

CREATION

Understanding the Mess We're in by
Understanding How it was Meant to be

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Preface

Our current world is in a great mess. On the one hand we are witnessing apparent advancements in science and technology that seems to testify that mankind knows what we are doing and are advancing in our sophistication. However, on the other hand, we are also becoming increasingly confused and clueless about what life on earth ought to be like. Decades of developments in economy has led to the bankruptcy of both communism and capitalism alike (alright, capitalism is not exactly raising its white flag as of yet, but when the worldwide solution to a debt crisis is a cry to spend and spend, we know something is definitely amiss!). Decades of research in psychology has not improved the societal or individual mental health. In fact, more people are mentally ill now than ever before. Suicide is on the rise; as well as senseless rampage killings. And psychology has improved nothing aside from proving the biblical thesis that the heart is deceitful above all things and not understandable by any human being. Consumerized science has managed to cause worldwide environmental issues, and instead of struggling to solve the problem, we somehow go on a sci-fi trip and spent millions of dollars looking for an alternate habitable earth (although how they'd think we could manage to reach that place IF such a place actually exists eludes me). And how science in general has caused millions of people (and apparently millions more to come) to think that homosexuality could ever be normal defies even childish logic.

In the face of such confusion, the Church must no longer remain silent. The Bible has clearly stated by virtue of its CREATION account how the world was meant to be. This alone should suffice in telling us how the world is so different from this original intent. The Bible also tells us why and how the deviation happened: it was because of the FALL. And then, The Bible again tells us what we are supposed to be doing in redeeming such lost culture back to God (REDEMPTION); giving hope to a world devoid of it. And the Bible finally tells us of a glorious hope that everything is progressing to that final CONSUMMATION.

This time, we are going to touch on the very first point: Creation. I shall not spoon-feed you the answers to the issues above; for this is neither the time nor the forum for it. Instead, we are going to look at the very basic point and see if you are able to figure out from there the summary of this answer: That economy is failing because people failed to understand STEWARDSHIP. That psychology is failing because people failed to understand ourselves as the very IMAGE OF GOD. That Science is failing because we have abandoned CREATION. And basically that all of mankind is under a curse of futility because they have abandoned God!

In the beginning God created

From the language used, it is clear that the Genesis story was meant to be a historical account of creation; not merely some mythical or poetic representation of it.

The very first words of Genesis wrote, "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This in itself is a statement that transcends human knowledge. What was "before" the beginning? Or, are we even able to ask that question? 'Was,' and 'before' denotes time; and the beginning was the alpha point of TIME, prior to which time did not exist. To ask what was before time is a misnomer. In the same way we may also ask, "where was God before there were the heavens and the earth?" Again, this is a misnomer of sorts,

for the creation of the heavens and the earth was the alpha point of SPACE, prior to which space did not exist. Thus, we see here how Genesis claims to narrate the very creation of the space-time continuum.

What follows are the creation of mass/ energy (or, MATTER). Here, we are being told that God creates everything *ex nihilo* (from nothingness) by His Word. The pattern we see throughout Genesis 1 is, “let there be X, and there was x, and God saw that it was good.” We see here the display of God’s omnipotence. He created all that He wished to create simply by speaking it into existence; and the result is always good. There was no mistake, no mishap, no unintended consequence. Everything was good, and altogether, it was very good.

As human beings, we understand the universe as a temporal and physical existence that is qualitatively and quantitatively defined by time, space and matter. This is our limitation, our boundary. Our language and thoughts are unable to perceive anything that transcends space, time, or matter. And the Genesis account prescribes God who is the creator of time, space and matter and who is not limited by those dimensions. The eternity of God is not simply an infinite, linear extension of time, but is a different dimension altogether. The residence of God is not in the skies, or simply beyond our galaxy, but is unhindered by our concept of space. He who creates, transcends His creation.

From Chaos to Order

The beginning state of the earth was described as such: formless, empty, dark (1:2). Now begins the work of putting everything into order.

