’s what I want us to get from the first chapters of the Bible. Genesis 1-2 cast a radically different vision of women than much of the ancient world—that God called men and women together to serve him, to function as rulers, and to act as priests, stewarding his temple. The picture we get is of a co-rule, co-worship, and harmony between God and man and woman.

I don’t think this precludes some sort of leadership or authority function from Adam.³ We see elsewhere in Scripture that Adam serves as humankind’s federal head, not just representing Eve but all humankind.⁴ But the real question is whether or not men have authority over women in Genesis 1-2.

Some have suggested that because Adam names Eve, he has authority over Eve (Genesis 2:23). In Genesis 16:13, Hagar, Sara’s maidservant, names God “the One who sees me,” but this does not imply superiority.

Elsewhere a husband is called the head of his wife.⁵ But if we look at what this means in Genesis, it’s not dominance or inequality. There may be some sense of authority or accountability, but the Genesis text emphasizes working together to be fruitful and serve God together. God calls Adam to work and keep the garden (he’s a gardener), and Eve gets to do that too, but she also is tasked with being fruitful, with giving birth to children. They have overlapping tasks that they can only accomplish together.

Back in the fall of 2014, I wrote a long research paper on women in ministry where I went through all the passages about women in the Bible to figure out my position on the issue. I gave it to a professor friend to

² Exod 18:4, Deut 33:7, 26, 29, Hos 13:9, Psa 20:3, 33:20, 70:6, 115:9-11, 121:1-2, 124:8, 146:5, and maybe Dan 11:34.

³ My figures are adapted from How (Not) To Read Your Bible by Dan Kimball, along with his points.

⁴ Romans 5:14-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-23; 45-49

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23.

review, and his question of my Genesis 1-3 analysis was whether Adam and men have some type of leadership prior to the fall or if that is purely a result of the fall. Many complementarians go to 1 Timothy 2:11-12, where Paul talks about Adam being formed first, then Eve, to establish that male-only leadership in the family and church is pre-fall. If that's your view, I respect you. It's a biblically strong view. I do believe in male leadership within the home, but I don't think that prevents women from serving alongside men in the preaching and leading ministry of the church. I hold a kind of hybrid position.

For the next two weeks, Andy is going to review the big picture and all the examples of women teaching and holding authority in the Bible. Then we will go to Paul's text and do our best to interpret it biblically. Start in Genesis; work our way through scripture, then review Paul's challenging words.

In Genesis, we see husbands and wives together ruling and serving as priests and kings. We see Adam viewing Eve as his partner, his equal in ministry, even though he is ultimately accountable to God for all humankind. What leadership he does have, he uses to lift up, empower, and call into greater service.

So, where'd it all go wrong? The serpent enters the garden and tempts Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and they succumb. As a punishment, God curses Adam and Eve

Genesis 3:16 (NIV)

To the woman he said,

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labor you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.”

Here's what happens to Adam and Eve's, male and female, humankind relationships. It becomes completely distorted. Women will desire men in an unhealthy way, and men will rule over women in an unjust and cruel way. No longer do they co-rule and co-serve as royal priests; now, they are ruled by desire and dominance, creating disharmony and brokenness. This is important because now the relationship between men and women is distorted and broken, and we all feel it. But is there any hope?

And is that the end of today's sermon? Is that it? No. Because Jesus has come to set things right. There's a story in the New Testament where Jesus and his disciples are traveling through Samaria. Samaria is a place of religious corruption, ethnic impurity, and Jewish disdain. Jesus, fully human, gets tired and stops at Jacob's well outside of a Samaritan village. His disciples go to fetch food, and a Samaritan woman comes out to get water. There's some evidence that women didn't usually fetch water during the middle of the day. It's hot and sweaty work; better to do it in the cooler hours. So there's some reason this woman didn't want to come with the other women, and Jesus reveals it.

John 4:17b-18 (NIV)

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband.¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

See, here is a woman who the snake has bitten. Here is a woman whose desire is for men, not just one man, but five men, who have ruled over her. Here is what it means for a woman to fully experience the curse, the fall, complete domination. And what does Jesus do? How does Jesus treat this woman?

John 4:25-26 (NIV)

²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

An unclean, unloved, social-outcast of a Samaritan woman is the first-person Jesus ever revealed his true identity and status to—even before his own disciples. What does she immediately do? She proclaims the gospel. She bears witness. Some might call it preaching.

John 4:28-29, 39 (NIV)

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” . . .

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.”

