

Genesis 2:8-15

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[0 : 0 0] Turn with me for a short time, please, to the book of Genesis and back to chapter 2. We can read verse 28 of chapter 1 and then some verses from chapter 2, verse 8, just to form the basis of our thoughts this morning. So Genesis chapter 1 and at verse 28, after God had created man, male and female, in his own image, we read in verse 28, And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit.

You shall have them for food. And at chapter 2 and verse 8, The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first was the Pishon. It is the one that flowed throughout around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Delium and oning stones are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria.

And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it, and so on. Now you recall that having looked at the account we have of the creation in these two chapters of Genesis, that we saw that there are three ordinances, as they're usually called principles in relation to human life, that arise directly out of the teaching of these two chapters in Genesis. And we saw that these three ordinances are, firstly, the ordinance of the Sabbath day, or the day of rest, as it comes in the cycle of the seven days of the week.

And we looked at that, as we see at the beginning there of chapter two. The second ordinance is the one we looked at last time, the ordinance of marriage, which we saw in the present-day context, is so relevant for us to look at, and especially to see that the ordinance of marriage and the stipulations in regard to marriage are not an invention of later times or of human thinking, but actually were set by God in the establishing of that relationship between the man and the woman as he had created them there in the beginning. The third ordinance is the ordinance of work or labor, usually maybe called labor, but it's the ordinance of work. Because as we'll see in these passages today, God actually did not put man in the garden of Eden, though it was perfect and without any restrictions apart from the one that he set in regard to not eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But man had all the other parts of the garden available to him. And yet, as we read there in chapter two and verse 15, the Lord took him and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the generic word man there includes the male and female. Man, as created by him, male and female, was placed in the garden of Eden to look after it, to keep it and to work it. Now we could say that these three ordinances really bring us, in the teaching of these chapters, bring us into relationships that we have as human beings with God, with one another, and with our environment. We've looked at our relation with one another in terms of marriage, and we've looked in terms of a relationship with God as the day of rest is stipulated there. But there's an overlap, obviously, between these three areas as you look at these three ordinances. And today we're looking, this is our final study for the moment, at least in this passage and these creation accounts that we have of the creation, we're looking at the ordinance of work, and we're looking at in terms of, first of all, man's relationship with God, and then man's relationship, secondly, with his environment. These things, perhaps, we may think as Christians are not really all that important in the overall teaching of the Bible. And yes, certainly there are more significant topics and subjects

for our attention in the Bible to do with our salvation, especially our relation to [5 : 15] God spiritually. But then that would be a mistake, really, just to pass over these things as of very little importance. The Bible has a lot to say on our relationship with the environment in which we're placed in this world, not just in terms of how God created man in the beginning and placed him in the environment of Egypt. The principles from that actually come to be applicable to work, to whatever type of work it is that we're engaged in, not just in a spiritual sense, but practically as well. And the ordinance of work is hugely important in human society. And we should be taking our instructions as to the principles that affect the ordinance of work from the Bible, and not from political manifestos, not from things that we have come up with over the years ourselves as to how, in a political philosophy of whatever kind it is, how labor or how work fits into that, and how unemployment is regarded. All of these things are important, and we'll indeed see today that the creation of unemployment, of course it's an imperfect world, but the creation of unemployment or conditions in human society that create a lot of unemployment are themselves of huge significance in the light of the teaching of this ordinance of work, as the Bible brings it to us. So man's relationship then with God. And you notice, first of all, the garden setting in which man was placed. The Lord God took the man that he had formed, and he planted a garden in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And what you see there is

God's care for these human beings that he had created in the beginning. He put them in the best possible environment for them, not just the best possible environment, but the most appropriate environment to the faculties that they had been created with. Because the ability that they were given to discern, to think, to choose, to make discoveries, to admire, to worship, all of these abilities as God had created human beings with, they were all facilitated. They were all given the maximum scope within the environment that God had placed them in, including the fact that he had put them in the garden. He had put them in the garden to work the garden and to keep it, to look after it for God, if you like, and for man's own benefit. So there's work for these human beings in the garden environment for their body and also for their minds. God had taken account of the constituencies of a human being, that he has a spiritual side to his life and that he also has a physical side to his and her life, and that they have that in relationship to each other. And that is something that the environment there gives scope to.

