

## Introduction

We have now crossed over into a new year. "Time marches on" and there is no stopping it. We cannot pause, hold back the clock, catch our breath, and then get time going again. We cannot give time a time out. New wrinkles appear, the process of aging continues, and circumstances may direct our thoughts to dying and death.

Looking back over the *year* may lead to reflection on the *years* of our lives, causing us to think about history in order to understand our place in it. We may ask questions again like, "Who am I?" and "What is the significance of my life?" If you are like me, I am sure that you not only want assurance that life has meaning, but you also want assurance that *your* life has meaning. We can each say, "I want assurance that my life counts for something." The great significance questions of life are abstract questions that touch life in very concrete ways. Accordingly, these questions are not irrelevant or unimportant. Indeed, they are very relevant and extremely important.

We need to ask them and answer them. In a word, we need understanding of the big picture of history to aid us in living the little picture of history. This brings up the notion of a philosophy of history in which we try to get some hold on our personal histories within world history. A philosophy of history helps us get a grip on life so we can keep our bearings in the flood of events that threaten to overwhelm us, drown us, and drown our hopes and dreams.

Probably, the two main things in the big picture most relevant here are the purpose of history and the nature of history. Last time we considered the purpose of history, which is the glory of God. His own glory is God's ultimate end in that there is no end, purpose, or goal beyond it. The display of His glory is the final goal. All other goals come to rest in this grand goal. **All things are from Him, through Him and to Him. To Him be all glory forever, amen** (Rom. 11.36). This text teaches that His glory was His great goal from the very beginning of the world in creation week (it is all from Him). It is His great goal in each stage of history on earth (it is all through Him), and His own glory is what remains when history comes to its appointed end (it is all for Him into the ages, forever).

Building on these things from last week, today, I want to discuss the covenantal nature of history. We can do this in three steps: explanation, support, and expansion. Then we can make concluding applications.

### 1A. First, the covenantal nature of history explained

It is remarkable that Christ existed before He was born and His birth was an act of obedience. We can only understand these facts against the backdrop of the eternal covenant relation between the members of the trinity. In the inter-trinitarian covenant, the Father gives particular sinners to Christ. Jesus commits Himself to die for them and give them the Spirit who will apply the death of Christ to the Father's elect. Therefore, history, from its very beginning, is a process through which God is keeping covenant. His eternal purpose that is covenantal in nature comes to expression in history in a covenantal way.

In this light, we can comment further on how that covenant comes to expression in history by considering a) the covenant of works in relation to the covenant of grace, and b) some subdivisions of the covenant of grace.

#### 1B. The covenant of works in relation to the covenant of grace

Notably, the term "covenant" does not occur in Scripture with reference to the eternal purpose of God and it does not occur in Genesis until after the Flood when the Lord said to Noah, **"I will establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you"** (Gen. 9:9). Nevertheless, thinkers

who adhere to reformed theology have commonly used the term covenant to cover *history from the beginning of creation to the end of time*. This is especially evident in the Westminster Confession of Faith that subdivides human history into two categories: the covenant of works with Adam and Eve and the covenant of grace (*WCF* 7.1-3):

**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.**

**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.**

**Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace, whereby He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.**

The Confession does not use the term covenant for the eternal covenant. However, it comes very close to doing so in the Shorter Catechism where it associates sovereign election with the covenant of grace. "God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer" (A, 20). Similarly, a main line reformed theologian, G. Vos, says that the words about Zacchaeus (that he is **a son of Abraham**) "trace back the blessed issue of Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus to the covenantal promise made ages before to the patriarch, and ultimately to the sovereign election of *which this promise was the outcome*" (*Grace and Glory*, 64, italics mine). Thus, the covenant to Abraham was an outcome of sovereign election before the foundation of the world. It is a simple step of good and necessary inference to conclude that it is the inter-trinitarian and eternal covenant that lies behind all of God's covenantal dealings with man in history. (cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 95, 212-216)

Using the language of the Confession, we can therefore say that the eternal inter-trinitarian covenant comes to expression in "the covenant of works" and "the covenant of grace." Alternatively, we can say that the various historical covenants whether so named explicitly or not are manifestations of the eternal covenant. More broadly, we can speak of the entirety of history and of the history of redemption as realizations of the eternal covenant (*pactum*, Bavinck, 212).

#### 2B. Some sub-divisions of the covenant of grace

Before leaving this section on explanation, we should discuss a general point that helps us see the entire history of redemption. Namely, the covenant of grace has some notable subdivisions (cf. the addendum below).

1) First, it divides into promise and fulfillment. This is essentially the movement from old to new, the OT to the NT, and old wineskin to new wineskin. These are rough and ready divisions that get us into the right ballpark.

