

Heirs Together of God's Gracious Gift of Life:

Christian Men and Women Serving Together in God's World—Lesson One

Here's an Overview of Where We're Going

This 11-lesson study begins by giving healthy emphasis to the often forgotten shared blessings and responsibilities men and women have in serving Christ. All the lessons are meant to provide opportunities for men and women to discuss what Scripture says about their interdependence and the unique applications of unchanging principles for different ministry settings.

This study will joyfully let Scripture speak, since in his Word, God offers perfect wisdom and unchanging truth for our hearts and lives. The study will stick as closely as possible to biblical terminology and let Scripture define its own terms so that we do not distort what God is really saying. This approach does not seek to drive Christians by the law to get a forced outward obedience (legalism), nor will it imply that God's law no longer had anything to say to us (antinomianism). The intention is to let the Gospel predominate. Yet at the same time, the law also needs to be present, however, to lead us to daily repentance of attitudes and actions that go contrary to God's will for living in Christ.

As redeemed children of God, our unique callings as women and men are a blessing to us. They were God's gift to men and women already in the perfection of Eden. Yet the greater emphasis of this study will be on the often forgotten shared blessings and responsibilities lived out in humble, Christlike service. The shared blessings and responsibilities reflect God's perfect plan for interdependent service between man and woman in his world.

The final outcome of this study is not to produce a new "Faith Lutheran Rulebook for Men and Women" that can be consulted for specific answers of application in any and every circumstance. Such an approach fails to encourage every child of God to make the principle his or her own through prayerful study and wrestling with Scripture. It also fails to take into account the unique applications of the unchanging principle that will be made in different ministry settings in our country and around the world. As terminology and ministry settings change over the course of time, the grave danger is that we may end up quoting the words of our fathers, while in fact our understanding or application has seriously missed their point and Scripture's focus. To merely parrot the words of those who have studied this before us rather than search the Word anew for ourselves leaves us with something dangerously short of a full understanding.

Finally, this study will encourage people not to run over the consciences of their brothers and sisters or to rush to unloving judgment about applications chosen by their brothers and sisters. As we carefully discuss these topics on the basis of Scripture, we will want to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). What must predominate is a spirit of humbles service that remembers that all authority in heaven and on earth is really Christ's. Authority is always exercised under the gracious shadow of the cross of the Son of God—our Head who out of love came not to be served but to serve.

The topics in the first half of the study are: Equality in God's Image; Equality in Sin and Salvation; Our Shared Mission as Royal Priests of God; The Spiritual Gifts God Gives both to Men and Women.

The second half of the study looks at our unique callings as male and female by defining head, helper and calling, and then applying these relationships in marriage, church and the unbelieving world.

- Lesson 1 ---- Shared Creation in God's Image
- Lesson 2 ---- Equality in Sin and Salvation
- Lesson 3 ---- Shared Mission as Royal Priests of God
- Lesson 4 ---- Spiritual Gifts Shared by Men and Women
- Lesson 5 ---- Unique Callings as Male and Female
- Lesson 6 ---- Defining Head, Helper, and Calling
- Lesson 7 ---- Head and Helper Partner in Marriage
- Lesson 8 ---- Women's Gifts as We Work Together in God's Church
- Lesson 9 ---- Headship as We Work Together in God's Church
- Lesson 10 --- Challenging Issues as We Work Together in God's Church
- Lesson 11 --- Heirs Together in an Unbelieving World

Lesson 1—Shared Creation In God’s Image

All God’s People Shared an Equal Status in Creation

Introduction

As I look at my family, we are really a diverse lot: Adult heights range from 5’ to 6’7”, weights from 115 pounds to over 300 pounds, natural hair color from white blond through various shades of red to brown so dark it appears to be black. Our professions range from factory workers to called workers in the church, nurses, plumbers, military service men and women, a farmer, firemen, a financial manager, and an airline pilot/mechanic, to name some.

