

*The Whole Counsel of God*  
**Study 12**

**MAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GROUND:  
MAN AS WORKER**

*“Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”*

*(Genesis 2.15)*

We have completed our study of the created constitution of man as presented in Gen 2.7. The human constitution has three dimensions: body, spirit and soul. These dimensions set up the human being in his essential relationships: to the ground, to God and to other souls or living beings. In an earlier study (WCG 9), we saw that the rest of the narrative of Genesis 2 shows how the three dimensions of Adam were activated. In this study we will take up Adam's first relationship, which is his relationship with the ground.

Everything in creation is foundational both for time and eternity. We saw this in our study of the human constitution. God only and ever builds on the foundation of creation. In Christ God brought about a new humanity, but this new humanity is raised up out of the humanity created in Adam. This also holds true for the theme of work introduced in the creation accounts. God is revealed as a worker creating all things who set up man to work within God's work. Through his fall and redemption and in his eternal glory, man is always seen in scripture as one who works.

**A. THE MANDATE TO WORK IN CONTEXT (Genesis 2.4-17)**

Genesis 2.15-16 sets up the fundamental economic order of life: man must work and then eat. God placed Adam in the Garden to work, i.e., to cultivate and keep the Garden, and then gave the permission to freely eat from any tree in the Garden, i.e., the sphere of his work. To fully understand this economic order of human existence, we have to see how it fits in with the context given in Gen 2.5-14.

**1. The creational conditions of human existence (Gen 2.5-7)**

Genesis 2.5-6 shows that the earth, as it was created in the day that the LORD God made heaven and earth (Gen 2.4), was not ready to sustain human existence. The kind of vegetation required to sustain human life had not been cultivated (v 5a), and the reason for this lies in two things that were lacking. The first is that there was no rain. Without abundant irrigation, the earth will not yield the level of produce that is needed for human life. The second thing lacking is that the Lord had not yet made man to cultivate the ground (v 5b).

We should pause and reflect on what Gen 2.15 is saying. The ground from which man was formed does not in itself yield the plant life needed for the sustenance of human life. The ground needs to be supplied with water. This theme is developed throughout scripture. The water is God's blessing and supply, and the need for water shows that man is dependent on God for his life. This fact of life was pressed on Israel in the Promised Land, for the land was dependent on the rains from heaven. The theme is also taken over into the spiritual realm. Water is a symbol of eternal life that Christ gives to people (see John 4).

Besides water, the earth needs the work of man to develop its potential to sustain human life. This can be seen everywhere in the world. Man is needed to make the earth provide for the existence of man. This means that there is a co-dependence between the earth and man. Man who must live from the yield of the earth is dependent on the ground, and the ground is dependent on man's work to produce its yield for man.

This dependence of the earth on man's work opens up a view on the purpose and design of creation. In creating the world, God did not do all the work so that man was left with nothing to do. Rather, God did all of his work, the work of creating, and his work set up man to work within what God has done. The world was created as the sphere in which man can work. This is an understatement. It was created in need of man's work and it was made so that man *must* work.

Genesis 2.6 and 7 show how God overcame the negative conditions set forth in verse 5. The lack of rain, i.e., water from heaven, was provided for by the water that rose from the earth to irrigate the ground (v 6). This is the creator's provision. The lack of a man to work the ground is provided for by the creation of man in v 7. This man was formed from the ground, and so by his nature he must go to the ground for his sustenance. He is bound to the ground. At the same time he stands above the ground. By the direct grant of life from God he is raised above the ground to work it and bring out of it what it will not yield of itself.

What we have observed from Gen 2.5-7 is important for understanding man's relationship with the ground. The need for man as the worker is built into the nature of creation. The earth by its created nature needs man to work it, and man needs the yield he brings out of the earth by his work. This is a created condition of human existence.

## 2. Setting up the conditions for human existence (Gen 2.8-17)

Genesis 2.8-17 tells how God set up Adam's living space. There is a direct correlation between the narrative of vv 8-15 and the presentation of the conditions of the earth before man was created in v 5. We will lay this out.

No shrub of the field... (v 5a)	God planted a Garden with every tree (vv 8-9)
No rain (v 5b)	The river flowing out of the Garden (vv 9-14)
No man to cultivate (v 5c)	Adam placed in the Garden to cultivate it (v 15)

To fully understand what the Garden of Eden is about, we have to take a closer look at the balance between these passages.

