Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

We began our study of sin and salvation by looking at the ***guilty* activity** of Adam and his wife as our study of sin. And last week we looked at the ***gracious* activity** of God as our study of salvation. And my original intention was to take verses 16-24 and complete our study by looking at the ***gospel* activity** of Adam and his wife and God. But as I was preparing this week, it became obvious that that would have meant either a really long sermon or too little said about some important matters. So, our study of sin and salvation has grown by one sermon to four. Today we will look at verses 16-19 and the ***cursing* activity** of God, where He reveals the consequences of their sin to Adam and his wife, and God willing, we will finish with the rest of the chapter next time.

Last week, we looked at the curse that God put on the serpent/devil. And the curses continue in our text. It is noteworthy, though, that the curses here are **not personal curses put on Adam or his wife**. With the serpent, God said, “*Cursed are you…*” But with the woman, there is no mention of curse at all. And with Adam, it is the ground that is cursed because of him, not he, himself. So, although Adam and his wife *did* come under the judgment of God and would experience severe and devastating consequences for their sin, God did not curse them. And what’s more, as we shall see next time, God made it possible for them, and future generations, to escape the judgment and curse of sin, entirely, through faith in Christ.

But there were still **consequences** for their sin. And I like how Rev. Joel Beeke summarized this passage. He said that the main idea here is that **our sin brings pain and sorrow into a world full of God’s blessings**. God had created a world of comfort and ease and fruitfulness and harmony. But because of their sin, there would now be much pain and sorrow in the whole realm of creation. And we want to see this together as we look at the ***relational*** **consequences** for women, the ***industrial*** **consequences** for men, and the ***mortal*** **consequences** for both.