This Greek word for “testimony, martyreō, is used elsewhere to describe the preaching and teaching ministry of Paul and other church leaders.⁶ Here is what has happened. Jesus has entered into this woman’s brokenness, has restored her, and elevated her status in God’s kingdom, and now she goes out and bears witness to the Messiah, enabled to do so by the Messiah himself. And this is a picture of the church.

Now we, as the body of believers that make up the church, are what Paul calls a “new creation.”⁷

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Together, we co-rule and co-serve, striving towards harmony as brothers and sisters in Christ. We as the church are to be a new creation, just like Genesis 1-2. Isn’t this what Jesus does? He finds a woman most oppressed, most taking advantage of, most despised, and he risks himself for her. And he’s done that for us, the church, the bride of Christ. He makes us into a new creation, and now we, men and women together, bear testimony of what God has done. We become a picture of those garden priests and kings, co-ruling and co-serving together in our garden, in our new creation, in the church. Let’s pray.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA. You can listen to his other sermons at CornerstoneWestford.com.

⁶ John 1:7, 15, 34; 3:32; 4:39; Acts 6:3; 10:43; 13:22; 23:11; 1 Corinthians 15:15, etc.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (NIV)

Service & Sermon

You can [watch the full service on Facebook](#) or [only the sermon on YouTube](#).

Discussion Time

Dear Church,

Andy and I have been processing the survey results with the Discipleship Team, and one of the things we're realizing is we need to communicate our goals for the small group discussions. Without goals, it's difficult to know how we're doing. So, here's a draft of our fourfold goals: 1) Get to know each other better; 2) Pray; 3) Study the Bible, and 4) Put it into practice. We hope you'll be able to see these four goals reflected in our weekly discussion format and questions. Also, each group will be getting a different question this week:

Ice-Breaker – Briefly share about a significant woman in your life. What's their name, and why are they so significant to you?

Prayer – Do you have a prayer request or praise reports you'd like to share?

Sanctuary – Read Genesis 1:26-28. How does the image of God give men and women authority and rule, and how, according to that passage, should men and women exercise it?

Foyer – Read Genesis 2:5-17. Where do you see the concept of a temple in the text? How are Adam and Eve supposed to act as priests?

Conference Room – Read Genesis 2:18-25. What is significant about the creation of Eve and their wedding to one another? What does it tell us about their relationship?

Application – How would your relationships with each gender change if you saw them more through the lens of Genesis 1-2?

Recap – What's your one-sentence takeaway from today?

Follow-Up

Dear Church,

Thanks for listening to this past Sunday's sermon ([link](#)). I know this topic can be both exhilarating and challenging. It's tempting to jump right to the rabbit hole, but maybe take a moment and work through the spiritual exercises so that whatever you encounter in your studies, you'll do so with Christ.

- Pastor Jonathan

Spiritual Exercises

Reflect – What emotions does this topic, *Women in the Kingdom*, bring to the surface? What do you want to be the answer? We may feel more comfortable in one camp or the other. Where does that come from in your own story? Lay it before your Heavenly Father. Take time to journal, reflect, pray, and praise—asking the Holy Spirit to uncover your heart and lead our church in this conversation.

Restoration – Confess any sin that comes to mind, selfishness, hurt, anger, anything raw inside of you. Jesus loves you and forgives you. He knows what's sin and what's you just processing. There's no shame. He is making you whole, exposing our hearts to his healing touch. We all need the surgeon's hand, but also our Father's warm embrace. Through Christ, we have both. You are loved.

Worship – Take time to listen and worship to “I Believe In Christ / You Raise Me Up - cover by ELENYI & Cayson Renshaw.” <https://youtu.be/M4x9Qh9yRvU>

Content Curation

Sermon –Gordon Hugenberger, when he was the pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, preached a sermon on Genesis 1-2 where he talked about many of the same themes I discussed in my message—the idea of the garden being a temple. He has a five-part series on the topic, but I recommend starting with the second one: “Aren't the Bible's Morals Out-of-Date Regarding Women? Part II - Colossians 3:18-19.” Link: <https://youtu.be/YnES1Lo86wk>

Resource List & Playlist – Andy and I have compiled a resource list on our website with a bunch of different sermons, videos, articles, and books you could check out if you're interested. You can also check out our [Women in Ministry YouTube playlist](#). Links:

- Resource List: <https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/resources/women-in-ministry/>
- Playlist: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL88-wL6SVCPhJ_NeiryWK915W48FOy5LA

Sermon Slides