

# LOVE'S DISCIPLINES

by Ray C. Stedman

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In our previous studies in this series we have seen that the matter of pain, toil, subjection, and death are the inevitable consequences of human disobedience to God. They were in the beginning, they are yet today. These are what the Bible speaks of as "death," in its widest and largest sense. When Romans 6:23 says "the wages of sin is death," it is not talking about a corpse; it is talking about this kind of death, the sense of pain, sorrow, toil, and subjection.

It is true that with these things we receive a temporary pleasure. Indulgence in sin is an ego-satisfying thing, and therefore we engage in it because we like the temporary pleasure it gives. But, as we have already seen, it is all a package deal. We cannot omit the bad parts and take only the good. It all goes together, and, thereby, contributes to the sense of loss familiar to all, a sense of emptiness within, the restlessness of our race.

Now we come to God's word to Adam and Eve after the Fall. We must now give closer examination to these four factors of pain, subjection, toil, and death, to see what they involve and why they were given to the race. We need greatly to understand this, because to understand it properly is to change us from grumbling, complaining critics of life to grateful, thankful optimists, fulfilling that definition of Christians we have so often quoted -- completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble.

Let us listen to God speak to the woman:

**To the woman he said,  
"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children,  
yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you." {Gen 3:16 RSV}**

There is something very interesting here. God's approach to the woman is always different than to the man, and certainly than to the serpent. Notice that he says to the serpent, "Because you have done this," and, in Verse 17, to Adam. "Because you have done this," but to the woman he makes no such charge of responsibility. This is very significant. There are consequences that follow sin in her life, but he does not charge her ultimately with being at fault and we shall see why when we come to the word to Adam.

In each of these cases, the serpent, the man, and the woman, there are two consequences that follow for each. The serpent was to experience humiliation and defeat -- continual humiliation and ultimate defeat. In the case of the woman the consequences are pain and subjection. These are factors arising out of her nature and we need to look more closely at them.

First, there is the factor of pain. Undoubtedly this verse does refer to the pain and danger of childbirth which women alone can experience. No man knows what a woman goes through in the birth of a child, but every mother here understands. But the word refers to more than mere physical pain; it is basically the Hebrew word for sorrow. In Hebrew there is no word for pain but sorrow is the word universally used. It comes from a root which means "to toil," i.e., "heart-breaking toil." This is perhaps why there has come into our language a description of birth pains as "labor," toil of a heart-breaking variety. It is evident, in view of the way the whole context has been developed, that this means more than simply physical pain; it refers also to the heartbreak associated with having children. This is woman's primary experience as a result of the fall, the presence of heartbreak in rearing children. It means that a mother's sense of success or failure in life is related to her children. A threat to a child is pain to a mother's heart. Perhaps every mother feels more sharply than the father does any sense of danger to or failure in her children. Mothers' hearts are bound to their children. We know this from experience, and it is in line with what this passage suggests. The mother becomes so involved in the life of her children that what they feel, she feels; if they fail, she feels the heartbreak of it particularly strongly.

All this helps to explain a very troublesome passage in the New Testament which has bothered many at times, found in Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 2, beginning with verse 12.

**I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. {1 Tim 2:12-15 RSV}**

You can immediately see how difficult the passage is; no wonder many have struggled with exactly what it means. We will need to correct a few things in the translation of it, but if we lay the corrected passage alongside the passage in Genesis 3, we are immediately helped to an explanation.

In the first place when First Timothy speaks of the woman being "saved," it must be clearly understood that this has no reference to her being regenerated, or born again. It is not talking about the entrance into the Christian life. Women and men alike are saved in that sense on the same terms, by faith in Jesus Christ. "In Christ there is neither male nor female," {Gal 3:28}; all come on the same basis. This is clearly not talking about that, but rather about how a woman finds fulfillment, a sense of satisfaction in life, the area of her fulfillment. You find the same use of this in First Timothy 4:16, where the apostle says to Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers," {1 Tim 4:16 RSV}. Obviously here he is not talking about redemption, in the sense of regeneration: he is talking about saving his life, i.e., making it worthwhile, rendering it useful and purposeful. This is the sense in which it is used in the second chapter about women. Women will find their lives fulfilled through bearing children.

