

The Book of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 5:15-16

Session 57: Notetaker

_____	_____
_____ → _____	_____ → _____
_____ / _____	_____ / _____
_____ / _____	_____

The Book of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 5:15-16

Session 57: Purpose and Meaning, pt. 2

Christ died so that we can cease living for ourselves, and begin to live unto Christ, who died for us. To the carnal believer this does not sound like an attractive outcome, but it does to us who are adopted sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. We understand that we are being offered the very best of lives by living unto God. We are not missing out on the best life, we are offered the best life which is offered to us through the death of Jesus. (This is not to say there will be no sufferings or adversities, but in spite of those things, it is a life which is full of joy, where our lives have significance, meaning and purpose – which, by the way, everyone wants whether they realize it or not.)

Let's talk about meaning and purpose for a moment because these constitute the two ways in which people live their lives. Please follow attentively because some of what I have to say to you may be difficult to hear, but it is important for us to hear it and understand it.

People have two ways to live their lives; by meaning or by purpose. In fact, this is exactly what Paul is talking about in verse 15, even though he is using different terminology.

2 Corinthians 5:15 And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth **live unto themselves**, but **unto him which died for them**, and rose again.

Notice that while Christ died for all, only they which “live” can stop living unto themselves and begin living unto Christ. That means that the key to a life of purpose is to trust Jesus Christ as your all-sufficient Savior.

People often confuse these two terms (meaning and purpose), but actually there's an important difference between them.

When people are not saved, they will naturally gravitate to a life of meaning for it is the only kind of life that is available to them.

When People live unto Him, which died for them and rose again, they now have the power to live a life of purpose, which is very different from a life of meaning.

Take for example, an elementary school teacher who teaches arithmetic. What meaningful things can she do with her students? As a teacher, she may find it meaningful to participate in games with her students at recess, as this interaction builds the bond between her and her students. She may find it meaningful to talk to them about some of the world's great mathematicians and their contributions, in hopes of inspiring her class. She may find it meaningful to bring cupcakes to her class because she knows they would enjoy a treat. These things are up to her, and she may decide to do them or not.

But as a teacher, what is her purpose? In this instance, she was hired to teach math. That is why she is in the classroom and success in her job will be determined by this criterion alone. Can you see the difference between her deciding to do some things which have meaning, and her achieving her purpose?

In other words, **meaning** is arbitrary and subjective. It consists of anything one deems to be enriching, inspiring, or beneficial, whether it actually is or not. Bringing cupcakes may cause the children to like the teacher, but it won't teach them math.

Living unto ourselves is like saying, "I don't have any purpose for being here, but since I am here, I guess I should do something." The reason people without God will gravitate to a life of meaning is because a life without purpose or meaning is no life at all, and when people lose both, they have nothing to live for, and they give up on life in a variety of ways. Sometimes they just give up caring and they drop to the very dregs of society, often living in squalor, unkept and uncaring, with no self-respect; they have given up. Other times, they may harm themselves to escape the torment of a life that is empty. But since there is built into every person the trait of self-preservation, most people will look for a life of meaning because it brings them a measure of worth, even if that worth is arbitrary and subjective.

On the other hand, living unto God demonstrates that there's a definite and objective reason for our existence that is beyond ourselves.

Purpose answers the question: Why am I here?

Now, let me ask you a question: Why are you here?

What you believe about God has a huge impact on your answer. If we were not created by Him, then we have no purpose; we are nothing more than an accident of time and chance, which is exactly what atheistic philosophers believe.

Take for example Richard Dawkins. While several prominent secular thinkers have expressed similar materialistic worldviews, Dawkins explicitly famously summarized this exact sentiment in his 1995 book, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*.

"The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference."

Accidental Product of Evolution: Dawkins argues that natural selection is a mindless, unguided process. In his book, *The Blind Watchmaker*, he explains that evolution has no foresight or ultimate purpose.

No Right or Wrong: From a purely materialistic standpoint, Dawkins asserts that absolute objective morality does not exist. Instead, "good" and "bad" are labels humans assign to behaviors shaped by evolutionary survival and social cooperative traits.

No Purpose for Living: Dawkins believes there is no inherent, cosmically ordained purpose given to humanity from the outside. However, he often clarifies that while the Universe is purposeless, humans can still choose to invent and construct their own personal meaning, happiness, and goals.

So, if you were to ask Richard Dawkins the question, "Why are you here?" he would say he was nothing more than an accident of chance with no purpose to his life.

By the way, if answering the question, "Why am I here" is a problem for you, I would refer you to our course on Sonship Transformation which begins by discussing this very issue.

When it comes to meaning and purpose, people can spend their lives searching for whichever one they want. The more important one is purpose, and I will tell you that without God, the first question of “why are you here” is difficult to answer. As a result, people who are unbelievers, and even many who are Believers “in name only” (if you understand what I mean), end up searching for a life of meaning.

