

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANTHROPOLOGY

The Doctrine of Humanity

Created, Fallen, and Redeemable — What It Means to Be Human Before God

UNIT 7

The Cultural Mandate and Human Vocation

Lesson 20

The Cultural Mandate

Humanity's Original Commission

“Be Fruitful, Multiply, Fill, Subdue, and Have Dominion”

Key Texts: Genesis 1:28; 2:15; 9:1–7; Psalm 8; Matthew 28:18–20

“God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

Genesis 1:28, NASB 1995

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Introduction

The preceding units of this series have established what the human creature is: made in the image of God (Unit 3), with a whole-person constitution of body and soul (Unit 4), in an original righteousness placed under a covenant whose Last Adam has fulfilled (Unit 5), as male and female in the ordered complementarity of gender, marriage, and mutual dignity (Unit 6). Unit 7 asks the next essential question: what is the human creature for? What is the specific commission, the specific calling, the specific vocation that God's image-bearing creature is designed to fulfill in the created order that God has entrusted to its care? The answer that Genesis 1:28 provides, the cultural mandate, is not a peripheral addition to the doctrine of humanity but the direct and necessary implication of the *imago Dei* itself: the creature who bears the image of the God who creates, governs, and develops the potential of the created order is thereby commissioned to create, to govern, and to develop the created order as God's vice-regent and steward.

Genesis 1:28 is the pivotal text of Unit 7: "God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (NASB 1995). The five imperatives of this verse, be fruitful, multiply, fill, subdue, rule, are not a list of incidental commands given to the first human couple in the specific circumstances of the garden; they are the comprehensive commission of the image of God to exercise the specific form of creaturely dominion that the image implies. The human creature who bears the image of the Creator is commissioned to exercise, in the creaturely sphere, the same creative, governing, and developing activity that the Creator exercises in the divine sphere: not in autonomy and self-determination, but in delegated vice-regency, as the steward and representative of the God who owns the creation and who has entrusted its development to the creature He made in His own image.

This lesson proceeds in six sections. We begin with the cultural mandate defined, its five imperatives examined with the exegetical precision their comprehensiveness requires. We then examine the connection between the cultural mandate and the *imago Dei*: why the dominion commission follows directly and necessarily from the image-bearing character of the human creature. The third section examines the full scope of the cultural mandate: the foundation it provides for every dimension of legitimate human cultural activity, from agriculture to art to science to governance. The fourth section examines the cultural mandate after the fall: why it was not revoked, how it was confirmed in the Noahic covenant, and how it is to be pursued in the power of grace amid the distortions that sin has introduced. The fifth section addresses the relationship between the cultural mandate and the Great Commission: the two are complementary callings of the same God-bearing, God-commissioned, God-glorifying creature, not competing agendas for the church's attention. We close with the eschatological vision of the cultural mandate fulfilled: the new creation as the perfected expression of the image of God's dominion over a renewed cosmos.

A note on the historical and theological context: the doctrine of the cultural mandate received its most sustained theological development in the Dutch Reformed tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in the work of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and their successors in the Neo-Calvinist or Kuyperian stream. Kuyper's famous dictum, "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!", is the most concise expression of the theological conviction that the cultural mandate generates when it is held with the theological seriousness it deserves. The Kuyperian tradition has provided the most developed account of the cultural mandate's implications for the full range of human cultural activity; this lesson draws on that tradition while grounding the doctrine firmly in the biblical testimony from which the tradition derives its authority.

I. The Cultural Mandate Defined: The Five Imperatives of Genesis 1:28

The Comprehensive Commission God Gave to Humanity at Its Creation

A. Be Fruitful, Multiply, Fill: The Procreative and Geographic Dimensions

Genesis 1:28's five imperatives constitute the most comprehensive single statement of the human creature's divinely commissioned vocation in the entire biblical canon, and each imperative deserves careful exegetical attention before the full scope of the cultural mandate can be appreciated. The verse is introduced by the divine blessing, "God blessed them", which establishes that the commission is not a burden imposed on the creature from outside but a gracious empowerment of the creature to fulfill the purpose for which it was made. The blessing and the commission are inseparable: God blesses the human creature by commissioning it, because the commission is the specific expression of the creature's vocation as the image-bearer who is designed for this purpose.

The first imperative, "be fruitful" (pru, פרו, from parah, to be fruitful), is the command to biological reproduction, the generation of offspring through the male-female union that Genesis 2 has established as the creation ordinance of marriage. The fruitfulness commanded here is not merely a biological function but a theological act: the bearing of children who themselves bear the image of God, who are themselves commissioned to exercise the dominion that Genesis 1:28 describes. Every child born into the world is a new image-bearer added to the community of those whom God has commissioned to develop the creation's potential under His sovereign authority. The second imperative, "multiply" (ravah, רבה), expresses the expansion that fruitfulness produces, the numerical growth of the image-bearing community that increases the scope and the depth of the dominion God has commissioned. The third imperative, "fill the earth" (male'u et-ha'aretz, מלאו אתהארץ), is the geographic extension of the multiplication: the human community is not to remain clustered in the garden but is to spread across the whole earth, bringing the whole created order under the scope of the divinely commissioned dominion. The filling of the earth is not geographical conquest for its own sake but the extension of the image of God's presence and governance across the full breadth of the created domain that God has entrusted to the creature's stewardship.

Together, the first three imperatives establish the anthropological and geographic foundation for the cultural mandate: the image-bearing community is to grow numerically and to spread geographically, so that the dominion God has commissioned covers the full extent of the created order He has entrusted to the human creature's care. This is not an incidental detail about population growth and geographic settlement; it is the specific expression of the Creator's design for the image-bearing creature to be the active, present, governing agent of His dominion over the full scope of the creation. The earth is not to be merely inhabited; it is to be filled, pervaded by the presence and the activity of the image-bearing community that exercises its vice-regal commission across every domain of the created order.

B. Subdue and Rule: The Developmental and Governing Dimensions

The fourth imperative, "subdue" (kabash, כבש, to bring under, to tread upon, to subdue), is the most theologically pregnant of the five and the most susceptible to misinterpretation. Kabash describes the bringing of the created order under the orderly governance of the image-bearing creature, the active development of the creation's potential through the human creature's intelligent, purposeful engagement with it. The word does not imply exploitation, destruction, or the domination of nature for purely selfish ends; it implies the bringing of the wild, the undeveloped, and the latent into the ordered, the cultivated, and the actualized. The earth as created was not a finished product but a raw material charged with potential: Genesis 2:5–6 describes the pre-Adamic state of the earth as lacking cultivated vegetation and the human tiller whose work would develop it. The subduing of the earth is the bringing of that potential to actuality through the human creature's creative, intelligent, and purposeful engagement with the created order, agriculture that turns wild earth into cultivated fields, architecture

that turns raw materials into habitable spaces, science that turns the hidden structures of the natural order into understood and usable knowledge, and art that turns the raw materials of sensory experience into the forms that express the human creature's response to the beauty the Creator has placed in the world.