But then it is not "if she continues" but, as it is literally in the Greek, "if they [the children] continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty." That is in exact accord with what we find in Genesis where it is suggested that a mother's heart is wrapped up with the life and career of her children. She lives in and by her children. The meaning of her life is revealed in them, and if they succeed, she has succeeded, but if they fail, she has failed. Every mother here will understand fully what I mean.

But this is not all that is part of woman's experience as a result of the fall. We read further,

**"yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you." {Gen 3:16b RSV}**

The phrase, "your desire," is interesting. It comes from the Hebrew word, *leg*, and means, "to run after." Her desires run after her husband. This is not primarily a reference to passion but to the hunger for approval. It is speaking of the fact that a woman finds her fullest sense of satisfaction in gaining her husband's approval. No other person can approach his approval in its significance to her. There can be no substitute for it. Others can be pleased and happy with her, but if he is not, she is distressed. He can be happy with her, and she doesn't care a fig what others think about her. Her desire thus finds its fulfillment in her husband -- she longs to be important to him.

I want to point out that this desire is not in itself a consequence of sin. This relationship of woman to man was present before the Fall as well. The headship of the man was a fact from the creation. It is the latter phrase of the sentence that marks the result of the Fall, "he shall rule over you." If, in imagination, we can put ourselves back with Adam and Eve before the Fall, in that blissful scene in the garden of Eden, then we can see that the relationship of the woman to the man consisted of a natural desire to follow. She came out of man and was made for him, to be his helper and to work toward his goals. It was a natural yielding to which she opposed no resistance, but found herself delighting in the experience of following the man.

But now as a result of the Fall, a perverse element enters into this. A struggle occurs, a tension ensues, in which the woman is torn between the natural God-given desire to yield to her husband, and at the same time, the awakened desire to exert her will against his, a perverse urge to rivalry or domination. This is what creates tension in women, as a result of the Fall. It means that in order to exert proper male leadership, men must sometimes do so against the will of their wives. This constitutes "ruling," in the sense intended here. The

struggle and tension produced in women's lives creates what sometimes ensues in marriage, which we call tyranny, where the man rules with an iron hand. This is never justified in Scripture. Husbands are exhorted to love their wives and to deal kindly with them, as the Lord Jesus does the church. But in fallen man it results in the tyranny of man over woman, as a result, often, of the struggle within her.

Perhaps a woman herself can describe this most accurately. I have here a quotation which describes this very reaction, written by a woman. She says,

Millions of words have been written on how a man should love a woman. I would like to give you my reflections on the things a man should not do in loving a woman. First, don't yield your leadership, that's the main thing. Don't hand us the reins, we would consider that an abdication on your part. It would confuse us, it would alarm us, it would make us pull back.

Quicker than anything else it would fog the clear vision that made us love you in the first place. Oh, we will try to get you to give up your position as number one in the house-that's the terrible contradiction in us, we will seem to be fighting you in the last ditch for final authority on everything, for awhile, but in the obscure recesses of our hearts we want you to win. You have to win, for we aren't really made for leadership. It's a pose.

Would you like to know who wrote that? Judy Garland.

This is why a woman can never find happiness in marriage until she takes seriously the words of Scripture:

**Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands in everything as unto the Lord. {cf, Eph 5:22, Col 3:18}**

One of the two major factors producing the terrible breakdown in marriage in our country today is this failure of women to understand this principle: that it is their privilege, under God, to find fulfillment in submission to their husband's leadership. They are not to resist it, or try to rival him in this matters.

I am continually amazed at how much this needs to be asserted these days, especially so among Christians. I heard recently of three Christian wives who raised the question in a discussion: If a woman feels the Lord wants her to do certain work at church or something else in connection with the Lord's work, and her husband objects, doesn't want her to do it, what should she do? They answered by agreeing that she should go ahead anyway and if the husband objected or raised a fuss, it could be interpreted as suffering for Christ's sake.