Or are we such a diverse lot? Probably the biggest eye-opener for all of us was when a cousin traveled to our small town for my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary. He sat down in the corner cafe in town for a cup of coffee. The man sitting next to him looked at him and asked, “So which one of George’s kids are you?” (My Uncle George hadn’t lived in the area in almost 75 years and had died about 10 years earlier.) My dad later looked for and found the man who identified my cousin so accurately. He asked how in the world a “stranger” knew who my cousin was. The man replied, “It was obvious. He looks exactly like the rest of the family.”

Have you had a similar experience? Parents often hear people remark how similar their children are in appearance or character traits. They are often surprised to hear such comments since they see many differences as they view their children close up. Who is correct? The closer we get to each other, the more we tend to see the vast differences. But if you step back, we start to appreciate the many things we have in common.

Many want to jump into a study to point out what is unique about us as men and women and what separates us because of our differences. But we dare not forget that what we have in common as sons and daughters of God in Jesus is really far greater than what is unique. **Only as we keep both points in mind—what is shared and what is unique—will we be able to grasp the bigger picture of what Scripture has to say to us as men and women serving together in God’s world.**

Part One: A Gift to Male and Female

Setting the Scene

We can only gaze in amazement at God’s activity on those six days of creation. At best we only gain a glimpse of what a perfect world must have been like fresh from its Creator’s hand. Through the lens of the first two chapters of Genesis, let’s view the awesome wonder of what our loving Creator made us to be. There we will find a rich gift shared by both female and male.

Understanding the Point

1. Quickly read through Genesis 1:1-25. Then carefully read Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:4-7, 18-25. As you read, note what is similar and what is different about the creation of human beings and the creation of everything else. Write your lists below.

<i>Similar</i>	<i>Different</i>

Imagine someone who has never traveled outside the United States trying to understand the culture of China. While books and study could reveal quite a bit, there is nothing like having “been there.” It is impossible for us in a fallen world to grasp fully what it was like for Adam and Eve to exist in God’s image as perfect creatures in a perfect world. We have never “been there.” If we could have fully experienced that, it would answer some questions we long to ask on the relationship of men and women.

But we can understand what it’s like to be in our parents’ image, can’t we? As we grow older, most of us discover that we “become” our parents. Certainly there is a physical similarity that becomes more pronounced as we age, but it’s much more than that. There are times we find ourselves responding like our parents. We tend to know the same things, like and dislike the same things, and have similar goals in life due to our shared experiences. People who knew our parents well may have responded, “When I look at you doing those things, you remind me so much of your dad (or mom).”

Scripture helps us gain a composite picture *of the image of God*, both of what it *is* and what it *isn’t*.

2. What does each of the following sections of Scripture teach us about the gift of being created in the image of God?

- Genesis 5:1-3 (compare again Genesis 1:26-27)
- John 4:24
- Ephesians 4:17–5:2

3. One of the ways for us to grasp what the image of God must have been in its perfection is to note the difference between our old self and our new self. Our new self is a spiritual re-creation of what Adam and Eve possessed before the fall.

We might also try to categorize the beauty of God's image by noting how that image is reflected in human intellect, emotion, and will. It involves knowledge that is true and correct (intellect in line with God). It includes loving what God loves and hating what God hates (emotion in tune with God). It displays eagerness to act in accordance with what pleases God (will in line with God).

Read the quote below by Johann Gerhard, a theologian and a well-loved author of devotional literature in the 17th century. How does he eloquently define the beauty of this image of God in which both man and women were created?

Man was created in the highest innocence, in the highest purity of soul and body, so that in him as in a kind of living mirror the image of God shone forth. Thus the image of divine wisdom shone in the intellect of man; the image of goodness, patience, gentleness, and tolerance in the soul of man; the image of divine love and mercy shone in the feelings of the human heart; the image of divine righteousness, holiness and purity shone in the will of man; the image of friendliness, kindness, and truth in man's deeds and words. (Johann Gerhard, *Locii*, p. 246)

4. Search the verses from Genesis chapter 2 listed below. Identify ways that Adam and Eve exhibited this awesome gift of the image of God.

