1. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN GENESIS 1:26-28

1.1. A profound hint in a grammatical peculiarity

a. God’s plural unity (Note: p = grammatical plural form, s = grammatical singular form)

26 Then God (p) said (s), “Let us make (p) man in our (p) image (s), after our (p) likeness (s); 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 earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” 27 So God (p) created (s) man in his (s) own image (s), in the image (s) of God (p) he created (s) him; male and female he created (s) them. 28 And God (p) blessed (s) them, and God (p) said (s) 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.”

b. ‘adam’ s (humanity’s) plural unity

26 Then God said, “Let us make man (s) in our image, after our likeness; and let them (p) have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” 27 So God created man (s) in his own image, in the image of God he created him (s); male and female (=p) he created them (p). 28 And God blessed them (p), and God said to them (p), “Be fruitful (p) and multiply (p), and fill (p) the earth and subdue (p) it; and have dominion (p) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

c. The point: As the singular God creates through an expression of divine plurality, that is, as a heavenly communion of divine persons, so a singular ‘adam, mankind/humanity, exists as male and female, in which plurality they have the capacity to emulate the intra-Godhead unity. Such a relationship will have something to do with their imaging God in marriage.

1.2. “in our image, after our likeness”

• An ‘image’ is a copy from which one gains a true impression of the pattern/prototype which it resembles/reflects/represents.

• The creating of man and woman in God’s image/according to God’s likeness means simply (but profoundly!) that God fashioned man and woman with the unique capacity and calling to image (reflect/represent) their Creator, thereby rendering a true impression of the Triune God on earth. In us God intends to become visible on earth. People, we could say, especially people in community, are God’s alternative to hand-crafted idols. We are intended to be a display of what God is like.
• This thought is reinforced by New Testament references to Jesus Christ as the image and to God’s work in conforming us to that image, thereby bringing to realization the creationally intended reflection and representation (i.e., his glory).
• This too has certain implications for marriage and family. It’s all about display, mission.

1.3. “and let them have dominion over . . .”
• Multiplying and filling and subduing are all in the interest of permeating the earth with the reflection of God—imaging God in it. The point is not that humans are to rule/subdue the earth directly (bringing the earth under human authority), but derivatively (bringing the earth under God’s authority), which humans do by filling the earth with God’s image-bearers.
• In other words, the passage is pointing to something infinitely more profound than simply populating the earth with babies and domesticating the occasional wild animal (Sea World dolphins, circus tigers, and the like). Humans are to fill the earth with image-bearers, and so with God’s glory, exhibiting God’s lordship and all of its implications over the cosmos, awaiting the ultimate Human who will bring this objective to literal fulfilment!

1.4. Summary implications for marriage and family
• The Creator uniquely fashioned humans as male and female, the crown of his creative handiwork, for the display of the One by whom and for whom they exist.
• God’s creating the one humanity as male and female has something to do with imaging God’s own plural oneness. Marriage will offer a formal mechanism for this to happen; or in other words, marriage is fundamentally about the Creator’s creational mission.
• Blessing, procreation, and dominion are all about filling the earth with image-bearers, i.e., with the image and presence and glory of the Creator. Family (child-bearing and child-raising) is fundamentally about the Creator’s creational mission.
• All of this is evaluated as “very good” (1:31), whereas a singular gender humanity is “not good” (2:18), presumably because of its inability to fulfill the Creator’s mission. To anticipate, the Creator will remedy that situation by fashioning woman, the “helper corresponding to him,” and will join these two, man and woman, in marital oneness (2:18-25).

2. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN GENESIS 2

2.1. God’s pronouncement, v. 18
• ‘adam’s aloneness is “not good” (a startling expression against the background of ch. 1!) because a uni-gender humanity cannot be/do all that God has in mind for humankind as outlined from 1:26 onward.
• God’s making a “a helper fit for him” (an exact counterpart, a perfect match), far from implying an inferior or demeaning provision, addresses this inadequacy in humanity’s ability to fulfill God’s intentions as per 1:26-28 and 2:15–i.e., to reflect the fullness of God’s image, to be fruitful and multiply and fill and subdue the earth, and to work/keep the ground properly as a reflection of God’s image.

2.2. Man’s predicament, vv. 19-20
• The man names the animals, but finds no “helper fit for him.” Suspense builds in anticipation of God’s provision in the following verses, preparing for the man’s poetic outburst in v. 23.
• Until now God has named everything that he created. God’s delegating to ‘adam the responsibility of naming the animals, differentiating this animal from that, signifies an act of rulership/dominion on God’s behalf (cf. 1:26, 28).
• In this light, the story of “Eden’s Zoo” sets up the reversal of ch. 3, where the man and the woman will yield to the enticements of a subordinate, indeed, the lowest of the subordinates.

