

3. WOMAN: AT THE FALL

In the beginning the woman shared a life of bliss, innocence, and spiritual union with the man. Now human existence is characterized by pain, discord, and death. Genesis 3 records for us how such a drastic change came about--sin entered the human race, and with it every evil that now attaches to the human condition. The chapter is one of the early narratives in the book that lay the foundation for the promise of blessing through the covenant. In short, these chapters explain why the human race needs God's blessing.

Even though the material deals with both Adam and Eve, for the sake of this series we shall study only the passages that pertain to the woman directly. This section will focus on the woman as she was beguiled, rebuked, and restored.

The Temptation (Genesis 3:1-7)

The subject matter in these verses is the temptation that led to disobedience. The record of how Eve was beguiled gives us a timeless picture of what temptation is, for the disobedience cannot be blamed on the environment--it was perfect; and it cannot be blamed on heredity--there were no parents for them. So we can read this chapter on two levels: on the literal, historical level we can see the account of how sin entered the human race, on the *archetypical* level the story describes the process that occurs repeatedly in human experience. Here the story achieves a didactic element, enabling us to withstand the tempter because we are not ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:11). So there was an Eve and an Adam whose sin brought death to the world; but Adam and Eve are also every man and every woman, because by our own sins we bring death on ourselves as well.

Temptation Comes In Disguise (3:1)

The story presents the tempter as "the serpent" whom the New Testament identifies as the devil (Rev. 12:9). But it is important to remember that the woman did not know it was Satan, or perhaps even what a Satan was. We know it from the full revelation of the Bible, but the point of the passage is that in the moment of temptation people do not know it is Satan.

That the tempter was a serpent indicates that temptation cleverly came in disguise. And, as the first verse says, this serpent was shrewder than all of God's creation. The serpent was a creature that she and Adam were to have dominion over, a subordinate creature. The approach is shrewd and calculating. If the tempter had come boldly and announced that he was there to destroy her life, she probably would have resisted. But the appeal from a subordinate creature apparently took Eve by surprise, for she was engaged in the conversation before she had a chance to think. It was at an unguarded moment. She was beguiled.

The appearance of a crafty serpent prompting Eve to sin is a mystery to us. The text is interested neither in the origin of evil nor in the nature of the snake; rather, it is interested only in what the tempter said. The narrative leaves all other questions enshrouded in mystery. However, it is worth noting that the serpent was a predominant symbol in the pagan world. The nations of the ancient Near East venerated the serpent as the life-giving goddess of the earth. In fact, the Egyptians, recent to the memory of the first generation of Israelites who fled from bondage, were reminded of this potency with a sacred cobra on the headdress of the Pharaoh. Consequently, the representation of the serpent in this passage strikes a remarkably antithetical theme. The story takes on a polemic nature -- hardly is the serpent life-giving! It became the cause of death.

Temptation Questions the Word of God (3:1b-3)

The second device of the tempter is to engage people in a discussion about the Word of God. This is no honest or sincere investigation into the deeper meaning of the revelation. Nor is it a discussion of some minor point of God's Word about which there might be some controversy. The tempter took a clear-cut commandment from God and turned it around for a topic of debate. In the process he discovered that the woman did not know the Word precisely.

It is worth noting that the wording of the question was, "Indeed, has God said . . ." He could speak only of "God," not of the LORD (i.e., Yahweh), the name that belonged to God and that emphasized the covenant relation He had with His creation. But what happens is predictably true of temptation--the woman responds in the discussion by using the tempter's designation "God," and not the covenant name Yahweh. She was supposed to have a relationship with the LORD; Satan did not, and so would not use the covenant name.

The question of the tempter is also shrewd in its effect. It was not a direct denial of what God said, not yet. The question Satan raised was not easy to answer, for it left several possible answers open. Its purpose, however, was to engage the woman in discussion, to give her a chance to justify herself and defend God, and in the process reveal some cracks in her defense.

In the woman's response to the tempter's question, it becomes clear that the precision of the Word of the LORD had not been retained. There are three changes that she made. First, she minimized the provision of the LORD. The LORD had said, "You may freely eat" (*'akol to'kel*), but Eve simply said, "We may eat" (*no'kel*). The temptation has gotten her to focus on the

prohibition, and so she minimized the privileges. Second, Eve added to the prohibition. The LORD had said nothing about touching the tree (2:16,17), but Eve said that God said, “Neither shall you touch it” (*w^elo’ tiggē’u*). Von Rad says that it is as though she wanted to set a law for herself by means of this exaggeration. Third, she weakened the penalty for the sin. God had declared, “You shall surely die” (*mot tamut*), but Eve said, “lest you die” (*pen t^emutun*).