Let’s suppose there is a man who has decided there is no God. His only recourse is to live unto himself. What he will naturally do is begin searching for a life of meaning. He may call it a life of purpose, but actually it isn’t, as we will see.

In the “MEANING” mindset, a person’s existence is what comes first. Notice, “meaning” begins with “me.”

Because life can feel empty, people do things in an attempt to make their life meaningful. Even when those things benefit others, ultimately, they are doing it so that their life can have some kind of meaning. Do you see it? Even by living a life which may benefit someone else, the actual motivation is that they are living unto themselves. The meaning they find answers to their existence.

For example, if a mother answers the questions, “Why am I here” by saying, “I am here to take care of my children,” she can find meaning in that task (and by the way, every mother ought to take care of her children), but once the children are grown up or moved away, she may be in danger of losing that meaning. This may send her into a depression or create anxiety until she finds something else to give her life meaning.

I have seen families destroyed over the loss of their child. They set up an altar of photographs and their lives basically stopped. The child is their only topic of conversation and there is nothing that brings them joy. They became bitter against God and would not be consoled. Now their lives are nothing but grief and sadness. Why? They were living unto themselves by investing in a life of meaning which has as its source that which is temporal and earthly, and not a life of eternal purpose.

You do realize, don’t you, that when you live unto God, when you are truly living a life of purpose, you can still love your children and grandchildren with all your

heart? God is not asking us to stop loving our family, helping our neighbors, volunteering our time, donating to charities – He is asking us to stop making those things the primary source of our lives as we live unto ourselves – He is asking us to live unto Him so that we are anchored in something beyond ourselves and beyond this world, so that we are rooted in Someone eternal who will be the source of our lives no matter what happens. In other words, He wants us to have the kind of life we can never have if we are living unto ourselves, if all we have is a life searching for meaning.

When we are saved, we no longer need to search for a life of meaning, we can “live unto God,” (who never changes, never moves off, never dies, never gets angry with us, never cuts us off from the relationship and never abandons us), which means we can have the kind of life God made us to have, an incredible life of purpose that is firmly rooted in an eternal relationship with Him.

As we live unto God, we have a life where the purpose comes first, and then our existence follows.

In other words, my purpose is my reason for existing; it is why I am here in the first place. I answer to my purpose. I am not an accident of evolution, I was created in the image of God to fulfill a purpose that has to do with Him. Don’t confuse this with the bad doctrine circulating in so many churches today. I am not saying that God created you to be a doctor or an engineer or anything like that, just as God did not create me to be a Bible teacher or pastor; that is not your purpose or mine. Being a pastor was a decision that I made.

My purpose is found in being conformed to the image of God’s Son so that I might, 1) become what God designed for me to be, 2) so that I can accomplish God’s will in my life and reveal His glory, 3) so that I can labor with Him in those things He is doing in the world, and 4) accomplish His will later in the heavenly places throughout eternity.

God’s purpose with each of us stretches into eternity! It never ends! And the farther it goes, the more wondrous it becomes!

People often confuse meaning for purpose because a life of meaning can be beneficial to others, which they think is their purpose. But here is the litmus test: If your answer to: “Why you are here” has to do with anything other than God, you are describing a life of meaning. Why? Because your existence came before the thing you are living for. That means that no matter how noble your efforts in life are, you are, at the end of the day, living unto yourself. The measure of it is not whether you are being selfish or sacrificial, the measure is who you are living unto.

A life of meaning has a different starting point (existence) and a different goal (giving meaning to my life) even when people don’t realize that is what is happening to them.

Even though a life of purpose can also produce a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, these two ways of living are not the same, as they have two different starting points and achieve two different goals.

Now, let’s add our second question: For what would I give my life?

When I ask that question, it is for the purpose of helping us discover if we are living a life of meaning (which is ultimately unto ourselves), or if we are we living unto God.

But do not misinterpret the question. This question has two implications to it. You may hear the question and think it is asking you, “What are you willing to die for?” And that is one implication.

But there is another implication. What are you willing to give your existence to? What or who are you willing to LIVE for and die for?

So, let’s recap what we have covered.

The search for meaning starts with me; my existence.

This is followed by my personal void, and then my search for meaning. It so happens that I find meaning in helping others, but that is largely a by-product of my central meaning, it is not what drives me. In this mindset, success is determined by one thing; whether I have found meaning (back to “me”). This is what Paul describes as “living unto ourselves.”

Purpose starts with a mission that precedes my existence. This is followed by my birth to fulfill that mission; me. It is certainly possible to find personal meaning in the fulfillment of my mission. But this is a byproduct of focusing on my purpose; it is not what drives me. In this mindset, success is determined by whether or not the “mission” or reason I was created was fulfilled (back to mission).

While this is not meant to be a philosophical discussion on the meaning and purpose of life, Paul says here in 2 Corinthians 5, that Christ died and rose again so that we might not live unto ourselves (sounds like a life of searching for meaning) but that we might live unto God (which sounds like a search for purpose).