2.3. God’s provision, vv. 21-23
• God’s provision comes in the form of a rib which he “took” from the sleeping man (v. 21), “made” (lit., built) into a woman, and “brought her to the man” (v. 22).
• The man’s response (v. 23) is presented in the form of a poetic outburst, in which he both recognizes the woman as distinct from himself and the other creatures and names her. But unlike the animals, he names her his equal, made of the same stuff—“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” –and calls her “Woman [‘iššâ], because she was taken out of Man [‘îš].”

2.4. God’s pattern, vv. 24-25
• The short epilogue provides the blueprint for marriage—a three-part formula which establishes marriage as the divine ideal for carrying out the mandate of 1:26-28. It entails leaving familial ties in whatever sense will be necessary in order to form a new domestic union, cleaving in the sense of the passion and permanence and of a marital covenant commitment, and becoming one flesh as the seal of complete and transparent oneness in heart and body as a reflection of the perfect communion within the Triune God.
• In the context of all that has preceded, we may infer that the unashamed nakedness of v. 25 has something to do with imaging the Triune God in transparent intimacy (1:26-27), signifying God’s blessing on the creation of perfect “counterparts” (2:18, 20, 23), and symbolizing and sealing the goal of the marital paradigm (v. 24). Whatever this nakedness represents or celebrates, it will be the focus of the serpent’s attack, so forming the bridge to ch. 3.

2.5. Summary: So far, we have learned that marriage is to be image-reflecting (1:26-27), heterosexual (male and female/man and woman, 1:26-27; 2:23), procreative (be fruitful and multiply, 1:28), mutually beneficial (helper, 2:18), intimate (one flesh/naked, 2:24-25), and permanent (2:24) (adapted and expanded from ICSB:G, 21).

3. GENDER ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN GENESIS 1–2

3.1. On the one hand, Genesis 1-2 highlights that:
• both man and woman bear the image and likeness of God (1:26-28);
• both are recipients of God’s pronounced blessing (1:28);
• both are given the responsibility of dominion (1:26, 28); and
• the two are perfect counterparts (truly a match made in heaven!), sharing like substance and bearing a similar name (2:18, 23).
• Clearly we are to understand that God created male and female as personal equals.

3.2. On the other hand, Genesis 1-2 highlights that:
• man was created first (2:4-23);
• woman was formed from man (2:21-23);
• man received the command not to eat from the forbidden tree prior to the creation of the woman (2:15-17), making him uniquely responsible; and
• the man named not only the animals (2:19-20), but also the woman (2:23; 3:20), differentiating her from the animals and also from himself.

Note: The significance of these observations becomes apparent in consideration of the fact that:
• God could have created the man and the woman simultaneously;
• God could have created both directly from the dust;
• God could have waited and given the prohibition to both; and
• God could have done all the naming (the same verb ‘call/name’ used 4x of the man in 2:19, 20, 23 describes God’s own naming activity 4x in 1:5, 8, 10) or delegated the responsibility to both man and woman.

Moreover, the significance of just these observations is firmly established by the fact that the New Testament places interpretive weight upon exactly these details in the Genesis account (cf. Rom 5; 1 Cor 11; 1 Tim 2).

Finally, just as clear then as the observation that God created male and female with personal equality is the observation that God created male and female with positional diversity. They do not occupy identical places or fulfill identical roles in God’s created order. Presumably male and female enjoy complete equality as persons, but have different positions and/or responsibilities. This notion of differentiation fits the orderliness highlighted in the narrated Creation pattern. The God of separations (ch. 1) imposes a design or rhythm upon gender roles and relationships in a creational pattern otherwise thoroughly marked by differentiations which serve the Creator’s purposes.

3.3. Presumably this tension embedded in Genesis 1-2 is intentional. As personal equality and positional diversity are inviolable in the Godhead, so must they remain without violation and compromise in the created order which images God. Ontological equality (the equality of being) does not necessitate positional identity (functional sameness or interchangeability); neither does gender-based positional diversity in itself violate personal equality. The rope of two strands—personal equality bound together with positional diversity—must not be unraveled either in the form of egalitarianism (which compromises diversity) or hierarchicalism (which compromises equality).

3.4. All of these observations emerge from the Genesis narrative prior to any mention of sin. Personal equality and positional differentiation are built into God’s perfect Creation order. Sin has the effect of disrupting this situation, not of implementing it. Personal equality and positional diversity would coexist in perfect harmony (as in the Godhead) were it not for sin, with the added implication that the only hope for such harmony lies in redemption and restoration. (Btw, it’s as a result of sin that our hearing tends to run along gender lines relative to the issues here—men/husbands hearing one side of the tension, women/wives hearing the other side of the tension.)

