**Marriage Core Seminar**

*Class 3*

**Marriage and Sin**

**I. Introduction**

Last week we looked at the shape of marriage that God gave it before sin entered the world, how husband and wife would pursue God in different ways. They’d be different in their life orientations—with him oriented to the task God had given them and her oriented to him. And they’d be different in authority, with the husband called to use his authority to love his wife. This is part of how we live out the paradox of marriage that Jamie told us about two weeks ago, to be different *and* one.

Of course, all that is rooted in Genesis 2 which describes a world without sin. But between us and Genesis 2 is Genesis 3, which tells how sin enters the world. Thankfully, in God’s kindness sin need not compromise God’s purposes for marriage. But how you respond to sin in marriage will very much dictate what marriage is like for you. And I promise you that marriage will surface all kinds of sin that neither of you had any idea was there.

Today, we’ll walk through Genesis chapter 3 and apply it to marriage. Then next week we’ll continue this theme of marriage and sin, looking especially at how the roles of husband and wife we discussed last week can flourish despite the burden of sin.

**II. Sin’s Arrival (Gen. 3:1-7)**

Let’s start at the beginning of Genesis 3.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

What’s going on here? Well, verse 1 – Satan enters the scene as a snake and asks a question that distorts what God says. “Did God *actually* say, ‘You shall not eat of *any* tree?’” No, that’s not what God said—but Satan’s question certainly makes God seem unfair, doesn’t it? Then, verse 2, Eve corrects Satan but adds her own distortion of what God said. God never said they couldn’t touch the fruit. Verse 4, Satan takes Eve’s distortion and runs with it, directly contradicting God. And laying down his best argument, verse 5, “you will be like God.” “God’s been unfairly keeping you in the dark. Don’t you want to see all he’s been keeping from you and be like him?”

Well, verse 6, Adam and Eve are both drawn into Satan’s twisted reality. She’s wants the fruit. So she eats and gives some to her husband. And then, verse 7, their eyes really are opened—just as Satan promised—but not in the wonderful way he implied. They realize they’re naked and they’re ashamed. The nakedness that in chapter 2 was a wonderful symbol of complete unity with nothing to hide is now terrifying.

Let me offer two observations from these verses about the nature of sin in marriage.

*A. Sin Disputes God’s Goodness*

Remember that in Genesis 1, God makes man and woman according to his image and *likeness*. Fascinating that Satan promises this very thing: “you will be like God.” But what Satan promised wasn’t “be in God’s likeness to show off how wonderful he is.” It was “push God aside and take his place.” In these verses, Adam and Eve attempt to dethrone God, rejecting the parameters God set up in creation. It was Adam and Eve declaring their independence from their Creator.

And this is the nature of every sin, isn’t it? Whether it’s lying or murder, every sin says “there’s a better way than God’s way.” So whereas God has called us to follow his good way to show off that he’s good, sin proclaims that there is a way that is better than God’s, that he is actually *not* that good. God had placed Adam and Eve in the garden as his representatives. But at Satan’s enticement, that’s no longer good enough for them.

This is what happens anytime we break out of the parameters God’s given us. God says “love your wife as you love yourself” and you say, “that’s a little extreme; I’ve got a better way.” God says “tell him the truth” and you say, “but right now that would be too painful; I’ve got a better way.” And so sin declares that God’s way is not best, that God is not good.

Much of our sin in marriage can be described as rejecting of God’s parameters for our life and an attempt to be god in our own little worlds. Consider Judy, the hypothetical controlling wife. Judy robs God of his sovereignty by acting as the sovereign queen in her marriage. If anyone crosses her or doesn’t follow her game plan, she makes everyone miserable until she gets her own way. Think about your own life. How have *you* rejected God’s parameters for your life and chosen to replace God?

I’m going to move on now to examine a second characteristic of sin but keep this one in the back of your mind because it’ll be important later in today’s class.

*B. Sin Disputes God’s Truth*

This is in fact what Satan does with Eve. “Did God really say?” Sadly, Adam and Eve accept this alternative reality and believe Satan rather than God.

What are the voices competing and threatening to overshadow God’s Words for you? Think about it for a moment. And stop listening to them. Nothing that stands opposed to God and his word will ever be good for you.

