

# God's Way? Or Your Way?

Genesis 2:15-17

Halifax: 29 June 2014

## Introduction:

Today we will continue with our sermon series in Genesis.

Last week, we looked at God's bountiful provision for us at creation...

- The sermon was an overview of chapter 2, verses 4-25,
  - And I told you that this week we would focus in on the covenant of works that God made with man at creation...
  - And that next week, Lord willing we would focus in on marriage.
- So as planned, our topic for this week is God's covenant with man at creation.
  - As this is a topic that does not take up many verses, our scripture reading today will be quite short...
  - We will read only Genesis 2:9 and Genesis 2:15-17.
    - But even though it may short, it is still the very word of God—and a particularly important passage at that, so give careful and reverent attention as I read it to you—

**Genesis 2:9:** And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

to tend and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; <sup>17</sup> 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."

**Genesis 2:15-17:** Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

Last week, I pointed out to you that in the portion I just read to you, we see God making a covenant of us at Creation.

- That is what Genesis 2:9 and 2:15-17 say.
- I pointed out to you that God is very kind to enter into covenants with us.
  - They are a way that God uses to make His intentions toward us as well as what He expects of us very clear...
    - so that we are not left to guess about what He wants from us or about what He is going to do with us.

## I. Let's begin today by looking more closely at what a covenant is.

- A lot of people come into a reformed church and they hear all this talk about covenants, and they wonder what they are...
  - A. Covenants were very common in the ancient world.

1. They were made between two parties so that one or both parties could solemnly declare their intentions toward the other as well as their expectations of the other—
  - so that the relationship would be defined in accordance with the terms or stipulations and promises of the covenant.
2. We find two basic kinds of covenants that were common in the ancient world...
  - Covenants that were agreements between two parties that were equals.
  - And covenants that were initiated by a sovereign with a vassal in which the sovereign or suzerain establishes terms describing what he will do and specifying what he expects of his vassal.

B. Let's look at some example of covenants between equals:

1. An example of a covenant between equals would be the Covenant that Jacob and Laban made when Jacob departed from Laban and Laban pursued him.
  - Once Laban overtook him and things were more or less settled between them, they set up a stone pillar and this is what they promised to each other according to Genesis 31:51:
    - **Gen 31;51-53: Then Laban said to Jacob, “Here is this heap and here is this pillar, which I have placed between you and me. <sup>52</sup> This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. <sup>53</sup> The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.**
  - You see that they both make a solemn promise—it is a mutual agreement.
2. Another example of a covenant like this would be the covenant that David and Jonathan made with each other...
  - This is mentioned in 1 Samuel 23:17-18.
  - By this covenant, they who might have been deadly rivals (with Jonathan being the natural heir to his father's throne and with David being the one that God had chosen to take the throne)...
    - I say, *they*, who might have been deadly rivals, assured one another of their good will by means of a covenant.
3. One other example that we might mention of a covenant between equals is the covenant of marriage...
  - The Bible twice refers to marriage as a covenant of companionship.
  - In it, a man takes a wife by making his intentions clear that he will be loyal to her alone until death, and a woman likewise pledges her fidelity to her husband to do him good and not harm all the days of their life...
    - Instead of a man coming into a woman's life and leaving her to guess about how long he might remain—or a woman doing the same—both are to make their intentions firm by a solemn promise that cannot be broken without incurring God's displeasure.

