

## Genesis 3:16-19

### *Why Is There Suffering In Our World?*

"Any philosopher's argument which does not treat human suffering is worthless. For just as there is no profit in medicine if it does not expel the diseases of the body, so there is no profit in philosophy either, if it does not expel the suffering of the mind." These are the words of Epicurus, born on the island of Samos, a few miles off the Ionian coast, in 341BC.

The problem of suffering and pain has intrigued philosophers, theologians, religious people, and irreligious people alike. The question is, why is there suffering in our world?

We're in a study of the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis. The word "Genesis" literally means origin, beginning, or source.

What we've seen over the past several weeks is the origins of some very foundational things. We've seen that God created the heavens and the earth. He made man from the dust of the ground and woman from his side.

We also saw that evil entered our world when Adam chose to disobey the clear command of God. We're all his descendants and we've inherited his nature which is why we all sin.

Sometimes that sin spills over into other people's lives in the form of hatred, war, violence, slavery, terrorism, abuse. There's evil in the world because there's people in the world and people are sinners.

Because of sin, God cursed the earth and out of that curse we find pain, toil, subjection, and death. These are the inevitable consequences of human disobedience to God. They were in the beginning, they still are today.

These are what the Bible is really talking about when it uses the word "death," in its broadest sense. When the New Testament book of Romans 6:23 says *the wages of sin is death*, it's not talking about a corpse; it's talking about this kind of death, the sense of separation, pain, sorrow, toil, and subjection.

Now, it's true that with sin we receive some temporary pleasure. Indulgence in sin is

an ego-satisfying thing. So we engage in it because we like the temporary pleasure it gives. But, as we saw last week, it's all a package deal.

We can't omit the consequences. It all goes together, and contributes to the sense of loss, of emptiness inside, of restlessness and purposelessness.

Today we're going to see Adam and Eve after the fall. As we do I want us to really zero in on these four factors of pain, subjection, toil, and death, to see what they involve and why they were given by God.

Here's what I want to challenge you with.

If we walk out of here today really understanding what the Bible is saying in Genesis 3 it will change us from grumbling, complaining critics of life to grateful, thankful people.

### **Turn with me to Genesis 3**

#### *I. God First Pronounces The Consequences Of Sin To Eve*

#### **Read verse 16**

There is something very interesting here. God's approach to the woman is different than to the man, and certainly than to the serpent. Notice what He says to the serpent in verse 15, *Because you have done this...*

And, in Verse 17, to Adam *Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree...*

It's like, "Because you've done this, because you've done that," but He doesn't say that to the woman. This is very significant. There are consequences that follow sin in her life. She disobeyed God too, but God doesn't charge her ultimately with being at fault. We'll see why when we get to to Adam.

But in each of these cases, the serpent, the man, and the woman, there are two consequences that follow for each. The serpent, actually Satan who spoke through him, was to experience humiliation and defeat. In the case of the woman the consequences are pain and subjection. These I believe are factors arising out of her nature. Let me explain what I mean by that.

First, there is the factor of pain and the danger of childbirth, which obviously only women can experience firsthand.

No man knows what a woman goes through in the birth of a child, but every mother here understands.

Now I'm sure at certain times in the pregnancy and delivery most women wish their husband could know first hand what their going through, but they can't.

Even Thomas Beatie, the 34-year-old guy who went on Oprah to announce he was pregnant, tuned out to be a woman who claimed to be a guy.

Notice the words "sorrow" and "pain" in verse 16. They both come from the same Hebrew root.

Technically in Hebrew there's no word for pain. The root word means "to toil," like, "heart-breaking toil." What word do we use to describe the process of a woman giving birth? Labor.

Now notice something interesting here. God says, *I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception*. We know that there was no pain and suffering before Adam and Eve sinned so God isn't saying "I'll increase something that didn't exist." That wouldn't make sense.

What I do believe God is saying is that the pain associated with childbirth will continue in other ways throughout a mother's life.

I think what God is pointing to is the potential heartbreak associated with having children.

A threat to a child is pain to a mother's heart. It's not that dad doesn't feel it but in a unique way mothers' hearts are bound to their children. A mother becomes so involved in the life of her children that what they feel, she feels; if they fail, she feels the heartbreak of it particularly strongly.

But this isn't all that's part of woman's experience as a result of the fall. The rest of verse 16 says, *Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.*

The phrase “your desire,” is an interesting one. It comes from a Hebrew word that literally means, “to run after.” It means “a longing after.” Her desires run after her husband.

Other people can be patting her on the back and telling her what a good job she’s doing, but if her husband doesn’t appreciate her, a wife is grieved. It can be the other way around too. If a husband encourages and cherishes his wife she can be OK even if other people don’t.

Her desire finds its fulfillment in her husband, she longs to be important to him.

Just remember, this desire is not in itself a consequence of sin. This relationship of Eve to Adam was present before they ate the fruit. The headship of the man was a fact from the creation.