Of course, few of us have the devil verbally telling us the lies like Eve did. Very often, he’s working through the world around us and our own flesh to confuse us. Remember those three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

* The world, of course, is telling us all kinds of lies about marriage. It lies about what we need to be happy. It tells us that personal freedom and control is the only path to happiness. It lies to us, minimizing the consequences of sin like rage and hypocrisy.
* And then there’s our own flesh. As human beings, our skills in self-justification and self-deception are really quite extraordinary. Very often, it is these lies that kill a marriage—the lies we tell ourselves.
  + Think about the man or woman who says, “my struggle with porn is really my spouse’s fault because they don’t satisfy me.”
  + Think about the person who justifies their angry speech. “It’s the only way I’ll ever get through to him (or her).”

Satan would like nothing more than to undermine Christian marriages. What better way for him to ruin things than to destroy one of the foundational pillars that sustains the kingdom—strong Christian marriages.

So how can we resist these lies? The lies he’s fed us that we’ve believed and then buttressed with our own web of self-justifying lies? We need God’s word, don’t we? The most important thing you can do for your marriage is to regularly spend time in God’s word. At home. At church. If you ever get into a season where God’s word has fallen out of your life, you are in a very precarious position in life, let alone in your marriage.

And we need others who know us well to speak God’s word into our marriages. When marriages get into trouble in this church, that trouble is often preceded by isolation. A busy season at work, or shame because of sin lead to distance from others, and soon lies are believed that wouldn’t have been a danger otherwise.

They say what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, and so often Christians try to do the same in their marriages. What happens in our marriage stays in our marriage; don’t you dare tell my friends about the struggles we’re having. What better way to play into Satan’s plans? Proverbs 18:1, “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.” If you’re married, you need to tell your spouse today—if you haven’t before—that there are no limits on who they talk to about your marriage or what they talk about. That you trust them. No exceptions. And you should agree on which of your close friends would be the best for him or her to talk to if they feel like they can’t get through to you. We’re all prone to self-deception, and our greatest ally is God’s word, spoken by God’s people who know us well.

I’ll pause and see if there are any questions so far.

**III. Sin’s Effect**

So what happens once Adam and Eve buy into these lies? Let’s keep reading. Verse 8:

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Two things that happen here. First, Adam and Eve try to hide from God. This sin has had terrible consequences for that vertical relationship. Then, when confronted by God, they try to blame each other. Imagine the look on Eve’s face as Adam responds, “The woman whom you gave to be with me…” Sin’s had terrible consequences horizontally as well. We’ll look at each of these.

*A. Sin Corrupts Your Relationship with God*

Adam and Eve’s disobedience brought guilt and shame into their relationship with God. Genuine openness and vulnerability were no longer possible, so Adam and Eve hid from him.

Hiding is fundamental to the way sin works. Sin thrives in darkness, away from God rather than standing in the light (Eph 5; 1 John 1). Are there ways you’re hiding sin?

If God is the fountainhead for all of life, this is how Satan destroys a marriage. Get you away from God; get you to hide from him; and that will ruin everything.

Don’t ever be deceived into thinking that the sin between you and your spouse is only between the two of you. Remember what David said to God after he’d had his way with Bathsheba and murdered her husband. “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps. 51:4).

*B. Sin Corrupts the Relationship with a Spouse*

But sadly, though sin’s attack on our relationship with God is most *serious*, what’s most *obvious* is its effect on horizontal relationships.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve lived in a harmony with one another, in complete openness and vulnerability, trusting and loving each other. After the Fall, their marriage was tainted by a self-centeredness and pride. When God questioned them, Adam blamed Eve and she blamed the serpent. And in that blame-shifting, they neither accepted responsibility for their own sin nor did they respond well to the sin of the other. Let’s look at each of those in turn.

*1. Your own sin*

Perhaps more than any other relationship, marriage tempts us to deflect responsibility for our actions. As C.S. Lewis said, “Those who do not think about their own sins make up for it by thinking incessantly about the sin of others[[1]](#footnote-1).” One complication is that in marriage the blame game is nearly always somewhat correct. You’re so tightly joined in marriage, *of course* your sin was influenced by your spouse. Just like Adam’s sin was not entirely independent of Eve’s. Yet you’re nonetheless responsible for your sin.

