

Reframing Pregnancy & Birth

QUICK THEOLOGY WOMEN'S SERIES



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Published by Every Woman a Theologian LLC

Cover design by Eric Novak.

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Printed in the United States of America.



Introduction

Conversations around pregnancy, labor, and birth come with much baggage. Many women are exposed to negative narratives about labor pain, ideas people claim are scriptural but which actually are not. So what does Scripture teach us concerning labor, birth, and pregnancy? What is God's view of fertility, and infertility, and how can we have the hope of redemption in our birth and pregnancy experiences?

As always, my hope in this little book - as with all books in the Quick Theology series - is to keep the gospel central. The gospel is the hope of Christ, a narrative winding through the entire Bible, pointing us to the One who redeems from sin and closes our separation from God. Jesus is the King with whom we get to live eternally, both now and forevermore! The hope of the gospel is the underlying assurance we have through every life circumstance: through pregnancy, infertility, birth,

adoption, marriage, and singleness. Our relationship with Christ is the foundation for how we view all of life and how we live with purpose in this world.



Our View of Birth

When I was pregnant with my daughter, I quickly noticed that conversations about birth in the church were very different than conversations about birth in New Age, holistic communities. I discovered the holistic community -- a more natural approach to pregnancy, birth, and women's health - due to a pregnancy induced autoimmune disease and a sudden switch from hospital to home birth (not my original plan). This community was supportive, positive, and empowering about birth. If you've never heard the term "New Age", the New Age is a secular ideology often connected with earth worship. It is a new form of Gnosticism, elevating knowledge in hidden things and connection to the universe. I didn't join the holistic community to become New Age. I discovered it when researching natural birthing methods.

Within this New Age movement, you will find ideologies about birth, pregnancy, and fertility, many of them positive and encouraging. But beneath those

supportive messages is the belief that a birthing mother is a “goddess” empowered by the Earth in fertility and birth. Birth is seen as a spiritual experience, a natural process of empowerment. Adherents to New Age ideologies tend to have a very positive view of birth and pregnancy. They are encouraging and supportive of the process, and they speak life over women who are facing labor. As a first-time mother -- who happened to be Christian -- I was astonished that the church was more negative than the pagan sources I was reading. Women who go through pregnancy and birth long to hear life-giving words, and, like I was, are drawn to the New Age community and its positive perspective on birth.

In contrast, the Christian community can (at times) be negative and discouraging about this life-altering process. The conversation around birth tends to center on pain and “Eve’s curse” . When I was first pregnant, I saw this discrepancy and wondered *how Christian women, who know Christ and His abundant life, could be more negative about the birth of a soul than people who worship the universe!*

How is it that the Christian theology of birth has become so dark that Christian women enter motherhood terrified rather than encouraged? Why are women who know the overcoming, Living God approaching birth scared? We have

put forth a narrative about birth that undermines our pro-life ethic. Women are avoiding children out of fear and anxiety, while women who don't know God are embracing them with such confidence and peace. Christians are positive about birth in discussions of abortion; we want women to choose life for their babies. But when Christian culture (at large) discusses the life-giving process, we put fear, anxiety, and discouragement in the minds of women who have never walked the road before. We have allowed the creation of a human soul and the miracle of birth to be overshadowed by the fall of Genesis; we have misinterpreted the “curse” of pain in childbearing. And it is hurting Christian women.

Perhaps we need to turn to Scripture itself. Perhaps we need to reframe our view of fertility, pregnancy, birth, and the labor process, inviting the truth of God's light into this tender situation.

When I was younger and had debilitating PMS, I cursed Eve's name in the classic “Blame Eve for my period” trope. But I'd forgotten something: The fall of mankind, and sin's entrance into the world, was not completely Eve's fault. Adam was standing right with her when it happened. And consequences God gave to the serpent and the world were rightly received for disobedience; parallel consequences for man and woman.

When Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3, *they* were not cursed. They were not set apart for destruction, as the biblical word for “curse” implies. Adam and Eve were not to be destroyed; they were not without hope or without redemption. To the contrary, the Messiah was promised in Genesis 3 as the hope of redemption! So what was cursed at the Fall? Only two things: the serpent and the ground. God explicitly curses the serpent, or Accuser, for his temptations, and He curses the ground, or earth, which will bring resistance to God’s people. Both the serpent and the ground will be destroyed in the final day, unredeemable -- unlike humanity.

So why do we act as if Adam and Eve themselves were cursed when Scripture does not teach this? Some might say, “It’s just semantics; it’s just words.” But words matter, shaping how we think and interact with information. God cursed the ground and the serpent, but He did not curse His children.

Instead, Adam and Eve received a *consequence* for their disobedience, which in turn affected the entire world. God observed the effects of sin on the labor of Adam and Eve. The world would now be resistant to them and their work (a work which existed before the Fall).

Adam and Eve were commissioned to tend the

garden and till the ground *before* the Fall took place (Gen. 2:15). At that time it would cooperate with Adam's labor. The ground was fertile, supple, and responsive. I think we can naturally draw the conclusion that the same was true of Eve's body—that when the Fall affected the world, it also affected her physicality and reproduction. Not only would Adam and Eve slowly die, but Eve's unique lifegiving capacity was affected, too. She would have to labor hard to produce life from her body, just as Adam would have to labor with difficulty to produce life from the ground.

In Genesis 3:16-18 we read:

"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.' 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 pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.'"

The word used here for ‘pain’—pain in childbearing and pain in work in the field—is exactly the same. Some scholars translated the word as pain, others translated it as labor. We often see two different words used: the word labor in regard to Adam, but pain used in regard to Eve. Our human assumption that childbirth must be painful has been applied to the translation process, leading us to assume pain instead of viewing birth as a labor equal to Adam’s but unique to Eve. Eve must labor to bring forth life from her womb, just as Adam must labor to bring forth life from the ground.

Depending on what Bible translation you have, you might see it translated as pain, sorrow, toil, or labor. We also see this word found later in Genesis when Lamech talks about his son, Noah. Here it says: “Now he called his name Noah, saying, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed” (Gen. 5:29, NASB).

The curse of sin affected men and women equally, but in a manner specific to their individual creative abilities. Humans have been granted an image-bearing status. And for men—because they are not bearing children—this creativity takes form through physical work. They echo the Creator God through their work; through what they make. Women’s work also takes this

form, of course, but only women possess God's creative ability to produce a human life from within their being.

Before the Fall, both men and women had to work to produce life from the ground and from the body. But after the Fall, both types of labor would *be marked by resistance*. What used to come naturally would now be marred by sin. For both men and women, labor would be increased to painful proportions. For Eve, this affected the entire process of childbearing, not just birth! The Fall broke her entire fertility process: conception, pregnancy, labor, birth, and raising the child.

The negative effect of sin on the womb does not make labor or pregnancy inherently bad or sinful. Pregnancy, labor, and birth are just as miraculous and beautiful as they were before the Fall, but are now affected by sin's hurtful consequences. Yet in birth, we get to partner with the creative power of God. Only women have this capability! It is a uniquely beautiful design.

When we talk about pregnancy and birth with other people, we must remember the biblical perspective. We do not tolerate a "curse" when we go into labor. Physical pain is not promised. There are women who have what they would call a "painless birth"—one is characterized by hard work versus excruciating pain. Not every birth will

be marked by pain nor is birth holier because it's more painful. It is not marked by sin, set apart for destruction, or hated by God. But because all good things in this world are impacted by the human choice to rebel, there is an inherent resistance in the conception, pregnancy, and birth process. Within that resistance we may experience the overcoming power and salvation of God. That is our hope.