

**The Covenant of Creation**  
**Gen 1:26-31, 2:15-25**

Friends, back in the late 90's I saw a movie called "Seven Years in Tibet." It's the story of Austrian mountain climber Heinrich Harrer who was detained by British soldiers in India at the start of World War Two.

He ended up escaping from India and fled to Tibet, where of all things he meets and befriends the current Dali Lama, who is a young boy, and becomes what we would see as somewhat of a father figure and mentor to him.

Yet at one point in the movie the young Dali Lama says to Heinrich *"You are far too informal with me to be my father."*

And that particular line struck me... and it has stuck with me because it was so different from my understanding and experience of what a father-son relationship was like.

I'm used to a very informal relationship with my father, where we related freely back and forth with no protocol, restrictions

or conditions, where emotion and feelings could be expressed... If we wanted to, we're still both guys after all.

So to hear a young boy express the awareness and expectation that a father-son relationship would be more formal really struck me and it highlighted that the significant differences in the relationship between Heinrich and the Dali Lama were not just those of age and world experience, but they were also cultural.

And maybe you've experienced or observed how different cultures regard certain relationships or social positions with various levels of formalities or informalities.

It can be a bit confusing really – especially if you are in a new culture - to figure out with whom and when, you are supposed to relate formally, and with whom and when you are supposed to be more casual and informal.

In another culture, for example if you address a school principle or a teacher by their first name they might be

offended or upset, whereas in Canada a school principle or teacher would probably say “please call me John.”

So for those who come to Canada and need to learn English as a second language, the challenge is to know which terms are appropriate for addressing people when you are relating to them in a formal manner and which are appropriate for an informal manner.

For example, you don’t want to call your boss “*dude*” but neither is it appropriate to address him as “*your honor*.”

Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with calling someone “dude” or “boss” or “your honor” or “Mr. Principle” or “John – but the point of what I’ve been speaking about here, is that the appropriateness of how we address someone, and how we interact with them, depends on the kind of relationship we have with them.

The relationship is the context and that context determines what is appropriate and what is right or wrong. So if we want

to interact appropriately with others, the challenge is to know what type of relationship we have with someone.

We’ve talked about formal and informal but there are many other types of relationships as well; there are friendships – close friends, casual friends, bff’s, there are professional relationships, working relationships, dating relationships, marriage relationships, parent-child relationships and so on.

And each relationship is a context which defines what is appropriate, what is right or wrong in how we interact with that person.

So with all this in mind friends, let me ask you – “*what kind or type of relationship do we have with God?*”

Now maybe your first inclination is to say “*does that really matter? Isn’t the most important thing that I know that have a relationship with God, does it really matter what kind of relationship it is?*”

Yes it does friends – because if we don't know the kind of relationship we have with God, then we don't understand the context in which we are relating to Him.

And that means we won't understand the ways in which He is relating and communicating to us and we won't know what the appropriate or correct response is - if we respond back at all – and thus we risk offending Him.

Now it's one thing to offend your boss – it's a whole other level of “uh-oh” to offend God – right?

Now maybe you're thinking *“I didn't know God could get offended, I've just thought God was always Loving, after all God is Love.”*

But that right there friends illustrates a particular kind of relationship that we think we have with God. Maybe we'll call it the “Star Wars relationship” because we relate to God like He is an impersonal power, like the force in Star Wars, except

He's all good because He's Love, and Love never gets offended or angry or causes hurt and so on...

Or maybe you're thinking *“yes! I'm so worried about offending God and having him punish me.”*

And that also illustrates another kind of relationship that we think we have with God, which we could call the “Angry God relationship” because we're constantly wondering if God is going to send some bad luck or trouble our way because He's angry that we've offended him.

But friends - are these correct understandings of the kind of relationship we have with God?

No – they are not! And we know this because God has made the effort to reveal and describe to us the kind of relationship that we do have with him in the scriptures - and that's good news friends!

Because relationally, nothing is worse than not knowing what kind of relationship you have with someone, right?

Especially for teenage guys who like a girl and you don't know if she likes you back in the same way or she just likes you as a "friend" - you want to know what kind of relationship you have.

And without know where we stand with God we're just guessing or speculating, and we don't know how to act appropriately, or to respond to what is expected of us.

So – what kind of relationship do we have with God? Friends, we have a Covenant relationship with God.

