

# THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

## Unit 4b Creation Mandates 1

Presented by the



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Hello. Welcome to Unit 4 Session B of Christian Narrative 1. Starting with this session and leading into our third and final session for this unit, we will discuss what are called the creation mandates or the creation ordinances. What we're interested in discovering through this investigation is what humanity was put on earth to do. So we read all about the great lengths that God went to create us, humanity, the pinnacle of his creation. Yet the question we wrestle with is "So what? What are we to do?" So our main teaching point for this lesson as well as the next lesson will be the same. God ordained that humanity was to carry out specific tasks within creation. These tasks being dominion, stewardship, labor, rest, and marriage.

We've been reading over and over again these past few units the creation narrative of Genesis 1 and 2. In essence, we've been reading the story of how God created everything we see and experience. We've looked at what this reveals about who God is and what this reveals about who we are. Now we must turn our gaze on what it is that God has created us to do. The very idea that God has created us to do something is predicated on the notion that God is a God of order. As such, we should expect that the God of order created us with a clear sense of purposefulness that when God set out to create all things, he did in fact have a plan in mind and did in fact bring that plan to fruition. What we begin to see throughout the creation narrative is that God gave a number of commands to humanity, his pinnacle of creation. These commands helped provide the "So what?" for Adam and Eve. They were not just created to sit about the garden sipping cocktails. God had a plan and it required their involvement.

So there are three parts of the creation narrative that reveal to us five creation mandates. These parts of the creation narrative that we want to look at are Genesis 1:28; 2:1-4, and Genesis 2:22-25. Let's take a look at each.

The first of three creation mandates come to us through the same passage, Genesis 1:28. Now, we've looked quite extensively at Genesis 1:26-27 where we discover some about the Trinitarian nature of God and much about the nature of man as well. This next verse, though, focuses on the purpose of man. Interestingly, while all of the Bible is God's revealed word, it seems that certain portions of it are more crucial than others. More crucial in that they are denser with meaningful theology. Genesis 1 through 3 is one of those sections. It has been and will continue to be mined over the years for all its richness. Genesis 1:26-28 represents one of the best sections within an already wonderful section of Scripture. This passage reveals so much to us about who God is, who we are, and what we are to do of God's creation.

However, I digress. So allow me to bring us back to the topic at hand. Genesis 1:28 reads, "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.'" Now, in this passage, not only do we see God blessing humanity like he's blessed the rest of his creation, but we also see him give one of the first commands to humanity. This is the command of dominion. It comes to us in that phrase, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

The next creation mandate is called the mandate of stewardship. This comes to us a little bit further on in Genesis 1:28. And really what we'll discover is that these first three mandates are all related amongst themselves. Stewardship comes to us in this highlighted portion in the slide that you're looking at where mankind is told to have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. So here mankind is called to take care of the rest of God's creation in a unique and special way.

The third creation mandate is the work mandate or the labor mandate. It's simply those three words *and subdue it*. So God put man on this earth, told him to multiply, told him to have dominion over the fish and of the birds and of the heavens and every living thing, and that throughout this process, he needed to work at subduing all that God had created. So we see the third creation mandate is work.

Now, the fourth creation mandate is the mandate of rest. This is where we move to our second portion of the creation narrative where we discover God's commands. So Genesis 2:1-4. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." Now, this one is a little bit more subtle than the first three. It's not so blatant. But as we begin to dig into this mandate, we discover that in the history of Israel, this has become a very important mandate that the idea of rest and Sabbath is drawn from this very first creation narrative, the story of creation.

Theologian Kenneth Matthews, in talking about this text, says this: "When God sanctified the seventh day, he declared that the day was especially devoted to him. This was the charge in the ten words or the Ten Commandments for later Israel: to observe the Sabbath by keeping it holy as a special possession of the Lord. The seventh day was subsequently called a holy Sabbath unto the Lord when no work was to be done by human or animal. The prophets speak of the Lord's Sabbath as 'my holy day' or 'my Sabbaths.'" So consecration in the Old Testament meant designating or setting aside persons, places, and things that were regarded sacred by the virtue of their relationship to or possession by the Lord, who in fact was holy. But because God sets this day apart, because God marks this day as holy, he was setting for his creation a mandate to rest.

Finally, we come to the last mandate. This is the marriage mandate, comes to us at the back end of Genesis 2:23-24. "Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Here, of course, verse 24 in particular, "A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

So here we have the five creation mandates. Now, a word must be said about the nature of these commands. A quick read through the Bible would prompt even the novice scholar to note that things are not always done like they used to be. This brings up the question for us today. Do the creation mandates still apply for us today, or are they no longer relevant in our modern context? The issue at hand is whether or not the creation ordinances or mandates are permanent or temporary commands. The truth is the Bible presents both permanent and temporary commands, and we must understand the nature of these five commands in order to understand if we're still under their authority today or not. Essentially, a command which reflects or reveals the character of God is one which is a permanent command. A temporary command, on the other hand, is one where the command is simply a mode by which to carry out a perpetual command.

