

The Curse on the Woman, Part 2

Scripture: Genesis 3:16

Code: 90-244

Well tonight, as we have our Bible study, we return to the third chapter of Genesis and the sixteenth verse. We are looking at the series on origins. As I mentioned to you a few weeks ago, it looks like I'm going to develop a book, at least on the first couple of chapters on origins, and who knows, in the future we may address these issues as well. And the reason they're so important is they frame up a proper and accurate world view. You cannot understand why the things are the way they are in the world unless you understand these early chapters in the Word of God.

Now, as we said last time, introducing the section where God curses the woman, verse 16, as we said last time, the plight of the women in the world is very hard through human history. For most of the world's women, it is still very hard. There is, of course, a general hardness of life produced by sin and that everybody experiences, men and women and boys and girls, everybody. We all suffer the consequences of the Fall which generally are weakness, danger, disaster, disease and death. We all experience measures of sadness and sorrow and disappointment and unfulfillment and loss and heartbreak, etc. We all know all of those things. Those are general areas of the curse that fell when man sinned.

But beyond those general consequences which everybody experiences to one degree or another, God pointed out some special judgments in addition to the general hardness of life caused by sin. God placed a special consequence, a unique judgment on the woman and on all women, and on the man and on all men. The judgment on the woman because of her sin in the garden is in verse 16. "To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain and your conception...literally.; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.'"

And what I told you last time, and I repeat just by way of introduction, women were cursed to suffer in the two relationships that most define their life. That is, relationships to children and to husbands...those really are the two realms in which women generally find their life. And through all the ages women have suffered uniquely in those relationships. While there is a measure of joy there, it is those relationships that bring upon women their most consistent and intimate trouble. All the dangers and pains of pregnancy, all the dangers and pains of childbirth, and particularly through centuries and centuries of time when there wasn't the modern medicine, the modern care, and

beyond just the pain of childbirth and the danger of bearing children, there is all the disappointment and all the sorrow and all the sadness that comes from the lives their children live and from those things that threaten their well being. Throughout most of history before this century just past, the twentieth century, women lived with suffering and sorrow in great measure connected to their childbearing and still today there is a measure of that pain. Most of the suffering today in the modern world with the benefit of medicine has reached its pinnacle, perhaps comes in the sorrow and the suffering that comes after childbirth as we struggle seeing our children fall into sin and disappoint us.

Why is it that women suffer? Well, it is according to this verse that they suffer because God said, "I will greatly multiply your pain and conception. In pain you shall bring forth children."

You remember that God said when Adam and Eve sinned, if you sin, if you eat the tree...of the tree that I told you not to eat, you're going to die. This was true. And death did come to Adam and Eve as God had promised. But they were still to populate the world. Back in chapter 2 verses 16 and 17 they were originally told to be fruitful and multiply and populate the world. So in spite of the sin and death, marriage would continue and families would continue. The race would survive though every member in it would die and then be replaced by someone else so that the domain of women would still be the home, the children and the husband. And when you come to Titus chapter 2, Paul says that older women should teach younger women primarily to do two things...love their husbands and love their children. They are instructed to be keepers at home, to provide for their husbands and to provide for their children. These then have continued to be the trouble spots, as well as the points of joy in the life of women.

I am not going to ask you to raise your hand but obviously you all, all of you married women, all of you who have mothered children could say you have experienced suffering, you have experienced sorrow because of your children and because of your husbands. Just the sinful reality of your children and the sinful reality of your husband is enough to bring a measure of trouble into your own life. A feminist in the modern world, of course, damn husbands collectively as abusers and inhibitors of women. They disdain marriage. They celebrate childlessness and they advocate lesbianism as the ultimate assault on men.

But in spite of such efforts, it's amazing that women continue to be naturally drawn and necessarily drawn to husbands and to children as the source of their fulfillment and their joy, even though they know that those are the realms in which there is the potential of the greatest pain and sorrow. They're still drawn there, almost inexorably because that's the way God made them. They find their greatest hope in marriage and in childbearing.

