

## Sermon 2, The Origin of Judgment: Human Sin Cursed by God, Gen. 3

**Proposition:** God disciplined Adam and Eve, and punished the serpent, for their first disobedience.

- I. The Serpent Succeeds, vv. 1-6
- II. The Humans Hide, vv. 7-8
  - A. Behind Leaves, v. 7
  - B. Behind Trees, v. 8
- III. God Judges, vv. 9-24
  - A. Depositions, vv. 9-13
    1. The Man Deposed, vv. 9-12
    2. The Woman Deposed, v. 13
  - B. Sentences, vv. 14-19
    1. The Serpent Sentenced, vv. 14-15
      - a) He is cursed, v. 14a
      - b) He will lick the dust, v. 14b
      - c) He will be crushed by the woman's seed, v. 15
    2. The Woman Sentenced, v. 16
      - a) Pain in childbearing, v. 16a
      - b) Subjection to her husband's rule, v. 16b
    3. The Man Sentenced, vv. 17-19
      - a) The ground is cursed with weeds and infertility, vv. 17b-18a
      - b) The man will have to toil to eat, vv. 18b-19a
      - c) The man will die, v. 19b
  - C. Acts of Clemency, vv. 20-23
    1. Life will continue, v. 20
    2. God will cover sin, v. 21
    3. God will not allow eternal life on our terms, vv. 22-23
  - D. A Final Punishment: Exile from Life in God's Presence, v. 24

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we saw last week the need to beware of gloating when judgment falls on the wicked. But this morning, we will look at the origin of judgment. When did judgment begin, anyway? It began in the Garden of Eden, long ago and far away. What we'll see this morning is that God disciplined Adam and Eve and punished the serpent for their first disobedience. In short, judgment came into the world because of sin. The

reason we have wars, disasters, plagues, and punishments is that we sinned against God in the beginning in the person of our first father Adam.

### **I. The Serpent Succeeds, vv. 1-6**

Now, obviously there is a great deal to be said about this chapter. The riches of these early parts of Genesis cannot be exhausted in a single sermon, or a half-dozen. So we're not going to talk about how the temptation went. We are only going to observe that the serpent succeeded in his mission of tempting the woman and her husband. But before we move on, I want to ask a single question: Where did the serpent come from?

We are looking at this passage, and many others, under the heading of "judgment." What can we learn about God's judgments here? The first thing we can learn, I submit, is that not every difficulty or hardship is a judgment! Adam hadn't done anything wrong, and yet God allowed this snake into the Garden to whisper evil counsels to his wife. Most of us would regard an interview with Satan as a pretty terrible thing to be subjected to. Perhaps you would rather spend ten years in prison than ten minutes in the presence of the prince of darkness. But somehow, God let this snake come in. Adam never asked for a serpent. Adam didn't do anything that made him deserve to have Satan invade his pleasant garden.

So bad things can come into your life and not be judgments. Pain and difficulty can enter your life, but not necessarily be judgments. We might instead call them "tests." God uses them to reveal our own hearts to us. And boy did this test reveal Adam and Eve's hearts.

### **II. The Humans Hide, vv. 7-8**

What did they do after they so casually ate? They hid. Their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked. In other words, they realized that they were exposed, that there was something shameful about the human person, something that needed to be covered. Imagine going to some conference or something at a hotel. All of the tables are covered with those floor-length black drapes, except one. It's just a regular old folding table, standing there buck naked. Imagine how that table feels. It is out of place. It is a blot on the landscape of that hotel.

#### **A. Behind Leaves, v. 7**

Well, that's how Adam and Eve felt. They went and sowed leaves together and made themselves coverings of a sort to hide their sin and shame.

#### **B. Behind Trees, v. 8**

Of course, those coverings were quickly revealed as inadequate when they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden. That voice penetrated right through the measly garments of fig leaves. It came to them and made them afraid. A single leaf was not thick enough, and so they got behind whole tree trunks.

This, of course, is already a judgment. They had loved to be with God. Now they hide from Him. If leaves can't hide from Him, trees can't either. But this sense of alienation from God, of not wanting to see the one in whom you live and move and have your being, is clearly a consequence of sin and thus a judgment on it.

