

Dominion Theology

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There is a movement about that is casting a long shadow for its size. It is known by different handles such as reconstructionism, kingdom theology, theonomy, and dominion theology, and it is a curious blend of Reformed/Calvinist theology and Charismatic influence. While there are relatively few who would call themselves reconstructionists, a number of the movement's ideas have infiltrated the thinking and actions of many believers, often without them knowing it. The movement is led by such theologians as Rousas J. Rusdoony; Gary North; Ray Sutton; Greg Bahnsen; David Chilton, and by Charismatic leaders such as Earl Paulk. But their ideas are often reflected by non-reconstructionists such as Pat Robertson, John Whitehead, Franky Schaeffer, and even Jerry Falwell.

A DEFINITION

Dominion theology (the belief-system behind the reconstructionist movement) teaches that through the coming of Christ the believer has dominion over every area of life. We are now in the Kingdom of God (note the similar view of the Kingdom that the Vineyard movement takes, as well as the plethora of Christian songs being written implying that we are in the Kingdom at the present time) and as a result we should be reigning with Christ over the earth as Rev 5:10 says. The question is when will we reign. If the Kingdom is on earth now then we should have dominion now! Right? Don't many of us proclaim this thought when we sing the popular Charismatic song "Majesty" which invites us to, "Come glorify Christ Jesus, the King," after all, "Kingdom authority flows from His throne unto His own." With this authority from the King we are to reclaim the earth for Christ, not just spiritually, but socially, economically (it is no accident that one of the reconstructionist's organizations is called, The Institute for Christian Economics) and politically. The dominion of the earth is accomplished not only through prayer and evangelism, but through the political process, and social reformation. Christ will not return to earth until the church has accomplished this task.

THE DOCTRINES

More specifically, what does Dominion Theology teach? Here are the highlights:

- The OT Law is our rule of life for today. Although DT teaches that keeping of the Law is not a condition for salvation, it is a condition for sanctification.
- In addition, the OT Law is to govern over society as well. Since we are called to subdue the earth (Gen 1:28), God's Law should rule (or dominate) all aspects of society. This view is known as theonomy (or God's law), and is described by Greg Bahnsen as, "The Christian is obligated to keep the whole law of God as a pattern for sanctification and that this law is to be enforced by the civil magistrate" (*Theonomy* p34). This would mean that Christians would be obligated to keep the whole OT Law except in a case in which the NT explicitly cancels a command, such as the sacrificial system.
- A central piece of DT is its belief in covenant theology. As a result it makes no distinction between the church and Israel. However DT goes beyond traditional covenant theology and teaches that the church is to be governed by the same laws, is subject to the same curses, and is promised the same blessings as Israel.

- DT teaches a high level of social and political activism. If the Kingdom of God is to gradually take dominion over the earth, it only makes sense that Christians should be attempting to change society through the changing of laws and through social action.
- Followers of DT, like many Charismatics, especially the Latter Rain movement, looks for a great end time revival in which the masses will turn to Christ. As a result DT does not believe in the rapture. The world should be, and is becoming, a better place through the efforts of Christians.
- As with many others who follow the teachings of George Ladd, DT believes that we are in the Kingdom age, but the Kingdom in another sense is yet to come. We are in the Kingdom, and have Kingdom authority, but on the other hand, we are ushering in the Kingdom through our efforts. “The Kingdom is now, but not yet,” is a popular slogan.
- DT is postmillennial. It is believed that as a result of the reconstruction of society by Biblical principles that the final aspect of the Kingdom of God will be established on earth. Christ cannot return until a certain amount of dominion is achieved by the church. It is believed that the curse will slowly be removed as the world is won over. Even disease and death will be all but eliminated before Christ returns to the earth.
- DT is preterist in its interpretation of prophecy. This means that they teach that virtually all prophecies which most Christians believe are still future, have in fact been fulfilled already, mainly between the years A.D. 30 and 70. In David Chilton’s book, *Days of Vengeance* he says that the book of Revelation , “Is not about the Second Coming of Christ. It is about the destruction of Israel and Christ’s victory over His enemies” (during the first century) (p43).
- DT uses an allegorical hermeneutic, especially in reference to prophecy. So we find that the Great Tribulation took place at the fall of Israel in A.D. 70; the Antichrist refers to the apostasy of the Church prior to the fall of Jerusalem; the Beast of Revelation was Nero and the Roman Empire, etc.

