

The Dominion Mandate

Genesis 1:28; 9:1-3

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❖ Introduction

We are considering these passages which have historically been called the *cultural mandate* which refers to the command of God to establish the race of humans by filling the earth. But even more, mankind was told by God that He gave him dominion over all things and that he should therefore manifest that rule over all the earth. The question is how is this command fulfilled today and what does obedience look like?

Genesis is literally a book of beginnings and we must return back here and seek understanding so that we do not begin off course.

❖ The Mandate

Genesis 1:28 - ²⁸ Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”[NKJV]

Genesis 9:1-3 - ¹ So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ² And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move *on* the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. ³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.[NKJV]

- ◆ Prior to the fall of Adam, God expressly gave Adam (and therefore mankind) charge to rule over all the creation. Some have argued that this was a condition that only existed prior to the fall and therefore does not apply again until later. However, we can see that the command is reiterated and imposed upon Noah who lived *after* the fall.
- ◆ If God had not given us the command to fill *along with* the authority to rule, how could we fill the earth? If faced with the new land like Noah was, we would not have the authority to go and clear a plot of land, build a house, plant a crop...we would be in a perpetual state of trespassing. We would be walking, building and harvesting things that we had no authority to do...things that belong to someone else. We have no absolute right in ourselves to fill the earth, but instead, as Creator, God gave man the authority to subdue and rule the earth—not *autonomous* authority, rather *authority under Him*.
- ◆ This was not a numbers game to God; He was not simply looking for a vast multitude of humans. If population was the only thing that God was interested in then He suffered a major setback in the flood. Godly dominion is not the same thing as being domineering. Godly rule is not the same thing as tyranny. Subduing the earth is not the same thing as a foolish, gluttonous destruction of the earth. All of these things we are called to do under God and in Christ.

❖ Modern Rebellious Thought

- ◆ Everywhere you turn, the news, nature documentaries, children’s books, you find this modern mindset that believes that mankind is the cancer of the earth. All of the problems on the earth are because of our mere presence here and the solution is to pretend that we don’t have the dominion mandate and that we are simply a reckless, out of control mammal and have no right to be here. This is obviously a belief that denies God, denies His position as Creator, and denies the distinction He made in placing His own image on mankind rather than anything else in the creation.
- ◆ The language used by many in the environmental movement is that of saving the earth, honoring mother earth, being one with the earth and it has the devotion of a religion. This is because to many, *it* is a religion—it is an *inconsistent* pantheism. Pantheism is the belief that everything is god or a part of the divine power. The inconsistency comes when they start to make distinction between what is good and bad they unravel the “pan” in pantheism.

❖ The Problem is Sin, Not Dominion

- ◆ However, this is not to say that everything the environmentalists are saying is wrong. We can not react to some of the silliness by coming up with equally silly countermeasures. Our responses must be founded *biblically* and not founded in emotion or sentiment. For example, Isaiah 5:8, or Proverbs 12:10.

❖ The Problem is Sin, Not Man

- ◆ There are those who say the problem is because humankind *is here*. But Scriptures say that the problem is because he is exercising dominion poorly, lacking wisdom. The extreme environmentalist may say that the problem is that man has no right whatsoever to exercise dominion, and the Christian says man has no right to exercise his dominion *autonomously*.
- ◆ God made mankind to rule in wisdom and glory over the face of the earth. After the fall, the mandate remained but fulfilling the command became more difficult. God increased the difficulty in child-bearing and He cursed the ground making it more difficult to yield its bounty.

- ◆ Psalm 8:1-9 gives further understanding on the creation account in Genesis. We see that God made man “a little lower than the angels” but nevertheless, He crowned him with glory and honor and gave him genuine dominion. Note that the pattern of dominion was not just for Adam as an individual but was for Adam as a symbol or representative of the entire human race. This glory and honor was damaged in the fall and God subjected all the creation to futility and mankind’s rule over the creation diminished.

❖ The Solution is Dominion in Submission to Christ

- ◆ The author of Hebrews quotes this psalm in chapter 2:5-10 and explains that mankind’s dominion over the creation was exhaustive but now had become impotent. The restoration of mankind’s righteous rule in the earth was *not yet visible*. However, although we do not see his rule in its restored glory, *we do see Jesus* who was made a man (a little lower than the angels) crowned with glory and honor. The Perfect Man has restored the glory for us so that now if we are in Christ, we are able to rule in faith, in obedience, and to God’s glory. The problem really is sin, but the solution is the new creation/order that has been established by Christ.
- ◆ When a non-Christian finds a plot of land and he tends it and produces a crop in accordance with the mandate God has given, he is *externally* obeying the law of God and he is *externally* blessed but he is *internally or eternally* cursed. When a Christian man does the same thing but is doing so by faith from the heart, he is obeying internally and he is *internally* blessed, *externally* blessed, and *eternally* blessed. The point here is that apart from Christ, we cannot fulfill the dominion mandate as we were first called to do. However, in Jesus Christ we seen a man exercising dominion over the heavens, the earth and beneath the earth and we fulfill our mandate by faith under Him.

❖ How Then Should We Live?

You Shall Not Steal

- ◆ As we go about our lives trying to fulfill the mandate which God has given to all humankind, we must keep in mind the law of God and one law, in particular that is essential to know is the prohibition on theft. When God forbids stealing, He is simultaneously establishing the right to own property. If no one owned anything, there would be no such thing as stealing. We cannot expect that our dominion gives us the right to demand that our neighbor take his beautiful land and make it into a terrarium so that we can all look at it. Whether we are saving the whales, saving the seals, the buffalo or the spotted owl we must not impose our fondness of things upon the way others exercise dominion. Naturally, it is not wise to spend every penny you have nor would it be wise to shoot every last buffalo.
- ◆ The point is that we are called by God to exercise dominion over *the things which are ours*—not things which belong to others. Do you want to save the buffalo? Then buy them...or form a collection of people and buy them.
- ◆ What things has God given to you over which you should exercise dominion? Your family, your car, your home, your lawn, your company, your dining room or your vocation. Everything we do should be done in such a way that we are exercising dominion over the realm that God has given to us and our desire is to do so, in a manner which glorifies God.

Typically there are three common responses that Christians may have to these concepts.

- ◆ The first might be like the servant who feared the vengeance of a harsh master and he hid his talents in the ground to ensure that he could give the talents back when his master returned. This is an escapist response that does not engage with the world around him but looks for a foxhole to hide in. This is the *retreat* mentality—but Godly dominion does not look like retreat it should look more like an advance.
- ◆ The second response comes from those who *really like* the idea of dominion and he consumes what he has (or is consumed by what he has), he craves what he does not have or he seeks dominion over others because of what they have or don’t have.
- ◆ The third response is one seasoned with humility, not ashamed of how God has made mankind, understands that mankind is fallen and strives to regain the righteous dominion over the earth through his communion with Christ.

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