I don't think I could think of a more classic example, repeating the pattern of temptation found here in Genesis 3. There is the same subtle desire for an ego-satisfying activity, coupled with a rationalization that, in effect, cancels out the Word of God, thus permitting an activity that is contrary to what God wants. It is God who said, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands for the Lord's sake" {cf, 1 Pet 3:1}, therefore he cannot be, and is not, pleased by wives who will not do so. No amount of justifying this on the ground of the nature of the work being done will cancel out that disobedience. It usually results from a subtle form of desire for domination.

I would like to bring, in that connection, another interesting quotation, this time from the then Governor Mark Hatfield of Oregon (now Senator from that state) who, in a very interesting article, recently gave some of the inside story of his own marriage. He tells how surprised the newspapers were when they reported his marriage, that his wife had included the word, "obey," in her marriage vows. He went on to discuss how he and his wife had come to the conviction that this word should be used and he says this,

I can recall the very evening that Antoinette first broached the subject. We had been invited to spend an evening at the home of married friends. Because we were considering marriage ourselves, perhaps we were sensitive to the relationship between this couple. At any rate, something about them puzzled us. Then, driving home, we suddenly put our finger on it. The wife, and not the husband, had taken charge of the evening. "Charles, dear," she had said as we came through the door, "won't you take their coats to the bedroom?" And later, "The phone is ringing, Charles." And still later, "Charles, don't you think it's time for some refreshments?" And each time Charles jumped up from his chair and dutifully did her bidding. Oddly, Charles is

not a Mr. Milquetoast: he is an aggressive businessman with a reputation as a go-getter. Nor is his wife mannish or overtly bossy. They are normal, average, likable people. In fact, I think it was the normalcy of the situation that alarmed us. The wife was the head of that household and nobody, least of all Charles, saw anything wrong with in it.

As I drove home that night, Antionette suddenly said, "When I get married, I want a husband, not a partner." I looked at her in surprise. "What do you mean?" "Perhaps I mean that I don't think there can be a real partnership in marriage," she replied. "It's like this car. We're traveling along together going to the same place, but you're driving. Both of us can't drive. And I don't think there can be two drivers in a marriage, either. One person's got to be at the wheel, and when it's the woman. I don't like what it does to her. Or to him. But it hurts her most."

Those are wise words, reflecting exactly the position of Scripture in this matter.

Some of you women are saying, "What a raw deal we've been handed. Talk about cruel and unusual punishment, this is it." But is it? Is this intended to be punishment? This is a question I wish to face as we look at these verses, because oftentimes these words are interpreted as though all this is a punishment dealt out by God upon the race, and woman's lot is the heaviest of all. But it is not punishment and was never intended to be punishment. If you will wait a moment until we can look together at Adam's word, you will see why.

**And to Adam he said,  
"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
'You shall not eat of it,'  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;  
and you shall eat of the plants of the field.  
In the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return." {Gen 3:17-19 RSV}**

In these verses we learn for the first time the nature of the sin that caused the Fall of the human race. It was not merely that Adam ate the fruit in disobedience to God. There was something before that, and God records it, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife." That was the sin that began the Fall of Adam and brought the misery of death upon the race. Now there are times when the wisest thing a man can do is to listen to the voice of his wife. Many a woman gives excellent advice to her husband, and a man is foolish who does not pay attention to what his wife says. Surely Pontius Pilate would have saved himself uncounted grief if he had listened to the voice of his wife when she sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with this just man for I have been greatly troubled in a dream because of him," {cf, Matt 27:19}. But he ignored his wife's voice which would have saved him.

But here Adam is charged with guilt because he listened to the voice of his wife -- when it was different than the voice of God. That is the point. It was wrong for him to take his leadership from her. It was a denial of the headship which God had established. Paul gives us the order of headship when he says, "Christ is the head of the man, the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ," {1 Cor 11:3}. It was also the Apostle Paul who tells us that Adam was not deceived in the Fall. The woman was deceived. She was deluded, for she believed the enemy. She thought he meant it when he said they would become like God if they ate the fruit. But Adam was not fooled, he was not deceived. He knew that if they ate the fruit the Fall would follow; that they would lose their relationship to God, and that death would occur. He knew it, but he deliberately disobeyed God and set his wife above God. He denied the headship of Christ over himself and surrendered his own headship over the woman.