### a. Plants for food

There is a direct contrast between *no* shrub of the field and *no* plant of the field in v 5a and *every* tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food in v 9. There is also the contrast between the field of v 5a and the Garden of v 8. The field is the open field which is farmed. The Garden is enclosed and has within it everything intended for it. Adam was set up to be a gardener and not a farmer. When he was exiled from the Garden, he found himself in the open field that does not yield the needed crops on its own.

### b. Supply of water

The rain is water that comes down from heaven. The river came up within the Garden and provided water for the whole earth. The universality of the supply is represented in the four rivers into which the one river divided. Four represents the four directions (north, south, east and west), and this means that the river flowing out of Eden was the water supply for the whole earth.

Water is the divine blessing on earth. In a fallen world, this blessing comes from heaven which is apart and above the earth. In the original creation, it came up from the Garden where man lived in fellowship with God. This theme is taken up in the closing vision of Revelation. The river that comes out from God's throne flows in the city of God in which God dwells with his people. The ideal will of God is that the water of life flows out from God in union with his people rather than from God in separation from people.

### c. **Man as the needed worker**

The third contrast is more subtle. To see the full force of what the biblical text says, we have to go back to the Hebrew. The word translated “to cultivate” in Gen 2.5 and 15 is the standard word used in Hebrew for serving. To serve the ground amounts to cultivating it. As we pursue the theme of man as a worker throughout the scriptures, we have to work with the precise concept presented in Genesis 2: man as worker is one who serves.

Notice the difference between Gen 2.5 and 15 in what man was to serve. In v 5 it speaks of man serving the ground, whereas in v 15 he is to serve the Garden. The idea of serving the ground is introduced into Adam’s existence in Gen 3.23: God sent Adam out of the Garden of Eden to “serve the ground from which he was taken.” The picture that Genesis 2 and 3 presents is clear. The earth by itself will not yield the produce man needs for his existence. If man is placed in the open field, he will have to serve the ground. He has to do for the ground the service that the ground needs for it to yield for man what he needs. This is the backbreaking work of the farmer. God did this work for Adam as part of his work of creation. God planted the Garden and placed man within it. Adam did not find himself in the open field that needed hard labour to set things up. He found himself in a Garden in which everything was there to meet his needs, not simply his material need for food but also the need of his soul life for that which stimulates delight.

Adam did not have to raise his own living environment. All was a gift of God. Adam was driven out of this environment when he disobeyed God and made himself to be like God by taking the forbidden knowledge. He chose to make himself a god, and for this he had to do for himself what God did for him. This brought him low into the dust. He became a slave of the ground to return to the ground.

*What if?*

The biblical narrative tells us how man was made the servant of the ground as a result of his sin. What would have happened if Adam had not sinned? In view of the decree of Gen 1.28 that Adam and Eve be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, we can see God’s intention. As the family grew and multiplied, human beings would have had to extend the Garden until it took over the whole world. The river that sprang up within the Garden and divided into the four rivers outside of the Garden suggests that Eden was to be the source from which the divine blessing on the ground would flow to the whole earth. The human race would have had to serve the ground, but from within the divine blessing and this would not have been the toil that came upon Adam when he had to serve the ground outside of the Garden.

### **3. Seeing work in its rightful place (Gen 2.15)**

We were all born outside of the Garden of Eden and so have only ever seen and experienced work as either the slavery to the ground (for farm boys) or as the labour of the fugitive from the ground, i.e., city work. For us, our work is not a matter of working with what God has given by his creative power. What we work with does not “naturally” yield to us the good we seek from it. Creation reacts to us in a stubborn way, withholding its yield, and of its own working creation undermines our efforts and frustrates our designs. The result is that we must eat in toil and by the sweat of the brow. All who put their hands directly on the earth to extract from it what we need know what it means to come home for supper sweating. Others run from the farm and other forms of hands-on work to the city to get the jobs that don’t produce the sweat of the brow. What they evade in terms of sweat they load up in stress, and the deodorant industry is an eloquent witness to the fact that there is the sweat of stress which we can at best only mask. There is no escaping of the curse of Gen 3.17f.

On top of the servile nature of work, God added the end of death (Gen 3.19). This stamps all of our efforts as vanity. As is the plight of slaves, what we work at is taken away from us at the end of our labour. Ecclesiastes 2 bears eloquent witness to this. Solomon used all of his wisdom, power and wealth to create for himself a paradise on earth. Being a king, he did not have to do the physical work. He had slaves to produce the quota of sweat Gen 3.19 demanded. The king only took the pleasures (Eccl 2.4-11). But, after

indulging in the pleasure he was hit with the reality of death (Eccl 2.12-23). Death made all in vain. What's the point?