And so, even when the culture has disdain for it and even when they are told that men will be their enemy and the source of their disappointment and abuse and children will bring them grief, they find themselves magnetically and inexorably attracted to that environment nevertheless. And that is because it is part of their created makeup.

So we saw last time the first area of the specificity of God's curse on women is related to her children. "I will greatly multiply your pain," that's an intense statement in the Hebrew, the actual Hebrew says, "causing to be great, I shall cause to be great your sorrow," doubly stated for the emphasis or intensity. I'm going to cause you to experience serious pain in the matter of your conceptions, your pregnancies and your children. And it says literally in verse 16, "I will greatly multiply your pain AND your conception," or "AND your childbirth."

And I told you last time, and I reiterate it, her fertility was increased by God so that women conceive more children after the Fall than before the Fall. That in obviously the terms of this verse is the point of the increase of pain. Now there would have been no pain, we assume, prior to the Fall. She would have had children at a slower pace, as I pointed out last time, but even when they did come, there would be no pain in the birth of those children. I don't know how that would work but in a perfect world that's the way it would work. And when the children were born, since they were perfectly righteous and they were perfectly innocent of any sin, they would bring upon the parents only great joy. There would be nothing but joy in that environment. But afterwards, the woman herself a sinner, all of her children being sinners, now multiplied pregnancies, multiplied childbirth fills her life, crowds her life with not only the battle for her own purity but for the purity of all her children who are exposed, of course, to the temptations of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life because of their own fallenness. And He reiterates in a clarification statement in verse 16, "In pain you shall bring forth children."

So summing it up, conception becomes more frequent, births become painful, children become a source of pain, suffering, sorrow and disappointment. So the woman then is initially punished in the most intimate way, in the point of her divinely designed role as a mother. We closed last time by asking what can a mother do to alleviate this curse? What can a mother do to reverse this in some measure? What can a mother do to turn this sorrow into joy? And the answer, as you remember, is in 1 Timothy 2:15, "Women will be saved, women will be rescued, women will be delivered," or as the NAS says, "Women will be preserved from the power of this curse through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self restraint."

Deliverance from the curse and the stigma comes when women have children. In other words, the very mitigation of that curse comes in the childbearing itself if the woman is a godly woman. That is to say, her life is marked by faith in the Lord, by sincere love for the Lord, by sanctification or holiness, purity of life and self-restraint or self-control. This marks her as a godly woman who will produce godly children. And in the lives of those godly children, the work of the Lord will go on, mitigating sin in their own lives, sanctifying them and therefore reducing her pain.

Now, this is wonderful as a promise to women. And only those, however, who know the Lord Jesus Christ, who are redeemed, who are justified and sanctified and given the Holy Spirit can enjoy this reality. But it is true that the curse is softened immensely through the power of the gospel and a godly life in the case of the mother as she raises her children to love the Lord.

Now let's come to the second area, the second realm. And this is one that's certainly well-known and well-documented by all of us. Verse 16 ends with, "Yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you."

A woman is going to suffer greatly in the area of conception and pregnancy. And we showed how that is definitely the case all over the world through all of human history. We still see it today in the Third World countries, horrible pictures and scenes pass before our eyes as we watch mothers with dying children and all the things that go on there. And even in our advanced society there is still a great measure of grief as we talked about.

Given that a woman has all of that sorrow, given that a woman suffers so much, she's in great need of some tender comfort. She is in great need of some understanding. She is in great need of some deference. She is in great need of some sympathy. She is in great need of some compassion.

Ah, too bad, too bad because the fact of the matter is, historically husbands have very little of that to give. It's almost proverbial to say, "Men don't understand women, even their wives." Through history it is true. Men have used and abused women, treated them unkindly, unfaithfully, indifferently, have demonstrated little compassion after all the bells and whistles calm down. Little sympathy, expecting everything out of them, giving them little in return, making sure the women do everything they want them to do and need them to do, but giving back very little in the area of compassion, kindness, tenderness and sympathy.

