

THE HUMAN CONDITION Genesis 3:8-19

Anthropology. The study of man, the attempt to tell us who or what we are and why we are the way we are. There are whole fields of study related to this discipline—psychology, sociology, even, in many ways, the fields of history, economics and even political theory, among others. There are, literally, thousands of books written every year in these, and other, fields attempting to answer the questions of who we are and why we do the things we do. Of these millions of books on the shelves, I'd trade them all in for Genesis 3. As a statement of the human condition, it's really unparalleled. You want to understand people, study Genesis 3 and its surrounding context and the way it's worked out in the Bible, and you will have gained the moral equivalent of a doctorate in anthropology.

Listen to what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German pastor who spoke out against Hitler, was imprisoned by the Nazis and ultimately martyred for his faith, once said, "The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus. The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is. Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of man. And so it also does not know that man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this... The psychiatrist must first search my heart and yet he never plumbs its ultimate depth. The Christian brother knows when I come to him: here is a sinner like myself, a godless man who wants to confess and yearns for God's forgiveness."

I don't think that Bonhoeffer is saying that psychologists and 'secular' counselors are worthless, but that they lack the insight of even the simplest Christian who understands the effects of sin.

What's happened in Genesis 3 up to this point? Eve rebelled against God by putting her desires and will above God's. But, verse 6 would seem to indicate that Eve wasn't alone, "she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." Although Adam is not included in the dialogue between Eve and the serpent, it seems that Adam was standing right there by her. Indeed God calls Adam out and lays the blame at his feet. That's when the blame game begins, Adam blaming Eve and God for his sin, and Eve blaming the serpent for her sin.

Now, a cynic would say, "They ate some fruit they weren't supposed to and now God goes ballistic. That's not fair. What about a warning or a time-out?" Alan Dershowitz, a famous lawyer, wrote a book called *The Genesis of Justice* where he claims that God is a lousy judge, but not because the punishment is too much, but because it's too little. Remember that when God gave the prohibition against eating the fruit, he said that, "in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. So, Dershowitz concludes, God has threatened death, and then not followed thru but rather changed the punishment completely by kicking Adam and Eve out of the garden and making their lives miserable. From this viewpoint, we're forced to conclude this is not good justice- I mean, every parent knows that if you threaten a punishment on your child and he breaks the rules, you can't just disregard the punishment and enact a totally different punishment.

So, is God unjust?

Let's look at the threat of death. We could focus on the word 'day,' whether it meant that Adam and Eve would die the very 24-hour period they broke the prohibition, or whether it meant the 'age' or 'time period' in which they broke God's law. This, by the way, is a big part of the controversy of Genesis 1, whether 'day' means 24-hour period or just some indeterminate period of time- but we're not going to get into that. Because the deeper issue here is what is meant by 'death.' Death in biblical theology seems to indicate, first and foremost, alienation and separation. As Paul says in Romans 3:23, "The wages of sin is death." Clearly we don't die the first time we sin. Rather we separate ourselves from God. If we understood the import of this understanding of death, we would see that it's much worse than simple extermination of life. So it would seem that the penalty of leaving the garden is a just and appropriate one; Adam and Eve had declared their independence and alienation from God and so it would not be right to have them stay in God's presence [temple?] in Eden.

Let's look at the consequences- starting with the last one.

The Curse on the Man

We see the justice here: the man obeyed his wife instead of God and ate the fruit, so the consequence is that all future eating will involve painful struggle. Life and work will become very hard.

I've noticed something with our college graduates- they typically struggle with their first job out of college. "It's tough- it's not what I expected." Sometimes the problem is that they're not in the right job, they start out in the proverbial mailroom instead of the corner office. But even when we get into our 'dream job' we realize the competition's just as tough, the disappointments just as big, if not bigger.

Genesis 3 gives us the truth about work that every man fights against, with every purchase of a big-screen TV or La-Z-Boy recliner: You'll sweat, struggle and eventually die. When I was studying the curse on the man, I thought about the movie *City Slickers* where Billy Crystal plays a tired middle-aged man named Mitch Robbins who goes to his son's career day at school to talk about his work as an advertising executive. Instead of inspiring the kids, he tells them this:

"Value this time in your life kids, because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices, and it goes by so quickly. When you're a teenager you think you can do anything, and you do. Your twenties are a blur. Your thirties, you raise your family, you make a little money and you think to yourself, 'What happened to my twenties?' Your forties, you grow a little pot belly, you grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud and one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother. Your fifties you have a minor surgery. You'll call it a procedure, but it's a surgery. Your sixties you have a major surgery, the music is still loud but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it anyway. Seventies, you and the wife retire to Fort Lauderdale, you start eating dinner at two, lunch around ten, breakfast the night before. And you spend most of your time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate in soft yogurt and muttering 'how come the kids don't call?' By your eighties, you've had a major stroke, and you end up babbling to some Jamaican nurse who your wife can't stand but who you call mama. Any questions?"

Now for a Christian, a good understanding of the curse of work shouldn't make us cynical like Mitch Robbins, it should make us ready to meet the challenges of life. It should also help keep us from being tripped up by the myth of the greener grass- that

somewhere, there's got to be a better job, better relationships, and an easier life. The grass usually isn't any greener than right where you're standing.