1. We begin, then, with the ***relational*** **consequences** for women.
   1. And the first part of the relational consequences of sin for *the* woman and for all women is **a multiplying or increasing of pain in childbirth**.
      1. Now, when we talk about something being **multiplied or increased**, that usually means that there was some to begin with but now there is more. So, unbelievers have seized on the word multiply to allege that there must have been some pain before the Fall. But that is not what is in view here. The command of God was to be fruitful and multiply. Children would be *entirely* and *only* a blessing, in every sense. And so, if the woman had given birth before the Fall, it would have been a pain free experience. And I am sure that sounds almost unbelievable and enviable to the mothers among us.
      2. So, what is meant by this multiplying? Well, what is in view is **not just the actual, physical pain of giving birth**, but everything that is a part of conceiving, carrying, giving birth to, and raising children.
         1. Think of the many physical and emotional aspects of the menstruation cycle.
         2. Think of the pain of infertility.
         3. Think of the pain of miscarriage and stillbirth, and the many mothers who have died giving birth.
         4. Think of the anguish of losing an infant child.
         5. Think of the toll that nursing takes on a woman.
         6. Think of the lack of sleep.
         7. Think of the emotional turmoil of trying to raise children in the fear of the Lord.
         8. Think of the pressures and stresses of comparing yourself with other mothers and your children with their children.
         9. Think of the gut-wrenching sorrow of a rebellious child who grows to hate his or her parents.
         10. And all these are consequences of the Fall that are borne, in the main, by women.
      3. Now, there is **a verse in 1 Timothy 2** that speaks about the Fall in connection with the command of God that woman are not permitted to teach or to exercise authority over men in the church. And the verse says, “*Yet she will be saved through child-bearing*.” And we have looked at this verse on a previous occasion. And we noted then that not every woman will be a mother, so this is a statement about what is true for *most* Christian women. But in summary, this verse is not talking about salvation from sin, but being saved from the idea that women are somehow lesser than men, or barred from make a meaningful contribution to the church of Christ. For while God has reserved office in the church for men, childbearing is just for women. And in terms of the well-being and growth of the church, the work of mothers is massively important! For with the vast majority of elders and deacons, there is a mother who was and/or is enormously influential in his life. And mums, your example of hard work, your willingness to put your needs behind those of your children, the Bible stories you read to them, the prayers you pray for them and with them, etc, are the soil of the church. So, you may not serve as elders or deacons, but your work is massively important for the wellbeing of the church.
      4. Still, though, a consequence of the Fall for women is all that is in view in the multiplying of pain in childbirth. It is why in the Lord commands husbands, in 1 Peter 3, to live with their wives in an *understanding* *way*, showing *honour* to her as the weaker vessel. And He is so concerned that we do this that He has warned us that is we ignore this command, He will not listen to our prayers!
   2. But as if this multiplying of pains was not enough, the Lord also said to the woman and to all women, “*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*.” And generally speaking, there are two ways that this judgment has been interpreted:
      1. One is that **the desire is good and healthy**. So, the woman truly desires the love and care and attention of her husband, but he is an ogre who just throws his weight around and doesn’t listen and tramples over her feelings and burps and farts, etc.
      2. The other is that this is **a sinful desire to dominate**. So, the woman wants to be in charge and to get her way; to manipulate her husband. But he is physically stronger than her.
         1. And there is support for the second interpretation in **chapter 4:7** where the words “desire” and “rule” are used also in relation to Cain. Cain’s heart was full of wickedness towards his brother, and God said to Cain, “*Sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it*.” In other words, sin wanted to dominate Cain, so Cain had to subdue it.
      3. But we don’t necessarily have to pick one interpretation over the other. The main point here is that **desire will meet rule**, resulting in a relationship that has great potential for conflict. And this is not to suggest that God was saying that all women would be constantly manipulative; always trying to control their husbands to get what they want. And neither was He saying that all men would be constantly domineering, ruling with harshness over their wives. But there will be these patterns, to one degree or another. And if you look at your own marriage and the marriages of others you know well, these tensions are very real and often painful.
         1. And there are gross and abusive forms of these behaviours that I don’t need to list because they are on the news, every day. But one commentator described being near a couple on a sunny street one day. And the husband was impatient and kept interrupting his wife, telling her that they needed to go, now. And she kept interrupting back, ignoring him as she rolled her eyes. The commentator said, I felt like I was in the middle of a little war, but she also went on to ask, which married couple has not been there, often? All of us, right?
         2. So, instead of being a relationship of great harmony and happiness, as God designed it to be, sin has twisted and distorted it.
         3. And this is precisely why in the two New Testament passages that speak in most detail about marriage, **Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3**, God commands wives to submit to their husbands “*as to the Lord*,” and husbands to love their wives “*as Christ loved the church*.” By the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible for husbands and wives to enjoy harmony and happiness, and even to experience forgiveness and reconciliation, and a return to harmony and happiness, after a time of relationship turmoil.
      4. But also, as we step outside of marriage, the opportunities for conflict between the sexes just multiply, exponentially, don’t they. And we live in times when this is at fever pitch, don’t we. Whether it is the workplace or sports or politics, it all has its origins in the Fall. And this not to suggest that any of this is OK because that is just how things are. Not at all. What it shows instead is the pain and turmoil that follows on from rejecting the word of our Creator.
2. Well, that brings us in the second place to what I have called the **industrial** **consequences** for men.
   1. And I have called it that because while the consequences for women focus on children and husbands and relationships, the consequences for Adam and men focus on **a cursed ground, and hard and painful and sweaty and repetitive work**.
      1. And in terms of our daily toil, you men will know what is described here from bitter experience. It is behind the most serious condition that doctors call **Mondayitis**. It is that moment when you wake up on a Monday morning and remember that you must do it all over again.
