

Marriage in a Fallen World: Genesis 3
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Last week we started a sermon series on marriage, and it's my sincere prayer that God will teach us through His Word about the magnificence of marriage. And I'm not just preaching this for married men and women. I'm preaching this for the whole church, and for anyone else who's willing to listen. For all of us, single and married, I want us to behold the beauty of what God has created, that He ordained marriage to be a pointer to Christ's relationship to the church. God has placed all kinds of things in His creation that point to spiritual realities—that point to Him.

Just think about sheep and shepherds. What a creative thing for God to do, to make these animals called sheep who wander around aimlessly and helplessly, who desperately need the guidance and provision of a shepherd. And then God, in His Word, can speak to us about our sheep-like qualities, and His shepherd-like qualities. That's one thing God has put in this world that He can use as an analogy.

Marriage is a massively significant analogy, and much more than that. It is ordained by God to be a pointer to the most glorious news there is. Christ loved the church, His bride, and gave Himself up for her so that she might be united to Him, redeemed by Him, sanctified by Him. You can see that in Ephesians 5, which I quoted from last week, and we'll be studying further in the weeks to come. That's the great reality of the Gospel, and marriage was created by God to be a tangible and visible drama of that reality. Marriage is not an end in itself. Marriage does not exist merely as a means of self-fulfillment or a way to find companionship. Marriage is not ultimately about us and our needs and desires. It's about Christ and the church.

Now, I recognize that this vision of marriage—the biblical vision of marriage—is not widely known or accepted. That's a huge reason I'm so passionate to preach about it. The culture around us views marriage very differently than the Bible does. Our government has redefined marriage. The media and many influences in the culture are pushing hard for a total reinterpretation of marriage which is directly at odds with what God tells us in His Word. And it would be naïve to think that the church is immune to these unbiblical influences. We are susceptible to imbibing those unbiblical views, because it's the air we breathe in the culture around us.

This is why I want us to go deep into God's Word and study the foundation and design for marriage—God's design for marriage. I want this church to be filled with strong, Christ-

exalting marriages, and filled with single people who have a vision for Christ-centered marriage.

John Piper, in his book, *This Momentary Marriage*, says this about the radical disconnect between the biblical vision of marriage and our modern Western culture: “the magnificence of marriage in the mind of God [will] seem unintelligible in a modern Western culture, where the main idol is self; and its main doctrine is autonomy; and its central act of worship is being entertained; and its three main shrines are the television, the Internet, and the cinema [and we might add the sports arena]; and its most sacred genuflection is the uninhibited act of sexual intercourse” (page 20). That’s what we’re up against when we look to the culture around us and also the sinful inclinations still active within us. Those are the sinful and selfish inclinations that make the biblical view of marriage unappealing, even incomprehensible.

So I’m praying, and I hope you will pray with me, that God will cause us to see the glory of what He created marriage to be. I pray that whatever worldly assumptions we have will be shattered and God’s design for marriage will be beautiful in our sight and inspire in us great hope in the Gospel.

Last week we looked at marriage as God designed it in Genesis 1-2. This week we’re going to look at marriage in a fallen world in Genesis 3.

This is a very weighty chapter of the Bible, and there’s much that could be said about it. If you want to think further about this passage and the broader implications of it, I would encourage you to go to the church’s website and find the 5 sermons that I preached on Genesis 3 back in 2007. For this morning we’re going to focus on the implications for marriage. We’ll look at three things: Fall, Curse, and Redemption.

Last week we saw that God created the man and woman as equals, and also with distinct roles. In creation, before sin entered the world, there was God’s good design for male headship and leadership and God’s good design for the woman to be a helper fit for him. What we find now in the degeneration of marriage is that it degenerates precisely at these points. Sin enters the scene and wreaks havoc on God’s good design.

Fall

Let’s look, first of all, at how this is evident in the Fall. The first thing to notice is the way that the serpent launched his attack. Who did he assault? He came to Eve, the helper, rather than Adam, the head. The serpent defied the leadership of the husband and assaulted Eve with his lies. Then Eve took the fruit and ate. She usurped the leadership role and led both of them into sin. She ate, and she gave some to Adam to eat as well. And notice the

wording of verse 6, “she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband *who was with her*, and he ate.” Adam was right there with her. He was standing by passively, failing to lead and protect his wife. In the midst of this tragic moment the specific roles of the husband and wife were severely compromised.

Take note of these four things here all pertaining to the roles of the man and woman.

First of all, **the serpent approaches Eve rather than Adam**. Second, **Eve usurps Adam’s authority and leads them into sin**. Then thirdly, **Adam was standing by passively and idly, forsaking his role as leader and protector**. Everything about this situation went wrong.