The changes that were made between the original commandment and this passage are within the legitimate range of interpretation. There is no violation in freely paraphrasing of the words of the LORD. However, if the precise wording of the original commandment is lost, the appeal of the tempter to sin can become stronger. “Lest you die” carries the meaning of God’s warning, but it does not clearly retain the certainty of the penalty of death. As Westermann says, “A command that is questioned is no longer the original command.”

Temptation Doubts the Integrity of God (3:4-5)

When the serpent saw that the woman had not retained a precise knowledge of God’s words, he flatly denied what God had said. It is striking that his words are much closer to the original. Almost precise; he said, “You shall not surely die.” The construction in the Hebrew reflects his boldness: “Not -- you shall surely die” (*lo’ mot t^emutun*). What was at first a question about the prohibition now became a denial of the consequence of disobedience. Here is the lie that has allured the human race from the beginning: there is no punishment for sin (see John 8:44). But the Bible again and again makes it clear that no one can sin and get away with it—“the soul that sins will die.”

Not only did the tempter deny the Word of God, but he also raised serious doubts about God’s integrity. His explanation of God’s motive in giving the law was that God was jealous and was holding them back from their destiny. According to the serpent, God knew that they would become like God, knowing good and evil. He thus held out the promise of divinity to them.

This knowledge of good and evil was and is intriguing. Adam and Eve lived in a setting that God had pronounced “good.” Yet they were now led to believe that there was a greater good held back from them, that somehow they could elevate life for the better, to enter into the work of God and do something God had not done. But with the knowledge of good there was also the knowledge of evil, that potential of putting life in danger or destroying it altogether. This potential they underestimated. Whenever humans try to improve on God’s plan for life, they introduce evil in some form, some side effect. God prevented them from having this knowledge because they do not have the wisdom to control it.

In raising doubt about God’s integrity, the tempter motivated the couple to sin by using the promise of divinity. The idea of becoming like God has an appeal that is irresistible (note the thought in Isa. 14:14; and especially recall the account of the proud king in Acts 12 and in Josephus). Yet, being led by a subordinate, as Kidner remarks, is “a curious way to achieve divinity.”

Temptation Appeals to the Senses (3:6)

The direct work of the tempter was now finished. He had removed the barrier to their eating--Eve was no longer convinced that God would punish them for it. And he had brought them to the brink of sin with his rationalization--Eve thought that God was holding them back from divinity. Now the appeal of the forbidden fruit itself was sufficient to draw them into sin.

Practicality for food, aesthetic beauty, and the potential for wisdom--the physical, emotional, and spiritual senses--all worked together to draw Eve into sin. The new possibilities of life enticed her to eat. This threefold description of what Eve perceived seems to be reflected in John's words: "lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Natural desires for food, beauty, and knowledge are gifts from God but are to be used with restrictions. The world ignores these restrictions.

The words used in Eve's reflections are significant. First, the words "pleasant" (*ta'awah*) and "desirable" (*nehmad*) are derivatives of the Hebrew verbs translated "covet" in the Ten Commandments; both verbs are used in Deuteronomy 5:21, but the second one occurs in Exodus 20:17. Strong desire such as Eve's, or coveting as the commandment prohibits, is usually followed by an unlawful taking, as it was here. This story, then, would have been instructive for Israel about the folly of acting on desire. Second, Eve's reflection concentrates on the potential good of the fruit and ignores the evil that there is in disobedience. And third, the use of the word for wisdom, "to make one wise" (*l'haskil*) introduces the strongest appeal to the woman. To be wise is to have mental and spiritual acumen. She clearly believed the tempter's lie but realized her mistake too late. Later, Paul would say that the world by its wisdom did not know God, and that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 1:26-2:16; 3:18).

The verse then reports simply that the woman ate and gave also to her husband. It was such a simple act, but how great were its consequences. The LORD himself would have to taste death before these verbs "take and eat" would become verbs of salvation (see the eucharistic words of Jesus).

This, then, is the detailed account of how the woman was beguiled. But the text of Scripture in no way places the blame for the Fall on the woman. The comment here that the man "ate also" is significant. He apparently needed no clever words of temptation--he simply went along with the disobedience, being led by Eve to eat. His way that led to transgression was willful sin, a conformity to Eve. While the New Testament says that Eve was beguiled and sinned, it affirms that man sinned willfully --and so it was by one man that sin entered the world (see 1 Tim. 2:14; Rom. 5:12, 17-19).