This has been the major failure of man in marriage ever since. The second major cause producing chaos in

marriage today is right here -- a man who refuses to lead, a man who turns over to his wife the ultimate responsibility of the family, how the children turn out, what their problems are, etc. He views his sphere as that of making a living and gives to her the job of making a life. He refuses to make decisions, refuses to give direction or to show concern over the way the family is going, or to enter into the problems of child discipline and training. All this constitutes failure and the breakdown of the headship of man over woman and of God over man.

There are basically two false concepts in marriage which this highlights for us. One of them is that man, when he gets married, is to please his wife by doing whatever she wants to do. Usually this results in the chinless, spineless, supine Casper Milquetoast kind of individual. But it is a widespread approach to marriage today, and sociologists are telling us it is rapidly producing in our country a matriarchal society, when boys, raised at home, do not have a male image to relate to; they do not know what a father is supposed to be, they never see one, so they relate to their mother and the mother becomes the dominant factor in the family. This turns society upside-down and produces the weakness, conflict, and violence we are seeing so widely today.

The second major false concept in marriage is for the man to regard himself as the head and to interpret this to mean he is to do whatever he wants; that he is to run the home to suit himself and his pleasure is the determining factor of what occurs. What he likes, that's the important thing. He becomes a tyrant, a dictator. This is equally wrong as the first view and equally contrary to the Word of God. The truth is, he, too, is under authority. He is to submit to the headship of Jesus Christ. He is to follow him. If a man refuses to do that, then his home is bound to go on the rocks one way or another, either in internal conflict or in the actual outward breakup. He is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Word of God and by prayer. Man is to follow him whether he, or his wife, feels like it or not -- that's the whole issue. He is kindly but firmly to insist that they are to do what God wants.

Because Adam refused to do that, and listened rather to the voice of his wife, letting her determine the course of the marriage, the Fall resulted. Two things came from it. First, toil: "The ground was cursed," we read. Thorns and thistles were to appear and to cover the ground. This suggests an immediate lowering of fertility. Nature produces only in response to God's continuing manifestation of power. All God needs do to change the course of nature is to reduce the flow of power to it and lower fertility results. Nature then goes out of balance, and the result is an increase in strong plants, such as thorns and thistles. The presence of these, on a widespread scale, indicates that nature is out of balance. It is a reflection of the eccentricity which has come to man: Nature is out of balance because man is out of balance.

This is why we must struggle so to make a living. Man is reduced to unending toil and sorrow. It is interesting that the word, toil, is exactly the same word in Hebrew that is translated "pain" for the woman. It is heartbreaking sorrow, caused by labor and toil. This is the reason for the so-called rat-race of life, why we are constantly under pressure to get more out of a reluctant nature.

Work is not the curse given to man; work is a blessing. It is toil that is the curse. If you do not have work to do, you are of all people most miserable. Work is a blessing from God; but hard, grinding, toiling work is the result of the Fall. It is sweat, anxiety, and pressure coming constantly upon us to create the endless rat race of life.

Then the second factor which resulted from Adam's failure to observe his headship, is death. God said, "In the sweat of your face you will eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Is it not this sense of death, lurking at the boundaries of life, that gives us a feeling of futility about life? Remember what God said to the rich man who built barns and filled them up and then said to himself, "Soul, take thine ease, for you have all you need." God said to him that night, "You fool! This night your soul shall be required of you," {cf, Luke 12:19-20}. Then he asked this question, "Then, whose shall these things be?" Yes, that is the question death forces us to face. You struggle to amass property, all the good things of life, and then what a sense of futility there is in having to pass them along to somebody else, someone who didn't turn a finger to gain them.

Years ago a young friend of mine said to another, "My uncle died a millionaire." The man replied, "He did not." The young man said, "What do you mean? You didn't know him, how do you know he didn't die a

millionaire?" "Because," the man said, "no one dies a millionaire." The young man said, "What do you mean?" And the older man replied, "Who has the million now?" The young man said, "Oh, I see what you mean." No, we never die millionaires. Naked we came into the world and naked we shall leave it. We have nothing that we can take with us but must leave it all behind. We are dust, and to dust we shall return.

