

CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE: THE MODEL OF DOMINION

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Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moved on the ground." (Gen. 1:26-28)

A. Mankind was created in God's image. Male and female were created in God's image. No other of God's creatures were defined as reflecting the very image of God. And we reflect His image, at least in part, by exercising dominion-- by subduing the earth--by ruling over the other living creatures. By God's own design, it was (and still is) pleasing that male and female develop and exercise dominion. No other creatures were given such dominion. By acknowledging and acting on this principle we fulfill one of God's most basic intentions for us.

This model for individual and relational health is based upon this principle of dominion. Though we can not hope to recapture or comprehend all that God intended for man and women in that innocent environment, it is still the best place to start.

B. One element of God's design was that male and female were intended to exercise dominion together. Male and female were given the authority to fill the earth with offspring, to subdue the earth, and to rule over the other living creatures. Male and female were created to reflect God's image and to complete each other--to be partners, companions, co-rulers over that unspoiled creation. The only negative word from God about all of His creation was that it was:

.... *"not good for the man to be alone. I will make a help suitable for him." (Gen. 2:18)*

The biblical basis for healthy marital respect is found in the terms which God Himself used to describe the woman, whom He was creating to complement the man: "ezer kenegdo"-- which translates to "a help suitable." Joy Elasky Fleming writes:

"The noun, 'ezer' is found 21 times in the Old Testament. It means 'help'... someone who will succor another, e.g. to help them or aid them. The word is found twice in Genesis 2. In 16 of the other 19 occurrences of the word, the 'help' spoken of refers to help which comes from one who is superior. In most cases, the 'help' is God Himself...In those instances where 'ezer' does not refer to God it is used of such people as kings, who come to the help of another... What is clear from the usage of this Hebrew term is that there is no connotation of inferiority or subordination attached to the word 'help.'

The adjective, 'kenegdo', means 'corresponding to him' or 'like him.' What is emphasized is the common nature and essence of the two beings, as well as their equality."

So the Lord God made woman out of man and joined them. Clearly the man and woman were created to relate to each other and to exercise together the dominion given to them. And they did so in a manner pleasing to their Creator. They worked to care for the garden and they oversaw the animals.

C. Sin changed everything. Because of their disobedience and desire to become like God, man and woman lost their innocence and were cut off from God. Self-centeredness, fear and distrust took over. They lost the capacity to relate to each other in the healthy manner which their Creator had intended. Their sin would forever distort their relationship and their ability to exercise dominion together! One sentence almost says it all:

"Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Gen.3:16b)

For the women, there would still be a desire for intimacy with her husband. But the bond of trust, respect, and partnership had been lost. Instead of exercising dominion along side each other, the man would exercise dominion over his wife. But why did this shift occur? Because of the effect that sin had on the man. First, of course, was that the man's nature was now self-centered and self-serving. But there was also another reason for his shift: survival!

"Cursed is the ground because of you: through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you...by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground." (Gen.3:17)

Because of man's desire to glorify himself, the soil had become cursed. Now the man would be forced to labor painfully for his livelihood--from a soil that would no longer cooperate with him the way it had in that perfect garden of Eden.

In this world now contaminated by self-centeredness, the man would become totally absorbed with himself--and his fears for survival. And the more he became preoccupied with his survival, the less attention he would give to the relationship with his wife. Instead of sharing dominion, it would be much easier for him to simply dominate her.

D. Sin has distorted our understanding of healthy, God-pleasing dominion. (We no longer desire to exercise our dominion under God's direction.)

Sin has twisted our motivation for exercising dominion. (We no longer desire to exercise our dominion for His purposes: we simply want to serve ourselves.)

And sin has eliminated our willingness to share dominion (We would much prefer to have dominion over each other than to exercise dominion alongside each other.)

E. Yet male and female are still given dominion. Each of us is still given a domain and the innate desire to rule within that domain. It is a part of who we were created to be. Even in a sinful world, it is a part of who we are.