

# The Woman as 'Helper'

Gen 2:18

**Gen 1:25 – 28** "God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule 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 moves on the ground."

**Gen 2:15 - 25** The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said,

*"This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called 'woman,'  
for she was taken out of man."*

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

## Men and Women

### III – Magic genie & 3 men.

That's one for the ladies, but in truth men have not always thought of women this way. Plato, the Greek philosopher, used to teach that *"Females are imperfect males, accidentally produced by the fathers inadequacy or by the malign influence of a moist south wind"*

One of the well known early Church fathers, Quintus Tertullian, said of women *"You are the devils gateway; you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God image - man."*

And even as late as 75 yrs ago theologians like H. M. Spences in his commentary "The Biblical commentary for English Readers" wrote *"The deception [of Eve in the garden of Eden] indicates a lesser ability to comprehension."*

Against that backdrop our text today seems to affirm that women are the lesser being, made only to be the 'helper' of men.

Verse 18: ***The Lord God said "it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him"***

But is this the lot God intended for women in creating them? Doesn't the context of the creation story in Gen 1 say something about their intrinsic worth - *" So God created man in his own image, in the image*

*of God he created him; male and female he created them.* Or does the bible affirm that a woman's worth is in her serving her husband for those that are married.

Traditionally Gen 2:18 has been understood a certain way, that women are to be subservient to men, and that the ideal Christian role of a wife is to be a helper to her husband, and her highest aspiration is to fulfil her husband's calling in life. This view has contributed to the undermining of a woman's place in society in many Christian circles. In truth I believe that this understanding of a woman's role is actually wrong. Why is this so?

**Our limited connotations** : You see, whenever you take a word that you are familiar with, you load your familiar meaning into that word. Let me demonstrate – say I was to come up to you and happily announce that “I'm gay”. Immediately it would set off alarm bells in you “Our pastor is gay? He's gone homosexual?” This is what we understand the word gay to mean today, but there was a time, not too long ago when it meant something totally different – to say I'm gay, meant to say “I'm feeling happy”. The word can actually be used in 3 different ways

1. homosexual
2. carefree and merry; *Example: with gay abandon*
3. bright and cheerful; *Example: smartly dressed in gay colours*

But word usage has changed, we have all become aware of the gay movement, and the overriding connotation or meaning we attach to that word is the first definition - homosexual.

The same thing happens when we come to the word 'helper'. Helper has a bad, negative connotation in our eyes. It brings to mind an office messenger, or a house-help, or a paid servant. Nothing wrong with these jobs, but we see them as jobs held by people who have no power to influence decisions, who serve only in being commanded around, whose opinion does not count and is not requested, or taken into consideration.

When I was in form 1, we used to be called 'Jiggers' by the 4,5 & 6<sup>th</sup> formers. We were told we are 'rubble' – there to be seen but not

heard. We were of no consequence, and had nothing of worth to contribute. Very strong negative connotation, but this is sometimes the connotation we have of a helper. And Eve was called a helper! Is this what God meant as her role?

My eldest daughter is an avid reader, and she's always hunting down new vocabulary. Sometimes as we ride to school together she'll pop up and ask “Dad, what does this word mean”, and I have no clue. How do we find out the meaning of a word? Let me give us 3 little rules we all use but have probably never consciously named

**Rule 1** – You know the meaning of a word by reading it in its context. So the first thing I always say to my daughter is ‘*read the whole paragraph and let's see if we can figure out what it means in the sentence*’

For example the word “run”. Look at these 3 ways of using the same word

- He run away
- Her stockings run
- His stomach run.

Same word but the meaning is totally different. It's the full sentence that gives you the meaning.

**Rule 2** – But if the sentence or context doesn't give you a clue, then rule no 2 kicks in - find another place where the same word is used in a similar fashion and see if that will help.

**Rule 3** – And then there's rule no 3, which is ‘check up the ‘root word’ and see if that gives you a clue. If you don't know what the word dynamic means – then you check up its root word, which is the Latin word ‘Dunamis’ which means power. So you know dynamic has something to do with power!

So when we come to a word like ‘Helper’ in Gen 2:18, we need to ask – What did God mean when he used the word in the original Hebrew? Well, our 3 little rules help us discover.

Rule no 1 – read the whole sentence or context. Well the first context that we have to understand woman in is in the larger creation story Gen 1

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule 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 moves on the ground."*

Several things immediately stand out there

1. Both men and women are made in the image of God. They have equal standing. They are both image bearers. And our ‘God-like-ness’ is not sexual, not gender . . . it has to do with something else totally. We don’t have time to develop this theme in detail, but in actual fact our god-like-ness has several qualities to it
  - i. Our ability to choose – animals act on instinct.
  - ii. Our ability and desire to love and be loved. God is love, so we have a deep hunger to experience and display this side of our god-like-ness.
  - iii. Our ability to think and communicate difficult concepts and ideas, even philosophies. Animals cannot do this, but God invites us to ‘*Come and reason with me*’.
2. Both were given the same mandates – 2 in fact
  - i. Rule over the earth
  - ii. Be fruitful and multiply.
3. Both were blessed of the Lord after the creation (Gen 1:28) There is nothing intrinsically different between man and woman in terms of their self worth and image bearing. We cannot agree with

Plato and his assessment of the worth of a woman as “*imperfect males*”

**Rule 2** : Rule no 1 however does not tell us anything about the word helper, which is our main focus here . . . but rule no 2 really helps us. What does the word ‘helper’ mean? Well rule no 2 says ‘*see how other parts of scripture use the same word.*’ In other words, scripture is it’s own best interpreter . . . let scripture define this word for us.

The word helper, which in the Hebrew is the word “Ezer”, is used a total of 21 times in the Old Testament.

