

The Curse upon the Woman

Genesis 3:165

v.1 “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”

That’s where it all started, where the first temptation to sin came to our first parents. And as we read this historical account of the fall, we read that Satan comes first to the woman. The serpent came to the woman first, to deceive her. And so we read about her sin, and the sin of Adam who was “with her”, according to verse 6.

They gave up all that God given them, in terms of their communion and fellowship with him in the garden of Eden. They gave up all the blessings of spiritual life which God had given them, life without sin. They gave up their innocence, gaining for themselves not only the knowledge of good but also of evil. And to express outwardly the guilt of that sin, and the shame of their guilt, they immediately covered themselves.

v.7 “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.”

That symbolism of covering their shame represented their shame in the presence of God, and so they hid from him as well.

v.8 “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

Such a foolish endeavor, isn’t it? Trying to hide from God. Though people still do it today—don’t they?— thinking to

themselves so foolishly that God simply doesn’t see their sin, that they can go on in their sin and rebellion against God without any consequences. But there is a consequence to sin. It is called death. God had promised that curse when he created men,

Gen. 2:16 “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Or, in the language of the New Testament, Romans 6:23, “the wages of sin is death.”

That death which God threatened, promised, is expressed in the form of what we call the curse. We saw the first element of that curse last week, the curse upon the serpent, which is the curse upon Satan. It was a curse of humiliating restraint and overwhelming dominance upon Satan, who had appeared in the form that serpent.

v.14 So the LORD God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life.”

God would rule over Satan. And, ultimately, God would provide the great victory in the spiritual realms over Satan, promising the incarnation of his only-begotten son as the instrument of his judgment upon Satan, noting in verse 15 that although Satan would cause harm to the seed of the woman, to Jesus, denoted by the words, “you shall bruise his heel,” there was a far greater curse inflicted upon Satan himself. The seed of the woman, Jesus, would bruise his head. Crush his head might be even more accurate. It is a picture of total and absolute victory, which Jesus would accomplish.

So Satan is now bound, restrained, for the whole of this age symbolically identified as a thousand years, as we read in,

Rev. 20:1 “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.”

We know what will become of Satan at the end of this age, when Jesus returns in glory. The simple explanation is the word hell. More descriptively,

Rev. 20:10 “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

So that’s the curse of Satan. Now we come to the curse upon the woman, which is our focus this morning. Next week, the climactic curse of death is pronounced upon man, the curse of death just as God had threatened.

v.19 “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”

But that’s next week. Today, the woman. And I want you to notice something particular about this curse upon her, the curse upon Eve as the first woman. It is,

I. A CURSE UPON HER DISTINCTIVE FUNCTION AS A WOMAN.

We live in such a crazy world, such a crazy intentionally-deceived world. We live in a world where the prevailing spirit of our age is to eliminate and destroy the distinction between male

and female. God made man, human beings, male and female. And there is something so incredibly obvious but astonishingly denied today, namely the distinction between male and female. Today it is as if you could be one or the other according to your own choice, according to your own self-identification, as if by that personal expression you can deny the obvious reality of God’s creation. You can move with fluidity between genders, or you can reject your existence in either gender, non-binary is the buzzword of the day.

All of that comes to us in the context of the desire to obliterate the distinction which God has created between male and female, man and woman. Ultimately, God’s curse is upon that rebellion against God as Paul would describe in,

Rom. 1: 18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”

Let me proclaim something that God has made known, that God has made evident and manifest. Women conceive children. A woman is created by God to conceive in her own body new human life. A woman is created by God to provide the nourishment of that new baby, through her own body. A woman does that, not a man. A woman is created to do that, by the obvious reality of her own reproductive organs. Only a woman can do that, because only a woman is designed by God, created by God, to do that. That is her distinctive function.

There is a lot of talk today about distinctive roles and functions of men and women, and I fear that some or even many of the distinctions between masculinity and femininity are not biblical distinctions at all. There is not separate list of the fruit of the spirit for men and for women. Men and women are called to bear that

fruit.

Gal. 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

And even if you think that women, by nature, tend to be more gentle and tender, which is often the case, still we read of the apostolic example of Paul,

1 Thes. 2:7 “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.”

So gentle and affectionate love is not a definition of femininity, it is definition of godliness, for men and women. But here is the distinctive feminine role which God has designed for females, conception. Bringing forth children.

I don’t mean by that you are not as much of a woman if you don’t have children, or if you are not married. Or, in God’s providence, not able to conceive children. Some of God’s people remain single, some even married find conception difficult if not impossible. But in the broadest sense of the distinctive function of a woman created as such by God, she is one whom God has made to carry within her own body the next generation of human life. And it is that distinctive female function which is the focus of the curse.

