

April 7/8, 2007

*No Perfect People Series*

## **No Perfect People**

### **Genesis 2-3**

Pastor Bryan Clark

If I were to ask you what you would consider to be the single most significant contributing factor to the everyday decisions you make, what would it be? Now we would probably come up with quite a list, but I would like to suggest to you this morning that the single most contributing factor to the most ordinary decisions you make every day is your view of God.

Every single one of us here this morning has a view of God. Your view of God may be relatively accurate, or your view of God may be highly distorted—but you do have a view of God. Even the atheist has a view of God.

Now it's a little bit difficult to unpack what exactly your view of God is, but one of the ways that we can test it is to see how you would respond to this question: If you imagine fully and completely surrendering to God, in your mind does that mean that you would experience more life, or less? Does that mean to you that life would become more restrictive, or more free?

Of course, it's fairly obvious, if you actually believe fully surrendering to God would give you more life, not less, and more freedom, not more restriction, you would of course do that. So if you hesitate to surrender your life to God, I would suggest that you have a distorted view of God.

One of the best chapters in the Bible to help us formulate a correct view of God is found in Genesis chapter 2. If you have a Bible this morning, I invite you to turn with us to Genesis chapter 2. Genesis chapter 1 is all about the Creator God—the God who is so big, the God who is so powerful. As a matter of fact, in Genesis chapter 1 God seems so powerful, He seems so big, that He feels unknowable. He feels distant and far away.

But when you get to Genesis chapter 2, that all changes—that God who is big and seems so distant suddenly becomes very intimate and very personal. For example, in Genesis chapter 2, verse 7, we read these words:

**Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.** (Genesis 2:7, \*NASB)

Now we were told in Genesis chapter 1 that God created man and woman, male and female, in His image—in His image with the ability to be relational and with the ability to somehow reflect God. But when we get to Genesis 2 we get a fuller explanation of that creation.

What's interesting about that is God forms man from the dust of the ground. Now God doesn't need material to work with. He just created the universe out of nothing. So why does God form man out of the dust? The answer is: It's a way of saying this part of creation is something God is intimately involved with.

As a matter of fact, the word “form” there is the Hebrew word that would be used to describe a potter working a piece of clay. It's a very intimate word—just as you imagine a potter getting his hands into the clay and working the clay and forming and molding it. It's a way of saying: When God created us as people made in His image, it was very intimate. God got intimately involved and got His hands in the mix and formed and shaped us. It's a way of saying, *My relationship to people made in My image is going to be different from My relationship to the rest of creation.*

He goes on to say, “Then God breathed life into the nostrils of Adam”—which again is a very intimate picture. God didn’t need to do that. With all of creation (all of creation that breathed), God simply created them and they breathed. But when it came to creating people in His image, the picture gets very intimate. God breathed into his nostrils the very breath of life. It was God’s way of saying, *I am filling this life with the very life of God, the very breath of God, and the essence of this life will be to be filled with the breath of God and to know God in an intimate way as no other creation knows Him.* It’s a very intimate picture.

Go to verse 8:

**The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food.** (vs. 8-9a)

Not only did God intimately create men and women made in His image but He created this fabulous garden that was both pleasing to look at and pleasing to eat. He called it Eden, which is a Hebrew word that means pleasure; it means Paradise. God created this place that He Himself—the God of the universe—called Paradise, pleasure. And He created men and women in His image and He placed them in the Garden that they might walk intimately with Him in a place called Paradise.

That is probably the best picture in all of the Bible of what God has always wanted for you and me—that we would dwell in an intimate relationship with Him, filled with the very breath of God, in a place called Paradise. It’s beautiful.

Genesis 2 goes on to describe the creation of a corresponding partner for Adam who would be called woman and then ends with the statement that they were both naked and unashamed. It’s a beautiful picture of what God has wanted: Two perfect people in a perfect environment that God Himself called Paradise, dwelling in an intimate relationship with God Himself in a way that no other creation would ever experience.