In her sin Eve took the lead. She acted independently. She spurned her husband's authority. She was going to go out on her own and call her own shot, as it were, act on her own behalf. She took the lead, she led the man into sin, usurping his role, acting independently of him in the temptation, overturning the divine order. She should have submitted to him, sought his counsel, let him be the leader. By taking control she lost it permanently, just as by seeking the delight of the forbidden fruit, she lost delight. She wanted to take the lead and she lost it for good. And the legacy of this is conflict with her husband. That's what's being expressed at the end of the verse. And throughout history, frankly, it is true that women have been degraded. That was even true in Jewish society. The Pharisees used to get up every morning and pray, "I thank God that I'm not a Gentile or a woman."

Men have been very active in degrading women. Women have known a measure of misery throughout human history. As much as she resisted by virtue of being the weaker vessel, she is subject to the man. And sad to say, he is not a perfectly fair man, he is not a perfectly loving man. He's not a perfectly kind man as unfallen Adam was. Sure, if Eve had known what she was going to have to deal with from Adam, she never would have taken that fruit in the first place. All of a sudden man is changed and becomes a selfish and dominating monarch. The subordination of women was always God's plan but in a lovely and enjoyable harmony of perfect fulfillment of mutual wills delighting in God and in each other. This has been taken away and the gracious subordination that was there, the wonderful ruling partnership that was there is gone.

And the language here defines what happened. Let's take the first line. "Your desire shall be for your husband." Some have suggested that this means a sexual desire. That's certainly not a punishment and that is something God gave them before the Fall. How else could He say, "Be fruitful and multiply," if they already weren't prepared to engage in that kind of relationship? This is not God cursing them by having the woman desire a physical relationship with a husband. She has always desired that in a perfectly loving way.

This means something else. This means that her desire, her desire is going to be something negative, something that reflects separation and alienation. Up to this point everything does. Enmity was put between the serpent and the woman. Enmity was put between the man and the ground. And enmity is put between the wife and her husband. She can't do what she wishes. She isn't going to live her own life totally independent like the feminists demand because her husband rules over her. Whatever she wishes, whatever she desires is subject to his will. She won't always get what she wants. She won't always have what she desires. She's going to have to bear the sorrow of unfulfillment. She's going to have desires and dreams and ambitions that aren't going to be fulfilled

because her husband does not have a perfect love for her, does not have a perfect understanding of her, or even might say an imperfect understanding of her. And he's going to rule her in ways that lack compassion and sympathy. This is how it is in the world. This is how it is.

And there certainly is a case to be made by the Feminists that can be supported in history that men have abused women historically. That is true. They are stronger. And they have used their superior strength. In some societies, many societies, women have been viewed as animals, as servants, slaves, sexual instruments. And even in our society men throw women away when they just find another one they like better. And that's not new either. They were doing that in Israel. The Jews had developed a system where you could send your wife away with a certificate of divorce if she burned your breakfast.

Now let's look at the specific of the language here that expresses the conflict. "Your desire shall be for your husband." Now let's talk about the word "desire." What does it mean? It's an interesting word, it comes from an Arabic root and I have continued to survey this passage because it's been a passage of some controversy. But it is of Arabic root meaning to seek control. Literally it could read, "You shall seek control over your husband...you will desire to exert your will," that is a sign of the curse, "you will desire to take charge, to be in control, to master." And that desire shows up in various women in various ways. In some of them it's a quiet, silent desire that smolders, with others it is a shouting desire that isn't much of a secret to anybody. And the more godless women are, very often the more hostile they are toward men. Sometimes that hostility takes the attitude of coldness, indifference, apathy. Because she can't achieve what she wants, she eventually becomes totally indifferent and apathetic toward the man.

But there is this desire, this seeking to have one's own way, to get control. That's why there have been through history always Feminist Movements, always. Even in the time of the Apostle Paul. I read some fascinating things about the time of the Apostle Paul. There was a liberation of women movement going on in the world of the Apostle Paul. Women were shaving their heads and going around bare chested with spears in their hands and trying to prove that they can do everything men did. There have always been that kind of...there's always been that kind of movement in history because it's reflective of this curse. The man has to deal with the fact that his wife wants to control him.

