

Easter's New Creation: Woman's Identity Restored



Countless are the glories of springtime in Minnesota. As winter's cold, dark days become warm and sunny, the thawing earth bursts with flowers, delighting the senses. These dazzling reminders of life out of death celebrate God's faithfulness in Christ, speaking to our spirits that sin's grip over all creation is ultimately doomed! Vividly, the events of Easter recorded in Scripture declare God's conquest over sin. Both sin and redemption began in a garden: one was a paradise where sin and male-rule eventually distorted the mutuality God intended for Adam and Eve. The other garden was outside Christ's tomb, where sin and male-rule were conquered on Calvary.¹

Echoes of Eden

Who has not been captivated by the glories of Eden? In God's perfect world, man and woman are both clothed in flesh. Without shame, they stand side by side in God's image. They share the same identity and calling. God calls both to care for the world as God's representatives (Gen. 1:26–29). Neither Adam nor Eve has authority over the other. Their rule over Eden was mutual. In oneness of body and purpose, man and woman cared for the world in God's image, with God's character. And this, God said, was very good (Gen. 1:31).

Tragically, the sinless harmony of Eden did not endure. Both Adam and Eve chose to defy God, and the consequences of sin have since distorted God's perfect world (Gen. 3:1–7). Male dominance upends their shared governance, and male-rule disfigures women's essential dignity and agency. Male authority defines women as men's inferior rather than as God's image-bearers and co-governors. Male-rule marginalizes women's gifts and silences their voices. No longer is there a shared authority where men and women's moral influence and leadership care for the world God entrusted to them.

Without the oneness of male and female mutuality so vividly celebrated in Genesis, a sin-driven world presents woman not as a kindred image-bearer, but as one who should be ruled. Her diminishment as a strong rescue for Adam (Gen. 2:18) to one ruled by him (Gen. 3:16) has been the source of enormous abuse and trauma throughout human history. As patriarchy enforces gender roles, it also furthers systems of impunity, dominance, power, and an absence of empathy—essential qualities of abusive systems.² In such a world, both men and women navigate

the sinful perils of patriarchy. Even so, male dominance could not destroy God's image and agency in women.

Despite a patriarchal culture, women in the Bible served God as prophets, judges, and military and business leaders (Judg. 4:4–5, 17; 5:7; 1 Sam. 25). These examples are echoes of Eden—where Eve governed beside Adam as a strong rescue in a sinless world. Equally, they remind us that we await the promised Savior, the child who would crush sin on our behalf (Gen. 3:15).

Easter's Restoration

In Jesus, we encounter the sinless man who welcomed women as God's imager-bearers created for shared dominion. In Christ, women found healing from the shame and trauma of patriarchy. He opposed the demeaning of their bodies just as he challenged gender roles by including women as students and disciples (Luke 10:38–42), trusted witnesses, and apostles (John 20:11–18). What other teacher from antiquity (or even the modern era) went first to women at the margins? Christ honored the Samaritan woman shamed by many husbands (John 4:3–42); the Syrophenician woman considered a dog (Mark 7:24–30); the bleeding woman excluded from the temple (Mark 5:24–34); the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11); and the woman whose priestly anointing Christians have celebrated for more than two thousand years (Matt. 26:10).

Through his life, death, and resurrection, Christ crushed the “head” of patriarchy, making visible women's dignity, worth, and agency. We see this clearly after his death and resurrection when Christ appeared first to women and enlisted them as witnesses and evangelists, even and especially in a world where women's experiences were ridiculed and deemed unreliable (Matt. 28:5–20). At the climax of human history, on Easter morning, women were the first to declare what all creation had longed for: God's victory over sin and death!

Yet, as the men struggled to believe the women's encounter with the risen Christ outside the garden tomb, Christ appeared to them behind locked doors. What did Christ do? He breathed on all of them and said, “Shalom—Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. . . Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:21–23). Jesus gave his disciples, both

male and female, shared spiritual governance, just as God gave Adam and Eve shared governance in the first garden in Eden (Gen. 1:26–28).

The history of Christ's redemption of sin and conquest over patriarchy is why we find women and men leading side by side in the early church. Many women served as Paul's coworkers, planting and leading house churches, serving as teachers, deacons, prophets, evangelists, and apostles (Rom. 16:1–15). Throughout Christian history, women served Christ as preachers, Bible translators, missionaries, and martyrs. Women carried their crosses and declared Christ risen to every corner of the world. The strength of the

church has depended on women's witness and leadership on Easter morning and every day since. Thanks be to God. He is risen! We are restored! He has risen indeed! Alleluia!

Notes

1. Many of my reflections here are inspired by N.T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).
2. See William Wan, "What Makes Some Men Sexual Harassers? Science Tries to Explain the Creeps of the World," *The Washington Post*, 22 Dec 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2017/12/20/what-makes-some-men-sexual-harassers-science-tries-to-explain-the-harvey-weinsteins-of-the-world/>.

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