

The Dominion Mandate for the Preterist

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. . . creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (Rom 8:19-22 ESV)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and 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.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food." (Gen 1:26-29 ESV)

THE DOMINION MANDATE CALLS humans to fill the earth and subdue it. The original context in the book of Genesis specifically mentions livestock, animals, and plants as elements in creation over which humans are to have dominion. The extent of the dominion of man over creation isn't limited specifically or only to those elements. As the biblical narrative progresses, we see positive value ascribed to excellence (or dominion) in the use of musical instruments (Jubal), metal working (Tubal-Cain), as well as raising livestock (Jabal).

Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. (Gen 4:20-22 ESV)

As we progress further into the Torah, we see artistic gifts given to Ohiliab and Bezalel for the construction of the moveable Tabernacle. These gifts were given by God specifically for the craftsmanship that they needed to produce all the various articles for the center of Old Testament worship. This is also a type of dominion over creation—crafting woods, metals, textiles, stonework (gemology), and perfumery. The full range of engineering (structures, materials, processes) and the supporting trades and sciences are positively under the dominion of humans—for the glory of God.

The Lord said to Moses, “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do.” (Exod 31:1-11 ESV)

At the fall of mankind in Genesis 3, we also have the competing element of the curse, where the ground would be prone to yield thorns and thistles. As we read in Romans 8, it wasn't just the ground that was subject to frustration/futility, but all of creation. Paul anticipates a time when creation “*will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*”.

The question that I want to consider is whether a fulfilled eschatology perspective changes how we look at this verse? Are we actually now living in a time where we are pushing back the ravages of entropy (“*bondage to corruption*”) in a uniquely religious freedom (“*obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*”)?

In many practical ways, over the last century many of the literal effects of the fall have been overcome. Thorns and thistles getting in the way of effective farming is largely a thing of the past with herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, and mechanized farming. As we look to the future of regenerative farming, the next generation of thorn and thistle control will be done without the use of synthetic chemicals; instead returning to time-tested holistic techniques. Because of these types of advances, a lower percentage of the population goes hungry even as a lower percentage of the population is directly involved in food production.

Beyond agriculture, we see similar advances in home building: the rise of standardized materials and techniques that make the human need for shelter something that is both affordable and comfortable for

much of the population. There are similar advances in textiles/clothing: what required more than ten percent of one's disposable income in the year 1930, now only requires roughly three percent.¹

The extra financial margin that many in the west have now enables money to be spent on 20th-century inventions (automobiles, appliances, telecommunications) and 21st-century inventions (cell phones, entertainment subscriptions, online shopping). Whatever the moral consequence of these various technologies, each represents a significant advance in convenience, quality, optionality, economic value (cost), or combinations of these. When we look objectively at the standard of living in the US or Europe (especially), we must acknowledge that creation, and our relation to creation, looks less and less like it is in "*bondage to corruption*." Even if we consider potential climate impacts of anthropogenic carbon emissions, the net negative impact to quality of life is very small.

Are these positive advances tied to a moral framework that is inherently tied to the Kingdom of God?

It is interesting to note that many of the scientific and engineering advances over the last centuries have been created by those who are strong Christians—Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, Michael Faraday, James Maxwell, George W. Carver, and Lord Kelvin.² The connection between engineering and the dominion mandate is explored by David C. Che in "*Engineering Through the Eyes of Faith*" (2017)³, "*Innovation Theology*" by Lanny Vincent⁴, and in the new book "*A Christian Field Guide to Technology for Engineers and Designers*".⁵

So, while this connection is not novel in Christian thought, the preterist brings yet a different perspective. That is, someone imbibed with dispensational premillennial eschatology is going to see the world as something that is getting worse and worse and heading towards the day that God will remove His people from it in preparation for making a new heavens and a new earth. There is, therefore, little incentive for someone with that eschatological perspective to work to redeem and renew the existing earth. In contrast, the full preterist sees this world as God's Plan A—a place that He, through His people, is making new. Not only is He making the world new in spiritual terms, but also in temporal terms.⁶ It is notable that the regions in the world with the most Christian influence also have seen the largest advances in standard of living. I argue that isn't just a correlation, but there is causation, even if not intentional in eschatological terms. The primary cause for the advance is loving one's neighbor.