Through work we are reduced to a slave's status and doomed to work for that which we cannot keep. This hard reality of our existence moves the mind to see work itself as the curse. We see work as the punishment imposed on mankind. Here, Gen 2.15 offers the important correction.

Work is essential to human existence as created by God. Just like the fallen human being is still the image of God, so work that fell into the servile and futile labour still retains its original dignity. The outcome of the Fall is not work but the additives: the sweat and toil and the vanity imposed on our efforts by death. As fallen creatures, we labour to get out from under the yoke of painful labours. Often people project their protest against work onto their view of salvation. They comfort themselves with the dream of an eternal retirement. We can sympathize with this feeling, but it is at best an inaccurate view of God and salvation. The scriptures take up the themes of creation and show how they are fulfilled in Christ and in our eternal salvation. By his created nature man is a worker and can only settle in the paradise of God with work to do.

## **B. THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND MAN**

The creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 present the relationship between God and mankind as a working relationship.

### **1. The earth as the sphere of work for both God and man (Gen 1.1-2.3)**

In the first chapter of the Bible, God is not seen in the solitude of eternity. Rather, he is introduced in his work of creating, and is only seen in his work. This is the key to understanding God's purpose in making man in his own image. Man is to represent the God who works.

#### **a. Work as the act of ruling**

The connection between God's role as the worker who creates and man's role within creation is made in two ways. God works as a king. He creates effortlessly by decree. Man is created within the world with the mandate to rule. Thus he is to reflect God who works by ruling. That man's role of ruling involves real work is indicated in Gen 1.28. He was to subdue the earth. This answers to God's work in creating. The stage for his work is the earth of Gen 1.2. It was without form and void and covered by water and darkness. God subdued this chaos by commanding light to shine and by separating the light from darkness so that darkness would not take over again. He divided the waters and made the water recede so that the dry land would be established on which he would create living souls. Finally, as the great king God placed all under his vice regent, man. "The LORD sat as King at the flood; yes, the LORD sits as King forever" (Ps 29.10).

God created the earth to give mankind a work to do. The world would not of itself just yield to man's wishes or meet all of man's needs in advance. Man had to subdue the whole, and we must keep in mind that this was the case in the ideal condition of creation as it came from the hand of God. In our minds, this raises the question, "What is the ideal condition of creation?" The answer that Genesis 1 gives is not a creation in which all is ready-made for mankind so that people could live in idle pleasure. The ideal creation is that one that sets up man to do his work and gives him the occasion to act like God and have a fellowship with the God who works. Work was given to man as the gift of participation in God's work.

Adam and Eve could not fulfill the mandate to subdue the world as two persons. This mandate was given in Gen 1.28 as part of the blessing and command to be fruitful and fill the earth. They were to have children and raise their children to spread out and subdue the earth. The principle of God's promise to Joshua applies here: "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you" (Josh 1.3). As the families multiplied and spread out, the earth was to be colonized by mankind for mankind. This mandate to work was not just one part of man's life. It involved his whole life, as a spiritual being in the image of God, as a physical being in the physical world, as a sexual being to multiply rulers and as a social being to build

a society through family life. In all man was to realize his goal, doing within creation what God did over creation—to work by ruling and to rule by working.

## **b. The work week**

The link we have seen between God creating and man working is confirmed by the pattern of the seven day work week in Gen 1.1-2.3. God created in a cycle of day and night. Each day's work closes with the notice that there was evening and there was morning, and after the announcement of morning, the past day is counted and the new work begins. This is the pattern for normal human work, according to Ps 104.22-23: "When the sun rises...Man goes forth to his work and to his labour until evening."

Individual works of creation were done in the days, and the whole work was completed within a week: six days of work and the seventh as the Sabbath. This is taken up in the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20.8-11). Here we are told that God's work in creation is to be regarded as the archetype of the work of his people. The Sabbath law is not only a command to rest. The first command in this law is: "Six days you shall labour and do all your work." Man is seen first of all as a worker, and he is told to do all his work. The expression, "all your work," answers to the statement in Gen 1.3: God rested from "all his work."

The Sabbath presses an important point. Creation, which is God's work, is not an endless and ceaseless working. God worked toward a goal, the completion of his work, and the completion of work leads to rest from the work. As far as the creation of the world goes, this speaks against the idea inherent in evolution that the creative process is endless and has no end in view. For us this speaks against being a workaholic who works for work's sake and does not work toward the completion and end of his work.

