

# **The Fatal Flaw of Dominionism**

A Particular Baptist's Essay

# Introduction

Within Particular Baptist circles, we are seeing a dramatic increase in systematics over biblical theology. In my opinion, many get the “cart before the horse” when it comes to theology. For some, their systematic theology guides their understanding of biblical theology. However, this is in reverse order and possesses the potential to guide one into deep error. I do not believe I am overstating this. In fact, this is precisely the problem with the doctrine of “Dominionism.”

While the term “Dominion Theology” is somewhat of a moving target when reading after and talking to individuals who hold to it, a simple definition of the doctrine of “Dominionism” would be that followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are to exercise dominion within Creation, Culture, and Society. It is the theocratic idea that, regardless of theological camp, means, or timetable, God has called His people, under Christ, to exercise dominion over society by taking control of political and cultural institutions.

It seems to me that the doctrine of “Dominionism” is a reaction to the sin-cursed world around us based on a fear of losing the comforts that our Western culture has granted us for so long. When hearing American Christians speak about their personal rights and the rights of local churches, I cannot help but think to myself, “What a foreign thought to the doctrine of the Lord and His apostles.” To be sure, Dominion Theology is not only foreign to the teaching of the Lord and His apostles, it also has a direct link to the religious nationalism that sprung forth from the teachings of the Roman religious structure. However, let's content ourselves with what the word of God says.

## **A Flawed Hermeneutic**

The fatal flaw of “Dominionism” is that it is based on a wrong hermeneutic (method of interpreting biblical texts). The correct and biblical method of interpreting Scripture is using New Testament revelation to interpret Old Testament revelation. This method of biblical interpretation is not only biblical but it is a Baptist distinctive. This is the clear indication of Scripture itself:

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (Hebrews 1:1-4)*

The fullness of God's revelation to sinful men came by way of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This means Divine revelation that came before the Lord Jesus Christ's first advent was not the Godhead's fullest expression to us. Bottom line? What has been revealed to us in New Testament Scripture is the lens through which all Old Testament Scripture must be interpreted.

Our Particular Baptist forefathers could not have been more clear on this point:

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which are not many, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly. (The 2nd London Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, paragraph 9)

Since we understand that God has revealed Himself through the covenants that He has made with men and the eternal Redemptive covenant that has been revealed in and through Christ Jesus, we understand that the covenants made from Adam to Christ Jesus was done by God through "farther steps." Our Particular Baptist fore-fathers concluded the following:

This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament; and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect; and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocency. (The 2nd London Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 7, paragraph 3)

The point that it is a Baptist distinctive to view the whole of Scripture through the lens of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be overstated. I love the way Nehemiah Coxe puts it:

God, whose works were all known by him from the beginning, has in all ages disposed and ordered the revelation of his will to men, his transactions with them, and all the works of his holy providence toward them, with reference to the fullness of time, and the gathering of all things to a head in Christ Jesus. So in all our search after the mind of God in the Holy Scriptures we are to manage our inquiries with reference to Christ. Therefore the best interpreter of the Old Testament is the Holy Spirit speaking to us in the new. (Coxe, Nehemiah. Covenant Theology: from Adam to Christ, Part 1(p.36). Reformed Baptist Academic Press. Kindle Edition)

As much as I love the way in which Coxe wrote about biblical doctrine, there is no replacement for what we find in Scripture. Paul wrote with great clarity what our method of biblical interpretation must be under the New Covenant:

*Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:12-18)*

Those who hold to “Dominionism” and the various expressions of it (Theonomy, Christian Nationalism, and some forms of the doctrine known as “Biblical Patriarchy”) use a hermeneutic that employs Old Testament Scripture to interpret the New Testament Scripture to prove the veracity of its claims. When touting the supposed biblical nature of their system of thought, the dominionist will go to the first chapter of Scripture to define terms for interpreting the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles.

