

WOMEN FREED FROM THE CURSE

Genesis 3:14-19; Galatians 3:10-14

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Years ago, when Jim Dobson of *Focus on the Family* was involved in counseling, he made a list of the ten most common complaints he heard from women. They were:

- *Absence of romantic love in my marriage*
- *In-law conflict*
- *Low self-esteem*
- *Problems with the children*
- *Financial difficulties*
- *Loneliness/isolation and boredom*
- *Sexual problems in marriage*
- *Menstrual and physiological problems*
- *Fatigue and time pressure, and finally*
- *Aging.*

He then surveyed 75 women between the ages of 27 and 40 from two churches. Most had small children. They were asked to rank the complaints as they applied to their lives. Do you know what was their most common source of discouragement and depression? More than fifty percent ranked *low self-esteem* as number one. Eighty percent put it in their top five. Those results were later confirmed by surveys of more than 5,000 women in Family Life Seminars.

Although women don't have a corner on low self esteem, those feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness cripple so many of the women we honor today. However, a great Mother's Day gift resides in the Scriptures. Let's turn our attention to the third chapter of Genesis.

The Bible locates the root of death and all our suffering in the curses of Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve rejected God's word, they not only suffered a crippling change in their vision of themselves and the world about them. They also suffered curses. The serpent suffered specific curses for acting as a medium for Satan. Eve suffered two gender-specific curses; and Adam was cursed as well. Genesis 3 reveals both a common curse for all humanity and unique curses for each sex. An in-depth look at the passage would consider how the curses flow from the sins and plague each sex. However, we simply want to look today at how women are affected.

Genesis 3 reveals two women-specific curses. First, Eve's sin led to the multiplication of pain in childbirth. Second, the sin resulted in wives being dominated by their husbands.

In one parish my lay leader had tremendous faith in the power of prayer. When his fourth child was born, he spent the entire time of labor laying hands on his wife and praying over her. He claimed that for the first time there was no pain. "Great," I thought, "that is good for you, but how was it for your wife?" (Of course, he was speaking of his wife; but the thought occurred). His testimonial reminded me of an important truth. *Curses are meant to be broken.* God *broke* the curse of sin through the death of Jesus on the cross. God *broke* the curse of death in the resurrection of his son. Even though *those curses are broken*, they still exist. They still affect us. They still require attention. They can trip us and trap us. *They're broken, not eliminated.* An eliminated curse no longer exists. A broken curse exists but need not dominate our lives or destiny. Christ has broken the curses we face, and one day will eliminate them completely.

When it comes to childbirth, many women, unlike my lay leader's wife, still suffer, although more and more women are experiencing release through new medications. The greater and more pervasive pain is found in the second curse.

In Genesis it is put this way:

To the woman he said... your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (Genesis 3:16)

Have you men ever thought about being a curse to your wives? I've never been comfortable with the idea that some of my behavior is a curse. However, according to Scripture, when I have my say or get my way at my wife's expense, that's a curse. I've discovered that I am some times oblivious to attitudes and ways of relating that also demean and cause her pain. I think sarcasm, even that which is couched in humor, perpetuates the curse and assaults all people's sense of worth.

In truth, women have suffered domination and denigration at the hands of not only their husbands but of men in general, in every culture. Anthropologists have not discovered a single culture where women have been accepted as full and equal partners in the human

family. Simply put, the curse is pervasive; and Christian men, who misunderstand the Bible's teaching, have continued to perpetuate such domination. These men misinterpret and misapply Scripture on submission to justify domination of their wives. In doing so, they perpetuate the curse.

Did you know that some churches still do not grant women the right to vote on any church matter? Did you know that the pain is so intense in some parts of the church today, that worshipers won't even use the word "father" when addressing God for fear such language will perpetuate women's domination and suffering?

One psychologist writes that ninety percent of our self-concept is built on *what we think others think* about us. When *we think others view* our opinions, our perspective, our existence as unimportant that affects how we see and feel about ourselves. Moreover, it makes it difficult for us to see when others actually do value us. With the signals we men have given women over the centuries, it is no wonder that many women struggle with a sense of worth and have difficulty seeing and believing that others, including their husbands, value them.

