

Genesis 2:15–25 — To Dress It and to Keep It

Man's Unique Place, the State of Innocency, Freely and Surely, the Seed Plot of Marriage, and Aloneness

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:15–25

“And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”

“And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

To Dress and to Keep: Day Laborer and Night Watchman

Man was put into the garden to dress it and to keep it — J.N. Darby translates: to till it and to guard it. These two functions together describe his place. To till it is the work of the day; to guard it is the work of the night. Neither function makes him the emperor of the world or the king of Eden. He is, in the most attractive possible sense, a day laborer and a night watchman. Mankind in general likes to think it was placed in this world to rule; but the scripture puts man in the garden to serve.

He was made in the image and likeness of God — two things that William Kelly distinguished: image having to do with man as God's representative or vicegerent in the earth, and likeness having to do more with his constitution. As image-bearer he had a function as God's representative to the rest of creation, a headship and an underlordship. But that is not a king's position. There is something humble about day laborer and night watchman that is entirely appropriate and far more fitting than the pretension to be king of the world.

The guarding element raises a question: what was he to guard? When chapter 3 later places cherubim with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life, Darby uses the same word guard there. The thought is that the way to guard what he had been given was by obedience. Obedience is the saint's liberty, as Darby's paper expressed it. He did not guard it by picking up a sword; he guarded it by obeying. And he did not guard it. He followed his wife. So the garden, the heritage, the innocency, was lost through disobedience, and the cherubim now guard what man could no longer keep.

Freely and Surely: Two Words Not to Be Omitted

Verse 16 contains the word freely, and verse 17 contains the word surely. Both are of great weight and neither is to be left out. Darby's marginal note observes that the Hebrew idiom in both cases is the same: eating thou shalt eat, and dying thou shalt die. One conveys the open-handedness of God's provision; the other conveys the absolute certainty of the consequence. Freely: the whole garden was available without restriction, except for one tree. Surely: the one restriction carried a consequence as certain and absolute as God's word could make it.

When Eve was speaking with the serpent in chapter 3, she omitted the word freely. That omission is telling. The idea had already been planted in her mind that God was withholding something good, that he knew it was good and had kept it from her. Once that doubt was entertained — once freely was gone from

her mental quotation of what God had said — the enemy had the foothold he needed. The wavering that James speaks of, like a wave of the sea, is exactly this: a quiet doubt about God's goodness, his open-handedness, his having given without reservation. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ — that is the New Testament equivalent of freely. Nothing held back.

Innocency: What It Was and What It Was Not

Innocency is not holiness. Adam was not created in a state of holiness. Had his humanity been holy, he could never have sinned, just as the Lord Jesus, whose humanity was holy (Luke 1:35), could not sin. Adam was created in a state of innocency, which means ignorance of good and evil — not ignorance of everything, for he had knowledge sufficient to tend the garden and to name all the creatures with names commensurate with their nature and classification. He was a man of remarkable intelligence. But he did not know evil.

Good and evil are correlative terms, something like hot and cold. To say that Adam knew good but not evil is as strange as saying a man knows hot but has no concept of cold. The knowledge of good and evil together constitutes moral knowledge, and Adam did not have it. God said, the man has become as one of us, knowing good and evil — and God knows both, but God exists in a holy state in which evil is repulsed and impregnable. What Adam got by eating was the knowledge, but without holiness, so that he was now capable of choosing evil and susceptible to its power.

With the knowledge of good and evil came a bad conscience — manifest immediately in the hiding. And simultaneously came what Romans 8:3 calls sin in the flesh: a nature resident in the soul that acts upon the will. Before the fall, Adam had no conscience because there was nothing to have a conscience about. After the fall, he had a guilty conscience and a fallen nature. These are not two

things that can come separately; they arrived together as part of what the fall means. Conscience is not a guide in itself; the word of God must inform it. And it is not dispensable: God never dispensed conscience. Man acquired it by the wicked act in the garden, and the state of things before the flood shows what man left to an acquired but uninformed conscience amounts to.

It Is Not Good: The First Thing in Creation That Was Not Good

On days one through five, God looked at what he had made and it was good. On day six, before the creation of woman, he said: it is not good that the man should be alone. This was the first “not good” in creation, and it was rectified on the same day. Only after woman was given to man could God look at everything he had made and say it was very good. The institution of marriage is thus the foremost thing in God’s sight from the very beginning, the thing whose absence made creation not good, and whose presence made it very good.

After the fall, God’s judgment on the woman included two things often misread. First, her desire shall be to her husband: this is not a description of romantic longing but of the tendency she had displayed — to entice and to control, to do what Eve had done. Second, he shall rule over thee: this is not the imposition of a headship that did not exist before the fall, but the distortion of a headship that did exist. Before the fall, Adam exercised a loving headship in companionship; after the fall, that headship became a domination. He shall rule over thee is a description of fallen man’s way with woman, not a prescription. The coming of Christianity elevated the woman’s place precisely because Ephesians 5 sets out the relation of husband and wife in terms of Christ and the church — nothing in all literature is so elevating as that.

Aloneness: From Adam to the Cross to the New Jerusalem

Adam was the first man of whom it is said he was alone. But the subject of aloneness runs through the scripture to its end. The Lord Jesus had a lonely pathway: misunderstood, pressed by crowds and yet alone among them, the grain of wheat that abides alone unless it falls and dies. His aloneness on the cross was of a different order altogether — forsaken by his disciples, forsaken by his creatures, and forsaken by God, the depth of the 88th psalm — a loneliness not worthy of being named in the same sentence as Adam's, yet traceable in the same thread through the scripture. He could say, and yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me — the answer to aloneness that only the perfectly dependent one could say.

At the end of Revelation, the aloneness is done. The New Jerusalem comes down as a bride adorned for her husband. The marriage of the Lamb has come. Genesis 2 is the seed plot: Christ and the church is the reality of which Adam and Eve were the type, though hidden until the New Testament opened it. There are types of the bride in the Old Testament, but there is no type of the body — that aspect of the mystery was kept in absolute silence. A shadow is not visible until one knows the body that casts it. Once we know the reality, we look back and see the shadow. That is what we have here in Genesis 2: the seed of the greatest marriage, planted in the earth's first day and not fully understood until Christ and the church are seen.

It is not good that the man should be alone. This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.