The woman was deceived first, and the woman thus receives the curse first. It is not hard to understand nor do I need to offer much explanation.

A. The joy of conceiving human life will be afflicted with suffering.

That’s part of the curse of death! That’s part of what it means to die—it includes all the sorrow and suffering the precedes death itself. The curse of death includes the curse of sickness and injury, and the this curse upon the woman is such that her most distinctive function that she alone can perform, which ought to be her greatest joy and delight in life, is one that now includes sorrow. Great suffering.

v.16 “To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children.”

I don’t like to speak hypothetically, because we are always much safer speaking in terms of reality, but hypothetically, if there had been no sin there would be no pain in childbirth. If there had been no sin, the female human body as designed by God would conceive and bear children without harm or danger, without sorrow or pain. But there is sin. And there is the curse. So even that distinctive function which remains for many women as the greatest joy of their lives, even that special ability that God gave to her alone as female, even the ability to bring forth life, even that is curse with the suffering of death. At the very least, there is much pain involved. At times, and especially before there was modern medical care, there was often death. Many a woman has physically died in the very act which God had created her to do, to bring forth children. So great, so awful, is this curse inflicted by God because of our sin.

Interesting, our use of words today as well, for we speak of the actual birth as a deliverance from than pain and suffering. Birth is not typically described as a joy and delight, but as a deliverance. So we say that a woman delivers a baby, delivering from suffering in order to gain the joy of that baby.

And there is still great joy associated with having a child.

There is still great joy in the awareness of new life, and the new life of a new baby remains a great delight, even in this context of having to endure much pain. And many a woman would testify of that joy even as they acknowledge the pain. But still this process of childbearing is frequently identified in Scripture as the postponement of that joy. I want to consider that idea as today as part of the curse.

B. The joy of bringing forth life will be postponed.

Bearing children, delivering children, is used to define that for which we must still wait, something good that we must wait for as we endure sorrow and trouble. So the whole of this age can be seen symbolically as a pregnancy, or even more pointedly, as the hours of labor to be endured before birth. Consider,

John 16:19 “Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? 20 Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. 21 A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”

Our whole lives can be defined by this same image of birth pains, in the anticipation of a joy for which we have to wait. And that’s the curse—having to wait for the promised joy of our eternal glory. Paul uses these words,

Rom. 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation

eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”

The curse is that now, even as believers, we have to enduring suffering as we wait for the promise of life to be fully ours. So we groan, with birth pangs, awaiting the restoration of life. “The creation was subjected to futility.” That’s the curse, symbolized by the labor pains of a woman. The joy of bringing forth life, the joy of life as a whole, is postponed.

That’s half the curse which we read in verse 16. Let’s continue.

v.16 “To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; [Then...] Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.”

What do those words mean? Lots of people have offered interpretations of that curse. Lots of differing ideas. Lots of books written, lots of articles and chapters authored. And I don’t want to get bogged down in all those differing opinions. I’ll declare and proclaim what I believe is the best explanation, which view I hold with a settled conviction, despite the variety of other possible interpretations. But let me start on safe ground, in broad terms, which is to say that this is,

II. A CURSE UPON HER DISTINCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH HER HUSBAND.

Whatever these words do mean, clearly the curse is upon the relationship between husband and wife. Not that every woman is married, as I said before, but that is the ordinary experience, allowing still for exceptions. But in the big picture, in the overall picture of the world, God has made man male and female such that a husband and wife together can reproduce so that the human race would continue.

But under the curse, that distinctive relationship between husband and wife is harmed. The question is, how? In what way? And my answer is this, that both the phrases at the end of verse 16 refer to the curse, two specific aspects of the curse. Thus both phrases describe a sinful rejection of the pattern and behavior God has prescribed for husband and wife. Both phrases describe the result of the fall in that marital relationship, describing a failure by both the woman and man. And that is the curse. Husbands and wives would no longer live in perfect harmony. Because of sin, because of the fall and the sinful nature inherited from Adam and Eve, because of this curse, the marital relationship is strained. By two things. I have them identified on my outline. And the first is, as a curse pronounced upon the woman,

A. The curse of her temptation to rule.

v.16 “Your desire shall be for your husband.”

“Desire” there is not merely something which you wish for. It is not simply something you ask for or long for. Rather, the whole personality is involved in the desire, it is the inclination of the soul. A deep, intense and pervasive longing or craving.