## **2. The Garden of Eden and the divine and human work (Gen 2.8-15)**

Genesis 1 shows us God's work and man's work on the cosmic scale. In the second creation account we see Adam's personal world in which he had the beginning of his experience. Here we get a closer look at the theme of work.

In Genesis 2 again we see God at work. After making man, he plants the Garden for man. Man is placed within the Garden to serve and keep it. Both God and man are seen as gardeners. God's work is the creative work of planting the Garden, and man has the work within the Garden. As in Genesis 1, God is the creator who sets things up for man, and man is given his work within God's work to share in the kind of work God does.

Adam's work in the Garden was twofold. He was to serve and to keep or guard it. Earlier we noticed that the idea of serving the ground was that man had to do that for the ground which would enable the ground to yield its produce for his needs. In the Garden Adam had to work to enable the trees to continue to yield their food for him. Everyone who grows fruit trees knows that the fruit trees have to be worked on to have them continue to bear their fruit for human use and pleasure. The work of serving the Garden gave to Adam the yield as his reward. We also noticed earlier that the decree to fill the earth and subdue it in Gen 1.28 meant that Adam would have to undertake the work of extending the Garden. This is another way in which he would have to serve the Garden.

The fact that Adam did not just have to serve the Garden but also keep or guard it, suggests that the Garden of Eden was not invulnerable. There was the threat of it being ruined and lost to man. This note answers to the need to subdue the earth in Gen 1.28. In Genesis 1 the focus is on ruling the whole earth, and the need of ruling is to subdue. In Gen 2.15, there is no immediate need to subdue. God has provided all. But, the need to guard the Garden suggests that there was a danger lurking. What was it? One may say that nothing more is in mind than what every gardener knows: a Garden involves upkeep. It must be maintained. But, Genesis 3.1 shows that more was involved in guarding the Garden. Adam could not take the continued enjoyment of the Garden for granted. He had to keep it from whatever would intrude and bring all to ruin,

and this turned out to be the serpent. In fact, the real threat was in Adam himself. His fall brought all to ruin. To guard the Garden he would have to guard himself (cp., 1Tim 4.16).

### **3. The link between working and eating**

Genesis 2.15-16 establishes the connection between man's work in the Garden and what he takes from it for his own sustenance. He must work and has the right to freely eat of that which he works at. We see the same order in Gen 1.28-29. Man first receives the mandate to subdue the earth (his work) and then is given the yield of the earth as his food. The link between a man's work and his food is expressed in the blessing of Ps 128.2 as follows: "When you eat of the fruit (lit., labour) of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you." This Psalm looks at the blessedness of home life. The food a man enjoys in his home is called "the labour of his hands" (see Ish 3.10; Hagg 2.17). Paul turned this OT principle into a law in his missionary instruction to the Gentile converts. He writes to the Thessalonians, "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either" (2Thess 3.10).

## **C. THE WORK RELATED THEMES OF CREATION DEVELOPED**

The work related themes of Genesis 1 and 2 are developed in the rest of the scriptures. We cannot present here an examination of what the scriptures teach on work. All we will do is outline some ways in which the ideas of work set in creation are developed to indicate their doctrinal significance. Through this we see how the theme of work fits into the whole counsel of God.

### **1. Reigning and serving**

The creation accounts give us two views of work: reigning and serving. Jesus combined these two views into unified understanding of our work—reigning through serving.

In a previous study of Gen 1.26-27, we traced the mandate to rule the earth through the gospel to the NT vision of the kingdom or reign of God. The theme of reigning did not end with man ruling over the earth and over animals. It only began here. With the introduction of spiritual evil and the bondage of man to Satan, God's purpose that man rule had to take up the higher and spiritual struggle against spiritual evil at the highest level of the created world.

The second description of man's role as serving and guarding is also developed from the physical to the spiritual realm. The double duty of serving and keeping or guarding is used to describe the role of the Levites in relation to the tabernacle. The Levites had to do the *service* of the tabernacle and *keep* the furnishings of the tent of meeting (Num 3.6-8). Their role in keeping or guarding the tabernacle is stressed. This was to keep all who are unholy away so that the tabernacle would not be desecrated (Num 3.10) and so that there would be no wrath on the congregation of Israel (1.53; see also 18.1-7). The link between Adam's work in the Garden of Eden and the Levites' role in the tabernacle is not far-fetched. Eden was the place where man lived in fellowship with God and from which he was barred due to sin. The way into the Garden that had the tree of life was guarded by the Cherubim (Gen 3.24), and this theme was taken up in the tabernacle. The source of blessing and life for Israel was in God's presence in the tabernacle, and the way in was to be guarded against unholy people coming in. The Tribe of Levi was chosen to have access to the tabernacle, and they had to serve it and guard it.