Now you might be thinking *"But I thought we had a personal relationship with Jesus? And what exactly is a Covenant relationship anyways?"*

Well I'm glad you asked because over the next two months we are going to look at how our initial covenant relationship with

God began, and how it ended up as what is typically called *"a personal relationship with Jesus."*

And as we do that, we are going to gain a much clearer picture of the finer details, a much deeper understanding of the subtle nuances, and a far greater appreciation of the kind of relationship that we have actually with God.

And oddly enough friends, when we fully understand our covenant relationship with God and what it means to be in this type of relationship with Him... we start to bring that reality into all of our other relationships, instead of projecting the realities of those relationships onto our relationship with God – and then that... brings about some significant changes in our other relationships.

So – are you still with me? Does this make sense so far?

Then let's start unpacking what a covenant is by looking at the scriptures passages we read from this morning which were Genesis 1 and 2.

Obviously this is where the relationship between God and humanity begins as God creates mankind – male and female in his own image and so we call this relationship between God and humanity the Covenant of Creation.

Now there is not much said about the Covenant of Creation in the scriptures – apart from the first two chapters of Genesis – and so it is often overlooked and neglected. But, make no mistake friends it is very important.

In framing the context in which we can understand our relationship with God, the Covenant of Creation is very much like a simple yet elegant frame for a picture or a piece of artwork.

It's not the center of attention - but it lies behind the artwork, and holds it in place, and the subtle details in that frame that shows around the edges can draw out and highlight particular features of the picture.

If you remove the framework, then those details and highlights are lost – do you know what I mean?

So the Covenant of Creation functions as a frame for our relationship with God, with others, and with the rest of the Creation – it frames everything.

So we want to make sure we don't overlook it, or neglect it and lose out on what it highlights for us.

So let's look at these subtle details in Genesis 1 and 2, which coincidentally also define what a covenant relationship is.

Now I need to make a quick side note on the connection between these two chapters in Genesis.

Genesis 1 functions like a trailer for a movie, where you are get snapshots of the action taking place in a way that summarizes what is going on.

Then when you watch the movie, you get the actual story which gives you the all details that fill out what you saw hinted at in the trailer.

So in Genesis 1:26-31 we get the “trailer” version of the creation of humanity and then Genesis chapter 2:4 comes along and the “movie” version starts – so it’s not a second account of the creation of humanity but a fuller more detailed version.

Now the first thing I want to draw your attention to is how often God is speaking in these passages... 1:26 *“then God said”*; 1:28 *“God blessed them and said to them”*; 1:29 *“then God said”*; 2:15 *“the Lord God commanded the man”*; 2:18 *“the Lord God said”*

Friends God’s words are never empty – they are not just powerful... they are power! And when God speaks His Word not only creates humanity but it outlines and determines the kind of relationship He will have with us. So what does God’s Word say?

God declares *“Let us make mankind in our image”* (1:26)

Friends, this simple statement reveals to us that a Covenant is a Bond that connects two parties – in this case God and humanity.

God had determined to create us – which already establishes a bond, a connection between God and us as Creator and created, but He goes further and determines to create us in His image – a specific bond which gives distinction to what the Covenant of Creation is about - *and we’ll look at what that means later on* - and God speaks this, He declares this determination to make it so.

So a Covenant is a Bond, and that Bond must be declared – but there’s more.

Look at 1:29 where God says *“I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.”*

And in greater detail in chapter 2:16-17 *“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”*

God is speaking about what will give life, and what will bring death. The creator, the one in whose image we have been made, whom we are bonded to, decrees what will give life to humanity and what will bring death.

So a Covenant is a bond, of life and death - but wait... there's still more.

Listen as I read these the remaining verses where God is speaking to humanity in these chapters and tell me if you can detect any negotiation, bargaining on the details of what God is declaring are worked out.

*“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (1:28)*

*“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (2:15-18)*

So friends, did you catch any negotiation going on in these passages? No there is none. God decides everything. He doesn't consult with anyone on the creation of humanity, He doesn't ask Adam if he likes being alone...

He does not entertain suggestions from Adam on what the consequence will be if Adam eats from the forbidden tree – God decides and decrees it and that's the way it is. And it's good.

So a Covenant is a Bond, of life and death, which is sovereignly administered.

