



Chapter 2

The Plan Derailed

Genesis 3:1–19

UNDERSTANDING

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Genesis 3:1–19

The Big Picture

The tensions that exist in relationships between men and women today have their roots in Adam and Eve’s original act of disobedience toward God.

In the previous chapter, we discussed how God created man and woman as complementary persons with equal dignity, and that the creation of the two sexes overcame “original solitude.” In God’s original plan for man and woman, they were created to live in a communion of love, both giving and receiving.

We know, however—perhaps quite intimately and painfully—that this original plan is often not lived out today in the relationships between men and women. If Eve was originally created with equal dignity alongside Adam so that together they might image the Trinity, then why is there often competition and strife between the two sexes? In the third chapter of Genesis, we trace the origins of the problem. First, though, let’s refresh our memories about one part of God’s original plan.

Review Genesis 2:15–17. In this passage, God’s generosity shines through, giving Adam free reign over nearly every tree in the garden. There is just one tree, though, from which He forbids Adam to eat. Let’s fast-forward now to Genesis 3.

Loving Father or Tyrannical Lawgiver? (Genesis 3:1-19)

By this time Eve is on the scene, and an infamous character now joins her. Look carefully at what the serpent says: He twists God’s words and leads Eve to disbelieve God’s goodness. God did *not* say that they could not eat of the fruit of *any* tree of the garden; in fact, he said that they could eat of *every* tree, except one. He also didn’t say anything about touching it. The devil’s lies shrewdly contradict what God told Adam. Eve believes him and begins to lose trust in her Creator.

Can’t we see this so often in our own lives and sins? We disbelieve that God is a generous, provident Father who has our best interest in mind, and instead we grasp at what we think we need, rather than being receptive and letting God provide.

The Protector

What about Adam? Where was he when the serpent approached Eve? We know from Genesis 2:16 that God gave Adam the command to “till and keep” the garden. The Hebrew word for “keep” is *shamar*, which can be translated as “protect.” In her Bible Study *Courageous Love*, Stacy Mitch states, “The words ‘till and keep’ literally refer to Adam’s responsibility to cultivate and guard the garden and its contents. He shirked his responsibility to guard his wife by allowing the serpent, a malicious intruder, to interrogate his wife and allure her to sin.”⁵

⁵Stacy Mitch, *Courageous Love: A Bible Study on Holiness for Women* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road Publishing, 1999), 93–94.

Note that Adam and Eve committed the first sin *together*. John Paul II explains that, even though Adam and Eve had different roles in the first sin, “*that first sin is the sin of man, created by God as male and female.*”⁶

Curses (Genesis 3:14–19)

After Adam and Eve eat the fruit from the forbidden tree, they hide from God, who comes to look for them in the garden. When God finds them, He addresses Adam first: God gave Adam the command not to eat the fruit, and Adam is the head of the human race. As the first man, Adam represents all of humanity—and so we begin to see how all of mankind is affected by sin.

There are four relationships wounded by original sin: man’s relationship with God, with himself, with his fellow man, and with creation. Each has become disordered. The Catechism explains the consequences of original sin for the relationship between men and women: “The harmony in which they [Adam and Eve] had found themselves...is now destroyed: the control of the soul’s spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions; their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination” (CCC 400).

Application to Jesus

Thankfully, with the Incarnation, Jesus becomes the new representative for all of humanity, the New Adam.

⁶Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Woman, Mulieris Dignitatem* (MD) (Rome: Vatican, 1988), 9 (emphasis in the original).

Man and Woman After the Fall

John Paul II explains it further:

The biblical description in the Book of Genesis outlines the truth about the consequences of man's sin, as it is shown by the *disturbance* of that original *relationship between man and woman* which corresponds to their individual dignity as persons.... While the violation of this equality, which is both a gift and a right deriving from God the Creator, involves an element to the disadvantage of the woman, at the same time it also diminishes the true dignity of the man.⁷

Instead of man and woman existing as a gift for the other, they now seek their own interests. The differences between them, which once inspired wonder and communion, now breed misunderstanding, tension, and selfish use of the other.

Genesis 3 explains that a woman's desire shall be for her husband, but that he will dominate her. It seems like a positive thing for a woman to desire her husband; how could that be negatively affected by sin? One possibility is that a woman could become preoccupied with and motivated by getting men's attention. Think of the saying, "Men use love to get sex and women use sex to get love." A woman's desire to be loved can sometimes leads her to manipulate a man—or to settle for being used. If, instead, a woman's primary desire were for God, she would find true fulfillment and satisfaction in the One who loves her perfectly.

Similarly, we can see the effects of the man's curse of "lust and domination" in such things as pornography, promiscuous sex, sexual abuse, and rape. For both men and women, it is only when their foremost desire is for God that they will find fulfillment, as He is the only one who will truly satisfy all our longings.

⁷*Ibid.*, 10 (emphasis in the original).

