

COLOSSIANS
The Cultural Mandate
Colossians 1:20
Genesis 1:27-31

INTRODUCTION

In Colossians 1:20, we might miss one of the great truths of scripture. In the words, “And through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things,” we have the basis, in my opinion, for the second most important truth in the Bible which is that reconciled (redeemed) men and women are to have dominion over the earth because of Christ’s reconciling work on the cross. Of course, the most important truth is that God saves sinful men by grace through faith in Christ, but Christianity is also to have an impact upon all culture.

The fact that redeemed Christian men and women are to have dominion over the earth is called the Cultural Mandate. Sometimes it is referred to as “redeeming” or “reconciling culture.” It is not an easy concept to understand but when one does grasp it, it has an impact on the whole way he views life. In fact, The Cultural Mandate is the basis for developing a Christian world and life viewpoint. What is the Cultural Mandate and how does Christ reconciling all things fit into the picture?

GOD

God is sovereign. He is absolute in all His rule. Everything exists because He created it by the word of His power. Everything belongs to God: **“The earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it...”** (Psa. 24:1); **“For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.”** (Psa. 50:10); **“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”** (1 Cor. 10:25b). God is King of all the earth: **“For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.”** (Psa. 47:7,8). God is the Creator and man is the creature.

CREATION

God, being a Covenant God, established His first covenant with man at creation. In this creation covenant, God promised to be man’s God, accepting worship from him and fellowship with him.

Originally man (Adam) was created in the image of God which made him the crown of God’s creation: **“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him...”** (Gen. 1:27). Because man is created in God’s image, God endowed him with certain creative abilities and with a God-consciousness not found in any other creature. Man was made to be creative. As a mini-creator, man reflects the Creator. All culture is a direct product of man’s creative ability and is a reflection of his faith and value system.

Because he was the unique creation of the universe, man was given responsibilities not given to any other created things-animals, and this is clearly seen in the Creation Covenant.

To Do Productive Work. ***“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work (cultivate) it and take care of it.”*** (Gen. 2:15). Adam was to cultivate the garden. Cultivate is from the Hebrew word shamar meaning “To protect and preserve from wild growth.” The garden world not only includes the vegetable growth but fruits from the soil such as metals and even synthetics.

To Subdue The Earth. ***“Fill the earth and subdue it.”*** (Gen. 1:28b). Man was responsible for naming or classifying all the animals (Gen. 2:19). He was given dominion over the earth (Psa. 8:6-8). This was the beginning of true science. Man was to be God’s steward over the earth, using its resources productively and wisely, and was to maintain a godly order throughout the earth.

To Use His Creative Abilities To Glorify God. Man was left to develop his creative abilities; to create order and build a godly culture. This gave birth to literature, music, art, drama, politics, communications, history, sociology and medicine. ***“Adam gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Zillah also had a son, Turbal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron...”*** (Gen. 20-22).

To Be Fruitful And Increase. ***“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number...’”*** (Gen. 1:28a). This command to reproduce inferred that both the godly character and the accumulated knowledge and the artistic advancements would be passed on to all generations.

To Rule Over The World. ***“Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*** (Gen. 1:28c). Adam (man) was put in complete control of the earth as God’s vice-regent. Man was created as prophet, priest and king. As king, he was to rule in righteousness and have dominion over creation. As priest, he was to consecrate to God all the works of his hands and the thoughts of his mind. As prophet, man would interpret the world which God made and knows it fully. This was Adam’s lifestyle in the Garden of Eden and it was the way his descendants were to be and act.

Taken together, these responsibilities may be called the Cultural Mandate. Culture, though undeveloped, was part of God’s creation, and was therefore pronounced to be good: ***“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”*** (Gen. 1:31).

FALL

Sin, however, entered the world at the Fall (Gen. 3). God’s image in man was marred but not destroyed. There was now a shifting of focus from God to man. Instead of bringing glory to the Creator, man becomes the object of glory (Rom. 1:25). Man still has the ability to create, but all creativity is perverted because of sin. Consequently, his culture is also perverted. After the Fall,

the elements of culture (music, art, drama, etc) remained good, but the direction of culture was changed from being God-centered to being man-centered. Because man is created in the image of God, he did not lose the capacity or the mandate to create culture. However, he lost the ability to direct the culture toward God.

After the Fall, man was no longer able to function properly in the offices of prophet, priest and king. Instead of ruling the earth, it began to rule him. His desire changed from serving God to serving self. He could not interpret the world correctly or understand it. It was at this point that humanism entered the world - an interpretation of the world from a sin-tainted, man-centered viewpoint.

It is important to note that the Creation Covenant and the Cultural Mandate were repeated after the Fall and after the Flood. ***“Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.’”*** (Gen. 9:1-3).

CROSS

God’s plan was not foiled by man’s sin. God in His sovereign mercy sent His Son Jesus Christ to redeem a people for His possession. Where man failed, Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, was victorious. Christ fulfills the office of prophet, priest and king perfectly. In His death and resurrection, Christ restored His redeemed people to their position as rulers in the world. What they lost in the Fall was regained in redemption. The person and work of Christ not only saves men from hell, but also gives them authority to assert their God-given rule in the earth again. Jesus Christ is King and every Christian is to work for the King.

According to Colossians 1:20, Christ reconciled all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the Cross. The “all things” certainly includes culture. Christ’s death positionally and potentially reconciled all culture to Himself and this will become a total reality to the Second Coming of Christ. However, until the Second Coming, Christians are to seek to reconcile all culture to Christ.

CHRISTIANS

Since the Fall, man has abused the creation in bringing glory to himself as opposed to its rightful object, the Creator. Because of this, no matter what man does with creation, all culture and creativity is tainted with sin. ***“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.”*** (Rom. 1:35). All culture has been perverted whether beautiful or ugly. Whether culture is created by Mozart or Madonna, it is tainted with sin.

