

Sin's Consequences, God's Mercy

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[0 : 0 0] to the book of Genesis. Genesis chapter 3. Today we are looking at the second half of the chapter starting at verse 14. Last week we looked at the first half of the chapter of the first sin and the nature of temptation. And today we are looking at the consequences.

Genesis 3 verse 14 to verse 24. Let's read these verses together.

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. 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.

To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing, in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.

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. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. 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 were dust, and to dust you shall return.

[1 : 4 9] The man called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. 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. Therefore, the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 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.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for how it has been preserved for us through the centuries, for how it's translated into our language, that we can understand it.

We pray that your spirit would walk with us and guide us as we look into this passage this morning. Enliven us, guide us, teach us, challenge us, encourage us. We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

But it was just one bite. But I didn't mean any harm. But he hit me first. But she told me to do it.

There are many skills and habits which parents teach their children when they are young, whether it's getting dressed or washing your hands or clearing your plate from the dinner table, keeping track of your belongings, speaking respectfully to older adults, looking both ways before crossing the street. All of these habits require intentional training, often over the course of months or even years. But one habit that seems to develop quite naturally without any parental instruction or intention is self-justification.

[3 : 56] Self-justification comes in many varied and varied forms, minimizing, blaming, excusing, avoiding, making a scene, or making it all a joke. And human beings of all ages seem quite adept at this skill. Though we tend to recognize it and point it out more quickly in others than we do in ourselves. And isn't that another form of it? Now, the Bible traces this deeply rooted pattern back to our earliest beginnings. Last week, we looked at the first half of chapter 3, when Eve listened to the voice of the serpent and Adam listened to the voice of Eve, and they both ate of the one tree that God had prohibited them. And then they hid, they blamed, they minimized, they tried to evade God's probing and persistent questions. And ever since, have we not continued down that same road?

We want to say that our problem is not that serious, or that somebody else is really at fault, or we can fix things on our own. But this morning's passage confronts us with the pervasive and disastrous consequences of sin. What is sin? Well, this very chapter depicts sin as distrust of God's promise and disobedience to God's command. We could also describe sin as putting ourselves in the center of the universe instead of God. And according to the Bible, sin is now the default condition of humanity, and it is at the root of all our troubles. See, the first thing we see in this morning's passage is that sin has consequences. And we see that sin has consequences in three areas. Now, this section of Genesis 3 that I read and before that is structured as a courtroom scene. So, verses 8 through 13, God is questioning Adam and Eve. And then in verses 14 through 19, God declares His verdict on the situation.

And then He carries out the sentence in verses 22 to 24. But in the course of this section, we see that sin has consequences in three areas.

In our human relationships, in our human endeavors, and in our relationship with God. First, sin has consequences in our human relationships. We see this particularly in verse 16.

God's word to the woman, He says, I will surely multiply your pain and childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, and he shall rule over you.

[6 : 52] Now, that verse does not describe how human relationships are intended to be, or how they should be. No, Genesis 2 gave us a picture of what marriage was intended to be, an intimate, trusting, one flesh alliance, male and female, corresponding to one another, and carrying out God's mission together.

Verse 16, rather, describes how relationships between husbands and wives and parents and children, by extension all sorts of human relationships, how they tend to decay on this side of the fall.

How they're hard and difficult and full of tension and conflict. The first half of the verse emphasizes the pains of childbearing, and by extension, childrearing.

Children are a great gift and blessing from God. The Bible says that over and over. But the Bible is also very realistic, that bringing children into the world and raising them to become healthy and functional adults is now costly and difficult and painful.

The second half of the verse emphasizes the struggles that attend marriage in a fallen world. Again, the Bible says marriage is a good gift from God.

[8 : 10] It says that in many places, but the Bible is also very realistic. Marriage in this fallen world is hard and difficult. Why? Because people are naturally selfish.

It's that simple. And self-centeredness is the greatest enemy of marital happiness. Now, some translations of verse 16 say, your desire shall be contrary to your husband.