The fifth imperative, "rule" (radah, רָדָה, to rule, to govern, to have dominion over), is the governing complement to the developing activity of the subduing: where kabash describes the active development of the creation's potential, radah describes the governing and ordering of the developed creation in patterns that reflect the Creator's own governance of the whole. The rule of the image of God over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every living creature is not the tyranny of the powerful over the powerless but the governance of the responsible steward who exercises the authority entrusted to him in patterns that honor the One who entrusted it. Psalm 8's reflection on the human creature's ruling position in the created order captures the theological character of this governance with lyrical precision: "Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet" (Psalm 8:5–6, NASB 1995). The governance is a crown, a delegated honor, not an autonomous power.

The two imperatives of subduing and ruling together establish the full scope of the cultural mandate's active dimension: the human creature is commissioned not merely to occupy the earth but to develop it, to order it, to bring its latent potential to actuality, and to govern the developed creation in patterns of responsible stewardship that honor the Creator's sovereign ownership of the whole. This is the warrant for every dimension of human cultural activity: every act of cultivation, construction, discovery, creation, governance, and care that the human creature exercises over the created order is an expression of the cultural mandate's commission. And every such act is, in principle, an act of worship, the creature exercising the specific vocation for which it was made, in the domain of the specific creation to which it was commissioned, in the image and the authority of the God who made the creature and entrusted it with this extraordinary responsibility.

"What is man that You take thought of him ... Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet."

Psalm 8:4–6, NASB 1995

II. The Cultural Mandate and the Imago Dei: Delegated Dominion

Why the Image of God Necessarily Implies the Commission to Govern

A. The Imago Dei as the Ground of the Cultural Commission

The most important structural feature of Genesis 1:26–28 for the doctrine of the cultural mandate is the direct connection the passage draws between the image of God and the dominion commission. The connection is both explicit and structural: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth'" (v. 26, NASB 1995). The conjunction "let them rule" follows immediately and directly from the creation of the image: the ruling function is the direct implication of the image-bearing status. The human creature is commissioned to rule because it bears the image of the Ruler of all. The dominion is not an arbitrary addition to the human creature's constitution; it is the specific vocation that the image-bearing constitution is designed to exercise.

The ancient Near Eastern royal context of the imago Dei, which Lesson 7 examined in detail, illuminates the specific force of this connection. In the royal theology of the ancient Near Eastern world, the king was the image of the god, the specific person whose bearing of the divine image equipped and authorized him to exercise the god's governance over the earth on the god's behalf. Genesis 1:26–28's declaration that every human being is

made in the image of God democratizes this royal theology: it is not the king alone who is the image of God and therefore commissioned to exercise dominion; every human being bears the image and therefore every human being participates in the commission. The cultural mandate is the democratized royal commission, the commission extended to every member of the human family to exercise, in the specific domain of their own creaturely existence, the vice-regal governance of the God whose image they bear.

The delegated character of the dominion is as important as the commission itself for the correct theological understanding of the cultural mandate. The human creature exercises dominion as God's representative, not as an autonomous ruler who owns what he governs. Psalm 24:1's declaration, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (NASB 1995), is the theological framework within which the cultural mandate must be understood: the earth belongs to the Lord, not to the human creature who governs it. The human creature governs as a steward entrusted with the governance of Another's property, accountable to the Owner for the quality of the stewardship, and directed by the Owner's character and purposes in the exercise of the governance. The cultural mandate is not the license for autonomous human self-determination over the creation; it is the commission for responsible, worshipful, accountable stewardship of the creation on behalf of and under the authority of the Creator who owns it.

B. Vice-Regency: The Character of the Delegated Commission

The concept of vice-regency, the exercise of authority as the representative and delegate of a higher authority, is the theological category that most precisely captures the character of the cultural mandate's commission. The human creature is not the lord of the creation but the lord's representative in the creation: the one who exercises the lord's authority in the lord's absence (or more precisely, in the lord's presence, since the God who entrusted the creation to the human creature's governance is omnipresent), accountable to the lord for the quality of the stewardship, and bounded in the exercise of the authority by the character and the purposes of the lord who entrusted it. The vice-regent's authority is real authority, not a simulation of authority but the genuine exercise of genuine power in the governance of the created order, but it is derived authority, not original; it is delegated authority, not autonomous; and it is accountable authority, not unconditional.

Genesis 2:15's account of Adam's specific vocation in the garden provides the most specific pre-fall picture of the vice-regal character of the cultural mandate: "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it" (NASB 1995). The two verbs, cultivate (*abad*, עבד, to work, to serve) and keep (*shamar*, שמר, to guard, to watch over, to preserve), together define the character of the human creature's commission with precision. The *abad* describes the active, creative, developing dimension of the mandate: the work that brings the garden's potential to actuality, that cultivates the soil and tends the growth and develops the created order's latent possibilities into their actual expressions. The *shamar* describes the protective, preserving, guarding dimension: the work that maintains the integrity of what has been cultivated, that protects the created order from the damage and the disorder that the absence of care would introduce. Together they describe the vice-regal character of the cultural mandate's commission: the active development and the responsible preservation of the creation entrusted to the human creature's care.

The *abad* of Genesis 2:15 is particularly significant because the same Hebrew root is used throughout the Old Testament for the worship and service of God: the Levites *abad* (serve) in the tabernacle; Israel is called to *abad* YHWH. The use of the same word for Adam's work in the garden suggests that the cultural mandate's commission is itself a form of worship, that the tending of the garden, the cultivation of the soil, and the governance of the created order are acts of service to the God who entrusted them to the human creature's care, as surely as the Levitical service in the tabernacle. Work is worship when it is done in the image of God's character, under the authority of God's commission, and for the glory of God's name, a theological conviction that the Reformation will recover and that Lesson 21 will develop in full.

III. The Scope of the Cultural Mandate: Foundation for All Human Culture

Every Domain of Legitimate Human Creative Enterprise Is Included in the Commission

A. Agriculture, Architecture, Science, and Art

The cultural mandate's five imperatives, be fruitful, multiply, fill, subdue, rule, are not a checklist of specific activities that God intends the human creature to perform; they are a comprehensive description of the character of the human creature's engagement with the created order that God has entrusted to its care. Every legitimate human cultural activity, every form of cultivation, construction, investigation, creation, governance, and care that the human creature exercises over the created order, is an expression of the cultural mandate's commission. The scope of the mandate is as broad as the scope of the creation that God has entrusted to the human creature's stewardship, and that is the scope of every domain of human cultural life.

