

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY
GENESIS 2:15-25

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Did you ever wonder about why we have a seven day week? I was thinking about that this week. Throughout the civilized world everyone operates on the basis of a seven day week. It is true in China and Southeast Asia and Europe and Africa and Russia and even in North Korea.

I spent a little time this week looking at the history of the week. I found out that there were a few ancient civilizations that had a weekly cycle different than seven days. The Mayans at one point had a 13 day week. One Chinese dynasty had a 10 day week. The early Romans had an 8 day week. But by 45 BC the Romans began to change to a seven day week. The ancient Babylonians had a seven day week. By the fourth century AD the Chinese were using a seven day week. The Japanese adopted it in 1007 AD. In India it was adopted by the sixth century.

Why is this the case? I would suggest to you that it reflects the original instructions of the Manufacturer. He created us humans to work best with a seven day week. Our subject is "A Biblical View of Government." I argued last week that if we want to know how to live life successfully, we need to look at the original owners' manual provided by the God who made us. Our owners' manual tells us important things about how we should be governed. That has important implications for us in terms of how we should vote, how we should pray, how we should interact with government, and when we might even disobey civil government.

So last week we began at the beginning in Genesis #1. We saw that God is the sovereign ruler and creator. We saw that he created human beings in His image. That has at least three implications for civil government. It means that it is very important that the government defend and protect human life from the womb to the tomb. It also means that humans do have the right and responsibility to rule the earth, under the supreme rulership of God. Third, it means that government should encourage the creativity that exists within humanity.

So today we are going to examine #2 in Genesis and learn additional information about how we humans were intended to live and what implications that has for civil government. I find four principles from the second part of the chapter.

I.
First, in v. 15, I find that HUMANS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. HUMANS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK) The text says, "**The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.**" The first part of the chapter describes the location of this garden of Eden. It is presented to us as a real place in a geographical location that is unknown to us today, although its proximity to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers is mentioned.

Now the gender of the Hebrew word for "it" does not match the gender of the Hebrew word for "garden." So some Bible scholars argue that we should clearly understand that man was working and serving God in this environment. But it is clear that there was some kind of meaningful activity that Adam had in this garden. Verses 18-25 describe the responsibility that Adam was given to name the animals. This would involve a mental and intellectual kind of job.

This points us in the direction of thinking that before sin entered into the world, humans were intended to be involved in work. Adam was not intended to lay in a hammock stretched between two coconut trees and drink lemonade all day. That is not what life in Eden was about. The original work responsibility involved mental and physical labor. Work by itself is not a result of the curse. We human creatures were intended to be involved in meaningful activity right from the beginning.

The implication for each of us is that we should find fulfillment in work, and we should see it as an opportunity to serve God, whatever that means for each of us. Former Pittsburgh Pirate baseball player got it right when he once declared, **"I just want to glorify God, that's why I play ball."** (*Christianity Today*, 4/14/1986) This stands in contrast to the view of work that many civilizations have had. Cicero was a Roman philosopher in the first century. He said that working daily for a livelihood was **"unbecoming to a gentleman"** and that **"vulgar are the means of livelihood of all hired workmen whom we pay for mere manual labor... And all mechanics are engaged in vulgar trades."** (*De Officiis* 1.150)

Many of us in this congregation are retirees. Our responsibility is still to be involved in meaningful activity. I remember years ago when Don Mo was looking for volunteers to lead Bible studies in jails on Cape Cod, he discovered that there were a lot of retired pastors living there. He got frustrated because he couldn't get them to help. So many of them seemed to be too busy playing golf. There is nothing wrong with playing golf, but what a terrible example to set about not being involved in meaningful work.

Fortunately, our retirees do well in this congregation. I hear some of them confess that they are busier now than when they were paid employees. As we get older, we do have to slow down. Our work may take different forms. It may involve caregiving, for ourselves as well as for others. In this coronavirus environment it may mean encouraging people on the phone, or through e-mails.

In terms of the implications for government of this responsibility to work, it means that government policy should always encourage work. For men who are of working age, the workforce participation rate in 1948 was 86%. Today it is about 68%. A third of men who could be working are not working. I am sure that there are many reasons for this. I don't mean to cast all of the blame on government. But government policy does affect the work habits of us Americans.