- C. Now let's look at examples of covenants between a sovereign and a vassal.
1. An example of a covenant between a sovereign and a vassal would be that which Joshua made with the Gibeonites in Joshua 9...
    - They came, pretending to be from a far country, asking that they might be Israel's servants and that Israel would promise not to harm them.
    - Thus, Israel made a covenant as a suzerain with Gibeon as a vassal.
  2. In the ancient world, conquering kings would often make covenants with the nations they either conquered or threatened to conquer...
    - In these, they would promise not to harm their vassal if the vassal would pay tribute to them and obey them.
    - An example of this is found in 2 Kings 17:3 which says:
      - **2Ki 17:3 Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute money.**
  3. But of course the greatest examples of covenants between a sovereign and a vassal are the many covenants that the LORD makes with us...
    - Whether it be with Adam or Noah or Abraham or David,
      - He comes to us with His promises to bless us, and establishes the terms of what He requires of us together with warnings or sanctions showing clearly how we will be punished if we break the covenant.
- D. By looking at these examples to learn what a covenant is, we can now see that in Genesis 2, God made a covenant with Adam at creation.
1. All that is required in order to have a covenant is God expressing to us His intentions toward us by promise and setting forth His expectations of us with a threat of punishment if we transgress.
    - That is what we have in Genesis 2, and that is why we call it covenant even though the word covenant is not used here.
      - If there are promises of a sovereign and stated expectations with sanctions, it is a covenant.
      - We have the same features in 2 Samuel 7 when God makes a covenant with David, but it is not called a covenant there either—however in Psalm 89 and elsewhere when it is spoken of, it is called the covenant that God made with David.
        - I say this because some people have questioned whether the covenant with Adam should be called a covenant.
  2. It is very good of the LORD to tell us of His kind intentions toward us and of His expectations for us as He did right from the beginning.
    - As I said before, He did not leave us to guess concerning what He would do with us or concerning what He expected of us.
    - He spelled it all out for us in a most masterful way—right from the beginning.

3. I might mention here that God's making a covenant was not *His* copying what men in the ancient world did,
  - but rather it was that they made covenants in imitation of what God had done with them—they got the idea from Him.
  - He is the original covenant maker.
    - I say this because some unbelieving Bible scholars say that creative writers in Israel got the idea of covenants from their neighbours and then wrote in covenantal arrangements to describe how God dealt with Adam and Noah and Abraham.
    - That is the way unbelievers think, but you should not think like an unbeliever.

TRANS> Now that I have shown you what a covenant is, I want to move on and show you the next thing...

- I want to show you some of the features of the covenant that God made with Adam at creation and what we can learn from these features in God's covenants in general...
  - And then after we have done that, I want to show you how this covenant with Adam fits in the scheme of God's dealing with mankind in general and with us in particular.
  - So next...

## **II. What are some of the features of the covenant that God made with Adam at creation and how do they pertain to us?**

- A. First, I want you to consider that in this covenant there was a promise of life from God.
  1. You might not immediately see this, but I think I can show you that there is such a promise.
    - If you look back at verse 9, you see that there are two trees that are said to be in the midst of the garden—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
      - I want you to note especially here the tree of life.
    - Notice that God gives Adam and Eve permission to eat from all of the trees except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
      - That means that God gave them permission to eat of the tree of life.
        - Now it is obvious that this tree is not called “the tree of life” merely because its fruit is nutritious and able to support and sustain biological life like all the other trees.
        - It is obvious that it has to do with a higher kind of life.
          - This is already clear from verse 9 alone...
    - But when you look over to Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden...

- If you know the story, they are expelled because they broke or transgressed God's covenant...
    - but if you look at the reason that they, as covenant breakers, cannot remain in the garden that is given in Genesis 3:22...
      - you can see that it says **“lest he (Adam) put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.”**
2. That tells us that God had, somehow, associated this tree with the promise of eternal life.
- I don't think we should suppose that the tree of life had some sort of power in its leaves or fruit to impart eternal life...
    - The LORD always reserves that sort of action for Himself—
      - He does not operate by putting charms into objects, but He operates by the personal exercise of His sovereign power.
  - He does indeed *associate* His promises with things like the blood on the door posts at the Passover,
    - or with the bread and wine on the communion table,
    - but these are given to us as visible signs and tokens of what He has promised...so that those who partake unworthily actually receive a curse instead of a blessing.
      - And in the garden, God promised life to Adam—
        - that He would not only sustain his life,
          - but that He would grant him eternal life if he showed himself to be devoted to God's will.
      - I will say more about the condition in a moment—but what I want you to see here is that there was a promise of life for Adam.
        - If he had continued in the covenant with faithfulness, the time would have come when he would have received eternal life...
          - that is, he would have been confirmed in life—
          - The time of testing—or of probation—would have been over—
            - just as it was over for Abraham after he showed that he was willing to offer his son...
              - he did not have to be tested again once he had proven his willingness...
            - and just as it was over for Jesus Christ after He had finished His work on the cross...
              - He does not have to be tested by the cross ever again.
        - As James says in James 1:12, the one who endures the test afterward receives the crown of life which the LORD has promised to those who love Him.

