

### ***Who fulfills the dominion mandate?***

Within the Reformed community there is always much discussion and sermonizing on the dominion mandate: “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” (Gen. 1.28). There are many Reformed pastors and theologians who appeal to this passage of Scripture and argue that the Church must carry out this command. The Church must not only carry out the mandate through evangelism, they argue, but also through procreation. After all, Christ reissued the mandate to the Church in the Great Commission (Matt. 28.18-20) and we are still obligated to God’s first command to Adam and Eve. Hence, the bottom line of their argument is that through the accomplished work of Christ the Church fulfills the dominion mandate. While this sounds true and scriptural, it misses the mark by a significant distance. It might surprise us to discover that the Church does not fulfill the dominion mandate. If the Church does not fulfill the mandate, then who does? Christ fulfills the dominion mandate.

When we look at the opening chapters of the creation account we all agree upon these facts: God created man, male and female, and gave them the dominion mandate. They were to subdue the earth by extending the Garden to the ends of the earth and filling the earth with the image of God through procreation. We also agree that Adam was the spiritual head in his marriage to Eve and therefore the one upon whom the responsibilities of fulfilling the mandate fell. Eve was Adam’s helpmate. We also agree upon the events subsequent to man’s creation—they rebelled against God. It is here where many fail to consider the effects of the fall. As a result of the fall man cannot fulfill the command of God because of the abiding presence of sin. Even if God cleansed the earth of all wicked men and started over with a righteous man, because of man’s sinfulness, he will fail. Noah, the righteous man, one who walked with God, failed. We must remember that Adam and Eve served as types, people who foreshadowed the person and work of Christ. In this case, Adam points to Christ (Rom. 5.12-19), and Eve points to the Church (Eph. 5.25ff). Christ is the one upon whom the responsibility of fulfilling the dominion mandate falls, not the Church. The Church, like Eve, serves as the helpmate to the covenant head, who is also our husband, namely Christ. This has some important implications for the manner in which we participate in fulfilling the dominion mandate.

We do not fulfill the mandate through procreation. We can not, no matter how hard we try, make Christians: “But to all who did receive [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1.12-13). Rather, it is Christ, who unites with his bride, the Church, to produce godly offspring. It is only when Christ sovereignly calls a person into his kingdom by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit that he becomes a child of God. No matter how many children a couple might have there is no guarantee that all their children will be saved, to wit, Jacob and Esau. The bride, the Church, produces children when we take the seed of the Gospel and plant it in the hearts of men. Some will plant, others within the Church will water, but it is God who gives the increase. This is how, for example, that Paul, though he was single and did not have a wife, had many children in the faith (1 Cor. 4.14, 17). This means that the barren single

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woman can still have many children, not because she has resorted to medical technology but because she has united to Christ to assist her husband in fulfilling the dominion mandate.

It is important that we see the differences between what we often hear and the biblical position on the dominion mandate. What we typically hear is that, the Church fulfills the dominion mandate on the redemptive work of Christ, therefore we must have many children to fill the earth. The biblical position is, the Church assists Christ, and he fulfills the mandate. The number of children that a couple might or might not have, is not a matter of biblical command but falls under the category of Christian liberty. While it may not seem significant, the question boils down to this: Will we stand at the end of history in front of Christ as the ones who have fulfilled the dominion mandate through our labors, or will we stand behind Christ, the one who has fulfilled the mandate through his labors? The two options are worlds apart. Let us assist Christ, our husband, as he fulfills the dominion mandate by his labors.