

THE CURSE ON EVE

A Meditation on Genesis 3:16

Eve was called to be a wife and mother. She was created to be a helper fit for her husband. And Adam and Eve together we're commanded to be fruitful and multiply. This vocation, which would have brought joy and fulfillment into Eve's life, will now bring pain.

The curse that came on Eve can be divided into two parts, corresponding to her calling. First, Eve is cursed in child rearing. "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing'" (Gen. 3:16a). Literally the Hebrew for "in childbearing" is "in conception." The figure of speech used here is called synecdoche, where the part is put for the whole. In other words, the reference to pain in conception is meant to tell us that there will be pain in the whole process of bringing forth and raising children that begins at conception. This, by the way, is another argument in support of life beginning at conception. Furthermore, notice that from the moment of conception mothers are responsible for their children.

God goes on to say, "in pain you shall bring forth children" (vs. 16b). Thankfully, God is merciful and once the baby comes the ecstatic joy helps the mother to forget the pain of childbirth. God has also blessed us with wonderful technology, so that the life of the mother and the child can be preserved. We take this for granted in America, but in earlier eras, it wasn't uncommon for woman to die giving birth to their children. In Genesis 35:18, we read of Rachel dying as she gave birth to Benjamin. This is a reminder of the curse; and a reminder that the pain in bringing forth children can be deadly.

Most commentators concur that the whole process of child rearing is in view here, not just conception through delivery. In fact, for many parents the real, deep, emotional pain begins after the child is born. When Simeon prophesied about Jesus, he told Mary, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from man hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34-35).

The second part of the curse relates to marriage: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16cd). The Hebrew word for *desire* can be interpreted either positively or negatively. In Song of Solomon 7:10 it is used positively: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me." Some egalitarians and feminists have said that God introduced submission as part of the curse. The logic runs along these lines: Since the woman is cursed with a strong, loving desire for her husband, she willingly allows herself to be ruled by her dictatorial husband. This interpretation is backwards.

It would be more accurate to say that Eve willingly submitted to her husband before the fall, but the curse brought pain into the marriage as the wife will now be stubborn and rebellious toward her husband's headship. Frankly, at least from the husband's perspective, the first interpretation wouldn't be seen as a curse, but a blessing. A fully, loving supportive wife is hardly a curse. If women disagree and see this as a curse (and I that know many feminists who reject the Bible do), then we need to go back to chapter two and review the purpose for which God created Eve and brought her to Adam.

The other interpretation takes the word "desire" negatively. Genesis 4:7 uses it this way: "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you can rule over it." The same Hebrew word is found just fifteen verses later—and with striking parallelism. In fact, Genesis 4:7 functions as a commentary on Genesis 3:16. Susan T. Foh wrote in the *Westminster Theological Journal*: "The woman has the same sort of desire for her husband that sin has for Cain, a desire to possess or control him. The desire disputes the headship of the husband. As the Lord tells Cain what he should do, i.e. master or rule sin, the Lord also states what the husband should do, rule over his wife. The words of the Lord in Genesis 3:16b, as in the case of the battle between sin and Cain, do not determine the victor of the conflict between husband and wife. These words mark the beginning of the battle of the sexes... Sin has corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband." To discern which interpretation makes more sense, you just have to be in touch with reality.

How can we overcome the curse on our marriages, and restore paradise? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be filled with the Holy Spirit, who enables wives to submit to their husbands, as to the Lord, and who also enables husbands to love their wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her (Eph. 5:18-25).

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