



ALL SAINTS
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Covenant Theology Week Two

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Introduction to Covenants

- The story of how God has dealt with humanity and creation is all about covenants.
- The study of the various covenants between God and man is covenant theology.
- In the reformed tradition, we use covenants as **a framework to understand the Bible.**

The Plan

- Week One--Part One: Introduction to Divine Covenants, pp. 1-63
- Week Two--The Covenant of Creation, pp. 67-87
- Week Three--Adam: The Covenant of Commencement & Noah: The Covenant of Preservation, pp. 91-126
- Week Four--Abraham: The Covenant of Promise & The Seal of the Abrahamic Covenant, pp. 127-166
- Week Five--Moses: The Covenant of Law & Excursus: What structures scripture—covenants of dispensations, pp. 167-228
- Week Six--David: The Covenant of Kingdom & Christ: The Covenant of Consummation, pp. 229-300

Sources

- For this class, I am largely drawing material from Christ of the Covenants, by TE O. Palmer Robertson.
- This is a now classic text originally published in 1980. It is commonly used as a text in our reformed seminaries.
- I am also supplementing with other material, and all errors are mine.

Today

- Finish Introduction
 - Diversity in the Covenants
- The Covenant of Creation

Diversity in the Covenants

“Both structurally and thematically the covenants of God are one. A covenantal unity characterizes God’s dealings with men from creation to consummation. But the various covenants administered throughout history do not appear as monotonous duplications of one another. A luxuriant diversity of covenantal administration emerges as history progresses.”
CoTC 53.

Pre/Post Creation

- It is clear from Scripture that from creation on, God has dealt with his people via covenants.
- It has been suggested that there was/is a pre-creation covenant between the persons of the Trinity to redeem a people.
- Scripture does not give us much on this, and Robertson thinks it seems artificial.
 - Plenty of scholarship has occurred on this since 1980.
- I offer no opinion and choose not to speculate.

Covenant or Works/Grace

“The division of God’s covenant dealings with men in terms of a ‘covenant of works’ and a ‘covenant of grace’ has much to commend it. It emphasizes properly the absolute necessity of recognizing a pre-fall relationship between God and man which required perfect obedience as the meritorious ground of blessing. In this structure, Adam cannot be regarded as a purely mythical figure. . . . Because of its inherent emphasis on the unity of God’s redemptive program, this structure delivers the church from the temptation to draw too strongly on a dichotomy between old and new testaments.” CoTC 55.

Old Covenant/New Covenant

“The incarnation of Christ represents the most basic differentiation-point in this history. The bond of God with man before Christ may be called ‘old covenant’ and the bond of God with man after Christ may be called ‘new covenant.’ The ‘old covenant’ may be characterized as ‘promise,’ as ‘shadow,’ as ‘prophecy’; the ‘new covenant’ may be characterized as ‘fulfillment,’ as ‘reality,’ as ‘realization.’” CoTC 57.

Old Covenant/New Covenant

- Much of the NT deals with how the new covenant fulfills the old.
- E.g. the entire book of Hebrews.
- Also much of Galatians.

Covenants Categorized

- Adam: the covenant of commencement
- Noah: the covenant of preservation
- Abraham: the covenant of promise
- Moses: the covenant of law
- David: the covenant of the kingdom
- Christ: the covenant of consummation

We will explore these over the next four weeks.

The Covenant of Creation

- Robertson discusses the the covenant of creation as having two aspects.
 - General Aspect
 - Focal Aspect
- The first deals with creation ordinances and the broader duties Adam had.
- The second deals with the specific probationary test.

The Covenant of Creation

“By the very act of creating man in his own likeness and image, God established a unique relationship between himself and creation. In addition to this sovereign creation-act, God spoke to man, thus determining precisely the role of man in creation. Through this creating/speaking relationship, God established sovereignly a life-and-death bond. This original bond between God and man may be called the covenant of creation.” Robertson 67.