I remember that in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, the federal government provided extended unemployment benefits for a long time. At a certain point they were cut off, and miraculously the unemployment rate dropped. A lot of people found ways to get back to work. The basic principle, which good government should take into account, is that humans have a responsibility to work.

II.

Second, HUMANS SHOULD HAVE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. (II. HUMANS SHOULD HAVE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE) That is the lesson coming out of v. 16: **"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden.'"**

Freedom, it would seem, is the Biblical ideal. Its opposite is slavery. Slavery was a big problem in Israel's history. The escape of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt was a defining moment in the nation's history. Later God's law provided for situations of personal bankruptcy with a system of indentured servanthood. But built into the system was an escape clause. According to Deuteronomy #15 v. 12 (DEUTERONOMY 15:12), **"If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew**

woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you."

Centuries later, as Israel began to experience oppression from surrounding countries, the prophets foresaw a coming time when the Messiah would bring freedom. (ISAIAH 61:1) Jesus would later identify Himself by quoting these words from Isaiah #61 v. 1: **"The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty--- freedom--- to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."**

Freedom was a theme also found in the New Testament. Usually it was associated with freedom from the power and the effects of sin. (JOHN 8:31-32) So it was that Jesus declared in John #8, **"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"**

The original attraction for so many of our ancestors in coming to this country was the prospect of freedom, freedom from religious oppression, freedom from government tyranny, and freedom of economic opportunity. Thus the famous words of Emma Lazarus (STATUE OF LIBERTY QUOTE) were inscribed on the Statue of Liberty: **"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."**

Freedom has a direct connection with creativity, which I argued last week is one of the things involved in our creation in the image of God. For creativity to flourish there needs to be a background of freedom. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In the government that most of us parents exercise over our children, we want them to have a certain amount of freedom, especially as they grow older. I had a good experience of being raised in the family in which I was raised. I had a strong conscience and a quiet temperament. So I didn't need many rules. I don't recall that I ever had a curfew. But I really didn't need one. I was just a responsible kid. So I was able to explore and do different activities throughout my schooling. Obviously not all kids have the same temperament. Some need stricter rules.

So it is with civil government. Ideally we don't want a lot of rules. But when we have more people who do bad things, rules have to be added. Pastor Tony Evans (TONY EVANS QUOTE) defines governmental freedom in this way: **"It is the unimpeded opportunity and responsibility to choose to righteously and legally pursue one's divinely created reason for being."** That seems to me to be an apt description of what we want from a government that recognizes the need for freedom.

Government should encourage it. Nelson Mandela, the famous South African leader (MANDELA QUOTATION), once declared, **"To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in such a way that enhances the freedom of others."** Slavery is a dark blot in our own nation's history. On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves not under Union control. (PROJECTOR OFF) Yet many former slaves found it difficult to leave their slavery. Many continued to live like slaves. Freedom is risky. We citizens need to take advantage of it. It is built into our DNA. Government needs to provide and defend freedom. It is essential to proper human flourishing.

III.

The third principle which I find in Genesis #2 which relates to government and the governed is that **HUMANS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO OBEY LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT.** (III. HUMANS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY...) Notice v. 17: **"...but 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."** Life for Adam in Eden had great freedom. But there was one rule. God, the Creator, was in charge. He had the right to have one rule.

I take it that the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were literal trees. Yet they also had great spiritual significance. Like a good parent, the Lord gave at least a partial explanation for the one rule. Eating from that one tree would produce death. Such was the test for Adam. The fate of the human race hangs in the balance. The nature of the test for him was the nature of the test for all of us: Will we believe the Word of God? Will we trust that the Manufacturer knows what is best for us?

We find out in #3 that Adam and Eve blew it. They broke the rule and ate of the forbidden fruit. John Calvin writes, **"So by eating of this fruit, man substituted his own finite self as the standard of right and wrong, replacing God's perfect Being as the standard."** (Genesis commentary, p. 23) Such is the problem of modern man. We are convinced that our science and technology and modern learning have given us greater understanding of humanity. The owner's manual is an outdated book that needs a modern update.

But the result of breaking God's rules is death. Death in its meaning here in Genesis is primarily separation from God. We find in #3 that Adam goes into hiding. He does not physically die immediately. But the process of physical corruption which leads to physical death has now begun.

