

# Creation Mandates

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, I'd like us to turn back together to Genesis 1. Let me read verse 28, where it says, 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.

As you know, in our evening services just now, we're doing a series called The Real Us. And all of this is thinking about how, in our society just now, there's lots of emphasis on thinking about who you are, the real you, being your true self, finding your true identity.

That's a big, big dynamic in our society just now. And as we've said, at one level, that causes difficulties and challenges, but at a fundamental level, that's a good thing.

It's good for humanity to think about who we really are. But the big claim that we want to make is that there's only one place that you'll actually find out the answer to that question.

It's in the Bible. The Bible reveals who we really are. And the beautiful thing about the Bible is that it contrasts with the individualism that we see dominant in our society.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] And instead, the Bible emphasizes our collective identity. The Bible is teaching us all about the real us. And we're looking at lots of topics. We were going to be in six parts.

We've kind of gone a wee bit all over the place. These are the topics that we're looking at, though, thinking about the creation of humanity, thinking about the nature of humanity, thinking about the purpose of humanity. And we're going to go on to think about humanity as the image of God, humanity as male and female, humanity as a blessed covenant creature.

At the moment, we're looking together at this, the purpose of humanity. humanity. And we're going to look at that just in a little bit more detail. We started it last week. We're going to look a little bit more tonight, probably a little bit more next week.

When we were talking about the nature of humanity, we're asking the question, what am I? When we talk about the purpose of humanity, we're asking the question, what am I for? And that's a question that we've always got to think about.

What are you for? Why are you here? What's life all about? And last week, we just looked at this in general terms, and we saw that the Bible's teaching is summed up in the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which some of you, I'm sure, will have learned from when you were very small.

[ 2 : 2 8 ] What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. That's our great purpose, summed up in one beautiful sentence.

We're made to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Now, that's the answer to the question in the shorter catechism. There's also a longer catechism, which gives more or less the same answer. I think it just adds the word fully. It says that we're to glorify God and fully enjoy him forever. But in making these, when these questions and answers were written 400 years ago, they attached texts to these passages to show that what they're saying has come from the Bible.

And one of the texts that gets attached to the larger catechism is John 17, 20, where Jesus prays, and at the end of that prayer, he says, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you've given me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them, even as you loved me.

[ 3 : 5 1 ] And what the theologians who wrote the catechisms are trying to tell us there is that glorifying and enjoying God is bound up with knowing him and being loved by him.

And that's really, you know, when we talk about glorifying God and enjoying him, that's not about fulfilling religious obligations. It's actually about enjoying, enjoying that unspeakable privilege of knowing God and being loved by him.

And so when you read the first catechism, it's not saying, this is a duty that you must do. It's saying, this is an amazing privilege that God wants you to receive.

Because what are you ultimately made for? You're made to know God. You are made to know the fullness of his love being poured into your heart forever.

And as you experience that, you glorify him and you enjoy him forever. In other words, you are made, your purpose, you are made for something utterly beautiful.

[ 5 : 14 ] The highest privilege of relationship with God. That's what you're made for. And all the ugliness that sin has caused in our lives and that sin causes in the world around us, all of that is a distortion of that.

And all of that is a corruption of that. It's not what we're made for. We're made for something so much better, something so much higher. And that ties in with what the Bible teaches us about being made in the image of God.

We're going to look at this in more detail later in our series. But it's really important to remember though that the image of God ties in with human nature and human purpose. What are we? We are the image of God.

And what are we to do? We are to bear that image. It's all part of our purpose as we know God, as we're loved by Him, as we live for Him in our lives now and forever.

So we'll pick up a little bit more of that when we come to look at the image of God in more detail. Tonight, I want us to look at some more specific aspects about the purpose of humanity as it's revealed to us in Scripture.

[ 6 : 22 ] And in some ways, what we're doing tonight and what we'll do next week is maybe just a little bit different to what we're normally doing because we're maybe looking at some things that are maybe, we're looking at maybe some more technical theological categories which, you know, we maybe don't normally talk about but I hope are still going to be helpful to us because they really are very central to the Bible's understanding, to what the Bible teaches us about our purpose.

