

A Dominion Mandate?

In our circles you will often hear people talk of God's "Dominion" or "Cultural" Mandate for Christians. This refers to the original commission God gave to Adam in the Garden,

Gen 1:26, 28

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." ... ²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."

However, there is disagreement over how that applies to Christians today. Was this a command only for Adam to fulfill or was it for all of God's image bearers? Is it ongoing? Was it fulfilled by Christ? These are important questions because this gets to the heart of what God has called us to do on this earth. So how are we to understand this "mandate" that God has given?

The scriptures reveal that this mandate was a charge for Adam, God's vice-ruler, to guard and keep the Garden of Eden. Certainly, he was to steward and care for it, but the commission given Him was much more substantial than that. He was to guard it from God's enemies and specifically to defeat or subdue them for YHWH. Sadly, we know how well that commission was handled: Adam failed both to guard Eve from the enemy, and to confront that enemy with the truth. He failed the test God had given to him. As a result, he and all humanity were not allowed in the Garden that they were to guard and keep. He and humanity were now cursed for their treason, and now face death. So what happened to the Mandate Adam was given?

David VanDrunen

If the first Adam was made in God's image and likeness, and was commissioned to work as God had worked, was he also to rest as God had rested? Was the image of God not only about working (and working and working and working ...) but also about *finishing* the work and *resting* like God himself? ... The first Adam did not bear God's image in order to work aimlessly in the original creation but to

finish his work in this world and then to enter a new creation and to sit down enthroned in a royal rest.¹

Paul states this truth in **Rom 3:23**, “For all have sinned and fall short of the *glory* of God.” What does he mean by the phrase, “glory of God?” Of what did sin cause us to fall short? The “glory” mentioned here is not God’s own glory; even in heaven, we will not ever be as *glorious* as God. But there is a kind of glory that He will share with us when we see him face to face. Instead, this is the glory we will experience as *glorified* creatures in heaven.² This is what we all had the opportunity to inherit through Adam. It means that had we not fallen short by sinning, we would have entered the glory God has prepared for us through the first Adam. Since he failed, Paul explains in chapter 5 that Christ, the second Adam, has made right and accomplished what the first Adam failed to do.

Rom 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and **we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**

We now have “access” to that Glory thanks to Christ. He is the one who has defeated God’s enemies perfectly for us and will guard and keep His Church until He returns.

So, what would God have us do *now* as His image bearers? We see an interesting example, right after the flood, that God gave a similar commission to Noah and his family. But (!) there is an important difference:

¹ David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 40.

² C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: International Critical Commentary* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 204–205; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans: New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 226–227; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans: Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids,; Eerdmans; 1988), 177; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, vol. 6, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids,; Baker Books, 1998), 187.

Gen 9:1-2

9 God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. ² The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority.

The “rule and subdue” language is gone through the rest remains nearly the same as in Eden. Mankind still has some authority given to them by God and they are to exercise it in all they do for His glory. But we see that we no longer have an option to rule or subdue. The failure of Adam meant that bringing this world into glory would not happen; that is what ruling and subduing God's enemies would have done. So here God sets up a way forward for humanity to be preserved on this Earth while they await his return.

But our understanding of the task before humanity took a significant turn once Christ came and, after rising again, gave us what we call the Great Commission. There is no language in the New Testament telling Christians to rule or subdue anything. We are to wage war against our own sin and engage in spiritual battle against the powers of Darkness. But when it comes to our duties in this world, we are told to serve (Phil 1:1-4) , love (Mt 5:44), and pray (1 Thes 5:16-18). And we are given the wonderful title of ambassadors for Christ's kingdom.

2 Corinthians 5:20–21

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God.” He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In this role we carry out His Commission to proclaim the gospel, bring people into His church, and then teach them all He has commanded us to do. (**Mt 28.18-20**)

So we do not need to find ways to "bring God's dominion to bear" on everyday matters. Why? Because He has already done so Himself. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8 illustrating how it describes Christ's dominion over creation:

Heb 2:2-9

⁶ But someone somewhere has testified: What is man that you remember him, or the son of man that you care for him? ⁷ You made him lower than the angels for a short time; you crowned him with glory and honor ⁸ and subjected everything under his feet. For in subjecting everything to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. As it is, we do not yet see everything subjected to him. ⁹ But we do see Jesus—made lower than the angels for a short time so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone—crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death.

And through Christ's victorious suffering, he will destroy death itself, the final enemy:

1 Cor 15:25-28

²⁵ For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be abolished is death. ²⁷ For **God has put everything under his feet**. Now when it says "everything" is put under him, it is obvious that he who puts everything under him is the exception. ²⁸ When everything is subject to Christ, then the Son himself will also be subject to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

We don't make Christ king of anything; He has done that Himself. We point others to His kingship, we tell others of the good news of His Kingdom, and remind one another of the hope we have because of Him. The first Adam failed the dominion mandate, and God graciously allowed the Second Adam to fulfill it for us. Therefore, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.