

Evangelism unto Discipleship and Dominion

The God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 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” (Genesis 1:26-28).

We will never properly understand and faithfully implement Christ’s last command to His followers in Matthew 28:18-20 without understanding God’s first command to man in the Garden of Eden. Theologians have denoted Christ’s last command as the “Great Commission” and have classified God’s command to His imaged man on the sixth day of the creation week as the “Cultural Mandate.” This mandate serves the purpose of distinguishing man from the other created realms by his being created uniquely in the image of God (Genesis 1:26; 9:6) and ranked a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5). The principal derivative of this reflection and rank is man’s exercise of dominion over the earth under God. God made man for the blessed purpose of granting to him dominion over the entirety of the created realm. The word dominion in Hebrew means “to rule over or to tread down” and subdue means “to trample under foot.”¹ This “footstool imagery” (speaks of obedient action under the authority and command of God) is a recurring theme throughout the rest of Scripture.²

In Genesis 2, we observe Adam in his initial steps of obedience to the Cultural Mandate in his naming of the animals, a scientific endeavor (Genesis 2:19-20). Naming something means to observe its characteristics and to classify it accordingly. Note that you cannot classify something unless you have previously been given authority to do so. Since God gave Adam authority over the animals, then Adam could exercise this authority by organizing the animal world. God also gave Adam the task of “keeping” the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). To keep means “to dress or to cultivate.”³ Adam was a husbandman of the Garden of Eden and this was not an easy task; it required hard work, mental and physical.⁴ God gave Adam the Garden as a “pilot project.” Once he had taken dominion over Eden, then the entire planet was his for the taking. In God’s plan, Adam and Eve were to bear children (be fruitful and multiply), train them in dominion tasks, and then fill the earth with these disciples, all to

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the glory of God.⁵

This was not to be. In Genesis 3, we encounter the Great Tempter, the serpent, enticing Eve to disbelieve the Word of God by becoming an adjudicator of it; i.e., to determine for herself good and evil (Genesis 3:1-5). Although Eve fell for the Serpent's lie (II Corinthians 11:3), Adam, not far away (Genesis 3:6), ate of the forbidden fruit in full knowledge of what he was doing. Because of Adam's federal headship⁶, his sin engulfed the entire human race in "The Lie" (Romans 5:12-21).

It is important to note that with the entrance of sin into the world God did not withdraw the Cultural Mandate as man's primary directive. This mandate reappears in several key places in Scripture after the Fall (Genesis 9:1ff; Psalm 8; Hebrews 2:6-8). The sin factor did not take God by surprise. God intervened and supplemented the Cultural Mandate with a redemption factor, the promise of a deliverer to come (Genesis 3:15). The "seed of the woman" (refers to Christ) destroyed the kingdom of "The Lie" (the seed of the serpent) on Calvary's Cross (I John 3:7-8).⁷ Christ's Great Commission serves as the victorious capstone of this redemptive promise.

Let's note the similarities between the giving of the Cultural Mandate and the giving of the Great Commission. First, note that God gave the Cultural Mandate after He had finished His creation work (Genesis 1:31-2:2). The giving of the Great Commission also occurs at the climax of Christ's divine labor (John 19:30). Second, the ultimate authority of the Triune God undergirds both the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission. It is the triune God (identified by the "Let Us" in Genesis 1:26) that commands Adam to take dominion. The Great Commission is to be obeyed in the name of the Triune God; i.e., in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Third, both "mandates" are connected to Federal Heads. The first mandate was given to Adam "in whom all die" (I Corinthians 15:22). The second mandate is accomplished under the authority of Christ and those who in Him are "made alive" by His grace (I Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 2:1-10). Fourth, both "mandates" engage the same task. Both are designed with the goal of subduing all the earth to the glory of God. The Cultural Mandate was to start from Eden and gradually extend to the "four corners" of the earth. The Great Commission was to start at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47) and gradually extend to all nations and the remotest parts of the earth (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; cf. Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Daniel 2:35, 44). Fifth, both "mandates" were initially given to small groups. The first was given to Adam and Eve and then renewed later to Noah and his sons (Genesis 9:1). The second was given to Christ's disciples and to those they will train.⁸ Sixth, both "mandates" provide the same enabling power. With the first, God implanted into man the "drive or enabling power" to take dominion. The entrance of sin perverted godly dominion into a desire to "be like God" (Genesis 3:5). With the second, redemption in Christ restores man to the dominion image of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). By Christ's redemptive work, God empowers man with His Holy Spirit to engage in and complete the primary directive; i.e., to take dominion over and subdue the earth, cultivating it to the glory of God.