So we're going to look at three areas this week and next week and they all sound a bit funny. We're going to look at creation mandates, creation offices, creation ordinances and creation offices.

That all sounds a bit weird. We'll explain what they all are as we go through them. Tonight, we're going to focus on the first of these on creation mandates and we'll see that there's a bit of overlap between these categories but nevertheless, they are very, very helpful.

So tonight, this is what we're looking at. Creation mandates. What on earth does that mean? Well, what it's referring to is the fact that when God created humanity, the narrative in Genesis 1 and 2 includes some specific activities and objectives that humanity is made to accomplish.

In other words, there's certain things that God wants to see manifested in the human race. Certain things that he wants us to do and to accomplish.

[ 7 : 50 ] Certain roles that he wants us to fulfill. And the key text is Genesis 1.28. God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and multiply, 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.

So much of our purpose is bound up in what that verse is saying. And I want to suggest that we can summarize these creation mandates under three subcategories.

We are given a dominion mandate, we're given a cultural mandate and we're given a relational mandate. Now all of these are going to be closely related and they will overlap but I think it's helpful to distinguish them and I think that distinguishing them accurately reflects what Genesis 1.28 is saying to us.

So we're going to whiz through them together one by one. So first of all, thinking about this, the dominion mandate. That arises from that word there. Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on earth.

And that phrase have dominion, it comes from a Hebrew word, the Hebrew word is rada and that's a word that has connections, linguists think it has connections to the idea of standing on a winepress where grapes, you know, you're pressing down on grapes, bringing out the juice and it's used in that sense in Joel chapter 3 and so you can have that imagery in your mind and you're thinking well what's that sort of speaking of?

[ 9 : 30 ] Well it's definitely speaking of the idea of like a hierarchy, of a superior over an inferior, the idea of one being above another and having that role of, that higher role, that role of authority and dominion.

Now there's a few things to say about that. The first is to say that this is reinforcing the uniqueness of humanity and this is a thing that we've been saying again and again and again. When we talk about the real us you will never understand the real us if you don't recognise that humanity is totally unique.

Humanity is in a category of our own in creation and the dominion is exercised over everything else, over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Now that's really important to notice that you've got these three categories here. You've got the fish of the sea, you've got the birds of the heavens, you've got every living thing that moves on the earth.

Now as Myrtle read through Genesis 1 you see that these are the three great spheres of life that get created. God creates the sea, He separates the sea from the sky and then He gathers the waters so that the land is exposed.

[ 10 : 51 ] All of that describing very beautifully the different spheres of life that are being created and so the seas, just describes how the sea is created, the sky is created, the land is created and then it goes back and describes the filling of these.

So the sea is filled with creatures, the sky is filled with birds, the land is filled with animals and creeping things. So you've got three big categories, big spheres of biological life described in Genesis 1 and then verse 28 says, humanity has dominion over them all.

And so you see there's a really vast comprehensive position of privilege and authority and leadership given to humanity.

And the same emphasis appears in Psalm 8. You've given Him humanity, dominion over the works of your hands. You've put all things under His feet, all sheep and oxen, also the beasts of the field, the birds, the heaven, the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

Now, isn't it interesting? Look, you've got the same things mentioned. You've got every living thing on the land here and you've got the sheep and the oxen and the beasts of the field here. You've got the birds of the heavens here.

[ 12 : 03 ] You've got the birds of the heavens here. You've got the fish of the sea here. You've got the fish of the sea here. Same three spheres, same dominion. It's actually a different word that's used for dominion in Psalm 8 than it is there, but it's conveying the same concept.

But the key thing that's emphasized in Psalm 8, which reflects Genesis 21, is that that dominion is given to Him, given to humanity by God.

And so that's so important for us to recognize. Yes, humanity has this role of dominion, but that role is given and bestowed by God. Human dominion is only possible through divine delegation.