God's intention is that man have maximum freedom. Yet there need to be boundaries. We learn that in sports. If you go out of bounds on the football field, the play is dead. If you hit the baseball outside of the line, it is a foul. The hit is of no value. If you hit the tennis ball outside of the lines, you lose a point.

At the beginning of human history, there was just one rule. But as rules get broken, there typically need to be more rules. In the early history of humanity it does not appear that God had a lot of rules. But eventually at Mt. Sinai, He provided the Ten Commandments. Those Ten Commandments were further defined and explained in the first five books of the Old Testament in such a way the the religious Jews determined that there were actually 613 rules that good Jews were to follow--- 248 positive commandments and 365 negative ones.

Today the rules are more complicated. If the ideal is a government with a minimum number of rules, perhaps we have gone over the top. But part of the need for them is the tendency of us Americans to go astray. So it is that the US Tax Code runs 2600 pages. The US Law Code, which contains all of the current federal statutes, has 22 million words.

Good government encourages freedom of choice. But we humans have a responsibility to obey legitimate government. When we go astray, we need more rules. What is really needed is personal responsibility and self-discipline.

John Adams, the second President of the United States recognized this tension. In a 1798 address to the Massachusetts Militia he said, **"We have no Government armed with Power capable of contending with human Passions unbridled by morality and Religion."** He went on to point out that human vices can **"break the strongest Cords of our Consitution as a**

Whale goes through a Net." (JOHN ADAMS QUOTE) He concluded with these significant lines: **"Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."** Thus it is that we humans have a responsibility to obey legitimate government.

IV.

We come then to the fourth principle described in Genesis #2. It is that **GOVERNMENT MUST PROTECT MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY.** (IV. GOVERNMENT MUST PROTECT...) In our study thus far of Genesis our focus has been primarily upon what kind of creatures we are and what kind of governance we need. Verses 18-25 tell us more about who we are as creatures created in the image of God. But they also recognize another divinely created institution. We saw in #1 that the image of God implies that human government is a necessary institution. Here we see that marriage and the family comprise another divine institution. Human government needs to be involved in protecting it.

According to v. 18, **"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"** The only thing in God's creation so far that is not good is the aloneness of man. So the promise is that God will create a helper fit for him. The original Hebrew word here for "helper" does not imply any inferiority. In fact, the Hebrew word in the Old Testament is used most often to describe God as the helper for people.

Before the Lord brings along the right helper, He brings members of the animal kingdom to him. We read in vv. 19 & 20, **"Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him."**

This was no doubt part of the meaningful work assigned to Adam in the garden. I suspect that this first man had a great intellect, untouched by any corruption. Thus he was able to come up with appropriate names for each creature. In the process Adam sees that these creatures cannot fully satisfy his situation of aloneness. He also sees that in the animal kingdom creatures come in pairs. Part of God's dealing with humanity is cultivating a need before He fills it.

Notice vv. 21 & 22: **"So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man."** There is symbolic significance to the part of the body that was used to create the woman. The ancient church leader Chrysostom said, **"Let us remember that God did not take the woman from man's feet to be trampled upon and enslaved, or from his head that she should dominate him, but from his side to be his companion from beneath his arm to receive his protection, and from near his heart to have his love and affection."**

Just as Adam as the first man must have been a perfect specimen physically and mentally, so also the first woman must have been both a physical and mental beauty. She was a true complement to Adam. Adam and Eve were similar but different. In our culture there is a certain element which seeks to minimize the differences and maximize the similarities. But man and woman are different--- biologically and mentally and emotionally. This is a good thing. This is how they can complement each other. The differences present challenges. But this is also how we

grow spiritually and psychologically. The image of God is somehow reflected in our complementarity.

Verse 23 tells us: **"Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'"** Most of the English translations fall short in describing the reaction of Adam to his introduction to this new creature. The RSV perhaps comes closest in describing the first words of Adam as "At last..."

The Hebrew words describe this connection in beautiful fashion. "Man" is *ish*. "Woman" is *ishah*. It so happens that the connection also comes across in English with "man" and "wo-man."

Verse 24: **"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."** This is likely the observation of Moses, rather than Adam, since Adam had no earthly father and had not yet experienced fatherhood himself.

Perhaps the significance here is that the man is in one sense making the biggest change. Prior to marriage, both man and women are regarded as being in submission to their parents. At marriage woman will become subject to the headship of the man. But man must now become independent and serve as a leader.

