

## Summary From Women's Discussion – 4.9.14

Community, caring and mutuality within the plurality of the Godhead inform our understanding of God's intention with his creation from the beginning. Witnessed brilliantly in the creation of humankind – male and female. Male and female together are the crown of creation, the climax of what God produces. The full use of God-given gifts, for both men and women, supports the Biblical value of oneness and reflects the full unity of relationships within the triune God. There is no apparent hint of hierarchy in this picture from Genesis 1.

So, from the beginning of the story, we begin to appreciate the picture of the kingdom of God. A world where God reigns, and male and female, made in his image, co-reign over all creation. They are co-regents to the king, extending his kingdom. His kingdom is life, ruled his way, marked by healthy relationship, unity, mutuality, and fulfillment.

We must not read into the word, “helper”, as in a subservient one who supports her man. More than 20 times God is referred to as our helper. Is God in any way inferior? Is God subordinate? A better translation of “helper” is “companion,” even stronger - rescuer. The woman is created for the man who by himself is incomplete. While he names her, God does not ask him to. While she is made after him, she is made from the same stuff as him, directly from his side to serve side by side. The man is incomplete without woman to do what he has been commissioned to do – rule the earth. They are called to have dominion together.

One could say this is the “pre-fall” vision. After the fall, the world changes in a hurry. However, the garden vision remains as a quest for us. The remainder of the Bible is moving to recapture the essence of the garden vision.

Appreciating these early stories is more than interesting Biblical material, rather they become the prism through which we look at Scripture and life. Scripture, then, is not primarily to be dissected into book chapter and verse for analysis. In fact, for hundreds of years, there were no chapters and verses. Likewise, Scripture is not a legal handbook. Nor is Scripture a how to roadmap, or a blue print with all of life's answers. Scripture is the revelation of God's story, told for countless generations orally, written down eventually, and revised frequently (thus the two creation stories), until it becomes the book of the people of God for all time. How we use it does matter.

First, it tells God's story. 2<sup>nd</sup>, it was written to certain people at certain times and places. 3<sup>rd</sup>, it varies greatly in its genre. Each section of Scripture, while blessed by God contains cultural conditioning from the storytellers and human writers of that time. The culture does change. The context does change. We must read the Bible with this awareness. Of course, our informed reading must not take the Bible from the hands of the common folk. So, we have a difficult task, we must read and apply with awareness and wisdom using the best tools available and yet we must not relegate the book to the theologians.

Still, everyone interprets, even the most simple Bible reader, therefore, we have no choice but to navigate a path that avoids two extremes, “It says what it means and anyone can understand it,” and “It can really only be understood by those that dedicate their lives to these matters”.

More to the point, the story that it tells always points us to the Lord Jesus, his kingdom, and the fulfillment of the story of God. We must not be Pharisees and become preoccupied with the words of Scripture, missing its life-giving intent. Scripture is not to be worshipped. In John 5, Jesus scolds the Pharisees, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think by them you possess eternal life.

These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. The Scripture is a window into the heart and ways of God. This is vital to our understanding and key value to uphold at MX.

From the beginning, then, the role of the Holy Spirit is paramount. From the opening of the Hebrew Bible and the Spirit hovering over the waters to the use of the plural “we” and “us” in the opening scene in Genesis 1, to the new day prophesied in Joel 2 and laid out in Acts 2, the Spirit leads. We interpret the Bible and lead the church with the Spirit of God at the forefront. Our work at MX is to honor God, through Christ, led by the Spirit. The heart of this message is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whereby we are born alive to God. The Holy Spirit leads us into his kingdom and the newness and renewal of his creation. We must not quench the Holy Spirit.

As we look at Scripture, we must have eyes wide open that we are products of our culture. The Bible for instance, was written in a patriarchal culture that extends to this day, as it was less than 100 years ago that women were provided the right to vote in the U.S.A. The cultural blinders are abundantly visible in the Old Testament record, and this was true at the time of Jesus, and in the churches to whom Paul wrote. We are helped along by witnessing occasional “breakouts” from the cultural norm - think of Deborah as a Judge in a highly patriarchal OT, and during Jesus ministry he had women disciples and encouraged the woman at the well as one of the first gospel preachers.

With the Bible laden with cultural and historical background, and addressed to certain peoples, in an “occasional letter”, like I Corinthians, for instance, it is important that we do not apply what we simply don’t understand, nor apply by the norms of the culture at that time, nor apply independent of our larger understanding of the story, nor apply inconsistently, with a “pick and choose” approach. For instance, we may read I Cor 11:3 and see that God has established a hierarchy, concluding that it is – God, Christ, man, and woman. This raises enumerable problems:

1. Does Paul’s hierarchy fit our understanding of Genesis 1 and 2?
2. Are we confident that this is Paul’s view, or the view that Paul is repeating held by the Judaizers?
3. If this is Paul’s view, then doesn’t Paul overturn his own view just a view verses later? Shouldn’t verses 11-12 be seen as the outcome of Paul’s logic? Here, there is no hierarchy.
4. Do we have sufficient confidence to know what Paul is saying about “authority” or “hierarchy” for instance, to make a conclusion for our day and time, remembering this letter was written to specific people for a specific purpose? How can we apply a principle of hierarchy from this section without stumbling? For instance, are we also to take Paul’s admonition, just a few chapters earlier, that it is better not to marry? Do we require women to wear head-coverings? If not, why not?

We must separate our best understanding of God’s intentions as set forth in the Biblical texts from: 1. Our traditions and cultural experiences. 2. How people will react to our understanding. 3. How we explain this teaching to others, and, 4. How we implement change. The first priority is to work on our “theology,” the 2<sup>nd</sup> is to think about how that theology gets worked out.

Abby is a great symbol for MX. She is growing up. She is growing up here at MX. She personalizes our need for clear direction. How do we create the contexts, community, and ministry opportunities where she can fully use her gifts and best fulfill the vision portrayed in the garden?