

# Having Dominion and Subduing: Genesis 1:26-28

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Sunday, February 19, 2023  
Covenant Church  
Pastor Zack Phillips

## Genesis 1:26-28

**26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."**

**27 So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.**

**28 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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."**

### A. Introduction

"Brutes are as things in our regard; so far as they are useful for us, they exist for us and not for themselves; and we do right in using them unsparingly for our need and convenience, though not for our wantonness." — Joseph Rickaby, a nineteenth century Catholic moralist

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975): Book Three, Part II, Chap. 112

### B. To Help Us Interpret

1. We must interpret "have dominion" and "subdue" in light of the whole Bible
2. We must interpret "have dominion" and "subdue" in light of God's command to non-human Creation to "be fruitful and multiply"

Gen 1:22 God blessed [sea creatures and birds], saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

See <https://www.iucnredlist.org/about/background-history>

3. We must interpret "have dominion" and "subdue" in light of God's command humans to "till and keep" the earth

**Psa 127:1 (NIV) Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.**

**Psa 121:4 (NIV) indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

Learn to serve and protect the ground. Commit to loving the soil, and in this loving work catch a glimpse of who I am and what I do. That God “took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15) is an invitation to know and share in God’s love for the whole creation. It is a summons to join in the hard, divine work that, by nurturing soil, nurtures human life. — Bahnson and Wirzba<sup>1</sup>

4. “Having dominion” and “subduing” does not originally entail eating animals

**Gen 1:29 29 God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.”**

**Gen 9:3–4 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. 4 Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.**

5. “Having dominion” and “subduing” are connected to our being made “in the image of God”
6. Deuteronomic laws (discussed two weeks ago) make clear that there are limits on our use of Creation’s gifts
7. “Having dominion” and “subduing” should be interpreted contextually not timelessly

## C. Conclusion

**Ezekiel 34:4 You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.**

Mary Oliver, Mary Oliver, “My Work is Loving the World,” available at <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=2168>.

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird -  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young and still not half-perfect? Let me  
keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.  
The phoebe, the delphinium.

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land: God’s Call to Reconcile with Creation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), loc. 119.

The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all ingredients are here,

Which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,  
telling them all, over and over, how it is  
that we live forever.

**Matt 20:25-26 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant..."**

*Question: What is one thing that God may have said to you through this sermon?*