It's all under the lordship and sovereignty of God. So this places humanity in a unique position.

Now, what does that dominion involve? Well, dominion is a word that can very easily have negative connotations in our society today.

And when we think of dominion and dominating, that doesn't sound like a good thing. That's often conveyed negatively. It's so important that we kind of try and filter that negative connotation out of our mind, because the Bible is not using it in that sense.

[ 13 : 17 ] Because in the context of the Bible, to have dominion, to have a rule over someone, it's always to involve responsible authority.

And it's never to involve an oppressive exercise of power. So there's an example of the same concept, in fact, the same word, in Leviticus 25, 43.

You shall not rule ruthlessly, but instead you should serve God. There's so many people that rule ruthlessly over people. God says, that's not the way you should do it.

Your rule, your dominion, is to carry appropriate care and responsibility. And you see that emphasized going into Genesis chapter 2, because part of the dominion mandate to humanity is the rule given to Adam in the garden and he's to work it and to keep it.

Now these are really interesting words as well, because the word work is actually literally the word serve. And the word keep is literally the word guard.

[ 14 : 25 ] And both of those just speak of a careful responsibility, not a kind of exploitive, abusive authority at all, but no, one that guards God's creation and that's living out a role of service as you exercise that authority.

In other words, everything that's been described here is a rule that neither abdicates nor abuses. A rule at night that abdicates abdicates nor abuses. So as we fulfill this role that God has given us, we are not to abdicate our responsibility.

We're not to say, well, oh, it's nothing to do with me looking after the world around us, fulfilling this role, exercising this authority that God's given. We can't abdicate that and say, oh, don't give me that responsibility.

But at the same time, we mustn't abuse that dominion mandate. The fact that God has given us abilities, opportunities, resources, skills that actually have the potential to make the world around us thrive, but also have the potential to cause a whole pile of harm.

We must not do that. We must not abuse the status that we have. We mustn't abdicate our responsibility. We mustn't abuse our authority. And all of that makes sense because the creation is not actually ours.

[ 15 : 51 ] It's his. It belongs to the creator. Any rule and authority that we have comes from him. It's exercised with accountability towards God.

And that's just such an important lesson about any form of leadership that we have. When we speak about dominion, that role of authority that humanity has, so often that will manifest itself in terms of leadership, and our leadership is always exercised with ultimate accountability to God. That's inescapable. Every single human authority, every single human ruler will one day appear before the judgment seat of God. The Psalms will often speak of that, Psalm 73. It speaks about judgment.

Those who are far from you will perish. You will put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. We are exercising authority before God. And so our purpose is to exercise wise, careful, God-honoring dominion over the creation.

So what are you for? Well, one of the first things that the Bible tells you is that you are to rule over the creation that God has made. Now, you probably don't think of yourself as fulfilling that role.

[ 17 : 11 ] You know, you think, well, as we go into a new week, what are the things that God wants me to do? And you think, well, he wants me to love my neighbor, he wants me to read my Bible, he wants me to pray. All of that's true, all that's important. He also wants you to rule over the created realm that's all around you.

And that's so important to remember because so often humanity departs from this mandate.

So often we depart from this mandate. So God has given us this role, the God-given mandate. I don't know if I've got enough for him to write this.

God-given dominion mandate over creation. Okay, so I'm running out of space, but we've got a God-given dominion mandate to rule over creation. Now, very often, sin will tempt us to go in opposite directions to God's instruction.

So often you'll see this in life, that God gives us an instruction and we'll either go one way or the other way. And this is definitely what can happen here. So we've got a God-given right, a God-given mandate to rule over creation.

[ 18 : 21 ] But often we will depart from that in opposite directions. One way we go is that we bow down to creation. And so people, and you see it all through the Bible, instead of worshipping the creator, people worship the creation.

And so they'll make an idol, they'll make a pole of wood, they'll make a golden calf, they'll look at gods of rain or of fire or of the mountains or of fertility.

They'll idolize the female figure or whatever it might be. And people will take things in creation and bow before them.

