

Understanding Biblical Dominion

Dominionists

After declaring that Jesus was and is a political figure, the issue of dominion logically follows. Dominion is a biblical word that has a valid application, but is often relegated to one particular eschatology or world view. Dominion Theology or those who are called “dominionists” are generally thought of as those who advocate theonomy or the establishment of a kind of political theocracy based on Old Testament biblical law. If we simply applied the example of the Old Testament laws of God as a model for government today, without applying New Testament grace, one could certainly expect the outcome to be a coercive and oppressive form of government. Problems arise when no differentiation is made between biblical law in general and Christian principle.

An extreme example of dominionism would be the dominion mentality held and practiced into the dark ages which made Christianity mandatory and resorted to coercive measures in an attempt to fulfill their misguided version of the dominion mandate. [1] The same error developed in many post reformation churches as well. Prescribed forms of worship were issued and anyone stepping outside those guidelines were subject to punishment and sometimes death. Such an attitude bears a striking resemblance to the methods of radical Islam as it seeks to establish a caliphate to dominate the world, but Christian dominion is far different. First let’s look at the original dominion mandate.

Three Dominion Mandates

There are several places in the Scriptures where we are given what can be termed a dominion mandate. The original one was given to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. We also see virtually the same mandate repeated to Noah and his sons just after the flood.

Eden Mandate

Genesis 1:26-29 (NKJV)

26 Then 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."

27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

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."

29 And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.

Post Flood Mandate

(Genesis 9:1-7 NKJV)

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. 4 "But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

5 "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

7 And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it."

The Eden Mandate and the Post Flood mandate are virtually the same. Be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, have dominion over the other creatures. However, due to the fact that sin and atonement came into play between these two mandates, we see a difference between the mandate given to Adam and the mandate given to Noah. Noah's mandate includes a basic principle of civil government [2] regarding the shedding of blood: "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." But in neither case do we see the original intent of these dominion mandates as instructions to dominate other humans who are created in the image of God.

Being created in God's image implies that people were intended to have a built in "God nature" and are designed to act in a godly manner on their own without coercion. But through the sin of Adam, the sin nature became part of the human race and the conflicting natures have produced oppression, bondage, and bloodshed ever since. A surface observation of history might be described as one person or people group struggling to have dominion over another. As men multiplied on the earth and evil increased, God certainly gave certain people dominion over others as expressions of His judgment as a means of keeping evil in check. But this not how it is originally intended to be.

Jesus' Dominion Mandate

In the fulness of time, God came to earth as the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to establish a New Covenant and restore true meaning of dominion and reinstate the dominion mandate. He demonstrated something drastically different from the letter of the law that, by design, was intended to show us the need for grace and redemption.

(Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV)

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

This passage is aptly called The Great Commission. [3] But the title Dominion Mandate fits equally well, if not better. In Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary, commission is defined as: *Charge; order; mandate; authority given*. Webster defines mandate as: *A command; an order, precept or injunction; a commission*. So we see that commission and mandate are virtually synonyms.

Looking again to Webster's definitions (1 and 4), he defines dominion as: 1) *Sovereign or supreme authority; the power of governing and controlling* or 4) *Government; right of governing*. So when we read that Jesus has been given all authority and tells us to disciple the nations, this is the authority to govern. There are parallel passages to Matthew's mandate found in the Gospel of Mark (see Mark 16:15-16). We also see another account of Jesus giving His disciples the dominion mandate in Acts (see Acts 1:6-8). [4]

(Mark 16:15-16 NKJV)

15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.
16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

(Acts 1:6-8 NKJV)

6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"
7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.
8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Notice again that Jesus' instructions to be witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth was a response to the disciples' question: "Is it now you are restoring the kingdom (government of God) to Israel?" They wanted to see the kingdom established on earth so Jesus told them what to do: take the good news of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Biblical vs Christian

As already pointed out, exercising Christian dominion is not about establishing a Mosaic theonomy or theocracy forcing people to become Christians. Some groups of Christians believe Christians should gain positions of authority in government and reconstruct a biblical system of punishment for crime modeled after the Law of Moses. Under such a system, things like adultery, homosexuality, blasphemy, idolatry, and even cursing or dishonoring parents were punishable by death. Those who think this way should take another look at the example of Jesus set in John Chapter 8.

(John 8:5-11 NKJV)

5 "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?"
6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.
7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

The law of Moses clearly stated that an adulterer should be put to death (Lev. 20:10) and this woman was caught red handed. So was it biblical to put the woman to death? Yes, it was biblical, but was it Christian? Since Christ Himself is the definition of "Christian" the answer is No. [5] So what happened there? Did Jesus condone the woman's sin? No, He clearly told her to go and sin no more. There was no compromise of truth. Adultery, homosexuality and every other sin listed in the entire Bible is still sin and always will be. But what Jesus did was introduce the concept of grace into civil government.

