

Reclaiming the Power of Marriage

Genesis 3

*“...and to put on the **new self**, created after the **likeness of God** in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Ephesians 4:24

REVIEW FROM LAST WEEK:

We started by taking a look at the **perfect marriage**, not one found in our experience but one that was laid out by God in Genesis 1-2. Adam and Eve were created in the **image of God** and after **His likeness**, which means that the purpose of life and marriage is to be His representatives, to both grow in understanding of and reflect forth His glory in all of life. The means to do that was to **multiply and fill the earth**, displaying His glory and goodness to all places. Adam was given the role to **work and keep** the Garden, meaning he was to serve and protect it as a stewardship. He was also given the **word of the Lord** as to eat of every tree *except* the tree of *knowledge of good and evil*. But Adam was **alone**, meaning he could not fulfill God's purpose for him without another, so in His infinite wisdom and grace, gave Adam a *woman*, taken from him, who was a perfect fit, a corresponding helper to accomplish what God had given. Eve was also made fully in God's image and after His likeness, and when Adam saw her, he spoke in **covenant language** and excited fulfillment that 'at last' there was one for him. Adam and Eve had pure intimacy, selfless sexual interaction ("one flesh"), nothing hidden, and shameless communication. There was no disputing of creative order, no railing against roles, and no competition in serving each other. **But it did not last long...**

We left everyone with **2 Questions** to contemplate as we concluded:

- 1) *What would be the mission statement if someone observed your marriage currently? What would they say you value, or what you are living for?*
- 2) *What would be a mission statement if God's glory was your end goal?*

Would anyone like to share what you came up with?

As we transition to the *ideal to the real*, we will look at what happened to marriage, why it's so hard, and how the gospel redeems and restores to make the ideal possible once again.

If someone asked you if they are ready to be married, what would you tell them? What are the Biblical requirements and principles?

- **Equally yoked together** – The principle of 2 Corinthians 6:14 plays out in marriage, as we would say that God would agree with two *unbelievers* getting married and two *believers* getting married. However, if one is a believer and the other is not, we **WOULD NOT** agree with or partner in it.
- **Sexually Pure** – 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 lays out how to know God's will, and it has everything to do with **abstaining** (stay as far away as you can) from sexual immorality, to be self-controlled (or Spirit controlled) in holiness and honor, and not driven by lust like those who do not know God.

Sexual immorality can become an anchor that you bring into your marriage. However, there is ALWAYS forgiveness from repentance and renewed purity that is possible. Almost every **post-marital crisis counseling** is a result of unrepentant, un-addressed, and un-dealt with sexual immorality before marriage.

- **Be prepared to love volitionally and unconditionally** – Feelings are fleeting, emotions wane, and there will absolutely come a time where the person in front of you seems different than the one that you married. This is also why we would say *be a person of Godly character*, which is refined over time, and marry a *person of character*. Character grows, personality stays flat, and physical beauty can fade, so invest in someone who is growing in the right areas. Biblical love is one of choice, volition, and commitment, and our covenant to love makes the next million choices to love the person to whom we say “I Do”
- **Anticipate God changing YOU through your marriage** – Marriage is the great *revealer*, as sin WILL come out, including some ugly stuff you never even knew was there. But far too often people go into marriage hoping God will change the **other person**, and they see *potential* instead of choosing to love what is. When we get focused on trying to change the other person instead of loving the person in front of us, we are tempted to **manipulate and control**. If I move into marriage prepared for God to change me into the image of Christ, I take all the good, hard, bad, unexpected, and ugly as an opportunity to trust the Lord more, resting in Him, and maturing as a result. As God reveals the muck of my life, I remember I’ve married someone who has committed to love me unconditionally, walking with me as God changes me.

Now, suffice to say, I’m not sure many have this grid in thinking about marriage, which means they are **unprepared when the inevitable problems come**. Remember, marriage is matching two sinners who are equal before the Lord but vastly different by design into close quarters for years, which will absolutely yield conflict, misunderstandings, and frustration. In fact, here are some, in no particular order:

- **Lack of Communication** (Criticism, contempt, stonewalling, poor listening, anger outburst, etc.)
- **Financial Tension** (hidden debt or spending, lack of planning, or not enough)
- **Lack of Intimacy** (not enough sex, changing of physical features, feeling disconnected)
- **Infidelity** (breakdown of trust)
- **Parenting** (stress, differences, lack of time together)
- **Unrealistic Expectations** (lack of grace given, unable to please)
- **Abuse** (Physical, sexual, and verbal)
- **Substance Abuse**
- **Trauma** (Infertility, loss of life, medical issues)
- **In-Law issues or expectations**

Why are these so common? Where do they come from? Is there a solution? Again, in order to understand how to walk through these **real issues**, we must understand that most are mere symptoms of something much deeper than a lack of compatibility. In fact, we are ALL behind the 8-ball when we get married, and it has little to do with personality or upbringing, but has EVERYTHING to do with what we drag into marriage: **our own sin nature!** How we deal with that is the difference between a redeemed, Christ-focused, joy filled, sacrificial, humble, selfless, and satisfied marriage and one that is always wondering what is missing, and filling in the blank constantly with the wrong answer.