Now, the ideal situation, according to 1 Peter 3, is that a woman would manifest a meek and quiet spirit and that she would say to her husband "lord" as Sarah said to Abraham, I submit to you. But that's not how it is in the world. She wants control. She wants what she wants. Maybe she wants

control of the checkbook, the credit card, or whatever.

On the other hand, verse 16, the end, "And he shall rule over you." Let's look at the word "rule" for a minute, *mashal*. It means to dominate, to reign, literally means to install in office. The idea is as the woman seeks to overthrow the rank, as the woman seeks to twist the divine order, as the woman seeks to master her husband, seek control over him, he dominates her. As the woman tends toward rebellion, the man tends toward despotism. And you have the battle of the sexes right here. That's why there's conflict in marriage. And there is conflict in marriage, no question about it. Her desire is *teshuqah*...*teshuqah*. It doesn't mean sexual desire, she already had that before the Fall. It's the desire to get her way. And it even shows up, sad to say, in places where it shouldn't show up. Paul is writing to Timothy in the church at Ephesus and he says, "I permit not a woman to teach nor to...what?...usurp authority." Because that's a tendency.

Now to show you an illustration of this, look over in the fourth chapter of Genesis and verse 7. Here is the only other use of the word *teshuqah*, desire in the Pentateuch, in the five books of Moses, the only other place it's used. And it is in a phrase that is an exact duplication of the phrase at the end of verse 16. The phrase is in Genesis 4 verse 7. Pick it up in the middle of the verse. This is the Lord speaking to Cain. "Sin is crouching at your door and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Fifteen verses away from Genesis 3:16 is Genesis 4:7 and you have an exact duplication of those phrases. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you....sin's desire is for you but you must master it. The same phrases. The construction is absolutely identical. We learn in studying the Bible that when you have identical terms and identical construction in close proximity, they mean the same thing, or they express the same concept.

What is it saying in chapter 4 verse 7? The Lord is speaking to Cain. He says, "Sin desires you." What does that mean? Sin wants to control you. Sin wants to dominate you. Sin wants to take over your life. "But you must master it, you must rule over it." It's the very same expression. The woman desires to control man and he rules over her. Sin desires to have you, you must control it. The woman then has the same desire for the man that sin has for Cain, a desire to control, a desire to have its way. And the husband has the same need to control his wife that Cain had to control sin.

As I said earlier, Eve resisted her husband's headship originally. She sinned, she led him to do her will, right? Essentially. She convinced Adam to do what she wanted him to do, eat the fruit. God wanted them not to do it, she wanted him to do it. She took the lead. She convinced him to do it. She usurped authority, she took the place of leadership. He submitted to her and he was therefore sentenced to have to deal with such rebellion on a permanent basis. The wife then seeks control. She

seeks to have her way what she wants when she wants it. The husband resists and tries to maintain his control and that, of course, is not always balanced, it's not always loving, it's not always kind. And therein lies the conflict of marriage that is so universal. Man no longer has harmony in the home. She no longer follows graciously.

One of the great scholars, Old Testament scholars, is E.J. Young. In a couple of little paragraphs on this particular portion of Genesis he writes, "Emancipation of women is an illusion. Woman cannot free herself. She is not the equal of the man. Only before God is she equal. The tragedy is that her husband will now rule over her. She had sought to rule him in giving to him the forbidden fruit, now he will rule over her. Although there was an original divinely planned subordination for the woman, this was to be a blessing for her. The man was to be her head in the sense that he loved her with a love in which no sin was mixed. He was to love her as he loved himself and no blot of evil would mar the relationship. All was now changed for the Fall had taken place. Instead of the mild and tender love of Eden, the husband would now domineer over his rebellious wife. Over her he would become a despot." E.J. Young says, "In many parts of the world the role of woman has been reduced to that of virtual slavery."

