

We continue in our study of Genesis. We are in chapter 3 and are now looking at the last portion of that chapter. I have entitled [the message] “Consequences”. The text itself is 3:8-24. Let me encourage you to open your scriptures and look at that and I will be reading it in just a few seconds. But first some opening comments.

One of the most important if not the first thing you learn when raising a child is the need to follow through with discipline. In other words, the child needs to learn that there are consequences to the choices and their behavior. This is more than mere pragmatism on the order of behavior conditioning. On the one hand teaching a child the reality of consequences orients their thinking to the reality of cause and effect. Cause and effect is one of the basic presuppositions of all scientific knowledge. If we continue to have a permissive society which does not understand the need to train children to understand cause and effect, we will continue to have a decline in our grasp of scientific principles. But it is more than just that. Teaching a child the reality of consequences helps them to understand moral truth. All moral education has to be built upon an understanding of consequences for choices made.

So it was for Adam and Eve. After they broke the trust relationship with God He said there would be and there were consequences. You and I live in the reality of those consequences down to this very day. If you have not yet, please do turn to Genesis 3:8-24 and follow with me.

(3:8) *“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. (3:9) But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ (3:10) And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’ (3:11) He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ (3:12) The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’ (3:13) “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.’*

(3:14) *“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. (3:15) 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.*

(3:16) *“To the woman he said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in child bearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.*

(3:17) *“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; (3:18) thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. (3:19) 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.’*

(3:20) *“The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. (3:21) And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. (3:22) 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— (3:23) therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. (3:24) 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.” [Ic]*

Consequences: obviously this whole section is just replete with consequences. The first section of Genesis 3:1-7 gives us the account of the Fall itself. Adam and Eve fell from innocence into guilt. Of course they fall into the consequences of that change in their condition. As fallen creatures ourselves, those who live in the shadow world of fear and death, where lies abound and we must forever be on guard, the nature of that dying by Adam and Eve may be obscure to us, but it is true nonetheless. Adam and Eve died and the sorrow of it is overwhelming. Look with me again to those opening verses, 8-14:

(3:8) *“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. (3:9) But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ (3:10)*

Now I want you to engage in a little imagination with me: you have raised a precious child whom you love deeply. The child is beautiful in every way. Through the child’s growing years you have been the best of friends, often walking together in the cool air of the evening [as they] ease away the heat of the day. You would talk sometimes of the beauty of the world around you and sometimes you speak of your dreams to come. You come home one day, eager for the evening’s talk again. But the time for the first time your child does not greet you at the door but stays in their room. When you enter the room your precious child will not look you in the eye. Your child’s voice is strained. Your child’s face is shadow with fear and resentment, and you, your heart is broken.

Notice the way in which God encounters Adam and Eve after the Fall. He does not thunder from heaven – ADAM!!! – oh no. He walks quietly in the garden and says, “Where are you?” He does not appear in overwhelming majesty, power. He does not sit upon a great throne as he did in front of Isaiah. He walks in the garden amidst the flowering, fruiting trees. He has met them there often before.

When we read this account I think we need to understand that God’s heart is broken. It is broken when He turns to speak to the serpent, that enticer to sin who has brought incalculable upon humanity, ages of sorrow. Sin has given birth to death, it is the death of peace, the death of communion, the death of joy between God and His creatures.

Someone at this point, probably someone will object and will say, “God knew all of this was going to happen already. Why is He upset?” But I would point out that at least I did not say God was surprised. He wasn’t. I have raised five children. When my children walked into the shadow of sin, when the gulf of guilt opened between us, when conversation faltered, and we both knew that hiddenness had displaced trust, when the easy joy of innocence was supplanted by the pain of doubt and suspicion, their mother and I were not surprised, but we were heartbroken. It hurt like fury. We understood of course that this is a cup of sorrow which love requires us to drink. God is perfect in love. God is also perfect in justice. Neither love nor justice is more true of God; both are totally true. We often say, and correctly, that grace is unmerited favor, an expression of love, and that is true. But when we are speaking of the grace of God, we would be wise to say that grace is unmerited favor given by a God of perfect holiness and justice. Such grace differs from that which we tend to extend to others in that it never compromises its commitment to righteousness and truth. That is why divine grace always restrains sin. Too often strictly human grace, because it is unclear regarding its own convictions and disciplines of holiness, drifts into compromise and even corruption.

Beloved, we utterly fail to understand the verses following in Genesis 3 and indeed the whole rest of the Bible if we fail to see that it is the Creator’s love that is speaking in chapter 3:14 and following. This is what the Lord says, expressing His perfect love of justice as He speaks 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. (3:15) 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.*

[This is the] first set of consequences, other than those woven into the narrative, looking at verse 14. Perhaps the thrust of the fourteenth verse is to give special meaning to a pre-existing condition. As I talked with my wife one morning she came up with the usual question and I am certain it is in your minds: “Did the serpent have legs before?” I said this is not an Aesop’s fable as to how the serpent lost its legs. Actually what I told my wife is that this is proof that the process of evolution stops for the snake and he doesn’t get any legs. But this we know, that the intention of Moses is that you and I would understand that God is saying the exquisite beauty of the serpent would be left in the dust of the earth and all who see it would recall the judgment of God: condemned. More significant by far than either of those comments is the fact that the bruising of the head of the snake is lethal, but the bruising of the heel of the man is not. Viewed in historical terms this is a remarkable statement. It is fulfilled, as I think most of us understand, 4000 years later with the birth of Jesus Christ, who indeed is the son who bruises the head of the serpent and brings about the glorious victory of grace over sin and death. It is a promise, of course, given as a simple statement of fact, and this is the fact that you and I have already celebrated this morning: in the end the serpent loses and you and I win, by the grace of God. Consequences.