I think that's what the Pew Bibles say. Other translations, even if you have an earlier version of the ESV, say your desire shall be for your husband. And you might think, well, wait a minute.

What does the verse mean? If you can translate it both of those ways. Well, however you translate it, the meaning is actually quite clear because the same phrase appears in the next chapter, in chapter 4, verse 7, when God is speaking to Cain, and God says, sin is crouching at your door.

Its desire is for you or contrary to you, but you must rule over it. Okay? However you translate the preposition for or contrary, it's a picture of a power struggle.

[9 : 21] In chapter 3 and in chapter 4. It's a picture of hostility and conflict. Derek Kidner put it this way, to love and to cherish becomes to desire and to dominate.

The picture we get in verse 16 is the woman and the man vying for control, putting their own self-interest first, and the result is frustration and conflict, manipulation and abuse.

And of course, these dynamics are not only limited to human marriages. Adam and Eve represent all human relationships.

No human relationship is free of pain and sorrow, tension and misunderstanding, alienation and conflict.

All human relationships are vulnerable to those things. Even the closest ones.

[10 : 27] And at some level, I think we can all recognize this. Whether you're a Christian or not, don't we all look at the world and see that human relationships are very often not what they should be?

Just read the news. Or just look around at our own families, our friends, roommates.

Sometimes we struggle most to love the people who are closest to us. And the Bible says that our fractured and fraught human relationships are a sign and a consequence of our broken relationship with God.

But sin doesn't just affect our human relationships. Sin also has consequences in our human endeavors. We see this in verses 17 to 19.

Our human endeavors are subject to frustration and disappointment. Or as we say, blood, sweat, and tears. Cursed is the ground because of you.

[11 : 30] In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles that shall bring forth for you. Now originally, according to Genesis, human beings were given dominion over the earth to cultivate it, to care for it, to order it, to bring forth life from it.

God put Adam in the garden to cultivate it, to bring it out to its fullest potential, and to guard it against any hostile intruders. In other words, work was meant to be a good thing and an aspect of our human growth and flourishing.

But what do we see in chapter 3? We see Adam fail to do his job. Instead of recognizing the serpent for the deceitful enemy that he was, instead of taking up his rightful authority and kicking him out of the garden, Adam did nothing.

He watched Eve fall under the serpent's sway, and then he joined right in with her and ate the fruit that God had said not to eat. And so God said to Adam, you will no longer have dominion over the earth.

Now it will fight back against you, and one day it will swallow you up. To dust you shall return. Meredith Klein put it this way, human existence has become a struggle for survival, a perpetual conflict, a vain history unto death.

[13 : 03] There's an entire book of the Bible that reflects on this theme. It's called Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is really an extended meditation on these first three chapters of Genesis, especially the end of Genesis 3.

Ecclesiastes is written in the voice of someone who has achieved every form of earthly success, who's climbed to the top of every ladder, who's experienced everything the world has to offer, and who says in the end, it's all empty and fleeting and futile.

What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation comes and a generation goes. The sun rises and the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it rises.

All things are full of weariness. I've seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity. Literally, it's all a breath of vapor and a striving after the wind.

And once again, don't we all feel this at some level or another? Whether or not you believe in the Bible, don't you see and feel the fleeting and frustrating nature of our human endeavors?

[14 : 29] Just a couple months ago, The Atlantic published an article by Arthur Brooks with the title, Your Professional Decline is Coming Sooner Than You Think. Most business entrepreneurs hit their peak in their 20s and early 30s.

Most poets and writers in their 40s and 50s. For research scientists, the likelihood of a major discovery begins to decrease after age 40. The highest performing major league baseball umpires are on average 33.

The older guys are not so good. Brooks writes, If your profession requires mental processing speed or significant analytic capabilities, most of the jobs that college graduates pursue, noticeable decline is probably going to set in earlier than you imagine.

And he says, Most of us are not ready to face that reality. Whole sections of bookstores are dedicated to becoming successful. There is no section marked managing your professional decline.

