

A KING WITHOUT SUBJECTS? THE SILENT PULPIT AND THE SOVEREIGN CHRIST

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I. The Sovereignty of God over All Creation

“The earth is Yahweh’s, as well as its fullness, the world, and those who dwell in it” (*Ps 24:1*). All theology begins here—with God as Creator, Owner, and absolute Sovereign. His dominion is not borrowed, nor His authority derived; it is intrinsic to His being. His rights are not granted but inherent, flowing from His infinite perfection and self-existence. As Nebuchadnezzar confessed, “For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation... He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, and no one can strike against His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (*Dan 4:34–35*).

This doctrine of divine sovereignty is the theological bedrock of every human duty, every form of authority, and every civil law. Without acknowledging God’s absolute reign, all concepts of justice, morality, and government lose their foundation. The God of Scripture is not merely the Lord of the church, nor only the Redeemer of souls—He is the King of all kings, the Ruler of all nations, and the rightful Lawgiver to every realm of human existence.

To confess God’s sovereignty, then, is to deny the autonomy of man. Human autonomy—the belief that man is self-governing, self-defining, and self-legislating—is idolatry in its purest form. From Eden onward, man’s rebellion has been a denial of the Creator’s crown rights over His creation. Yet Scripture is explicit: “Yahweh has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all” (*Ps 103:19*).

All authority—family, church, or state—exists only by God’s decree and answers to His righteousness. Therefore, any true doctrine of government must begin not with the will of the people or the customs of men, but with the sovereign will of God revealed in His Word.

II. The Nature of Human Authority and Obligation

Man is not autonomous but accountable. Created in the image of God (*Gen 1:26–27*), he possesses delegated authority and defined obligations. His authority is loaned; his obligations are law. God’s sovereignty grounds all human duty, while man’s creatureliness limits all human rights.

A. The Source of Authority

Every form of authority exercised by man—whether in the home, the church, or the state—is delegated authority. As Paul writes, “For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are ordained by God” (*Rom 13:1*). The family, the church, and the civil government each exist

as divine institutions, structured to preserve and promote human flourishing under the moral order of God's law. None are ultimate; all are ministerial.

B. The Nature of Obligation

If only God possesses intrinsic rights, then man's "rights" are derivative from his obligations to God. Rights are not autonomous possessions but moral corollaries of divine commands. For example:

- Because man is commanded to worship God, he has that right, before other men, to worship God.
- Because man is commanded not to murder, he has a right, before other men, to life.
- Because man is commanded not to steal, he has a right, before other men, to private property.
- Because man is commanded not to commit adultery, he has a right, before other men, to the sanctity of marriage.

True human rights exist only insofar as they are grounded in divine obligation. This understanding corrects both libertarian individualism and totalitarian statism: the former exalts man's freedom without reference to duty, while the latter exalts the state's authority without reference to God. In Scripture, both are false. Man is bound to God, and the state is bound to God's moral law.

C. Sphere Sovereignty

To preserve human duty and order, God has established distinct spheres of authority:

1. **The Family** – the foundational institution, tasked with fruitfulness, nurture, and dominion.
2. **The Civil Government** – ordained to protect the rights that arise from God's law and to punish evildoers (*Rom 13:4*).
3. **The Church** – constituted to proclaim the gospel, guard the truth, and disciple the nations (*1 Tim 3:15; Matt 28:18–20*).

These spheres are distinct but not divided. Each is accountable to Christ as Lord. No sphere possesses absolute sovereignty; only God does. But neither may any sphere usurp the others. Parents do not bear the sword, magistrates do not administer the sacraments, and pastors do not wield corporal punishment. Yet all three are bound by the moral law of God, revealed in Scripture and written upon the heart (*Rom 2:14–15*).

This doctrine of sphere sovereignty protects against both ecclesiastical tyranny and political totalitarianism. It maintains the freedom of conscience under God, while requiring obedience to Him in every sphere of life. While you may disagree with the *term* sphere sovereignty, you cannot deny the *concept*. Long before Kuyper's Sphere Sovereignty, we have William Perkins, the architect of Puritanism, "In His word, God has ordained the society of man with man, partly in the Commonwealth, partly in the church, and partly in the family." (A Treatise on the Vocations.).

III. The Cultural Mandate: Dominion as Worship

The earliest commission given to mankind is profoundly theological: “And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion...’” (*Gen 1:28*). This is not a mere command to reproduce or to cultivate the soil—it is a call to image God’s rule, to exercise righteous dominion for His glory and the good of creation.

A. The Image of God and Representation

Man was created as God’s vice-regent, a ruler under the Ruler. The cultural mandate flows directly from man’s identity as the image of God (*Gen 1:26*). To bear God’s image is to reflect His character and represent His authority within the created order. As Psalm 8 declares, “You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (*Ps 8:6*).

Dominion, therefore, is not domination. It is a kind of regal stewardship. It is the righteous administration of God’s world according to His moral law, motivated by love for His glory. The cultural mandate is a call to godly productivity, creativity, and governance—all of which are forms of worship.