Agriculture is perhaps the most direct and the most obvious expression of the cultural mandate: the turning of wild earth into productive fields, the cultivation of plants and the care of animals, the development of the created order's biological potential into the forms that sustain human life and contribute to human flourishing. The development of agricultural practice from the basic tillage of Genesis 2:15 through the elaborate agricultural systems of ancient civilizations to the sophisticated agronomy of the contemporary world is a direct expression of the cultural mandate's commission to subdue the earth and to fill it with the human creature's creative engagement. Architecture, the design and construction of habitable spaces, from the rudimentary shelters of the earliest human settlements to the soaring structures of great cities, is equally a direct expression of the mandate: the bringing of raw materials into the forms that serve the human community's need for shelter, for civic gathering, for worship, and for the full range of human social life. Science, the systematic investigation of the created order's structures, laws, and processes, from the microscopic to the cosmic, is the bringing of the hidden potential of the created order into the light of human understanding, in direct fulfillment of the mandate to subdue and rule a creation whose structures must be known before they can be governed.

Art is perhaps the most theologically interesting expression of the cultural mandate, because it most directly expresses the image-bearing character of the commission. The God whose image the human creature bears is the Creator who brought the universe into existence by the sovereign act of His creative word, who made the beauty of the created order in all its richness and its variety, who planted the garden with every tree that is "pleasing to the sight and good for food" (Genesis 2:9), and whose own creative character is the source and the standard of all beauty. The human creature who makes art, who creates paintings, sculptures, music, poetry, architecture, and every form of the creative arts, is exercising in the creaturely sphere the same creative capacity that the Creator exercises in the divine sphere: bringing new forms into existence, making visible what was not visible before, expressing in the medium of the created order the response of the image-bearing creature to the beauty and the meaning that the Creator has placed in the world. The human artist is a sub-creator, a creature who creates within and from the creation that the Creator has made, and whose creative activity is a direct expression of the image-bearing vocation.

B. Education, Technology, and Governance

Education is the transmission of the cultural mandate's accumulated knowledge, wisdom, and skill from one generation to the next, the preservation and the development of the understanding of the created order that the human community's engagement with the cultural mandate has produced. Every act of teaching, every school and academy and university, every curriculum and library and archive, is an expression of the cultural mandate's demand that the human community's growing understanding of the created order be preserved, transmitted, and developed across the generations. The educational enterprise is not incidental to the cultural mandate; it is one of its most essential expressions, because the cultural mandate's commission to subdue and rule the creation requires the development and the transmission of the knowledge that subduing and ruling require.

Technology, the development and the application of tools, techniques, and systems that extend the human creature's capacity to exercise the cultural mandate's commission, is the most visible expression in the contemporary world of the cultural mandate's developmental dimension. Every technological development, from the hand-crafted tools of the earliest human settlements to the digital infrastructure of the contemporary world, is an expression of the human creature's exercise of the mandate to subdue the earth: the application of human intelligence, creativity, and purposefulness to the development of means by which the created order's potential can be more fully and more effectively actualized. The theological evaluation of specific technologies is a complex and demanding enterprise that requires the application of the cultural mandate's full normative framework, including the vice-regal accountability and the shamar's preserving care, to the specific ways in which specific technologies develop or distort the created order's potential. But the existence of technology as a category of human cultural activity is directly and necessarily grounded in the cultural mandate.

Governance, the establishment and maintenance of the ordered social, legal, and political structures that make human communal life possible and human flourishing achievable, is the most direct expression of the radah's governing dimension. The human creature is commissioned to rule: to establish and maintain the patterns of order, justice, and accountability that allow the human community to live and to flourish in the creaturely domain entrusted to its governance. Civil government, the specific form of governance that organizes the human community's life in the political sphere, is a direct expression of the cultural mandate's governing commission, even though Genesis 1:28 does not mention civil government specifically. The implicit logic of the mandate is that every domain of the human community's life, including the political domain, requires the kind of ordering, governing, and stewardship that the mandate's radah describes. The Christian's engagement with civil governance, as a citizen, as a voter, as an officeholder, is therefore not a diversion from the specifically spiritual vocation of the image-bearer but one of its direct and legitimate expressions.

"The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

Psalm 24:1, NASB 1995

IV. The Cultural Mandate After the Fall: Complicated but Not Revoked

Genesis 9 and the Noahic Renewal of the Original Commission

A. *The Fall's Complication of the Cultural Mandate*

The fall did not revoke the cultural mandate; but it complicated it profoundly. Genesis 3's account of the fall's consequences for the human creature's engagement with the created order is precise and comprehensive: the ground is cursed (v. 17), so that the cultivation the mandate requires will be accomplished only "in toil" (v. 17) and "by the sweat of your face" (v. 19); the earth will now produce thorns and thistles alongside the food the mandate's fruitfulness requires (v. 18); and the creature itself will return to the dust from which it was taken (v. 19), so that the filling of the earth and the developing of the creation will be carried out by creatures who are mortal, limited, and subject to the comprehensive distortions that total depravity has introduced into every dimension of the image-bearing vocation. The cultural mandate's commission remains in force; the creation it was designed to develop remains the property of the God who entrusted it; but the creature who carries out the commission is now fallen, the creation itself is subjected to futility (Romans 8:20), and the exercise of the mandate is now carried out in the conditions of toil, frustration, and mortality that the fall has introduced.

The distortions that sin introduces into the exercise of the cultural mandate are as comprehensive as the distortions that sin introduces into every other dimension of the fallen human creature's existence. The subduing of the earth that was designed to be the responsible development of the creation's potential becomes the

exploitation that depletes the creation's resources for short-term gain without regard for the Creator's ownership or the creation's long-term integrity. The ruling over the created order that was designed to be the governance of the responsible steward becomes the domination of the autonomous tyrant who treats the creation as his own possession to be used and discarded at will. The fruitfulness and multiplication that were designed to fill the earth with image-bearers who govern the creation in God's name become the population dynamics of a fallen human community that fills the earth with violence (Genesis 6:11) rather than with the vice-regal governance of the Creator's image. The cultural mandate's five imperatives remain the commission; but every expression of the commission is now distorted by the selfishness, the shortsightedness, the idolatry, and the injustice that the fall has introduced into every dimension of the fallen human creature's engagement with the creation.

