

*Punishment and Grace: Genesis 3:16-24*  
Ben Reaoch, THREE RIVERS GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH  
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*Punishment and Grace* is the title of the sermon this morning, as we look at Genesis 3:16-24. Adam and Eve sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit, they hid from God in their shame, they blamed others, and now God is pronouncing His punishment on them. First the serpent was cursed by God, and we saw last week that there is a great Messianic promise contained even in that curse. And this morning we'll look at the punishment given to the woman and to the man, and then we'll also see a profound display of God's grace in the midst of punishment.

**Eve's Punishment (v. 16)**

Verses 14-15 contain the curse on the serpent, and this morning we're going to begin in verse 16, which speaks of Eve's punishment. I'm going to spend quite a bit of time on this verse because it has such massive ramifications for manhood and womanhood. Notice that the punishment given to the woman and to the man (in the following verses) are each specific to their role and their calling as woman and man. For the woman, the punishment relates to childbearing. Childbearing is such a blessing and a privilege, and even in the previous verse God gives Adam and Eve this newfound hope that an offspring of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent. For Eve, and for her daughters throughout the ages, childbearing is accompanied by excitement and expectation and hope. But now this beautiful aspect of the woman's existence is marred by sin. Now her childbearing will also be accompanied by great pain.

As a side note, I don't think this punishment should be taken as a command. In other words, it's not wrong to try to alleviate this pain. Modern medicine has been able to significantly reduce the pain in childbearing, and I consider that to be a good thing. I knew of a husband who didn't want his wife to use an epidural because of this verse, and I think that is wrongheaded and cruel. Each woman can decide for herself concerning those medical options, and this verse should not be read as a prohibition against alleviating some of the pain in childbirth.

The fact remains for all women that childbearing is accompanied by much pain. A husband and wife can still experience tremendous joy in the birth of a baby, but the pain in childbirth will continue to be a reminder that we live in a fallen world. I think this applies not only to the birth of the child, but also to parenting in general. Children bring great joy, but because of sin (both ours and theirs), parenting becomes a difficult task, and it brings heartache and pain and toil.

The meaning of the next statement has been debated. "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." What kind of desire is this verse talking about? Is it sexual desire, as some have suggested? Or is it a kind of psychological dependency on the husband, as others have suggested? I think what illuminates the meaning of this verse is looking a few verses down at chapter 4:7, where the same words for "desire" and "rule" are used, and the structure of the sentence is also very similar. In 4:7 God says to Cain, "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." Sin has a desire for Cain. And what might that desire be? It is a desire to master him. A

desire to overcome him and dominate him. But Cain must not let that happen. He must rule over sin.

In a similar way in 3:16, the wife will desire to dominate her husband. She will try to manipulate him and master him so that she is the leader rather than him. But the husband will rule over her. He must be the leader, and yet sadly he will often become an oppressive leader. Rather than being the loving sacrificial leader that Ephesians 5 describes, he will treat her harshly.

Much damage was done to the marriage relationship through the Fall. Before the Fall, God's beautiful design can be seen for the roles of men and women. There is absolute equality between men and women in the sense that we are all made in God's image. And there are also wonderful differences that God intends for us. The man is to be the head. The leader. And the woman is made to be his helper. We saw that in chapter 2. Adam was created first. Then the woman was made from him and for him. And Adam named her. And it also says that the man will leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife. All of those things show the creation mandate for male headship and male leadership.

Those who deny the idea of male leadership will point to this verse (Genesis 3:16) and say that male headship is simply a result of the Fall. The fact that men often rule over women is a result of sin, and not part of God's good plan. But for the reasons I just stated, I think it's very clear from Genesis 2 (before the Fall) that male headship IS God's design. It is part of God's wonderful creativity that He gave unique and specific roles to each gender. We are created male and female in His image, and that is a good thing.

What sin did was mess up that good design. Sin did not produce male headship. Sin distorted male headship. Now, rather than husbands who sacrificially lead their wives and wives who gladly submit to their husbands, sin produces husbands who fail to lead as they ought and wives who want to usurp the leadership role that properly belongs to the husband.

My passion when I talk about biblical manhood and womanhood is to encourage men to step up and be the godly leaders that we are meant to be. When I think about God's design for men and women and the different roles He has given to us, I don't first think about wifely submission. What I think about first is the need for men to be men. Godly men. Christ-like men, who will lead boldly and courageously and sacrificially and lovingly and humbly, for the good of their wives and their children. That's the kind of man I want to be, and I want to encourage others in that as well. This is how we can combat the effects of the Fall and move toward God's good design.