Genesis 1:26-31

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” 29 And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:1-14

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist[c] was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— 7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. 14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Genesis 2:15-24

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat[d] of it you shall surely die.”

18 Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for[e] him.” 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed[f] 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. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam[g] there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 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. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made[h] into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 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.”[i]

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

The Covenant of Creation: General Aspect

Three Creation Ordinances

- Sabbath
- Marriage
- Labor

The Covenant of Creation: General Aspect

“Man, as part of creation, is responsible to obey the ordinances embedded in creation’s structure. Three ordinances, inherent in God’s creational orderings, deserve particular attention. They are the Sabbath, marriage, and labor. Each of these creational orderings stands as an inviolable principle inherent in the structure of the world as God has ordained it.”
CoTC 68.

WLC 20

Q.20. What was the providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created?

A. The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was the placing him in paradise, **appointing him to dress it**, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth; putting the creatures under his dominion, and **ordaining marriage for his help**; affording him communion with himself; **instituting the Sabbath**; entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, of which the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.

The Sabbath

- While modern culture, and unfortunately many Christians, disregard the sabbath, it is a creation ordinance which is as binding today as it was the first day.
- It did not originate at Sinai, and it has not been abrogated in the NT.

Genesis 2:3

“So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”

The Sabbath

- God did not “bless” the sabbath for himself—he did so for man.

Exodus 20

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ **For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.** Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Mark 2

25 And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: 26 how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” 27 And he said to them, “**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.** 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath

- In addition to the 6:1 pattern of the weekly sabbath, there is also a sense in which the creational idea of **entering into a sabbath rest** is part of God's plan.

Deuteronomy 12:8-11

⁸ “You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, ⁹ **for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the LORD your God is giving you.** ¹⁰ But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and **when he gives you rest** from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, ¹¹ then to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the LORD.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹² “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ **You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.** Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Hebrews 4:1-10

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

“As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest,’”

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” 5 And again in this passage he said,

“They shall not enter my rest.”

Hebrews 4:1-10

6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 **So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,** 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Marriage

- Marriage was instituted by God as part of the covenant of creation.
- It is an ordinance that is in effect for all of humanity.
- This is why it is not a sacrament—it is not limited to Christians.
- Obviously not everyone is married, but everyone must respect the sanctity of marriage.

Genesis 2:21-24

²¹ 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. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ 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.”

²⁴ **Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**

Marriage

- Like the Sabbath, marriage was instituted at creation.
- It pre-dates Sinai and continues in the new covenant era.
- It is expressly affirmed by Jesus.

Matthew 19

3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?” 4 He answered, **“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6** So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” 7 They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” 8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, **but from the beginning it was not so.** 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Marriage

- Note that as instituted in Genesis 2, marriage is between one man and one woman for life.
- Later examples in the OT of men with multiple wives are never normative.
- The nature of true marriage excludes polygamy, homosexuality, and no fault divorce.

Marriage

“God’s creational orderings for marriage and family have continuing significance in the purpose of redemption. The propagation of the race through the institution of marriage indicates a primary means by which God’s purposes in redemption find realization. Not by a method contrary to the structures of creation, but by a method in conformity with creation, God accomplishes his purposes of redemption. Marriage, therefore, may be regarded as a most significant dimension in God’s creational ordering. This ordinance continues to have binding significance on man in redemption.” CoTC 79.

Labor

“The solidarity of God’s ordinance of labor with the creation order may be seen in its immediate connection with the Sabbath principle.

Meaningful rest may be experienced by the creation only in the context of meaningful labor. One day’s rest in seven clearly implies six days of labor. By God’s own pattern of creation, and by his blessing the creation in terms of this pattern, man’s order for labor is established.” CoTC 79.

Labor

- Work itself is not part of the curse of the fall.
- It was instituted before the fall.
- It was made more difficult and futile as part of the curse, but man was made to work.

