God's Covenant with man

Chapter 2 – Covenantal Beginnings: The Covenant of Creation

Summary

It is fairly rare that we speak of God’s Covenant of Creation, but it is not a concept which is foreign to the church in history. Robertson writes, in Christ of the Covenants, “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.”

Paul focuses the opening chapter of his epistle to the Romans on the knowledge all men have of their creator, simply by observation of creation, and, that many unrighteously suppress this knowledge. Romans 1:20-21 – “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

This is followed by Paul’s writing against the sins of all people – that God has given over people to the slavery of their sins, and they have taken the ball and run with it. In the above paragraph, he emphasizes their knowledge of those transgressions – knowledge they have as part of their very creation.
Creation of man – and ordinances associated with it:

Adam, our first father, was created in communion with God. He was not only forbidden eating of the fruit of the tree, but he was placed in creation with some very specific positive instructions. He was told, in Genesis 1:28, to "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." The work of “subduing” the Earth was placed in the context of God’s creative work, which ended on the sixth day. The seventh day of creation, on which God rested from his work, was blessed, and sanctified.

We learn also that Adam was not designed for solitary life, but to be joined to another. In Genesis 2:23-24, we read of the God’s design for marriage: “The man said, This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man. For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

All these broader aspects (i.e. beyond the prohibition of the tree of knowledge of good and evil) illustrate the way in which man was brought into the order of creation. Now, let’s consider this more specifically.
1. Let’s think briefly about how Adam related to God covenantally. Though the word for covenant does not appear in the Genesis account of chapters 1 and 2, it’s safe to say that before the Fall he was indeed under covenant. Sketch out the elements of the pre-Fall relationship between God and Adam in covenantal terms (as we did in the last chapter’s discussion).
In this chapter of *Covenants*, Robertson has had us look at three “ordinances” of creation – three elements of the creation story which relate God to man by virtue of their relationship to the creation story. These are, as alluded to before, the Sabbath, labor and marriage. Throughout human history, these three elements of human life have been corrupted, just as we have, as a result of the Fall.

*The Sabbath*

The degree to which Christians ought to observe the Sabbath has been hotly debated throughout the ages, and we’d best not get too deeply entrenched here. But we can and should note the blessings of this day, and the poverty of the observance of it by much of Christendom.

2. As we read in Gen. 2:3, God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. In what ways is it blessed, and/or in what ways are we blessed by it? (liberally quote scripture if you like! 😊)
3. In what ways, briefly do we as a society, or we as Christians, make light of the Sabbath? Should we be concerned about this?

4. We will be speaking, as we go through the rest of this study, about the ways in which Israel points forward, through all their exercises of religion, to Christ. How does the Sabbath observed by Israel, and by contrast, our observance of the Lord’s Day, reflect the differences between the church before Christ, and that afterward? Can you make a connection regarding Christ’s work?
Labor

It may seem strange that labor is included here, but it is in fact part of the mandate which Adam was given. He was told to “subdue” and “have dominion” over God’s creation. Labor is something which man should enjoy – something which should be a “principal means by which man’s enjoyment of creation is assured” (Robertson)

5. Just as we celebrate the reprieve of the Sabbath rest, we should consider the 6-day cycle of work a blessing as well. Is there scriptural support for such a concept?

6. How does this blessing of the work of our hands get warped in our society? How does an unhealthy view of work affect us & our relationships (to each other and to God?)
Marriage

Again, this “covenant” has its origins in the very creation of man. Adam was created, but his creation was not deemed good in solitude – he needed a helpmate “comparable to him”. Hence, Eve, and the institution of marriage.

7. In light of verses such as Gen 2:22-24, Matt. 19:4-6, Eph 5:25-33, (and others if you would like to look ‘em up 😊 ) how has society corrupted the covenant of marriage?
8. *Point for pondering*... Robertson speaks of the “radical obedience” of Christ’s perfect work at the end of the chapter... These areas of our lives of which we’ve been speaking, if we conduct ourselves as we see prescribed in scripture (also “radical” in the world’s eyes) will bring a particular brand of flak from our neighbors. Reflections?

9. Can you think of ways in which these three creation institutions are reflected in the character of Christ’s relationship to His people? How do we see labor, Sabbath, and marriage reflected in what He did and/or will do?
In conclusion, and thinking ahead

We see in the opening chapters of Genesis a relationship spelled out between God and man, between God and his created order. It involves blessing and curse, life and death – the “bond of blood sovereignly administered” seems clearly to be in view here, though we don’t see the word “covenant” until Genesis 6:18.

Adam failed that test – to fulfill the stipulations of the covenant of works. However, our God is a great, gracious and merciful God, and Adam’s fall was not the end of history. God showed this mercy in his gracious promise the first administration of what we might call the *covenant of grace* in Genesis 3. Our discussion next time will begin a series of discussions about the unfolding expressions of God’s gracious Covenant.

Quotes & quips for rumination –

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin wrote,

“There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty... Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will.”

From John Murray’s *Principles of Conduct*,

“The stress laid upon the six days of labour needs to be duly appreciated. The divine ordinance is not simply that of labour; it is labour with a certain constancy. There is indeed respite from labour, the respite of one whole day every recurring seventh day. The cycle of respite is provided for, but there is also the cycle of labour. And the cycle of labour is as
irreversible as the cycle of rest. The law of God cannot be violated with impunity. We can be quite certain that a great many of our physical and economic ills proceed from failure to observe the weekly day of rest. But we can also be quite sure that a great many of our economic ills arise from our failure to recognize the sanctity of six days of labour. Labour is not only a duty; it is a blessing. And in like manner, six days of labour are both a duty and a blessing.”

From Federal Husband, by Douglas Wilson:

“...God’s dealings with people throughout history (which are always covenantal) are set before us in the New Testament as the pattern for husbands to follow. The doctrine of male headship in marriage is set down for us in Scripture in a way which relates the whole thing to a right understanding of the divine covenantal order: “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3)

The covenantal order is plain. The head of Christ is God. This does not mean that Christ is less than God in His nature or being, but it does mean that the Father exercises authority over the Son. The Son is equal to the Father with regard to His nature; theologians describe this in terms of what is called the ontological Trinity. But with regard to how the Father and the Son relate to one another, the Father has all authority. Theologians describe this in terms of what is called the economical Trinity.

Within the Triune God, the Father is the economic head of the Son. This means He has authority over the Son with regard to their roles. The Son is equal to the Father in nature and being but did not consider that equality something to be grasped (Phil 2:5-8). He submitted Himself to the will of the Father, and that submission has never been seen by any orthodox Christian as an admission of substantial inferiority to the Father.

In our modern egalitarian world, submission is always seen as a form of losing or of being inferior in some way. But we fall into this error because we no longer think in a Trinitarian fashion. Submission is seen as entailing inferiority
because we do not understand the deity of Christ and His full submission to the Father. ...

A man’s head is Christ, and a woman’s head is man. But this headship does not necessitate inferiority. Paul teaches us that a woman is man’s equal ontologically. Both male and female are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27), and Paul emphatically declares that in Christ differences between the sexes are nonexistent. (Gal 3:26-29)