

Series: God & Man & Woman #751

Title: Genesis 2.15, Part 4

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world! I hope you enjoyed the weekend. When we left off on Friday we were here at Genesis chapter 2, and verse 15. Obviously, given the time I am giving to this verse, I see it as important. The title of our series is God and Man and Woman and our objective is to get to know who we are from *God's perspective*. That's why we turn to the Word of God. We want God's opinion of man and woman.

And this verse (verse 15) is like turning on the light in the room of God's perspective. For what purposes has God walked this first man into the garden? Later, of course, the woman will be here also. We discussed the first two purposes last week. First, man was made for work. Man is to work the garden. Man was created by God as a worker. Indeed, before sin enters the garden, man was made for work. So work is not evil. Despite how you may feel – leaving the weekend behind and returning to work on this Monday – work is not evil. Work is good. (Let me just say that yes, there are certain jobs that promote or honor evil and those we want to avoid doing.) But, by and large, God created us to work and we do our work to honor God. Why did God put man in the garden in Eden? He did so that the man would work the garden.

And then we searched the Bible and came to this second purpose: God put man in the garden to provide safety and rest for the man as well as to dedicate this man to God in God's very presence. This took a few days to develop because it involved a word study as we left Genesis 2 for Genesis 19 and also Exodus 16. This purpose of being dedicated to God in the presence of God also applies to us. Are you dedicated to God? Can you live in His presence today as one who is pledged to Him as your Lord? There is only *one* God. Does He have your devotion?

We live in a world of many gods (small g). We are not unlike the ancient Greeks or Romans in this respect. The gods people choose from today come more from materialism than mythology, but they're just as popular. Maybe the god to whom you are dedicated is money? Power? Properties? Sex? Food? Sports? Personality? Politics? Hobbies? Here is a good way to assess this: what do I spend my time thinking about? What do I spend my time doing? Who do I spend my time with?

Chart time spent on your phone and what you are doing when you're on it. Whatever that is, that is what or whom you are dedicated to. But, this first man and woman, in the garden, have been dedicated to God by God and in God's very presence. Am I dedicated to this Living God? Are you? How we live our lives and whom we spend our time with will say a lot about us in this regard.

We have set in our minds purpose number one: God put man in the garden to work. And purpose number two: God put man in the garden for safety and rest and to dedicate the man to Himself. Well, going back to the Bible now, this brings us today. **What is a third purpose? Here it is: God put man in the garden in Eden to be a steward of God's creation. In a word: stewardship!**

To see this in the text we come back to these words "cultivate" and "keep." (I told you on Friday we would do this.) Genesis 2.15 reads, "**15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.**" The words cultivate and keep speak to man's stewardship of God's creation. Please note that this garden in Eden is God's garden. God made it. Man did not make it. So that when man enters the garden man is given stewardship over that which belongs to God. Therefore, man should treat this lush, delightful environment the way God has treated it. Man is not to destroy the garden, man is to keep it the way he found it.

Let me draw us back to Genesis chapter 1 for a few moments here to solidify my point in your mind. In Genesis 1 we have a repeating phrase: "**God saw that it was good.**" God's perspective on His creation is repeated in Genesis 1, verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25. And then down in verse 31, after the creation of man and woman, "**God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.**" Now that is clearly God's perspective on God's creation. Well, then, if God saw that everything (and everyone) in the garden was good, who is man or woman that they should not see it as good? And, not work to preserve that goodness?

Should that not convince us that to cultivate and to keep made man and woman stewards of the creation, we should certainly need nothing more than to know God commanded they do this. That was God's purpose for putting man in the garden, as verse 15 so clearly states. The implication here is that if man and woman refuse to be stewards, then they are living in disobedience to God. In the words of theologian John Calvin, they should not "abuse those things which God requires to be preserved (125)." (They should not "abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.")

Now the question emerges: does this apply to us also? It definitely does. We are to be stewards of God's creation today. I think of it personally this way: the creation is God's artwork. I dare not scribble over it in crayon. If you have a splendid piece of artwork in your home – let's say it is a real beautiful painting, a real gem – then I do not think you want your child to walk over to it one day when you are not paying attention and to scribble across the painting in Crayola Crayon or marker. Do you? You love your child. God loves us. But you have warned your child to care for the painting, not to destroy it. So too, God has warned us to care for the world He has made, not to ruin it. We are to cultivate and to keep the land. This world is God's but He has put you and me here as stewards of it. We are custodians of the earth.

I like what Robert Harbach said, we are to make the world "a beautiful mirror of the glory of the Creator." ("A beautiful mirror of the glory of the Creator.") I agree.

And so, these words cultivate and keep really do bring us back to this matter of work. You and I have work to do in our time here on earth, as in jobs. But we also have work to do in the creation itself. Christians definitely ought to care about the environment. By saying this I am not making a political statement, I am making a biblical statement. According to God we are stewards of what is His handiwork and we do not want to ruin it unnecessarily.

As to *how* we apply what God is teaching us about being good stewards, well, this can be applied in many ways. A simple one would be to properly handle getting rid of your trash. I am amazed at how much litter there is just around my neighborhood. Chucking (throwing) an empty bottle and a container out the window of the car is *not* good stewardship! Put it in a proper trash receptacle.

The reality is that whatever stewardship looks like in practice, it takes some effort, just like tending to this first garden did. Weeds are an awful thing. Where I live we have some bricks outside and everytime I go walking along there I have my eyes open for weeds and even grass growing up through the cracks in the bricks. Sometimes I set aside time and bend down there to yank them out with my hands. After spending significant time on this it is always frustrating to come along a few days later and see the weeds and grass has sprouted back up again! UGH! I have to bend down and go through my process all over again. It is a never ending battle!

Near my bricks there are some plants and flowers we like to grow, and it is amazing how the weeds spring up there, near the roots of what we are growing and, again, I have to get down on my hands and knees and weed out that which will kill and destroy what I am hoping will blossom! Likewise, cultivating and keeping a whole garden is not easy work. I believe Adam and Eve spent much of their days doing it. For them, still in perfection, this was a joy and a pleasure. For us, post-fall and dealing with pain (that we get from tending our gardens) this is not always a joy. But the type or the kind of work is the same.

I am sure the Spirit of God will speak to you about what you can do to cultivate and keep His creation and to be a good steward of what He has given you. Caring for the environments in which we live should not be left to the godless, pagan people in our country and world. God's people should be an example to others of how to cultivate and keep the earth.

So, this is the third purpose for which man and woman are put in the garden: **God put man in the garden in Eden to be a steward of God's creation. In a word: stewardship!**

As John Milton wrote in his poem, *Paradise Lost*, "This Paradise I give thee; count it thine. To till and keep, and of the fruit to eat (B.8, as quoted from Harbach [66])."

Tomorrow I want to bring us back again to cultivating and keeping one more time to discuss a very interesting idea. Since the garden in Eden is perfect, then is there a danger or dangers that threaten this perfect place? What, if any, threat exactly was man working to keep the garden protected against? That's tomorrow on God Is!

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