If the connection between the Garden of Eden and the tabernacle is valid, we can see Adam's work of serving and guarding in a new light. He was serving and guarding that place provided by God in which mankind was to live in fellowship with God and have access to the tree of life. At least this much is clear, the twin roles of serving and guarding what God provided for man's life are taken up for the spiritual work of the tabernacle.

Jesus took up the idea set in Gen 2.15 that Adam was placed on earth to serve when he said that "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." (Matt 20.28). This throws light back on Gen 2.15. Adam was not placed in the Garden to be served. The Garden of Eden was no fool's paradise in which man had nothing to do and all was done for him. He was placed in the Garden to serve. To return to Matt 20.28, Jesus saw his service in priestly terms, for he describes his service as giving "...his life a ransom for many..." Thus he moved beyond the idea of serving in working for food to the priestly idea of service. Due to sin and death, human life needed to be ransomed and not just sustained by food. Jesus tied the theme of service to that of the kingdom. The context of Jesus' servant saying is the disciples' ambition for position in the kingdom (Matt 20.20ff.). He pointed out that to rule is to serve, and this is the view of work we get if we combine Gen 1.26 and 2.15.

The closing vision of the Bible presents these two views of human work. In Rev 21.10-22.5 we have a vision of the glorified church as the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Here we see the church in its eternal state and glory. This vision comes to its end with clear allusions to the Garden of Eden. John was shown a river of the water of life coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22.1). This takes up the theme of the river that flowed out of Eden. He also saw the tree of life (Rev 22.2), which takes up the theme of the tree of life in the midst of the Garden in Gen 2.9. Then he writes that there will be no longer any curse (v 3), and this answers to the curse that was placed on the ground as man was exiled from the Garden. John follows these allusions to Eden with two descriptions of the occupation of the inhabitants of that heavenly city. They are the bond-servants of God (Rev 22.3), and this expression answers to the idea of serving in Gen 2.15. John says that these slaves of God will serve Him. The word he uses for serving here is the word for priestly service (*latreuo*) in the tabernacle or temple (in Heb 8.5 for serving the tabernacle, and in Heb 9.9 for the service of worship). Adam's role of serving the Garden is now fulfilled in priestly service in the heavenly city. In Rev 22.5, John moves to a different set of ideas taken from Genesis 1: that of day and night, light and reigning. The inhabitants of the heavenly city "will reign forever and ever."

We noticed the connection between working and eating is established in Gen 2.15-16. Is this carried over to the eternal state as well? Revelation 22.1-2 suggests that there is a type of eating for the tree of life grows by the side of the river bearing twelve kinds of fruit. The number twelve symbolizes the completeness of God's people as the elect and represents the twelve months. The tree of life bears fruit to supply the people of God in their completeness and the supply is perpetual, i.e., eternal. The closing vision of paradise answers to the first promise Christ gives in Revelation. To the overcomer in Ephesus, Christ promises access to the tree of life in the paradise of God (Rev 2.7). This access is given to those who do the first works of first love (v 5). God never abandons his created order.

The Bible begins and ends with a vision of man's role as reigning and serving. In creation man is set up to reign over the physical world and serve it. In the vision of the eternal state, the reigning and serving is heavenly and spiritual. The story of scripture is how the transition from the earthly work to the heavenly and spiritual work is made. This is the subject of the gospel, for the transition from the earthly and first Adam to the heavenly and second Adam was made in Jesus Christ.

## **2. From the physical to the spiritual spheres of work**

Jesus joined the two types of work in his own life. He began like Adam working in the material sphere. He was a carpenter. After he was anointed by the Spirit, he worked spiritually, preaching the gospel, healing people and teaching his disciples. Then he fulfilled his priestly work by sacrificing himself and taking his place as our High Priest in heaven where he carries on his work on our behalf.

### **a. Jesus' view of work**

Jesus worked out the relationship between the two spheres of work in his call to discipleship. We are naturally struck by what challenges us. So, when we read that Jesus called Peter and Andrew while they were at work and that they immediately left all to follow him, we fixate on what plays on our fears: they had to leave their livelihood. But, we must also see the other side. He called them at their work. That this is

significant is seen from what Jesus never did. He never called a person who was idle and doing nothing. Where the Gospels give details, the person being called was occupied with some business in which he was called.