In other words, God's provision for them and God's love and God's parental care, if you like, for them, as he has created them, is a care that shelters them and provides the best for them, but it doesn't smother them. It doesn't actually provide them with an area where they don't have to think much about what they're doing, where they're not really going to be engaged in any meaningful work. That's all there right from the beginning. And it's there for the good of human beings. Not only that, but even the capacity that human beings have for engaging in discovery, for doing research, for looking for answers, all of that sort of stuff, that also is built into the garden environment, because you notice how intriguingly there, you can't make too much of it, but it talks about these rivers that were flowing out of Eden to water the garden. And there it divided and became four rivers, four heads of rivers, and they're named there. And it talks about something of the lands into which these rivers actually flowed. So you've got a picture there of this garden that God had actually created for the human beings that he had created and placed in the garden. And they're looking at this river, and they're looking at how it divides into these four heads as it flows out of the garden. In other words, God is saying to them, there's actually more than you actually see here in this garden. There's more to be discovered for your human lives. There's research to be done. There's thinking to be done. You can actually see that there's more to what I have created than this part that you're already in. And that's what God was actually, from the very beginning, placing man in that situation, so that even his capacity for further discoveries was right there at the beginning in relation to his environment. And of course, all of that has become distorted by what you see and read about in chapter three, by our fall from that position of advantage and of perfection into sin, which has distorted our human thinking, our human environment, our practices, our work, our thoughts. All of, as you know, has come to be infected and distorted by sin, by our sinfulness, our sinful condition. And you can see that all too readily in the world in which we live. And if you just think about our physical environment, we'll see in a moment how it involves dominion, but how that does not actually mean exploitation and ruin. But just think for a few moments of space exploration, for example, and the vast sums that are spent on space exploration. Now, there's nothing wrong with that in itself. It's part of what human beings were created with, the capacity and the desire to find

out more about himself and about the environment and about the world and indeed the worlds and the universe that he's part of. But you have to balance things out, and it's the balance that was lost in the fall. Because here you find human beings sending at vast cost spacecraft to the likes of Mars to look for water or evidence of water, which in itself you could say is perfectly proper as a fact of man's own exploratory mind. But when there are millions of people and millions of children in the world dying for want of clean water, you see where the balance has been lost. And the fact that we have the capacity to discover and to do research and to actually engage in these amazing space exploratory missions, and they are amazing, but at what cost to human life and at what cost to the environment in this world that we belong to and that we're placed in. So you see, there's the principle of it there in the beginning, but the distortion of it is then evident from chapter 3 onwards, where all of these things that man was created with are actually coming to be abused and not used in the right way, and where the balance in his very thoughts is lost from what was there in the beginning.

[12:48] So that's the garden setting where God's care is evident as he placed man in that setting. And it's important for us to realize that he was placed in that setting for the benefit of every faculty that he possessed. In his mind, in his soul, in his body, God is giving him the best.

But then, along with that, there's a test. The environment in which God placed man also involved a test. You could say that man was put on probation. Sometimes theologians call it that, but it's really a test in terms of what God had said to him, that there was indeed one particular tree, verses 16, 17 there of chapter 2. You can eat of every tree of the garden, but the tree of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. There's the test. Is he going to be obedient to God as creator or not? Or is he going to follow his own free will, as it was at the time, and engage in something that is harmful to himself and to his environment and to his descendants? Which is what happened. But you see, the fact that God gave him a command shows you the dignity of man in the beginning. The fact that God had created him with a capacity to understand, to respond, to listen, to think about, to ponder what God's own word was saying to him shows you how significant man is above the rest of the creation. Here is God actually giving him a word, and it proves to be a word of command. You may eat of all the trees of the garden, but this one you may not eat of it. The day you eat of this one you shall surely die.

And isn't it interesting when the serpent came and Satan's presence in the serpent in chapter 3 came, what was it that was singled out as being unfair of God? It was the fact that he had put a restriction on this one tree out of all the rest. And that's how the result of the fall still makes itself known in your heart and in my heart, because our tendency is, as fallen sinful human beings, to pick out on the one thing, perhaps, that we may ourselves find looming large for our attention. The one thing that we think is wrong, the one thing that is out of place, the one thing that's unfair, and we lose sight of the sheer number of things that are to our advantage, and in which God's goodness is still so evident to us.

That's how Satan in the beginning actually put it to man. God, you know, should not have kept this one tree from you, even though he's given you all the rest. That was just in the passing.