Work is frustrating. Work is toilsome. And it doesn't just get better with the passage of time. The Bible is very honest about this reality. And again, it says, The frustration that we experience in our human endeavors is a sign and consequence of our alienation from God.

[15 : 50] Sin has consequences in our human relationships. Sin has consequences in our human endeavors. And sin has consequences in our relationship with God. We see this in verses 22 to 24. The chapter ends with Adam and Eve being exiled from the garden.

Banished from the temple of God. They are now defiled and they can no longer live in close communion with God. They can no longer eat of the tree of eternal life.

David Atkinson wrote, The joyous dance of creation becomes a dirge as a shadow falls over all things.

And the shadow cast by the end of this chapter hangs over the rest of the Old Testament. Now there are some scholars who say that the story of Adam and Eve is unimportant or even unknown to the rest of the Old Testament because Adam and Eve are rarely referred to by name after Genesis 5.

But that statement is very misleading because the imagery of Genesis 2 and 3 reappears constantly throughout the Old Testament.

[17 : 11] So when God brings the people of Israel into the promised land he says it will be like a fruitful garden. A place of eating and flourishing and joy. Like a renewed garden of Eden and in the center of that land would be God's holy temple.

And the priests were to do exactly what Adam does to work and guard the temple. And the people would meet with God like Adam and Eve did in close communion.

And there was a hope of renewed Eden renewed fellowship with God. And yet throughout the Old Testament we see the same pattern of Genesis 3 happening over and over again.

The garden the temple is spoiled by the people's idolatry and disobedience and the result is shame and defilement conflict and disarray exile and death.

They can never make it back in. The shadow of Genesis 3 hangs over the rest of the Old Testament and in one particular place it's very evident in the very center of the temple that God commanded the people to build there was a constant reminder of the end of this chapter.

[18 : 26] Genesis 3 ends with the cherubim. The cherubim are fiery warriors of light angels who are standing guard at God's throne.

So the cherubim stand guard at the east gate of the Garden of Eden with a flaming sword barring the way to the Tree of Life. In the temple the cherubim were also there.

They guarded God's throne. So the center of the temple was the Holy of Holies and in there was the Ark of the Covenant and on top was the mercy seat or sort of representing the throne of God and there were two cherubim one on each side overshadowing that throne of God in the center of the temple.

Guarding the way to God's presence and then there was a curtain surrounding that central place that represented the presence of God and only one person only the high priest could go in there only once a year but on that curtain there were woven into it pictures of these warrior angels the cherubim.

Exodus 36-35 is the reference if you want it. They were beautiful but also terrifying reminders that the way into God's presence the way into the garden was not yet open.

[19 : 56] You see sin separates us from the presence of a holy God and according to the Bible that is the most serious consequence of all.

It's not just that our human relationships are fractured and fraught. It's not just that our human endeavors are fleeting and frustrating. It's that we are at odds with the very God who made us.

Why are human beings all over the world haunted by guilt and fear and anxiety? Why is the history of religions littered with attempts to atone for sin somehow or other and appease the deity in some way or other?

Why are even non-religious people driven to worship something? Whether it's their work or children or politics or a relationship it's because at the deepest level we are not right with God.

Sin has consequences in our human relationships in our human endeavors and ultimately in our relationship with God. That's the first thing that we see in this passage this morning.

[21 : 09] But thankfully there's another thing that we see. We also see in this passage that God has mercy. woven into God's judicial verdict on sinful humanity are glimmers of mercy.

You see God doesn't just dish out all the consequences that we deserve for our rebellion against him. We see the first glimmer of mercy in verses 14 and 15 in the hope of Satan's ultimate defeat.

Now verses 14 and 15 are not intending to explain why snakes crawl on the ground nor are they implying that snakes previously had legs.

No, this is a figure of speech. When you say the New York Jets are going to eat the dust, everybody knows what it means.

Right? They do that most of the time. Okay, in the story, the serpent represents or symbolizes or embodies the devil, the source of temptation and the father of lies.