Paul is counting on us getting the point because he is offering us a life that is different, and that is where verse 16 comes in.

2 Corinthians 5:16 **Wherefore** henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.

What you may not yet realize (because we haven’t studied verse 16 yet) is that the kind of life you are living (unto yourself/meaning or unto God/purpose), will determine how you think about things. If you are going to think about things like your heavenly Father, that can only be a by-product of living unto the One who died for you and rose again! Do you see how important it is to get verse 15 right?

If you are reading / watching this session, do you know you can join us live on Zoom? We publish session notes and note-takers that allow you to interact with the lesson. You can request these resources or inquire about how to join us live on Sundays or Tuesdays by contacting us by phone at (888) 605-3202, or email staff@mbiworldwide.org.

If you are not sure about where you will spend eternity, we care about you and we want you to have eternal life. Scan the QR code below to watch a short video that will explain how you can have salvation through Jesus Christ.



The Most Important Decision

Doctrinal Summary: Session 57

Session 57 advances the doctrinal force of 2 Corinthians 5:15 by establishing that the death and resurrection of Christ were not designed merely to secure forgiveness, but to bring the Believer under a new governing principle of life. The issue is no longer self as the center, source, or measure of life, but Christ as the One unto whom the Believer now lives. The verse presents a dispensationally vital contrast between life ordered around self and life ordered around the risen Christ, who died for the Believer and rose again as the ground of the Believer's new orientation before God.

The Session defines the doctrinal distinction between meaning and purpose in relation to the Believer's walk. Meaning belongs to the realm of subjective value assigned after the fact of existence. It begins with the individual and seeks some enriching, beneficial, noble, or emotionally satisfying object to give life a sense of worth. Purpose, however, is objective, prior, and God-derived. It begins with God's design, God's will, and God's eternal counsel in Christ, so that the Believer's

existence is interpreted by Divine intent rather than by personal fulfillment, temporal relationships, or earthly usefulness.

Living unto self is therefore not measured merely by outward selfishness, moral corruption, or refusal to benefit others. A man may be sacrificial, affectionate, charitable, and socially useful, yet still be living unto himself if the controlling reference point of his life is his own identity, fulfillment, grief, reputation, relationships, or sense of significance. The doctrinal test is not whether the activity is noble, but unto whom the life is being lived. Temporal things may be proper in their place, but they become doctrinally disordered when they become the foundation, object, or functional source of life.

Living unto God rests upon the Believer's new standing and identity in Christ. The Believer is not an accidental product seeking personal meaning, but one created by God and redeemed in Christ for conformity to the image of His Son, the fulfillment of His will, the manifestation of His glory, and participation in His present and eternal operations. In this sense, purpose precedes existence: the Believer does not invent a reason for being, but receives and answers to the reason God has revealed. Personal satisfaction may accompany purpose, but it must remain a byproduct rather than the governing end.

The movement into 2 Corinthians 5:16 shows the necessary doctrinal consequence of verse 15. "Wherefore" indicates that because Christ died and rose again to deliver Believers from self-oriented living, the Believer must henceforth operate from a changed system of perception. To know no man after the flesh is to cease evaluating men, Christ, and self, according to the old order of fleshly identity, earthly standing, and temporal estimation. The Believer's thinking must be governed by the new life, new identity, and new purpose established in Christ, so that doctrine reshapes not only conduct, but perception, value, and the very reason for living.

Beloved, do not let this doctrine remain merely a matter of definition, outline, or theological precision. Let it search the heart. The Spirit of God would have each of us ask honestly before the Lord: unto whom am I living? It is possible to possess sound doctrine in the mind while still allowing self, comfort, fear, grief, approval, family, ministry, or earthly responsibility to function as the practical center of life. The issue is not whether these things have a place, but whether they have taken the place that belongs only to Christ.

Therefore, receive the doctrine of 2 Corinthians 5:15 as both correction and comfort. Correction, because Christ did not die and rise again so that we might sanctify a self-centered life with religious language. Comfort, because He has not left us to invent our own reason for being or to secure our worth from fragile and passing things. He has given us Himself, His life, His purpose, His calling, and His eternal hope. To live unto Him is not the loss of life, but the recovery of life as God intended it to be lived.

So let us bring every lesser attachment, fear, ambition, sorrow, and pursuit under the authority of the risen Christ. Let us love our families, serve our neighbors, labor in our callings, endure criticism, and speak the gospel, but let all of it be done as those who belong to Another. We are not our own; we were bought with a price. The great question before us is not merely, "What gives my life meaning?" but, "Is my life being yielded to the One who died for me and rose again?"

May this doctrine move us from admiration to obedience, from conviction to yielded-ness, and from self-reference to Christ-reference. May we learn to measure life not by how fulfilled we feel, how approved we are, or how much we have preserved for ourselves, but by whether the Lord Jesus Christ is being honored in our thinking, affections, service, and witness. Since He died for us and rose again, let us, by faith, live unto Him.