As beautiful as Genesis chapter 2 is, Genesis chapter 3 is equally sad—because in Genesis chapter 3 it all comes crashing down. In Genesis chapter 3, verse 1, we read:

**Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.** (3:1-6)

The serpent of course is Satan himself, who has been cast out of heaven and now it’s his mission to do whatever he can do to destroy what God has made good. So his mission is to figure out a way to tempt or to lure Adam and Eve away from God—which raises an interesting question: How do you tempt someone who literally has it all? How do you tempt someone who is perfect in relationship, is perfect with God, who is in a place called Paradise?

The answer is: The only way to do that is to offer them more. *As good as this is, how do you know that there isn’t more? How do you know that God isn’t really restrictive and God isn’t holding you*

*back?* As a matter of fact, the opening line, when the serpent says, “Indeed, has God said,” is a Hebrew phrase that’s really difficult to translate into English. But the essence of it is a questioning of God’s goodness—a way of saying, *You know, God may not be quite as good as you think He is. God may not be quite as generous as you think He is. As a matter of fact, God may be restrictive. And how do you know that there isn’t more outside of what God has said?*

Now when Eve responds back, she’s referring to what God said in chapter 2 when He introduced the idea of morality into the picture—when He told them that they could eat of any tree of the Garden; in other words, the Garden was a sea of ‘yes’ because of God’s generosity, but there was one tree in the middle that was a ‘no’. God said, “If you eat of this tree, you will surely die.” (Genesis 2:17)

This is the introduction of what we would call moral responsibility—which is understanding that when God made people in His image, He didn’t make them as robots; He didn’t preprogram His computers. But rather, to reflect the image of God, He made them as people with a will to choose—which meant people could choose to obey God or people could choose to disobey God. And God reminds them, *But there are consequences to those choices.*

So now this is what comes back up. The serpent misrepresents God and says, “Hasn’t God said that you can’t eat from *any* tree in the Garden?”—in other words, God is really restrictive. Eve responds back and says, “No, that’s not what God said. God said we could eat from any tree of the Garden except for this one in the middle—and we can’t eat it and we can’t touch it.”

Now that’s interesting. If you go back to Genesis 2, God never said they couldn’t touch it. He just said they couldn’t eat from it. But all of a sudden, Eve is making God more restrictive than He really is, and the focus has moved away from this Garden full of ‘yes’ to the one ‘no’ in the Garden—and that now is the focus of attention. Somehow God is more restrictive than He is generous.

Eve says, “God said if we eat from that one tree or touch it, we shall die.” The serpent says, “You know, you won’t die! I mean, that’s just God kind of trying to scare you, trying to intimidate you. You know, God’s kind of a control freak and this is His way of keeping control over you. But you won’t die. As a matter of fact, you could become your own god and decide for yourself what is good and evil.” In other words, “God may be a lot more restrictive than you think. And if you were to become your own god and make up your own rules and live your life on your own terms, you’re probably going to experience more—because at the end of the day God is really more restrictive than He is generous.”

Adam and Eve think about this, *You know, that sounds pretty good. We could become our own god. We could call our own shots. We could run our own show. We could have more in life.* And in verse 6 it says they were convinced, and they took the fruit and they ate it.

The question is: What happened next? Did they experience more freedom? Did they experience more life? Chapter 3, verse 7:

**Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are**

**you?” He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”** (vs. 7-13)

Notice carefully what the woman said. She knew at this moment, *We have been had. We've been deceived. We've been lied to. He said that we could be our own god. He said that we could decide for ourself what is good and evil. He said that we wouldn't die. He said that being our own god would mean more life, more freedom, not less.* But at that moment she knew, *We've been had. We've been deceived*—because what they found on the other side of that choice was not more; it was less. It was much less.

Suddenly now they are covered with the shame of their sin. They recognize their own guilt. They are separated from God. God comes looking for them in the Garden, and they're hiding from God.

There is a sense in which they now are aware of the consequences of their choice. As a matter of fact, when God confronts Adam, Adam says, “Hey, it wasn't my fault; it was her. It was that woman You gave me.” And now Adam and Eve are pointing fingers, and the whole thing is coming unraveled.