Friends, God and God alone sets the terms and conditions for the bond of life and death that He has with us – with every

one of us, with every human that has come from God's command to multiply, increase in number and fill the earth.

This is the Covenant of Creation friends – a bond between humanity and God with life and death implications which was brought into existence by God's decision and Word.

So however else you might want to categorize the relationship that we have with God... call it a personal relationship with Jesus, a saving relationship, a loving relationship, calling God our Heavenly Father, even seeing God as angry, or vengeful, distant or remote...

If we are to be true to the revelation of scripture – we have to set what we think about our relationship with God within this starting framework of the Covenant of Creation.

This is the starting point for correctly understanding our relationship with God and who He is revealing Himself to be.

And as I mentioned earlier, this Covenant relationship that we have with God also determines our relationships with others and with the creation – so the practical implications of the Covenant of Creation for our day to day life are huge!

And this all comes from the uniqueness of the Bond that we have from being made – male and female – in the image of God, which means that we reflect who God is to the rest of the creation on a smaller scale.

The image of God is not some quality we that have, e.g. reason, or creativity, it is our position within the creation as stewards who rule as God's representatives.

That's what is reflected in 2:19 – 20 where God brings all the animals before Adam and whatever he called them – that was their name. There was no negotiation if the giraffe didn't like its name and preferred to be called a Longneckker instead...



Adam's relationship with the animals reflects the sovereign administration of God's covenant bond with us – that's the image of God.

Similarly in 1:26 when God – as Creator, Spirit and Word – determined to make humanity, God says *"let US make mankind in OUR image"* and then 1:27 says *"in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them."*

And then of course then comes the command to multiply and increase.

So there is a plurality, a community aspect, which comes from male and female being together in how humans reflect the image of God.

Now move ahead from the "trailer" version of chapter one to get more of the details in chapter two and we see this fleshed out as God decides it is not good for man to be alone, so He provides a suitable, appropriate helper in order that humanity

can correctly reflect the communal nature of God to the rest of the creation.

And so the scripture then declares that it is upon the basis of this task of reflecting the communal image of God that we have the basis for why a man and a woman are intended to enter into a marriage relationship –which by the way we also call a covenant.

So, our work reflects the Covenant of Creation, marriage reflects the Covenant of Creation, and there's a third part to this practical aspect as well.

It's from 2:1-3 where it says *"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."*

God takes a Sabbath rest... and friends the significance of a Deity being able to rest is lost on us.

Ancient creation myths often attributed the existence of our world to the efforts of some god who was locked in an eternal struggle to subdue the equally powerful force of chaos that always threatened to undo what the god had created.

But the creation account in Genesis reveals the truth to us. Yes in the beginning the *“earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep”* (1:2) but God’s creating Word conquered this chaos, subdued it, gave it shape and form and purpose and brought forth life out of it and it is sustained without the need for God to eternally battle chaos.

There is no greater power than God, there is no equal opposite power to God.

God finished creating, and He rested and He blessed the seventh day and set it apart as a day of rest.

So – as we are made in the image of God, to reflect God correctly to the creation we also must rest, we must observe Sabbath to reflect God’s sustaining and preserving power in His Word which created all things and sustains them as we trust that it sustains us.

And so chapter two ends with what I think is a wonderful description of the first human observance of the Sabbath.

As Adam and Eve have imaged God together in marriage and community and have seen the necessity of that partnership in work – they now reflect God in Sabbath together, and the scripture says *“Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”* (2:25)

That is kind of relationship they had, because of their covenant relationship with God. They could “rest” with each other – and if you’ve been in a relationship for long enough you’ll know how amazing that is.

And that's the whole point of having the Covenant of Creation revealed to us as the backdrop for understanding our relationship with God.

To cause us to marvel and wonder at what it was like at the start of this relationship between God and humanity, and the world, and each other – before things changed to the way we know them to be now...

To cause us to wonder if things might be able to be as they once were – to hope it would be possible for it to be like that again?

And this gives us something to strive for, for as bad and things might be as we know them now... it can help to make some sense and bring some meaning and purpose to life to know that marriage, family, community, work and rest and recreation are part of who we are and how we are connected to God

But it's just the start of the story of our Covenant relationship with God friends – it has only just begun, and so we'll leave things where they stand in the Covenant of Creation this morning...

With Adam and Eve naked and feeling no shame – wouldn't that have been incredible.

Let's pray.