Jesus made a vital connection between one's work in this world and the calling to spiritual labour. He first made this connection in the call of Peter and Andrew. They were fishermen, and he called them to make them fishers of men. Jesus saw the disciples as workers whom he would send out (Matt 9.37-38). The link between work in this world and work for the kingdom of God is opened up Lk 16.10-11. Jesus said,

He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you?

The little things are the things of this world, the earthly wealth entrusted to us. Jesus is speaking of money rather than work here, but we must keep in mind that in the context the money is gained by work. Jesus said that faithfulness in the physical sphere qualifies us to be entrusted with spiritual things. The reasoning follows the path set by God in creation. Man is set up in the physical world. Here he must learn to be faithful in what has been entrusted to him. If he proves faithful, the spiritual riches will be entrusted to him. This means that the material sphere is the context in which we develop our character, and this character is carried over to the spiritual realm.

Jesus kept the disciples' work for the kingdom of God within the economic law set in Gen 2.15-16. In his instructions to the disciples, he said that they were to live in their mission on the principle that "the worker is worthy of his support" (Matt 10.10). The word translated "support" is the Greek word for nourishment (see Lk 10.17). Jesus is thus thinking in OT terms in which a man has the enjoyment of his work in his food. Paul maintained this economic principle in his teaching (1Cor 9.13-14; 1Tim 5.18).

## **b. Work as learning from God**

Isaiah's parable of the farmer points out another way that work connects us with God (Ish 28.23-29). The prophet points to the farmer's wisdom in knowing what to do at the right time and how to do it (vv 24-25). He explains, "For his God instructs and teaches him properly" (v 26). No, Isaiah's farmer is not a prophet. God does not give him visions and oracles. God never gave a Farmer's Almanac by revelation. But, in working the soil and working with the seasons, the farmer has to learn the ways of the creator and cooperate with God. As people have to work with creation, they engage with God and learn from him. Isaiah moves on to speak of the use of man made instruments in extracting the desired and processing parts of the crop (vv 27-28). Here we move from agriculture to processing. In the use of technology, Isaiah also sees wisdom from God. He says, "This also comes from the LORD of hosts, who has made his counsel wonderful and his wisdom great."

We have to take Isaiah's oracle on the farmer at face value. To work with creation is to interact with God and to learn from him. God imparts his counsel and wisdom through work. This raises work to engagement with God. But, we must also get Isaiah's point. He is speaking in a parable. While the farmer learns from the creator at the physical level, the people of Judah failed to learn at the spiritual level. Here we see the principle that Jesus worked with in speaking parables. God teaches people the principles of his ways through their work in the material creation, and these principles can introduce us to an understanding of the kingdom and the age that is to come. The whole Bible moves along this line. Revelation begins with the physical realm and moves up to the spiritual and eternal. This is the order from Genesis to Revelation. We might say that the physical creation is God's elementary school where we learn the elements and acquire the basic mental skills needed to understand the truths of the spiritual and eternal realm. We do not learn in this elementary school from books. God's school is a hands-on school. We learn through working within creation.



### **c. Seeing work in the larger picture**

In the previous study (WCG 11), we saw that the body made from the ground is the seed for the spiritual resurrection body. This means that the body of dust has eternal significance. It must be given up, but this does not discount it. The spiritual body comes out of the body of dust. The same is true with the work of this body. Work in this world is like the seed out of which God raises spiritual work. As the call to discipleship shows, we must leave our material work behind to follow Jesus so that he can make us workers for the kingdom of God. But, this does not discount the value of work in the world. It affirms the value of work, for Jesus makes workers for the kingdom of God out of people as workers in this world. The way the Lord does this in each person's life is up to him. Some are called to give up their earthly employment to serve fully in the gospel. Others are called to serve him in their employment. The underlying principle remains. Both are called in their employment within the creational framework of work.

Work has gone beyond the first level of work set in the Garden of Eden. It is no longer simply a matter of working at the material creation. Already in the OT, God ordained the priests and Levites to serve in the tabernacle. They were to serve in establishing the relationship between God and the people. We should note that in the Garden of Eden man's work carried out this role. We could say that if sin had not driven out man and his work from God's presence, all human work would be priestly. It simply would be service in man's relationship with God. It is a principle of revelation that what has been lost cannot be regained. So it is with this world, with life in the body and with our work. Jesus Christ has opened the way for us to live and work toward the kingdom of God beyond what is in this world. But, in this he did not make a break with creation. Rather, he builds on the foundation of creation to fulfill what was set in creation.