Of course, sometimes we don’t respond to our sin by deflecting but by deflating. “I’m so terrible. I’ll never change.” Which translates to “give me pity” or “don’t ask me to change.” Whereas blame-shifting avoids addressing sin by casting responsibility elsewhere and moving on, self-condemnation avoids addressing sin by giving up. But the result’s the same: we run from responsibility for sin and it lives to fight another day.

As Christians, why do we do this? After all, we have an answer to sin: the gospel! The gospel tells us that, yes we’re sinners but that through the cross Jesus has forgiven us and broken the power of sin. But we still act in marriage—perhaps especially in marriage—as if we’re victims, not perpetrators. So what do we do about that tendency?

We opt for the blame game, or self-condemnation, because it seems like the best way in that moment to get what we want out of marriage. Peace, or satisfaction, or security, or what have you. But what if we wanted what *God* wants for marriage—to use it to show *us* his mercy; to use it to show *off* his mercy to others? When Paul was confronted by weakness in 2 Corinthians 12, he said, “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (v. 9). What treasures of Christ’s power could you experience by applying the gospel to your sin rather than running from it?

So your spouse confronts you and 95% of what they say is true. But we zero in on what’s not true instead of on our own sin. If we’ll adopt *God’s* goals for marriage—to pursue and portray him—we’ll find it much easier to address our sin with the gospel.

*2. Your Spouse’s Sin*

But that’s only half the battle, right? What about responding to your spouse’s sin? Adam *condemned* Eve before God. How can we do better? Three ideas:

* Not all that you call your spouse’s sin is really sin. So often, what we *think* is sin is just difference, or just weakness. It’s easy early in marriage to use morally-loaded language to describe something in a spouse that’s more difference than sin. It’s easy later in marriage to moralize what’s simply weakness or infirmity. Have the humility to listen to your spouse before you jump to conclusions. Proverbs 18:13, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” [example from your own marriage???]
* Beware the danger of growing to disdain your spouse. Disdain can creep up so subtly. One year, delight…the next, disdain. The difference so often is between approaching the sin of a spouse with compassion versus condemnation. Jamie mentioned in week 1 that an initial task in marriage is to trust the differences you and your spouse bring into marriage. I mentioned last week that a second task is learning to trust the differences God creates *in* the marriage. Well, this is a third task that comes up a few years in: learn to trust God amidst the *deficiencies* of your spouse. Sometimes it takes a few years to see them. When you realize, “Oh – this problem, this is probably here to stay.” Or your spouse changes over time. It’s really astounding how much a person will change over 20 or 30 years. As one person quipped, “I’ve been married to five different women in my life…and they all had the same name.” So what do you do when you’re confronted with these flaws in your spouse? That’s my third thought.
* Trust God with your spouse’s sin and weakness. It’s so tempting to have a mindset that says, “I’ll take the good with the bad. That is, “well, he’s not as awesome as I thought on our wedding day but he’s still a pretty good husband and I can put up with his flaws.” That *sounds* fine, but that’s not a very Christian way to think. Instead, in a world governed by a good and sovereign God you should see your spouse’s flaws as custom-made by God for your sanctification. Every one of them. And he will redeem every one of them for your good. So you don’t say, “well, I have most of the package I was hoping for and that’s pretty good.” But “I have *exactly* what God wants for me and in that I can trust him.” *That* is how you avoid the trap of disdain. *That* is how you will delight in your spouse *in* their sin and weakness, not merely *despite* it. As Paul writes about the body of Christ, “on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor” (1 Cor. 12:23). What a great model for marriage! And once again, we can do this best if we have the right goals for marriage. Think back to week #1 where Jamie contrasted marriage as *portraying* God (to yourself and your spouse) on the one hand, versus the things marriage *produces* on the other (like kids and companionship and ministry). If your goal for marriage is what it *produces* then you’ll struggle to trust God with sin and weakness because marriage isn’t doing what (in your mind) it’s supposed to. Your temptation will be to shout to your spouse, “hey – cut that out. Start pulling your weight!” But if you come to value marriage because of how it reveals and displays the goodness of God, his plan to use sin and weakness will fit right in. *That’s* the path to patience, compassion, and affection in a fallen world.

*Any questions?*

**IV. Sin’s curse**

We have one more section of our passage left to go, starting in verse 14. God curses the serpent, he curses the woman, he curses the man, and in all this he gives hope.

