

Genesis 3:17-19

We have been studying Gen 3. We have divided the chapter as follows,

1. The Temptation, vs 1-5.
2. The Fall, vs 6.
3. Spiritual Death, vs 7-8.
4. The Divine Confrontation, vs 9-13.
5. The Adamic Covenant, vs 14-19
6. The Results of the Fall, 20-24.

We are in the fifth section which is called the Adamic Covenant since it is a binding unilateral declaration of God's judgments against the five participants in the fall.

1. Verse 14 details judgement on the serpent.
2. Verse 15 details judgement on Satan.
3. Verse 16 details judgment on the woman.
4. Verses 17 and 19 detail judgement on the man.
5. Verse 18 details judgment on the creation.

Last time, we examined the judgments on the woman and noted there are three judgements on her that fall into two domains. The first and second judgements concern the domain of her children, while the third concerns the domain of her marriage.

- a. Pain with childbearing. The idea is everything associated with a woman's childbearing machinery will increase in pain, vexation, and sorrow. This means menstruation, conception, and carrying a pregnancy. All phases are affected, so even if you are a woman and have not had relations with a man or have never born a child, you will know the curse, for every month you will be reminded of God's judgement.
- b. Pain in childbirth. The implication is twofold. First, women will have increased physical pain with the act of labor and delivery, but secondly, the child itself will bring forth sorrow for they will grow and have free moral agency, and make decisions that are sometimes contrary to what you as a godly parent may desire—and it brings heartache.
- c. Subjection to her husband, accompanied by the desire to rebel against that subjection and rule him. The woman will desire to take charge, to control, and to master her mate. We noted from Gen 4:7 it is like the desire sin has to control us. This desire can be explicit, and for others it can be an implicit silent smoldering that seeks to circumvent your husbands headship. However it is manifested, her desire seeks to usurp his authority.

Now we get to verses 17 and 19 in which God pronounces judgement upon the man.

Vs 17-19, To Adam he said, *"Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

Let us now dissect these verses.

Vs 17a, *Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it*

The reason for the curse upon Adam is given in the first two phrases of the verse: The first is, *Because you listened to your wife*. Adam failed to exercise his headship and allowed his wife to take the lead in dealing with the serpent. He abrogated his God given role of authority and leadership.

The second reason for the curse was the actual sin, the eating of the fruit: *and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it*. This act was in direct disobedience to God's command. It was a willful, conscious decision.

Adam stands as the representative of the human race, for we are all his descendants and were in his loins at the time of his sin. What is said to Adam by God not only holds true for Adam, but also applies to every child that proceeds from him. In other words, the judgment on Adam becomes the judgement on humanity. Paul notes in Rm 5:12, *When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned*. David also notes in Ps 51:5, *In sin did my mother conceive me*.

God now proclaims a fourfold judgment on Adam, and hence humanity. The first provision is found in verse 17b.

Vs 17b, *Cursed is the ground because of you*

That which was under Adam's authority is now cursed. God had given Adam and Eve dominion over the earth in Gen 1:28-30. Now this dominion would come under judgment. Verse 18a gives us an indication of what this will look like as instead of beautiful plants springing forth from the ground as noted in Gen 1:11-12, the ground now produces *thorns and thistles*. In other words, weeds came into being with the curse of Adam. It is also important to note a corollary idea here. In Gen 1:11-12, the ground easily and robustly brings forth beautiful plants and trees. Here in 17b the idea is now the earth will easily and robustly bring forth thorns and thistles (i.e. weeds).

Paul discusses nature's curse in Rm 8:20-22, *Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, ²¹ the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. ²² For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time*.

The second provision of God's judgment is found in vs 17c and 19a.

Vs 17c, *through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life*

Vs 19a, *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food*

Adam will now have to work for his food. Where once he could just move from plant to plant, or tree to tree, with no concern for the procurement of food to satisfy his hunger; his hunger will now drive him to

work, with sweat and toil, to procure food. Notice the irony here. Adam sinned by eating, now he will suffer to eat.

Before the fall, Adam labored; he named the animals, he cultivated the garden; now that toil is painful. His bones ache, his hands are blistered, his lips are dry and cracked, his brow is furrowed, he sweats, he stinks, he gets tired, he has to fight off thorns and thistles without roundup. In short, life has become hard. Here is another corollary to this. This curse was placed on Adam and hence to each of his progeny, hence we all painfully labor for what we eat. There is no free ride. God intended everyone to work for what he gets. It makes me question our welfare system and free handouts. Don't get me wrong, I believe in helping those who cannot help themselves, but we should legitimately question when people receive benefits who can work but don't. Paul addresses this same principle in 2 Thess 3:6-10, *And now, dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from all believers^[c] who live idle lives and don't follow the tradition they received^[d] from us. ⁷ For you know that you ought to imitate us. We were not idle when we were with you. ⁸ We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We certainly had the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. ¹⁰ Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat."*

The third provision of God's judgement is found in verse 18b,

Vs 18b, and you will eat the plants of the field.

The third provision of God's judgement is that Adam will eat of the plants of the field. Note before the fall, he could eat from any of the plants or fruit that was in the garden. Though Adam will remain a vegetarian, his diet will now be restricted to that of *the plants of the field*. In other words, his diet will be one which he grows himself. From the first provision we know this field will easily produce thorns and thistles, but it will not easily produce grain, therefore Adam will have to suffer the second provision of judgement which means he will have to labor and sweat, to get the field to produce grain which he can eat. This is now his life: laboring in a field that naturally produces thorns, to grow grain, for his bread.

The final provision of God's judgement is found in verse 19c.

Vs 19b, until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

The final provision is physical death, *to dust you will return*. God reminds Adam he was formed from the ground (see Gen 2:7), and to the ground he will return after all the toilsome days of his life. God now imposes the promise of death He gave in Gen 2:17. I'm not sure Adam knew what death meant when God gave the command not to eat of the tree in 2:17. But God now makes clear to Adam what death means. It means *you will return to dust*. You will no longer have physical existence.

So this is now Adam's lot,

- a. Everything under Adam's authority, his dominion, has now been cursed. Where once creation readily produced beautiful plants and trees, it now readily will produce thorns and thistles.
- b. Adam (and hence all mankind) will have to painfully toil to produce food to eat.

- c. And though Adam's diet will remain vegetarian, he will be restricted to eat from what he can produce.
- d. And lastly, Adam now knows he will physically die and understands his body will return to dust.

Sadly, save for the vegetarian provision, we all know this curse is in effect today. We live it, we feel it, we suffer under it. But the good news, no the great news is that God has provided a way through it.

Next time we will see how God remedies their now sinful state, and their banishment from the Garden to start their now new life as sinners in a fallen world.