

1. From Genesis to Galatians

Objectives

- Reflect on the creation story in Genesis through a gender lens
- Examine the key passage of Galatians 3:26-28 in light of our faith and gender dynamics
- Assist participants in the integration of scriptural principles in all aspects of World Vision's work

(Estimated Session Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes)

Session Flow and Description

Introduction - 10 minutes

- Present objectives to participants.
- Have Genesis 1:26-28 on a transparency or on sheets of paper for each participant.
- Ask as many participants as time allows to stand and read Genesis 1:26-28 aloud to the group. Intonations and emphasis will vary from reader to reader. You want participants to listen to this very familiar passage with diverse intonations as well as with both male and female voices.

Small Groups: Genesis 1:26-28, Activity 2.1a, Genesis and Gender - 20 minutes

Divide into groups that each include both men and women.

Discussion Questions

- Genesis 1:26-28 is a familiar passage. How has it affected your life as a Christian?
- How has it affected you as a member of your particular gender?

Plenary Group: Examining Genesis 1:26-28 - 30 minutes

Activity 2.1a, Genesis and Gender

- Debrief and share responses from the small group discussion.
- Present key points from Handout 2.1a on Genesis 1:26-28.
- The word “man” in Genesis 1:26 is gender- neutral in the original language and includes both men and women.
- Both men and women were created by God and blessed by God.
- Both men and women were given the task of caring for God’s creation.

Small Group Discussion: Galatians 3:28 - 15 minutes

Activity 2.1b, Gender Transformation in the New Testament

- Read the passage aloud before groups’ discussions begin.
- Ask participants to read the passage to one another again as they begin their discussion.

Discussion Questions

- How does this passage challenge each of us, every day, in every interaction?
- What promises are contained within this passage?
- Who was Paul talking to then? Who is he talking to now? Why does this passage translate across genders, millenniums and cultures? How does this passage speak to diversity? How are we all “equal”?

Plenary Group: Equality, Complementarity, Unity and Diversity - 10 minutes

Handout 2.1a

Discussion Questions

- Put these four concepts on a flip chart in a “table” format. Ask participants to give concrete examples from their workplace of each.
- How do the passages from Genesis reflect God’s original intention for equality, diversity, unity and complementarity between genders? Give examples of these from your own lives as Christian.
- How does Paul address these concepts in Galatians 3:26-28?

- How do these concepts inform our own development objectives for transformed gender relations and intentional focus on both women and men, boys and girls?

Post-Session Assignment: Becoming a Gender Equity Witness - 5 minutes

- Set up a section in your library or office for articles and theological reflections on gender.
- If you keep a prayer journal or a personal journal, set up a section for questions, prayers or biblical insights on gender and theology.

Materials

Handouts and Activities

- Handout 2.1a, Equality, Complementarity, Unity and Diversity
- Activity 2.1a, Genesis and Gender
- Activity 2.1b, Gender Transformation in the New Testament

Facilitator Preparation

- Create transparencies of Genesis 1:26-28 and Galatians 3:28.
- Make copies of Handout 2.1a and Activity 2.1a and Activity 2.1b for participants.
- Consult other texts or theologians if you have questions.
- Practise discussion questions with colleagues and reflect on possible responses.
- Create a flip chart of equality, complementarity, unity and diversity to use in the plenary session.
- Prepare copies of discussion questions and assignments for small group work.

Genesis and Gender

The Creation

Genesis 1 and 2 reflect God's ideal intention for the world and for all people: male and female together as created in the image of God. Male and female both were to work co-operatively together to care for the rest of creation.

In Genesis 1, we read: 26*Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” 27So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”*

The Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God’s image, had a direct relationship with God, and jointly shared the responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen. 1:26-28). In Gen. 1:26-31, the word sometimes traditionally translated “man” should be interpreted as a human being (as in “mankind”), and the Hebrew “adam” as a generic and gender-neutral term. “Adam” becomes gender-specific when it is used as a proper name. When God said, “Let us make man in our image”, the intended gender neutrality is emphasised in verse 27, “male and female he created them”. Thus men and women are to be co-stewards and share God-created potential.