I'll never forget, Patricia and I along with our family were in Calcutta. We were in Calcutta in August and it was hot and steamy and we were staying in the William Carey home just off the streets of Calcutta. There are millions of people who live in the gutters of Calcutta, it's an incredible place. And, of course, there are approximately a billion people in India. It is an overwhelming experience, the sights and sounds and smells of India, nothing like it on the globe.

And we were staying in a place that had a dirt floor and I was ill most of the time. Our son, Matt, was very ill. I'll never forget it. He was so ill that somebody called for a nurse to come, which is a very scary thing because the medical care there isn't what it should be, at least not for people like us. And we were going to try to get him some intravenous feeding so he didn't become dangerously dehydrated. And I'll never forget, this nurse came into the room and they were looking for a place to hang that bottle to drip some fluid into him to rehydrate him and when she was ready to inject his arm, she lifted the needle up and wiped it off a few times and then inserted it into his vein before I could stop it. It's a frightening place. And the culture is so deeply entrenched in Hinduism and all of that.

Well after we had been there just one day, that night we had a meeting in the area. I'll never forget them sort of pounding out our food on the floor there, we were wondering how we were going to survive all of this, not used to that. That we were concerned about, that physical part, until I went to a meeting that night and there was a missionary there who had just graduated from a liberal seminary

in America. And I...we were talking in a little circle and I said to him, I said, "You've just arrived in India after your training, what is your goal? What is your mission? What is your great objective?"

I'll never forget what he said. He said, "My goal is to liberate Indian women from male oppression." I just was a blank, just like you. Oh, you're going to liberate half a billion women from male oppression. One thing they didn't teach him was Genesis 3:16. Well, I suppose somebody spent a lot of money to get that guy there. I don't think he stayed very long. You're not going to eliminate oppression, male oppression. You're not going to eliminate female rebellion. Therefore you're not going to eliminate divorce, terrible conflict in marriage. Conflict has always been there. It will always be there. It's just part of the sentence that that's the payment for sin. And God by doing that gives to all people a constant reminder of what disasters sin produces. It's just like an inescapable illustration, how can anybody who thinks not come to some conclusion that since every marriage experiences conflicts, since every mother struggles and is sad through the process of childbirth, since that is universal there must be some universal source for that. Indeed there is...sin. It is an incessant reminder of sinfulness.

Now the question comes as it did in our last study...is there hope for some relief in this? Well let's find out. Turn to Ephesians 5. And I know you know there is and it's in Ephesians 5. And here again, folks, there is really no relief from this apart from Christ, no real relief from this apart from Christ. You know, it's almost safe to say rarely will you ever find a marriage among unbelievers that lasts a long time that is anything more than a truce for whatever reason, they just agree to stay together. You don't find marriages generally around the world among unbelieving people filled with joy and fulfillment and happiness and love and satisfaction to the point where they never considered any one else because they are so totally fulfilled with each other, where the friendship is the best friendship, where the love is the deepest. Rarely will you ever, ever find that outside the realm of Christianity. Sad to say, even within the realm of Christianity there are many who do not take advantage of what God has provided.

But let's see what the pattern is. In Ephesians chapter 5 there is a principle that we need to look at to start with and it's in verse 18. "Do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." There was this idea in the ancient religions of the Greek world that drunkenness induced a state of hypersensitivity that catapulted you into communion with the deities. Timothy Leary tried to popularize that in the 1960's culture, drug culture. That somehow if you wanted a transcendental religious experience, you needed to become drunk or high and that catapulted you in to some euphoria that connected you with deities. And that was the way it was in Paul's day. You would go to an orgy, a festival of Bacchus and you would drink yourself into oblivion under the illusion that that drunken stupor was some kind of religious experience with the deities. The Apostle Paul says if you want to have an experience with God, don't get drunk, get filled with the Spirit. If you want to commune with the living God then be under control by the Holy Spirit. And being filled with the Spirit

is not a mystical experience, it simply means to be controlled by. "Filled" is simply the idea of being controlled, being dominated. If you say someone is filled with anger, you mean they're controlled by anger. If they're filled with sadness, they're controlled by sadness. If they're filled with the Spirit, they're controlled by the Spirit. It's an exact parallel to Colossians 3:16, "Let the Word dwell in you richly."