B. The Fivefold Commission

In Genesis 1:28, the cultural mandate includes five imperatives:

1. **Be fruitful** – advance life; produce godly offspring.
2. **Multiply** – extend the community.
3. **Fill the earth** – expand culture through civilization under God’s rule. (*see Gen 6:11, 13 and how the use of “fill” has to do with morality in culture*)
4. **Subdue it** – bring creation’s potential into ordered beauty, like the Garden.
5. **Have dominion** – exercise moral and physical governance as God’s representative.

These commands are accompanied by divine blessing. The cultural mandate is not a curse but a creational calling. To fulfill it faithfully is to participate in God’s purpose for creation: “For the earth will be *filled* with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea” (*Hab 2:14*).

C. The Political Dimension of Creation

It is significant that Genesis 1 presents creation in a political structure: realms and rulers. The sun and moon “rule” the day and night (*Gen 1:16–18*); man “rules” over the living creatures. God Himself is enthroned as the ultimate Sovereign. Thus, political order is not a post-fall necessity but a pre-fall reality. Governance is inherent to creation, not a concession to sin.

This reality grounds all human governance in divine precedent. Civil order is not man’s invention; it is God’s design. The problem, then, is not government itself, but government divorced from the law and lordship of God (which is why the sword is given *after* the fall).

IV. The Fall and the Corruption of Dominion

Sin did not abolish man's responsibility; it corrupted it and made it harder (*Gen 3:17-19*). When Adam rebelled, man did not cease to be a ruler—he became a tyrant. He did not lose the image of God entirely but marred it, perverting dominion into domination and stewardship into self-exaltation. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (*Rom 5:12*).

The fall's effects are both spiritual and cultural. Man's affections, intellect, and will were darkened, leading him to serve “the creature rather than the Creator” (*Rom 1:25*). The cultural mandate was not revoked but rendered impossible to rightly fulfill apart from redemption. Man never ceases in the cultural mandate as he is still made in God's image; thus showing that there is a kind of instinctual aspect to the mandate. He still builds cities, creates art, crafts tools, and forms governments—but now his motive is idolatry rather than worship, and his purpose is autonomy rather than obedience. The question is not *whether?*—but *which?* It's not whether man will create culture, he will. The question is: what kind of culture will he create?

Genesis 4 shows the rapid descent of culture under sin: Cain's line produces cities (*Gen 4:17*), musical instruments (*4:21*), and metallurgy (*4:22*). These are legitimate cultural developments, yet they occur in a line that rejects God. The result is technological advancement without moral righteousness—a civilization marked by skill but devoid of godliness.

The judgment of the flood confirms this trajectory: “Now the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was **filled** with violence” (*Gen 6:11*). Man's dominion had turned destructive; the earth, which was to be filled with the glory of Yahweh, was instead filled with violence—violence by and upon image bearers of God.

Yet even after judgment, God renewed the mandate with Noah (*Gen 9:1–7*); a thread that David pulls on as he corrects Job (*Psa 8*). Human sin did not nullify divine purpose. God's goal for the earth remains unchanged: His glory will fill creation through the obedience of His image-bearers. But for this to occur, fallen man must now be redeemed.

V. Redemption: Restoring the Image and Reclaiming the Mandate

In the second Adam, Jesus Christ, the image of God is restored and the dominion mandate reclaimed. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created... and in Him all things hold together” (*Col 1:15–17*). Christ fulfills what Adam failed to do: He exercises righteous dominion under the Father's authority.

A. The Mediatorial Kingship of Christ

Following His resurrection, Christ declared, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (*Matt 28:18*). This is not limited to ecclesiastical authority; it is cosmic and comprehensive (*Eph 1:19–23*). His kingship encompasses every sphere—personal, familial, ecclesial, and civil. Psalm 2

prophecies that the nations are His inheritance and the ends of the earth His possession (*Ps 2:8*). The Father has enthroned His Son as King of kings and Lord of lords, even as we await His seating on David's throne (*Rev 19:16*).

Thus, any theology that confines Christ's reign to the private or "spiritual" realm commits a dualistic error. Such thinking reflects the pietistic and quasi-Gnostic separation of sacred and secular—a notion foreign to Scripture. Christ's lordship is total, and His gospel bears public, political, and cultural implications.

B. The Law of God in Redemption

Redemption does not abolish law; it reorients obedience. "Do we then abolish the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law" (*Rom 3:31*). The moral law remains the standard of righteousness, not as a covenant of works for justification but as a rule of life for the redeemed. Grace does not negate duty; it empowers it.

Therefore, in Christ, the believer is renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator (*Col 3:10*). This restoration entails renewed dominion. The regenerate man once again subdues the earth—not for his glory, but for God's. Whether he governs a household, conducts business, or legislates in the civil sphere, he is to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (*Col 3:17*).