Verse 24 also points toward a sexual union. Some in the history of the Christian church put forward the case that sex was somehow the result of the fall and somehow an unholy act. Clearly this is not the case. The total union of man and woman in marriage is something that came with the original creation.

Verse 25 reminds us of the original sinless environment in which all of this happened: **"And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."** It is only when sin enters in that there is desire to hide and cover up.

Verse 24 will be quoted by Jesus and the New Testament writers as the divine basis for marriage. Clearly marriage and the family is a divine institution. It is foundational to the success of human life. This divine institution is intended by the Manufacturer to be a union of one man and one woman for life. Anything else is a distortion of God's intended creative order. Later, God will explain that the marriage arrangement is an illustration of Christ's relationship to the church.

Our particular interest is in how marriage relates to good civil government. Since marriage is a divine institution, it would appear that good government should promote and defend marriage. Unfortunately, our civil government has not done such a great job of providing good support for marriage in recent years. There are three problem areas that I see.

The first is divorce. Divorce has always been a threat to marriage down through history. But in 1970 the first state in the country authorized no-fault divorce. That state was California, and the governor who signed that idea into law was Ronald Reagan. Since then, government has made it relatively easy to dissolve marriages. Nevada especially has a reputation for that. In 1970 the divorce rate in the US was 3.5 per thousand per year. By 1980 it was 5.1 per thousand per year. According to the American Psychological Association between 40 and 50% of married couples in the US divorce.

With the exception of marriages where there is physical violence, divorce almost always has negative consequences for kids. Judith Wallerstein was a psychologist who began studying 131

children from 60 families in Marin County just north of San Francisco in 1971. Marin County is a pretty wealthy area. So these families, for the most part, had financial resources that many other families facing divorce do not have. Wallerstein reinterviewed these children every five years for 25 years.

She found that 15 years after divorce, half of these children were still "**worried, underachieving, self-deprecating and sometimes angry young men and women.**" Only 40% of these kids eventually married, half of the national marriage rate. Those who did marry were more likely to experience divorce themselves.

God can and does graciously intervene in situations of divorce where Christians turn to Him for strength. But the statistics show that on average children of divorce suffer negative effects on a multitude of statistical scales. The bottom line is that government should seek to preserve marriages.

The second problem area with government policies in our country concerning marriage and the family is not only have government policies made it easier to divorce, but also they have discouraged marriage. Several years ago I was counseling a couple who had a child outside of marriage. They were both Christians and they seemed to recognize that the right thing to do was to get married. So I began doing marriage counseling with them, and we were even making plans for a wedding. But then the woman discovered that if she got married, she would lose significant financial benefits from the government. So she refused to get married.

Government programs may be well intentioned in their desire to support single women with young children. But the effect of these programs over the years has been to weaken marriage. This has been especially devastating in the African American community. In 1965 24% of black infants were born to unmarried mothers. Today that figure is 69%. Kids growing up in homes without fathers suffer all kinds of negative effects.

Then the third problem with government policies is that our country has adopted gay marriage. This is not marriage in God's definition. This goes contrary to the divine order. Modern America is thumbing its nose at the owner's manual which we have been given. Over time we will find out the negative effects which this has, especially on children. In the meantime, public schools will develop curriculum that supports this false view of marriage, which will further mess up our young people.

While we as individuals and a church may have a difficult time in changing these bad government policies, we can in our individual lives and in our life together as a church encourage and support marriages among us. Many of us are without mates. But we have kids and grandkids and nephew and nieces who have embarked upon marriage. We can look for opportunities to support them. Perhaps we can help them out financially. Perhaps we can help watch their kids. Maybe we can help them to send their kids to a Christian school or help them with homeschooling. We can offer advice when they need it.

We can also model and teach what good marriage is about. University of Texas sociologist Mark Regnerus writes in his recent book *The Future of Christian Marriage*, "**The focus of twentysomethings has become less about building mature relationships and fulfilling responsibilities and more about enjoying oneself, traveling, and trying on identities and relationships... We now get ourselves ready for marriage, rather than marry to get ourselves poised to accomplish common objectives--- a home, a job, a family. Instead,**

marriage itself has become one of those objectives, an accomplishment signaling that [we] have 'made it.'"

Marriage is difficult. But it is attainable, and it is ultimately essential to our flourishing as a society and a nation. We need to be on the lookout to do what we can to support and encourage Biblical marriages.