The lesson for the contemporary church is important and practically urgent: the cultural mandate's activities, agriculture, art, science, technology, governance, education, are not inherently sacred activities that escape the corruption of the fall. They are activities that the fallen human community exercises in ways that are as comprehensively distorted by sin as every other dimension of the fallen creature's life. The Christian engagement with culture is therefore not the naive optimism that celebrates every human cultural achievement as the fulfillment of the cultural mandate; it is the discerning, theologically informed engagement that can distinguish the genuine development of the creation's potential from the distortion of that potential by the selfishness, the idolatry, and the injustice of the fallen human heart. The cultural mandate provides the theological framework for engaging every domain of human culture; the doctrine of total depravity provides the hermeneutic for evaluating the specific ways in which fallen human beings have exercised, and distorted, the cultural mandate in every domain.

B. *The Noahic Renewal and the Mandate's Continuation After the Fall*

The most significant single piece of biblical evidence that the cultural mandate was not revoked by the fall is the Noahic renewal of the mandate in Genesis 9:1–7, in language that deliberately echoes Genesis 1:28. God says to Noah and his sons: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (v. 1), the three procreative and geographic imperatives of the original mandate, repeated in the same order and with the same language. The deliberate echo is theologically intentional: after the most comprehensive divine judgment on the distorted exercise of the cultural mandate that the biblical narrative records, the flood that destroyed the violence-filled world of Genesis 6, God does not revoke the mandate but renews it. The fallen human creature remains the image-bearer who is commissioned to fill the earth and to exercise the delegated dominion; the fall's distortions have been subjected to divine judgment, and the mandate's continuation is established by divine covenant.

Genesis 9:2–6 adds to the Noahic renewal two dimensions that are new in the post-fall mandate: the fear and the dread of humanity placed upon the animals (v. 2), and the specific institution of capital punishment for the taking of human life (vv. 5–6). Both additions reflect the fall's impact on the mandate's exercise: the relationship between the human creature and the animal world, which was designed to be the governance of the responsible steward over the creatures entrusted to his care, now carries the dimension of fear that the fall introduced; and the governing commission of the mandate's *radah* now includes the specific governance of the human community's own violent tendencies through the institution of judicial accountability. The Noahic renewal of the cultural mandate is not a restoration of the pre-fall mandate in its original form; it is the confirmation of the mandate's continuing validity in the specific conditions of the post-fall world, a world in which the mandate remains in force but in which its exercise requires the specific governance structures that the fall's distortions make necessary.

The theological significance of the Noahic mandate renewal for the church's engagement with culture is substantial. It establishes that the cultural mandate is not a pre-fall institution that became irrelevant after the entrance of sin, that the church's vocation in the world is not merely evangelistic and pastoral, concerned only with the spiritual dimensions of the fallen creature's redemption. The cultural mandate's commission to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to rule it in the image of God remains in force for every generation of the fallen human community, and the church that understands this will engage the full breadth of the cultural mandate's domains

with the same theological seriousness that it brings to the specifically evangelistic and ecclesiological dimensions of its mission. The Noahic renewal is the post-fall charter of the human creature's cultural commission, and it remains in force until the eschatological new creation in which the mandate's fulfillment is consummated in the perfected governance of the redeemed over a renewed cosmos.

V. The Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission: Complementary, Not Competing

How the Two Commissions Relate in the Church's Mission

A. *The Relationship Between the Two Commissions*

One of the most important and the most contested questions in the contemporary evangelical theology of mission is the relationship between the cultural mandate and the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18–20's commission to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (NASB 1995) is the church's specific evangelistic and discipling mission, given by the risen Christ to the apostles and their successors as the primary missional charge of the church in the present age. The cultural mandate's commission to fill and subdue and rule the earth is the broader human vocation, given by God to the image-bearing creature as a whole at its creation. The relationship between the two, whether they are complementary, competing, or hierarchically ordered, has generated significant theological debate in the evangelical missiological tradition, particularly in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This series holds that the cultural mandate and the Great Commission are complementary expressions of the same God's purposes for His image-bearing creature in the world, and that the church's engagement with the cultural mandate is not a distraction from its evangelistic mission but one of the legitimate and necessary expressions of the image-bearing vocation that the Great Commission itself assumes and requires. The Great Commission is not the replacement of the cultural mandate by a purely evangelistic mission; it is the specific redemptive-historical form that the cultural mandate's commission takes in the age of the new covenant, after the fall has introduced the specific problem of sin and estrangement from God that the gospel addresses. The disciples who are made by the Great Commission's proclamation are image-bearers who remain commissioned by the cultural mandate's charge; and the discipling that the Great Commission requires, teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded, includes the formation of disciples who understand and exercise the cultural mandate's commission in the specific domains of their creaturely existence.

The danger on one side is the reduction of the church's mission to the cultural mandate at the expense of the Great Commission's evangelistic urgency, the "social gospel" reduction of the church's mission to the transformation of social, cultural, and political structures without the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ that addresses the root of every human problem. The danger on the other side is the reduction of the church's mission to the Great Commission at the expense of the cultural mandate's broader human vocation, the narrowing of Christian engagement with the world to evangelism and personal piety while abandoning the full range of human cultural life to the autonomous self-determination of the fallen human creature. The theologically adequate account of the church's mission holds both together: the evangelistic urgency of the Great Commission as the church's specific redemptive-historical mandate, and the broader cultural mandate as the framework within which every dimension of the redeemed creature's engagement with the world is to be understood and exercised.

B. *The Great Commission as the Renewal of Image-Bearers for the Cultural Mandate*

The most theologically satisfying account of the relationship between the cultural mandate and the Great Commission is the account that treats the Great Commission as the redemptive-historical provision for the renewal of fallen image-bearers in their capacity to exercise the cultural mandate. The fall has distorted every

dimension of the human creature's exercise of the cultural mandate: the subduing of the earth has become exploitation, the ruling has become domination, the fruitfulness has become the violent filling of the earth with the distorted image of the fallen creature's self-expression. The gospel that the Great Commission proclaims is the gospel of the renewal of the image, the renewal of the fallen human creature in the true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10) that the original creation had and that the fall destroyed, making possible once again the exercise of the cultural mandate in the image of God's character rather than in the distorted image of the fallen creature's selfishness and idolatry.

On this account, the Great Commission and the cultural mandate are related as the redemptive provision is related to the vocation it restores: the Great Commission proclaims and applies the redemption that renews the image-bearer's capacity to fulfill the cultural mandate with the knowledge, the righteousness, the holiness, and the love of neighbor that the mandate requires; and the cultural mandate defines the scope and the character of the image-bearing vocation that the renewal of redemption makes possible. The disciple who has been formed by the Great Commission's proclamation and discipleship is the image-bearer who is equipped, by the Spirit's renewing work, in the community of the redeemed, under the authority of the Scripture's full counsel, to exercise the cultural mandate in every domain of her creaturely existence with the specific quality of vice-regal stewardship that the Creator's commission requires.