This passage teaches a very important lesson. We cannot hope to withstand the tempter if we do not know the Word of God correctly. If we doubt the penalty of sin and the goodness of God, the appeal from the world, the flesh, and the devil will overcome us.

But there is more. Many women have been brought to doubt the goodness of God in this age of women's movements. Their concentration is drawn to prohibitions and they feel God is holding them back, or God really does not like them. When the biblical passages are discussed, Satan often turns it into an option rather than a command, just a few ideas that men wrote and not God, and so many have rejected it. Christian women must remember that spiritual, physical, and mental fulfillment does not come by disobeying God. The results of following Satan's promise of freedom and wisdom are grotesquely anticlimactic. God-likeness--in character and ability--does not come by opposing God. It comes by knowing and obeying His word.

Sin immediately brings a consciousness of guilt: their eyes were opened. But Satan had deceived them. They now understood, but it was too late. Their hope of being like God was gone. Here is the sad picture of guilty sinners who are trying to evade judgment: they are afraid, hiding, and trying to cover their shame. But God finds them.

The Oracles of God at the Fall (Gen. 3:8-24)

God's oracles in Genesis 3 have often been called "curses." In a general sense that is true, but God never actually says that the man and the woman are cursed--only the ground is cursed, and a human (Cain) is cursed only in the next chapter. Here there is questioning, for God wants confession; there is punishment, for sin has destroyed the life they once had; but in the punishments there are provisions for the sinners that provide hope. These oracles of God are not commandments. They are not mottoes to live up to. They are God's declaration of the new order that will exist throughout time because of the presence of evil. Try as they may, humans cannot set them aside. Only God Himself can do that--will do that eventually through Christ who will become the curse.

The chapter reveals that there are many effects of sin that both the man and the woman share. They are universally shared. We all share them, not only because through them sin entered the human race, but also because we have sinned. First, there is the danger of exploitation rather than integrity. Life would be a dangerous struggle from now on among people. Second, shame would characterize human life rather than innocence. They covered themselves because they were no longer at ease with each other but alienated. Third, fear would replace close fellowship. They hid from God. Fourth, painful toil would replace dominion over creation. They now had to scratch out a bare subsistence from the ground, but not in the lush garden. Fifth, death would reign over the entire race. They were declared to be but dust (not divinities) and so would return to dust. Thus, the result of sin is conflict, shame, fear, pain, and death.

And then there is the perpetual struggle between good and evil. In the oracles there are three significant effects of the Fall that pertain to the woman. The first is that there will be perpetual warfare between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed, ending when the seed of the

woman delivers the crushing blow after receiving the crippling blow (3:15). Much has been written about the seed of the woman, but it usually concentrates on the connection with the victory of Christ over Satan. But there is more to this passage. The immediate seed of the woman would be Cain, and then all humanity, for she was the mother of all living, and finally Christ who is the representative of the human race. The seed of the serpent is not so easy, but by New Testament times it may have included all who rejected the Lord and opposed His kingdom (e.g., “you are of your father the devil” in John 8:44). Along the way, we may say, anything that represented the forces of evil could be included in “the seed of the serpent.” In Genesis 4 there is an immediate outworking of the conflict between Cain, the seed of the woman, and sin that is couching at the door, whose desire was to have Cain. This struggle between good and evil would always be there in the human race, but ultimately the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent’s seed.

So because a conflict began between the evil one and the woman in the garden, it would continue throughout life’s existence. But victory is promised to the woman through her seed. It would take the rest of God’s revelation to unfold this glorious drama of redemption.

There was also to be painful agony in bearing children. In the oracle for the woman (v. 16), one part introduces great pain into the process of having children. The Hebrew construction must be interpreted carefully: “I will greatly multiply your pain in conception.” The older Bibles had “pain and conception,” a literal reading that misses the point of the verse. “Conception” precisely locates the pain, but conception is not a curse (indeed, conception was always considered a blessing from God). The curse is the pain that will take place in conception. That this is the correct interpretation may be seen from the rest of the verse that parallels the idea: “in pain you shall bring forth children.”