### **III. God Judges, vv. 9-24**

But judgment in the full sense, in the sense of a penalty or consequence imposed by a greater authority for some breach of the rules, only now arrives. God begins to speak to Adam.

#### **A. Depositions, vv. 9-13**

Though as the omniscient judge it would have been perfectly appropriate to Him, God does not immediately pronounce sentence on the guilty parties. Instead, He first takes depositions, asking the man and the woman what happened. Why does He do this? He does it because of His mercy and grace. He cares for His creation, and He treats us in accord with our natures. He does not condemn them unheard.

##### **1. The Man Deposed, vv. 9-12**

So what testimony does Adam give? He admits his fear, his nakedness, and his hiding. When God asks him how he knew that he was naked, and whether he was guilty of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam doesn't take it like a man. Instead, he promptly blames his wife and God Himself.

God gave Adam a chance to give testimony in the case, to say why he was not guilty of eating the forbidden fruit. This is the best Adam could come up with. Just as any judge will tell that the best thing you can do in your own defense is to say nothing, so we all look at our first father and wish that he had said nothing. That would have been far better than what he did say. Of course, we are no better. You and I love to cast the blame wherever we can. But I think even highly biased observers like ourselves can see that Adam's excuse was absolutely pathetic. All he managed to do was blame the Almighty and complain about the best thing that had ever happened to him (viz., Eve).

So Adam has given his deposition. The results are far from encouraging. He only blamed the judge and his wife, and admitted his guilt.

##### **2. The Woman Deposed, v. 13**

The woman's deposition is only slightly better. While she avoids blaming God, her defense is "The devil made me do it." "I had no idea he was lying! I swallowed it all, hook, line, and forbidden fruit." Brothers and sisters, again, as biased as we are in favor of Eve, can we acquit her on the basis of testimony like this? I should say not.

The Lord did not ask Satan for a deposition. Instead, He moves immediately to the process of sentencing.

#### **B. Sentences, vv. 14-19**

##### **1. The Serpent Sentenced, vv. 14-15**

Here, then, we see judgment proper begin. Here we see a penalty imposed for the violation of the law. Not every bad thing in your life is a penalty. But every penalty is going to be a bad thing — something you wish you didn't have.

###### **a) He is cursed, v. 14a**

So, first of all, the serpent is cursed. God has spoken a malediction over him, and he will remain cursed forever. He is the worst-off of all domestic and wild animals.

### **b) He will lick the dust, v. 14b**

As part of the curse, he will eat the dust. Later on, the Bible tells us (for instance in Ps. 72) that the enemies of Christ will lick the dust. Doing so is a sign of humility and submission, of being totally conquered. Well, brothers and sisters, the serpent will lick the dust, crawling on his belly. Some people have asserted based on this text that the serpent had legs prior to the fall. With Calvin, I think it more probable that God is simply reaffirming the serpent's created leglessness. "You tried to rise above your low position, but it's not going to happen," the Almighty says to the serpent.

### **c) He will be crushed by the woman's seed, v. 15**

And finally, the last-pronounced judgment on the serpent is that he will be the enemy of the woman's seed, and that the woman's seed will prevail over him and crush his head. He will score a limited victory by bruising the heel of the woman's seed, but his head will be crushed.

Here we see another truth about judgment: God's harshest judgment is reserved not for human beings but for the Devil. The prince of darkness is doomed to have his head crushed by the seed of the woman. Adam and Eve are not sentenced to having their heads crushed, as we will see in just a moment. But in the meantime, before the final judgment falls on Satan, he is allowed to inflict grievous harm upon God's people. He has power to hurt your heel. And he can and will use that power. In other words, though judgment is always most severe for Satan, you are hardly free from it just because you are a member of Christ's seed.

## **2. The Woman Sentenced, v. 16**

And so, God turns to the woman and pronounces sentence on her.