He goes on to speak to the woman in v. 16. *“To the woman he said...”* The first thing to note here is mercy. Realize the sentence of death has been delayed. Eve and Adam have not come to a complete end. To be sure, this is a severe mercy. What is described to us following hereafter is a kind of living death. Death has occurred as the consequence of sin exactly as God had said it would. What has happened? Fear and shame have overtaken both Adam and Eve. It has prompted them to hide from their Creator. They will soon realize that they are also now hidden from each other. The unity of heart and mind is lost. We hear it as they proceed to blame rather than to bless. Life continues, but it does not continue as it was. Life is now hard and soon it will be dangerous. The pleasantness of the garden will be lost. By the end of the chapter God actually evicts them, but ruin has already overtaken them. But even so they are still alive.

The judgment of God strikes Eve at the heart of her calling and purpose. What God says is that she will have great pain in childbearing. That pain, which you and I know now, will sometimes take the life of the mother. Further we can reasonably assume that with the onset of physical death the number of children each woman will need to bear will increase. Therefore the associated pain and danger will increase as well. Children, often the greatest joy in a woman’s life, have become costly, very costly.

The troubles however go beyond those focusing on the woman alone. Equally troubling is what we read regarding the marriage relationship. The key to understanding what is being told to us here is to recognize the specific word being used for “desire”. When God says to Eve, *“...your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you...”* it is the same word as is used in Genesis 4:6-7. You might want to drop your eyes over there. What do we learn? In Genesis 4:6-7 it speaks of sin’s desire for Cain. *“The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 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...’*” What kind of desire is this? I can assure you and you know this as well as I. Sin has no desire to bless Cain. What it wants to do is to control him, to enslave him to his ruin. It is the desire to control. The desire of the wife, God says, will be countered by the husband’s rule. The change from how things were before the fall is profound. Before the fall Adam and Eve, male and female, were to rule together over, together to rule over, the garden and the world. They were to subdue it while keeping it. Together they were to live with joy and delight and mutual satisfaction with God and with one another. But that is gone. Much later the apostle Paul would write this to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 7:28, *“If you marry you have not sinned...yet those who marry will have worldly troubles.”* How many can agree? Every single couple that comes to me saying they have fallen in love and they want to get married I try and disabuse them of the horrible misunderstanding! Do not do this! How often do I succeed in giving wisdom? Zero! How often do they run into trouble? 100%! Why? Because they are fallen.

What we observe here is that the consequence of the fall is the disordering of desires. The desire for control is driven by the wife’s fears. Fear of what? Fear of what is not known, because now she looks at Adam and she cannot see into his soul. He is not open to her. Fear of not being heard: I have done a lot of marital counseling. The fear of not being rightly honored; the fear of not being cared for; and any number of other things all of which are gathered together under the general heading of a diminished joy. This is death by slow degrees. I am well acquainted with marriages that begin with an efflorescence, a lovely blooming of anticipatory joy, swiftly fulfilled with a delight together, and then gradually the sun sets, and sets, and sets.

Remembering all these things brings the description of God’s salvation through Jesus given to us in Hebrews 2:14-15 in bold relief. Listen to what is there written for our benefit. *“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, Jesus 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, and deliver those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”* Whether or not you can at this moment find your experience inside that verse, let me assure you it is. If you are one of those, and you are one of those, who has experienced the diminishing of joy, the dimming of light, the sense of suffocation which sometimes overcomes us in our married lives, please understand, these verses are talking about you as they also talk about me. We fail, I think, to appreciate the full meaning of these words if we limit our understanding of death to the termination of physical life. More to the point is that death is the loss of life comparable to the dimming of a light till finally it is dark, or perhaps, relating to our experience [in California] now, to a drought that continues until finally there is no water left at all, or what would have been powerfully relevant to them a famine in which finally there is no food and all are starving.

[Is this] grim? Yes! Grim; that is correct. That is also why you rarely hear anybody preach on Genesis I-II. These chapters, these opening sections in the book of Genesis lay the necessary foundation for you and for me to understand why God deals with us according to what we really are. It is not pleasant; on the contrary. But it makes the light of the gospel shine as a jewel in the deep of night and excites joy as nothing else can when realize that for you and I who walk in shadow the light of God’s grace comes freely and invites us to embrace life eternal through Him. I pray no one neglects that invitation.

We need to understand that the woman is not evil in the sense of malicious or driven by perverse desires or enflamed passions. She is simply unsure and vulnerable, senses her weakness and is in need of reassurance. But beloved, that fear can lead to undesirable consequences itself, deepening fear itself in a downward spiral of sin and death. Let us not speculate on how many marriages have died and those who are in them have died with them.