Then we read on to see that **God holds Adam responsible**. In verse 9 God “called *to the man* and said *to him*, “Where are you?” Wouldn’t it seem more appropriate for God to come looking for Eve? After all, she was the one who ate first. She was the one who succumbed to the serpent’s temptation and ate, and then gave some to her husband to eat. Why didn’t God call for her and hold her primarily accountable? Or why didn’t God call for both of them? It seems curious that He calls specifically for the man. This is another pointer to the male headship that is woven into God’s design for marriage.

They are both responsible for their sin, of course, and they will both experience the consequences of their sin, but God holds Adam primarily responsible. God had entrusted Adam with the role of leading and protecting his wife. But instead Adam passively watched the serpent deceive Eve. He didn’t step in. He was not decisive. He didn’t take the initiative. He was not assertive. He should have stepped up, spoken with authority, and put himself between Eve and the serpent. But he utterly failed, and he was held responsible for his failure.

This having happened, it now would have been the right moment for Adam to confess his sin to the Lord, repent of it, and cry out for mercy. But what does he do instead? He points the finger at his wife. Adam should have been protecting his wife from Satan’s attack, but he didn’t. And now he should be leading them to repentance, but he doesn’t. Instead he blames her. He says in verse 12, “*The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.*” Isn’t that remarkable?! Adam tries to shift the blame to Eve, and even hints at it being God’s fault! He tries to place the blame as far away from himself as possible. He doesn’t want to own up to his own sin. He doesn’t want to admit his own wrongdoing. He doesn’t want to assume the responsibility assigned to him. His wife follows suit and blames the serpent. And thus the age old blame game begins.

Isn't this sad? Not long before this, Adam had rejoiced over Eve, "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." He was ecstatic that God had made Eve. But now sin has severely tainted the relationship. Sin has driven a wedge between them.

For those of you who are married, can you identify with this in your marriage? Can you identify with the impulse to blame rather than repent? Can you identify with that immediate reaction to point the finger at someone else rather than pointing the finger at yourself? I sure can, I'm sad to say. I know there are times when problems arise and my defenses can go up so fast. And my mind immediately starts racing to figure out a plausible justification for why I'm in the right and the problem is someone else's fault. When I think that way, I'm thinking like Adam.

Here's a place where the rubber meets the road in the fight to kill pride and foster humility in our lives. Pride says, It's not my fault. I'm fine. She did it. It's her fault. But humility says, I know I'm a sinner, and I know my sin has all kinds of negative ramifications. I repent. And humility cries out to God for mercy and help and forgiveness. Humility also makes confession to those whom we've sinned against, and seeks reconciliation and peace.

What an important thing for us to think about and pray about in our marriages. Pray to God that the next time you find yourself in some kind of conflict with your spouse, you'll be convicted of pride and you'll desire to respond in a humble and self-controlled and repentant way. **Gary and Betsy Ricucci**, in their book *Love That Lasts: When Marriage Meets Grace*, say that conflict can always be redemptive. And they encourage us to think of conflicts as spiritual pop quizzes from God.

Gary writes, "It seems God often lets me be caught off guard. I can't count the number of times that just when I think I might have this husband thing figured out, it happens: 'Okay, Mr. Maturity, Mr. Understanding, Mr. Love That Lasts—it's quiz time!' And soon, a few minutes into another unexpected conflict, I realize I'm either blaming Betsy for it or am trying to excuse, justify, or explain away my sin." (page 104) The reason this can be redemptive is because it reveals our sin and our pride and gives us the opportunity to confess that and repent of it and ask for God's grace to overcome it. That's how these conflicts can be sanctifying if we reflect enough to realize that so often we're acting just like Adam and Eve when they tried to pass the buck. All of this is sin. All of it is part of the Fall and part of living in a fallen world.

I'll say more about redemption in the third point of this message, but let's realize here that playing the blame game is just what Adam and Eve did, and it's sinful. If we understand that, and

desire to counteract it, then times of conflict can turn out to be redemptive and sanctifying.

The Curse on the Woman

Now let's look at the curse that comes as a result of the Fall. In verses 14-15 there is the curse on the serpent, which we'll come back to in the next point. Then comes the curse on the woman in verse 16, and the curse on the man in verses 17-19. And we'll notice in these verses that the curse upon the woman and the man are gender-specific. The Fall affects women and men in particular ways that correspond to their specific God-ordained roles. For the woman, the Fall affects childbearing. Not that every woman bears children, but this is a role God has given uniquely to women. And we should understand that childbearing itself is not the curse, but pain in childbearing is the curse. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were instructed to be fruitful and multiply. But now the sad news comes that the beauty of childbearing will be accompanied by great pain.

