

**“The Sixth Day”**  
**Genesis 1:26-31**  
**September 28, 2008**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

We’re taking a break today from our study of Acts in order to consider a passage related to the arts weekend. I’ve chosen for our consideration this foundational passage from Genesis 1, specifically the portion that describes the important events of the sixth day of creation. There are several cues in the text itself that point to this day as being the most important of the six days of creation. For example, after God’s creative work of each day, we read of God’s evaluation of what he had done on that day. **“And God saw that it was good.”** But after the sixth day we read, **“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good”** (v. 31). The central feature that sets apart the sixth day is that it was the day on which God created human beings. So with every creative act that preceded this day, the word from God that made it happen was the impersonal “Let there be...” But on this day when God created humanity, there is the more personal language, **“Let us make man”** (v. 26). And we are told of all the other creatures that they are created “according to their kinds.” In the case of humanity, man and woman are created “in the image of God.”

God gave a very important command on this sixth day, a command that he intended to be the central, organizing principle of mankind’s interactions with the planet God had made and on which they had been placed. This command, found in verse 28 of our text, has been called “The Cultural Mandate.” As you can see, it is a command with two parts. Mankind is to fill the earth and to rule the entire creation, both its animate and inanimate parts. Seems simple, right? Actually, the application of the cultural mandate has become a very complex question. The question before us is essentially this one: to what extent should Christians in this now fallen world engage with our culture? Had sin not entered into the world, this would not be a disputed issue at all. But sin has entered in, and as a result this question has become a complex one.

Let me start by summarizing the three different answers Christians have given to this issue of our engagement with the culture at large. One answer given by Christians is to say that we should not engage beyond what is minimally necessary for survival. The extreme form of this is seen among the Amish communities of our nation, where even basic elements of life in America, like cars and electricity, are spurned. A more mainstream version of this disengagement view is seen in the analogy of our culture to a sinking ship. The point is then made that the duty of Christians is to rescue as many souls as possible, not to straighten deck chairs. The other two views of Christian engagement with the culture both advocate engagement, but one does so with pessimism and the other with optimism. The “engage with pessimism” view believes that Christians are

part of two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. We are not to separate from this world, as in the previous view, but as we participate in culture we don't have hope that the Lordship of Christ will be evident in any significant way until heaven. The final view, to engage with optimism, is the one most common in Presbyterian theology. It urges us to move out into our world with a goal of asserting the lordship of Christ over every area of life. So a Christian artist is to think about what it means to follow Christ as an artist. She is to attempt an integration of Christianity with her art, with the result that the artistic culture should begin to be changed into one that more honors Christ. Since this third view is the one I believe the Bible teaches in Genesis 1:28, we will look at it more thoroughly in our first point below.

## **I. The Cultural Mandate Given**

There are two parts to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28. First, mankind is to fill the earth as God's image bearers. Verses 26-27 talk of the uniqueness of humanity as the only creatures on the planet that are created in the image of God. This doesn't mean that humanity will ever become God, but rather that there are similarities between God and humanity. God creates and so can we. The rest of the animal creation acts mostly out of instinct, while humanity has the capacity to exercise the will. God is a moral being, able to love and show kindness, and so is man. In the Ancient Near East, it was commonly believed that the spirit of the gods lived in the statues of those gods. So these statues would be erected throughout the land that believed in that god. It was also believed that the king ruled as a representative of that god, so that the king came to be described as an image of that god. The view of this passage is not far from that, except that it's more democratic. All humans, and not just kings, are designed to rule for God. His desire and his glory is to see his images throughout the creation.

The second part of the cultural mandate is to rule the earth and to have dominion over the rest of the animals. God has placed us in charge of this world, and we are to use it and rule it as God himself would. So God creates, and we are to do so as well. God works to see the planet flourish in every way, and we now are to rule with that same goal. The cultural mandate steers us between two of the errors present today regarding the relationship between mankind and the environment. On the one hand, we are to avoid the error of much of the current environmental movement, the error of worshiping the earth. But we are also to avoid the error of abusing the earth. Only God is to be worshiped, part of that worship of God is act as responsible stewards toward the earth he has made, ruling it as God would so that it can flourish.

This command to rule the earth takes us into just about every realm of our culture, including the political, the sciences and the arts. Let's take one area of life and use it as an example of the way this command to rule as God's image

bearers should work itself out in our lives. It is given to God's image-bearers to create and perform music that reflects God and his nature. Part of God's nature is that he loves to bring joy and delight to others. A Christian musician should be motivated by that, seeing it as the fulfillment of the cultural mandate. David Jones is a professor at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. He also is an amateur tuba player. I once heard him report how one of the St. Louis malls sponsored an annual event called the Merry Tuba Christmas event, which is when all the low brass instruments—euphoniums and under—go and play Christmas music for the folks who are walking the malls. As you can imagine, such an event would attract attention. In his words, "It is hard to ignore a herd of elephants." But people appreciated it and responded with polite applause. After playing for a while, there was an intermission, after which four tuba players from the St. Louis symphony and other symphonies gave a mini-concert. The tuba rarely gets to shine as a solo instrument, but when it is played well, it has its own unique beauty. After the quartet concluded, people were delighted, and in place of polite applause, stomped and applauded loudly. That's a fulfillment of the cultural mandate, bringing delight to people just as God's work brings delight.