There is the sentence of God -- pain, subjection, toil, and death. Is this punishment?

I promised to face this question with you. Is it punishment? Is this the result of our folly for which we must grind our teeth and struggle with all our life, a curse for what Adam did? No, it is not. It only appears to be punishment when we refuse it and resist it or rebel against it. But these things were never intended to be any kind of punishment. They are instead intended to be helps to us, means by which we are reminded of truth, means intended to counteract the subtle pride which the enemy has planted in our race which keeps us imagining all kinds of illusory things, things that are not true at all: that we are the captain of our fate and the master of our soul; that we are capable of handling and solving all the problems of life; these arrogant pretensions we constantly make, that we have the knack and know how to make gadgets that can solve all the basic problems of existence.

But we are constantly being reminded that these things are not true. Death, pain, toil and subjection are limits that we cannot escape. They are there to cancel out constantly our egocentric dreams and reduce us to seeing ourselves as we really are. We are dust. We are but men. We are limited, dependent. We cannot go it alone -- we desperately need other people, and we desperately need God. The hour of greatest hope in our lives is when our eyes are opened to this basic fact and we say, "Lord, I can't make it without you. I need you desperately." These are the things that remind us of that.

Who of us has not had a loved one suddenly pass away and in the presence of death we sensed that we were facing a hard, stark, naked fact which could not be explained away or covered up or shoved under the rug? There it was, facing us every time we turned around. It was to remind us of what we are, and where we are. You will find this principle running all through the Bible. Jacob limped upon his leg for the rest of his life after wrestling with the angel at the brook of Peniel. It was to remind him that he was a man, nothing but a man, dependent upon God; it was to turn him from reliance upon his own craftiness and the cleverness of his own wit. Moses was denied the right to enter into the land, because of his failure. It was a reminder to him, who had been given great prestige and power before God, that he was nothing but a man and he must live within the limitations of God.

A sword came upon David's house because of his sin. It was a reminder to him, constantly, that though he was the king he could not do his own will, or act as he pleased. He was a man, dependent upon God. Paul had a thorn in the flesh given to him, and he cried out against it. But God reminded him that it was given to him to keep him humble in order that he might be a useful instrument in God's hands, dependent upon his love and grace. Out of that experience comes the great, triumphant cry of the apostle's heart, "I will glory in my infirmities." I am glad of these things. Thank God for them. "For out of weakness am I made strong," {cf, 2 Cor 12:9-10}.

Remember the closing words of the 23rd Psalm:

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
for ever. {Psa 23:6 RSV}**

Some quaint commentator has said that those two words, "goodness and mercy," are God's sheep dogs. This is the Shepherd's Psalm. David wrote it when he was but a lad, keeping sheep. In referring to the goodness and mercy of God, he is referring to the sheep dogs that nip at the heels of the flock and keep them in line, driving them into place. "Surely Goodness and Mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," nipping at my heels, humiliating me, turning me back from that which looks good but is really evil, keeping me from getting what I think I need, and what I think I want. But in the end we must name these what God names them -- goodness and mercy!

No, these things are not punishment. These are the disciplines of grace. They are what Paul refers to in Hebrews 12. If you are not chastised, disciplined by God, you are not a child of his. These things are given to bring you into subjection, for God loves you, and he wants you to be what he made you to be -- and what your own heart longs to attain. Your pride needs to be crushed, humiliated; your ego smashed; your dependence upon yourself broken; your reliance upon your abilities, your background, your education, pulled out from under you -- until you depend upon the God who made you and who is able to supply all that you need. When you do that, you will discover that "he who saves his life shall lose it; but he who loses his life shall save it," {cf, Matt 10:39, 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, 17:39, John 12:25}.

**Prayer:**

Our Father, we pray that we may take seriously these words. How much of the time we have ignored them, to our own despair and folly. But Lord, you have called us to listen to them, to heed them, to regard them as truth and to act upon them. We pray that you will help us to do so, not only in this quiet moment when our hearts are touched by your Spirit, but also tomorrow, and all through this week. That we may learn to walk in this way and thus to understand what life was intended to be-as you designed it. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

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