Kuyper's famous declaration captures the comprehensive scope of this integration: "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!" The Christ who is proclaimed in the Great Commission is the Christ who is sovereign over every domain of the cultural mandate's commission, the Christ who is Lord of the farmer's field and the artist's studio and the scientist's laboratory and the magistrate's court and the parent's home, as surely as He is Lord of the gathering church's worship and mission. The disciples whom the Great Commission makes are disciples who acknowledge His lordship over every domain of the cultural mandate's commission, and who exercise the cultural mandate's stewardship in every domain of their creaturely existence under His sovereign authority and for His glory. This is the integration of the cultural mandate and the Great Commission that the church's mission requires, and it is an integration that honors both commissions by holding each in its proper relationship to the other.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."

Matthew 28:19–20, NASB 1995

VI. The Eschatological Vision: The Cultural Mandate Fulfilled in the New Creation

The Renewed Cosmos as the Perfected Expression of the Image of God's Dominion

The cultural mandate's ultimate horizon is eschatological: the commission that God gave to the image-bearing creature at its creation finds its final fulfillment not in the achievements of the present age but in the new creation where the redeemed and glorified image-bearers exercise the perfected governance of the renewed cosmos in the fullness of the knowledge, the righteousness, and the holiness that the eschatological state provides. Romans 8:18–25 describes the present creation as subjected to futility, groaning and suffering the birth pangs of its own frustrated potential, the cultural mandate's commission thwarted at every turn by the fall's comprehensive damage to both the creature and the creation. But the groaning is not the final word: "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21, NASB 1995). The liberation of the creation is connected to the glorification of the image-bearing creature: when the

children of God are glorified in the eschatological state, the creation they have been commissioned to govern is also liberated from the futility that the fall imposed on it.

The eschatological vision of the new creation in Revelation 21–22 is the vision not of a bodiless, worldless, purely spiritual existence in a disembodied heaven but of a renewed and glorified cosmos in which the redeemed dwell with God in the fullness of embodied, creaturely existence. The new Jerusalem that descends from heaven in Revelation 21:2 is the eschatological city, the supreme expression of the cultural mandate’s building and ordering dimension, now brought to its final perfection by God’s own transforming work. And Revelation 22:3’s statement that “His bond-servants will serve Him” (NASB 1995), using the same word (*latreuo*) that describes the worship and service of God in the temple, establishes that the eschatological state will involve the active, ordered, worshipful service of the redeemed in the renewed creation: not the passive rest of those who have retired from the cultural mandate’s commission but the perfected exercise of the vice-regal vocation in conditions where the fall’s distortions have been fully and finally removed.

The eschatological vision of the cultural mandate’s fulfillment has a specific and important implication for the way the church understands the relationship between the present age’s cultural achievements and the new creation. Revelation 21:24, 26’s statement that “the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it”, the glory and the honor of the nations being brought into the new Jerusalem, suggests a continuity between the best of the present age’s cultural achievements and the new creation’s inheritance. The cultural mandate’s work is not merely a temporary activity that will be entirely discarded when the new creation arrives; the best of what the image-bearing creature has produced in the exercise of the mandate, purified, transformed, and glorified by the renewing work of God, will be brought into the new creation as the inheritance of the redeemed. This does not mean that every human cultural achievement will survive the eschaton without transformation; but it does mean that the cultural mandate’s commission is not futile labor that will leave no trace in the new creation. The image-bearing creature who has exercised the mandate faithfully in the present age is contributing to the inheritance that the eschatological new creation will receive. And the God who declared the original creation very good will declare the new creation more than very good, the perfected, glorified, consummated expression of the image of God’s delegated dominion over a cosmos that has been renewed and glorified by the sovereign power of its Creator.

“The creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Romans 8:21, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Cultural Mandate	The comprehensive commission given by God to the image-bearing human creature at creation (Genesis 1:28) to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to exercise delegated dominion over every living creature. The cultural mandate encompasses every dimension of legitimate human cultural activity: agriculture, art, science, education, technology, and governance. It is grounded in the imago Dei (the human creature bears the image of the Creator who governs the creation) and is characterized by vice-regal accountability (the human creature governs as God's representative, not as an autonomous owner). The mandate was not revoked by the fall but was renewed in the Noahic covenant (Genesis 9:1–7) and is to be pursued in the power of grace.
Vice-Regent / Vice-Regency	The theological category describing the character of the human creature's cultural commission: the exercise of authority as the representative and delegate of the sovereign Creator, accountable to the Creator for the quality of the stewardship, and bounded in the exercise of the authority by the character and purposes of the Creator who entrusted it. The human creature is not the autonomous lord of the creation but the lord's representative in the creation, governing on the lord's behalf and in the lord's name. The vice-regal character of the cultural mandate is grounded in Psalm 24:1 ("the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains") and is what distinguishes the biblical doctrine of dominion from every form of autonomous human self-determination over the creation.
Kabash (כבש)	Hebrew for "subdue," the fourth imperative of the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28. Kabash describes the bringing of the created order under the orderly governance of the image-bearing creature through the active development of the creation's potential: the cultivation that turns wild earth into productive fields, the construction that turns raw materials into habitable spaces, the investigation that turns hidden structures into understood knowledge, and the creation that turns the raw materials of experience into the forms of art and culture. Kabash is not a license for exploitation or destruction but the commission for the responsible actualization of the creation's potential under the authority and accountability of the Creator who entrusted it.
Radah (רדה)	Hebrew for "rule" or "have dominion," the fifth imperative of the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28. Radah describes the governing and ordering of the created order in patterns that reflect the Creator's own governance of the whole: the establishment and maintenance of the ordered social, legal, political, and ecological structures that make human communal life possible and human flourishing achievable. Psalm 8:5–6 describes the radah as a divinely conferred crown, a delegated honor, not an autonomous power. The radah is not the tyranny of the powerful over the powerless but the governance of the responsible steward who exercises authority in patterns accountable to the One who entrusted it.
Abad (עבד)	Hebrew for "cultivate" or "work," the first of the two verbs describing Adam's commission in Genesis 2:15 ("to cultivate it and to keep it"). Abad is the same root used throughout the Old Testament for the worship and service of God (Israel's Levitical 'service' in the tabernacle uses the same word), suggesting that the