      2. Now, just as we saw with marriage, by God’s grace, there can be much in work and family life that is enjoyable and even exciting. We saw that in the description of the believing family that we read earlier in **Psalm 128**. The man is enjoying fruitful labour, his wife is enjoying her industry at home, and there are happy children around the table. But because of sin, there is much potential for pain and sorrow in work and family life also.
      3. And women sometimes laugh at what they unkindly call man-flu and the complaints of their husbands about how hard their work is, and they respond with: “Try giving birth sometime!” But all joking aside, as Kathleen Neilsen said in her wonderful book called ‘*Women and God*,’ “Women don’t fully know the pain that many men experience when they try to provide for a family and find little success [and much frustration] – whether it is growing crops or companies.” Now, we should acknowledge here that while men cannot share in the pain of actual childbirth, women do share in the pain and frustration of work. But as per the roles that God has assigned and the divisions of the curse that He made, God has assigned *to men* the special weight and responsibility of leading and providing for a family. And Kathleen Neilsen acknowledges that women probably often underestimate the ongoing pain of the burden to lead a family and provide sufficiently and securely.
   2. But alongside this narrow aspect of the curse, just as we saw with what God said about childbirth, much **more is in view here than just hard and repetitive work**.
      1. Earlier I referred to office in the church begin reserved for men only, by God. And while there are many joys in serving in this way, it is for good reason that the Lord Jesus described Christians as sheep. Sheep are needy and often dumb! And this means that serving as an office-bearer can weigh, heavily.
      2. But wider still. the curse on the ground is what lies behind storms and floods and earthquakes and volcanoes. It is the source of cancer and heart-disease and famine and plague. It is why we suffer fraud and robbery and insect bites and slander and torture and broken bones and mental illness and disability and overheating and being frozen. It lies behind poisons and toxins and pollution and parasite. It underlies all crime and misery and loss and hurt.
      3. **Romans 8** speaks about creation being “*subjected to futility*” and being in “*bondage to decay*.” If we could invent a camera that revealed sin as a red spot, it wouldn’t matter what you took a photo of, there would be red spots in everything! Sin is as real as cancer or rust, but it is in everything, all the time.
      4. And it all has its origins in the arrival of sin into the world through the disobedience of our first parents.
   3. The general view of most in our world is that **everything is always progressing or advancing**. And the theory of evolution is a big part of why people think like this. So, we will live longer and longer, we will get richer and richer, we will get smarter and smarter, we will build bigger, we will get happier and happier, and so it goes. It is why people are utterly bamboozled when crime statistics go up or educational achievements trend down or mental health hospitals and prison populations explode. They just cannot understand why this is so when we are so advanced. Well, I don’t know if you have thought about this before, but the most advanced human beings that ever lived were Adam and his wife and the generation or two that lived after them. It is why they lived to be up to 900 years old! But the consequences of sin began to grow, progressively, from the day described in our text. It is why lifespans got shorter and shorter. So, I don’t mean to offend, but you and me are much *weaker* and much *dumber* than Adam and his wife were, and even than human beings of 100 years ago were.
      1. Let me give you just **one example**: Just a few hundred years ago, the examination of ministry students in England was entirely in Latin. Students sat in front of the whole faculty and clergy and watching public, and they had to answer whatever question was asked. And they had no idea what they would be asked prior to the exam. Well, when I was at seminary, Latin was what a few weird homeschoolers learned. And we thought it unfair if our professors did not give us a study guide for each examination. And it wouldn’t surprise me if even seminary exams are open book now, or will soon be ditched all together because we don’t want anyone to fail anymore, and, well, ministers can just Google everything or ChatGPT can provide sermons.
      2. But in all seriousness, and not wanting to get into the science of the whole thing, our world is consumed with **climate change**. We are told that we must reduce carbon emissions or else there will be a climate emergency and the world will burn up. Well, guess what? The world *will* burn up. But it will not be because of man-made carbon emissions. **2 Peter 3:10** says that when Christ returns, “*the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed*.” And immediately before Christ comes, **2 Timothy 3** tells us that “*in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*.” So, what will increase as time goes on? Sin and its consequences. And again, it all has its origins in the arrival of sin into the world through the disobedience of our first parents.
3. And that brings us thirdly, and briefly, to the final aspect of sin’s curse, which is the **Mortal** **consequences** for men and women.
   1. The last part of verse 19 says that hard work and toil will continue “*till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return*.” And this does not really need any explanation, does it. For regardless of how strong or weak or smart or dumb humanity was or is, what has remained the same, and will remain the same until Christ returns, is that 10 out of every 10 people die. And death is brutal. **1 Corinthians 15**:**56** talks about “*the sting of death*.” And that is a most appropriate image. For death cuts, deeply. Young or old, today or in many years, we will die. We will breathe our last and our bodies will return to dust. And do you remember what that verse in 1 Corinthians 15 says is the sting of death? It is sin. It is because of the disobedience of our first parents that sin came into the world. And one consequence of sin is death.
   2. Now, death is not the end of the story. Even the passage in 1 Corinthians 15 goes on to speak about death being “*swallowed up in victory*.” And this victory is through our Lord Jesus Christ. And this will be our focus next time when look at how Adam and his wife responded to the curse and promise of God. And we will see that faith in Jesus is how we can enjoy eternal life on the other side of death.
   3. And eternal life is about the undoing of the curse that we have studied today. This is why we read **Revelation 21** earlier. When we are with Jesus in the new heavens and new earth, “*He will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away*.” It’s hard to imagine, isn’t it, but believers will enjoy eternal existence in a place that is entirely free of the judgment and curse of sin. In a few moments we will sing ‘Joy to the World.’ It is a hymn that looks forward to the Second Coming of Jesus. It says,

*No more let sin and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground;*

*He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found.*

And so my closing question to each of you today is: Will you be there? Have you put your trust for salvation in Jesus Christ? I hope so! Amen.