### **a) Pain in childbearing, v. 16a**

She will suffer pain and sorrow in childbearing. Ladies, I am not fit to preach about this. The more children you have born, the more you know how much it hurts — not only the reality of being pregnant, the wrenching process of birth, and the agony of motherhood, but also the even greater pain that comes from damage and loss in this area. There is no pain like losing a child. There is no pain like seeing your now-adult child living in a way you cannot comprehend or affirm. Mothers, you know something of this pain. Yes, there is the flip side, the tremendous joy of being a mother. But that joy has a shadow side, and that shadow side is God's judgment on the women of the human race. Rare indeed it is to find a woman who is satisfied with her own childbearing, who has no regrets and who has not lost any children or failed to have any.

In other words, ladies, in that thing that is at the core of your being as a woman — your reproductive ability, your potential motherhood — you are under God's judgment. If you have children, you will know pain. If you do not have children, you will know pain.

### **b) Subjection to her husband's rule, v. 16b**

That sounds awful enough. Yet it gets worse. The woman is told that she will desire her husband. What does this mean? Attempts to limit its meaning fall flat. It means that women will want a man, not only sexually but with their whole being. Have you ever noticed that women's magazines are devoted to the topic of getting and keeping a man, either directly or in terms of

making a home for that man to live in and meals for him to eat? Yet though the woman will want more than anything to have a man and to have him love and cherish her, she's likely to get one who will dominate her, rule her harshly, and in general be mean and nasty.

So in the things where your identity is found, ladies — home and family, husband and children — you will suffer. You will know pain. If you haven't, come talk to me afterwards. Never yet have I met a woman who has not experienced pain in the area of husband and children — either from having them or from not having them, from domestic violence or domestic emptiness.

Brothers and sisters, what do we learn about judgment from this? We learn that judgment hits where it hurts. God does not sentence the woman to fifteen lashes with a wet noodle. He doesn't sentence her to material deprivation or to bad weather. He sentences her to frustration and pain in the things she cares about the most. Here we see already that judgment is not nice, not manageable, not pleasant, and not something that we can overcome with a little good old-fashioned American ingenuity. All the means devised so far for delivering women from pain in childbearing and from domination by evil men have been notably unsuccessful. If they do deliver a woman from needing a man or having children, they can't deliver her from regretting her lonely home and barren womb.

### **3. The Man Sentenced, vv. 17-19**

But then God turns to the man. The first one deposed, he is the last one sentenced. God addresses him first and last, because he is the most responsible party. He was the one who was supposed to deal with the snake. He was the one who was supposed to offer himself to be cursed and killed in his wife's place. But instead, he shifted the blame and gave the first and lamest excuse in the history of the world.

#### **a) The ground is cursed with weeds and infertility, vv. 17b-18a**

The sentence begins with a curse on the ground. Notice, too, that the serpent is cursed because of his actions, and Adam is cursed because of his. But the woman is not cursed because of her sins per se — at least, God doesn't say "Because you have done this." He simply pronounces a curse. In any case, the connection between the sin and the curse is most evident in the case of the man. The man ate what he was not supposed to, and failed to take dominion over the garden and drive out the snake and protect God's sacred garden. And so, how is he cursed? The earth is cursed with thorns and weeds. Adam will have to labor hard to get rid of them. Though Adam himself is not cursed directly, the ground is cursed for his sake. The entire creation groans and suffers together because Adam ate the forbidden fruit.

#### **b) The man will have to toil to eat, vv. 18b-19a**

Since he ate the wrong thing, now he will have to toil to eat. It will take hard work, toil, sweat, and agony to get the earth to produce the things needed for life. Of course, this curse on the earth on the labor of farming is more broadly applicable to all human work. I say it all the time to blue-collar folks: "The most obviously true thing in the Bible is the statement that work is cursed." And they always heartily agree with me! Work, brothers and sisters, is cursed. You have

to toil to get the food you need to live. Nothing is as easy as it should be. Why is it so hard to change a car fender, or keep your house clean, or pay your mortgage? The answer is that God has cursed these activities.