Our mandate, as blood-bought followers of the Lamb, is four-fold. First, we are to grow in the

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knowledge and grace of our Lord (II Peter 3:18). We do this by learning how: (a) to fellowship with the Lord by listening to His all-encompassing Word as obedient disciples (Isaiah 50:4; Mark 3:14) and (b) to faithfully live by “every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Romans 1:17; Matthew 4:4; cf. Habakkuk 2:4 and Deuteronomy 8:3). Second, using the tools of dominion that God has given to us in His Command-Word, we are to cultivate the earth in terms of our lawful callings (whether it be a parent, a child, a husband, a wife, a single person, a farmer, a plumber, an artist, a scientist, a carpenter, a businessman, an educator, a student, a pastor, a missionary, a doctor, a nurse, a lawyer, a judge, a congressman, or a President).⁹ In other words, by His enabling grace (He gives what He commands), we are to follow Christ in every aspect of our lives as obedient and faithful servants (I Peter 1:13-16; Colossians 3:17; I Corinthians 10:31; Hebrews 12:14; cf. Leviticus 19:2 and 20:7). We are to take captive every thought, including vocational thoughts, to the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5).¹⁰ We are to press Christ’s crown rights, bringing to bear His righteous claims and preeminence, in every sphere of human endeavor (Colossians 1:18). Third, armed with a Biblical apologetic (I Peter 3:15) and with power received from the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), we are to both defend and proclaim the good news to those trapped in “The Lie” (II Corinthians 4:1-6). We command all men everywhere to turn from their rebellion and surrender to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 17:30). Then, we bring the repentant into the fellowship of His Church and train them to “follow Christ even as we do” (I Corinthians 11:1). We baptize them and teach them, as apprentices, to observe all of Christ’s commands (Matthew 28:20) and to understand and implement the realities of the His kingdom (Acts 18:23; 19:8, 9; 20:27-32; I Peter 5:2; Acts 28:30-31). We teach them not only how to grow in God’s grace, but we also train them in the skillful use of the Biblical tools of defending the faith, evangelism, and dominion. Fourth, we must remember that the goal of the Great Commission is not just the making of individual disciples. We are to make nations of disciples; i.e., nations as disciples (Matthew 28:19). The goal of the Gospel is that “all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him” (Psalm 72:11; cf. Psalm 86:8-10). The goal of the Gospel is the taking back of ground unlawfully held by the usurper Satan and that ground means the kingdoms of this world because they now rightfully belong to our Lord and His Christ (Revelation 11:15; Psalm 2:8). The goal of the Gospel is the fulfillment of the Cultural Mandate by flooding the earth with the blessed “knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14; Psalm 72:18-19).

Let us all commit ourselves afresh to the filling of the earth with followers of the Lamb, those who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12; cf. Revelation 12:17), for His Name’s sake (Romans 1:5).

Endnotes:

¹ This taking of dominion and subduing the earth was to flow out of man’s obedient fellowship with his Creator (pictured as walking with God in the cool of the Garden – Genesis 3:8). Man was responsible to God and accountable to Him for his dominion-related activities.

