

## The Covenant with Adam: Inaugurated

### I. The arrangement with Adam was a covenant

- Just because the word “covenant” is not used in Gen 1–3 does not mean there is no covenant. Same thing with the word “Trinity” in the early chs. of Genesis.
- Hos 6:7: “like Adam they [Israel] transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.”
- Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:22, 42–49: Adam and Christ have analogous roles in redemptive history: both are heads of the human race. If the arrangement with Christ and his people is a covenant, Adam’s arrangement is also a covenant.
- Looks like a covenant, smells like a covenant, acts like a covenant—must be a covenant! In God’s dealing with Adam there are two parties, a solemn command, blessings and curses. Adam was not given an option about whether to accept the covenant or not, but this only shows that God imposed it of his own will.

### II. The terms of the covenant

- Stipulations:
  - Adam was the “representative head of the human race, so that he could act for all his descendants” (Berkhof; cf. Rom 5:15, 18–19; 1 Cor 15:22)
  - General call to love: the entire moral law (ten commandments)
    - Bavinck: Adam knew the moral law by nature, which was essentially the same as the 10 commandments (including the 4<sup>th</sup>).
  - The mission of humanity: fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:26–28)
    - Beginning with working and keeping the garden (Gen 2:15)
  - Before Adam’s permanent establishment in the kingdom, God ordained a time of probation, the “do not eat” command: “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen 2:17).
    - Turretin: the law of the tree was a “positive law” in that “it did not bind man from the nature of the things (which was in itself indifferent), but from the mere will of God....it was given for a symbol and trial of the obedience of man.”
- Curse: death (Gen 2:17: “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”)
- Promise: eternal life (by implication from the curse, if he obeyed he would not *ever* die).
  - Disobeying with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil meant that humanity was barred from the tree of *life*, which would have signified that they would live forever (Gen 3:22).
  - The promise of Sabbath: sharing in God’s 7<sup>th</sup> day rest was the goal of humanity after their world-improving labors. Sabbath corresponds to eternal life.
- Summary: WSC 12 Q. What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created? A. When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.

### III. The purpose of the covenant

- Adam's initial situation was *not* perfect: his fellowship with God was intermittent; the earth was not yet perfected; Adam and Eve were capable of sin, subject to death, and able to lose fellowship with God.
- But God intended to bless us with the highest kind of life: eternal, indestructible life together with him, completely free from the threat of sin and death.
  - Tipton: "[Apart from the covenant of works,] God did not owe Adam anything, while Adam owed God everything according to their natural Creator-creature relationship ... In other words, if God created Adam, but did not give him a covenant, then advancement from earth to heaven would have been impossible."
  - Bavinck: we could never merit anything naturally. The only way we could be blessed in God, is for "God ... to come down from his lofty position, condescend to his creatures, [and] impart, reveal, and give himself away to human beings" (cf. Isa 57:15).
- This condescension for the sake of blessing is the essence of God's covenants with us.
  - 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."

### IV. The implications of the covenant

- God's undeserved generosity even before there was sin:
  - Bavinck: "True religion ... cannot be anything other than a covenant: it has its origin in the condescending goodness and grace of God."
  - Bavinck: "[Religion] is not work by which we bring advantage to God, make a contribution to him, and have a right to reward. It is grace for us to be allowed to serve him. God is never indebted to us, but we are always indebted to him for the good works we do."
- The vital importance of obedience for love's sake alone:
  - Berkhof: God giving an arbitrary command shows us that the "great question that had to be settled was, whether man would obey God implicitly or follow the guidance of his own judgment."
  - Vos: would Adam "act from personal attachment to God" alone, without knowing why God had forbidden this tree? (Cf. C. S. Lewis' *Perelandra*).

#### Questions:

- Are you willing to obey God even when you don't understand his commands?
- Do you believe God's purpose is always to bless you and do you good?
- Why is obedience so important to God?