

The Blessing of the Curse

Genesis 3:14-24

The world in which we live has been cursed. All humanity lives under a curse. As good and as beautiful as is the world in which we live, pain and suffering and death are everywhere present. God has pronounced a curse upon this world. It permeates everything. Some things are more affected by the curse than others, but nothing has been untouched.

Today we are in the last half of Genesis 3. It is God's pronouncement of the curse. And, if someone pronounces a curse on you, they usually intend you harm. Who would pronounce a curse upon someone that they intend to bless? But as strange as it may sound, it is in the curse that we can God's mercy. And it is in the curse that the foundations of blessing are indeed laid.

Read Genesis 3:14-24.

The extent of the curse falls upon three individuals: Satan, the woman, and the man. Of these three, only the curse upon Satan is final and complete. There is no mercy given to him. And there is no future hope of blessing for him.

God pronounces true Judgment upon Satan. (vv. 14-15)

14 The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you
above all livestock
and
above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and
dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

15

I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and
between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

Satan has deceived and led into rebellion the crown of God's creation. Satan was motivated by pride and jealousy and hatred. He wanted the position that Adam was given. He thought that he was more deserving than Adam. And rather than being happy for Adam, Satan seeks to destroy Adam. He is full of bitter hatred for the Apple of God's eye. Even though we may wonder why God allows Satan in the Garden to begin with, this is not what God wants us to dwell upon. Instead, He wants us to recognize the responsibility that Satan bears for his actions. Satan, because of his actions, motivated by pure evil, must be punished. And what is more, Satan, because he has determined that he will be God's adversary, must be overcome. It is not enough that Satan be punished. The destruction that He has wrought must be entirely reversed. Anything less than full and complete fulfillment of God's original plan will be declared a victory by Satan.

My brother has been paralyzed since he was 17. He dove into a pond and broke his neck. It is a tragedy that has affected his entire life. One brief moment altered everything for him. When Jimmy went to college at Wright State University, he became friends with many other students with disabilities. One of these was also named Jim. He too was living a life altered by paralysis. Before Jim's accident, he was playing football for Pitt. The cause of Jim's paralysis was very different from my brother's. He was changing a tire along the road when he was hit by a drunk driver.

The sinful actions of this stranger altered Jim's entire life. This man needed to be punished. I am sure he was. And Jim received financial compensation from him. But no amount of compensation could give Jim his life back. The damage had been done. There was no going back.

The work of Satan did enduring damage. We continue to feel the effects of his evil actions thousands of years later. But God is not satisfied with compensation. Nor is the punishment of the Evil Doer sufficient.

God's victory is only found in the complete reversal of the damage itself. God must overcome Satan in such a way that every evil intention of his heart is thwarted completely.

Sin has consequences. These consequences are terrible. Sometimes the sins flow out of us and inflict terrible damage upon others. Sometimes the sins flow from others and do terrible damage to us, or those that we love. The terrible effects of sin are not all fixed here and now. Just as my brother and his friend have lived with paralysis for

decades, we all must live with some form of evil that began when Satan led Adam and Eve into sin.

But although we must wait long and endure much suffering, God is working to overcome Satan entirely and reverse entirely the effects of his work.

And this grand work of God begins here, immediately after the Fall. God's judgment upon Satan is both temporal and eternal. It begins in this creation, but it will continue on through all eternity.

The physical body of the serpent is altered. Whatever he looked like before, he now looks like a snake. God will also curse the ground, so the serpent's slithering on the ground symbolizes that he will most keenly feel the effects of the curse. The livestock and the other beasts of the field will also be affected by the curse, but none so much as the serpent.

But the slithering of snakes on the ground is not really the point. They really are only a visual reminder to us of the work of Satan. When we see snakes, we should be reminded of Genesis 3. Snakes are not satanic. But the fact that they must slither on the ground licking the dust is a reminder to us that he who lured us to sin is judged and is suffering humiliation at the hand of God. It is Satan who is being cursed. God is telling Satan that his future is doomed. Eating the dust of the earth symbolizes his ongoing humiliation.

In verse 15 we have what theologians commonly call "The Proto-Evangelion", the First Gospel! Rather than a statement promising to save Adam and Eve, it is a promise of the crushing of Satan entirely. Our redemption is the opposite side of the coin of Satan's destruction. We are only fully saved as Satan is fully defeated.

God takes the initiative and acts to make Satan and Eve enemies. Satan has always hated Eve, but Eve had listened to Satan and sided with him against God. Eve, and all of her children, would have continued in their hatred of God, if it were not for God's gracious work to create hostility between her and Satan. God is speaking to Eve. The enmity that she will have in her heart towards Satan is a gift of God and is a sign of her redemption. To love this world above God is to make ourselves God's enemy.