<u>Day 1</u> Light		<u>Day 4</u> Objects of Light
<u>Day 2</u> Sky and Sea		<u>Day 5</u> Animals of the air & the sea
<u>Day 3</u> Land Vegetation		<u>Day 6</u> Animals of the land Man
<u>Day 7</u> Sabbath Rest		

Here we see the work of a Master Architect. Every detail was planned; nothing was left to accident. As the table (above) shows, the first 3 days of creation was dedicated to building the foundations of the latter 3. As such, day 1 (light) becomes the foundational work for day 4 (objects of light), day 2 (separation of sky and sea) for day 5 (animals of air & sea), and day 3 (separation of dry land) for day 6 (animals of the land; and man). And all of these creation were being reserved for a final day of rest; the day of Sabbath.

There is an interesting thing to note here. There is a discontinuation in the work of creation (it was completed on day-7, and was concluded as “very good”), but there is also a continuation. Paul tells us in **1 Cor 3** that God is still at work to this very day, and is still building. He is building us, His Church (v. 8) and we have somehow gained the honor of being called His co-workers (v. 9). When describing this, Paul tried to exemplify God’s wisdom in laying firstly the right foundation, and then building on it with the right materials.

We wait for that day when once again, God will declare His new creation (**2 Cor 5:17**) “very good” as we are presented to Christ as the unblemished bride on that eternal Sabbath rest(**Eph 5:27**).

In the work of laying a foundation, one vital attribute must not be overlooked: that of planned knowledge. Before starting the work of a building, for example, we need to know how high we are going to build. The public infrastructure of Indonesia, for example, is suffering from this very lack. We were ill-prepared for the developments that were to come. We have already built our expressway as a three-lane roads, but are finding now that it is not sufficient. The roads in Bandung and Bali were built far too small for any massive development of the cities, and it is now witnessing in its traffic this lack of planning and foreknowledge. When the foundation is laid, it can no longer be dug out and added to. In the story of Creation, God is displaying this foreknowledge and omniscience. Like an expert builder, God has first determined the end from the very beginning. *“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come. I say, ‘my purpose will stand, and I will do as I please’ (Isa 46:10).*

The earth’s self-healing ability, to name but one example, shows how God has made it to fulfill this need SUSTAINABLY. Mahatma Gandhi detected correctly when he said that the earth can provide enough for every man’s need but not their greed. But greed was never part of the picture. Just like we cannot blame the maker of a kitchen knife if it breaks when we use it to saw a piece of wood, we are mistaken when we blame the Creator for our own faulty stewardship.

Man as the Image of God

Being created last is testament enough that man is the pinnacle of God’s creation. Man is the only created being which was not simply spoken into existence, but was also personally shaped, and personally breathed into by God (**2:7**). He is also created in a very special way – after the very image and likeness of God Himself (**1:26-27**). And man is explicitly provided with his reason for being (**1:28**). Yet, in all its glory, lest we forget ourselves, we are also reminded of our humble estate, that we are but dust (**Ps 103:14**). We will discuss in greater detail the aspects of man revealed in creation; especially what it means to be the Imago Dei – the Image of God. We will explore what it means for man to be created in God’s image.

Etymology. The word rendered into “the image and likeness of God” actually are the interchangeable Hebrew words *Tselem* צֶלֶם and *Demuth* דְּמוּת. This will be discussed later, but to just briefly mention, the two words are meant to explain that we as God’s image are meant to represent God to the rest of creation. When they see us, they should see in us the image and likeness to their Creator-God. Just as a statue of a ruler placed in the middle of a city is meant to remind the populace of their ruler and king, we are supposed to represent God to the created world in all of His divine attributes.

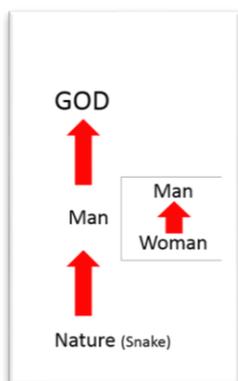
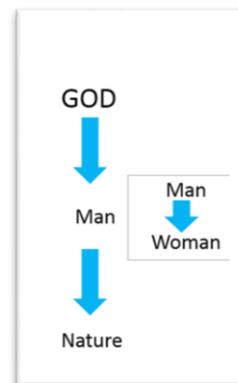
Aspects of the Imago Dei. There are a few aspects of the Imago Dei that we can identify from **1:26-28**. (1) *Authority.* Because we are God’s image, we are given authority to rule over creation on God’s behalf. (2) *Spiritual.* That man is made after God’s image means that man is made as a spiritual being, and one who is given the potential to relate with God Himself. (3) *Social.* Man is created after the image of the Triune God. We are called man (singular), but are created male and female (plural). This is exactly like God when He said, “let us (plural) make man (singular) in Our (plural) image (singular).” Not only are we to relate to God, we are to become social beings who relate to each other with the divine attributes like love, justice, holiness. (4)

