

Voices: Equality—A Second Glance at Adam and Eve

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The first three chapters of Genesis lay out a biblical foundation for ideal living. But how should these passages be interpreted in light of events that question the roles and power of women?

This subject has been a point of contention, with many citing the first chapters of Genesis as God's plan for male and female relationships. Males and females are said to be created in the likeness of God, which begs the question: In what way is humankind made in God's likeness?

Interpreting God's likeness in men and women

Traditional interpretations recognize that men and women are equal in ability but not in roles.

However, the structure in Genesis 1:27 emphasizes God's inspiration given to humanity: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

God's original intent for humanity was equal partnership. To be made into the image of God does not mean power or dominion over each other; rather, it is the invitation to a shared relationship with God.

Together, male and female are created to govern creation, to reveal the image of God collectively rather than individually.

An equal sense of responsibility is clearer in Genesis 1 than in Genesis 2.

However, the second creation story is often interpreted as prescriptive of the female being in a submissive—rather than a shared—role.

In Genesis 2, Adam was crafted by God’s hands first, while Eve was drawn from Adam’s rib. This leads some to assume men have ordained leadership roles in the family.

However, Eve was formed after no suitable *ezer* (helper) is found. This word—*ezer*—denotes one who is well-suited for the task at assisting, not one who submits because of inferiority or as a complement to their leader.

If *ezer* refers to submission, how should one interpret the following passage: “Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and *ezer* and your glorious sword” (Deuteronomy 33:29).

While the second creation narrative often has been used to assert women are to be submissive to men, a more suitable reading highlights the togetherness of men and women. This emphasis is clearer in the Hebrew after God fashioned Adam’s helper: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called *isha* (woman), for out of *ish* (man) this one was taken” (Genesis 2:23).

The Edenic fall as an interpretive challenge

Holding to a submissive interpretation becomes more complicated in Genesis 3 after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit. Eve’s punishment to submit to her husband often is understood as a clear commandment for women to submit to men.

Since this is a punishment for disobeying God, Eve’s command to submit to Adam should not be understood as God’s approval of this new social

structure, especially since both uniquely are fashioned in God's image.

Genesis 3 shows that sin alienates people from God and each other. What was once a perfect image of God's likeness spread onto Earth's canvas now is marred with the blemishes of sin, causing unity to become separation and peace to be traded for blame.

Genesis 3 must not be read as a picturesque reality of God's purpose for humankind, because it is far from that world. Rather, it is the pronouncement of what is to come: relationships distanced from God's once-perfect reality.

We must not accept willingly this broken system but strive continually for the original and divine intent: a world of shared authority, a world reshaped into God's likeness.

Too often the question is asked: "Who wields the power and authority between man and woman?" The creation story asks: "How can we best reflect God's image together?"

A version of this article appeared first on [Ethics Daily](#).

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