So where you have Christian people who are controlled by the Spirit, who are worshiping God, as indicated in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and singing and making melody in their heart to the Lord, who are marked by thanksgiving always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God even the Father, wherever you find somebody who is totally lost in wonder, love and praise, where you find people controlled by the Spirit, where they are filled with worship and filled with gratitude, where they are contemplating the greatness of their salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He has done for them, and by the will of God even our Father, where you have those kinds of people who submit themselves to one another because they have such a reverence for Christ, you have the possibility of reversing this curse. You come to it in verse 22, "Wives, stop desiring to overpower your husband and submit to your own husbands as to the Lord." You don't rebel against the Lord, you don't rise up against the Lord and try to take authority over Him. You don't want to control Him, so don't do it to your husband. Why? "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church."

Now here is a whole new perspective on things. Here again "in Christ" the curse is softened, where you have someone under the control of the Holy Spirit, someone whose life is filled with worship, verse 19, filled with thanks, verse 20, for their salvation for all that God has done for them in the Lord Jesus Christ, where you have someone who lives with reverence to Christ and is humbly able to submit himself to others, then you're going to have the possibility of literally softening greatly this curse, minimizing the natural conflict. And, wives filled with the Spirit, filled with worship, filled with thanks, filled with reverence for Christ are going to be subject to their own husbands as to the Lord. That's the duty of the wife.

It doesn't say you are to obey your husband, that's reserved for children and servants, later in the passage. The husband and wife relationship is different, it's not a commanding and obeying motif, it's a more intimate, inward vital kind of thing. And that's why it says, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands." There's intimacy there. This subjection doesn't imply spiritual inferiority, for in Christ there is neither male nor female, Galatians 3:28. The Lord Jesus, after all, is subject to God the Father but in no way inferior, neither is the woman inferior to the man. But for the sake of unity and the sake of harmony and the sake of peace and because of God's created design, she is commanded to be subject to her own husband as she would be subject to the Lord Himself.

It isn't the kind of submission that says...I don't like it, but I'm submitting. It's not that. You don't say that to the Lord. You understand that that would be duplicity of the clearest definition. You don't say, "Lord, I'm subject to you but I don't like it." That's not a heart of submission at all. You submit to your husband the way you would submit to the Lord. And how would you do that? I gladly submit, I happily submit because I know that honors you, I know that's Your will.

You see, you have a higher point of reference here. You're submitting to your husband with the same kind of attitude that you would submit to the Lord. It doesn't say that your husband is the equal of the Lord, we know he's not. But you submit in the same way.

Why? Verse 23, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church." That's the way He designed it. God designed Christ to be the head of the church. God designed the husband to be the head of the wife. That's the way He designed it. That's the way it has to be. A home without a head is an invitation to chaos. And that's what you have in the conflict, the woman trying to rebel and master the husband, the husband trying to crush the rebellion. It's as chaotic as a body without a head. Submitting is by divine design. You do it in the strength of the Holy Spirit. You do it in the joy of worship. You do it with a heart of thanksgiving. You do it with reverence to Christ.

He's not only the head of the church, verse 23, but He's also the Savior of the body. What's the point? The point is, listen very careful, because this is very important, He's the head of the church not in a domineering way but in a saving way. When you think of Christ as the head of the church, you don't think of Him as a dictator, you don't think of Him as a despot. You think of Him as a Savior. You don't think of Him as some dominating task-master making life brutal. You think of Him as a Savior. What is that? That is a protector, that's a rescuer, that's a preserver, that's a provider, that's somebody who has your well-being in His heart, that's somebody who is interested in your welfare, somebody interested in the very best for you, that's somebody who rescues you from sin and rescues you from death and rescues you from hell and rescues you from trouble, somebody who protects you, somebody who safeguards you.

So in Christ the husband becomes a savior of his wife. That's what we were saying this morning. If he has fortitude, if he has the courage of his convictions built on truth and the strength to stand for those things, he becomes the savior of his wife. He becomes the protector, the preserver, the guardian. He makes sure that she is safe, that her environment is safe. That she is exposed only to those things that bring about her well-being, physically, morally and spiritually.