Then God says to Eve: "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." So the Fall affects not only the woman's role as mother, but also as wife. It tarnishes the beauty of childbearing, and also distorts the beauty of marriage. To interpret the meaning of this statement it's very helpful to see that two of the same words are used just a few verses later in 4:7. The word for "desire" and the word for "rule" are both used in 4:7, making the two verses very similar in structure and wording.

In 4:7 the desire is referring to sin's desire to overcome Cain. "And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." It's a desire for domination, for control. Yet Cain must rule over it, resist it, subdue it. Similarly in 3:16, the Fall distorts the beautiful complementarity of creation. Rather than the wife joyfully submitting to her husband, sin now causes her to rebel against his leadership and desire to dominate him and control him. She wants to be the boss. She wants to be the leader. And yet, as the rest of the verse says, "he shall rule over you."

So do you see how the creation order of the man as the leader and the wife as the helper degenerates into the wife trying to manipulate and dominate her husband, and the husband trying to resist her, subdue her, rule over her, and doing so often in demeaning and unloving ways? I think we can see these tendencies in every marriage, and in every man and woman, because we are all sinners. And we certainly see the devastating effects of these things in many relationships. The battle of the sexes began at the Fall. God's design in creation was perfect and

harmonious, but the Fall into sin resulted in rivalry and manipulation and abuse.

Before we move on to talk about the curse on the man, let me encourage the wives to really consider what verse 16 means for you. First you should search your heart and think of ways that you have tried to dominate your husband or manipulate him to get certain things that you want. Some women pride themselves in the fact that they “wear the pants” in the relationship. That can happen in blatant ways, or very subtle ways. What all wives must realize is that the desire to control your husband is a product of the Fall. It is part of the curse. It is a result of sin. It’s not the way it’s supposed to be. So 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. If your husband is abusive or if he is asking you to sin in some way, you cannot be submissive to those requests and you should seek godly counsel in how to handle that. But aside from situations like 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 or withholding physical affection or intimacy from him. Don’t boss him around. Confess these sins and repent of them, and seek God’s grace to change those habits.

The Curse on the Man

Moving on to verses 17-19 we read of Adam’s punishment. And notice the way the Lord words this in verse 17. He doesn’t just say, “Because you have eaten of the tree.” He says, “Because you have listened to your wife and have eaten of the tree . . .” Adam not only sinned by disobeying God’s clear command, but he also sinned by passively following his wife into sin. He listened to her, rather than instructing her and leading her.

Now, we have to be careful here. Husbands, we need to listen to our wives. I don’t want anyone to leave here and say that Pastor Ben told you not to listen to your wife, or that the Bible says you shouldn’t listen to your wife. We need to listen to our wives. Most of us probably don’t listen to our wives nearly enough or with nearly the level of attentiveness that we should. We need their help and advice and wise counsel.

But we must listen as leaders, not as followers. We must listen as spiritual leaders who are seeking the help and support of one placed in our care, not as a spineless, undirected child who is persuaded by any suggestion that floats his way. That’s what the Lord is chastising Adam for. The way the Lord speaks to Adam here highlights his sin, not only in disobeying the command, but in

his failure to lead and protect his wife. Rather than leading and protecting, Adam followed his wife into sin.

The Lord also emphasizes Adam's primary responsibility in this. He does not address Eve in the same way. When the Lord spoke to Eve, He simply stated the punishment without expressing the cause for punishment. But with Adam, He speaks to him at greater length, and He is much more direct in assigning the main responsibility to Adam. The Lord tells Adam, this curse is because of you. Look at verse 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;" (Genesis 3:17, ESV)

Because of Adam's sin, God curses the ground. 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 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. Like childbirth is not the curse for the woman. It's pain in childbirth that is the curse. Similarly, work is not the punishment for the man. 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. But the Fall changed that. The Fall brought a curse on the ground, and it caused work to become burdensome.

I think about this often when I'm working in my yard. The things that we want to grow and look nice, like flowers, they usually wilt and die. But the things we want to die and go away are as hearty as can be. I would like to think that when the grass is turning brown because of lack of rain, that the weeds would turn brown too, and maybe die. But no. The weeds still seem to be doing fine. That's just how it is in a fallen world. And it's not just yard work. There are organizational thorns and thistles, relational thorns and thistles, financial thorns and thistles, logistical thorns and thistles, and on and on. Whatever line of work you're in, there are things that throw a wrench in the gears and mess things up.