## **3. At the end of all work on earth**

God's work of creating the world came to an end, and he had his Sabbath. An interesting omission in the description of the seventh day is the missing refrain, "And there was evening and there was morning, the seventh day." God's rest from his work of creating never ended. Creation was complete and needed no further creative work. With the end of God's work, man's work began. Now man was to rule and subdue; he was to serve and to guard. The work of man was to be carried out within the finished work of the creator.

When God sent man out from the Garden of Eden, man was removed from his original setting for work. In the Garden, Adam had his work totally within what God did for him. Now he must work in separation from God and produce his own means of subsistence from the ground. A new start had to be made for the realization of God's purpose for man. Man must be raised from the fallen state to his God appointed destiny of reigning and his divine role of serving. The story of this new work is the subject of the rest of the Bible. We will look at what the Bible discloses about the end of man's work in the fallen world, and how this end takes up the themes of work set in creation.

### **a. Evaluation of each man's work**

The Bible makes it clear that in the end God will judge each man according to his works. This shows how God views each person living on earth. God sees us in the position in which he set up Adam. We are on earth to work, and in the end each man will be evaluated as a worker. During life, people may evaluate their life in terms of talents, love, possessions, enjoyed ease, what they get away with, how they can live without working, etc. But, in the end, they will be looked in one way only—as workers.

The divine evaluation of our works answers to God's evaluation of his own works in Genesis 1. Each day's work closes with God looking at the work of the day and evaluating it as good. Then, when all the work of creation was done, God looked at all that he had made and evaluated it as very good (Gen 1.31). This shows that God regards work as that which must be assessed. The apostle Paul expresses the proper response of faith to this divine judgment of our works: "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that

each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2Cor 5.9-10). Even the menial tasks of a slave receive the highest value as being done for the Lord to be rewarded by the Lord (Col 3.22-25).

Jesus taught in the parable of the talents that all who claim to be his disciples must work with a view to having their work evaluated and rewarded by him when he returns (Matt 25.14-30). One slave in the parable opted for idleness, choosing to do nothing with what he had received. The laziness was seen as an act to be judged. The slave who does nothing will be judged for what he actually did, for not working with and increasing what had been entrusted to him. We cannot evade being judged for our works by not working.

#### **b. To rest from one’s works**

The end of God’s work in creation was his Sabbath rest. Hebrews 4.9-11 tells us that this rest remains for the people of God.

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience.

God’s has already rested from his works as Gen 2.1-3 states. Now it remains for his people to rest from all their works. As we noticed earlier, when God’s work was finished man’s work began. Having noticed this, we must make another observation. God did not command Adam in the Garden to rest on the seventh day. The Sabbath day rest was first commanded through Moses after the Exodus. Moses pointed out the reason for this in Deut 5.15. God commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath so that the Israelites would remember that they were slaves and that the Lord delivered them through the Exodus. Moses is pointing out that the commandment to observe the Sabbath has a redemptive significance.

Adam’s work in the Garden of Eden was not the kind of work that was set in contrast to rest. In fact, there might be a pun in the Hebrew of Gen 2.15 to this effect. The verse begins, “Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden....” The word translated with “put” is a form of the Hebrew word to rest. This word can simply mean to put down, as when we lean something against a wall and say that we are resting it against the wall. But, the word is different from the word used for the same effect in v 8 where God is said to have placed Adam in the Garden. Some scholars have suggested that the use of the word to rest in v 15 is a significant hint, though most think that this is pressing the language too hard. At any rate, the Sabbath rest symbolized deliverance from the type of slave labour in Egypt which was not what God assigned to Adam in Eden. What we saw from the vision of paradise in the heavenly Jerusalem in Rev 22.1-5 shows that the type of work assigned to man in creation is sabbatical.

The connection Moses made between the Sabbath commandment and Israel’s redemption agrees with the way the Sabbath is understood in Heb 4.9-11. In Hebrews 4 Israel in the wilderness was en route to enter the Sabbath by entering into the Promised Land. The goal of the Exodus was Sabbath rest in the land. But, due to disobedience, God swore that the Israelites would not enter his rest, and this means the redemptive Sabbath still remains to be entered. The message of Hebrews is that Jesus brings the people of God into this Sabbath. Within this framework, the works from which the people of God will rest are the works in this world that we must rest from. The rest is entered when the whole people of God cease from their labours in this world that is under the bondage of sin and corruption.

To understand the eternal rest fully, we must take note of what we noticed earlier. In the New Jerusalem, there is no longer any curse. But that does not mean that there is no work. The type of work God assigned to Adam in creation will be our eternal occupation. We will serve and reign forever. This work will not be a continuation of our present work on earth. The eternal activity does not contradict the meaning of the Sabbath.