In Genesis 2 we read: 7*Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 15Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17but 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 surely die. 18Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” 21So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.*

Mary Evans, in her book *Woman in the Bible*, points out in Genesis 1-2 that “the distinction between the sexes is there from the very beginning, inherent in the idea of Man; the creation of mankind as male and female is an integral part of God’s decision to make Man...Sexual distinction in creation therefore is quite clear. Nevertheless in this account there is no distinction between male and female in their creation as in the image of God or as having dominion over all the earth.

No hint of subordination of one sex to the other can be found here. The blessing and commission of verse 28 in no way excludes or limits the female part of Man.”

Gilbert Bilezikian provides a more detailed reasoning for the equality of man and woman in Genesis 1-2. Just as both man and woman bear the image of God, both are assigned responsibility of stewardship for the earth, without any reference to differentiation on the basis of gender. He argues, “The text gives no hint of a division of responsibilities or of a distinction of rank in their administration of the natural realm. They are both equally entitled by God to act as His vice-regents for the rulership of the earth. The lack of any restrictions or of any qualifications in their participation in the task implies roles of equality for man and woman.”

The Temptation and Fall

In Genesis 3:1-6 we read: *Now the serpent was more crafty than any wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.*

The Bible teaches that man and woman were co- participants in the Fall: Adam was no less culpable than Eve (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:21-22).

The Bible also teaches that rulership by Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was, therefore, not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall, rather than a prescription of God’s ideal order.

Evans states, “It is not the relation as such that is destroyed, but rather its perfection. Man and woman are still complementary but no longer perfectly so. Life outside of Eden must be lived with all the conflicts and tensions that were the inevitable result of Man’s disobedience to God.”

Gender Transformation in the New Testament



***No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found.***

– Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World”

Redemption

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to redeem women as well as men. Through faith in Christ, we all become children of God, one in Christ and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social or gender distinctives (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-28).

Galatians 3:28 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

In Galatians 3:28, Paul challenges us to reflect on how we relate to each other when we identify ourselves as followers of Jesus. On this subject, Gilbert Bilezikian provides a detailed exposition of Galatians 3:28: “When males and females identify with Christ by faith, their spiritual allegiance takes precedence over their maleness and femaleness. Because of their commonality in that one area of life which is of supreme importance to them, they are united in Christ. Their sense of personal worth shifts from their maleness or femaleness to the unity they share in Christ. They still remain male and female, but such distinctions become immaterial to their equal participation in the life of the church.” He says the lesson to be learned from this passage is that the practise of sex discrimination is irrelevant and sinful in the church.”⁷

Important Texts

1. The Bible teaches that both women and men are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10-11).
2. Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole body of Christ, under his authority (Acts 1:14, 18:26, 21:9; Rom. 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; Phil. 4:2-3; Col. 4:15; see also Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-7; Luke 8:1-3; John 20:17-18; compare also Old Testament examples: Judges 4:4-14, 5:7; 2 Chron. 34:22-28; Prov. 31:30-31; Micah 6:4).
3. The Bible teaches that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5; 1 Peter 2:9-10;

Rev. 1:6, 5:10).

4. The Bible defines “head of the household” as a function of leadership. Leadership is consistently represented throughout Scripture as empowerment of others for service, rather than as the exercise of power over others (Matt. 20:25-28, 23:8; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17; Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

Equality, Complementarity, Unity and Diversity

Equality - Men and women are of equal value in the sight of God. The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word “helper” (ezer), used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18, is also used in describing God in most instances of Old Testament usage (eg., 1 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.

Diversity - The diversity between men and women is expressed biologically, emotionally and psychologically. However, these differences do not presuppose or imply superiority or inferiority.

Unity - Male and female together represent the image of God. The Bible teaches that the forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings (Gen. 2:21-23). In Genesis 2:18, 20, in some versions, the word “suitable” or “fit” (kenegdo) denotes equality and adequacy.

Complementarity - Men and women need each other.

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