

Lent 2018 ✠ Chapter 2
Sin: Not Taking Our Life from God



The stuff of life and various circumstances we face come and go. Any meaning we experience must be derived from a source of consistency outside ourselves. God never changes! When we are made new in Jesus, we can process the sea of change around us because we are in him, who never changes. This is the order that God set up for his creation. We are the creatures, he is the creator. We are dependent on him for life and all things. Thus identity, meaning, and contentment can originate in Jesus alone. Only when we have open hands and hearts to receive what he has given and to recognize that he is sovereign, can we find this contentment—can we find this place of belonging in him.

That keeps us from the nastiness of self-promotion. If we understand our identity in Christ. If we can enjoy life as his gift of grace, within the boundaries that he has given us. If we truly are content. Then we don't have to push ourselves out in front. We don't have to push our agenda. We don't have to fight for our rights. We don't need to force others to recognize our power, or recognize our authority. We don't have to be consumed by materialism and "keeping up with the Joneses." When we understand identity and meaning, then we can truly be content in Christ.

To wrap our souls around this idea, it is good to go back to the beginning....Right from the beginning of God's revelation to us—Genesis 1.1—God shows himself to be the author and creator of life. That's what *he* does.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the

birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.” (Genesis 1.26-31)

God is the author of life and what does he give humanity the role of doing? Taking care of life. He is the author of life. We are to take care of life. In order to take care of life, he does some pretty unique and special things for us that he doesn’t do for other living creatures. Note that it is an act of grace for us to receive his life and care for life.

“And the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 2.7-9)

God is the author of life and he has tasked us to take care of life. What has he done? He’s breathed his life into us. What are we until we have the life of God breathed into us? We are clay! Dust! And so there is this breathing of life that he did for us, and he is the source of life. He has this tree of life in the garden for us as we have fellowship with him. Then he gave us instructions to guard his gift of life.

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’” (Genesis 2.15-17)

God is the author of life; he has tasked us to take care of life. God has breathed his life into us. What brings death? We know the drill, the attempt to be self-sustaining, messing everything up. Our forerunners, like each of us thereafter, have been making decisions to attempt to live life on our own terms. It starts by not recognizing a lie, a twist of what God really said (hey, listening is important). It gets exaggerated by a weak male not stepping up. Eve sins; then Adam does.

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not

eat from any tree in the garden?”” The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”’ ‘You will not surely die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Genesis 3.1-7)

Everyone in the pericope is an imposter. Being like God results in pretending to be like God. How does humanity pretend to be like God? By assuming we are the giver of life, assuming that life is something that we can look out for on our own instead of accepting the gracious gift of life on his terms. He is the source of life, not us!

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’ And he said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’” (Genesis 3.8-11)

What is lost when we take our life source as our own self, when we look for life, when we look for meaning apart from God? We lose the intimacy of our relationship with God. Hearing the sound of his voice brings the thoughts of condemnation. Shame is felt at the perception of lost ability to walk with God. The source of life is guarded and Adam and Eve are kicked out of the garden. And God still provides!

“The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of

the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3.21-24)

God makes a provision. An innocent animal has to substitute its life to clothe humanity, protecting Adam and Eve’s life. Still today, God is the giver and protector and sustainer of life. That’s who he is and what he does. Jesus satisfies the justice of God on the cross and his life-given Spirit is blown into our lives. God is the author of life. He sustains all creation and he authors our re-birth, when we receive our spiritual life. Will we try to find life on our own (even after we have experienced saving grace), or will we submit to his grace to find and sustain life? This is what God does. He provides life and provides for life.

In essence what happens in Genesis is the opposite of what happens in the new covenant. Adam and Eve are made with a heart of flesh. They are made to relate and to walk with God, and to have an intimate relationship with him. They are made without sin. When they choose sin, they take their heart of flesh and exchange it for a heart of stone. Ironically, trusting their own flesh is what gets them in trouble. Eve sees with her senses, with her flesh, that it’s desirable for gaining wisdom. In our fleshly senses, the way of the world still makes sense doesn’t it? The question is, what do we look to, to gain wisdom? As an example—it’s great to say God is who we look to when we are in church, but in our homes, what “news” channels are on 24 hours a day? We are guilty of looking for wisdom in the world through the senses of our flesh. We inject a little Jesus into the idol we have made of our politics and expect it to help us sleep at night.

In sin, Adam and Eve did not take their identity in being made in the image of God and having God breathe their life into them. Neither do we. They did not accept the meaning manifested in their God-given role to care for creation. Neither do we. They were not content and they tried to live life on their own. So do we. Sin goes against the character of God, who is the only life-provider. This sets and relieves the tension of identity issues: How do we know who we are? Where do we take our life from? Do we take our life from Jesus after salvation, or are we living in the flesh?

Making specific parallels to our lives brings up an interesting question. We have different opinions of how and when, but all believers believe that God will fully manifest his kingdom. We believe that God was sovereign enough to create space and time. Do we actually live in faith, believing that God can redeem space and time, before the end of space and time? We get into trouble when we spiritualize God’s promises away. We

get into trouble when we cast all those promises into the future. We get into trouble when we just flat deny the promises. He is going to make all wrongs right and we should live with this end in mind. At issue is the living of our faith and our trusting in Jesus in everything we face in this life. This is a theological grid issue because if we are going to understand the newness of life in Jesus, the new covenant, we have to understand the old covenant. To understand the old covenant, we have to understand this walking and talking with God before he gives the law.

There is great tangibility to accepting life on God's terms. While we live in the flesh, do we trust the flesh and live according to the best of the world's wisdom? Do we really trust that God's provisions are enough? Will we really yield to the Spirit's searching of our hearts and understand that the world's wisdom is just a cheap substitute? Do we live in faith, trusting that God is powerful enough to speak to us and show us how to live? Do we walk and talk with God? Do we submit to his law? Do we look forward to his appearing?

When we gather as his church, how much waiting and listening to Jesus is there? Are we content with him and the gospel, or do we need to fill up our worship to satisfy what we want? Do we focus on relationship or programs to meet felt needs? When we are in conversations outside of church, does Scripture come to our minds? Are we walking and talking with God more than just when we do our morning devotions? Or when we are given a political problem, do we immediately respond with what our party says? When we have conflict with our spouse, or when somebody tries to speak truth into our life, do we snap? Or are we humble and able to listen, allowing that person to say something to us that might be hard to hear?

In daily life, are we drawing our lives from him? If we take our identity in him and not from our search for meaning or finding purpose, then we are free to be the persons he has created us to be. Without this focus on abiding in grace, our focus often reverts to what can be done in the flesh using worldly wisdom. If we walk and talk with God, if we submit to his law, if we look forward to his appearing, then we can find contentment in Jesus.