- The tree that was called “the tree of life” was called that deliberately because by eating of it, Adam was reminded and assured of God’s promise.
    - But after Adam had transgressed, it was not appropriate for him to eat of the tree that promised life because having transgressed, there was no life for him—
      - he had forfeited life by turning away from God.
    - Just as it is not appropriate for those who break the New Covenant to come to the Lord’s Table,
      - so it was no longer appropriate for Adam to eat of the tree of life because the life it promised by his personal obedience was no longer possible for him.
        - God barred him from the tree because of his apostasy.
3. But how good it was of the LORD to hold out the promise of eternal life to us in His covenants!
- He held this out as an encouragement to Adam, and he holds it to us in the covenants He makes with us...
    - Jesus says, “whoever believes in me will not perish, but will have everlasting life.”
  - What an encouragement this is to us to go on for the Lord Jesus, trusting in Him until the end!
    - Eternal life means that we are able to live forever under the blessing and favour of God—and to be among those and to be counted as those who truly please Him.
    - It is a most excellent promise that ought to draw us in loving gratitude to our gracious Lord!
      - Especially when we consider the way by which He secured life for us—in giving His only Son to die on the cross for us!
      - What a marvellous thing that He wants us to share eternity with Him—that He promises life to us...
        - Let us go forward in His covenant with thanksgiving!
- B. Next, I want you to consider that in this covenant with Adam at creation, the LORD shows clearly what He requires of Adam.
1. This is true in all of God’s covenants. The LORD always makes His expectations for us clear.
- There was no doubt for Abraham that he was to believe the promises that God gave him even though they seemed impossible...
    - And no doubt that he was to receive the sign of circumcision that God appointed for him and his sons.
  - There was no doubt for David that he was to rule faithfully in the fear of God as God’s servant—with a heart to do God’s will,

- and that he was to believe God's promise that God would establish a son of David to sit on his throne forever and ever.
  - And there is no doubt for you that God wants you to repent of your sin and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.
    - You are to look to His cross for the remission of your sins and you are to follow Him and to keep His commandments....
    - And you are to look for your justification, not from your own deeds, but from the perfect deeds of Jesus for your sake.
      - And you are to receive the sign of baptism...and you are to continue in the communion of the church that Christ established.
      - Nothing is vague or unclear about what He requires of us.
2. And what is it that was required of Adam?
- a. In verse 16 and 17 it is clearly spelled out—Adam is not to eat of one tree—the tree that is called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”
    - There is nothing unclear here—it is plainly stated so that even a child could understand it.
    - That is the way the LORD operates.
      - We do not perish because God is unclear about what He expects, but because we do not do what He requires of us.
  - b. This is a very masterful requirement on God's part—simple, yet loaded with profound meaning and significance!
    - 1) It is masterful because it tests Adam to see if he is not only committed to being *good*...
      - but is he committed simply to pleasing His heavenly Father—simply to do what God wants even if it is not a moral issue...
    - 2) You see, Adam was created morally upright—
      - he had a natural inclination to follow all of God's moral commandments—to do the right thing.
      - He had no interest in murder or blasphemy—no inclination toward adultery or lying to his neighbour...
        - He rather wanted to bless his neighbour and to do good to him.
      - What I am saying is that when it came to anything that was morally reprehensible, Adam's will was the same as God's will.
    - 3) But with the tree, he was given a special test—
      - Here was one thing that in itself was not morally reprehensible—
        - There was nothing wrong in itself about eating of this tree...
          - it was only that God had forbidden him to eat from it...
        - This is the point at which Adam was tested...
          - Was he committed to doing the will of God just because it was the will of God.