If you look at the very last verse of Genesis chapter 3, you also find out they were kicked out of Paradise. At that moment it was Paradise lost. The question is: Is it lost forever? Adam and Eve went from the innocence and the freedom of Paradise, to the shame and the guilt and the despair of their choice. Not only did Adam and Eve choose for themselves, but at that moment they doomed us all—because from that moment on there would be no perfect people.

In that moment Adam and Eve went from the innocence and the freedom of Paradise to the bondage and the despair of their sin. And in that moment there was no one whose heart grieved more than God—because God knew what He had always wanted for people made in His image. God knew what Adam and Eve had forfeited. And only God fully understood the price tag that would come for their decision. God had said, “If you disobey Me, you will die.”

We read Genesis 3 and we say, “Wait a minute. Adam and Eve didn't die.” Yes, they did. There is a greater death and there is a lesser death. And they died both deaths.

The greater death is a spiritual death. In the Bible, death is separation. Because God is a holy God, all it takes is one sin to separate us from God. In that moment, Adam and Eve were separated from the life of God. What had defined them was that they were filled with the very breath—the very life—of God. And now they were separated from God. What makes this a greater death is this is a death that lasts forever. This is a death that includes the condemnation of the wrath of God.

Physical death is the more obvious but the lesser death. It's meant to be a picture, or a metaphor. It's a constant reminder that there is such a thing as death and there is a greater death—and that is the death that lasts forever. At that moment, Adam and Eve began a slow, painful process of dying. It is the same process every single one of us is experiencing today. We are all in the process of a slow, painful death. And that death is meant to remind us that there is yet a greater death.

The reason death lingers over 70 or 80 years is God's grace and mercy. It's a warning for 70 or 80 years that there is a greater death. And if it isn't addressed, it's a death that will last forever. So we

live in a world of death and dying that constantly is screaming this message: There is a greater death. It is a spiritual death that could last forever.

Of course the question is: Is there no hope? Are we doomed for all eternity? And the answer is: There is hope, and we're told about it in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15. We get just the slightest hint that God is not finished yet. In Genesis 3:15 God is speaking to the serpent and He says:

**And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise [or crush] him on the heel."**

God is saying, "Satan, you think you won, and you may have won this round; but ultimately, at the end of the day, I will still emerge victorious." It will come through the seed of a woman. In other words, it will be flesh. And it will be possible for the enemy to bruise His heel, this seed of a woman. But at the end of the day, the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, and God will ultimately emerge victorious.

It's God's way of saying that He will do what is necessary to ultimately once again bring life out of death. The serpent had brought death to life, but God would bring life to death. You say, "Is that what Adam and Eve understood?" Absolutely. Look at verse 20:

**Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.**

The name Eve means "mother of the living." Well, that's a strange name. They have just been told that they are beginning a process of dying. For the first time in all eternity, death entered into the picture. So the appropriate name would be to call her "mother of the dying."

But what Adam is saying is he heard in God's word a promise that God would ultimately once again bring life out of death. And so he named his wife Eve as his testimony of faith, saying, "God, I believe You. You've made a promise, and I'm going to believe that. So even in this moment of despair, I'm going to name her the mother of the living." You see another hint of it in verse 21:

**The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.**

For the first time in all of eternity, death entered the picture in an ugly way. The blood of these animals was shed in order to cover the shame of the sin of Adam and Eve. And in that there is a picture: This seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent and that would include the shedding of blood in order to cover the shame of our sin.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament and on into the New, that plan of salvation is developed a little bit at a time. You get to the story of Abraham, and God promises Abraham that this promised seed from Genesis 3:15 would come through his family line. But God also adds to that that God Himself will shed His blood to atone for Abraham's inability to keep the covenant. In other words, we know now that this seed of the woman, this flesh, would actually be God Himself who would become flesh. And it would be God's blood that would be shed in order to atone for our inability to keep the covenant.