It’s the end of this verse that marks the result of sin, *he shall rule over you*. Try to put yourself back in the Garden with Adam and Eve before the fall. The relationship of the woman to the man consisted of a natural desire to follow. She came out of man and was made for him, to be his helper and to work together toward God’s goals for them as a couple. It was a natural yielding.

But now as a result of their sin, a perverse element enters into all of this. A struggle occurs, a tension ensues, in which the woman is torn between the natural God-given desire to yield to her husband, and at the same time, the awakened desire to exert her will against his. Suddenly she wants to be in charge. This is the tension that exists, as a result of the fall.

God says *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*. Ephesians 5:25 Unfortunately, because we’re all sinners, some men want to dominate their wives and some wives want to control their husbands.

Here’s what the Bible says, *Submitting to one another in the fear of God*. Ephesians 5:21

That’s the introduction to what’s said next. It’s the introduction to the next verses.

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*. Ephesians 5:22-23, 25

One of the two major factors producing the terrible breakdown in marriage in our country today is women who want to dominate and men who don't lovingly lead.

Let me share something interesting from the then Governor Mark Hatfield of Oregon. He was governor of Oregon for 8 years and then a US Senator for 30 years. He tells how surprised the newspapers were when they reported that his wife had included the word "obey" in her marriage vows. He went on to discuss how he and his wife had come to the conviction that this word should be used and he says this, "I can recall the very evening that Antoinette first broached the subject. We had been invited to spend an evening at the home of married friends."

"Because we were considering marriage ourselves, perhaps we were sensitive to the relationship between this couple. At any rate, something about them puzzled us. Then, driving home, we suddenly put our finger on it. The wife, and not the husband, had taken charge of the evening. And every request Charles jumped up from his chair and dutifully did her bidding. Oddly, Charles is not a Mr. Milquetoast: he is an aggressive businessman with a reputation as a go-getter. Nor is his wife overtly bossy. They are normal, average, likable people. In fact, I think it was the normalcy of the situation that alarmed us. The wife was the head of that household and nobody, least of all Charles, saw anything wrong with in it."

"As I drove home that night, Antoinette suddenly said, "When I get married, I want a husband, not a partner." I looked at her in surprise. "What do you mean?" "Perhaps I mean that I don't think there can be a real partnership in marriage," she replied. "It's like this car. We're traveling along together going to the same place, but you're driving. Both of us can't drive. And I don't think there can be two drivers in a marriage either. One person's got to be at the wheel, and, when, it's the woman, I don't like what it does to her -- or to him. But it hurts her most."

Those are wise words.

Now, as a women you might be saying, "What a bad deal we've been handed. Talk about cruel and unusual punishment, this is it."

But here's the question? Is this intended to be punishment? This is the question as we look at these verses. it's easy to look at all this as a punishment dealt out by God upon the race, and woman's lot is the heaviest of all. But, see it's really not punishment and was never intended to be punishment. When we look at what God says to at Adam I think you'll see why.

*I. God First Pronounces The Consequences Of Sin To Eve*

*II. God Then Pronounces The Consequences Of The fall To Adam*

**Read verses 17-19**

In these verses we learn for the first time the nature of the sin that caused the fall of the human race. It wasn't merely that Adam ate the fruit in disobedience to God. There was something before that. *Because you have listened to the voice of your wife.* That was the sin that began the fall of Adam and brought the misery of death upon the race.

Now, there are lots of times when the wisest thing a man can do is to listen to the voice of his wife. God has given husbands their wives as a gift to complete them and a man is foolish if he doesn't tap into her wisdom.

As a husband I couldn't imagine a situation where Sandy really strongly was opposed to something and I decided to do it anyway. I value her as my wife and as a fellow believer too much to do that.

Pontius Pilate could have saved himself a lot of grief if he had listened to the voice of his wife. There he was trying to decide what to do with this Jesus the Jewish leaders have brought to him and he gets this message from Mrs. Pilate, *Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.* Matthew 27:19 The problem is he ignored his wife's voice which would have saved him.

But here Adam is charged with guilt because he listened to the voice of his wife when it was different than the voice of God. That's the point. The New Testament tells us, *And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.* I Timothy 2:14

She believed the Enemy. She thought he meant it when he said they'd become like God if they ate the fruit. But Adam wasn't fooled, he wasn't deceived. He knew first hand what God had said. He knew that they would lose their relationship to God, and that death would occur.

Look back at verse 6 for a moment.

I've read this a hundred times and never really noticed this it until one of our elders, Steve Hartman pointed it out to me this week.

*So when the woman saw... she took of its fruit and ate.* Her eyes weren't opened. She didn't know she was naked. She didn't try to cover herself.

Verse 6 continues, *She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*

Verse 7, ***Then*** the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked...

The consequences came on both of them when Adam, the head of the family ate!

He deliberately disobeyed God and set his wife above God. He denied the headship of Christ over himself and surrendered his own headship over the woman. This has been the major failure of men in marriage ever since.

I know that dominating, domineering husbands can be a problem but here's another chaos producer -- a man who refuses to lead, a man who turns over to his wife the ultimate responsibility of the family.

