

Chapter 2

STEWARDSHIP

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Genesis 1:26–28).

Analysis

The first principle of a biblical covenant is the sovereignty of God. This means the absolute transcendence of God. In the field of economic theory, this principle is revealed in the doctrine of God's original ownership of all the creation, including mankind.

The second principle of a biblical covenant identifies the principle of hierarchical authority. This is also the law of judicial representation. God directly and personally controls His creation (principle one: transcendence). Nevertheless, God has delegated to mankind the full responsibility of caring for the earth as a whole. God doesn't directly control the earth apart from those He has chosen to manage His property. He directly controlled all of it during the first week of creation, but He no longer does. In His providential control and mercy, He has decided to delegate control over His property to mankind throughout history.

This raises a whole series of very difficult questions. The most important question is: What or who is the primary manager of God's property?

A. Image of God

Point one of the biblical covenant is God's transcendence, yet also His presence. This is the biblical concept of God's sovereignty. It asks: "Who's in charge here?" How does this apply to stewardship under God?

God is present with mankind. He is not a distant deistic god. He is the God of the covenant. He has made a covenant with redeemed men. It is the same covenant that He established on day six of the creation week. Covenant-keepers are enabled by grace to ratify that original covenant, unlike Adam, who ratified his own version of the dominion covenant: a man-centered version.

The passage begins: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This is fundamental to our understanding of point two of the biblical covenant: hierarchy. Because man is made in God's image, he has a legitimate claim on authority. God is both one and many: "our image." So, this hierarchy involves grants of authority to individuals and collectives.

God did not turn over the administration of the world to angels. Angels have greater power than men do in history, but they do not possess greater authority. This is why redeemed men will judge the angels at the final judgment (I Corinthians 6:2).

Because man is made in the image of God, he possesses similar characteristics, although on a creaturely basis. First, he has been delegated ownership. Second, he has been delegated authority. Third, he has been given the law, and it is his task in life to apply the law to specific circumstances. He is to protect God's property. Fourth, he has the ability to impute value and make judgments in terms of this law. In other words, he applies the general laws of God to specific cases. Fifth, he extends dominion in history by means of children. This is what God does in his extension of authority in history. God acts through mankind, and mankind is the family of God. There have been two branches of this family after the fall: the eternally disinherited heirs of Adam and the eternally inheriting heirs through adoption by means of Christ's substitutionary atonement on their behalf.

A heresy that has continually afflicted the church and the world in general is the idea that nature and man are in some way equal. The idea of the equality of nature and man is a mirage. People who argue for the symbiotic equality of man and nature usually come to the conclusion that nature is superior to man. They assume that nature has rights, just as man does. They usually do not say exactly who granted such rights to nature, other than autonomous nature. This is the concept of mother nature. It is the concept of Gaia: Mother Earth. It is the idea that man is basically subordinate to nature, and therefore any attempt by individuals or organizations to extend dominion over nature is perverse. This idea became widespread in the 1960s as an outgrowth of a popular book by an amateur ecologist, Rachel Carson: *Silent Spring*. It was a book against the use of DDT, a chemical which saved more lives in the 20th century than any other invention of mankind. Her book launched the modern ecology movement. In the case of the deep ecology movement, mankind is identified as a cancer in nature: a malign, uncontrolled growth.

This view of mankind has been common in Eastern mysticism and in all forms of animism. Mankind is supposed to placate the gods of nature. He is not to violate the domains of the gods of nature. Biblical religion broke with all forms of animism.

Nature is subordinate to man. Certain aspects of nature have rights protecting them from men's interference, but this is only because God owns nature, and the terms of His lease to man specify the protection of His property. As with all property rights, these restrictions on men's use of property are rights of God as the original owner.

Reference

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