Productive Stewardship. We have a mission to carry out, to be fruitful, to increase in number, to fill the earth and to subdue it (**1:28**).

- **Authority.** One of the most obvious aspect of the Imago Dei that is immediately identifiable from the verses is that of “authority.”

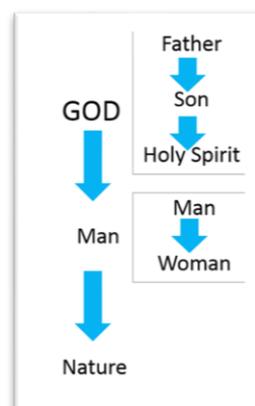
*Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, SO THAT they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground (**Gen 1:26**)*

The word “so that” is the clear indication. We are made in the image of God so THAT we would rule over the created world. It means that we are to act authoritatively on God’s behalf. As mentioned earlier, the words translated Tselem and Demuth means that we as human beings are to be the representatives of God in this world. That means that it is going to be God’s reign and rule over the whole creation, but conducted through the rule of human beings. That way, when the rest of the creation looks at man, they are going to see God. We are to rule over the world the way God intends: with servitude, love, sacrifice, authority, empowerment, etc. This was to be the flow of authority (indicated with the blue arrows):



When we look at how authority is supposed to be, we can immediately see how Satan, through sin, intended to destroy this very pattern. By using the form of a snake, what he had done was using a representation of NATURE, to tempt Eve the WOMAN, who in turn caused Adam the MAN to sin, and who finally rebelled against GOD. What the sin in Eden did was to turn the sphere of authority upside down, represented with the red arrows (left).

Perhaps it must be mentioned as a side note (because this book is not about feminism or about the family), this flow of authority must not be mistaken to mean that God created woman as being inferior to man. It is clearly written that the image of God consists of the male and female (**Gen 1:27**). The very same Paul who emphasizes on the headship of the husband (eg. **Eph 5:23**) also reminds us that in Christ both male and female are equal heirs according to the promise (**Gal 3:26-29**). However, perhaps the most convincing proof of the fact that the act of submission is not meant to denote inferiority is the very example of the Triune God Himself. Jesus very often emphasized the fact that He did nothing of Himself; that He spoke and acted only in submission to the will of the Father (eg **John 5:19; John 8:28**). In fact, in the climax of His earthly ministry, Jesus showed the ultimate example of submission when He said, “not My will but Thine be done” (**Mat 26:39**). Yet, Christ’s undeniable claim is this: “I and the Father are One” (**John 10:30**). In the same way, the Holy Spirit was sent by God the Father and the Son (eg **John 14:26**), and speaks not on His own but will only speak what He hears from Christ and glorify only Christ (**John 16:13-15**). But God the Father, God



the Son and God the Holy Spirit are equal in their status. Any theology that describes God the Spirit as being subordinate to God the Son and God the Son as being subordinate to God the Father is heretic. So, the flow of authority is described in the picture (upper right).

- **Spiritual.** God is Spirit (**John 4:24**). This implies that our being made after the image of God does not refer to the fact that we are made to look like God physically. God is Spirit, and He is not limited by physical body that occupies space. No, God is omnipresent and transcends the need for space. And He is imaterial, He is unlimited by matter. So to be made in God's image means that we are made as SPIRITUAL BEINGS. As such, we are made to communicate and have a communion with God Himself. We can only have a communion with those who are in our image and likeness. As much as we can love our pets, we can never have a meaningful communion or communication with them, as they are not in our image or likeness.