2 of those times is in Gen 2:18 and 20.

3 of those times it is used of other sovereign military nations that helped Israel in a time of battle, and

17 of those times it is used of God himself!

Let’s look up a few verses

*EX 18:2 After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her <sup>3</sup> and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have become an alien in a foreign land"; <sup>4</sup> and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."*

*DT 33:29 Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places. "*

*PS 10:14 But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.*

*PS 27:9 Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.*

*PS 118:6 The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? <sup>7</sup> The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on*

my enemies. <sup>8</sup> *It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.*

*PS 121:1 I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from?  
2 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. <sup>3</sup>  
He will not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber; <sup>4</sup> indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

From these use of the word ‘helper’, what sense do you get the word means? My sense is that there is absolutely no negative connotation in the meaning of the word. Indeed, seeing how it is used here I would have to define the word as follows

The helper is the stronger one who steps in when the one in need of help is at his ropes end. The helper lends the needy power and wisdom that is beyond the access of the one in need. The helper majestically turns a situation around!

**Ps 118** *“The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? <sup>7</sup> The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.”*

The helper is the deliverer in times of need, the right hand, the cause of victory and the mighty one. When God the helper comes into a situation, the world stops and trembles!

Women – this is what God has called you to be!

**Secondly**, I would have to say that God calls himself, God wears the title of “the helper of Israel”. Again there is no negative connotation to this title – indeed if anything – because it is a title God himself uses – it is infact a title of honour, not a title of subservience – God himself wears this title and none of us would dare call him a doormat.

Men, when God has given us a Major General to be by our side, to bring us success and deliverance – why would we want to undermine and mistreat them? Their success and victory is our deliverance. If

we recognized their true, God-given worth, we would be deeply blessed by it. Somehow men have become the masters of turning the tables on Genesis.

- God said “*a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife . . .* “. today we have turned the tables and it is the woman who leaves her father and mother and cleaves to her husband.
- God said to man “*by the sweat of your brow you shall labour . . .*” but today when you look in the shamba’s it is the women who do all the digging and labour.
- God said “*Women – you are to wear my title and to be the deliverer and helper of man as I am the deliver and helper of Israel . . .*” somehow man has turned this to bear a negative connotation.

But because we have turned the table on women, we have lost sight of the true value of what God was seeking to do in giving Adam Eve. Eve wasn’t coming to help Adam fulfil his goals . . . Eve was coming as an ambassador of God to dwell alongside Adam and enable the accomplishment of great and glorious things . . . somehow we turned that Ambassador into a servant.

Men turn to the ladies next to you and say to them “**You Woman, are an ambassador of God**”

If your wife is here tell her “**You are a deliverer**”

Tell them “**You are God’s secret weapon to bless me**”

I can see my good friend **Woodex** is a little worried about where this is going since, as an African man he is the “BOSS”. How did such a powerful position get turned into a position of subservience?

I think it happened in the fall – Genesis 3. Because the woman used the powerful Ambassadorial position God had given her **AGAINST** the welfare of the man she was to bless . . . Gen 3:13

*Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

*<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."*

In light of the honored position God had given her, can you now see the how devastating the curse placed on the woman was? Man has not ruled over this ambassador wisely and lovingly, he has ruled harshly, taken advantage of her, and oppressed her into servitude.

Aha! But you remember that the true definition of salvation is that Jesus, the 2<sup>nd</sup> man has reversed the curse of Adam. Jesus has come and brought healing even to this relationship, and woman can, in Christian community and in Christian marriage, serve in her true capacity and glory as an ambassador.

Ladies, this is one reason why God says "Don't be unequally yoked". Christian marriage promises you an honored position, don't throw that away.

Now mine is not a teaching to instigate the womenfolk among us to go home and overturn the tables . . . no. Mine is a teaching to say 3 things as a conclusion

1. **Women recognize the honoured place God gave you** when he took a title he used on himself and graced you with it. Live up to that calling and nothing less. Scripture gives us one example of a woman living up to that calling . . . Prov 31

*PR 31:10 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.*

*She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it*

*is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls.*

*She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.*

*She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.*

*Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.*

*Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:*

2. Mine is a teaching that says "**Men, if only we knew what God has given us in these women, we would sit back astounded!**" We should do everything to free, facilitate and empower our womenfolk back to the state of Glory that rightfully belongs to them.

I once heard a conversation between 2 women where the one argued that a wife needs to be beaten once in a while because it shows that the husband still notices her – what rubbish! We have so subjugated our womenfolk that one would even believe that a beating is good for her? In the end we are the losers.

Prov 31 ends by saying "*Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.*" When the women excel it is a blessing to all of us. So men, do everything to enable your wife, your sister, your daughters to excel. I keep telling my daughters they will be the next president of this land. I don't have sons, but my daughters have learnt everything I would have taught my sons and more.. I have a daughter who has the greatest budding voice in this country. I have a daughter who is going to be your first woman president, and I have the next Attorney General of Kenya growing up

in my house. Right now you have the best Children's Pastor this country has ever produced, and you ain't seen anything yet!

3. Thirdly – **Christ has come and reversed the curse.** Our Christian relationships, marriages, and community life should show this. The curse on woman has been healed. Women hold an esteemed place among us, they are ambassadors and deliverers! This is the one community where they find their true self and rest. This community does not take advantage of them as labourers, as sex objects or as subservient messengers. The world may do that, but not the Christian community! Plato was wrong – women are not wana-be males – they are **WOMEN**

So, lets all go home and digest this, and ask what needs to change in my self image, in my relationship with my daughter, my wife? What do I need to confess before God? And yes **Woodex**, you can still be boss, but you have a woman in the house ! **WOW**.