Since the Fall, there now exists two systems in the world.

God is redeeming a people for Himself, but as these people are restored to their original relationship with God, they are also to reconcile culture to Christ which was lost in the Fall. Christians have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to direct and perpetrate a godly culture. Christians, therefore, are to work productively, to exercise dominion through responsible use of the earth's resources, to develop the sciences and the arts, and to pass this godly heritage down to all ages through the covenant family and the Church.

All of creation is frustrated because of sin and is waiting for liberation from its bondage. ***“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”*** (Rom 8:20,21). This frustration comes from its being forced to glorify and serve an object it was never intended to glorify -man! Now the creation looks to Christians, the children of God, to liberate it from its frustration. This liberation, which will never be perfect this side of glory, will come through obedience to the Cultural Mandate.

The Christian's mandate to reconcile culture is based on the finished work of Christ. It is through Christ that God will ***“reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven”*** (Col. 1:19,20). Thus, all things are reconciled to God through Christ. The Christian, therefore, is to seek to reconcile all things as he strives to liberate creation from its frustration. Therefore, the Cultural Mandate which was invoked at the creation, perverted in the Fall, and reclaimed under the Cross, is to be manifested today by Christians.

Each Christian has a salvation mandate and a cultural mandate. The Great Commission and the Cultural Mandate are the two great thrusts of the Christian Church. Christians must declare the gospel of God's saving grace in Christ, and Christians, armed with the authority of Jesus Christ, must seek to bring all things under His Lordship. Christians are to assault this world, which is presently under the influence of Satan, and seek to reclaim it for Christ the King. Complete victory will not come until Christ establishes His kingdom at the Second Advent, but even now the Church is to subdue the earth for Christ the King, liberating creation and culture from its frustrations. Christians are to be doing kingdom work now.

Christians are to rule over all creation for the glory of God and the service of mankind. All that comes from creation is to be made subservient to the Creator for His glory and not man's glory. Every area that man creates and develops in culture this side of the Fall will have to be liberated from the curse and frustration of secular man. Therefore, the task of the Christian is to develop culture and rule over culture by redeeming it; that is, by liberating it from its manward bent, bringing it under the Lordship of Christ.

Christians are called to the forefront to create and develop culture - music, art, science, medicine, engineering, politics or whatever. Instead of Christians isolating themselves from their culture (because they think it is evil), they are to involve themselves in their culture, seeking to direct it to the glory of God. In so doing, Christians will be fulfilling Christ's command to be salt and light in the earth. ***"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house in the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*** (Matt 5:13-16).

RESPONSIBILITY

Christians must impact their children for Christ. They must protect and preserve culture from the perversions of sin, and they must rule and develop creation to the glory of God. The practical basis for the Culture Mandate is II Cor. 10:5: ***"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*** The goal of the Cultural Mandate is found in Philippians 4:8: ***"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things."***

Vocation. To rule in vocation, there must be application of Christian ethics to business practices so as to replace secular presuppositions with Christian principles. The Christian is also to develop and improve his particular vocation to the glory of God. Christians must be trained in their roles as Christian doctors, lawyers, politicians, teachers, mechanics, bus drivers and milkmen so they can influence their culture for Christ. Christians must understand they are as much called to their vocations (jobs) as the gospel minister is to his ministry. People must not feel as though they are second class Christians if they are not in full-time Christian service, but they must be fully Christian in whatever vocation God has called them into. All useful work is kingdom work.

Arts. To rule in the arts is to apply Philippians 4:8 and II Cor. 10:5 so as to aesthetically match style and content so as to focus on virtuous things that exist as reflections of God's character and moral law. We need to develop Christian artists, musicians, poets, actors and dancers who will create excellence in the arts. Christians also need to take the secular artistic culture and reconcile it to Christ.

Francis Schaeffer says in his book, Art and the Bible:

"As a Christian adopts and adapts various contemporary techniques, he must wrestle with the whole question, looking to the Holy Spirit for help to know when to invent, when to adopt, when to adapt and when not to use a specific style at all. This is something each artist wrestles with for a lifetime, not something he settles once for all."

Sociology. To rule in sociology, Christians are to liberate people from poverty, oppression and racism by the application of Biblical law and principles to society. Christians should be leading in social reform.

In America, until 1912, almost all social works, - orphanages, work with the elderly, relief for the poor and many other humanitarian works were church related. Born again Christians should be leading in social justice but most are not. We evangelicals have given the social concern over to the liberals or the State, which is a travesty. Christians should be leaders in race relations and our churches should be open to all races of people, but much to my disappointment, many evangelical churches are filled with racial bigots.

Politics. To rule in politics, the Christian must seek to release government from injustice in all areas like tax laws, civil rights national security and other things. Christians should be out front leading in the right to life issues and should oppose abortion on demand.

Education. To rule over education, the Christian must reconcile present secular philosophies and methods and develop new ones so as to bring out all truth that is consistent with God and His written Word. A goal for Christians should be to reconcile public education to Christ. However, to assure a Christian education for our children, Christians should continue to build Christian schools.

CONCLUSION

Christ is sovereign over the universe. He is sovereign over the church. He is sovereign over every true Christian. He is Lord now and His kingdom will be victorious!

However, the question is, "Is Christ your Lord?" If He is not, then you must face the consequence, which is eternal judgment. Bow to the King! Bend your will to the Lord! Listen carefully to this verse: ***"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved"*** (Rom. 10:9).

Confess Christ as Lord, King, Master, God and you will be saved! Then you will begin to make an impact on your culture for Christ and be guaranteed a place in heaven when all things will ultimately be reconciled to Christ.