So let me exhort the husbands in the room for a moment. Husbands, it is our calling and responsibility to love our wives with the kind of love that Christ showed to the church. That is sacrificial love. It is costly love. It is love that will involve suffering on your part because you must deny yourself in order to please your wife. That is our duty and calling as husbands. And lest you think this calling is a burden, we must realize that it will produce wonderful results. The more you please your wife, the more you love her and protect her and provide for her, the happier she will be, and the happier you will be as a result.

You must lead your wife and your family. It must be loving and sacrificial, but it must also be leadership. Too many men are passive and apathetic, and leave all the

responsibility to their wives. Or, on the other hand, they rule over their wives in a harsh and domineering way.

Let me give a few practical suggestions for ways in which we need to exercise strong and humble leadership in our homes. First, we need to lead in spiritual matters. We need to lead our families in prayer and devotions and church attendance. We need to lead our families in the pursuit of holiness, and guard them from influences and activities that will detract from that.

We also need to lead by providing for our families and we need to lead in financial decisions. We need to make sure that our wives can stay home with our children. That's her primary role and responsibility, and a husband shouldn't burden his wife by making her work outside the home. It may mean making some dramatic changes in your lifestyle, or picking up a second job. But you need to lead and guide your family in such a way that she can stay home.

We also need to lead in the discipline of our children. If the child needs a spanking and you're there, you do it. Your children need to know that there are boundaries, and if those boundaries are crossed, there will be consequences. We, as husbands need to lead in setting those boundaries and enforcing those boundaries.

I think we also need to lead by pursuing our wives romantically. Plan dates. Plan meaningful times for the two of you to spend together. Think of ways to express your love for her so that she doesn't think the two of you are just co-workers in running a busy household, but you are lovers.

The bottom line is that we, ourselves, must be pursuing God in our daily walk. We need to pray for His grace in our lives to make us the men we need to be. On the one hand we need to guard against apathy and cowardice and laziness that will keep us from leading as we ought. And on the other hand, we must be very diligent to kill the sin of selfishness and pride that will cause us to domineer over our wives and treat them disrespectfully. The effects of sin will push in one direction or the other. Passivity or aggressiveness. Apathy and laziness or hostility and insensitivity. The biblical model, and the path of greatest joy, is strong but humble leadership. Let's make that our goal.

For wives, you must resist the temptation to manipulate your husband. God has appointed him as your leader, and you are to graciously submit to him and respect his leadership in your life. There are exceptions to that, of course, if the husband is abusive or if he is leading you into sin. But aside from that it is the wife's glad obligation to support and encourage and respect her husband. Don't pester him. Don't ridicule him. Don't seek to get your way by giving him a guilt trip or manipulating him. Don't boss him around. Some women pride themselves in the fact that they "wear the pants" in the relationship. And that is exactly what Genesis 3:16 says sin will produce. The woman will desire to overcome her husband and usurp his authority. But the husband is to lead.

I believe with all my heart that God's beautiful design for manhood and womanhood will bring great happiness to every husband and wife who seek to follow these distinct roles. And I pray that our church will be filled with marriages that clearly display what they were designed to display: the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ's sacrificial love for the church, and the church's submission to Christ.

#### **Adam's punishment (v. 17-19)**

Moving on to verses 17-19 we read of Adam's punishment. Because of Adam's sin, God curses the ground. Just like Eve's punishment related to her role and calling as a

wife and mother, Adam's punishment relates to his role as husband and father. He is responsible for working to provide food and shelter for his family. And just like the woman will have pain in childbirth, God says to Adam in verse 17, "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life."

Don't misunderstand this, though. Work, itself, is not the punishment. Work is good. It is pleasurable and rewarding. And before the Fall it was nothing but pleasurable and rewarding. In Genesis 2:15 it says "the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." Just think of how delightful Adam's work must have been. There were no thorns or thistles, and thus there was no pain or frustration as he worked the garden. It was Paradise.

But the Fall changed that. The Fall brought a curse on the ground, and it caused work to become burdensome. This is something we can all identify with. Whatever the work is, and however rewarding it may be in certain respects, there will always be elements of frustration. The teacher must deal with disobedient students. The engineer or architect or builder has to wrestle with various unforeseen problems in order to get the job done. Doctors and nurses have to treat patients who have all kinds of injuries and illnesses, and oftentimes there's not a clear solution to the problem. Anyone who works alongside others experiences the difficulties of trying to work at peace with other sinners. In our homes, we know how rapidly things deteriorate from a state of order to disorder. Have you noticed that? The house doesn't stay clean and tidy for weeks on end. And it never, by itself, goes from messy to neat. It's always the opposite. These are the thorns and thistles that are a result of the Fall, and as we experience them in the course of our everyday lives they should cause us to long for heaven.