- God wanted him to be a good guy—and he was—but God also wanted his obedience—his submission.
  - He wanted Adam to do what He told him to do even when there was no moral reason for it.
3. From this we learn a very important lesson about what God expects of us as His creatures—not just in the garden—but always!
- a. He expects us to delight to do His will—
    - to delight in doing what pleases Him just because it pleases Him—
      - for no other reason than because He wants it.
  - b. Submission is hard for us—but it is what God wants from us!
    - It is not enough for us to simply be told that God wants something...
      - We want to know why He wants it, and if we can't see a good reason, we do not want to do it.
      - This is wrong of us.
    - The tree is called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because by eating it,
      - man becomes his own Lord—
      - He takes upon himself the role of deciding what is good and what is evil—what ought to be done and what ought not to be done.
    - That is why in Gen 3:22, after he has eaten from it, the LORD says, “now the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil...”
      - Man was no longer a servant to God, but now he had made himself like God...
        - No longer would he do the will of God, but now he would do his own will!
        - No longer would he walk in obedience to God, but now he would walk according to his own wisdom.
  - c. But do you see that when you come to Jesus, you are coming in order that you might be restored as one who is God's servant?
    - When God calls you to be reconciled to Him in the gospel, the call is not just a call to be forgiven of your sins by trusting in Jesus...
      - It is also a call to return to a right relationship with God through Jesus in which your will is to do the will of God.
        - to do as Jesus did—not your own will, but the will of your father in heaven!
        - to do what Adam ceased to do.
      - Even if He calls you to suffer for Him, you submit to it as Jesus did—not my will, but yours be done!
  - d. Don't misunderstand here...



- The gospel does not teach that you obtain eternal life by doing the will of God...
  - but it does teach that you are saved to do the will of God!
  - That means that if you come to Jesus and it is not your intention to do the will of God, you do not come to Him in the right way.
- A repentant sinner realizes that he, along with the whole human race, is ruined because we forsook the will of God to go our own way.
  - He comes to Jesus for forgiveness and for eternal life which is life in submission to God's will—
    - life that is not detached from God and from what pleases Him.
- So don't kid yourself...
  - If you refuse to do the will of God, it shows that you are not a true believer—you have yet to be reconciled to God through Christ.
  - You are still in rebellion and you need to repent and turn to Christ—that you might live for God and not for yourself.
- e. Do you see what I am saying?
  - The prohibition to eat from the tree shows that what matters to God is that we are committed to doing His will.
    - That is what a right relationship with God entails.
    - Adam was to live in such a relationship—to continue in it for life.
      - And we are to come to Christ that we might by Him be restored to such a relationship.

TRANS> And now, having seen what God promised and having seen what He required in this covenant at creation,

C. I want you to consider thirdly the threat of God for the breach of the covenant.

1. He tells Adam that in the day that he eats from the tree, in that very day, he will surely die...
  - a. The language is very strong—literally, He says, “in the day that you eat of it, dying you shall die,”
    - which is an idiomatic way of saying, “you will most certainly die.”
    - There is nothing at all ambiguous or unclear here.
  - b. There never is in God's covenants.
    - He is very clear in expressing His penalties...
      - Yet, even though He is clear, men muddle up what He says because they don't like what He says—
        - of course not- there are terrible penalties.
    - The New Testament is crystal clear that the punishment God imposes on those who do not come to Christ is everlasting torment without intermission in hell fire forever!