The most common complaint I get from wives is that their husbands don't value them. They'll say, "He doesn't care about me anymore." The most common thing I hear from men in counseling is that their wives are mad at them. The wife's desire is for her husband, and she sees a husband who's got a pretty good deal. He is into his own things and getting his way; and she's left out unless she does whatever he wants. He rules, and she's mad.

A few years ago, I hosted a video series on marriage. The lecturer was Gary Smalley. Gary is one of the most respected and engaging leaders in marriage and family life. In his first video Gary gives his most crucial advise to couples. The most important secret to a healthy marriage is honor. Gary spends most of his time in that video helping men and women see how different they are from one another. Only when you see the differences and the different needs, which men and women have, can you really honor one another. Some differences in us result from God's creative design. He made us male and female. There are creative differences. However, the gender-specific curses also produce men and women with different needs.

Men need affirmation in their work. It's in their work that they encounter the curse of Genesis 3. Often they find themselves haunted by self-doubt because of the difficulties they encounter in their work. They need respect and encouragement. The Bible instructs wives to respect their husbands. Doing so helps husbands overcome the power of the curse.

Even as men encounter the curse of Genesis 3 in their work, women encounter it in their relationships with men. Therefore, they expressly need to be valued and honored by men. Even as New Testament authors explicitly tell wives to respect their husbands, they urge the men to love their wives. Love values people. It cherishes and honors people.

The Bible teaches us to honor one another. Both men and women are made in the image of God. We are all sacred to God. Christ came to die for men and women. We equally need redeeming love. We equally need to have the curse broken over our lives. Men and women equally are important to God, worth the sacrifice of God's one and only son. Jesus poured out his Holy Spirit on men and women, and there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

Women are freed from the curse when they recognize this. Women are freed from the curse when they recognize that they are sacred, precious, inestimable in value and won't accept any other opinion. They won't accept a lower vision of themselves. Women are freed from the curse when they realize they've bought into lies, have harbored self-degrading attitudes and seek God's forgiveness. Women are freed from the curse when they first recognize that ancient men and modern men need their forgiveness and when second they extend forgiveness to them.

We men truly honor and bless our mothers, our wives and daughters when we understand the curse that they've suffered and its affect on them. We honor them when we face our complicity in their pain and seek their forgiveness. There is no substitute for this. We must face our sin.

Four years ago, I sat in a classroom in Colorado Springs. Doctoral students had gathered from across the world to study the global revolution occurring in the church of Jesus Christ. Despite the excitement, there was tension. Pain edged the voices of several women who struggled with male dominance among the clergy. The tension boiled over when some men became defensive. Suddenly, a pastor knelt on the floor near me. I recognized him. He was the Asian pastor of a Singapore church that had grown to 10,000 worshipers each week. He wept bitterly. "Please forgive me," he cried. "We Asian men have sinned against you women and caused you great pain. Please forgive us," he pled. He detailed some of the attitudes and actions of Asian men that dishonored women and sobbed. Torrents of tears fell as men of other cultures confessed their sins and asked forgiveness of the women. I knew an American man needed to represent us to these women. Most of their pain had not come from men of other nations and continents. These were American women who were hurt by the way American men talk and act. I was in no shape to represent us. I was crying so hard I could not talk. To my relief, another American pastor knelt and asked God and these women to forgive us for our attitudes and actions that have perpetuated their pain. After a prolonged period of weeping, a profound healing took root. One woman wept angrily as she confronted the professor. Instead of defending himself, he simply asked for forgiveness and acknowledged their right to be angry. The release of emotion among the sexes was unbelievable and so important. The bonding in that class was so amazing and so profound.

We men only honor women when we no longer rule them. We honor them when we live as their partners not their rulers. We honor women when we realize that their differences are gifts not deficits. So let this Mother's Day be more than a day of sentiment and appreciation. Let it be a day of renewal and new beginnings, for the women about you are sacred gifts.