The Curse on the Woman

We see the justice here: Eve led her husband to sin, so she would now be ruled over by him. My short-hand for the curse on the woman is, "Relationships will be hard." This principle applies to every human relationship, but God here specifies two relationships that stand for all others: children and marriage.

Now, every woman who has ever had a baby knows that there is much pain involved in the labor and delivery process, hence we see the truth of God's claim, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing, in pain you shall bring forth children." However, there's a wider implication; that not just *bearing* children but *rearing* them will be painful. When I got married, I was awakened to my own selfishness, but when I had children, I had *undeniable proof* of my enormous selfishness and sinfulness. Children are a joy, but they cause us great pain. Even the best children cause their parents some grief!

The translation of the second half of the verse, "And your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" is a little ambiguous. But what seems to be represented here is a power struggle between a husband and wife. When I agree to perform a wedding, I always require at least 3 pre-marital counseling sessions and I have the couple fill out an informational sheet. On that sheet is a section about expectations for marriage, with the question, "Do you think marriage will be difficult?" You would be amazed at how many people answer 'no' to that question. To those of you who are engaged or wanting to be married: Marriage is tough! You need to go into it with your eyes open.

The most tragic thing I see is when a couple is a couple years into a marriage and fighting like cats and dogs and they think 'something must be wrong, I must have married the wrong person.' Yes, something is wrong- the curse. It's not the person you married. Do you know how you know if you married the right person? When you said your marriage vows, you married the right person. But don't think marrying your 'soulmate' is going to be all flowers and walks on the beach. It's hard work, power struggles and a lot of repenting and forgiving. But it's good work, if you can get it.

The Curse on the Serpent

The curse on the serpent is also justice- because the serpent was more clever than all the other animals in helping destroy the human race, so he would now be humiliated more than all the other animals by having to crawl in the dust and will eventually be destroyed by the humans.

Wow, this seems pretty depressing, doesn't it? That there's pain and a curse over all of life and all of creation. *But there's hope.* We get a taste of it here in 3:15 when God promises that the seed of the woman will one day triumph over the seed of the serpent. If we take this verse literally, we might expect Cain or Abel to have an encounter with a baby snake. But, in a larger sense, the snake represents evil and Satan himself. God is saying that a future offspring in Eve's line will be bruised by some manifestation of evil, but he will not only bruise, but crush, the head of evil.

The answer to life's pain and struggles is not to give up or to fight your way out of it- giving up just means death has won quicker, and the curse is a divine curse,

meaning you'll never overcome it because it was given by someone who's infinitely greater than you. But He did promise a way out. He promised a champion who would undo the curse by crushing the head of the enemy of God's people. We see champions throughout the Bible: In Judges 4, an Israelite woman named Jael stuck a tent peg through the head of the commander of the rival army of Canaan, Sisera. In Judges 9, an Israelite woman drops a millstone from the top of a wall, crushing the head of evil Abimelech. And in 1 Samuel 17, we see young David, the hero of Israel, crushing Goliath's head.

All of these were victories for God's people. But they were only temporary victories. The real victory came in a death. It came when an innocent man who did nothing wrong willingly took on the punishment of those who did do wrong. That's the meaning of the cross- Satan thought he had destroyed the Son of God, but he had merely bruised his heel. When Jesus rose from the grave, He triumphed over Satan and death and dealt the death-blow.

Jesus Christ came not to tell us that all the pain of life is an illusion or can be avoided- He came to take all of that pain and sorrow onto Himself, so that in Him our burdens might be lifted.

3 Applications [for yourself and when counseling others]

Stop thinking of people as just 'empty love tanks.' The 'empty love tank' idea is one that has been very pervasive in both secular and Christian counseling- the idea that other people (particularly your spouse) are like gas tanks that just need to be filled with compliments and their personal love language. Now, there is some helpful insight to be gained here, that meeting needs and loving others is a way to help a relationship flourish.

But, if there's one thing we've learned from Genesis 3, it's that people are infinitely more complex than that, and there are power struggles and idolatries going on that can empty out the 'love tank' as easily as it's filled. [Even in the car analogy, we know that it takes more than gas in the tank to make it go; there's a transmission, a motor, all kinds of belts and hoses; it's a complex operation] We need to think of people as the Bible does, sinners who need to repent for their rebellion and find grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Stop blameshifting. Own up to your problems. You may be able to fool some people, but not God. This is why we do a confession of sin every week, not to grovel in our sin, but because we realize that until we own up to our sin, we'll never be free from it.

Stop being naïve. Look at the world head-on as it is. You're a lot worse off and more sinful than you think you are, but God's grace is infinitely greater than your sin and it turns your sorrows into joy, your shame into glory.

Some of the resources I used for this Genesis series were *Last Things First* by JV Fesko, *Creation and Blessing* by Allen Ross, *Genesis 1-4* by C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-11* by JM Boice, *Patriarchal Saints* by James B. Jordan, sermons by Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, and Mark Balthrop, and various other resources. As usual, the reader should assume that little, if any, of this material is truly original.