The words in this section must be studied very carefully. First, since there is no pain in conception, the word “conception” must be a figure of speech, a *synecdoche* representing the whole process that begins with conception. The parallel “bring forth” gives us further understanding of what is meant. Second, the word for “pain” (>*iss^ebon*) is not to be limited to physical suffering in the process of childbirth. It basically means “painful toil” and includes emotional as well as physical pain. The woman’s susceptibility to the emotional and physical pain associated with the process of, and ability for, child-bearing and child-rearing is what Peter had in mind in his description of “weaker vessels” (1 Peter 3:7). The pain will be there from the word “go”; that is, from conception onward it will be painful, not just labor pains, but the pain of caring for the child through life, even seeing the child suffer, or die. All of it will be painful for the woman, more than for the man.

Sin brings pain to the heart of God; thus, sinners, both man and woman, will suffer pain, he in labor, she in bringing children into the world. Even when the promised seed, Jesus, became the curse for us, a “sword” pierced the heart of his mother Mary (see Luke 2:35). Pain will exist until the curse is removed at the end of the age. But here there is also a note of hope. Under the sentence of death the race will continue--children will be born. And the birth of children was to be interpreted as a sign of God’s blessing (Psalm 127:4, 5).

The struggle for control between the sexes is the second part of verse 16. It reads in standard translations, “your desire *will be* to your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Many have thought that this means that a woman will have a strong desire to get married. But that is not a curse; neither can that be what these words in this context mean.

First, it is important to know that in the Hebrew construction this is a nominal sentence. That means, there is no verb--the translation must supply a form of the verb “to be” to make a smooth English sentence. The future tense “will be” has been supplied by traditional translations because the oracle seems to be saying what will now happen. But a study of the words leads me to suspect a past tense “was” would clarify what is going on here. In the oracle on the serpent, and in the oracle on the man, a pattern emerges something like “because you did such and such, this shall be your curse.” Here the “desire” is the basis and the “mastery” is the result--because you desired . . . he will have the mastery.

This now requires a word study. The Hebrew word “desire” (*ʾeshuqah*) has some of the same uses that the English word has. The interpretation that says it means that a woman will be drawn to her husband is based on the usage of the word in the Song of Solomon. There it clearly is physical desire. But this is not a love song. This was not written by Solomon. And this is much earlier. Genesis 3 is God’s oracle on sin. In the context of Genesis the term has a different meaning. A comparison with Genesis 4:7 helps us to see what is meant here, for that passage appears to be drawing on this one precisely. There God warns Cain: “sin is crouching at the door, and its **desire** is for you, but you can have the **mastery** over it” (the Hebrew terms being identical words with the pronouns changed). According to the usage in Genesis 4, “desire” should have the connotation of desiring to control and even prompting to evil. The idea of the verse in the oracle on the woman would then be that, because the woman took control and prompted the man to sin by giving him something to eat, that is, taking the lead rather than maintaining a partnership, the man would have dominion over her. I would translate it this way: “Your desire was to your husband, but he shall have the mastery over you.” This view also finds support in the way God immediately addresses the man in verse 17: “Because you obeyed your wife”

Important to the understanding of this line is the meaning of the word “rule” (*mashal*). This word cannot be weakened to mean loving leadership, as many expositors wish to do. It is a term that describes dominion, mastery, control, lordship. It can have a rather harsh application. The significant point about this verse is that it is part of the punishment for sin. To attempt to make it teach something good--the love of a woman for her husband and the leadership of the husband to his wife--completely misses the point. Those are qualities that are part of the work of the Holy Spirit; they are taught in the New Testament as the way that God takes the sting out of the curse. But this passage is different. This is what sin is like; this is what it produces.

How would this saying apply to subsequent generations from Adam and Eve? It may be that the male domination in the history of the human race is a perpetual reminder of the Fall, just as the serpent’s crawling on the ground. But if Eve is an archetype, that is, if she represents every woman as Adam represents every man, then the story portrays a characteristic of fallen human nature. It would say that woman at her worst--not all the time, and not necessarily often but potentially and occasionally because of her sin nature--would be a nemesis to man, desiring to control him for better or for worse. And the man at his worst (because of his sin nature) would be

a domineering tyrant. So the conflict or struggle will be in the human race, turning the institution of marriage into a power struggle.

We will have to come back to this issue when we discuss the New Testament teachings about men and women. The Christian exposition of this passage will necessarily carry the ideas further. For believers in Jesus Christ, life in the Spirit removes the sting of the curse so that a more harmonious and loving relationship is envisioned than that which is declared to be a result of evil in the human race. Regeneration does not yet remove the curse--there is still death, pain, and conflict; but new life in Christ changes how people live in a fallen world.