When I love my neighbor, I seek to improve the world for them. I seek to relieve their burden, to improve their lot, to create structures of justice, fairness, equality. These legal structures, with the backbone of individual responsibility and individual liberty, create a framework for advancement in all spheres of life. This loving-my-neighbor impact on society thereby creates a space for the technological advances that have already been mentioned. The technological advances, in aggregate, show how the entropy in creation ("*bondage to decay*") can be pushed back. And this re-creation of nature is a dim mirror of the re-creation of the individual redeemed by God. That is, creation doesn't get the *same* re-

creation that the individual Christian receives in his or her salvation, but creation does get a parallel re-creation in being set free. The Christian ought to see his or her stewardship of creation as a divine calling, as one of the “*works that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Eph 2:10). We have both a spiritual/relational calling in our relationships to fellow man and a temporal/redemptive calling in our relationship to this world (this creation). Uniquely, the preterist sees his or her role as the very hands and feet (and mind) of God working out the creation of the “new earth.”

This working out of the “new earth” is not some utopian, post-liberal⁷, take-over-everything type of endeavor. Note how the Bible portrays the new earth: there is a strong God-oriented community of believers, but there is still death for those outside the community of believers (Rev 21:8, 27; Is 65:20, 66:24)—implying that there is still a group of people outside the gate to be contrasted with those inside the gate (inside the New Jerusalem). The mode of creating the “new earth” is described in cataclysmic terms in 2 Peter but, as is widely acknowledged in preterist circles, this terminology aptly describes the magnitude of the change in covenant that was consummated at the fall of Jerusalem. The rest of the ongoing “new earth” re-creation is the era of time in which we currently find ourselves.

Here we come full circle, and I argue that not only ought Christians to see their roles in this life as one of helping to create the new earth, but also see themselves endowed with spiritual gifts, similar to Bezalel and Oholiab, to execute the re-creation. While Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12 (and elsewhere) emphasizes spiritual gifts that are given for the building up of the church, I don’t believe he implied a rigid duality of gifting that distinguishes between the ecclesiological realm and the rest-of-life realm. If God gifted people with temporal skills in the Old Testament era, shouldn’t we expect Him to do similarly (or even more so) in the New Testament era. Can anyone doubt God’s gifting when G. F. Handel wrote “The Messiah”? Or when J. S. Bach wrote “St. Matthew’s Passion”? Or in the craftsmanship of any number of amazing cathedrals in Europe? Or when John Bunyan wrote “Pilgrim’s Progress”? Or in the engineering of heavy equipment by R. G. LeTourneau?⁸ If this is true, that God gifts His people with abilities that both serve the church and fellow mankind (through the stuff of creation), then not only are all spheres under His domain⁹, but He is working through His people towards His ends. And, if the preterist eschatology is true and the dominion mandate still holds, then His ends are more thorough, more pervasive, more tangible, and more complete than most Christians acknowledge.

They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Rev 21:26)

Ultimately, the church, the bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem, is the recipient of all the benefits of material, technological, sociological, and economic advances. The glory and honor of the nations is brought into her. The religious and covenantal nature of the church is the penultimate reality, but that doesn’t diminish the reality of the benefits that accrue to the church through common grace as well. When people are well-fed, the Christian too is well-fed; when infant mortality decreases, tears of grieving

mothers decrease for the Christian as well; when housing is available across society, the Christian can live securely in their own home; when legal structures enforce individual liberty, justice, and order, the Christian benefits by having religious liberty defended; when monetary policy is stable, the Christian can better avoid worrying about tomorrow. And lastly, when the Christian understands their leavening in the world, they will participate in ushering in the Kingdom on Earth, just as it is in Heaven. ✝

1. <https://seekingalpha.com/article/194764-apparel-spending-as-a-share-of-disposable-income-lowest-in-u-s-history>
2. <https://www.famousscientists.org/great-scientists-christians/>
3. https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=christian_engineering_conference
4. <https://www.amazon.com/Innovation-Theology-Lanny-Vincent/dp/1532608713/>
5. <https://www.ivpress.com/a-christian-field-guide-to-technology-for-engineers-and-designers>
6. Note that this is different for a partial preterist, amillennialist, or postmillennialist—all of whom still anticipate a divine interruption into this world to either recreate it or remove and replace it.
7. <https://brianmattson.substack.com/p/the-world-that-would-not-obey>
8. LeTourneau University has an excellent website that recognizes Christians who have been excellent engineers and who see the connection between their faith and their engineering practice. <https://www.letu.edu/academics/engineering/academy-engineering.html#ContentBlock-4-1>
9. <https://uniocc.com/archive/Sphere-Sovereignty-according-to-Kuyper>