James 4:4 ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

But if we have within us a hostility towards Satan and the evil of this world, this is a work of grace. God is promising this grace to Eve, and to her offspring. How are we to understand offspring? Let's begin with Satan's offspring. Satan's offspring are not

physical snakes. Satan's offspring are those men and women, descendants of Adam and Eve, who follow after Satan. They are the friends of this world who make God their enemy. Initially, this refers to all the descendants of Adam and Eve. Even the redeemed recognize that this was once true of them.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But because God in His great mercy does work to save people out of their slavery to sin, not every child of Eve will remain the offspring of Satan.

Ephesians 2:4-5 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved-

So, in cursing the Serpent, God is promising to save some of Eve's descendants. The offspring of the woman, in this context, are those who are saved by God's grace. They are the ones who feel hostility in their hearts to Satan.

Mind you, the explanation of the details of the Gospel are not here revealed. We have the privilege of looking back after the finished work of Christ upon the cross. Nevertheless, salvation through God's grace alone is promised here in Genesis 3:15. Right at the very beginning of history after the fall. The woman had chosen to be on the side of the Serpent. She had given her allegiance to him. Immediately, God intercedes and works to change the heart of Eve, such that she now has "enmity" towards Satan. God does this out of sheer grace. He could have left her in her sin. He creates a new heart in the woman that results in enmity towards Satan. And not only does God do this for Eve, but he also promises this for her offspring, her seed.

The word offspring is in the singular. This means that it may refer to one specific offspring, or it might refer to all the offspring taken together as a group. Both aspects are important to the context. Eve initially has two sons – Cain and Abel. It becomes clear that Cain is of the seed of the Serpent and Abel is of the seed of the woman. Abel offers a right sacrifice to God. Cain does not. We will explore this in chapter 4, but most of us know that in the end, Cain kills Abel. After Abel is killed by Cain, God will give Eve another son named Seth. He replaces Abel as belonging to the seed of the woman.

In fact, as we read through the book of Genesis, we will see a distinction between the offspring of Satan and the offspring of Eve. There will be a godly line and an ungodly line. This distinction is helpful as long as we do not conclude that these lines are forever fixed or that becoming a seed of the woman is nothing more than being born of a godly mother.

Eve has been given saving grace. But from her comes those who are born in original sin. Only an act of God's Sovereign mercy creates new life in the soul. In the first chapter of John's Gospel, we are told clearly how any person becomes a member of the offspring of the woman. They "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:13)

Those who are saved experience a war. This war is against Satan, against the evil of the world, and against their old evil heart. The Westminster Confession describes this well in its chapter on sanctification.

WCF 13.2 This sanctification is throughout in the whole man,(1) yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part: (2) whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.(3)

This war between the offspring of Satan and the offspring of the woman continues to the end of this world.

^{ESV} **Revelation 12:17** Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

So, Genesis 3:15 has an ongoing collective application for all who are the offspring of Eve. But Genesis 3:15 is also a promise that "one" of Eve's children will be "The" seed that will crush Satan. This seed is none other than Jesus Christ.

he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

The Hebrew word for bruise is "shup". It is difficult to translate. "Strike" and "crush" are other possible translations. "To strike at" seems to fit the context of a snake-like action.

Satan strikes at Jesus with the intent of destroying him. But instead of defeating Jesus, he is only able to strike His heel.

On the other hand, Jesus has struck a blow to the head of Satan. As Luther wrote in his great hymn "A Mighty Fortress", Satan's doom is sure. And it has been sure ever since God pronounced these words upon him.

But it is at the cross that Jesus inflicted the fatal blow. As Satan was orchestrating the death of Jesus, he was accomplishing his own demise.

ESV Hebrews 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

Revelation 12:9-11 ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Satan struck at Jesus while he hung on the cross. But it was on the cross that Jesus struck Satan's head in true victory.

Immediately after the Fall, in the midst of curses being pronounced, God gives hope to Adam and Eve. All will not be lost. One will be born of a woman who will overcome the corruption caused by Satan.

We live at the end of the ages. We place our faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. We live in the victory of Jesus Christ over Satan. He continues to fight against us as a defeated foe.

Revelation 12:12 ¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Satan's doom is sure. All who place their trust in Jesus are guaranteed victory over him.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:20** The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The rest of Genesis 3 must be understood in light of verse 15. The curses pronounced upon the woman, the man, and the ground all have a redemptive purpose. The curse is full of blessing. God's curse upon the woman begins with multiplied pains in childbearing.

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.

Every time a woman gives birth she is reminded of the curse. But this is not simply a statement that women will have pains in childbirth. The physical pains of childbirth point us to the difficulty of bearing children who will love God rather than Satan. Prior to the fall, the raising up of godly children would have been natural. It would have been without pain. But because of the Fall, mothers will experience the pain of seeing their children love evil. What was more painful to Eve – birthing Cain or enduring Cain's killing of Abel?