So the lesson from these oracles is clear: sin brings pain, discord, and alienation. These problems in life should remind us of sin, and that the way to correct them is not by disobeying God. That is how they got there in the first place!

The Gracious Provision (Genesis 3:20-24)

Faith Overcomes the Doom of the Curse (3:20)

At first it might seem that the text reports an incidental matter--the naming of Eve. But a closer analysis of the meaning of, and the motivation for, the name, especially in contrast with the prospect of death as a punishment for sin, will show that it indicates Adam's faith (Eve's faith is expressed in her naming of Cain in Genesis 4:1--the first birth). The whole incident shows that they accepted their lot in a fallen world (now Adam named his wife; in chapter 4 the woman named her children--so the order had taken effect) but held on to the positive side of it--life would continue. Their look is uplifted in faith (contrast Cain's bitterness after his interrogation).

The name "Eve" (*Khawwah*, "living" or "life-giver"), interpreted by the narrator as "the mother of all living (*khay*)," signifies that the woman became a pledge in the continuation of the race, in spite of the curse. The name celebrates the survival of the race and the victory over death. It is certainly a consolation to the woman that she will be the mother of all living, or to put it another way, she shall be saved by childbirth (we shall return to this connection in Paul's teachings later). By anticipating life the name also commemorates the establishment of a new order.

God deals graciously with the sinners in two other ways. First, he drives them out of the garden of Eden to prevent them from eating from the tree of life and living forever in this sinful state. Second, God graciously clothes them with skins as a sign that he covers their guilt and their shame. This marvelous act begins the long history of sacrificial atonement that would lead to Christ, the perfect sacrifice.

It should be noted that the clothing which God provides was in itself different from what they thought of doing. They used leaves from a tree. Their instinct was right, but the remedy insufficient. Dods explains that God deprived an animal of life, that guilt might be covered. This is the last thing that Adam and Eve would have thought to do. To us life is cheap and death familiar; but they were introduced to death as a punishment for sin. Death was a sign of God's anger. Sin could not be covered by a bunch of leaves snatched from a bush as they passed by and would grow again next year--but only by pain and blood. Suffering must follow wrongdoing. Once we have sinned, we cannot regain peace of conscience except through pain, and not just our own.

Summary

1. Jesus Christ, the greatest seed of the woman, would become the curse for us.

In the fulness of time He came and was born of a woman. This Son was the express image of God, the final Adam. As by the disobedience of one man who sinned willfully sin entered the world, so by the obedience of Christ was it conquered. At His temptation (Matt. 4), Jesus demonstrated His power over the tempter by His knowledge of the Word of God--Deuteronomy! He assured us of paradise regained. In His sacrifice for our sins He became the curse. He sweat great drops of blood, He shed His tears, He bore our sorrows, He suffered the pain, He was crowned with thorns, He was nailed to a tree, and He was laid in the dust of death. All these motifs are from the curse oracles in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve lost the way to God, but Jesus said, "I AM the way"; they believed a lie, but Jesus declared, "I AM the truth"; Adam and Eve received the penalty of death, but Jesus promised, "I AM the life." Through His resurrection He triumphed over death. He is God's complete remedy for mankind's complete ruin.

2. The effects of sin are still with us, but should not control us.

Certainly the effects of sin are with us--struggle, pain, sorrow, alienation, mastery, labor, and death. But by faith the believer can live above it all. The sting of it is gone because death has been swallowed up in victory, and the present suffering will be changed in glory. Positionally, in Jesus Christ, the believer is not burdened by the curse, but lives above it as much as possible. I do not mean to oversimplify this--it is difficult and we frequently groan under the impact of a fallen world; but faith should give us the victory that overcomes the world. In marriage there ought to be a different relationship than the world has because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It should not be defined by the terms of the curse--domination or manipulation. It should be a mutually satisfying relationship patterned after Christ's loving relationship to the Church. We shall return to this theme later.

3. The woman is responsible before God for herself.

To be spiritually and intellectually equal with man means that the woman is responsible before God for her own spiritual life. She does not derive her spirituality from a husband. She stands before God as an individual. She must be saved as an individual soul. She must grow in grace and knowledge of the word as an individual believer. She must also obey the word. Without this spiritual growth the appeal of the affluent worldly life will destroy her and her usefulness to God as a Christian woman. Such a fall can easily influence others, especially a husband and children. Only a thorough knowledge of God's word and a complete assurance of God's goodness protects from such beguiling from the world.