[15:49] But we'll leave that maybe for another occasion. Here is God giving to man this word, this instruction, this command for his good, for his benefit. And there's a principle that follows from that as well into our lives, and even into the ordinance of work as well. And it's this.

The fact that God gave him that instruction gave man the basis on which he could show his love for God. He gave him this command, and by giving him this command, he was putting him to the test, but it was a situation and a circumstance and an environment in which God had given to man a basis on which to show his love for his Creator.

And it's precisely at that point that man failed. And, you know, that still follows through into our life as well.

It was, in fact, the same principle for Jesus as he came into the world and took our nature, and in that became the servant of the Father. And as he said many times, he was there to do the Father's will.

He was there to obey his command for the mission that he was on in the world to be accomplished. And you recall from chapter 14 of John's Gospel that Jesus there spoke about doing the things that the Father had commanded him to do, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

[17:22] You see, he's connecting the command the Father gave him to do and the obedience that he shows in relation to that. And he's connecting that with the way the world comes to see that he

loves the Father.

His obedience to the command to fulfill what has been given him by the cross and by his resurrection, that's actually the means by which his love for God the Father was made known to the world.

How does that bear upon our own lives as human beings? Well, in this way, at least, that God's law is not the enemy of human love.

Indeed, you have to put it this way. If love does not have law along with it, then it can't be love to the same extent. Or you could put it another way.

Love without law becomes very soft and pliable and ultimately meaningless. Law without love becomes restrictive and even persecuting in its application.

[18:34] But law and love, especially God's law and love and respect to it, you have the two in equilibrium, balanced.

And you find that right at the very beginning where God created mankind. He put them in this environment. He put them in the garden to work it and to keep it. And in the midst of that, this condition was placed upon man in that environment, in his work environment.

There's one tree that you're not allowed to eat of. And if you keep that command, you will find the benefits of loving me, God is saying, will come to you again and again.

And that's why you have to actually set against the idea that's been current in human society ever since man fell.

But it's certainly very much a thing in our own day as well to take note of. Where the law of God, where the law of God is set out in the Ten Commandments especially, is really increasingly put aside.

[19:37] Especially those aspects of these Ten Commandments that don't any longer appeal to human thinking and to human behavior. And if you get rid of the law of God, you're left with not love, but something so flexible, so pliable, that really there's no meaning or substance to it at all.

Our children need to know where boundaries are set. God was setting boundaries even to man in his perfection. He was saying to him, this is the boundary, Adam.

You don't eat of this one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That's where I draw the line, God is saying. And if you abide by that, it will be for your good. In the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.

You go beyond the boundaries and you pay the consequences. And as we educate our children, let's not educate them thinking that love absolutely is the crucial thing.

It's a hugely important thing, but not detached from law, from setting boundaries, because ultimately our security needs certain boundaries to be set for us.

[20:53] And the best ones are the ones God has set through his law, through the moral law, through the Ten Commandments. That's where our security is. That's where we know what is and isn't acceptable.

And security ultimately is not really being free to live as we want to live as human beings, but being free to live as we ought to live, as God has specified that for us.

So there's man's relationship with God in the garden setting, and then in God's test where he set these conditions in that environment for him.

Let's look at man's relationship with his environment in terms of his work as well. First of all, the dominion that he was given back in chapter 1, verse 28. Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

To subdue the earth, to have dominion over these creatures, is part of man's dignified position. And nowadays, these terms are looked at as things which really are pretty damaging.

[22:10] And you get the idea that really human beings shouldn't see themselves as superior to other forms of life, that there should be no such thing as the Bible says about subduing the earth and actually having dominion over other forms of life in this world.

Well, it's been distorted, of course, by the fall, as we mentioned other things too. Man's dominion over the rest of the creation is spoiled and marred and warped and sinful through the fall that's described in chapter 3.

Because now, instead of a care for the environment, you have such things as flow from human greed, from the sin of the human heart and its pride, in its setting out to establish what's good for

me personally, whatever anybody else thinks of it.

You've got the greed not only of individuals, but of large corporations. A greed that flows against the idea of dominion, a proper loving dominion and respect for God's environment.

You have exploitation of resources. You have exploitation by large companies in places in the world that make massive profits and yet leave the people there in poverty.

[23 : 36] I know there are complicated questions and issues arising out of all of that, but our relationship with the environment, in terms of having dominion over it, is not one where exploitation and greed and all the other things that are attached to that make themselves known.