So let's take a look at a temporary command which was set up to display a more permanent command or truth about God. Let's start with the basic truth that God is holy and, as such, is morally perfect. What we discover then in Scripture is that what is sinful cannot ultimately stand in the presence of God or be

in communion with God. This is why Moses was not allowed to look upon God's face and live in Exodus 33. Okay. We cannot look on God's face and live if we are unholy. A permanent command. It reveals something essential about God: that God is absolutely holy. However, when we come later on in the life of Israel to the building of the tabernacle, what we discover in the building of the tabernacle is a massive set of temporary commands. God was extremely particular about how things should be built when it came to the tabernacle. We read about this in Exodus 25. There in verse 9 [Exo 25:9], we read, "Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it." And later on in that same chapter, in verse 40 [Exo 25:40], we read, "And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain." Moses has to ensure that everything that was done was done to God's exacting plan because the commands contained with the building of the tabernacle reflected something deeper. They reflected the holiness of God and the reality that sinful people could not live in God's presence.

Now, fast forward many, many years later to the coming of Jesus. He dies. He lives again. And as the church begins to wrestle with the reality of this new covenant that he brings in, we come to the Book of Hebrews. Now, in the Book of Hebrews, we're told this in Hebrews 9:11-12: "When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." Okay. So Jesus came and the commands surrounding the tabernacle and the Jewish cultic rituals are no more. They were temporary commands. They were fulfilling a particular role in a particular time. They were modes of carrying out the perpetual command of keeping sinfulness in the presence of God. But since Jesus came, a new way, a better way was introduced which accomplished the same task and thus replaced the old way.

Notice that the eternal command still stands fully intact. Sinfulness cannot be, in fact, in God's presence without being consumed. However, the mode by which the law was carried out, or, more properly, the mode by which people protected themselves against this law changed. And of all the commands, the tabernacle and the new covenant found in Jesus, all of these are contained within the Bible. One was replaced by another better way. So temporary commands are a mode of carrying out perpetual commands. This is what makes them temporary. So coming back to these five creation mandates, I want to argue that each of these are a permanent command. Each one of these mandates reveals something essential about the character of God.

Furthermore, these creation mandates stand as what James Greer calls trans-household commands, meaning that each of these commands represents a moral constant that should exist in every household on the earth, no matter their particular religion. If it's true about God, it's true for all of us, whether we believe in God or not. Furthermore, these commands were given to humanity prior to the entrance of sin, and thus, they are intrinsically good and intrinsically blessed by the very fact that all that God created prior to the introduction of sin was deemed both good and blessed by God himself. These commands then reveal the right way for man to relate to God. Our purpose is important and our purpose is functional. As we will see following the creation mandates, it keeps us in right relationship with God and it keeps us in right relationship with one another.

So let's take a look at each one of these mandates individually. The first is the dominion mandate. And as we mentioned before, it comes to us in Genesis 1:28. There it reads that God said, "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.” The creation mandate essentially has to do with the concept of procreation. It was God’s will for humanity to have dominion over the earth. And to do so, man needed a progeny. This command brings to light some pretty powerful concepts related to human sexuality. Implicit in this command is the idea that humanity has the capacity to control their own sexuality. And this is so countercultural to our world today. We are completely unlike animals in this regard, in regard to our sexuality. Human sexuality is not a bestial, primordial, or even evolutionary aspect of who we are. It is rather a God-given gift that can and should be controlled. And controlled it in fact must be because also implicit in this command is the idea that the sexuality of mankind is to be used under the direct command of God. Human sexuality is to be used in the fulfillment of God’s will. Our sexuality is good and blessed by God, but it is to be used for his purposes alone. The dominion mandate then reveals that God is the source of life on earth. Man derives his life from God, and God commands mankind to populate the earth, thus exercising dominion over the earth. This mandate then obligates man to spread the image of God born in humanity over the full expanse of God’s creation. You see, God never intended for Adam and Eve to be the only human beings on earth. He intended for them to recreate his image within the world, and so we have the dominion, the procreation mandate.

The stewardship mandate is next, and it’s also found in Genesis 1:28, that bottom portion talking about having dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. The stewardship mandate has to do with the idea of vice-regency. Now, in medieval times, when a king would leave his kingdom for a time, he would leave in his place a vice-regent. This is someone he left behind to steward his kingdom. It was the responsibility of the vice-regent to care for the possessions of the king until his return. Now, this vice-regent did not become the owner of what belonged to the king. Rather, it was his responsibility to care for and expand, if possible, the holdings of the king in the king’s absence. If we take this concept and apply it to humanity, then we begin to see that man is to care for the things of God, that is, the earth and the animal kingdom. And so man is then to fully develop all of the potential that we find within creation. God *sic* [Man] is to bring it to its fullness, to a place where it glorifies God.

So this idea of stewardship or this mandate of stewardship really helps us understand that one of the primary things that creation reveals about God or the call for us to steward creation reveals about God is that God is in fact sovereign over all creation. Everything that we see, everything that exists ultimately belongs to God. And so, as mankind is God’s special creation, the pinnacle of all that he’s created, as mankind shares God’s image, he shares a responsibility to steward the things that God has given him. Thus, the task of man is to extend the glory of God throughout all of his creation.

So we come to the conclusion of our first teaching point. In our next session, we’ll continue to talk about the remaining creation mandates. But I’ll pause here and remind us of our teaching idea. God has ordained that humanity was to carry out specific tasks within creation. These tasks are dominion, procreation, stewardship, labor (work), rest, marriage.