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² These Scriptures illustrate this theme and its manifold applications in the life of the believer: Deuteronomy 11:24; Joshua 1:3; 10:24; 14:9; Psalm 8:6; 47:3; 91:13; 110:1; 119:59, 101, 105; Proverbs 4:26; Isaiah 49:23; 52:7; 60:13-14; Malachi 4:3; Matthew 10:14; Luke 1:79; Acts 13:51; Romans 10:15, 16:20; I Corinthians 15:25-27; Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 6:15; Hebrews 1:13; 2:8; 10:13; Revelation 3:9.

³ Our word “culture” is derived from cultivate; i.e., the application of work or other means of improvement. It carries the idea of obedient and faithful stewardship.

⁴ Imagine the manifold work tasks that faced Adam. He had no tools and he had to control the animals and coordinate the gathering of food (from the nearby fruit trees) and water. He had to construct some kind of fencing, some kind of food/water containers, and, because of the morning mist, some kind of “lean-to” to sleep under during the night. Of course, when Eve appeared on the scene, like all women, she probably looked at Adam’s arrangement of things, saw how improvements could be made, and told Adam to please “rearrange the furniture.” With the coming of Eve came more work for Adam!

⁵ Note that from Eden a river parted into four river heads (Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates). These rivers were designed to take Adam and his descendants to the “four corners” of the earth (Genesis 2:10-14).

⁶ Remember, by “federal” we mean that Adam did not just act for himself, he represented the human race that would spring from his loins.

⁷ Destroy in the Greek means to “loose” or “dissolve.” It carries the meaning of “breaking up of a kingdom” by depriving it of its authority; i.e., to overthrow it.

⁸ After 2,000 years of Gospel blessings, these mandates have come to you and to me. Like the Apostle Paul, we find “Timothys” who will commit these blessings “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:1-3).

⁹ God requires all men, including Kings and judges, to live and rule by His prescriptive Word; i.e., to “kiss the Son” or perish in the way (Psalm 2:10-12). To briefly see how this works out, for example, in the civil realm, see Romans 12:17-13:7. Here the Apostle Paul wrote, not descriptively (of the current rule of the Roman Caesar Nero), but *prescriptively*. The “separation of church and state” is a biblical concept *only* in terms of functionality (the church is a minister of the Word of God and the state a minister of the Sword of God). In contrast, the church and state are united in terms of their mutual submission to God and His Word; i.e., each must “kiss the Son” in their respective spheres of authority. Rulers and judges, as ministers of God, are responsible, under Him, to use the sword of God’s vengeance as a terror to evil doers (and thereby praise what is good). This prescription assumes a standard for defining civil evil and enforcing penal sanctions. What standard did Paul assume? That standard was the lawful use of the law code of the Bible (I Timothy 1:8-11). Originally given by God to Israel through Moses, Scripture indicates that this wise and just law code is binding on all nations and all kings (Leviticus 18:24-27; Deuteronomy 4:5-8; cf. Psalm 119:46, 118-119; Proverbs 8:12-16;

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Romans 1-3). It was upon the basis of this righteous law code that the prophets could proclaim judgment, not only upon God's people, *but upon all nations* (cf. Isaiah 13-23; Jeremiah 2-20, 46-51; Amos 1-2; Jonah; Revelation 15, 16:4-7, 18:6, 19:1-8). It is historically noteworthy, in this context, to remember that each ungodly ruler of the Roman Empire (including Nero, Paul's executioner) *perished in the way* by refusing to "kiss the Son." And, eventually, the Roman Empire (the referent in Revelation 13-19), not only a persecutor of God's people but also a rejecter of God's civil law code, "bit the dust." God continues to bless or judge nations in terms of their obedience or disobedience to His Son, His Gospel, and His law-word (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; Psalm 33:10-12; Proverbs 11:11; 14:34; Hebrews 12:25-29; Revelation 6-19).

¹⁰ We are not to view our vocational callings as merely opportunities to "witness for Christ." We are to take the Word of God to our work. By this, I do not mean that we merely take a Bible to work so that we can read it during our breaks or lunch. We "take our Bible to work" by reforming our vocations in accordance with God's prescriptive commands (i.e., every word that proceeds from His mouth).