We have looked at the Sabbath as a rest from work. We must also see it from the other end. In Genesis 1, the Sabbath is the achievement of God's work. He completed the entire work of creation so that all was very good, and this brought God to the rest of the Sabbath. The Sabbath day which Israel was to keep never had this character. It was a day that was to be taken off from the ongoing work. But, the Sabbath rest in view in the NT answers to God's rest. God will not impose a rest on an incomplete job. Rather, the work of God on earth through his people will be completed, and the eternal Sabbath will be the result of that completion. This is brought out in the final vision of Revelation. The heavenly city is the church in her completion. This church is being built now on earth, and our eternal dwelling will be in the completed church.

### **c. Another look at God's rest and our rest**

The vision of God's people being active for all eternity points out that the Sabbath rest is not idleness or inactivity. This rest is an active rest. The scriptures show that this is the case with God. After God rested from his work of creation, he continued to be active in his providence by which he holds all things together and governs the world. At times the scriptures give us a view of heaven, and what we see is a busy court in which God rules the world in the court of angels. There is no idleness in heaven. Even at present, God is ever at work. He said to his Son, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Ps 110.1; Heb 1.13).

Jesus gave us another view into this continued working of God. The Jews accused him of breaking the Sabbath commandment by healing a lame man and telling him to take up his bed and walk. Jesus replied, "My Father is working until now, and I myself am working" (Jn 5.17). Jesus was saying that God the Father has not stopped working on his Sabbath. He is ever working. The healing on the Sabbath was the work of the Father and of the Son. Jesus goes on to open up a view of his relationship with the Father as a continuous working relationship (Jn 5.19ff.).

This brings us back to an observation we made earlier about Genesis 1: God is only revealed in his works. The Godhead is not idle. When God made man to be a worker, God made him to be like the God who works. This divine working does not break the Sabbath. As Jesus' miracles show, the work makes the Sabbath. It gives true rest. For the lame man, the miracle hardly broke his rest. Even the task of taking up his bed and carrying it away was a true rest for a man whose labour was to sit on that bed for so long. In Jn 14.10-14 Jesus draws the disciples who believe in him into the divine working. Just as he did what he saw his Father doing, he wants us to do what he does. This divinely given work is the fellowship within the Godhead into which we are brought.

Earlier we saw that work was an integral part of the human existence in creation. God created man from the ground to live from it by what he contributed to the ground or, in the case of the Garden of Eden, what he contributed to that which grew from the ground. At the end of our study, we see that work will forever be the expression of man's existence. In this, man is made to be like God who is ever an active God within the relationships of the trinity. This biblical view changes our view on work and on what it means to rest. Rest is not idleness or indulgence in that which is wholly apart from work. The Sabbath rest is the result of true work, and our eternal rest is our active engagement in that which was brought about through our involvement with God in his work.

### **Christ's call to work**

Jesus takes up the theme of labour and rest in Matt 11.28-30. He says: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Here Jesus gives two calls. In the first call he promises rest as a gift to those who come to him as weary and heavy laden. The Greek word behind the word, weary, is the word for labour and means to be exhausted by labour. The fatigued labour is seen as carrying a load too heavy to bear. The first call is followed up with a second. Those who have come to be given rest are called to take up his yoke (answering

to the word “weary” in the first invitation) and his burden (answering to the word “heavy-laden). The first call is the gospel call, and the second is the call to discipleship. Jesus does not call people to the type of rest that does not engage them in work. Rather, in giving them rest, he engages them in his labour and to carry his burden. He explains why he does this. He will lead them in the way in which they will find rest for their souls. Jesus’ point answers to God’s Sabbath rest in creation. Rest is the outcome of a certain type of work. Work outside of God’s work is a killer. The answer to this is not idleness. In fact, idleness does not yield rest to the soul. It makes the soul restless and drains one of the energy to life. The answer to human toil outside of the work of God is to step into the work of God and work with God. This is the gift Jesus offers.

Paul gives us the encouragement that comes to us from the risen Lord who guarantees us the resurrection of the body. He writes, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord” (1Cor 15.58). This biblical view of work challenges the view so common in our world that we work to get out of work and spend our time in idleness or activities that have no work value. We must remember that God will judge us for our works, and that our eternal reward and glory will come from our works done in the Lord. These works do not strip us of our dignity as the image of God. Our personal and distinctive eternal glory will be given to us out of these works. In our glorified bodies, we will be seen for what we have done for the Lord in our bodies.