

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have demonstrated and given us the priceless gifts of compassion, forgiveness, kindness, and of peace. The world thinks little of these things, but they are a reflection of Your glory in our midst, and we give You thanks. They are the some of the most enduring of spiritual qualities, and we praise You. May we use these gifts as You would have used them, Lord Jesus, AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Barak Obama

Pray for the ceremony of swearing in the new President of the USA. Pray for those operating security and for the many world guests and ordinary people at the event.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those people of the world who are poorly governed*
- *Pray for deprived people of the world whose voices are not heard*
- *Give thanks for the skill of pilots and the safety of travel by air.*

Meditation

Be free, Brothers and Sisters; be free in the Spirit of God.

Be free, for you are gloriously different but equal,
Free from the cultural pressures which bind you;

Be free, sister, to be a woman in God's image,
Free in the Godly qualities of being 'female';

Be free, brother, to be a man in God's image;
Free in the Godly qualities of being 'male',

Be free to be the person God made you to be,
Free to reflect God's image back into society;

Be free within the church to receive His gifts,
Free to minister your God given calling.

Be free, God saves you; and you are saved to be free.

Bible Study - Genesis 2:18-25

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper to complement him.' ¹⁹ So the LORD God formed from the ground every kind of animal and bird, and brought them to the man to see what name he would give them; and whatever the man called them, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every other animal; but no suitable helper was found as a partner for the man.

²¹ So the LORD God made the man fall into a deep sleep, and as he slept, he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the LORD God constructed a woman from the rib that He had taken from the man, and

brought her to him. ²³ Then the man said, 'This is truly bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, for she was taken out of Man.'

²⁴ For this, a man leaves his father and his mother and is joined to his wife; they become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.

Review

It is extremely hard to capture in words the powerful nature of these verses of scripture. This is because they are about the creation of men and women, and they tell us so much more than Genesis 1:27,28. In the first chapter of Genesis we learned that men and women were made together in the image and likeness of God, yet here the story is much more complex. Our passage today gives an abundance of information about the nature of men and women as created by God, as well as the well known story of woman being made from the rib of man.

No solitary man! The text begins with God's concern that it is not right for Adam, 'the man', to be a solitary keeper of creation (2:18). As God observes the man working to maintain the garden by himself, He is dissatisfied for the first time. Everything God had done previously was recorded with favour ('and God saw that it was good ...' – Gen 1:10,12,18,21 etc.); but now we see Him concerned. Is this concern because He thinks Adam is inadequate or not up to the task? Is Adam's loneliness the issue? Is this just a secondary feature of the story designed to lead us into what happens next? From a literary point of view, any of these is possible, however, given that God Himself was not simply alone in His work of creation (see the Spirit in 1:2 and also 1:26) God naturally felt that solitariness was not right for Adam. His life could not be lived in solitude.

Animals and birds were paraded in front of Adam for him to name and to see if they would provide a suitable partner for him (2:19), though no fish are brought forward! The naming of animals and birds was significant because in ancient times, there was a perceived link between knowing the name of something and having power over it (an example is that you cannot summon someone or something unless you know its name and can speak to it intelligibly). The exercise was finished, but no suitable 'partner' was found for Adam.

The creation of 'woman' So it is that Genesis describes the creation of 'woman' within an amazing story about her being taken a rib from a man (2:21-23). After this had been done, Adam responded positively and accepted the 'woman', with the explanation that she was taken 'out of' man (2:23). What is not obvious to the reader in English is that at this point in the Hebrew text the name 'Adam' is dropped, in favour of two words; 'ish' for 'man' and the (linguistically) feminine version of that word 'ishah' for 'woman'. There is much debate about this and what it means, but we cannot escape the fact that once God has put Adam to sleep and re-made him into 'ish' and 'ishah' ('man' and 'woman'), He has introduced the essential dynamic of relationships into human life.

The way in which God made the man and the woman is fascinating. Man is only truly human when woman is made, for she is both complementary to him and substantially different from him. Elsewhere in scripture, the fact that woman is made 'out of' man occasionally seems to reflect the strongly male dominated societies of ancient times. However, the text of Scripture itself rises above this and describes both as God's creation, allowing us to perceive that even though 'woman' was made 'out of' man, the two are inseparably interdependent.

Men and women together in God's plan I close with a quote from Matthew Henry, which is not entirely devoid of cultural bias but it is still helpful in directing us towards the essential equality of God's order. He says in his commentary that woman is made 'not out of his

head, to top him, not out of his feet to trample on him, but out of side to be his equal, under his arms to be protected, and near his heart to be loved'. The passage concludes with a quite astonishing description of marriage, confirming our view that God's intention is that men and women should live in a state of equal partnership, for in this passage a man leaves his parents to be joined to his wife (2:24). Please not that this marriage act required of a man is one of subservience to his wife, and the opposite to what we might expect of a male dominated society! Scripture is not interested in the issue of 'the battle of the sexes' here. It is interested to tell us God's truth about men and women.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Does the core story of the creation of woman from the rib of Adam worry you. Can you explain why? Discuss this within your group.
2. How is the Christian institution of marriage tainted by today's society? Why?
3. What qualities exist in the relationship between man and woman within this text? Reflect on this and discuss the differences between men and women.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The relationship between men and women is a vital issue for all society. It is not, of course, just about one man and one woman, even though our text today focuses on this because of the nature of the story. It is perhaps wise for us to keep one eye on our own personal relationships when reading this text, and another on the way people in general live their lives, both within and outside of the church. I would go as far as saying that how a society treats men and women is a fundamental marker of its humanity, for both are equal in God's eyes, and should be in ours. Unfortunately, God's Church has some hard lessons to learn from scripture, which cannot be conveyed to society unless God's people accept His truth.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Do you think that this passage of scripture reflects male domination of women, or gives permission for the domination of women by men? If this is an important issue for you, then discuss this with others as much as you can over the coming days, and see where the Lord leads you in your thinking.*
- *Ask the Lord to make it clear what this passage of scripture says to you about your own self image, and who you are as a man or a woman. If you find this hard, then speak to a close friend about it.*

Final Prayer

The measure of Your grace, Lord Jesus, is the passion You showed for people and your care for them in life and death. Lead us in Your pathway of life, we pray, so that we may show love and care for those we meet and testify to the power of Your saving work in all we do. Be present with us as we walk in Your steps, Lord Jesus. AMEN