2) Second, fulfillment comes in the well-known pattern of "now and not yet." The day of salvation has dawned but we have not yet reached high noon!

Thus, in reformed theology, history is a stage like unfolding of God's covenant purposes. To be wise (to have wise principles regarding history, to have a godly philosophy of history), we need to view history as covenantal in nature. This will help us understand the Bible as a whole better, which, in turn, will give us wisdom for our journey through time. So let us consider some of the biblical support for this view of history.

#### 2A. The covenantal nature of history supported

We can begin here with some passages that intertwine the agreement between the members of the trinity with the history of redemption. These show that human history is the

outworking of the eternal inter-trinitarian covenant that contemplates a fallen race in need. From the sinful world, the Father chooses particular people for salvation (2 Thess. 2.13-14). Jesus secures this salvation (as Jn. 17.1-10 teaches), and the Holy Spirit applies it (as 1 Thess. 1:4-5 teaches).

Nevertheless, a stubborn fact remains. What can we say about the fact that the term covenant does not appear in Genesis until the time of Noah after the Flood (Gen. 9:9)? Put another way, the question is, "How can we legitimately speak of the covenant of works with Adam and Eve or of a creation covenant?" To answer this we can look in Genesis and in the book of Hebrews.

1) Beginning with the opening chapters of Genesis, we have to view the fall in the context of the Sabbath. God worked in six days creating the heavens, the earth, and the host of things that make them up (Gen. 2:1, in six days God finished the earth, the heavens, and all their fullness). He rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). Fittingly, because He rested on the seventh day, God blessed it and made it holy (2.3). The implication is that every seventh day in the weekly cycles of days that will make up human history is a holy day to be set apart as a blessed and holy day. As His image bearers, we are to honor and set apart what God honors and sets apart. In a nutshell, this line of thought shows that Sabbath keeping (keeping the God-appointed seventh day holy) is an obligation that we have that goes all the way back to creation. The fourth commandment in the Ten Commandments is a reiteration of this duty. From Exodus 20.8-11, we learn our duty to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy *because of God's action and word recorded in Genesis 1:1-2:3*.

**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 the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Ex. 20:8-11).**

Furthermore, this obligation to enter into rest with God in His rest (a great privilege and obligation) carries with it a promise regarding history in its weekly unfolding. Consider how the promise emerges in this context. Adam and Eve had a future to reach by covenant obedience. (Gen. 2:15-17, **The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die**). They were subject to death if they disobeyed, and thus they had the promise of eternal life in the way of covenant keeping. Notably, per Genesis 3.22, eating of the tree of life meant living forever.

Therefore, the rest that is promised at the end of each week (rest with the Lord) stretches across all the 6-1's of history showing us that the end of history as a whole is rest with God in His rest. Consider the rhythmic unfolding of work to rest (work to rest, work to rest, work to rest, and so forth). This unfolding shows that history is a process of work that leads to rest. Thus, the end of all the work of all of history is rest, eternal rest. That is the great promise of the six and one pattern God gave in the very way that He created all things. He gave this pattern before the fall and it thus underlies all of human history, impressing on history both a weekly promise and an ultimate promise. The promise is rest with God weekly and eternal rest with God ultimately.

2) The writer of the book of Hebrews points us in the same direction. He says, **"the promise of entering his rest still stands"** (4:1). If it still stands then it continues in place from some earlier time. He actually refers to *a number of earlier times* going back to the time of David (4.7 citing Ps. 95:7-11, **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**). Then he cites the time of Joshua and those who did not enter rest in the conquest of the land (4.8, **For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on**). Reaching even further back, he cites the seventh day of creation week (4.3-4, **They shall not enter my rest," although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works**).

Therefore, God promised this rest from the time that He finished His works. In other words, as the writer of Hebrews says, they did not enter "although his works were finished from the foundation of the world." This puts His rest as a promise out in front of us.

We have to conclude that the six and one pattern of creation binds man as man (by his very nature) to image God by following His extraordinary example in a covenantal six and one. This duty contains a marvelous promise at the end of every week within history. It promises a special blessing on a divinely blessed day. It promises rest with God in His rest. Moreover, this weekly promise is a token of the great promise of entering His rest that still stands out in front of us at the end of the entire course of human history.

### 3A. The covenantal nature of history expanded

There is expansion in the covenant associated with the coming of Christ. We can fill this out with the following the comments.

#### 1) The fall did not altar the promise

An *amazing feature* of the creation covenant (or the covenantal six and one) that highlights the fact that history has a covenantal nature impressed on it is *the fact that the fall did not alter God's promise*. From the beginning, God promised to bring His image bearer, man, through history to the grand finale of eternal Sabbath rest. Due to the fall, the promise must find fulfillment through a second Adam, through the death and resurrection of Christ. Because of sin, a second Adam must fulfill that promise by obedience in both life and death (cf. Rom. 5).