3.5. Some concluding inferences: Functional roles of man and woman (husband and wife) from Genesis 1-2:

a. The man (husband/father) is uniquely responsible for perfecting God’s household, i.e., for championing the family’s pursuit of image-bearing, and for protecting God’s household, i.e., for preserving the family from veering off course of image-bearing. These undeveloped notions (in Gen 1-3) appear to inform the biblical concepts of
headship and fatherhood, which come accordingly to be understood as creational positions in God’s order for the perfecting and preserving of God’s household. Authority is built into the concept, but authority to “rule” only in a manner that God has assigned and for God’s purposes. See further below.

b. The woman (wife/mother) is uniquely responsible for a dependent role in the marital relationship and (beyond Gen 1-2) is uniquely privileged to bear the Deliverer into the world. Like the “headship” of man, the New Testament will develop further these concepts of “submission” and “seed-bearing” as the special responsibility and crowning privilege of the woman.

4. GENESIS 3: THE FALL AND ITS FALLOUT

4.1. The Fall narrative highlights that man and woman turned God’s created order on its head:

- God creates ⇒ the man ⇒ and the woman ⇒ and gives them dominion over the animals (serpent) (Gen. 1-2);
  - but the animal (serpent) ⇒ entices the woman ⇒ who gives to the man ⇒ who fails God (3:1-7).

- God approaches the man ⇒ and the woman ⇒ (the serpent) (3:8-13),
  - and pronounces judgment on the serpent ⇒ the woman ⇒ and finally the man (3:14-19).

4.2. It is noteworthy that God’s questions are met with lame excuses, evasions of responsibility, and blame-shifting (vv. 8-13). The initial effects of sin on the vertical and horizontal relationships are represented in the poles of “hiding” and “hurling” (Howard), which effects continue to disrupt communication in marriage and family and society generally.

4.3. For violating God’s assigned place in the created structure, each of the three participants receives in order its (the serpent’s), her (the woman’s), and his (the man’s) just penalty (vv. 14-19). Three details are especially relevant to our concerns:

a. The serpent’s demise would come at the hands of a wounded but winning warrior born of the woman. The woman’s seed would produce a deliverer. Woman, in other words, would enjoy a privileged place in the provision of salvation (3:15; cf. 1 Tim 2:15).

b. For her part in the reversal which constituted the Fall (namely, she acted independently from the man and yielded to a subordinate [the serpent]), woman would experience the consequences of sin in two crucial areas—maternity and marriage (v. 16)—both of which were meant to be blessed.
  - Respecting the former (v. 16a), while childbirth would be accompanied by pain, such pain would be precisely the means by which the Deliverer (v. 15) would come (a true no-pain-no-gain situation). The pain of childbirth signals the hope of the Deliverer.
  - Respecting the latter (v. 16b), woman would be perpetually troubled with a desire toward man in the direction which Mrs. ‘Adam herself had pursued, namely, independence, or in other words, a desire in violation of the creational
order (cf. 4:7b, for the only close biblical parallel to the language of 3:16b). As a consequence of her first sin, woman’s inclination would be toward insubordination and dominance relative to man—an inclination that would put her in tension with the role God had assigned to him. In the context of Genesis 1-3, the concluding words “and he shall rule over you” (or “but he must rule over you”) are neither degrading toward the woman nor license for domination on the part of her husband, but are simply a reminder that God had assigned to man a function analogous to that of the luminaries (cf. 1:16, 18), hence always for good in the maintenance of God’s order. As the sun and the moon were assigned the responsibility of “ruling” the day and the night (i.e., in the sense of preserving an orderliness built into God’s creative plan), so God had assigned man a similar responsibility relative to woman. (N.B. The sun and the moon do not “rule” the day and the night in an arbitrary or self-serving manner, but by taking their assigned place in maintaining the order God has already established in the creational cycle. The husband’s/father’s “rule” follows this model, on analogy of the luminaries’ “rule.”) According to v. 16b, then, as a consequence of the Fall woman’s desire would conflict with man’s God-given role in the creational order. Not the order itself, but conflict over such an order, was a result of the Fall. The deliverance from such would come, of course, through the Deliverer announced in v. 15!

c. For his part in the reversal which constituted the Fall (namely, listening to a subordinate [the woman] and disobeying God by failing to “rule” properly; cf. v. 17; cf. 2:15-17), man received the longest and fullest and most pointed sentence (vv. 17-19; cf. 3:22-24), presumably because he bore the greater responsibility. Toilsome labor and finally death, both in conspicuous contrast to God’s beneficent creative intentions, would be perpetual reminders of “paradise lost”—a loss which all Creation mourns (Rom 8:18-27) as it awaits the restoration through the Deliverer-Seed of the woman (Gen 3:15).

4.4. It will be doubly clear by now that the ability to get married and to impregnate/procreate is not the measure of a man’s readiness to be a husband and father, any more than the ability of a woman to marry and bear children is an indication of her readiness to be a wife and mother. Readiness will be measured by the ability of both to exercise dominion as God would, to reproduce image-bearers who will rule/manage the Creation the way God would, and to fulfill their Creator-given roles and responsibilities in God’s household—personal equality and positional diversity in sync with Creator and Creation.