Of course, this raises questions on how civil government should respond in the context of a multitude of different crimes and the circumstances surrounding them. We obviously have to have consequences for breaking the law. Often times, it is a judgment call, thus the need for judges. Laws alone, no matter how many or how precise, can never replace the mind of Christ. But that is a subject not being addressed here. The point here is that dominion is an appropriate term for the mission of the church, a mission which includes application to civil government.

Teaching to Observe

Jesus issued "how to" instructions along with His dominion mandate. He said to be a witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that He had commanded (see Matt 28:19-20).

[6] There is no coercion here, but rather preaching the good news to all, personal conversion (represented by baptism), and teaching people to observe His commandments.

Teaching the nations to observe all that Jesus commanded is where the rubber meets the road and the culture rises up in protest. This protest from the culture, as well as the application of the dominion mandate, can be seen in Jesus' parable about stewardship.

(Luke 19:11-15 NKJV)

11 Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately.

12 Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.

13 "So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.'

14 "But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'

15 "And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

Like the mandate given in Acts 1:6-8, we see that the context is the kingdom/government of God being established. Jesus was nearing Jerusalem and they thought He would establish His kingdom government. Since it was not yet time, Jesus gave them a parable which painted a picture for his disciples that explained to them that

- He would entrust His resources to them;
- He would leave for a period of time;
- They should conduct His business while He was gone
- Then He would return to establish the kingdom, evaluate how they handled the resources He had entrusted to them.

There is much more to glean from this parable, but the interesting part here is verse 14. The citizens of the nobleman expressed their hatred for him saying they would not submit to his reign. Their resistance to his reign begs the question: “Why was the nobleman’s rulership over them an issue, since he was away on a journey to a far country?” The obvious answer is that the nobleman’s servants were conducting his business in his absence and by doing so they were to some degree applying the nobleman’s values and principles to the surrounding culture. [7] They were governing. The parallel is obvious. As we carry out the dominion mandate given to us in Matthew 28 and Acts 1, it includes an application to the culture. Not all citizens will like it, but that is not to prevent us from doing so.

Restoring the Christian Mandate: A Paradigm Changer

Restoring a Christian Dominion Mandate to the Church is a critically important issue in our time. Properly grasping the concept of Jesus’ Dominion Mandate is a paradigm changer. Because we have not had a dominion mentality, we have bent over backwards, given in when challenged, and ultimately compromised our very mission. [8] We have allowed political correctness to push us to the fringe and have become virtually irrelevant in the culture. We have given up on prayer in schools. We have allowed the radical homosexual agenda to desecrate marriage, alter its definition which has existed for 5000 years, and normalize homosexuality, a deviant sexual behavior that was clearly condemned in scripture. Under the politically correct idea of sensitivity to the feelings of others, we allow one person’s complaint about references to Christ in a classroom or government agency to violate the freedom of religion and speech for everyone else. This is spiritual weakness.

Meanwhile, as we do nothing, radical Islamists have been advancing their own world dominion plans and have been doing so for more than 1000 years. The Marxists/Socialists have been advancing their dominion plans since they became a recognized movement over 100 years ago. Sadly, both have seen considerable success in recent decades. [9]

Our failure to influence the culture comes not only from a shallow understanding of the dominion mandate and other weak theological positions, but also from having believed a twisted and tortured version of separation of church and state that tells us that Christians should be politically neutral. We must realize that neutrality is a myth. If Christianity isn’t the dominate religion in our culture and our government, another religion will be. There is no such thing as a spiritual vacuum or spiritual neutrality. [10] Consider this quote by the Chairman of the Board for CAIR (Counsel for American Islamic Relations).

Islam isn't in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant. The Koran should be the highest authority in America, and Islam the only accepted religion on earth.

– Omar Ahmed, chairman of the board for CAIR.

According to some reports, people who are traditionally Christian are converting to Islam in numbers that are alarming. Why would anyone abandon light for darkness? Good question, but one reason may be that the version of Christianity they have had is counterfeit. Maybe the light they have had isn't really light. Jesus said: "Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness" (Luke 11:35).

In other words, maybe they are frustrated with a version of Christianity that is so weak and powerless that it has no appeal. Maybe the church has become so heavenly minded that it offers no practical solution to earthly problems. I submit that we Christians will not be able to exert a significant influence on the culture until we embrace a biblical and practical application of dominion. We need to realize that our biblical mandate is to displace all other philosophies with the teachings of Jesus Christ. The great commission of Matthew 28 cannot be understood any other way. [11] Though this will find its fulfillment through the return of Jesus, it is nevertheless our goal, but that is an other issue. Regardless, we must have dominion as our ultimate goal.

A Picture of Christian Dominion

So what should our culture look like when Christians are walking out Jesus's Dominion Mandate? Imagine this scenario.