This passage calls upon us to engage with our culture in an effort to see it transformed to become what God created this world to be. God still desires to fill the world with his image-bearers. Each of us is called to labor toward this end in whatever field God has placed us. One of the features of the Protestant reformation was to help Christians approach their everyday lives and their culture with faith. The Protestant reformers taught that every job can be a calling from God if approached with a heart of faith.

In 1520, Martin Luther wrote *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. He was calling the church to reform itself, and recommended the abolition of all holy orders, the orders of the monks and nuns of the church. He wrote, "The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.... Indeed, the menial housework of a manservant or maidservant is often more acceptable to God than all the fastings and other works of a monk or priest, because the monk or priest lacks faith."

## **II. The Cultural Mandate Complicated**

The events of Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve believed the lies of Satan and entered the mutiny against God, changed so many things, including the cultural mandate. Now, instead of filling the earth, they begin killing one another, as Cain kills his brother in the very next chapter. When Adam sinned, his authority to rule the earth was seriously damaged. Instead of having dominion over the animals, disharmony and fear began to dominate the relationship. There's a well-

known George Whitefield quote where he asks, “Dost thou know why the wild animals fear and growl and shriek at thee?” And then he answers his question, “Because they know thou hast a quarrel with their Master!” We were created to be at peace with the animal world. But other than a few domesticated animals like dogs and cats, there is only fear between man and animal. We still long, though, for harmony with the animal world. A friend of mine likes to collect wild animals that he finds dead and take them to a taxidermist so he can have the animals around him. He once found a dead skunk and put it in his freezer early in his marriage. He didn’t know that a skunk will burst when frozen, until his wife began noticing a very offensive odor in the house. His desire to collect these animals is rooted in man’s original harmony with the animal world.

Another effect of the fall upon the cultural mandate is to complicate it by the introduction of a second kingdom. Now there is a kingdom of this world and also a kingdom that will endure through eternity. And those of us who belong to Jesus are part of both kingdoms now. How should we think about these things? I believe that we are bound to pursue God fully in both kingdoms. The cultural mandate and the Great Commission should both be pursued, with both being given their place. But it gets complicated for us, because we have a dual citizenship. Let me illustrate the complexity of this in the area of art. The Protestant Church has been criticized in the past for its removal of art from the places of public worship. The Protestant reformers did so for a variety of reasons, including their conviction that the attempt to represent God through artistic imagery was a violation of the second commandment. But they also desired to elevate the word of God to its proper place, and they felt that the use of artistic imagery impeded this effort. But it would be wrong to conclude that they assigned no value to art. What they did was actually to release art from the confines of the church and bring it into the kingdom of this world where it could flourish. Their view was informed by their realization that in this fallen world there are two kingdoms, and Christians are called to serve God in both.

### **III. The Cultural Mandate Fulfilled**

The cultural mandate is to fill the earth and rule it. The first Adam failed to keep this commandment. But the second Adam, Jesus, keeps it perfectly as he fulfills both sides of this command. First, he fills the earth with his spiritual offspring. Isaiah 53:11 says that he will **“make many to be accounted righteous.”** Second, he will rule as a king. He rules the animal kingdom, so that they submit to him. Do you remember that time when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey? Luke tells us that it was a colt on which no one had ridden before. Though it was wild and unbroken, it submitted to Jesus because he is the ruler. Paul says of him, **“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church”** (Eph. 1:22).

Before we close, there are two applications that need to be considered. The two applications concern the cultural mandate and the Great Commission to make disciples. God calls us to pursue both, so let's consider them one at a time. First, God calls his children to pursue the cultural mandate by engaging our culture, wherever God has placed each of us, in order to pursue the preeminence of Christ everywhere. Since this is an arts weekend, let's apply it to the area of Christianity and the visual arts. I want to do so by reading two statements from Abraham Kuyper, a Christian theologian, educator, journalist, and politician in the Netherlands. In 1901 he became prime minister of the Netherlands. Three years prior to that, he delivered a well-known series of lectures at Princeton Seminary called the Stone Lectures. I understand that Covenant College has a stain-glass window in their chapel that features these lectures. Both statements I want to read to you come from these 1898 lectures, in which Kuyper developed what he saw as the proper way for a Christian to pursue the cultural mandate. His most well-known statement from those lectures is this one. "Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'" So the application is to consider the preeminence of Christ over whatever domain of life God has called you to. If you are an accountant, there is a Christian way to think about accounting that you must pursue. The same could be said for being a teacher, a salesman, a businessman, custodian or artist.

The second Kuyper statement from the Stone Lectures concerns what it means to be a Christian artist. "But if you confess that the world once *was* beautiful, but by the curse has become *undone*, and by a final catastrophe is to pass to its full state of glory, excelling even the beautiful of paradise, then art has the mystical task of reminding us in its productions of the beautiful that was lost and of anticipating its perfect coming luster" (p. 155). In other words, art can speak to us where words fail, portraying in multiple ways the paradise that was lost in the fall of our race, and the paradise that has been regained by Christ. Good art will also accurately portray man's fallen condition, but do so in a way that brings hope rather than despair to the human soul.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The second application, and the one that I would like to lead us into communion this morning, is to remember the Great Commission. Jesus calls us to make disciples for his new kingdom. This world is not all there is, and we must never forget it. All that we were created for will only be realized in Jesus and through a relationship with him. Jesus has come to restore us to a right relationship with God first of all. But he doesn't stop there, because he also has come to restore us to a right relationship with the world God has created, that we might live in it full of joy and delight in our God.