- But because men don't like this, they conclude that it must not be so and that perhaps the words have some different meaning.
  - But it is all just wishful thinking.
    - Jesus repeatedly calls it the place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, and where the fire is not quenched the worm does not die...
    - In Matthew 25, He calls it everlasting punishment...
    - And in Revelation 20:10, the LORD refers to it as the place where "they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."
    - God is never fuzzy in issuing His sanctions...
2. Now let's consider what is included in the penalty of death that is threatened against Adam if he does not do the will of God.
- We learn from scripture that death includes three things...
    - a. First, it includes spiritual death—detachment from God.
      - As it was for Adam, he enjoyed communion with God in the garden.
      - He was close to God so that he saw God's hand of loving care in his life, God providing for him and blessing him...
      - And so that he saw much of the beauty and perfection and of the majesty and glory of God.
        - But that would all be severed if Adam ate of the forbidden fruit.
      - And, as we have seen, Adam also enjoyed moral completeness in the garden...
        - He saw clearly what was morally upright, and he was inclined to that only—he had no desire to do what was morally corrupt.
        - But the death with which he was threatened would cause him to be, as Ephesians 2 describes it, dead in trespasses and sins...
          - He would no longer be able to clearly distinguish right from wrong—and, being left to himself, he would be attracted to what was corrupt and hateful...
          - And even though much morality would remain in him, he would find that even when he tried to do right he would not be able to...
            - Like Paul, he would find that the good he wanted to do, he was not able to do.
            - All of that is spiritual death—death because of separation from God.
    - b. Second, the threatened death includes physical death...
      - God spells this out for him in chapter 3 after he has broken the covenant when He tells him that he will return to the dust...
      - His body that was formed of the dust of the ground will rot and return to dust again.

- And in the meantime, he would feel in his body the pall of death—
  - In his injuries, in his sicknesses, in his decline with old age...
  - All of these as harbingers of his eventual destiny to rot in the grave.
  - His whose honour it had been to walk upon the earth with dominion over it will be reduced to dust and ashes and subdued by the earth.
    - This is physical death...
- c. Third, the threatened death includes eternal death...
  - This is strongly implied in Genesis 2 and would surely have been understood by Adam before the fall distorted his mind...
    - for as we have seen the promise of life was that he might live forever as signified by the tree of life...
      - so surely the threat of death is of death forever...
      - Surely the penalty for refusal to do the will of God can be nothing less than eternal death...
  - In any case, as we have seen that in the New Testament the fact that eternal life is in view as the penalty for sin is made very clear...
    - and the only reason it is denied is not because of honest exegesis but because men don't like it and don't think it is fair...
    - They, who are the guilty transgressors, set themselves up as judges to determine of the justice of their own punishment from God!
      - God, on His part, is willing to mete out that punishment on His only Son that sinners might be pardoned.
      - Apparently, God's Son saw no injustice in it,
        - for He was willing to bear it all for us!

TRANS> So now I have shown the features that are found in this covenant that are found in all of God's covenants...

- Sure promises of life,
- Clear declarations of what He requires of us,
- And clear threats of death if we transgress.

And now to conclude,

### **III. I want to show you thirdly how this covenant in Genesis 2 fits in with the whole scheme of God's dealing with man.**

A. First of all, it should be understood that this covenant is a covenant of works.

1. The church calls it that because it requires Adam to do the will of God.
  - Now I showed you that this is what is always required of us—that we live to please God.
  - There is not a man who ever has lived or who ever will live that God does not require that of...