This is why man is the only creature which God breathed (breath – Hebrew ruach = spirit) into (**Gen 2:7**) and in whom God had placed a sense of eternity (**Ecc 3:11**). And because of this, we can have a consciousness that transcends our physical existence. We instinctively know that our existence transcends our physical bodies, and it does not end with the death of this body. This is why mankind has always cared about leaving behind a good name; and also precisely why no animal would ever care about it. This is also what Christ reminded us when He told us to regard with greater respect the existence (and salvation) of our souls as compared to the existence (and safety) of our bodies (**Mat 10:28**).

In short, we are made for God and to have a communion with God; and this will be the exact reason that we will never be truly satisfied until we find our satisfaction in Him. Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly defines the chief purpose of man: "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

And in explaining this joy; both our joy when worshipping God and God's joy when receiving our praise, is hymnatically enacted in the paraphrase of Psalm 147 by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), where our "duty" of praise is also our "delight":

Praise ye the Lord! 'Tis good to raise
Your hearts and voices in His praise:
His nature and His works invite
To make this duty our delight.

The delight, however is also God's, as the final stanza makes clear:

But saints are lovely in His sight,
He views His children with delight;
He sees their hope, He knows their fear,
And looks, and loves His image there¹.

- **Social.** We see the following oddity in Gen 1:26-27, ""Let Us (plural) make man (singular) in Our (plural) image & likeness (singular)... God (singular) created man (singular) in His own image (singular), in the image of God He (singular) created them (plural); male and female (plural) He (singular) created them

¹ Wainwright et al (2005) *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, Oxford University Press, USA, p.9-10

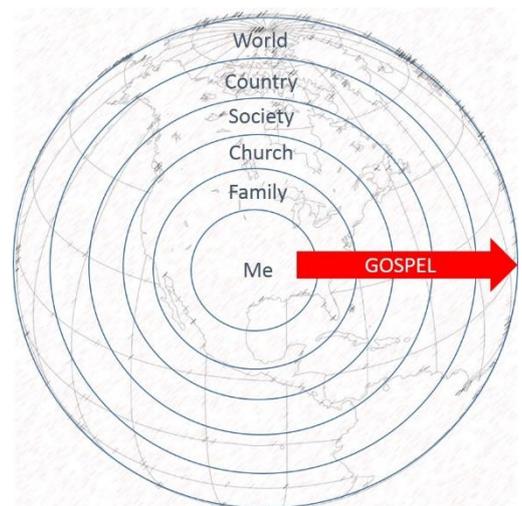
(plural)” (Gen 1:27). Linguistically, this statement is structurally wrong. However, this is also the earliest evidence in the Bible that our monotheistic God is also Triune.

But the point I would like to raise is this: God created man as a social being in that mankind is created male and female. We are meant to create a community that resembles the Triune God. The theology of the Trinity is a concept that is exclusive to us Christians. Whilst many people normally shudder when they are asked to explain the Trinity. Their reluctance is understandable, as the Trinity is indeed something that transcends human understanding. However, this is also an important concept to grasp, because it is one of the most powerful knowledge that will help us understand a lot of things. For example, a strictly monotheistic religion will have difficulty explaining the RELATIONAL aspect of their god. They will not be able to explain, for example, who their god LOVED before the creation of the world. This is because love is a RELATIONAL ATTRIBUTE, one that needs an object to relate. Without an object, love becomes self-love, which equates to selfishness. So, understanding the doctrine of the Trinity is vital in understanding love, submission, justice, and a lot of the relational aspects in the attributes of God.

Man, male and female, are corporately made in the image of God. Notice that in the process of creation, everything was declared as “good” and corporately as “very good,” but there was one time when God declared something that is “not good.” *“It is not good for the man to be alone”* (Gen 2:18). This means that we are indeed created to be a social being. We are not meant to be aloof. We are called to engage one another and practice our holiness to each other. We are meant to love one another, to practice justice, to have mercy, to be patient, to bear with one another. We are called to portray God in our everyday lives. This is also what it means to be created in the image of God.