Let me draw out a couple of implications from all of this. First, husbands need to recognize their role as the provider. As men, we are to work. And because of the curse on the ground, we need to work hard. It is clear in creation, and it is clear in the

curse, that it is our specific duty as men to work. Each one of us needs to be pursuing a vocation that can support the family. That may not be possible in every circumstance . . . if there's a disability or some other hardship. But, generally speaking, this ought to be our aspiration as men. It should be your goal, as a husband, that your wife will not feel a necessity to work outside the home, but can rather be free to focus her time and energy on the all-important task of nurturing the children and caring for the home.

Another thing needs to be said about work, though, and that is to acknowledge the potential of becoming workaholics. With the curse of sin comes division in marriages and families. The wife desires to manipulate and control her husband, as we looked at earlier in verse 16. And the issue that often mirrors that is the absent husband—the husband who loves his work too much, and loves his wife and children too little, that he is too often absent from the home. And you can see how this problem escalates and perpetuates itself if the wife nags her husband and bosses him around, which makes him want to be at home even less, which makes her nag even more. It's a vicious cycle, a downward spiral.

In his excellent book, *The Masculine Mandate*, which I quoted from last week as well, **Richard Phillips** (2 slides) gives this insightful summary. “God’s curse on the man draws him unwholesomely *away* from the woman, even as God’s curse on the woman draws her unwholesomely *toward* the man. This is why most marital counseling sessions are some variation on this theme: Wife—‘You don’t pay any attention to me.’ Husband—‘You are too demanding and nag too much.’ God has cursed the marriage relationship with a poisonous desire for control by the woman and a self-absorbed focus outside the relationship by the man.” (page 73) I think that’s extremely perceptive. Again, if we can see this and recognize it in our own sinful tendencies, it can be redemptive. We can fight to kill these sins which are a result of the Fall.

Husbands, work hard to provide for your family. But at the same time, don’t make your work an idol. Don’t let work become the mistress that steals your passion away from your wife. We have to keep these things in balance—wanting to work hard, but keeping ambition in check so that work doesn’t become the all-consuming passion of life that ends up severing us from the family.

Redemption

We’ve looked at the Fall and the curse. Now let’s observe the pointers to redemption that are also found in this same chapter. Look at verse 15, which contains a great message of hope. God says to the serpent, “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 verse is ultimately

referring to Christ, the offspring of the woman, and Satan. It's pointing to the fact that Christ will bruise Satan's head, and Satan will bruise Christ's heel. This is the Gospel message, that Christ was put to death in order to triumph over death. Christ's victory was not easy. He was tortured and crucified, and Satan thought he was triumphing over Christ. But those events did not signal Christ's defeat. Rather, it was in this way that Christ triumphed. Satan may have bruised Christ's heel, but Christ bruised Satan's head.

As **Hebrews 2:14-15** says, "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself [Jesus] 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 all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." Jesus died to defeat death. And because He died, we don't need to fear death. He took our punishment on Himself, so that we don't have to try to cover our own shame, and we don't have to be separated from God forever, and we don't need to blame others. Our shame, our guilt, our blame, our punishment, was all placed on Jesus' shoulders as He died on the cross.

There's also another poignant demonstration of God's grace in this chapter. You remember that Adam and Eve had made fig leaves for themselves because of their shame (verse 7). And their 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 some 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.

In fact, even a lifetime of penance, a lifetime of punishment, could not fully cover our sin. A news story from this past week points to this reality. James Holmes, the man who killed 12 people and wounded 70 during a shooting spree in a movie theater in 2012, was sentenced this past week. And this was the sentence given: 12 life sentences without chance of parole and 3,318 years. Of course, we all know that's impossible because he's not going to live that long. But it's an attempt to show how vast is the guilt of this man's crime. Even if he could live out 3,318 years in prison, the grave evil he committed would not be erased or covered. And the same is true of my sins and yours. There's no amount of good deeds we could ever do, no penalty we could pay, that would atone for our sins.

What *can* cover my sin, then? Only God can provide the covering needed to remove our guilt and shame. And 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 in order for this to happen. This was the first shedding of blood, the first physical deaths. Who *should* have died, we might ask? 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 clothe them with garments of skins.

It’s 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. Even though this chapter is dominated by sin and separation and punishment, 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, the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed so that we may live. And it’s Christ’s righteousness 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.

What a gracious God we have, that immediately after the Fall into sin, He gives a statement of hope in verse 15 and even tangibly demonstrates His mercy in verse 21. He is a gracious and forgiving God. So whether you’re married or single, don’t try to cover your own shame and guilt. Don’t try to blame others. Trust in Jesus. Put your hope in Him. He has crushed Satan’s head and has triumphed over sin and death, and He mercifully clothes His children with the righteousness of Christ.