C. The Law of God: Threefold Use, One Harmony

Historic Protestant theology distinguishes the **three uses of God's Law**:

- **Civil** — restraining evil (*Rom 13:3-4; 1 Tim 1:8-11*).
- **Evangelical** — revealing sin and leading to Christ (*Gal 3:24*).
- **Normative** — guiding the regenerate in sanctified obedience (*John 14:15; Matt 5:17-19*).

These uses are not in competition but in harmony (*1 Tim 1:8, 11*). Law and Gospel are not opposites but ordered allies: the Law exposes sin and points to grace; grace restores man to love God's Law (*Rom 8:4*). Thus, a nation that enacts biblically-shaped laws participates in a form of **common grace evangelism** — displaying God's standards and directing consciences toward Christ. To discard moral law from the public square is to silence one of God's tutors of the soul.

D. The Great Commission as Redemptive Fulfillment

The Great Commission (*Matt 28:18-20*) is the redemptive form of the cultural mandate. It does not replace it; it redeems it. The command to "make disciples of all nations" extends the original call to fill the earth, now with worshipers who glorify Christ. The Redemptive Mandate and the Cultural Mandate are not competing missions but complementary aspects of one divine plan: that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh" (*Hab 2:14*).

The gospel produces new hearts that love God's law, new communities that live under Christ's reign, and new societies shaped by righteousness and truth. The ultimate goal is the same as in Genesis—

to manifest the knowledge of the glory of God throughout the earth—but now through redeemed humanity under the Lordship of the risen Christ.

VI. The Unity of the Cultural and Evangelistic Mandates

The church must reject false dichotomies between the “spiritual” and the “civil,” between “evangelism” and “obedience,” or between “preaching the gospel” and “building culture.” Scripture knows of no such divisions. The same Christ who commands, “Make disciples of all nations,” also commands us to pray, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (*Matt 6:10*).

A. The Historical Priority of the Cultural Mandate

In the order of revelation, the cultural mandate precedes the evangelistic mandate. God designed humanity to represent His glory before sin entered the world. Cultural development, dominion, and labor are therefore not consequences of sin but features of God’s good creation. Redemption restores, rather than replaces, this purpose.

B. The Redemptive Priority of the Evangelistic Mandate

Yet because of sin, cultural restoration is impossible without personal regeneration. The gospel must precede transformation. The redemption mandate has an evangelistic priority—regeneration must take place for the cultural mandate to be truly fulfilled. Only the redeemed can truly glorify God in their work, family, and governance (*Prov 21:4*).

C. The Eschatological Harmony of Both Mandates

In Christ’s kingdom, these two mandates converge. As redeemed men and women labor faithfully in every sphere, the knowledge of God spreads; as the gospel advances, cultures are reformed (*Tit 1:10-16 vs. 3:1-2*). The motive of both is doxological: “From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (*Rom 11:36*).

Summary & Implications

1. The Family: The Seedbed of Dominion

The family remains the foundational sphere of all culture. Parents are commanded to raise their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (*Eph 6:4*). Family worship, education, and labor are not peripheral but central to the cultural mandate. To neglect the household is to abdicate the first realm of dominion.

2. The Church: The Pillar and Support of the Truth

The church's mission is not only to save souls but to disciple nations (*Matt 28:19–20*). It is the training ground for godly men and women who will carry the truth into every vocation. The pulpit must equip the saints for cultural faithfulness, not retreat into pietistic privatism. The church militant must again become the church courageous in witness, proclaiming Christ's lordship over every sphere (1 *Tim 3:15*).

3. The State: The Servant of God for Good

Civil government is God's institution, accountable to His moral law. It bears the sword not to invent justice but to enforce it according to divine standard (*Rom 13:4*). When rulers legislate contrary to God's law, they rebel against the very authority they claim to wield. Christians in free countries, as citizens and stewards, must therefore engage the civil sphere—not for partisan ends, but for the glory of God and the love of neighbor. Voting, governance, co-belligerence, and public service are all forms of neighbor-love when exercised under God's rule.

4. The Call to Repentance and Renewal

Western Christianity must repent of its pietistic withdrawal, its fear of man, and its privatization of faith. "Religion has nothing to do with politics" is not piety; it's blasphemy. To disengage from the public square is to surrender it to idols. The Lord Jesus Christ is not a tribal deity; He is the King of kings. The church must therefore declare, with prophetic courage, that every magistrate, every citizen, and every institution is accountable to Him.

Conclusion

All things exist for Christ and through Christ. His reign is not postponed; it is present. Therefore, the cultural and redemptive mandates unite under one cosmic purpose: the manifestation of God's glory in all creation.

The Christian's task, then, is not to retreat from the world but to subdue it in righteousness; not to separate faith from public life but to sanctify every sphere by obedience to Christ; not to wait idly by like hyper-Calvinists for heaven but to labor that earth might reflect its King.

In the words of the psalmist: "Kiss the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" (*Ps 2:12*).