And that's a direct contradiction of what the God-given mandate is, that we're absolutely not to bow down before them. If we bow down before something that's created, then we are completely betraying our purpose.

It's far, far below what we're made for. But we can also go in the complete other direction where we're abusive of the creation around us.

[ 19 : 32 ] And so we exercise a dominion and authority that's reckless and careless and selfish and has no regard for the fact that this is God's beautiful creation.

Instead you think this is my patch that I can exploit for my own benefit. and you've seen that in history and there's issues of that today as well.

So instead of bowing down to creation, people are stamping on creation and abusing it. And so we've got this God-given creation mandate here.

Please, please forgive my terrible handwriting and drawing. We make the mistake of going in opposite directions from it. We go that way and people bow down before creation. We go that way and people stamp on creation.

But even though these things are going in opposite directions, they eventually come to the same destination. They both lead to destruction.

[ 20 : 37 ] And you've got, you know, it's a bit of a depressing diagram, but it's like the circle of destruction. That you depart from God that way or you depart from God that way.

And it looks like you're going in opposite directions, but you're both heading for exactly the same place. The place of destruction. We're destroying ourselves if we bow down before idols. We're destroying ourselves if we're abusing and stamping on the creation that God has given us to live in and to thrive in.

And it's all a departure from what we've been made for. We've been made to exercise a careful, God-honoring dominion over the created realm around us.

And that's just a really, really important thing for us to remember. So, you know, it means you can go out this week. I'm not sure what the weather's going to do this week, but the last couple of days have been so beautiful.

people. And when you stand and you see the amazing creation around us, you can stand and you can say, God's given that to me.

[ 21 : 51 ] Or in fact, more accurately, you can say, God's given that to us. God's given us. God's given us. It's ours to look after, and thus we glorify him, and it's ours to enjoy.

And if we're glorifying and enjoying him, we're fulfilling our purpose. So we've been given a dominion mandate. We've also been given a cultural mandate.

Now, what do I mean by this? Well, these are arising from the words, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.

And so, what's been taught here? Well, be fruitful, multiply, fill. These words are speaking of the growth and advance of the human race. And that's how the dominion is going to be possible.

We can exercise that role of dominion because we're going to grow and spread out over the whole earth, which we have done. And so, there's going to be numerical growth as more humans are brought into the world.

[ 22 : 58 ] And there's going to be geographical spread. And now, it's so important to remember, humanity was never made to stay in the Garden of Eden. So, Garden of Eden was made, but our purpose was never to remain there.

Our purpose was actually to extend that garden so that it got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and filled the whole earth. That was the great purpose for humanity, that God's temple, God's garden, that beautiful environment, that paradise where God and humanity is together, that was to fill the earth.

That was really part of the great purpose that humanity had. So, there's this fruitfulness, multiplying, filling. It's just a wonderful vision for humanity's purpose given by God.

word. And part of that is to subdue the earth. And that's an important word for us to think about. It's a fascinating word really in many ways because it speaks, it actually literally means to bring something into bondage, to bring something under control.

And that's really what we mean by the word subdue. Later on in Scripture it's used to describe the Israelites gaining control of the land of Canaan. Even later on it's used to speak of David bringing enemy kings under his control.

[ 24 : 15 ] So, obviously there's a connection there to the dominion mandate. But in Genesis 1.28 you can see there that subdue is sitting alongside fruitful, multiply, and fill. It's all part of this one package together.

And so it's helping us to see that as humanity expands the earth's resources are coming under the control of humanity and therefore they are to be utilized in the service of humanity.

And you see an example of that in the very next verse. God says, look, I've given you the plants, every tree with its seed, every fruit, they're yours, use them. And then in chapter 2, as Adam is told

to work and keep the garden, part of that is also fulfilling this mandate.

So this idea of a cultural mandate is speaking to us of the fact that the earth's resources are to be cultivated by humanity. In other words, the earth's potential is to be realized.