It's where we should be looking at it. If we're looking at it in biblical terms, the environment is there to be worked and to be used and to be looked after to the glory of God, whose resources they are, having given them to us as human beings for our benefit.

So every time you see the environment being exploited and the wastage that you see in human society and the exploitation of human beings themselves by other humans who have more and more in terms of power, not just in terms of riches and money, but of power and of influence, the more we should be thinking, how far we've gone away from the conditions that God created in the beginning for human life.

But you see, that's where God has taken account of the environment, even in our redemption. Redemption is not just simply something where we're spiritually brought back into a proper relationship with God.

God has taken account of the creation which has come under the curse of God through human sin. As chapter 3 makes it very clear, the curse, the ground is cursed for your sake.

[25 : 06] You will eat bread in the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you. There's going to be pain for human beings now in relation to their environment, in relation to their work situation.

That's through sin, through their fault, through their disobedience. But through redemptive grace, God is restoring the very creation itself back to order and to the relationships that ought to be in it as created by God.

The Bible talks about God bringing in a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. That's at the end of all things.

Romans chapter 8 talks about this creation itself in the bondage of corruption by the fall of man, by human sin, is groaning in itself, waiting for this great event to happen, for the return of Christ, where the creation itself will be released from its bondage to corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God.

And the final environment that you find described in the book of Revelation is an environment in which you find man surrounded by an environment that's perfect, deliberately taking some of the terminology from Genesis and the Garden of Eden and applying it to the final state of glory where God and human beings live together in harmony, where they have harmony with one another, where they have harmony with their environment, with their surroundings, where all of that is restored to perfection, to the glory of God.

[27 : 01] So there's the element of dominion. And if you go to Colossians chapter 1 verses 15 to 20, you can take a note of that if you like and read it afterwards, you'll see there the emphasis on God's recovering of or restoration of the creation through Christ again to what it should be.

But then there's this matter of work itself. We've seen it in reference all the way through, but specifically in itself. It comes from bearing the image of God that man is given to work the Garden of Eden and to keep it.

It's a mistake to see work as something that came into human experience after we became sinners, after we fell. Work is not mentioned in the first instance in chapter 3 of Genesis.

It's there in chapter 2 before anything of what happened in chapter 3. So work is a privilege. Work was something man was created with and something man was created for and something his environment as we saw made possible for him where God placed him.

And indeed you could say it's in working in the Garden that man found his fulfillment. Man was to find his fulfillment in the Garden of Eden by working it and by looking after it.

[28 : 19] not by avoiding work. The Garden of Eden was not something like you find on certain holidays where you just have a good time and relaxing where there's not much work to be done.

That's not the ideal environment that God came nothing wrong with having a holiday of course or that sort of thing. But it's not like that in the beginning. It's a time of working and keeping this garden for God.

Work, labor was something man was privileged to be given by God right at the very beginning. It was proper to him as a perfect human being to be a working human being to labor even in the Garden of Eden for his God and his Creator.

What did come in after the fall was the drudgery of work the misery of work the misery attached to work. We've all got up in the morning at some point or other I'm sure unless you're a pretty remarkable human being you've all got up in the morning and sometimes say I'm not really facing like work today and when you can't take a day off the way you planned it begins to plant thoughts in your mind about how much of a toil and a task work is.

Well sometimes it is and of course that too is a result of the fall where God said to man instead of the ground now being productive for you you're going to have to work harder you're going to have to do it in a way that in pain you will eat of the produce of the ground.

[29 : 57] But it's the drudgery of it that actually comes in with the fall in chapter 3 the fall of man. But again it's important that the principle of work has not disappeared even though there is now some pain and some drudgery attached to it.

If we go to the passage we read in 2 Thessalonians in chapter 3 it's really interesting and significant that Paul makes work such an important matter as he writes to these Thessalonians.

You may think from the beginning of the passage he's really dealing with something other than physical work that is something spiritual he's got in mind when he is commanding them there to keep away from any brother but then he says it's a brother that walks in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

What was that tradition? What was that teaching? Well it was that they were not to be idle but were actually to give themselves to work.

If anyone is not willing to work let him not eat. Now let's not think from that that every instance of unemployment is something where people can deliberately be accused of not working.

[31 : 20] There are sometimes people made unemployed through no fault of their own and it's not an issue we should think of lightly. We should remember people who are unemployed who have looked for work whose genuine desire is to work but don't have work available to them.