	cultural mandate's active, creative, developmental engagement with the created order is itself a form of worship, a service rendered to the God who designed the creation and entrusted its development to the image-bearing creature's care. The theological connection between <i>abad</i> as work and <i>abad</i> as worship is the foundation for the Reformation's doctrine of vocation (developed in Lesson 21).
Shamar (שמר)	Hebrew for "keep," "guard," or "preserve," the second of the two verbs describing Adam's commission in Genesis 2:15 ("to cultivate it and to keep it"). <i>Shamar</i> describes the protective, preserving, guarding dimension of the cultural mandate's commission: the work that maintains the integrity of what has been cultivated, that protects the created order from damage and disorder, and that ensures the sustainability of the development the <i>abad</i> produces. The pairing of <i>abad</i> (active development) with <i>shamar</i> (protective preservation) defines the character of the vice-regal stewardship: the mandate's commission is not mere exploitation but the responsible development and preservation of the creation entrusted to the human creature's care.
Noahic Renewal of the Mandate (Genesis 9)	The post-flood renewal of the cultural mandate in Genesis 9:1–7, using language that deliberately echoes Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (v. 1). The Noahic renewal establishes that the cultural mandate was not revoked by the fall or by the comprehensive divine judgment of the flood; it continues in force for every generation of the post-fall human community. The renewal adds two dimensions absent from the original mandate: the fear and dread of humanity upon the animal world (v. 2), reflecting the fall's impact on human-animal relations, and the institution of capital punishment (vv. 5–6), reflecting the mandate's <i>radah</i> now including the specific governance of the human community's own violent tendencies through judicial accountability.
Sub-Creator	J. R. R. Tolkien's term for the human artist as the creature who participates in creation by creating within and from the creation that the Creator has made. Applied to the cultural mandate's creative dimension, the concept of sub-creator captures the theological character of human artistic, technological, and cultural creativity: the image-bearing creature exercises in the creaturely sphere the same creative capacity that the Creator exercises in the divine sphere, bringing new forms into existence within the created order, making visible what was not visible before, and expressing through creative activity the response of the image-bearing creature to the beauty and the meaning that the Creator has placed in the world.
Kuyper's Square Inch	The famous declaration of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), Dutch Reformed theologian and statesman: "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!" The declaration captures the comprehensive scope of the cultural mandate's commission under Christ's lordship: every domain of human cultural life, agriculture, art, science, technology, education, governance, falls within the scope of Christ's sovereign authority and the cultural mandate's commission. The Kuyperian tradition (Neo-Calvinism) has provided the most sustained theological development of the cultural mandate's implications for the full breadth of human cultural engagement.
Cultural Mandate and Great Commission	The relationship between the pre-fall commission to fill and subdue and rule the earth (Genesis 1:28) and the post-resurrection commission to make disciples of all

nations (Matthew 28:18–20). The two commissions are complementary rather than competing: the Great Commission is the redemptive-historical provision for the renewal of fallen image-bearers in their capacity to exercise the cultural mandate's commission, and the cultural mandate defines the scope of the image-bearing vocation that the gospel's renewal makes possible. The danger of reducing the church's mission to the cultural mandate alone (the social gospel) and the danger of reducing it to the Great Commission alone (narrowing Christian engagement to evangelism and personal piety) are both to be avoided by holding the two in their proper complementary relationship.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the cultural mandate is a genuine and comprehensive commission from the Creator to the image-bearing creature, not a marginal detail of the pre-fall narrative but the specific vocation for which the image-bearing creature was designed and for which it is accountable to the God who entrusted it. Every domain of legitimate human cultural activity, agriculture, art, science, education, technology, governance, falls within the scope of the cultural mandate's commission, and the Christian who has understood the cultural mandate will engage every domain of her creaturely existence with the specific quality of vice-regal stewardship that the mandate requires: the active development of the creation's potential (abad) and the responsible preservation of the creation's integrity (shamar), carried out under the authority of the Creator who owns the creation and accountable to the Creator for the quality of the stewardship.

We must also believe that the cultural mandate remains in force after the fall, that the Noahic renewal of the mandate establishes its continuing validity for every generation of the post-fall human community, including the generation that receives the Great Commission's evangelistic charge. The church that has understood the cultural mandate will not abandon the broad range of human cultural engagement to the autonomous self-determination of the fallen human community, but will bring to every domain of the cultural mandate's commission the specific quality of image-bearing stewardship that the Christian's renewal in the image of Christ makes possible. The Great Commission's work of making disciples is not in competition with the cultural mandate's work of filling and subduing and ruling the earth; it is the specific redemptive-historical provision for the renewal of the image-bearers who carry out the mandate.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the doctrine of the cultural mandate produce in you a genuinely doxological response to the full range of legitimate human cultural activity. The farmer who cultivates the earth, the artist who creates a painting, the scientist who investigates the structures of the created order, the teacher who transmits the accumulated wisdom of the human community to the next generation, the magistrate who establishes and maintains the ordered governance of the civic community, each of these persons is exercising, in their specific domain, the specific vice-regal vocation for which the Creator designed the image-bearing creature. The appropriate response to the cultural mandate is not the anxiety of those who feel that engagement with culture is a distraction from the spiritual life, but the joyful, worshipful engagement of those who know that every lawful calling in which they exercise the cultural mandate's commission is a form of service to the God who made them for exactly this purpose.

Desire the discernment that the doctrine of the cultural mandate requires of those who exercise it in a fallen world. The cultural mandate's commission to subdue and rule the earth is a commission that fallen human beings have distorted in every generation through exploitation, domination, idolatry, and injustice. The Christian who exercises the cultural mandate needs the specific quality of discernment that the Spirit's renewing work produces: the ability to distinguish the genuine development of the creation's potential from its distortion, the responsible stewardship from the exploitative misuse, and the vice-regal governance of the image of God from the autonomous self-determination of the fallen creature. This discernment is one of the most practically urgent expressions of the Spirit's work in the believer's life, and it requires the sustained engagement with the Scripture's full counsel that the cultural mandate's breadth of application demands.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 2:15 together as the two foundational texts of the cultural mandate. For each of the five imperatives of Genesis 1:28 (be fruitful, multiply, fill, subdue, rule) and the two verbs of

Genesis 2:15 (cultivate, keep), identify: (a) the specific dimension of the cultural mandate's commission it describes; (b) one specific domain of human cultural activity in which it is expressed in the contemporary world; (c) one specific way in which it is distorted by the fall's comprehensive damage to the human creature's exercise of the mandate; and (d) one specific way in which the Spirit's renewing work in the believer's life enables a more faithful exercise of the mandate in that domain. Bring your reflections to the group discussion.