Now let me give you a quote from a book that's called *Created in God's Image* that speaks about this by a theologian called Anthony Hoekma. He says, this verb that the earth subdue tells us that man is to explore the resources of the earth, to cultivate its land, to mine its buried treasures.

[ 25 : 30 ] Yet we must not think simply about land, plants and animals. We must also think about human existence in itself insofar as it is an aspect of God's good creation. Man is called by God to develop all the potentialities found in nature and in humankind as a whole.

He must seek to develop not only agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry but also science, technology and art. In other words, we have here what is often called the cultural mandate, the command to develop a God glorifying culture.

Now that is such a helpful paragraph, it's such an important thing for us to think about because it's telling us that whatever your job is and whatever your hobby is, in that you can glorify and enjoy God.

So if you're a builder, an engineer, a teacher, an artist, if you're a researcher, if you're a manager, if you're a trainer, if you're involved in some kind of production, if you're a gardener, farmer, fisherman, whatever, all of it is within the scope of what's being commanded in the cultural mandate.

And so we are being commanded to utilize the resources and gifts that God's given us. So in every area of our society, art, music, economics, engineering, politics, language, education, sport, technology, all of these things feed into this cultural mandate.

[ 27 : 05 ] It's all part of what we're being commanded to do as we fulfill the amazing potential that God's given us. And this is such an important reminder that it should never be that our relationship with God is here in this little box and then the rest of our life is here, our work and our hobbies and other stuff that we do.

No, our relationship with God is here, over it all. And it feeds into every single thing that we do. We glorify and enjoy him in it all.

And this is again emphasizing the fact, the uniqueness of humanity. It's only us that has this relationship to culture.

We cultivate it. We are the ones who help bring all these advancements. We are the ones who are helping the earth to fulfill its potential. All of that is honoring God.

all of that is fulfilling this mandate. Now there's an interesting and important distinction to maintain and I'm just going to give you a quote from another theologian called John Frame and he makes this important distinction which I think helps clarify this point even further.

[ 28 : 14 ] We should make an important distinction between creation and culture. Creation is what God makes. Culture is what we make. Now of course God is sovereign so everything we make is also his in one sense or somewhat better.

Creation is what God makes by himself and culture is what he makes through us. All of that is reminding us that as Christians we don't despise or avoid or condemn the culture around us.

Yes when we see sin ruining that culture we lament that and cry out to God over it. But we do not shun or condemn or avoid areas of cultural development.

Things like technology and art and music and literature and government. Our purpose is not to separate ourselves from these. Our purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him in them all.

That's a key part of what we're made for. In every part of our lives we honour God as we live and follow him and glorify him. And there's a great example for you all this week as you go to work, as you go into your hobbies.

[ 29 : 21 ] Wouldn't it just be cool if we're working with people, we're around other people and they're looking at you and you're thinking wow, they are glorifying and enjoying God in what they're doing today.

They are glorifying and enjoying God on Monday morning. That's all part of the cultural mandate.

That's part of what we are for. Never ever think that our God given purpose is only ever about our last day or about eternity.

A key part of our God given purpose is what we do tomorrow morning in whatever aspect of culture we're involved in. We glorify and enjoy God as we follow and serve him in it.

Last of all, very quickly, we're also given a relational mandate. Now, you'll often find the phrases cultural mandate and dominion mandate in theology books. I don't think that you'll find the term relational mandate in the same way, but I think it is an important category to have because it's definitely the case, and all theologians will agree with this, that the whole category of relationship is central to the purpose of humanity.

And you see that so clearly in the Genesis narrative. Relationships are at the heart of our purpose. And there's four subheadings to that. There's a relationship with God.

[ 30 : 43 ] And you see that. It's woven right through the Genesis narrative. God speaks to people. God said, God said, God said, God commands the man. And all of that is an outworking of the relationship that God has.

God speaks, God provides, I've given you, God commands. It's all speaking about that relationship. And in many ways, it's captured in that wonderful phrase, God blessed them. Humanity is to enjoy a relationship of privilege and benevolence and delight with the God who's made us.