Genesis 2

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden **to work it and keep it.**

Genesis 3

17 And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,

‘You shall not eat of it,’

cursed is the ground because of you;

in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;

and you shall eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your face

you shall eat bread,

till you return to the ground,

for out of it you were taken;

for you are dust,

and to dust you shall return.”

Labor

- As Robertson points out, the Sabbath implies that man is working the other six days.
- Consider how the Fourth Commandment is worded.

Exodus 20

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ **Six days you shall labor, and do all your work,** ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Labor

- And of course the creation ordinance of Labor has not been abrogated in the new covenant.
- It has rather been affirmed.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

10 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living

The Covenant of Creation: Focal Aspect

- The Probationary test
- Eschatological Hope

The Covenant of Creation: Focal Aspect

“In considering the prohibition of Genesis 2:17, it is essential to appreciate the organic unity between this commandment and the total responsibility of man as created. The requirement concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil must not be conceived of as a somewhat arbitrary stipulation without integral relation to the total life of man. Instead, this particular prohibition must be seen as the focal point of man’s testing.” CoTC 81.

The Covenant of Creation: Focal Aspect

- Adam's end state was not to live forever in the garden.
- He had an eschatological hope, just like we do.
- Our ultimate hope is not heaven.
- New heavens and new earth with resurrected bodies.
- Adams was the same.

The Covenant of Creation: Focal Aspect

“[M]an was required to do many things under the provisions of the covenant of creation. But the probationary test concerning the tree established a focal point at which man’s submission to the Creator could be scrutinized. Now the point of testing reduces itself to a man’s willingness to choose obedience for the sake of obedience alone. The raw word of God in itself must become the basis of man’s action.”
CoTC 84.

The Probation Tree

- The tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolized Adam's probationary test.
- It was also the means by which Adam was to reach a state of maturity—either by obeying or by disobeying.
 - If he obeyed, he would have an enhanced sense of good and evil from having obeyed.
 - If he failed, he would have any even greater sense of the same.

The Probation Tree

“Therefore, the covenant of works puts man to the test at this tree. He has two options: (1) eat and die; (2) don’t eat and live. Either way Adam will put that word to the test and see the truth of God’s word is inescapable. He will learn good and evil, but he will learn it either in submission to and worship of God or in rebellion against and in opposition to God.” Lane G. Tipton, *Foundations of Covenant Theology*, Session 8.

The Probation Tree

- Adam had to choose rather to worship and obey God for God's own sake or to raise himself and his own will over the Creator.
- The seemingly arbitrary nature of the test emphasizes this.
- There was no ethical judgment required other than to obey God—or not.

The Covenant of Creation: Focal Aspect

“To do the good and reject the evil from an unreasoned insight into their respective natures is a noble thing, but it is a still nobler thing to do so out of regard for the nature of God, and the noblest thing of all is the ethical strength, which, when required, will act from personal attachment to God, without for a moment inquiring into these more abstruse reasons. The pure delight in obedience adds to the ethical value of a choice. In the present case it was made the sole determinant factor, and in order to do this an arbitrary prohibition was issued, such as from the very fact of its arbitrariness excluded every force of instinct from shaping the outcome.” Geerhardus Vos, Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments 32 (Banner of Truth 2014)(Originally published 1948).

The Covenant of Creation: Focal Aspect

“Man was to attain something he had not attained before. He was to learn the good in its clear opposition to the evil, and the evil in its clear opposition to the good. Thus it will become plain how he could attain to this by taking either fork of the probation choice. Had he stood, then the contrast between good and evil would have been vividly present in his mind: the good and evil he would have known from the new illumination his mind would have received through the crisis of temptation in which the two collided.”