And then in verse 24, he sums it up, "As the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands...I love this last part...in everything." No exceptions, in everything. Less, of course, it violates God's command. If your husband asks you to do something God forbids or asks you not to do something God commands, then you must obey God.

Now in that environment the rebellion is quashed. It's put down because the woman now filled with the Spirit, under the control of the Spirit with a happy heart, worshiping God, filled with gratitude for her salvation and the goodness of God, living in reverence to Christ submits to her husband the same way she submits to the Lord, with a willing, eager heart. She views her husband as her rescuer, her protector, her guardian, her savior.

On the other hand, look at the husband in verse 25. Instead of him trying to crush this woman, trying to dominate this woman, trying to bring her under control, it says, "Husbands, love your wives." It doesn't say "control your wives." No, it doesn't say that. It says love her. It doesn't say ruler her, doesn't say order her around, make sure she does everything you tell her. It doesn't say subject her, command her, exercise authority over her, or dominate her. There's nothing here related to authority at all, it just says love her...agape, the highest and deepest kind of love, the love of the will, the love of self-sacrifice. The husband has that authority but it is controlled and it is exercised through love. What a man needs to convince his wife of is that he loves her so much that he is always concerned with her well being. That makes his authority soft and warm, and then his authority is her protection, not a threat to her independence.

And he goes on to say some other things but most notably in verse 25 he says this, "Husbands, you are to love your wives just as Christ also loved the church." Well what do we mean by that? What does that mean? That's the standard though, love your wife the way Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? First of all, sacrificially. He gave Himself up for her. He humbled Himself to death, gave up His life. The Spirit-filled husband will give his life up for his wife as Christ did for the church. There's no tyranny here, there's only sacrifice. He takes the role of protector, guardian, overseer, but there's no tyranny, only sacrifice.

Secondly, it's not only a sacrificial love, it's a purifying love. In verse 26, "That He might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word that He might present to Himself in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that she should be holy and blameless, so husbands ought also to love their own wives." Now we're to love our wives in the way of sacrifice and then in the way of purification. This is really a very beautiful concept.

There was in ancient Greece a custom, a bride was bathed in sacred water prior to the wedding. It was a custom sort of symbolizing her purification for her husband. In Athens there was a place called Caluro(??) and the waters of Caluro were believed to be sacred and brides were bathed in those waters, symbolizing a cleansing from any previous defilement and entrance into a pure life. Well, marriage was to be a purifying environment for the woman. You never want to do anything, men, you never want to do anything that exposes your wife to anything that is impure, any temptation. Any impure influence you should protect your wife from that. True love is concerned with the purity of its object.

So here is a man who loves his wife, he loves her sacrificially and he loves her with a purifying love. Any so-called love which drags a partner down to uncleanness of any kind is a false love. And I tell young people that. You know, if some guy comes along and says "I love you, now go to bed with me," that's not love. That's not love, clearly that's not love.

First of all, love never seeks its own, does it? It doesn't seek its own fulfillment. And secondly, true love is both a sacrificial experience, a sacrificial attitude, a sacrificial characteristic and one that pursues the highest good and the best for the object of its attention. Any love that makes a coarse and hard rather than a refining and purifying the character of another is a false love. Any love which weakens the moral fiber of someone is a false love. Love seeks to sacrifice itself for the other and to pursue the purity of its object, just in the way Christ sought the purity of His church. You think Christ is concerned about the purity of His church? Of course He is...of course He is. He wants to present to Himself a church, verse 27, that doesn't have a spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that is holy and blameless.

And then in verse 28, it is a sacrificial love, it is a purifying love, it is a caring love. It says in verse 28, "Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ also does the church for we are members of His body."