You're just made to enjoy him. You're made to enjoy God. And that's so, so important. Please, like, please don't ever think that God wants you to be sad.

Or that God wants you to be heavy. Or that he wants you to feel guilty. He doesn't. He wants to deal with your guilt. He wants to wipe away your tears.

He wants to bind up all your wounds. And he wants you just to enjoy the God-given happiness of knowing him. He wants you to enjoy that relationship that he's made you to have with him.

[ 31 : 57 ] But that's not the only relationship that's mandated. There's also the relationship between humans. That's seen in the command, the need for companionship in Genesis 2. We'll look at that in more detail in a couple of weeks' time.

There's the establishment of marriage. There's the blessing of children. It's all reminding us that the command, be fruitful and multiply, is impossible alone. And so, to be what God wants us to be, we can never do it alone.

We're only real when it's the real us. Because God's made us to be in relationship with one another. Now, here's an important thing to note regarding the dominion mandate.

When we have the dominion mandate in Scripture given to humanity, it's so important to notice. Remember what we said, the dominion mandate is given to the three realms of created life.

So there's dominion over the fish in the sea, dominion over the birds in the sky, dominion over the animals on the land. But there is no dominion mandate for one human to exercise dominion over the other.

[ 33 : 03 ] There's no dominion mandate for one people group to exercise dominion over the other. There's no dominion mandate for one race to exercise dominion over the other.

And all that we see in history where one group of humanity or one individual humanity exercises oppressive dominion over the others, that is a blasphemy and a betrayal of the dominion mandate. Because the relationship between humanity is to be one of equality and harmony and fellowship and love. We're made to enjoy one another in beautiful friendship.

Then there's also the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. You see that in 2, 19 and 20. There's the naming of the animals.

And it's just tying and emphasizing the fact that humanity is made to relate appropriately to the rest of creation. You see it also, where's my other verses, there they are, just the relationship to the sea, the sky, the land, it's all just emphasizing that fact that we are made to live in harmony with the creation around us.

[ 34 : 23 ] We're made to enjoy the beautiful world that God has made. So there's the relationship with God, the relationship with one another, the relationship with the rest of creation, and there's the relationship with ourselves. And that's captured very powerfully at the end of chapter 2.

The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. So often we are crippled by a sense of shame and so often the person who gives us the most hard, the hardest time in life, the person who is hardest on us, is ourselves.

It's not what we were made for. We were made to have a harmonious relationship with God, with one another, with the rest of creation, and with ourselves. Now sins come and broken all of that. Jesus has come to restore all of that because at the heart of our purpose is a relational mandate. So we're made to have dominion, we're made to cultivate the world's potentials around us, we're made to have a relationship.

The dominion mandate, the cultural mandate, the relationship mandate, all reveals more about our purpose. I'm running out of time as always. Last thing I want to say is this.

[ 35 : 31 ] Sin has made all of these ugly. Sin's made the dominion mandate ugly. People are awful to one another, oppressive, exploitive, abusive, and the human race is wrecking the world that God gave us.

Sin has made the cultural mandate ugly. So art and literature and music and sport and technology, all of these things that were supposed to help us are causing a huge amount of damage.

And sin has made the relational mandate ugly. See, broken families, broken relationships, broken friendships, individuals who hate each other, peoples who hate each other, nations at war.

Sin has made all of these things ugly. The gospel has come to restore them. Jesus has come to restore them.

Not to abandon them, but to restore them. And the gospel makes all of these things beautiful. A beautiful dominion where humanity leads well with kindness, courage, compassion, and strength.

[ 36 : 57 ] A beautiful culture where we use the things that God has given us to just, to glorify him, to lift up his name.

And beautiful relationships where we know the amazing reality of God's love. And as that love is poured into our hearts, our love for one another strengthens.

And our love for the creation strengthens. And even our love and acceptance of ourselves gets healed and restored.

God made us and he gave us a dominion mandate, a cultural mandate, and a relationship mandate. And Jesus says, that's what I want you to have. That's what I want to restore.

Amen.