Here is a recent example of this approach:

Genesis contains the blueprint for recovering manhood. It contains the key to explaining our present cultural moment. It contains the information you need to understand women. It contains the clues necessary to interpret God's direction for your life. It contains the landmarks you need to find your way to mature manhood. Everything is in Genesis. (Foster, Michael ; Tennant, Dominic Bnonn. It's Good to Be a Man: A Handbook for Godly Masculinity (p. 17). Canon Press. Kindle Edition.)

It should come as no surprise that a Presbyterian minister like Foster would conclude this, as Presbyterians have always contented themselves with using the Old Testament to define New Testament Scripture when it comes to Baptism (i.e., Baptism is the new circumcision). However, as Particular Baptists, this has not historically been our standard for biblical study. Baptist theologians have historically combatted such theology by using the New to interpret the Old. We must seek to understand the whole of Scripture through the lens of God's most special and full revelation to us, Christ Jesus our Lord. And so, what does God's word say?

## What is the answer?

There is absolutely no question that our first parents were given the mandate to subdue and take dominion of Creation:

*And 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 fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26-28)*

What has gotten in the way of our ability to take dominion? The short answer is sin. The dominionist fails to acknowledge the fact that the result of our first parents' sin against their Creator and the curse that followed fundamentally altered Creation itself. In fact, some go as far as to say that the world in which our first parents dwelt before their rejection of the Creator was not perfect. They contend that outside of the Garden of Eden, the world was a wild and dangerous place. The fundamental question that one must ask at this juncture is, "If there was no death before the fall of Adam and his posterity, how could anything in the world be regarded as dangerous?"

Here is a quote from the modern dominionist quoted above:

While the garden in Eden was a sanctuary, Genesis does not suggest that the rest of creation was similar. The garden was bounded; the rest of the world was not gentle or soft, but wild and dangerous. Adam was made to bring it into submission, to order and shape it. Perhaps the garden was a kind of model for Adam of how things should look once he was finished with this commission. (Foster, Michael ; Tennant, Dominic Bnonn. It's Good to Be a Man: A Handbook for Godly Masculinity (pp. 22-23). Canon Press. Kindle Edition.)

The claim above is made not because of thorough study of the biblical record, but because the author is seeking to apply his own system of thought to Scripture. In other

words, in his reaction to the world around him, he has sought to force Scripture to say something that it has never said. Isn't this a direct violation of the direction we have received in further revelation?

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*  
(Colossians 3:1-4)

It is true that the creation mandate was for Adam and Eve to subdue and take dominion of all that God had created in those six days. But after the fall, we never see this mandate repeated in the record of Scripture. The dominionist will say, "What about Noah and the command of God to him after the flood? Certainly this is a recapitulation of the creation mandate, right?" Well, let's see:

*And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.* (Genesis 9:1-3)

The word for "dominion" that we find in Genesis 1 does not appear in this command of God to Noah and his posterity. What we see in Genesis 9 is God having given fear of man to the creatures, showing His dominion; He does not command Noah to "take dominion." In fact, nowhere in the whole of Scripture do we ever see God commanding post-fall man to take dominion of Creation. Over 60 times we see various words translated "dominion" in the King James Version, and the majority of the time it is used in reference to the work of God:

*But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the*

*LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul. (Psalms 103:17-22)*

The fact that the natural-born man cannot take dominion over Creation is because Creation will outlast all of Adam's children who will die before the return of Christ Jesus. Death is what keeps us from ever taking dominion over the world in which we live. An inflated view of ourselves and our abilities has always been sharply ended by the final breath we take. How can anyone teach that we can take dominion of anything when we read such sobering Scripture as:

*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (1 Peter 1:23-25)*

The only Man revealed to us in Scripture capable of taking dominion over all Created things is Christ Jesus:

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)*

Of the Lord Jesus Christ's dominion, the apostles would go on to write such things as:

*But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11)*

Many of the dominionists that I have read over the last several years would have us believe that our taking dominion over the earth has been redeemed and restored to us.