A mother has a special love for her children. What pain she feels as those she loves follow after sin. And even when children grow to love the Lord, there is another sort of pain that mothers endure. What pain Eve must have endured as she looked at Abel with no life in him, killed by his brother, her son.

Bringing children into a world full of sin is painful. God does not sugar-coat this reality. But it is in childbearing that the woman can see God's grace to her. Rather than strip her of this privilege, God continues to entrust the woman with the raising of children.

It is easy to miss the incredible mercy of God in this. When you fail in a big way, it is not typical to be given the same, if not more, responsibility. God had commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. Instead of stripping them of this privilege, God continues to affirm the woman in this role.

This reminds me of a story of when I was living in Dayton, OH, working construction for a small company. I was working on a crew framing a house. The crew leader was not the owner of the company. We were framing the second story. The first story was framed with 2 X 6 walls. This allowed for thicker insulation. But it was not typical. What was even more unusual was that the plan called for the 2nd floor to be framed in 2 X 6 walls. Our crew leader did not notice this on the blueprint. We framed the entire 2nd floor with 2 X 4 walls. Sometime in the afternoon, our boss came to check the progress. He was a patient man, and a good man, but I have never seen him more irate than he was that day. We had caused him a huge loss in both labor and materials. After he laid into the crew leader for what seemed to be an hour, he told us to take apart all that we had done. The next day, we had to rebuild the second floor using 2 X 6's. But even though our boss was angry, he did not remove the crew leader. He continued to be the crew leader.

God is doing something similar, only on a grander scale. Eve's failure is still causing havoc in the world. But she is preserved in her role of bearing and raising children. God does not remove her from her responsibility. Adam seems to understand the gravity of this when he gives to the woman the name of Eve – the mother of all living. Ladies, raising children is painful. But it is a privilege given to you by a good and gracious God.

Next, God informs the woman that her relationship with her husband will be one of struggle. Before the Fall, the man and the woman experienced natural harmony and oneness. Now, the marriage relationship will be full of struggle.

Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."

God is explaining to the woman the nature of the struggle that will occur because of sin. The woman will have a desire to be in the place of her husband. She will desire his position of authority. And the man will abuse his position of authority to dominate the woman. Rather than man and woman accepting their roles and living in harmony as equals, they sinfully struggle against one another.

God has placed the wife in a position of submission to the authority of her husband. Instead of embracing biblical submission, the woman strives to have the authority given to man.

At the same time, God has placed man in a position of authority, but he desires man to use this authority from an attitude of love and humility and service to the welfare of the woman. Instead, husbands, like the rulers of this world, use their authority to dominate. This understanding is made clear in the next chapter. Cain is jealous of his brother. He wants the favor that God has given to Abel. God confronts Cain and uses the same language.

ESV Genesis 4:7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

The desire of sin is to overcome Cain. And God tells Cain that he must rule over that sin. The implication is that Cain is to dominate his sin. The same struggle that occurs within the heart of Cain is the struggle that also occurs within the marriage relationship.

Wives must fight against the desire to usurp the position of authority given to their husbands. And husbands must fight against the desire to dominate their wives.

In this struggle, we again see God's redemptive purpose. It is in this struggle that God trains us for our relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the perfect husband who rules, but with love and service. And we are learning to submit our hearts to him. This submission is for men and women. Husbands, have you ever tried to learn from your wives what it means to submit, so that you can better learn submission to Jesus?

The world sees God's roles in marriage as evil. As Christians, we see the misuse of these roles as evil. But the roles themselves are necessary to prepare us for our eternal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now we move to God curse upon the man.

God's curse upon man is joined to his curse of the ground. In this curse, God alters the creation, subjecting it to futility. God tells the man that his labors will not bring about the life God has promised. Man's work in this life will be painful and frustrating and will end in death. This is bad news for sure. But it is also a blessing.

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."

Before the Fall, man would work and his efforts would produce good fruit. The creation, the land in particular, would respond wonderfully to the efforts man put forth. Man would not have known futility in his labor.

But after God's curse upon the land, the limited enjoyment of this world that man would experience would be mixed with pain. "In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life."

It is not just that subduing the creation would be more difficult, but with enough blood, sweat and tears it would be accomplished. It is rather that God has subjected the creation to futility. It is no longer capable of bringing about the fruitfulness for which our hearts yearn.

The creation still has the capacity to "sustain life", at least for a season. "by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." But thorns and thistles will grow more readily than good fruit bearing plants.