#### 2) Jesus is now Sabbath King.

As Son of Man, He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:28). The perpetual obligation to Jehovah God to set aside a day that distinctively belongs to Him as Sabbath King is now a continuing covenant obligation to the Lord Jesus. God's day is now Jesus' day. The Lord's Holy Day of the old covenant (Isa. 58:13) is now the Lord's Day of the new covenant (Rev. 1:10). He is Lord of the Sabbath and as Lord of the Sabbath He *defined* its true spirit and depth for the church (Matt. 12:1-13, etc.), and He *changed* the day from the Saturday to Sunday.

Therefore, as risen Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus is providential ruler and sovereign Lord over the heavens and the earth in all their fullness. He is the one who sits on the throne of the heavens and props His feet on the footstool of the earth (Isa. 66:1; Heb. 1.3, 13).

How does this apply to you?

You may be asking yourself, "How does this apply to me?" It applies as a philosophy of history; it applies by giving you wise principles regarding history and your life in it.

1) You are wise and build on solid rock when you order your life in a six and one pattern of work and rest. History has this structure impressed on it. This is the flow of history as an outworking of the eternal covenant of the triune God. This is therefore an extremely important principle in a Christian philosophy of history. There is no more fundamental way to order your life so that it harmonizes with the nature of history; there is no more fundamental way to "go with the flow" of history in accord with God's will. Thus, you know how to live in history by knowing what history is (in technical terms your epistemology derives from your metaphysics).

2) Wisdom involves working daily under the authority of Christ as Sovereign Lord whether that work does or does not earn money. Each of the six days has the definition of a workday *in which you are to emulate the work of your Father in heaven*. In this way, each day of your life, specifically, each day of your work-life has dignity, meaning, and value for the glory of God as you reflect His glory. You do this by being what you are: His image bearer and a son or daughter that follows the Father's example. What a great perspective for going to work each day!

You discipline yourself for godliness when your life conforms to this God-ordained structure for daily living. This means disciplining yourself for wise living. One aspect of this is schooling in faith regarding earthly things. Simply put, you trust the Lord to supply your needs to

sustain your life for seven days a week while determining to work only six days. When you set one day aside to the Lord in this way you say, "Lord, I trust you to provide for me according to the pattern you set forth from the beginning, and I trust that you can give me more than I would have obtained by working seven days." Moreover, you say, "Lord even if I have less in the end, I gladly accept that from your hand for my life is yours in all that I am, possess, and hope to be. If you give me less, then I know you are giving me something more precious than silver and gold. Amen."

3) And wisdom involves giving special honor to Sunday because the Lord took ownership of this day, as His day, by His resurrection.

The six and one pattern is a creation ordinance (like marriage) that is valid for all time. An earthly Sabbath remains because the heavenly fulfillment still stands out in front of us (cf. Heb. 4:9). Now a new owner of the six and one modifies the pattern that abides throughout history. Thus, we have a day that is distinctively "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10) just as we have a supper that is distinctively "the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20).

Jesus is Sabbath King. You are wise (godly, you display godly wisdom and a godly philosophy of history) when you give special honor to Sunday in recognition of Christ. You honor Him by honoring His day. He says it is special, so, you say it is special. He sets it apart from the other days, so, you set it apart from the other days.

4) Finally, wisdom leads you to call the Lord's Day Sabbath "delight day" (Isa. 58:13-14) because you have the privilege of fellowship with the Lord Jesus in a special way. You set the day apart to Him, for Him, and with Him. Thus, by means of this day He gives you hope. Your little picture or snap shot of life is not futile. It is not a mere chasing after the wind. It is not a meaningless cycle of events going nowhere. By focusing on delight day, your eyes concentrate on the coming city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. You taste now of eternal Sabbath rest yet to come. So, enjoy the day as you remember it to keep it holy.

**May the Lord of the Sabbath richly bless you in your work in history, in the six units of work that make up part of the rich six and one pattern God gave for life on earth. May He give you a sense of the value and dignity in your work, day by day, as you emulate your Father in heaven. May He give you a special sense of value regarding Sunday. May you call it "honorable day" in honor to the Lord Jesus. May He give you special delight on this day because it is a foretaste of eternal resurrection glory and eternal Sabbath rest with Jesus Christ the Sovereign Lord and Sabbath King! To God be the glory forever. Amen.**

## Addendum

**A visualization of the inter-trinitarian covenant (*pactum salutis*)  
and the history of redemption:**

**Pactum Salutis (above, before, transcending history)**

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**Covenant of Works and Covenant of Redemption (subdividing history)**