They would also contend that Christ Jesus is not the fullest revelation of God to His people. More is needed:

This is a point lost in modern Christianity, where the focus is almost exclusively on the model of Jesus in the gospels. But while that model is of course perfect, it is not complete. It is a model of God, as the second Adam, humbling Himself to correct the mistakes of the first. (Foster, Michael ; Tennant, Dominic Bnonn. *It's Good to Be a Man: A Handbook for Godly Masculinity* (p. 23). Canon Press. Kindle Edition.)

Notice that the dominionist method of interpreting Scripture is on full display in this quote. The perfect, full, and Creator-accepted obedience of Christ Jesus as the last Adam is not the complete revelation to us concerning who men are to be (note: Scripture calls Jesus the last Adam, not the second Adam (1Cor 15:45). Of the two Adams in Paul's discourse, Jesus is the second man.). No, we must also look to the first Adam. We must look to the man who failed to obey God. We must look to the one who accepted the curse of death for himself and every one of his children, and then died. Does that sound right to you? It does not sound right to me.

## **All of Christ, or Nothing At All**

If the Lord's earthly ministry is not the complete representation of who our Creator commanded us to be, then God the Father did not accept the atoning sacrifice of His Son. Christ Jesus failed to take dominion over anything because He remains in the grave. However, Christ Jesus did that which the first Adam would not.

Ultimately, the dominionist will point to the fact that Christ Jesus has taken dominion. As the risen Savior, He is the Risen King. He has been given all authority over Heaven and Earth. I would say "amen and amen" to that. This is the gospel truth in which we place our eternal hope, and that is the rub for the dominionist.

What all dominionists conflate is the "now/not yet" of our redemption in Christ Jesus. They fail to understand that until the Lord Jesus Christ returns and we are risen to newness of life, we must still participate in the way of our fathers, which is death. Our hope does not lie in our ability, or lack thereof, to take dominion of Creation:

*I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25)*

Paul's war at the time that he wrote this is our own as long as we dwell in this sin-cursed flesh. We long for the eternal hope granted to us by the Father through His own dear Son. Ultimately, however, we will not experience the total victory and dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ, until He grants to us our own glorified bodies, untouched by the curse that we now endure this side of eternity. This is precisely why Paul wrote:

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. (Philippians 1:21-24)*

Notice that Paul does not say in the above quoted text, "Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is needful for dominion." You see, Paul was not concerned with taking dominion over a broken world that had been cursed by death. Paul's hope was future eternity and glory with his Lord, his Savior, his King!

Bottom line? Christian, if the Lord tarries, you will die. Your death means that you have in no way taken dominion over anything in Creation. The fact that some think that they are concerns me to say the least. The only dominion that you will ever have will be given to you by the One who took it, and it will not be here and now, in time and space:

*And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the*

*Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5)*

Whether intentional or not, dominionists come to their theological system by putting words in the mouth of their Creator. They have traded the Divine fruit of patience for pragmatism. In other words, they have determined to help God establish godly rule on Earth by attempting to overcome and taking dominion of the world. In doing so, they believe that they have also helped themselves by creating an environment on Earth in which they flourish socially, economically, and politically.

There is a tendency within dominionist thought processes to focus attention on the world around them. Societies and culture become the primary goal, with far less concern about living and walking in the Spirit of our Lord. Scripture, however, is clear:

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: (Colossians 3:1-5)*

Another tendency within dominionist circles is the near constant polemical, or war-like, response that they have to anything and anyone who would disagree with their position. This, in and of itself, can be the practical denial of the fruit of the Spirit of our Lord:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:22-26)*

Instead of constantly pursuing “dragons” in this world to “slay,” the clear indication of New Testament Scripture is that we are to go to war with the “old man” of the flesh and to mortify the deeds of our flesh. Ultimately the disposition (inclination and outlook) of the faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ is such that, if pursued with vigor, is much more revolutionary than the dominiost’s desire to dominate the world around them. Our pursuit of the kingdom of God will always result in our overt love for one another as Christ Jesus commanded. The love that we are to have for God and others is the same love that can only be the result of the Spirit of God in us.