To facilitate this, God initiated the most basic institution: marriage. The basic idea is this. Two righteous individuals make up a righteous family. God initiated this and blessed marriage so that out of that marriage will come godly offspring (Mal 2:15). Many godly family will make up a godly society which will in turn make up a godly nation, which will ensure a blessing that reaches unto the ends of the world. This calling, initially given to Adam and Eve; and then again given to Abraham, was in fact the essence of the Gospel. Paul explained it this way, *“Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and ANNOUNCED THE GOSPEL IN ADVANCE to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’ ”* (Gal 3:8). This means that God intended for Israel to be a nation that spread the blessing to the whole world. That the message of a Jewish Messiah was to become the hope to all mankind; and that the faith of Abraham is supposed to be spread to all nations.

In short, man is created to be a social being. And the right way of being social is to emulate God’s being and character and become a blessing to each other. The Gospel must be spread to all nations, and it starts with godly individuals and godly family (see right).



- **Productive Stewardship.** Our being made in the image of God has this application that we are supposed to produce, to be co-creators with God Himself. This is the reason why although God had made the land produce vegetation on the third day, there were yet any shrub that had sprung up, for no man was there

to work the ground. I do not see any contradiction between the account of Genesis 2 as compared to Genesis 1, as the “no shrub” in Genesis 2 must not mean that there was absolutely no vegetation that has existed; because if that were the case, there would be no GARDEN to put man into. I would just see this as an unworked vegetation. This is the reason in the immediate story (**2:15**) we see God putting man in the garden to work it(abad – עָבַד) and take care of it (shamar – שָׁמַר). Now, this is to represent our Cultural Mandate. This is what we are called to do. (1) We are called to UTILIZE the earth for our benefit. In fact, the Hebrew word used, abad, is a much stronger word. It can be translated into “to enslave.” We are called to “enslave” the earth to yield its benefits. This is why some people have blamed the Christians for seemingly legalizing the destruction of the earth’s resources. However (2) we are also called to CULTIVATE the earth. This second word, shamar, is also much stronger. It means to protect, to guard. Basically, the Cultural Mandate that God gave has this exact meaning, in which we are called to utilize what God had put under our authority for the betterment of all of creation. We are called to become stewards of God’s creation, to work it in such a way that when we are called into accountability, we are able to show not only what God had given to us when He entrusted us with the stewardship, but also how much we have multiplied from what He had given us. This nuance is again given by Jesus as He explained about the parable of Talents (found in **Mat 25:14-30**). Notice that the setting is that of an end-time judgment; of a time when He would call us to give accountability for what we have done with what God had entrusted us. The point is this: God did not create the earth to contain every little detail that the world needs. God created the trees, but He did not create tables, or chairs. When we uproot a tree, invent a table, and then replant the tree, we get a tree, and a table. We have in fact multiplied the resources that had been given to us. And so the balance of utilizing the earth and cultivating it is the basis of creating a God-glorifying culture.

Seeing Creation as Original Intent

I think it is befitting for us to end this article by giving an explanation to the issues I raised in the beginning of the article. I started off by showing you what is wrong with the state of our world. I shall end by showing you how understanding creation helps you put into perspective what had transpired when we deviate from the original intent that is found within this story of creation:

Economy. Let us stop for a moment and ponder what had gone wrong with our system of economy, and what had led to the worldwide failure of economic systems. At its very roots, man was never meant to have an autonomous authority. Any authority man derives is due to his representational status to God. This means that any misuse of that authority; or anything man does, whether intentional or otherwise, that does not glorify God; effectively cancels his right to exercise authority. When communism usurps power to a single individual or a group of individuals (despite its opposite claim), it creates a culture which disincentivizes productivity and multiplication; which is the very intent of creation. And when capitalism irresponsibly enslaves the world to fulfill man’s desires, it is failing because (although it encourages productivity and multiplication) it fails to cause man to enjoy creation in view of God’s glory; and because it fails to call man to balanced and faithful stewardship by also protecting the earth.

Psychology. This field has displayed seemingly vast improvements. However, when we declare psychology as a field of science despite being unable to make objective observations on the human mind and soul, we are making a huge mistake. What instead transpires in the study of psychology is sinful people observing the behavior and trends of other sinful people; resulting in sinful conclusions drawn and implemented in a sinful

world. The only reason we see an effectiveness in psychology is because it is right in determining and identifying the situations and the depraved needs of sinful people. When implemented, psychology does give us temporal relief from the emptiness that floods our sinful soul. But this relief is both deceptive and empty. Deceptive because it causes us to discard the need for the true peace of God that we can never gain unless we find it in Christ. Empty because we are not facing the problem head on and are only delaying the inevitable. When you have terminal illness, it is comforting to hear to positive comments and false hopes, but what we truly need might be a painful medical treatments.