In Romans 8, Paul comments on this. He writes in verses 19-22, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." This passage is speaking about Genesis 3:16-19, where God cursed the ground. That's what Paul refers to when he says, "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it." God subjected the creation to futility. But as Paul adds, it is "in hope." God subjected the created order to futility. He cursed the ground as a punishment for sin. But that's not the end of the story. God has done this with the intention of freeing the created order from this bondage to decay. It's likely that Paul was thinking of Genesis 3:15, the first gospel, when he wrote the phrase "in hope." Even in the midst of the curse there was already hope that a Savior would come who would bruise the head of the serpent.

So as we labor and toil in a fallen world, we should look with the eyes of faith to the Day when Jesus Christ will return, and all things will be made right. And in the new heavens and new earth there will be no curse on the ground. There will be no futility. And all of our activity will be pleasurable and rewarding.

### **Sign of Grace**

We've looked at Eve's punishment and Adam's punishment. Now let's observe a poignant demonstration of God's grace in verse 21. Last week I talked about the fig leaves that Adam and Eve made for themselves because of their shame. The fig leaves were a sad attempt at covering sin. Nothing that comes from us can adequately cover our

sin. In fact, it just makes us look all the more foolish. If I contrive a self-help program, or develop a religion of external requirements, or follow a philosophical system, or buy into a certain pop-psychology; those are all fig leaves. None of those things can cover the guilt and shame that is a result of sin. I am a sinner, and I cannot stand before the holy God.

What *can* cover my sin? Only God can provide the covering needed to remove our guilt and shame. This is what He does for Adam and Eve in verse 21. “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.” These were not fig leaves. These were garments of skins. And since they were made of skins, it is understood that animals had to die. This was the first shedding of blood, the first physical deaths. Who *should* have died? Adam and Eve should have died because of their sin. But God had mercy on them, and instead Adam and Eve watched as God killed animals in order to cloth them with garments of skins.

It’s very difficult to know how much Adam and Eve understood about what was going on. But from our vantage point we can look at this scene and marvel at God’s intricate and marvelous plan to display His glory. Because even though this chapter is dominated by sin and separation and punishment, it is also laced with grace. There is a gleaming thread of grace that runs throughout these events. And I believe this is a very poignant evidence of that. Instead of killing Adam and Eve, God kills a substitute. He sheds the blood of animals in order to adequately cover their shame and guilt. This points to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament and ultimately to the atoning death of Jesus Christ, whose blood was shed so that we may live. And it’s Christ’s righteousness, His skin as it were, that clothes us in the courtroom of God. We are declared righteous in God’s sight because we are covered in Christ’s sinless perfection.

### **Punishment**

In the last verses of the chapter we see the final element of their punishment. God expels them from the garden. The tragic finality of this event is emphasized by the way He protects the tree of life. Verse 24 says, “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.” The cherubim guard God’s presence. In the tabernacle and in the temple there were pictures of cherubim sown into the veil (Exodus 26:31). There were cherubim on the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:18-22). There were very large cherubim covered in gold that guarded the inner sanctuary of the temple (1 Kings 6:23-28).

With the cherubim in the garden there was also a flaming sword that turned every way. This is a pretty intimidating image. The point is: No sinner can get to the tree of life. The way to the tree of life has been cut off because of sin. That’s our predicament as descendants of Adam and Eve. On our own we cannot gain life. We are cut off, separated from God’s presence. All we deserve is punishment.

The Good News, though, is that Jesus Christ has made a way. There is grace! He said in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” On our own, wearing our silly fig leaves, there is no hope of gaining access to God’s presence. There is no hope of getting to the tree of life. There is only punishment. But in Christ there is grace. Christ is the way. When Christ died, that veil, on which the cherubim were sown, was torn from top to bottom. He opened the way to the tree of life. It’s through Him that we have life. And to be in Him, you need to trust in

Him. You need to forsake your own attempts at making yourself presentable before Him, and you need to accept His perfect clothing of righteousness. For all who are clothed in His righteousness, we will one day rejoice in His presence for ever and ever.

Revelation gives us a glimpse into that Paradise, and I'll close with these verses from chapter 22, "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him."