You move on to Moses and the Law and the sacrificial system and the work of the Temple and the priests. The Bible is clear that the sacrificing of these animals day after day, year after year had no ability to forgive sin; but rather, it was meant to be a picture. It again was a testimony of faith—of saying, "God, You promised that one day You would shed Your blood to cover the shame of our sin. So every time we shed the blood of one of these lambs, it is saying, *God, this is only a picture, this is only a symbol of our belief that You'll keep Your promise one day, and that will be the basis of our salvation.*

That's why on that first Christmas, when the angels announced the birth of Jesus, they said, "Unto you is born a *Savior*." That's why John the Baptist, when Jesus began His ministry, said, "Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world!"—meaning the Lamb would be slain for the sins of the world. God was keeping His promise.

That's why Jesus ultimately voluntarily went to the cross—to shed His blood in fulfillment of the promise God made all the way back in Genesis 3:15: That God Himself would shed His blood, would die our death in order to pay for our sin, that we, in exchange, might receive forgiveness of sin and be restored to a relationship with God. Why? Because that's what God has always wanted for us.

Jesus was buried, and of course Easter is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus—proof positive that God offers victory and life after the grave, in Paradise with Him forever—and all that He freely offers to you and me as a gift.

You say, if it's that's simple, wouldn't everyone receive it? No, there's a problem here. It goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 3. Every single one of us struggles with the same thing that Adam and Eve struggled with. And that is there's something deep within us that causes us to want to be our own god. We're attracted to a message that says, *You know, you could be your own god. You could run your own life. You could call your own shots. You can decide for yourself what's right and wrong. You decide for yourself what's good and evil.*

As a matter of fact, interestingly enough, religion is a byproduct of this desire to be my own god—because for the most part, religion is kind of a manmade system to get to God. It's a way of saying, "God, we'll do this ourselves. God, I'm going to do this my way. And I'll formulate my own way and my own rituals and my own system in order to get to You."

Religion appeals to people because at the end of the day, I can say, "I did this. I kept these rule; I kept these rituals; I jumped through these hoops. Therefore I deserve Paradise." Religion causes us to evaluate ourselves on the basis of comparison. I look at others and say, "You know, compared to them I think I am a pretty good person—certainly more good than bad—and if God is grading on a curve, I think I'm in."

But you know that's not what God says. God says all it takes is one sin. All it takes is one sin to be forever separated from God—because God is a holy God. He cannot dwell in the presence of any sin. So one sin and you're out.

Are there good people in this world? There are many of them—wonderful people. And we might say those good people are drowning in ten feet of water. The world also has some very bad people, and we might say they're drowning in a hundred feet of water. But at the end of the day, what difference does it make if you drown in ten feet of water or a hundred feet of water? You're equally dead. And you're equally in need of saving.

There are those in the religious world today that would tell you there are many different ways to God—that there are all these different religions and all roads eventually lead to God. That's a way of saying, *I'm my own god. I'll call my own shots. We'll decide our own way to God.*

But God disagrees with that. God says, "There's only one way." So I'd pose to you a question this morning: Who do you think has it right? Religious people seeking to be their own gods, or God Himself?

Is there any other way? Clearly not. In Matthew chapter 26, just hours before Jesus was to be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He cried out to the Father and asked Him that question. He said, **“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”** (Matthew 26:39) Jesus was saying, “Father, if there’s any other way to get people back to Paradise, let’s choose that.”

The fact that Jesus went to the cross was proof positive there was no other way. Jesus said it to His disciples in John 14:6, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”**

In Acts 4:12, after the death, burial and the resurrection of Jesus, the writer of Acts says, **“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”**

I can’t imagine how it could be stated more clearly than that. God has established one way from Genesis 3:15, the seed of a woman, God Himself, who would shed His blood in order to cover your sin and mine, that we might have a relationship with Him.