Even in our advanced society where we are able to produce far more abundantly than we need, that which we produce is not able to nourish us as well as we might like. The current trends back to healthier organic foods demonstrate this. But we must not think that the problem will be resolved if we eat all organic foods without pesticides or gmo's. Genesis 3 tells us that the problem is in the creation itself. And God has made it so.

Man's labor and toil will be painful and frustrating. In the end, man will simply return to the dust.

The Serpent was humiliated by having to lick the dust. Now, man suffers his own humiliation. He must return to the dust.

At first glance, it is difficult to see how the curse upon Adam and the ground is also a blessing. It really only looks depressing. Ecclesiastes understands the futility of the curse as well as any other book of the Bible. And not many people enjoy Ecclesiastes.

But pain and frustration and futility are indeed a blessing that God uses for our redemption. How many people have come to know Jesus Christ during the happiest moments of their life? I would guess that the vast majority are brought to see their need of Jesus Christ through the emptiness of what this life has to offer them. Jesus said that it is the sick who need a doctor. If a person thinks that all is well, he will never go to the doctor. Pain is a gift. Think of the terrible condition we would be in if we had been separated from God by our sin, and yet, the creation was never cursed. We would be empty without even feeling the pain of our emptiness. I am not saying that we should seek pain. But we should be glad for it, even while wanting to avoid it.

It is obvious from the final verses of chapter 3, that Adam and Eve see God's blessing in the midst of the curse.

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

Adam names his wife. And he gives her a wonderful name. He might have named her, "she through whom sin and death entered the world." Or maybe he could have named her "Mara" meaning bitterness. Instead, He names her Eve, the mother of all living. He could only have come to this conclusion because he believed that the woman would not only bear physical children, but that through her would come descendants who would fight against the offspring of the serpent. And one of her descendants would conquer the Serpent.

²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced guilt and shame. They sought to cover this guilt and shame through their own efforts. But their own efforts to deal with their sin were not enough. It is not just that fig leaves shrivel up. It is that human efforts to cover our sin are futile. There is no means that we can devise to cover our sin. None are sufficient.

But rather than leave us in our shame, God takes the initiative to cover our guilt. He does this through slaying animals and using the skins to cover Adam and Eve. It is from this initial death of an innocent animal that God begins to reveal the need for the death of his only Son.

The Bible does not tell us the thoughts of Adam and Eve, but surely they were encouraged by God's provision for them.

22 Then the LORD God said,

"Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.

Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever-

23 therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden
to work the ground from which he was taken.

24 He drove out the man,
and

at the east of the garden of Eden he placed

the cherubim

and

a flaming sword

that turned every way

to guard the way to the tree of life.

We have already seen how pain and futility can be a blessing that leads us to Christ. Now, we see that death itself, even though it is the last and greatest enemy, is also the result of God's mercy to us.

Man's nature has been altered by the Fall. Instead of accepting that God alone has the right to determine good and evil, man has sought to determine right and wrong for himself. In this sense, man has become "like" God. But even this knowledge is twisted. God knows evil, but God does not experientially know evil. We, on the other hand, experience the evil of choosing for ourselves what is right and wrong.

At the root of all sin is the desire to choose for ourselves what is right and wrong. We do not want to conform to the standard of God. We want to establish our own standard. It is this corruption of our heart that must be overcome if we are ever to be restored to a right relationship with God.

And the only way for our corrupt nature to be overcome is for it to be killed. It cannot be repaired. It must be put to death. And another new heart must replace the old.

But what if Adam and Eve were to partake of the tree of life? Not only would their physical bodies endure forever, but so would their souls, their corrupt souls. It is death that makes possible our redemption.

We are crucified with Christ. This death begins at conversion, but it is completed when we die physically. When we breathe our last breath, we are made perfect in holiness to the full enjoyment of God. Being prevented from partaking of the tree of life is a curse. But there is blessing in the curse.

We see this mercy as the temple is built far later in history. The entrance to the temple would face East, just like the entrance to the Garden faced East. But while the cherubim prevent anyone from getting back into the Garden, the temple is designed to show the pathway back to the presence of God.

And in the death of Jesus Christ, the curtain is torn. We have access into God's presence. We can know him and will once again partake of the tree of life.

Application:

1. We live in a sin-cursed world. God has subjected this world to futility. But He has done this for our good.
 - a. **Romans 8:28** ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
2. Jesus Christ has crushed the head of Satan. We continue to be at war with him. But he is a defeated foe, and his time is short.
3. Recognize your love of ruling your own life. Repent of this root of all evils. And ask God to put you to death – to crucify you with Christ. And ask Jesus to graciously give you a new desire to live at war against Satan.
4. Use your pain and suffering to turn to Christ. In Christ alone is hope of the resurrection. Jesus alone is able to lead us back into the garden.

Only in Christ do we look back upon the curse... as a necessary step on our road to blessing. Amen.