But here is the principle of it saying where we're saying if a person does not eat does not work then they should not eat. That's in principle ordinary. That's the ideal of it.

So the ordinance of actually working continues even though the element of drudgery and now of course the element of unemployment all complexities in human society have come about since the fall.

So when you hear somebody saying I really wish I could win the lottery if I won the lottery I would be able to put my feet up I wouldn't have to work for the rest of my life.

You can't fit that into the New Testament or the Old Testament because man has been created to work and work is an honorable privilege and work is important in the teaching of the apostles despite the fact that there is drudgery now associated with it in terms of it being a result of the fall.

[32 : 40] When you go back to Eden again where he took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work and to keep it he was putting him in the garden to work to the pleasing of God. What's happened now since the fall of course is that work is associated not with the pleasing of God but with pleasing of ourselves with self with this terrible thing called self that the Bible calls self our own inward sinfulness of heart and that affects our work like it does everything else.

And redemption actually brings us relief from that as well or at least brings us the right thinking because in Colossians chapter 3 and also in Ephesians chapter 6 you find Paul writing as follows having dealt with the relationships and family life and so on having mentioned things to do with the creation and recreation in God he comes to relationships with unemployment and he says slaves which of course were current in Paul's day obey in everything those who are your earthly master not by way of eye service as people pleasers but with sincerity of heart fearing the Lord whatever you do work heartily as for the Lord and not for men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as you reward for you are serving the Lord Christ work heartily not with eye service as men pleasing but with singleness of heart serving the Lord and that is a first principle of work going right back to man's creation by God and being placed in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it to the pleasing of God and John Murray a late professor

John Murray in his excellent book Principles of Conduct the good thing about these books that type of book is it deals with things which are never going to be old fashioned or old in the proper sense though they may be regarded as that nowadays but in Principles of Conduct he deals with some of these ordinances all of these ordinances in fact that come from the creation account and in terms of work and this point that we've just made where the Bible tells us we are to work with singleness of mind to the Lord primarily and not to men even if we're employed by people this he says no consideration is more relevant to our modern work situation from whatever angle it may be viewed than the necessity of having the worker imbued with this attitude of soul its widespread absence is our basic economic ill now there's a question for you to ponder what is our basic economic ill in our society today according to this statement by Professor Murray it is that we as human beings lack or have lost this sense of working to the pleasing of God and if you think about it it makes perfect sense if I set up about my work to the pleasing of God if that's my aim if that's the principle by which I work then that's going to be to my benefit and to my satisfaction whatever things

I may encounter in the carrying out of it and of course to conclude with heaven is not going to be a place without work you go again to Revelation and there's no unemployment in heaven because everybody serves the Lord in that final state of glory that Revelation chapter 22 actually describes so you could in fact say that as you read that passage Revelation chapter 22 and the first few verses especially this is the pinnacle of work the pinnacle of work the pinnacle of the ordinance of work is in heaven itself where there is an activity that is in fact work in serving the Lord in worshipping the Lord to the glory of God so these are the ordinances that arise from the creation the day of rest the relationship of marriage the ordinance of work all three of them are hugely significant in the society we belong to and in our relationship with that society let's show that they mean so much to us as well as we seek to live to God's glory let's pray

Lord our God we thank you today for the ordinances that you have established that you established them in your own creation of the environment that we as human beings were placed in forgive us Lord we pray for all that we see in our world by way of human selfishness and exploitation of its resources and for the way in which even in human to human relationship we find so much that has degenerated into war into hatred into casting aspersions and untruths at other people forgive us Lord we pray for our failures in regard to our relationship to you and to our environment forgive us for our desecration of your day as a people and as a society help us Lord we pray to return to these values through the blessing of the gospel and bless us we pray throughout the rest of this day hear us in this our prayer and cleanse us from all our sin for Christ's sake

[38 : 56] Amen Let's sing in conclusion now Psalm 128 Psalm 128 from the Sing Psalms version on page 172 Singing these three stanzas How blessed are all who fear the Lord who walk the way that he has shown success and blessing will be yours you'll eat the fruit that you have grown Let's stand to sing these three verses in conclusion I bless I bless the Lord who fear the Lord will walk the way that he has shown success and blessing will be the fruit that you have grown your wife will be a fruitful life and round your table will be raised your children like the god is sure the sea earth fears the

Lord is blessed may you behold that is there have been all years die in return through his life and men amen to how you are so and have alles PRThis I'll go to the side door this morning after the benediction.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.