Sins subtle roar enters the world (Genesis 3:1-6)

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “**Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?**”² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, **neither shall you touch it**, lest you die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, **and you will be like God**, knowing good and evil.”⁶ **So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.***

Let’s make some observations together. Notice that the serpent was **crafty**, meaning he dealt in subtleties, in deception, rather than full frontal attacks. He used **three tried and true tactics** that are still in play today:

1. **Can God be trusted?** – “*Did God actually say?*” is a foundational lie from which all other lies come.
2. **Is God really good?** – “*You will be like God*” is the lie that somehow God was holding something back from man. Remember, God made us to **recognize and reflect HIS GLORY, not seek our own**. The temptation is to think there is a better way in life and marriage, which is what we believe every time we step out of line from Biblical truth and sovereignty, from *lust to being controlling*, we are looking to do it our own way.
3. **Is God enough?** “*Tree was good for food and a delight to her eyes, and the tree was desired to make one wise...*” This is absolutely still in play today: *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world (1 John 2:15-16).* God did not withhold from Adam and Eve, and everything He gave was for their best.

Where do these lies play out in our marriages or our view of marriage?

Now there is something else that happened in this exchange. The serpent went to Eve first. Why? **1 Timothy 2:13-14** gives us a clue:

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Does this mean Eve was weak or unable to understand deception? No, but it does point out that Adam had **loving responsibility** to protect and lead his wife through temptation and deception. Remember, Adam was given the **Word of the Lord**, not Eve. He was to teach his family and lead them from God’s Word.

The next question: **Who sinned first here?** It’s clear that Eve did. But who was held responsible forever? Adam (see Romans 5:12-21)!

Final Question: **Where was Adam?** Look at 3:6 again. *Why was Adam silent in the whole interaction between Eve and the Serpent? What does this help us see about the struggle with have with leadership and even being a helpmate?*

Sins rebel yell affects every marriage (Genesis 3:7-13)

*Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew **that they were naked**. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

*⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife **hid themselves from the presence of the LORD** God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² **The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."** ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, **"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."***

There are at least **three key effects of sin** that Adam and Eve experienced that every marriage struggles with as a result, at least to some degree:

- 1) **Moved from shameless intimacy to covered protection** – Shame was introduced to marriage. Now there is motivation to hide, whether its sin, insecurity, or parts of us we do not want the other to know. This kind of shame can kill marital intimacy.
- 2) **Moved from open relationship with the Lord to moving away in FEAR** – **1 John 4:18** reminds us that fear has to do with punishment, and here Adam and Eve knew they had sinned (in which case the serpent told them they would know good and evil!). When we are afraid of punishment, instead of running TO God, we run away and hide – again, trying to hide our sin from God, others, and our spouse.
- 3) **Moved from loving responsibility to BLAME-SHIFTING** – Perhaps more than any other relationship, marriage tempts us to **deflect responsibility**. We surely can point out the sin of our spouse but fail to see our own. Notice Adam blamed BOTH his wife and God – the same wife he was previously exhilarated by, now he was willing to throw her under the bus! Eve blamed the serpent. Neither was willing to **take or own their own part of the problem**. This has plagued marriage since this interaction. And sometimes we don't respond to our own sin by **deflecting but rather by DEFLATING**: *"I'm so terrible...I'll never change...I'm the worst"* which translates to 'give ME pity' or 'don't ask me to actually change'. Blame shifting avoids addressing sin by casting responsibility somewhere else and moving on, **self-condemnation avoids addressing sin by giving up. BUT THE RESULT IS THE SAME: we run from responsibility for sin and it lives to fight another day.**

Sins lingering echo corrupts God's design (3:16-19)

Unfortunately, sin was not done and there were more lasting consequences that we deal with today in life and marriage:

¹⁶ **To the woman he said,**
*"I will surely multiply your **pain** in childbearing;
 in **pain** you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you."*

¹⁷ **And to Adam he said,**
*"Because you have listened to the voice of your
 wife
 and have eaten of the tree
 of which I commanded you,
 'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;*