Let’s start with his curse on Eve. Verse 16, “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.’” In Genesis 1, God *commanded* Adam and Eve to be fruitful; now he *curses* their fruitfulness. Beyond that, sin has upended their relationship. This “desire” and “rule” is not benevolent. These are the same words God uses in chapter 4 verse 7 when he warns Cain that sin’s desire is contrary to him and so he must rule over it. Wrestle it to the ground so to speak. Before sin, a wife gladly submitted to her husband while he led her in love. After sin, her temptation is control while his is tyrannical rule. And so the battle of the sexes begins. The corrupting influence of sin is to try to turn everything in the created order we saw in Genesis 2—and our calling as Christian spouses in Ephesians 5—to turn that upside down. And these power play dynamics are at work in every marriage.

* When you use your spouse’s sin to prove your moral superiority, you are living out the curse.
* When you keep score in marriage (I’ll forgive you, but now you owe me) you are living out the curse.
* When you relish the opportunity to point out your spouse’s sin because it puts them in their place, you are living out the curse.

And sadly marital abuse is a yet more serious manifestation of this, and it is a terrible evil. Because a husband has been given strength and authority, abuse most often occurs at his hand but not always. The calling of a Christian is never to submit to abuse precisely because our primary calling is not to the marriage but to Christ. A Christian woman should not submit to abuse because in so doing she is allowing her husband’s sin to go unchecked. Now, the word “abuse” is thrown around often today, sometimes well outside its Biblical connotation. I don’t have the time to discuss that further right now. But if you are ever experiencing something that is abusive in your marriage, even if you’re wondering whether this behavior really constitutes “abuse,” you need to reach out to an elder, a pastor, a counselor at church, a strong Christian friend and begin to seek help. If your safety is in jeopardy, get yourself to a place where you are safe, making use of the police and laws designed to protect you. And remember that submitting to abuse when you can escape is not biblical submission; it is prolonging an evil that God hates.

Let’s move on to verse 17 where we see the curse at work on Adam. In Genesis 1, he was to exercise dominion over the earth. Genesis 2, to work the garden and keep it. But now we see, verse 17, that the ground itself will rebel against this divine commission. And in the end it will win and he will die. If this were a core seminar on work, we’d talk a lot about this. It’s not, so we won’t. But let me just point out something intriguing. The curse on Adam lines up precisely with God’s commands in Genesis 1, just as it did with Eve. The commands to be fruitful and exercise dominion were to be the way in which Adam and Eve lived out their purpose as those made in God’s image. Now their attempts to keep those commands are cursed.

What’s going on here? Your great temptation in marriage is to value it for what it produces—companionship, children, and so forth—rather than for its deeper purpose, to portray the goodness of God. I mentioned that earlier. And this curse is God’s guarantee that you will never be successful in that endeavor. If the purpose of your life is your labor and your love, divorced from the deeper purpose of portraying the goodness of God—which is how our culture views it—you *will* come up empty-handed. Remember Ecclesiastes. You *will* come up empty handed because God in his mercy has cursed your love and your labor so that apart from him it cannot and will not satisfy. So when sin infects your marriage, remember the curse, that God is protecting you from living for your marriage instead of for him.

And that’s not the only mercy we see in God’s curse. Verse 15: “he shall bruise your head,

and you shall bruise his heel.” The gospel in seed form. Our hope as sinners, who give into the curse in our marriages, who pursue marriage for ourselves rather than for God, is that Jesus was bruised for us, and in his temporary bruising he has crushed the head of the serpent. Praise God that we can approach a topic so dark with a hope that is so bright.

Questions?

**V. Conclusion: Weakness and Sweetness**

When sin and weakness confront your marriage, your temptation is to run away from your own sin and weakness and to condemn your spouse’s. But when you resist these temptations and respond with honesty to your own sin and weakness, and with compassion and tenderness to your spouse’s, you’ll see the redemptive power of marriage. There is a danger, after all, to a weakness-free marriage. Without weakness, it’s difficult for a marriage to grow sweet. Without weakness, it’s difficult for a marriage to grow sweet. That’s because weakness, handled honestly, brings vulnerability. And vulnerability, handled tenderly, is sweet. Naked…and not ashamed. There’s nothing quite so powerful as being known in marriage—with all your sin and weakness—and yet loved. And that idea, the beauty of safe vulnerability, is our topic for next week.

1. C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)