He views his responsibility as going to work and cutting the grass. She's left with the job of making a life. He refuses to make decisions, refuses to give direction or to show concern over the way the family is going, or to enter into the problems raising children.

All this constitutes failure and the breakdown of the godly headship of man over woman and of God over man.

There are basically two false concepts in marriage that this highlights for us: One of them is that a man, when he gets married, is to please his wife by doing whatever she wants to do. The second is the flip side of that, where the man regards himself as the head and interprets this to mean he's to do whatever he wants.

The truth is, a husband is under authority. He's to submit to the headship of Jesus Christ. He's to follow Jesus. In fact, a husband's to follow Jesus whether he, or his wife, feels like it or not -- that's the real issue. He's to kindly but firmly insist that they are to do what God wants. He's to be a loving servant/leader.

Because Adam refused to do that, and listened to the voice of his wife who wasn't listening to God, letting her determine the course of the marriage, the fall resulted.

Two things came out of that: First, toil: *Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you...*

All God has to do to change the course of nature is to reduce the flow of power to it and lower fertility results. Nature goes out of balance, and the result is an increase in strong plants, like thorns and thistles. Nature's out of balance. Nature's out of balance because man is out of balance.

This is why we struggle to make a living. Man is reduced to unending toil. And what's really interesting is the word translated "toil" is exactly the same word in Hebrew that is translated as both "sorrow" and "pain" for the woman

This is why we call life a rat race. This is why we're constantly under pressure to get more out of a reluctant nature. Work isn't the curse given to man; work is a blessing. It is toil that's the curse.

Work is a blessing from God. Adam had work to do in the garden before he sinned. Genesis 2:15 says, *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.* NIV But hard, grinding, toiling work is the result of the fall. It is sweat, anxiety, and pressure coming constantly upon us to create the endless rat race of life.

Then the second factor which resulted from Adam's failure to observe his headship is death. God said, *In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.*

In the New Testament Jesus told about a rich man who built barns and filled them up and then said to himself, *And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'* Luke 12:19-20

That's the question death forces us to face. You struggle to gather up stuff and then you die and leave it all behind.

You might have heard about the guy who died who had made a fortune in real estate. Someone asked, "How much did he leave?" The answer? "All of it."



As Job said, We came into the world naked and we leave it naked. We're dust, and to dust we shall return. So here's the sentence of God -- pain, subjection, toil, and death. But we still haven't answered the question, is this punishment?

*I. God First Pronounces The Consequences Of Sin To Eve*

*II. God Then Pronounces The Consequences Of The Fall To Adam*

*III. The Consequences Of The Fall Are Intended To Be Our Spiritual Teachers*

I believe the answer is it's not punishment. It only looks like punishment when we refuse it and resist it or rebel against it.

Ray Stedman writes, These things were never intended to be any kind of punishment. They are instead intended to be helps to us, means by which we are reminded of truth, means intended to counteract the subtle pride which the enemy has planted in our race which keeps us imagining all kinds of illusory things, things that are not true at all -- that we are the captain of our fate and the master of our soul; that we are capable of handling and solving all the problems of life; these arrogant pretensions we constantly make, that we have the knack and know how to make gadgets that can solve all the basic problems of existence.

But we are constantly being reminded that these things are not true.

Death, pain, toil and subjection are limits that we cannot escape. They are there to cancel out constantly our egocentric dreams and reduce us to seeing ourselves as we really are. We are dust. We are but men. We are limited, dependent. We cannot go it alone -- we desperately need other people, and we desperately need God. The hour of greatest hope in our lives is when our eyes are opened to this basic fact and we say, "Lord, I can't make it without you. I need you desperately."

Stedman is so right. These are the things that remind us of what we are, and where we are.

The closing words of the 23rd Psalm say, *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.* Psalm 23:6

One Bible commentator said that those two words goodness and mercy are God's sheep dogs. Psalm 23 is the Shepherd's Psalm, written by David a shepherd. In referring to the goodness and mercy of God, he is referring to the sheep dogs that nip at the heels of the flock and keep them in line, driving them into place. "Surely Goodness and Mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," nipping at my heels,

humiliating me, turning me back from that which looks good but is really evil, keeping me from getting what I think I need, and what I think I want. As much as we hate pain, subjection, toil, and death God designed them out of His goodness and mercy.

The results of the fall aren't punishment. They're the disciplines of grace. They are what the New Testament refers to in Hebrews 12. If you are not chastised, disciplined by God, you are not a child of his.

Pain, subjection, toil, and death are given to bring you and me into subjection. See, God loves us, and He wants us to be what he made us to be

So our pride needs to be crushed, our ego needs to be smashed, our dependence on ourselves needs to be broken, our reliance upon our abilities, our background, our education, need to be pulled out from under us until we depend upon the God who made us and who is able to supply all that we need.

Why is there suffering in our world? Ultimately it's the result of sin. Why is there hope in a suffering world? Because the God of hope gives us forgiveness and eternal life when we put out trust in His Son.

And he uses all things to work together for ultimate good in our lives.

Note: This message was based on Ray C. Stedman's "Disciplines of Grace."