- Identify the specific domain of the cultural mandate's commission that you exercise in your own daily vocation, the specific dimension of agriculture, art, science, education, technology, governance, or other cultural activity in which you exercise the image-bearing stewardship of the mandate's commission. Then reflect: how consciously and how deliberately do you exercise the cultural mandate's vice-regal character in your specific vocation? Do you understand your daily work as the exercise of the image-bearing commission, carried out under the authority and in the presence of the God whose image you bear? What specific practices of theological reflection, prayer, and communal accountability would most effectively deepen the vice-regal quality of your daily vocational exercise?
- **Read Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism (1898), especially the lecture on Calvinism and Science and the lecture on Calvinism and Art.** Kuyper's treatment of the cultural mandate's implications for science and art remains the most theologically rich and the most practically comprehensive account of the doctrine's application to the full breadth of human cultural activity available in the Reformed tradition. For a more accessible and more contemporary treatment of the same themes, Andy Crouch's *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (2008) provides the most engaging and the most practically useful account of the cultural mandate's implications for Christian engagement with culture available in the contemporary evangelical tradition.
- Prepare a brief (one-page) theological account of the cultural mandate's implications for one specific domain of contemporary cultural life in which the tension between the mandate's commission and the fall's distortions is most acutely visible in your specific context. The domain might be digital technology (with its extraordinary capacity for both the development and the destruction of the creation's potential), environmental stewardship (with its tension between the mandate's abidance and the exploitative distortions of the fallen exercise of the mandate), political governance (with its tension between the mandate's *radah* and the idolatrous claims of every fallen political system), or another domain of your choice. The account should be theologically grounded, culturally specific, and practically useful for the congregation you serve.
- Spend time this week meditating on Psalm 8 as the Psalter's reflection on the cultural mandate's vice-regal commission. Read it slowly, attending to the specific theological claim the Psalm makes about the human creature's position in the created order: "Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet" (vv. 5–6, NASB 1995). Let the specific language of the crown, the glory, and the majesty produce in you the appropriate creaturely response: not the pride of the autonomous self-determiner who celebrates human achievement as the expression of human sovereignty, but the doxological wonder of the image-bearer who recognizes in the cultural mandate's commission the extraordinary grace of the Creator who designed the creature for this astonishing purpose and who has not revoked the commission even after the creature's betrayal of it.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before working through this lesson, how would you have described the relationship between your daily work or vocation and your Christian faith? Did you understand your daily work as an expression of the cultural mandate's commission, as a means of earning a living in order to fund specifically spiritual activities, or somewhere in between? Has the lesson changed your understanding of the theological significance of your daily vocation, and if so, in what direction?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 2:15 side by side. What is the specific connection that Genesis 1:26–27 draws between the creation of the human being in the image of God and the commission to exercise dominion over the created order? Does the grammar of the text establish a causal connection (“because they are made in the image of God, therefore they are to have dominion”) or simply a narrative sequence? What does the answer to this question contribute to the understanding of the relationship between the imago Dei and the cultural mandate? And what does Genesis 2:15's specific account of Adam's vocation in the garden (“to cultivate it and to keep it”) add to the broader commission of Genesis 1:28?
- Read Psalm 8 in full. What is the specific doxological movement of the Psalm, how does it begin, what is the theological claim it makes about the human creature's position in the created order, and how does it return at the end to the doxological frame with which it began? What does the phrase “a little lower than God” (or “a little lower than the angels,” depending on translation) establish about the human creature's position relative to both the divine and the creaturely realms? And how does the Psalm's doxological frame, beginning and ending with the declaration of the Lord's majestic name, shape the theological character of the cultural mandate's commission that the Psalm describes?
- Read Genesis 9:1–7 in comparison with Genesis 1:26–28. What specific language of Genesis 1:28 is echoed in Genesis 9:1, and what does the deliberate echo establish about the theological relationship between the original mandate and its Noahic renewal? What two new elements does Genesis 9:2–6 add to the post-flood renewal of the mandate that were absent from the original commission, and what does the addition of these elements suggest about the impact of the fall on the character and the conditions of the mandate's exercise?
- Read Matthew 28:18–20. What is the specific scope of the authority that Christ claims as the basis for the Great Commission (“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”), and how does the comprehensiveness of that authority relate to the comprehensive scope of the cultural mandate's commission? What does the instruction to teach the disciples “to observe all that I commanded you” (v. 20) contribute to the understanding of the relationship between the Great Commission's discipling work and the cultural mandate's broad commission? Does “all that I commanded you” include the cultural mandate, or is it limited to specifically spiritual and ethical instruction?
- Read Romans 8:18–25. What is Paul's account of the creation's present condition under the fall's damage (“subjected to futility,” “groaning,” “birth pangs”)? What is the specific connection Paul draws between the liberation of the creation and the glorification of the children of God (v. 21)? And what does this connection imply about the relationship between the cultural mandate's present exercise in the conditions of the fall and its eschatological fulfillment in the new creation where the creation's groaning will have been transformed into its freedom?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the cultural mandate's five imperatives are a comprehensive description of the character of the human creature's engagement with the created order, encompassing every dimension of legitimate human cultural activity. Do you find this comprehensive interpretation persuasive, or does it

seem to overextend the specific imperatives of Genesis 1:28 beyond their original scope? What specific features of the text support or challenge the comprehensive interpretation? And what specific hermeneutical principle determines how broadly or narrowly the five imperatives should be understood?

- The lesson distinguishes between the subduing (*kabash*) of the earth as the responsible actualization of the creation's potential and the exploitation of the creation for purely selfish ends. Is this distinction exegetically grounded in the word *kabash* itself, or does it depend on the broader theological framework of the vice-regal accountability and the shamar's preserving care to modify what *kabash* alone might seem to permit? What specific biblical texts and theological considerations most clearly establish the distinction between the legitimate subduing and the exploitative distortion?
- The lesson holds that the cultural mandate and the Great Commission are complementary rather than competing, and that the Great Commission is best understood as the redemptive-historical provision for the renewal of fallen image-bearers in their capacity to exercise the cultural mandate. Do you find this account of the relationship between the two commissions persuasive? Some evangelical traditions hold that the cultural mandate is a secondary concern that must always yield to the Great Commission's evangelistic priority. Others hold that the two are so complementary that the cultural mandate's cultural transformation work is as central to the church's mission as the Great Commission's evangelistic proclamation. Where does the lesson position itself on this spectrum, and do you find the positioning exegetically and theologically adequate?
- Kuyper's declaration that "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ ... does not cry: Mine!" has been criticized by some as a form of cultural triumphalism that does not adequately account for the fall's comprehensive distortion of the human community's cultural exercise. Is this criticism fair? Does the Kuyperian integration of the cultural mandate and the lordship of Christ adequately account for the fall's damage to every dimension of the human community's cultural life? What specific theological qualifications are required to hold Kuyper's vision with the biblical account of sin's comprehensive distortion of the cultural mandate's exercise?
- Revelation 21:24, 26's statement that the kings of the earth will bring their glory and honor into the new Jerusalem suggests some continuity between the best of the present age's cultural achievements and the new creation's inheritance. Is this the most natural reading of the text? If some of the present age's cultural achievements will be carried over into the new creation in some form, what are the theological implications for the Christian's understanding of the value of cultural work in the present age? And what specific criteria, drawn from the biblical teaching on the eschatological new creation, would determine which cultural achievements are carried over and which are not?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that every legitimate human cultural activity falls within the scope of the cultural mandate's commission and is therefore an expression of the image-bearing vocation that the Christian is called to exercise with specific vice-regal accountability. How adequately does the preaching and teaching of the congregation you serve communicate this comprehensive theological understanding of vocation? Is the relationship between daily work and Christian calling a topic that receives sustained theological attention, or is it treated as a peripheral concern relative to the specifically spiritual and evangelistic dimensions of the Christian life? What specific initiatives, in preaching, in formation, or in communal culture, would most effectively develop a more comprehensive theological understanding of vocation in the congregation?
- The lesson identifies several specific distortions that the fall introduces into the exercise of the cultural mandate: the subduing of the earth becomes exploitation, the ruling becomes domination, the fruitfulness fills the earth with violence. Identify one specific contemporary domain of cultural activity in your context in which the tension between the mandate's commission and the fall's distortions is most visible and most practically urgent. What specific theological formation, what specific ethical discernment, and what specific