Now we might ask where is the mercy of God in all of this? God had already told Eve that it would be her offspring, one of those born in multiplied pain who would kill the serpent. Did she understand what that meant, she who had never experienced physical death? Did she realize that it was the serpent and the spirit of the serpent who would rule over her and all humanity? We do not know. We do know this, that the prospect of the birth of that child stirred hope in Eve. We see that in Genesis 4:1 and 25. This is what there is written for us: *“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain – and this is her comment – saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.’”* and *“Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.’”* Both children are direct actions of God in her life. [Were they] worth the pain? Of course [they were].

Eve’s words indicate that she believed her children were the direct action of God in her life. Eve’s hope was in God’s actions. What was that hope? It was that one of her offspring would bruise the head of the serpent as God had said. Perhaps she dreamed as well of the restoration of joy now that it had been lost.

God’s statement that the husband would rule over his wife was good news, both merciful and hopeful, but it is so in an ironic way. Beloved there have always been loving husbands who have worked alongside their wives in raising their children and providing for their needs. But too often, right, the relationship has been otherwise. As mentioned, sin brings loss of communion. The soul under the power of sin is locked up inside of itself. Inevitably much of what we are remains hidden and we both long and fear having it made known. I am speaking of husbands and wives. We are inwardly conflicted. Women long for intimacy; men fear it. Women desire relational closeness, intensity, completeness; men tend to remain aloof, reducing relationships to a series of tasks. Most of us are familiar with those generalizations; they persist because for the most part they are true. There are always exceptions, but they are exceptions that prove the rule. The heart of the matter is that the relationship between man and woman, husband and wife has become painful. Happiness is not a given, beloved, it must be pursued, most of the time with sacrificial effort. Without that effort most marriages drift into mediocrity. Under the conditions of modernity – our age – which has so weakened the covenant of marriage as to make it little more than consensual sex, such marriages break. But this does not restore paradise. Now we have single mothers struggling to raise children, children growing up without fathers, material poverty joined to emotional deprivation. Are there exceptions to this? Yes, but again they prove the rule. So can we say that there was mercy in God’s giving rule to husbands over their wives, laying the foundation for societies in which families were constrained to continue even if less than happy? Yes. We have made an idolatry out of personal happiness and fulfillment, insisting that everyone who is married should be blissfully happy and ecstatically fulfilled. Therefore our marriages crash. It is folly, and it is cruel, and it is destroying us.

I have an article which I won’t read but I make available. It is by Albert Mohler. He says, it is very interesting; when the homosexuals decided they wanted to make homosexuality a mainstream value in American life, evangelical Christians rose up with loud shouts and objections. But when we decided to make divorce easy, obvious and common, nothing was said. Do we think that divorce is less a sin than homosexuality?

One of the commentators said that Adam’s curse did not fall on Adam himself, but only on the soil, on his work. Presumably this was in contrast to Eve. I don’t agree. More than anything else what Adam has lost is the one thing he needed the most: a helpmate. Adam is incomplete without his wife. But it is not just a wife that he needs. He is incomplete without a wife who is his equal, who can join with him as an equal, supplying what he does not have, receiving what he has to give. For the most part, however, it is easier, is it not gentlemen, it is easier to rule than to collaborate, to issue demands, commands, and edicts than to seek mutual understanding in the common pursuit of shared goals. It is easier in the short run to rule than to collaborate, and it turns out that every day is a short run until the long race of life is over. Then we stand at the far end and we look back and we say, what went wrong? Why do I stand here and feel so empty? By rule the husband secures the marriage and preserves the integrity of the family, but it is only after a fashion. This is not what God planned.

I’ve not finished but the time is up. We will continue with the consequences next week.

Questions for Understanding and Application: “Consequences”

1. Why is it important that grace is grounded in personal holiness? Can you think of occasions or situations where grace ended up with compromise and confusion?
2. In what ways is God’s judgment on the woman merciful?
3. Is it wrong or problematic to say that bearing and raising children is the calling and purpose for women? (See on this I Timothy 2:15) Is it fair to say that often the greatest joy in a woman’s life is her children, or that her children often bring her great sorrow?
4. What makes for a good marriage and what are the major challenges to having one?
5. On the surface I think few Americans would be described as fearful, but do you think there is underlying fear in people’s lives, and if so, what do people tend to fear?
6. Do you think that easy divorce, both legally and socially, has proven helpful for the general quality of marriages? What might be a better way forward for American life?
7. Are there outstanding married couples in your life, and what was their secret?
8. If you are married, what are the essential qualities which your spouse brings to you and your marriage which help it to “whole”?
9. It is widely observed that mothers are the spiritual leaders in their families rather than the fathers. Why do you think this is so? Why might it be a problem?
10. Are you often mindful of death? Do you agree that the realization of the “passing” of all things (think of Ecclesiastes 2:12-17) tends to rob life of its seriousness, to render our characters shallow, and to promote the pursuit of passing pleasures rather than eternal truths?