Listen to these words of Romans chapter 5 as Paul describes how Jesus perfectly fulfilled the promise that was made in Genesis chapter 3. He says,

**For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly....But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified [that’s a word that means to be declared legally righteous before God on the basis of Jesus’ blood; He says you’re now perfect] by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.** (Romans 5:6, 8-10)

Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of Genesis 3:15—that God Himself shed His blood that our sins might be forgiven, that Jesus took our death upon Himself on the cross. But more than that, not only are our sins forgiven but Paul says in Romans on that basis we are reconciled. We are restored to a relationship with God. This is everything that God has ever wanted for us: that we might dwell in relationship with Him, that we might be filled with the very breath of God that gives our life meaning and purpose.

Every single one of us, at the deepest part of our being, has a soul. And until that soul finds its rest in God, that soul is restless. There is something deep down within us that says there’s something missing. There’s a restlessness in us that will never be satisfied until we find our relationship with God—because that is what our soul was always meant to experience.

That is why when Jesus hung on the cross and spoke to the thief on the cross (when the thief on the cross called out to Jesus), Jesus said, **“Today you shall be with Me [where?] in Paradise.”** (Luke 23:43) That wasn’t a word Jesus just threw out there. That was a very calculated term. It was Jesus’ way of saying, “This is what it has always been about.”

All the way back to Genesis chapter 2 it has always been about God’s desire to dwell in an intimate relationship with people made in His image in a place called Paradise. And the cross is what Jesus was willing to do—what God was willing to do—to make it possible. This morning God offers that to you and me freely—freely as a gift.

On this Easter morning, some might ask: Why exactly do we need salvation? And the answer is: Because there are no perfect people.

*Our Father, we are thankful this morning that when we were lost in our sin—separated from You, headed for an eternal death—that You were willing to send Your Son to become flesh, the seed of a woman, to be bruised on the heel to ultimately crush the head of the serpent, to ultimately bring life out of death, to make it possible to grant us forgiveness of sin, that we might be reconciled back into a relationship with You. Lord, we understand this is the price You were willing to pay for us to make it back to Paradise because this is what You've always wanted for us. Lord, help us to understand this morning that surrender to You means more, not less. It's freedom, not restriction. It is everything that our soul longs for. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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April 7/8, 2007

## **Study Questions**

*No Perfect People*

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**Genesis 2-3**

Pastor Bryan Clark

#### **Opening Discussion**

1. What do you think is the single most significant factor for determining how a person lives each day?

Pastor Clark suggested it was our view of God. Do you agree or disagree and why?

2. What factors go into cultivating our view of God?

What gives us an accurate view of God, and what causes us to have a distorted view of God?

3. One of the early church fathers once stated that every soul is restless until it finds its rest in God. Do you think that is true?

What evidence of restless souls do we see in our culture?

#### **Bible Study**

1. Read Genesis 2. What did God want for people made in His image?
2. How does Genesis 2 help us form a correct view of God?
3. Do you think most people, including Christians, believe surrender to God will bring more restrictions or more freedom? Why?
4. What was the strategy of the Serpent to tempt Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:1-6?

In what ways is the strategy of the enemy the same today?

5. One of the consequences of the Fall was death. In what way is physical death merely a metaphor for a greater eternal death?

In what way is death and suffering in the world a constant warning from God to deal with our greater death?

6. The core sin of Adam and Eve was thinking they could be their own god and decide good and evil for themselves. That tension between surrendering to God and wanting to be our own god is the theme of Genesis 1-11. In what way do the consequences of sin to the man and woman (3:16-19) reflect God's commitment to get us back to paradise?

What must we acknowledge to receive God's promised salvation (Genesis 3:15)?

7. In what ways can we use the truths of Genesis 1-3 to help people make sense of the suffering in this world and turn their attention toward God?

How does Genesis 1-3 help us cultivate a right view of God in the midst of a suffering world?

## **Application**

1. What God has always wanted for us is to dwell in relationship with Him in paradise. In one or two sentences describe God's plan to get us back to paradise.
2. What evidence would we have from the Bible that there is no other way of salvation?
3. Prayerfully consider whom God would have you invite to the *No Perfect People* series over the next several weeks.