*in **pain** you shall eat of it all the days of your
 life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for
 you;
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ **By the sweat of your face**
 you shall eat bread,
 till you return to the ground,
 for out of it you were taken;
 for you are dust,
 and to dust you shall return."*

CURSE TO WOMEN:

- 1) Now to fulfill the mission God has for mankind – to multiply and fill the earth, it will come at the cost of PAIN (at least before epidurals)
 - 2) Eve's desire would be 'set against' her husband – The same word is used in Genesis 4:7 when God warns Cain that sin's desire is set against him but he must rule over it. Both 'desire' and 'rule' are not benevolent actions. Before sin, Eve gladly submitted to God's placement of Adam over her as he lovingly led her. But now her built in temptation is **control** while his is **tyrannical rule**. God's design is turned on its head because of sin. Now instead of selfless, sacrificial love and help, power play dynamics are at work:
- Curse is seen every time you use your spouse's sin to prove your own moral superiority
 - Curse is seen when you keep score in marriage (I'll forgive you, but now you owe me)
 - Curse is seen when we play *quid pro quo* games (I'll do ____ if you do ____; or I'll withhold ____ unless you do ____)
 - Curse is seen when you relish the opportunity to point out your spouse's sin, or nitpick, or put them in their place.
 - Curse is seen when out of frustration, you lash out verbally or physically at your spouse, instead of responding in calm, gentle, and patient love

The curse extracts a key ingredient needed in every marriage: **GRACE**. We see our spouse through our own set of expectations, and anything short leaves us frustrated with them, seeing them as a roadblock to happiness. Grace does not seek to control but seeks to truly help, to listen, to encourage, to build-up, and to stop comparing with others.

CURSE TO MEN:

- 1) **Failure to lead created a world set against us** – Rather than working and protecting the Garden, the world is now set against us – thorns, thistles, and sweat of the brow will be needed to bring forth its yield. Instead of pure worship, work will be hard.
- 2) **Curse of the ground did NOT nullify the responsibility to lead** – Now Adam had all the same responsibilities to lead, protect, and provide, except now it will be done with pain
- 3) **Curse resulted in the problem of DEATH** – Sin breeds death. Now they would not live forever but face impending death, returning to the same dust from which they were created.

What are the practical implications of this for men?

- Curse now brings **frustration and anger** to the forefront with men. Leading is hard. Now he is called to lead a wife that will by nature be set against him, a world that is plagued by sinful consequences (thorns and thistles), and still be a provider, protector, and spiritual guide. Men are prone now to trying to **rule** because loving, humble, selfless leadership still faces these challenges.
- Curse now bring **pressure**, and men do not always know how to deal with pressure – In the face of pressure, men have a propensity to wilt, to leave, or find a pressure release somewhere else. This is why men turn to alcohol after work, or gaming at night, or pornography. These are all the same symptom of a deeper issue. Each of these things presents a **fantasy world that can be controlled**, since the world around them and the people around them are seemingly against him. Men turn to these when they feel like they have failed, or are disrespected, or can't do anything right, or find no encouragement around.

So this is the plight. You can see where marriages can get to impasse, as each spouse believes they have it the hardest, that their position is worse than the other, and if the other spouse would simply do what *they* wanted them to do, everything would be fine. The answer is found NOT in changing your spouse, but in God transforming YOU! *How does God transform us? Through the glorious nature and power of the gospel!*

Sins silenced voice at the cross

At the end of Genesis 3, God graciously escorted Adam and Eve out of the Garden so that they did not eat of the *Tree of Life* and live forever in their pitied, distorted state (Gen. 3:22-24). They were covered in animal skins, which was the first echo of atoning work done on behalf of mankind, where something else had to die so they could live (Gen. 3:20). But God also imbedded the hope of redemption in His curse to the Serpent, where the offspring of Eve – which points to Christ – would crush the head of the Serpent, ending his influence and short term victory (see Romans 16:20). The serpent would crush the offspring's heel, which would cause suffering but not defeat.

This all points to the glorious fulfillment in Jesus Christ, which answers our questions about reconciliation to God, the problem of sin, and how we deal with physical, spiritual, and eternal death. But it also answers the question about how we can reverse the curse's effects in our marriages. *How does a husband lead when everything is set against him? How does a wife follow a selfish and imperfect husband? How do I continue to walk faithfully when my spouse continues to fail or not keep up their end of the bargain? Where does joy come from in an imperfect marriage?*

The answer to these questions are deeply rooted in the same answer, and the next 3 times together will try to unpack the realities of how the gospel reverses the curse in life and marriage.

*Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to **put off your old self**, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be **renewed** in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to **put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.***

Ephesians 4:17-24