A certain community has experienced a revival. There is a renewed understanding of Christian values and there are many new and renewed commitments to Christ. Many of the teachers in the local high school have been converted to Christ, and at the recent election, several Christians in the community ran for positions on the school board and won. As a result the school board is dominated by Christians. As a result of many people coming to Christ, including students and teachers, personal testimonies regarding Jesus, discussion about the Bible, and prayer is taking place in class and at other school activities. One person commented, "This is like a little bit of heaven on earth!"

But one student, who is an atheist, files a complaint with the school superintendent, complete with letters from his lawyers from the ACLU. Legal action is threatened against the principle and the school board. They have demanded that all religious activity cease immediately. No more prayer, no more talk of Jesus.

Word is sent out and an emergency school board meeting is called. The options are clear. Force everyone to stop all religious activity or face legal action. But wait! This is a school board with a Christian dominion world view and they are backed by a significant portion of the community. They decide to take a stand. They issue a statement to the ACLU and to all to concerned.

"We recognize there are those who in our school who hold religious beliefs different from Christianity or hold no religious belief at all. We respect and protect their right to freedom of religion and will insure that they are not coerced or bullied in any way to become Christian.

However, we also recognize that Christians too have freedom of religion. Therefore we will not prohibit or curtail the freedom of speech or the freedom of religion in our school.”

Good for them! That is standing up for your rights! But this is not the end of this hypothetical saga. Having made their position clear, the school district is taken to court and legal battles continued for some time which ultimately resulted in a ruling against the school district. Either they prohibit religious speech and religious freedom or lose all state and local funding.

The school board holds another emergency board meeting which reveals that their resolve has not changed. They decide to reject all state and government funding and conduct their school with local support only. As a result, the community rallies. Local businesses and individuals donate computers and other equipment and supplies. The entire staffing plan and schedule is restructured to facilitate volunteers, local tutors, and apprenticeship programs. People who have specific skills and abilities volunteer to teach various subjects. Being free from state and federal control, the schools throw out much of the old curriculum and introduce new materials, including books that teach Creation instead of evolution. Students’ scores go up and they learn real skills instead of humanistic philosophy. Non Christians are still welcome and treated with respect in the school and they are free to practice and discuss their religion as they please. Or they are free to attend another school; the choice is theirs.

This hypothetical story could be extrapolated much farther, but you get the idea. This is a picture of Christian dominion. In fact, it is very much the way education was conducted in early America — you know— back when literacy was about 100% and it wasn’t uncommon for young people to enter a university at the age of 14 years. This is a picture of Christians who believe in that dominion mandate called “The Great Commission” and are not afraid to act like it. This is a picture of people who are no longer intimidated and are willing to take responsibility for the world they live in.

What Makes Christian Dominion a Reality?

Imagine if school districts all over America took a stand as the hypothetical community described above did? That would be wonderful but, as pointed out earlier, there are two key factors that must be a reality before it can happen. First is revival. There must be conversions on a wide scale in a community to create a base of support. This is obvious. The second is a dominion mentality. A biblical understanding of civil responsibility must be in place or the full potential of the local revival will not be realized.

We can see historically, ever since the Reformation, God has sent revivals with a degree of regularity. Each major revival has not only caused the salvation of souls, but has restored major elements of foundational truth in the Church. But did that element of truth come about because of the revival or did the revival come about because of the element of truth? I believe it was the latter.^[12] Someone in our hypothetical community carried the vision of Christian dominion before the revival came and was likely the spark that started the revival. As a result, the people who were converted and renewed their commitment to Christ were not just tired of the status quo. They were a kind of “new breed” who possessed a new paradigm. They knew that the definition of insanity was to do the same thing over and over and expect a different result, so they were willing to change. They were Christians who were willing to think outside the box.

The same is true in history. People like Martin Luther were willing to think outside the box and dared to think in a new paradigm, declaring that justification was not by works, but by faith alone. The ultimate result was a revival that we call the Reformation. But those who sowed the seeds for the reformation paid a price for being a pioneer, which included hardship of every kind, sometimes even death.

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a scriptural foundation regarding biblical dominion without getting into the exhausting subject of eschatology. However, simply using the word “dominion” often raises eschatological questions and triggers preexisting conclusions that threaten to cause misunderstanding of what has been said. Therefore, a general overview of eschatology is in order. In the next chapter we will address the general idea of understanding the future. Then we will address Four Millennial Views. But to summarize, the kind of dominion that can be experienced in this age is a taste of the powers of the age to come (see Heb 6:5), not the whole meal. [13] The full manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth will only be seen when Jesus returns.

Paradigm Builder

Jesus came to establish a New Covenant and reinstate the dominion mandate. Our biblical mandate is to displace all other philosophies with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Before reading this chapter, how would you describe your position regarding this concept?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

How would you describe your position regarding this concept after reading this chapter?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree