

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: Covenant: God's Way of Relationship



A Teaching Sermon: "The Covenant of Creation, Part One"

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A covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. A covenant is characterized by a bond, a binding oath, signs and seals, cutting, a bond in blood, life and death, provisions, and in the case of God's divine covenants, it is unilateral. God's multiple bonds with His people unite into a single relationship. Details may vary, but the covenants of God are one. By structure and by theme, God's covenants are one.

Each successive covenant builds on the previous relationship, continuing the basic emphasis already established. In the progression of the covenant of grace we can find a unity in historical experience as God deals with His people.

The framework of covenant is "I will be Your God and you will be My people." God is with us. O. Palmer Robertson says, "In the covenant of grace we can distinguish:

Adam: the covenant of commencement a/k/a the covenant of creation, the covenant of God's favor, the covenant of works, the covenant of life, the Adamic covenant

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 (Robertson, *Covenants*, page 61)

The law-covenant under Moses did not annul the covenant of promise made to Abraham (Gal. 3.17). Law in distinction from promise was given to reveal sin (Gal. 3.19). The Law uncovered sinful man's inclination to self-trust. The unity of the covenant of grace was not ruptured; rather revelation progressed to bring man closer to Jesus, the way, truth, and life. God has a single purpose—I will be your God and you will be My people. God with us.

The Covenant of Creation

By the word of His mouth God created all that is. He declared it good. He created humanity, male and female, in His own likeness and image. He established a unique relationship between Himself and what He created. He also spoke to man and determined man's role and responsibilities. He also established unilaterally and sovereignly a life-and-death bond. Some theologians, like O. Palmer Robertson, call this original bond relationship the covenant of creation. Others call it the covenant of favor or the covenant of life and still others call it the covenant of works. First we will look at the position called the covenant of creation.

The covenant of creation is so-called because of the general aspect of the broad responsibilities of humanity to the Creator and then the focal point of the specific responsibility of man arising

from the probation or testing command instituted by God. In this view, to call the original covenant a covenant of “works” narrows the original bond between Creator and humanity and deprives it of its kingdom orientation.

The general aspects of this covenant are found in Genesis 1.26-28, Genesis 2.1-3, and in Genesis 2.15-18.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image: in the image of God He created him: male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “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.” Genesis 1:26-28.

“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because in it He rested from all the work which God had created and made.” Genesis 2:1-3

God provided creational orderings and holds humanity accountable for obeying the ordinances embedded in creation’s structure. These orderings are considered inviolable and inherent in the structure of the world as God ordained it.

The first ordinance is the institution of the Sabbath. It begins with the pattern of God’s creative activity with the structural order of six and one. In six days God created and on the seventh He rested. Genesis 2.3 tells us that God “blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it.” He blessed this day with respect to His creation and to humanity in particular. The Sabbath came into being for the sake of man because it was for the good of humanity and the whole of creation. (Mark 2.27)

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath:

Therefore the Son of Man is LORD also of the Sabbath.” Jesus, Mark 2:27, 28

The Sabbath principle continues even today because of its creational character and the Sabbath blessing.

In the Law God tells His people to remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it or keep it holy (Exodus 20.8, 11). Even the animals are to participate in this rest. God wants to bless the whole of creation through this institution.

The Sabbath delivers people from being enslaved to labor. By God’s grace, provision for seven days will come from six days of labor. God gave relief from work 52 days a year or 1 ½ months out of 12. We must choose this, to cease from our labor. On the Sabbath, the Lord “refreshed Himself” (Exodus 31.17). It is a time to enjoy what has been created. (Exodus 23.12) Remembering the Sabbath honors the Lord of creation, the Creator. By sanctifying the Sabbath, by setting it apart, God indicates His expectation for us to bring ourselves and the fruit of our labor to be consecrated before Him; for us to gather in His presence to worship Him and to honor Him.

Israel was to celebrate a weekly Sabbath, a Sabbath year, and a jubilee Sabbath. The seventh year Sabbath was to protect the land from abuse and provide refreshment to God's people. The land was to rest because even though the land is at man's disposal, the land is the Lord's.

The idea is that humanity is not to be captive to the creation. We were not created to exist for labor alone but to live in the peaceful enjoyment of God's good creation.

In the jubilee year all debts were to be cancelled. Isaiah 61.1-3 uses this sabbatical imagery to describe the proclamation of liberty coming with the Messiah. Jesus characterizes His personal ministry using the same imagery (Luke 4.18, 19). **"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."** Luke 4:18, 19.

In the Sabbath we see the pattern of progress in God's dealings with His people. In Psalm 95.11 we see God's denial of rest for Israel because of their sin in the wilderness. Because Joshua could not give Israel "rest," a Sabbath yet remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4.8, 9).

The Sabbath determines much of history for the people of God. For example, Israel's 70 years of captivity results from Israel's sin. Now the land will observe an enforced accumulation of Sabbaths during the exile (Leviticus 26.33-35). The years of captivity compensated for Israel's neglect of the sabbatical principle. (See also 2 Chron. 36.21.) Daniel speaks of 70 sevens which structure the eschatological expectations of God's people.

We have to consider and understand the role of the Sabbath in the origin, the history, and the eschatology of the world to see its significance in the new covenant. **The Sabbath was not abolished.** It is a creation ordering. Instead we should see how the Sabbath ordinance reaches its consummation in the new covenant. With redemption comes a consummate restoration and rest. (Deut. 5.12) **Creation originates a people of God and redemption recreates a people of God.**

By His resurrection from the dead, Jesus consummated God's redemptive purposes. A new creation occurred. The original creation launches the world, but the resurrection-creation brings the world to its ultimate destiny. **The new covenant radically alters the Sabbath perspective.** We begin the week rejoicing in the rest accomplished by the resurrection of Christ and then we joyfully enter into six days of labor confident of success. On the first day of the week we bring God the first and the best, and we know He will bless the rest of the week. We bring God the offering of Jesus Christ and our own gifts, the first fruits, and we do it gladly, graciously, generously, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We give as we have purposed to give.

The Sabbath principle is abiding. We are to keep the Sabbath holy, refrain from work, and restrain ourselves from making others work. We are to find re-creation and refreshment in the Lord and renew a right spirit within us. When our society disrupts the Sabbath principle, we bring disaster upon ourselves.

Jesus dealt many times with Sabbath issues, "about working and the keeping of the fourth commandment. (Exodus 20:8-11) The significance of the fourth commandment is that God wrote His Name on His covenant with this commandment. **In the Mosaic covenant, God signed His name in the keeping of the Sabbath; it is His signature day.** The Sabbath was basically this from creation: work followed by rest. According to Meredith Kline, the Sabbath is a sign of sanctification marking that which receives its imprint as belonging to God's holy kingdom with promise of consummation. The Sabbath will have relevance and application at

any given time period of redemptive history only in the holy dimension(s) of the life of God's covenant people.

“With the coming of Christ, there is a change. When applied to the pre-fall and Mosaic covenant, the Sabbath day of rest clearly has a “stamping” function. But now, **in the new covenant mediated by Christ, the Sabbath rest is sacramental in the sense that the Sabbath rest is realized already in Christ enthroned in heaven. Now, it is the first day remembrance of the resurrection of Christ in a realized eschatology. It is already, and not yet.** It is an eschatological sign. We reign in the heavenlies with Christ, but at the same time, we witness, we suffer with Christ, we experience weakness. We have it, but not yet. It is already, but not yet. The just shall live by faith.” (Craig, Dr. Mary. “*A Sabbath Day Surprise*,” May, 2015)
<http://www.marycraig.org/NewsViews/SabbathDaySurprise.pdf>

God through redemption achieves His original purpose of creation. Each successive covenant expands on previous administrations. Each finds its fulfillment in Christ, who embodies the new covenant. Grace and truth come in Jesus. Amen.

**“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”
Revelation 21:7**

Declaring Jesus Christ, the Promised One, who heals, saves, and delivers,

Mary Craig

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