practical engagement would most effectively equip the congregation's members to exercise the cultural mandate's commission with the vice-regal accountability that the Creator's ownership of the creation requires?

- The lesson argues that the Great Commission is the redemptive-historical provision for the renewal of fallen image-bearers in their capacity to exercise the cultural mandate. How specifically does the congregation you serve understand the relationship between its evangelistic mission and its members' engagement with the full range of the cultural mandate's domains? Does the congregation's missional culture treat these as complementary expressions of the same God's purposes, or does the evangelistic dimension of the mission tend to crowd out the cultural mandate's broader commission, or vice versa? What specific pastoral leadership and communal formation would most effectively cultivate the complementary integration that this lesson commends?
- The abode of Genesis 2:15, the cultivation of the garden as a form of worship and service to God, using the same root as the Old Testament's vocabulary for liturgical service, suggests that the daily work of the cultural mandate's commission is itself a form of worship. How does this theological understanding of work as worship change the specific character of the congregation's engagement with the Monday-through-Saturday dimensions of its members' lives? What specific liturgical practices, what specific pastoral care, and what specific communal culture would most effectively form the congregation's members to approach their daily work as the worshipful exercise of the image-bearing commission?
- The eschatological vision of the lesson's closing section describes the new creation as the perfected expression of the image of God's delegated dominion over a renewed cosmos, the cultural mandate fulfilled in the conditions where the fall's distortions have been fully and finally removed. How vividly and how specifically does this eschatological vision of the cultural mandate's fulfillment function as a motivating reality in the congregation's understanding of its present cultural engagement? What specific formation, in preaching, in eschatological teaching, in the communal imagination of the new creation, would most effectively translate this eschatological vision from an abstract doctrinal affirmation into a living, energizing, motivating reality for the congregation's engagement with the cultural mandate in the present age?

Prayer Focus

Open this twentieth lesson of the Anthropology series, and the first lesson of Unit 7, with a reading of Psalm 8 in full, which is the Psalter's own meditation on the cultural mandate and the image-bearing creature's vice-regal commission in the created order. Read it as the doxological expression of the awe that the doctrine of the cultural mandate should produce in every image-bearer who considers what has been entrusted to her: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty!" (Psalm 8:3–5, NASB 1995). The Psalm begins with the doxology of the Creator's majestic name and ends with the same doxology, establishing that the cultural mandate's commission is framed entirely by the worship of the God who designed it: the creature who is crowned with glory and commissioned with dominion stands in the presence of the God whose name alone is majestic in all the earth, and the dominion is exercised in that presence, under that name, and for that glory. Read the Psalm as the theological posture with which Unit 7's treatment of the cultural mandate should begin: the posture of the awe-struck image-bearer who wonders that the Creator has entrusted so much to a creature so small, and who receives the trust with the worshipful accountability that the Creator's majesty demands.

Spend time in Trinitarian adoration, allowing the doctrine of the cultural mandate to deepen your worship of the Triune God whose creative character is the ground and the model of the mandate's commission. Begin with the Father, the Creator who spoke the world into existence by the sovereign power of His creative word, who designed the created order with the potential to be filled and subdued and ruled by the image-bearing creature He was planning to make, and who entrusted that development to the creature He made in His own image as the specific expression of the creaturely vocation the image implies. Adore the Father who, despite the fall's comprehensive distortion of the image-bearing creature's exercise of the mandate, renewed the mandate in the Noahic covenant and has never revoked the commission He gave to the creature He made for this purpose. Move to the Son, through whom and for whom all things were created (Colossians 1:16), who is Himself the image of the invisible God in whose likeness the cultural mandate's commission is grounded, and who in His earthly ministry exercised the cultural mandate's commission in every domain of His creaturely existence: cultivating human relationships, governing the social dynamics of His community of disciples, creating the conditions for the kingdom's flourishing, and exercising the ultimate vice-regal governance of the one who stilled the storm and fed the multitude and raised the dead. Adore the Son through whose obedient exercise of the cultural mandate in its fullest and most ultimate form the way has been opened for the redeemed to exercise the mandate in the power of the renewal of the image that His redemption makes possible. Conclude with the Spirit, who is even now renewing the image of the fallen creature toward the true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of the original creation and the eschatological completion, making possible the exercise of the cultural mandate in the power of grace rather than in the distortions of the fallen human will.

Pray together at the opening of Unit 7 in three specific directions. First, for the theological formation that the cultural mandate requires: that the congregation would develop a genuinely comprehensive understanding of the image-bearing vocation that encompasses every domain of legitimate human cultural activity, and that would equip every member of the community to approach her daily work, her creative activity, her civic engagement, and her care of the created order with the specific quality of vice-regal stewardship that the mandate's commission requires. Second, for the discernment that the fallen world's exercise of the cultural mandate demands: that the congregation would develop the specific quality of theological discernment that can distinguish the genuine development of the creation's potential from its distortion, the responsible stewardship from the exploitative misuse, and the image-bearing governance of the cultural mandate from the autonomous self-determination of the fallen human will. Third, for the eschatological hope that the cultural mandate's vision of the new creation's perfected dominion produces: that the congregation would engage the present age's imperfect and frustrated exercise of the cultural mandate with the specific quality of hope that knows the groaning will not be the final word, that the creation's liberation is coming with the glorification of the children of God, and that

the best of the present age's faithful cultural stewardship will be received into the new creation's inheritance when the Creator who owns the earth declares it very good, and more than very good, in the eschatological consummation of His purposes for the creature He made in His own image.

"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!"

Psalm 8:1, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15; 3:17–19; 9:1–7; Psalm 8; 24:1; Colossians 1:15–17; Romans 8:18–25; Matthew 28:18–20; Revelation 21:24, 26; 22:3*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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