Application to Our Lives

Can you imagine what it would have been like before relationships between men and women were subject to lust, domination, and unhealthy attachment? What is one thing you can do to make your relationships with men correspond more to God's original plan?

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 3:1–19

STEP 1: OPENER

Bring a few magazines to the study (*Cosmo, Maxim, Seventeen*, etc.) and ask the women to look through them and pick out one or two articles or images that might illustrate the disorder and problems that exist in male/female relationships today.

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Last time, we read about the creation of man and woman. We learned that they were created as complementary persons with equal dignity, and that a man and woman living in a communion of love are an image of the inner life of the Trinity. Our experience, though, tells us that, when it comes to the relationships between men and women, things have not turned out the way God planned. We can think of many instances where a woman's dignity is ignored, or where we can see deep wounds caused by the way the two sexes selfishly treat each other. Today, we're going to look at the third chapter of Genesis to find out why this is so and delve into how it affects us right now.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Read Genesis 3:1–19. To begin, let's refresh our memories about one part of God's original plan.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

Review Genesis 2:15–17.

1. What are the three duties that God gives to Adam?

To till the garden, keep the garden, and not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

2. The Hebrew word for “keep,” shamar, can also be translated as “protect.” With this in mind, how is Adam also responsible for the first sin?

It’s not clear where Adam was when the serpent approached Eve. Regardless, Adam failed to protect the garden and all of God’s gifts, the most important of which was his wife, Eve, from the devil.

Read Genesis 3:1–7.

3. What does the serpent first say to Eve?

“Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’”

4. Do you notice anything strange about what he says?

He twists God's words. God did not say they couldn't eat of any tree; He said they could eat of every tree, except one.

5. How do the serpent's lies and suggestions affect Eve?

They cause her to question what God said and distrust His goodness and providence.

6. Jesus tells us that Satan is the "father of lies" (John 8:44). What are the lies that we, as women, hear and believe from the devil?

Allow the group to discuss. Some answers could likely be: I'm not enough: pretty enough, smart enough, skinny enough, etc. Or, I'm too much: too emotional, broken, serious, loud, etc. Or perhaps that we have to have it all to be happy: good grades, a career and family, an active social life, a multitude of talents—putting emphasis on "having" (grades, success, boyfriend, etc.) versus "holiness."

7. What can we do to combat these lies?

Allow the group to discuss. Some ideas include turning to the Word of God to hear the Truth; seeking friendships and community with those who speak the truth to us; being aware of the specific lies that each of us is likely to listen to in our hearts, and rejecting them as soon as they creep in. If it seems relevant, you could encourage your group to read chapter 4 of Song of Songs to hear how beautiful women are in the eyes of God.

8. Do you have a "serpent" in your life, someone who presents you with temptation? Have you ever misled someone, like the serpent misled Eve?

Allow the group to discuss.

Read Genesis 3:8–19.

9. After Adam and Eve eat the fruit, whom does God address first? What is significant about this?

God addresses Adam first, which is fitting: God gave Adam the command not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam is also the head of the human race, and since he is the first man, he is the representative for humanity.

10. What are the curses that God describes for Adam and Eve after they have eaten the fruit?

For Adam, his work will be difficult and full of toil. For Eve, her childbirth will be painful, and her relationship with her husband will be full of tension.

11. The Catechism says that, after the fall, “the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination” (CCC 400). How have you seen this double problem of “lust and domination” in relationships between men and women?

Allow the group to discuss.

12. At first glance, it seems like a good thing for a woman to desire her husband, but how could it actually be sinful or broken?

Women can become preoccupied with and motivated by getting men's attention. Think of the saying, “Men use love to get sex, and women use sex to get love.” A woman's desire to be loved can lead her to either manipulate a man or to settle for being used.

13. Do you ever find yourself experiencing an unhealthy desire for men, perhaps by either being preoccupied with getting attention or using manipulation to obtain it? How can we combat this tendency?

Allow the group to discuss. Some possibilities include reminding ourselves that our worth as women does not come from anyone's opinion or interest in us, but from being made in the image and likeness of God. Our focus should not be on "getting" but instead on giving. More practically, the group might decide to do individual examinations of conscience each night for the next week on the issues of desire and manipulation.

14. Do you think it is a common problem for women (on this campus) to be used by men? If so, how are they used?

Allow the group to discuss.

15. If, in baptism, we are wiped clean of original sin, why do we still experience the effects of Adam and Eve's sin?

Have someone in the group read CCC 405. As a result of Adam and Eve's sin, every man and woman inherits and is born with concupiscence—that is, the fallen state that inclines us to evil. Because of concupiscence, we all have (1) a darkened intellect, (2) a weakened will, and (3) disordered passions.

16. The Catechism describes Adam and Eve's sin as such: "Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command.... All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness" (CCC 397). How are your sins a manifestation of a lack of trust in God's goodness?

Allow the group to discuss.