Now, in one sense that seems very good. A woman should have desire for her husband. But in this context of a curse, the word “desire” takes on the implication of desire for control, desire

for dominance, desire to rule. Such desires are opposed to the relationship which God established, in which a woman would honor and submit to her husband.

Therefore, because of the fall, because of her inherited sinful nature, because of God’s curse, a woman will seek to be freed from the authority of her husband, she will chafe under that authority, and submission will become something entirely undesirable. Her desire would become one of control. To love and cherish becomes to desire and dominate. To respect her husband becomes to govern her husband, to rule him rather than submit to him. That’s the curse upon the marital relationship. And I believe the next phrase also reflects that curse, the effect of the curse upon the husband such that this marital relationship is also harmed. In fact, this aspect of the curse referring to the sin of men and husbands is a curse upon the woman because she is one most often harmed. It is,

B. The curse of her husband’s temptation to rule with oppression.

Again, my emphasis and understanding of this verse is the whole verse describes the effects of sin. That’s the curse. The woman fails in her responsibility, and her marital relationship is therefore harmed. And the man fails in his responsibility, and her marital relationship is also harmed. So the curse upon the woman, in this context, is the man, the husband is tempted to be oppressive. The man is tempted to be abusive, and the woman is harmed. Instead of loving her with the willingness to lay down his own life for her, her husband would dominate her, rule over her. Those words clearly imply a harsh and demanding rule, the dictatorship mentality--the chauvinistic, self-centered male dominance that is often played out even in Christian families today. Women tend to want control, and men tend to want to be selfish.

Interesting, isn't it, that the Scriptures don't command a man to rule his wife. The Bible instructs wives to submit to their husbands, the corresponding role is not a command to exercise authority but to love. The duty to exercise authority is a responsibility, not a privilege. It is a duty, not an entitlement. And in the exercise of that responsibility, a husband is called to lay down his life for his wife, as Jesus did for his bride, the church. But the curse ruined, perverted, all of that. Now the man demands his rights, subjects the woman to his every need and desire, and demands of her an unqualified submission while being unwilling to love her as he is commanded to do!

Because of this curse, marriage is a lot of work today, and despite the great joys still available to those who walk according to God's ways, and there are great joys, but there is still great pain. No relationship is perfect, and no relationship is spared from the effects of the curse. And that is abundantly obvious in our society today!

That's what sin does, and the curse is but God's declaration of the results of sin. God is not imposing upon the woman some sort of external curse, as might be the case with the pain of childbearing, but here the curse are the direct effects of sin itself. The woman seeks to be dominant. And the man becomes abusive. The woman desire to govern herself and the man becomes overbearing. Needless to say, it's a recipe for disaster. It's a recipe for misery, and that's the curse. The curse of misery. Rather than enjoying the distinctive male-female marital relationship, Adam and Eve are cursed to endure the pain and suffering so common still to so many marriages today. Conflict, discord, even trauma and injury. Instead of being able to enjoy the delight of a husband and wife living together in marriage as God designed for them at creation before the fall, they become antagonists. Even enemies. What God designed to be so very

good becomes the context for some of the greatest pain mankind can possibly experience. Sadly, I know that some of you have endured such pain in your own lives, including the pains of divorce. I don't need to explain to you why psychologists of our day consistently identify divorce as such a dramatic cause of stress and pain second only to the death of a spouse.

That's the curse. The curse of a woman's temptation to rule and the temptation of the man to rule with oppression. When that happens, God's blessing upon the distinctive relationship of a husband and wife is gone.

v.16 "To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you."

I can't end my sermon here. I can't end simply by declaring to you that the curse pronounced upon the woman means that she will suffer in the process of bearing children and she will be compelled to endure the dreadful pains of broken marriages because of sin. I can't declare all of that and then end the sermon, because my calling is to preach the gospel. That includes this awareness of the curse and the awareness of the effects of the curse, but it also includes the only possible solution. So we study the curse imposed upon the the woman and then the man so that we might more readily understand that it is that curse from which Jesus sets us free.

Gal. 3:13 "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us."

Sadly, until the last enemy, death, is destroyed at the end of this age, we will continue to live in a fallen world subject to this curse, but as there is salvation now through Jesus, there is all the more a living hope of what yet lies ahead. So as you endure the inescapable consequences of living in a fallen world, still this

hope I proclaim to you, that you might trust and believe in the Lord Jesus. This is what lies ahead,

Rev. 21:1 “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

And then Jesus says to us,

Rev. 21:6 “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. 7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”