AN EVALUATION

Space does not permit a detailed critique of DT (see *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* by Thomas Ice and H. Wayne House if deeper study is desired). However, we would like to comment on the most important distinctive of DT — its belief in theonomy. DT teaches that Christians are under the Law as a way of life, and are obligated to ultimately bring the world under that Law. This concept is based on several passages. First, **Gen 1:28** commands Adam to subdue the earth. Adam lost his ability to do so to Satan as a result of sin. The church should now be in the process of reclaiming from the devil what Adam lost. You will note a hint of the Spiritual Warfare movement here (see our paper Vol I #6-8). Secondly, the Great Commission (**Matt 28:19-20**) commands the the followers of Christ to disciple all nations, which we are told, goes beyond personal salvation and sanctification to the reformation of society.

Finally, **Matt 5:17-19** is the passage upon which the system hinges. DT claims that the word “fulfill” actually means “confirm.” Thus Christ did not in any sense fulfill, or complete, or do away with the Law, rather he confirmed it as our rule of life today. It should be mentioned at this point that the normal and best translation of *plerosai* is “fulfill” not “confirm.” Besides this however, we have the weight of the NT teaching concerning the Law. The epistles clearly teach that believers are no longer under the Law of Moses (**Rom 6:14; 7:6; 8:2-4; Gal 3:24,25; 5:18**) having been set free from that bondage to serve under grace and the law of Christ (**Gal 6:2**).

And besides, if the Christian is still under Law why do we *not* keep the OT ceremonial laws? DT’s answer is that the Law was divided into three sections: civil, moral and ceremonial. The ceremonial law, it is claimed, has been fulfilled by Christ and is no longer incumbent upon the believer, but not so the moral and civil parts of the law. Therefore, we are to live under

the moral law and seek to establish, in our society, the civil system of OT Israel. The problem with this view is that nowhere in the Bible is the Law broken into these three sections, this is something invented by men. Whenever the Law is mentioned the Scriptures are speaking of the whole Law as a unit. The Jews were as obligated to keep the sacrificial system and commandments concerning food and dress (ceremonial law) as they were the Ten Commandments (moral law). If the NT says that Christ fulfilled the Law, and that as Christians we are no longer under the Law, it means the whole Law. Church age saints are no longer obligated to any aspect of the OT Law. No one has the right to arbitrarily claim that we have been set free from some of the Law (the parts we don't like) but that the rest of the Law is obligatory. Either the believer has been released from the whole Law (**Rom 7:4,6**) or none of it. As Thomas Ice reminds us, "The Law of Moses was given to a specific people (Israel), to be followed in a specific location (the land of Israel), to deal with their specific situation. Therefore, the Law cannot simply be obeyed today by the Church, as was expected of Israel when it was given to that nation" (Biblical Perspectives Vol II #6). On the positive side Ice comments, "Paul teaches in Galatians 3 and 4 that Christ has set us free from the bondage of the Law, not so that we can be lawless as the Reconstructionists insist, instead, so that we can walk in the newness of the motivation of the Holy Spirit" (Ibid p2).

APPLICATION

What negative effects are the teachings of DT having on evangelical Christianity today. We would mention several:

- Reconstructionists teach that the mission of the church goes beyond the spiritual transformation of individuals to a mandate to change society. For Christ to be pleased with Christians they must become political and social activists. We must change the laws of the land, gear up to elect Christians to office, and generally seek to take dominion over our world and bring it under the Law of Moses. We see the influence of this thinking even in those who may know little about DT: James Dobson, Larry Burkett, The Christian Coalition, Pat Robertson, Promise Keepers, Charles Colson and the Evangelicals and Catholics Together document, Operation Rescue, are but a few of the evidences that reconstructionist thinking is beginning to dominate the evangelical world.
- Motivation for godly living, based upon the blessed hope: the return of Christ (Titus 2:16), is replaced with the task of restructuring society. This is a task that may take thousands of years, even by the DT's own admission.
- If we are in the Kingdom of God now then the Charismatics are right to teach that health and prosperity is the right of believers today. This is why "Reconstruction" Calvinists and "Kingdom Now" Charismatics have formed at least a loose unity — they both have the same world view. They are not looking for Christ to return and set up His Kingdom, they are attempting to set it up for Him.