The Covenant of Creation: Focal Aspect

“On the other hand, had he fallen, then the contrast of evil with good would have even more vividly impressed itself upon him, because the remembered experience of choosing the evil and the continuous experience of doing the evil , in contrast with his memory of the good would have shown most sharply how different the two are. The perception of difference in which the maturity consisted related to the one pivotal point, whether man would make his choice for the sake of God alone.” Vos 31-32

Adam's Hope

- Adam was (initially) under the covenant of works.
- But his end goal was not to merely remain in the Garden of Eden forever.

Adam's Hope

- Genesis 1-3:5 Primeval Special Revelation
- The revelation is sparse and mostly in symbols.
- The tree of life symbolizes life in its highest degree. This has a sacramental cast.
- The tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolizes Adams's probationary state.
- The serpent symbolizes temptation and sin.
- God's covering Adam and Eve with animal skins anticipates the Gospel.

Adam's Hope

Note: The fact that these things have symbolic significance does not mean that they are not true. We absolutely affirm that the events related in Genesis 1-3 are literal and historical.

Adam's Hope

- As a creature, Adam had a natural inclination toward God, but God owed him nothing.
- God condescended, out of his own good pleasure and for his own glory, to make a covenant with Adam—offering him the hope of ultimate fulfillment by fulfilling his priestly office in a higher state of life.
- This was Adam's (first) eschatological hope.

WCF 7:1

“The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet **they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward**, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.”

WCF 7:2

“The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein **life was promised to Adam** and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.”
WCF 7:2.

The Tree of Life

- The Garden has the character of a temple.
 - Man is made to worship God. Adam was a priest-king, and the Garden was his temple.
- There is no indication Adam (or Eve) ate from the tree of life.
- It symbolized the hope of the future state to come.
- It has a sacramental character.

The Tree of Life

- After the fall, the Garden is guarded because fallen Adam might try eat the fruit when he had no right to do so.
- It is implied that only the newly fallen Adam had this propensity to eat of the fruit of the tree life inappropriately.

Gen. 3:22-24

“²² Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, **lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat**, and live forever—” ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”

The Tree of Life

- The Tree of Life comes back around in Revelation.
- “ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” Rev. 2:7.
- It also comes back again in Rev. 22. More on that later.

The Tree of Life

“From the significance of the tree in general its specific use may be distinguished. It appears from Gen 3:22, that man before his fall had not eaten of it, while yet nothing is recorded of any prohibition which seems to point to the understanding that the use of the tree was reserved for the future, quite in agreement with the eschatological significance attributed to it later. **The tree was associated with the higher, the unchangeable, the eternal life to be secured by obedience throughout his probation.**”
Geerhardus Vos, Biblical Theology 28.

Adam's Hope

- So what exactly did Adam's eschatological hope look like?
- We do not have a lot of detail from the scriptures.
- We are limited to what God has revealed to us.

Adam's Hope--Summary

- Adam was in a probationary state in the garden.
- He had an eschatological hope that likely included a glorified body and future state of bliss worshipping God.
- The details are sparse, but can say this much.

Rev. 22:1-5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; **also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.**

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Poythress

“The tree of life is present, renewing the blessing of Eden in Genesis 2:9. Access to God’s life-giving blessings, barred after the Fall, is here renewed . . . The point is that Eden is back, with its fullness of blessing multiplied many times.”

Vern Poythress, The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation 193.

Robertson

“Apparently the tree of life symbolized the possibility of being sustained in the condition of covenantal blessing and life. If man would pass the test of probation, he would live forever. This sign of perpetual blessing reappears in the biblical imagery of consummation. The tree of life appears once more. This time 12 different varieties of fruit appear, providing freshness of life according to each month of the year (Rev. 22:2.” CoTC 86.

Robertson

“The ultimate alternatives of the covenant of creation are spelled out quite explicitly. Clearly this relationship between man and his Creator may be described as a ‘bond of life and death sovereignly administered.’ Cursing and blessing, life and death—these are the alternatives faced by man under the covenant of creation. The outcome focuses on the probation test.” CoTC 86.