What he means is you love your wife the same way you love yourself. You don't have to learn to love yourself, you do that naturally. You take care of you, that's what you do. You feed you, you dress you, and you make sure that all your needs are met. Well that's exactly the way you want to take care of your wife with the same kind of attentiveness, same kind of devotion, the same kind of consistency that you give to yourself. She is not just a cook and clothes washer and baby sitter, etc., etc. You want to cherish her, he says. I love that term. We cherish our own flesh. We nourish our own flesh.

Cherish in the Greek means to warm with body heat, to soften to melt. It's used of mother birds sitting in the nest with their little birds all around them.

And furthermore, it is not only sacrificial love and a purifying love and a caring love, but this love that husbands have is an unbreakable love. Verse 31, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they two shall become one flesh." That's a quote from Genesis 2:24 and indicates the permanent character of a marriage. It is indivisible, it is unbreakable and it is securing for a woman to know that a husband is not looking for somebody other, or somebody better. You love your wife with a sacrificial, purifying, caring love and an unbreakable love. You do that because that's how Christ loves His church.

In spite of the curse, marriage can be the best that life has to offer. The New Testament calls it the grace of life, that's a way of saying it's the best. Now we understand sin hit marriage really hard. It hit marriage hard just because everybody in the family is a sinner. The husband is a sinner, the wife is a sinner and as they battle their own fallenness we are close to the conflict not only in our own lives, but in their life, that compounds the difficulty. Then we bring children in and that even compounds it more as all their fallenness is mingled with our own. In that environment the woman because of her special curse wants to propel herself to the fulfillment of all her own desires. She doesn't want to submit. She doesn't like to submit. It's not something she wants to do. She wants control. She wants her way. She wants her will. And the man is given then to having to crush and overpower her and he goes too far and there's the conflict. And the only hope is the power of justification and the power of sanctification. The only hope is the work of the Spirit of God in the heart.

Well let me just close by saying the curse is there and it doesn't get mitigated except through the gospel. And like so many realities, back to where I started, so many realities in our world, you can talk to sociologists, you can talk to psychologists, you can talk to professors, you can talk to experts and they haven't got a clue why things are the way they are. But you do. In our study of Genesis we have added components to our world view. We understand the physical universe. We understand everything we need to understand about its origins because we understand Genesis 1 and 2. We understand the moral universe. We understand why there is morality and immorality, why there is sin. We understand what comes from that because we understand the first part of Genesis 3. So we understand the physical universe, we understand the moral universe, we also understand the social universe which is played out most intimately in the family. And we understand why there's trouble there and why there's conflict there. And that has to do not only with the natural sequence that flows out of fallenness but also because of the divine curse.

And, you know, we are not many noble and not many mighty but we know more than the rest of the world knows about why things are the way they are. But isn't it even more wonderful than that? We know the solution to the problems, don't we? And you heard it tonight in the waters of baptism, total transformation. The first gal that gave her testimony, Kim, said, "Things I used to love I loathe, things I used to loathe, I love." That is a total transformation. That's what Christ can do in a life.

Well, next time we're going to look at the curse that fell on the man and why it is that we all have to work so hard. Let's pray.

Father, again this has been such a wonderful day. And You've always opened the Word to us and we are fed. Thank You for that. This is a feast beyond description. And we grieve that its great truths are unknown to most of the world, most of our nation, most of our city, people everywhere who have absolutely no understanding of the universe around them. Nor do they know You, the only true God and our Savior Jesus Christ, therefore they have no answers to the struggles of life. We thank You that we know Your Word, we marvel that You have brought us to this place, that You have exposed us to the gospel and we have believed and we have been saved, that You have given us Your Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to be our resident teacher. And that You have taught us the truth. How blessed we are and we thank You. Bless our marriages and our families and may our...our relationships as husbands and wives be what You can make them in spite of the curse through the work of Your Spirit in our lives. May the relationships between mothers and children be joyful and fulfilling as the mothers live godly lives and the children respond with faith and obedience. For all of the joys of life which we experience and the world does not, we thank You. We thank You that we're not lost and wandering hopeless and miserable because we can't understand the present and we have no hope in the future. That's not us, Lord. We do understand the present and we do have hope in the future. You've given us that hope in Christ, we praise Him. We pray in His name. Amen.

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