Science has gone off-track because we stupidly think that our discoveries are in fact independent creational works. Although in a sense man is given the privilege to be co-creators with God (as I have explained), we create differently from God. God creates *ex nihilo* – from absolute nothingness. We as humans create by discovering the laws and workings of nature; and using raw materials or principles found within nature; we create or invent products that have never before existed. But we are never independent; we are always dependent. Man may be able to simulate God’s creation, but is never able to achieve this independently. Take one example: even in the technologically advanced year of 2013, simulating a mere 1 second of real brain activity, on a network equivalent to 1 percent of an actual brain’s neural network; and using the world’s fourth fastest supercomputer took 40 whole minutes! If computing time scales linearly with the size of the network (a big *if*), it would take nearly two and half days to simulate 1 second of activity for an entire brain². We think ourselves smart? We think ourselves independent? Think again!

There are many, many more that can be said, but the main point that we need to realize is that everything that is wrong around us at this present day is due to the fact that we have deviated from God’s creational intent. And this deviation is called SIN. Why is there suffering? Sin. Why is there evil? Sin. But thankfully, the story doesn’t end there. It doesn’t end with sin. It continues with the redemptive work in Christ Jesus and shall ultimately end with the hope of glory that awaits those who are in Him.

Getting There: The Redemption of Christ and the Hope of Glory

The story of Creation in Genesis ends not with the 6th day, but with the 7th day. Although there is nothing new announced in the 7th day, it is there for a purpose. The 7th day is the day when God rested from all His works. And God made the 7th day holy to celebrate His work of creation. Does it mean that God had stopped working after the 6th day? Absolutely not. In a debate regarding sabbath with the Jewish leaders, Jesus answered them this way, “*My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working*” (**John 5:17**).

God is accomplishing in and through history His story of creation. The hope of eternal life with God is not some sad story that got lost when Adam fell into sin. It was rather “*promised before the beginning of time*” (**Titus 1:2**). The coming of Jesus Christ into the world was NOT a “Plan B” that God had to devise because His “Plan A” surprisingly got jeopardized by Adam. This statement may be a lot to take in, but is nevertheless an important one to make. Knowing that God is navigating through history in full and total control is the only assurance we get that history will also end in the perfect way that God had revealed it to be:

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of

² <http://gigaom.com/2013/08/02/simulating-1-second-of-real-brain-activity-takes-40-minutes-83k-processors/>
accessed 15.08.13

heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then He said, "write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all of this, and I will be their God and they will be My children. (Rev 21:1-7)

The God who knows the end from the beginning. The Alpha and Omega God, the Beginning and the End. He is the God who has total and absolute control over the course of history. This is the God whom I worship, the God whom I put my faith in. A god who is surprised at the turn of history can in no way assure us of the conclusion of history. And that is not the Christian God.

This hope of glory is promised to us through the work of Christ in us (**Col 1:27**). Through this union with Christ, we are in fact being rebirthed; being recreated in accordance to the plan and will of God. "Therefore in anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old one has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (**2 Cor 5: 17**). Because of sin, we had become the enemies of God. And the just God cannot and will not, on account of His holiness, forgive sins and grant mercy. Justice must be served. However, on account of His love, He sent His own begotten Son, so that in Him we might be reconciled to God (see **Romans 5:8-11**).

Conclusion: The Final Sabbath

And so, as mentioned earlier, God is still at work to this very day, accomplishing His plan of the perfected creation. This is why the Sabbath, which is a celebration of the 7th day rest, was not final. "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from His" (**Heb 4:9-10**).

The final Sabbath-day will be the climax of God's creational work. For on that Day, we look at what God had made, and we declare it together with Him, "very good." We rest in enjoyment of His great and wonderful work; and we worship Him in honor of that accomplished work. When we enter that day of rest, we shall really be able to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. This shall be the final Consummation; our hope of glory!

Soli Deo Gloria!