[22 : 24] That's how many Jewish and Christian interpreters throughout history have understood it. So what we have here is God's verdict upon Satan, and he is cursed, consigned to crawl on the ground, a picture of humiliation and eat the dust, a picture of ultimate and total defeat.

And then the glimmer of mercy comes in verse 15. I will put enmity between you, the serpent, and the woman.

Now what does that mean? What it means is that the unholy alliance of Eve and the serpent will not last. That's what Eve did in the beginning of the chapter.

The serpent said, hey, listen to me. Why? You know, no, no, no, no, no. What God said, put that to the side. I'm going to frame the way you think about the world.

And Eve allies with him. But here it says that alliance won't stand. Why?

[23 : 29] Because Eve will once again come to love God and therefore hate Satan. You see, it is God's mercy when we begin to see our sin for what it is and to hate it.

Now, hating our sin is not the same thing as hating ourselves. Self-hatred is not the way to atonement, but neither is self-justification. It's God's mercy when we are no longer comfortable hiding and minimizing, blaming, and excusing, and deflecting.

It's God's mercy that leads us to say, I was wrong and I need help. It's God's mercy when we begin to see Satan's lies for what they are and to resist them.

It's God's mercy when we want to be free from our addictions and habitual patterns of sin and self-contradictions even if we don't know how to get rid of them. That's where God's mercy begins.

Now the rest of verse 15 describes an ongoing struggle culminating in a decisive battle between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of Eve. Now there's certainly mystery and ambiguity in this verse.

[24 : 49] In particular, grammatically, offspring could refer to an individual descendant of Eve or the serpent or a group of descendants or both. But regardless, the end of the verse says that the offspring of Eve will bruise the serpent's head but the serpent will bruise his heel.

Now the verb is the same. Some translations translate the verb differently but the verb in Hebrew is the same. It can be translated bruise, crush, or strike. But the body parts are different.

The head of the serpent, the heel of the woman's offspring. So in other words, there's hope that the serpent will ultimately be defeated with a blow to the head.

But the victory will be a painful one for the offspring of the woman, a blow to the heel. So it's a puzzling prophecy but in it we see God's mercy in the hope that the one who led humans astray in the first place will ultimately be defeated.

So that's a first glimmer of hope and mercy. The second aspect of God's mercy that we see is in verse 16 to 21 we see God's present provisions for humanity.

[26 : 09] Adam and Eve are not immediately wiped out. God does not personally curse Adam and Eve. Do you notice that? He curses the serpent in verse 14 and he curses the ground in verse 17 but he does not directly and personally curse Adam and Eve because he's not done with them yet.

He doesn't say you will be eternally cursed. He also doesn't say they're not condemned to immediate destruction.

They will not starve to death imminently. They will not remain childless forever. There's still a future for the human race. Marriage and childbearing work and eating will all continue despite the pain and conflict sweat and sorrow involved.

You see in every moment of marital joy, in every birth of a new child, in every satisfying human achievement, in every good and nourishing meal, in all those ordinary yet at times breathtaking gifts, the mercy of God is sustaining us and even reaching out to us.

God's daily sustaining graces are His mercy. And in verse 21, we see even a further expression of God's sustaining mercy.

[27 : 38] The Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. Walter Brueggemann wrote, God does for the couple what they cannot do for themselves.

They cannot deal with their shame. The fig leaves that they try to cover themselves with, in verse 7, do not suffice.

They cannot deal with their shame, but God can, will, and does. In the Old Testament, clothing is often a sign of a covenant bond, a promise of provision and care.

That's why when Ruth asks Boaz to marry her, she says, spread your garment over me. That's why Joseph's father gives him a coat of many colors, a robe of honor, a sign of his sonship.

And here God clothes Adam and Eve, symbolically restoring their relationship with him and reuniting them with one another, promising his ongoing care, protection, and provision.

[28 : 59] Isn't that a picture of God's tender mercy? Now you might wonder how does verse 20 fit into the flow of this passage.

The man called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all living. That seems to come out of nowhere. What's that verse about? Well, look up at verse 12. Adam's last words toward his wife, before verse 20, are in verse 12, and they are, the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.