- We are the creature and He is the creator and it belongs to us to do His will forever...
  - Our experiment with being like God, knowing good and evil has been a disaster....
2. But in the whole scheme of things, Adam was tested to see if he was committed to doing the will of God...
- And he showed that he was not.
  - And it should be understood that God did not intend to test every man and woman that comes into the world individually...
  - He rather created us as a race—with solidarity—so that Adam would be the father of us all and would represent us all.
  - We were in him as those that would proceed from him by natural generation—
    - And God made him the federal head and representative of us all so that if he transgressed, we would all be counted in the transgression.
  - This is clearly stated in the simple pithy statement of 1 Cor 15:22:
    - **1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.**
  - And more fully in Romans 5:12 which says:
    - **Rom 5:12: Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—**
    - Adam was the one through whom sin entered the world...
      - And because it did, everyone since Adam dies—and the reason given is because all sinned...
      - Not that we were individually tested as Adam was, and individually sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, but that when he sinned, we were all counted in that transgression...
        - When he did it, we all did it.
        - As in Adam all die...That is what happened.
3. Some people argue that this is not just—but who do you think you are to say such a thing?
- Would you really like it better if everyone was tested individually?
    - Can you imagine sinless children being born to sinful parents?
  - But regardless of what you think, God counted the whole human race as being in Adam so that when he sinned, we all sinned...
    - and because of that, we come forth from the womb dead in trespasses and sins and destined for eternal death unless God reaches out to save us.
- B. And my friends, that is exactly what God has done in the covenant of grace! He has reached out to save us.

1. We were completely unable to obtain life by the covenant of works—by doing the will of God...
  - Because in Adam we have already rebelled and eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...
  - We cannot now go back and un-eat from the tree—the deed has been done and there is no way to reverse it.
    - Nor can we pay the penalty of the death that we brought upon ourselves in Adam—in Adam, all die...eternally!
    - By what means could we ever pay that great penalty?
  
2. But this is where God comes to our rescue in the covenant of grace!
  - He sent Jesus Christ, His only Son, to come in human flesh that He might be the second Adam.
  - He too was required to do the will of God—and in Psalm 40 it says of Him that He came to do the will of God...
    - He always said that of Himself too—that He did not come to do His own will, but “the will of Him who sent me”
  - And in His case the will of God was much, much, more than abstaining from eating the fruit of a tree!
    - It was also something that was not morally required of Him, but was required only because God commanded it.
    - For Him, the will of God was that He, the perfect, spotless, sinless Son of God who lived in perfect communion with the Father for all eternity...
      - That He should be cut off from God on the cross to bear the transgression of His sinful people!
      - As our representative, He was to do the will of God in a matter that was a million times more difficult than what Adam was to do...
        - What a test this was!
  
  - 3. And in the covenant of grace God promises that all who believe on the LORD Jesus Christ will be saved...
    - We don’t have to do what we are no longer capable of doing—
      - We can no longer do the will of God...
      - All we have to do is look to Jesus who has now done all that God required of Him in order to redeem us!
      - He has borne our iniquities and by His stripes we are healed...
        - He took the punishment so that we could be released!
          - In Adam, all die, in Christ all shall be made alive!
    - This is called a covenant of grace because instead of us having to do the work to meet the requirements,

- God provides His Son to meet the requirements and all that is left to us is to believe.
- But being dead in our trespasses and sins, we won't even do that...
  - So God works in us by His Spirit, giving us a new heart, that turns us back to Him—not to be saved by our works—but to come to Jesus to be saved...
  - And when you do, you are immediately given eternal life—because all the requirements have been met by Jesus on whom you are relying!
    - It is all of grace!
    - And the end result is that we are forgiven, reconciled to God, and promised perfection in which we will be able to do what pleases God—and that only!
- If anyone here is outside of Christ—all I can say is *What are you waiting for?*
  - Until you come to Him, you are in Adam—and in Adam all die...
  - In Christ all are made alive...
    - Why would you continue in death when you might enter into life?
    - Nothing is stopping you but your own wickedness.
      - God is not unclear in His covenant.
      - He tells you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.
- And you who are trusting in Him—
  - What could be more marvellous than to be restored to eternal life on the merits of the One who cannot fail?
  - You have it better than Adam though he was in paradise...
    - Because for him paradise could be lost—but for you it is confirmed forever because Christ has already been accepted...
    - It is not about you and what you do—it is about Him and what He did for you...
      - In Adam, all die, In Christ all shall be made alive!
      - Adam went his own way instead of God's way...
        - Now God's way is open to you in Christ...
        - Will you go God's way? or your own way?