- Genesis 2:15-17
- Genesis 2:18-20
- Genesis 2:21-24
- Genesis 2:25

Taking This Home

- What is the potential impact for male and female relationships if they would each look at the other as originally created in God's image?

Please note: In the biblical account of Adam and Eve's creation, Scripture not only shows us what we have in common as men and women, but it also begins to point to what is unique about our callings as women and men. Those points will be discussed later in our study.

Part Two: The Purpose of This Glorious Gift

Setting the Scene

You can all think of times when it was good to be with family and friends. Perhaps it was a wedding or a special holiday meal that brought you together in a special bond of fellowship. Sometimes it can be pictured in the ways you “walk together” for enjoyment or encouragement. At other times it can be appreciated by eating together—which is enjoyed across all cultures as an expression or building of a close relationship.

God does nothing by accident or on a whim or flight of fancy. Whatever he does is done in perfectly planned wisdom and lovingly executed perfection. As we look again at key sections of Scripture, God reveals the beauty of his purposes in giving us the gift of his image.

Understanding the Point

1. Read Genesis 3:8. After they fell, Adam and Eve heard “the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” They recognized that sound immediately. What does that tell us?
 2. Undoubtedly as God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, he desired fellowship with them. Because Adam and Eve were created in God’s very image, God was able to relate with them in a uniquely personal way. With them he could share the bliss and happiness that existed in the Godhead from eternity. Examine how these passages illustrate God’s continuous desire and activity to rebuild the type of fellowship with him that we could enjoy.
 - Exodus 24:8-11 and Matthew 26:26-29
 - Isaiah 62:4-5
 - Matthew 22:1-14
 3. Enjoying fellowship with God does not seem to be the only purpose for the gift of his image. Look at Genesis 1:28-30. This comes right after God created male and female in his image. Describe what God means by ruling over the earth and subduing it. (*Note: This is not the oppressive type of ruling that sinful man devises.*)

When we speak of God entrusting the care of his world to those created in his image, this does not mean that God has stepped back and has nothing to do with the day-to-day operation of his world. The world would then cease to exist. And yet, God does allow human beings to be his instruments in the world. He has entrusted much of his care of the world into the hands of his “representatives.” Luther often spoke of this as the “masks” God wears.

4. Read the following passages. Explain how each passage adds to our understanding of what it means to care for God’s creation as his representatives.
 - Compare Psalm 115:16 with Psalm 24:1
 - 1 Corinthians 4:2

5. Because of the fall and the loss of God's image, our ruling and subduing a fallen world is marred and incomplete. To see evidence of that, compare Genesis 1:26-30 with Genesis 9:1-3.

- Give examples from our fallen world of how mankind's ruling and subduing the world remains a blessing of God.

- Also, give examples from our fallen world where we can see this ruling and subduing marred by sin.

Taking This Home

- What are the implications of the fact that God spoke to "them" (not just to Adam or just to Eve) about ruling over the earth and subduing it?

- Why would human beings need the image of God if they were to properly carry out the task of ruling over the earth and subduing it?

Living It!

- As male and female who are heirs together of God's gracious gift of life, what truths do we want to treasure in our hearts from this first lesson of our study?

- List at least two ways your words and actions will be affected by what we have learned today.

At home!

- Review the discussions of this lesson. Keep a journal during the week, writing down the ways this lesson challenges you to grow in your thinking or living.

- Consider: **A Third Purpose of the Image: Godly Offspring**

It could very well be stated that a third purpose for God's image was to pass that image down to "godly offspring" who would join Adam and Eve in the care of God's creation. Even in our fallen world, this is still one of the great purposes behind marriage as God seeks to produce godly offspring from believing homes through his gospel. This is why the role of believing father and mother is so critical in the home!

Consider these passages:

- Malachi 2:15

- Ephesians 6:4