Men, we are cursed in that area with which we most strongly identify — our work. Don't tell me that you don't. As soon as you meet another man, what do you want to know? "What does he do?" You don't care about his skin color, hair color, eye color, or hometown. You care what he does. When your son comes home with a girlfriend, you're going to want to know what her dad does. You know you are. And the longer she withholds that information, the more you will be dying to know it. Surely this is one of the largest tolls of joblessness: the loss of identity! No man wants to say "I'm a bum. I live on welfare." So, as with women, in this area where you find your identity and spend your days, you are cursed — either to labor in frustration and vexation as jobs that should be easy repeatedly turn out to be harder than they should be, or else to not labor at all, to be unemployed and wither away in irrelevance and mental breakdown.

We live in a rich country, at least right now. Perhaps we will spend it all fighting coronavirus. Regardless, we men are cursed in our work.

### **c) The man will die, v. 19b**

And finally, in a climactic penalty not mentioned to the woman or the serpent, the man is informed that he will die. You will return to the ground from which you were taken.

What do we learn about judgment here? It fits the crime. The man had failed to do his job and had eaten what he shouldn't have. Therefore, he is condemned in his eating and in his work. Again, this is a judgment which cannot be evaded. You can try to find a man who has never experienced frustration and cursing in his work. Good luck. There is no such man, as there is no woman who has not felt the pain of childbearing, either by its presence or its absence.

So brothers and sisters, look on the judgments of God and tremble. Covid and other plagues are just smaller echoes of this judgment reverberating down through time. God's people have been judged before. We have been experiencing the negative consequences of this primordial sin ever since God finished sentencing Adam.

### **C. Acts of Clemency, vv. 20-23**

Yet the passage continues and records three divine acts of mercy.

#### **1. Life will continue, v. 20**

The first is this juxtaposition: Life will go on, for Adam has named Eve the mother of all living. Though the curse of death has come upon the human race, still we live, bear children, are fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. In other words, though judgment is awful, it is not total.

#### **2. God will cover sin, v. 21**

God will cover sin. He killed animals and took their skins and used those skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. The message of the gospel is in this chapter twice — both in the promise of the woman's seed, and in God's provision of sacrifices that cover sin.

### **3. God will not allow eternal life on our terms, vv. 22-23**

A final act of mercy is God's stationing of the cherubim and flaming sword to keep human beings from messing with the tree of life. He will not let us live eternal life on our terms. It must be on His. Why is this a mercy? Because eternal life on our terms is not life but death. To live in wickedness extended forever is misery piled on misery. God gives eternal life — but only on His terms.

#### **D. A Final Punishment: Exile from Life in God's Presence, v. 24**

Yet the chapter ends with a final judgment, one that will shape the remainder of the book. This judgment is the judgment of exile from God's presence. Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden. They weren't just asked to leave. They were kicked out.

Brothers and sisters, this exile was miserable. It was painful. It is miserable. It is painful. We are no longer living in God's presence, but remain here in this world separated from Him. Christ has made a way of return to the presence of God, and as we listen to this sermon we are walking on it even now. But we have not yet reached the end of it, when we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Brothers and sisters, what did we learn about judgment today? Just this: It is a result of human sin, a penalty imposed on us for doing what God told us not to do. If there were no penalty, then God's prohibition would have no meaning. He would be forbidding us from doing something out of pure arbitrariness, for whether we did it or not would make no difference. God is not a bureaucrat in love with His own power. No. He commands us for our own good as well as His glory. His judgments are designed to teach us righteousness. They are merciful, because without them we could more easily imagine that we were self-sufficient.

Why did God lay these judgments on Adam and Eve? To teach them that to be sinful is miserable, and to drive them back to Him. That's what judgment means, as we will see next week. Yes, these judgments are horrible and painful. But sin is worse. We wouldn't care that sin separated us from God unless He revealed its true character to us through our misery.

So how do we handle judgment? By going to Him as the all-sufficient one, even as Eve does at the beginning of the next chapter. Childbearing and work are not our ultimate identity. That is found in Jesus Christ, our creator and redeemer. You will know pain in your childbearing or in your daily work, or, Heaven forbid, in both. That is the human condition because we are sinful creatures living under God's judgment. But don't give up hope; instead, turn to Him in repentance and faith. He will care for you. He will give you something better than work and children. He will give you Himself. Amen.