In other words, Adam was saying, she's the source of my problems, and God, you gave her to me. But verse 20 displays a very different attitude on Adam's part.

Adam calls his wife Eve. The word means life giver. Eve is not the source of Adam's problems. Eve is now the source of life. You see, Adam in verse 20 is responding to God's promise in verse 15 with faith and hope and with renewed love for his wife.

You see, that's what happens when God's mercy starts to get a hold of us. Our faith in God is renewed.

[30 : 21] We see hope for the future because of God and his promises, and our love is also renewed. attitude toward other people begins to change.

Even people who have caused us problems and dragged us down, and previously we've just pointed the finger at them and blamed them for everything bad that's come into our lives. And now we long for them to turn to God and experience the same mercy that we have.

Sin has consequences, but God has mercy. we see that in how God deals with Adam and Eve in Genesis, but as we look at the rest of the Bible, we can see that even more clearly.

When we turn to the New Testament, we see the fullest display of God's mercy in his son, Jesus Christ. The New Testament shows us that Jesus came to conquer our greatest enemy.

He's the fulfillment of verse 15. Hebrews 2 says, since the children share in flesh and blood, that is the human, we share in flesh and blood, the son of God partook of the same things.

[31 : 43] 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.

You see, what the verse is saying is Jesus came to destroy the power of Satan and deliver all those in captivity to his lies. The New Testament says Jesus is that offspring of Eve who came to fight the decisive battle over the serpent and triumph even through a painful ordeal.

And the Apostle Paul assured the Christians in his letter to the Romans that they too would share in that victory of Christ. He says the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

In other words, because Christ has won the victory through his death and resurrection, everyone who is joined to him, by trusting him and giving ourselves to him, we too will share in that victory over Satan and all his lies.

Jesus came to conquer our greatest enemy and also he came to clothe us in his very own righteousness. He's the fulfillment of verse 21. He came to take away our filthy rags of sin and give us a robe of righteousness and honor.

[33 : 11] He gives us a new identity. He calls us God's beloved children. children. And he has promised himself to us. He said, never will I leave you.

Never will I forsake you. Just as God clothes Adam and Eve, we're clothed by Christ.

We have the promise of his ongoing care and protection and provision and love. So Jesus came to conquer our greatest enemy. He came to clothe us in his righteousness.

And third, he came to do what nobody else in the Old Testament could do. He came to lead us back into the garden. You see, for centuries, that curtain in the temple stood there with the cherubim embroidered on it.

It hung there as a perpetual reminder to the people of Israel that sin separates us from the presence of a holy God that we cannot enter in to that place of intimate fellowship with God.

[34 : 24] Only the high priest could go in there and only once a year and only with a sacrifice and then he had to leave. But when Jesus was crucified, when he breathed his last, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

God had opened the way through the death of Jesus. Jesus had gone in his death. He had passed under that flaming sword.

He had endured the consequences that we deserved so that he could make a way for us to enter in and have eternal life, freely and forgiven.

God has made a way where previously there was none. Have you entered in? Have you come to God through Jesus? Turn to him and trust yourself to him and you will know God's mercy for you today.

Sin has consequences, but God has mercy. If you've come to Jesus in faith, listen to this word of encouragement from the book of Hebrews.

[35 : 43] It says, Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith.

With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful, and let us stir up one another to love.

Faith, hope, and love because of God's mercy to us in Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. God, we thank you that you have not simply left us to experience all the consequences of our sin that we deserve, but we thank you for your intervening mercy.

We pray that we would, that each one of us would know your mercy for us. Lord, that we would see your mercy even in your daily provisions for us, and that we would ultimately see your mercy in your son Jesus, overflowing, despite our sin, despite our undeserving.

Lord, may we be people who, who take our sin seriously, who do not live in denial, or in excuse, making excuses for it.

[37 : 26] May we be people who hate it and fight against it. May we be people who are strengthened to do that because we rest in your merciful love and provision for us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.