

Genesis 1:26-28

COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew 28:18-20

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DAGER IN THE BACK: PART II

In the last issue, I dealt with general conceptual problems in Albert James Dager's view of the covenant and his criticisms of my work in his book, *Ours*. In this issue, I turn to his comments about the State.

The Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission

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 1:28).

Going therefore, disciple the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatever I gave command to you; and behold I am with you all the days until the completion of the age (Matthew 28:19-20 from the original Greek).

Dager's comments about my statements on a Christian view of the State grow out of his confusion about the Great Commission. He objects to the idea that the Great Commission is the covenant renewal of the cultural mandate because this means cultural responsibility, something modern evangelical have been running from for well over a century. He says,

Sutton attempts to establish the dominion mandate for civil government by stating that Christians are to take dominion by covenant: "Some Christians do not understand their Commission from the Lord. It is a renewal of the cultural mandate; it has the covenantal structure; it means Christians are to take dominion by means of the covenant." By what authority does Sutton make the statement that the Lord's Commission is a renewal of the "cultural mandate"? If it is made on the basis that the Great Commission has the covenantal structure, Sutton is assuming more than the Scriptures allow.¹

Dager is right. I believe that the Great Commission is the covenantal renewal of the cultural mandate. He sees the point. If the Great Commission renews the cultural mandate then the Great Commission involves cultural responsibility, including the political arena. He does not really object to the structural parallels between the two. He simply says that structure does not prove enough. Of course, I didn't argue purely on the basis of structure because the structure cannot be established if the substance of each covenantal point is not there. And clearly, the covenantal substance of the matter is there in the cultural mandate and the Great Commission.

Aside from the structure, Dager doesn't understand the covenantal nature of either, and he consequently doesn't see the covenantal parallels. He is blind to the renewal of

the cultural mandate by the Great Commission. But, forget about the **covenantal** parallels. He fails to see the basic parallels that makes the one a renewal of other. What are these parallels?

First, the cultural mandate was given in a garden on a mountain. We know that Eden was on a mountain because the four rivers flowed out of it. Since water does not flow up hill, Eden was obviously on a mountain. Jesus gave his Great Commission on a garden/mountain. The context of the passage says, "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, . . ." (Matthew 28:15-18).

Second, the cultural mandate was comprehensive in scope, involving the whole world. God told Adam and Eve to bring the earth under their direct dominion, which meant the Lordship of the Creator-God. He used words such as, "Subdue," and "have dominion." When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He argues for no less a comprehensive dominion over all the earth of His personal Lordship. He used similar language to the cultural mandate when He said, "Disciple the nations." All the nations are to be disciplined just as Adam and Eve were called to subdue "every living thing that moveth upon the face of the earth." The word, "disciple" assumes a teacher/pupil or leader/follower relationship. Granted it is to be done through servitude. Nevertheless, discipleship involves the establishment of Christ's Lordship over the nations.

Third, the dominion mandate of Genesis called for multiplication. Adam and Eve could not carry out the task alone. They needed the entire family. They had to have others, their descendants. The Great Commission also called for multiplication. It was not contrary to but dependent on the family, as is confirmed by a careful reading of the Commission itself and the Book of Acts.

The Great Commission commands the disciples to "Disciple the nations, baptizing them." Does this mean sprinkling or immersion of nations as a whole? I don't think so but how do we know? In the original Greek, there is a discrepancy in gender between "nations," the antecedent of the pronoun "them." The discrepancy means that there is not a one-to-one correlation between "nations" and "them" but it does mean some kind of relationship answering to the plural number of the pronoun. The only sociological unit that could fit a reasonable interpretation is the family unit. It could not be the individual. It has to be bigger than the individual but smaller than a nation. A cursory reading of Acts proves the point. There was a multiplying effect when thousands were added to the Church in a short period of time. This multiplication involved the family unit, even though not exclusively so. Luke explains that the Great Commission includes the family when he tells

1. Albert James Dager, *Vengeance is Ours*, p. 213.

us about entire households that were being baptized and taught, the two requirements of the Great Commission (cf. Acts 16 with Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, the Great Commission could not be done alone either. It required multiplication.

Finally, the cultural mandate called upon Adam to do teaching. If he was to subdue the animals, he had to train them. He had to give them instructions. The Genesis account explains how he named the animals to this end (Genesis 2:20). The Great Commission involves no less. Christ commands the disciples to teach the nations.

Thus, a simple analysis of the cultural mandate and the Great Commission reveal the obvious parallel. Granted, there are minor differences. In the garden, the Fall had not occurred, explaining why the family is not the primary means of bringing about the Lordship of Jehovah. And, it is only through the New Covenant that the family, specifically the bearing of covenant children, once again becomes a true means to the end of salvation.

The Apostle Paul says of the woman,

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived entered the transgression. But she will be saved through her childbearing, if they remain in the faith and love and sanctification with sobriety (1 Timothy 2:22).

This passage cannot possibly make sense apart from a covenantal fulfillment view of the cultural mandate by the Great Commission. Paul is certainly not saying that the woman is literally converted to Christianity by having children. How do we know? The Book of Acts nowhere shows this as an example. So in what sense is she "saved"?

Only the household interpretation of the Great Commission makes any sense, meaning, only by viewing the Great Commission in light of the cultural mandate does Paul's statement become clear. The Apostle is simply restating the multiplication principle of the cultural mandate. As God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply for the dominion of the earth, he tells Timothy of the woman's responsibility to bear children for her own salvation. How will she be saved by bearing children? Notice that Paul does not say that just the bearing of children brings salvation but the birth of a Godly seed. As she raises Godly children, Paul says salvation for woman is a result. How? Godly children will carry out the Great Commission, converting the nations into disciples and bringing salvation to the woman. This is a direct parallel, indeed a renewal of the cultural mandate. Being fruitful and multiplying Godly children plays a special role in the Great Commission, a cultural mandate role!

Thus, if Mr. Dager does not agree that the Great Commission is the covenant renewal of the cultural mandate, so what? The New Testament expressly clarifies that the Great Commission is the renewal of the garden mandate. The parallels are too obvious and blatant on the part of Jesus and the New Testament writers. The bottom line, therefore, is that there is cultural responsibility transferred into the New Covenant from the Old Covenant, placing **civil** concerns within the Great Commission itself. The question is, "What is the nature of those concerns?" Here is where an understanding of the **covenantal** nature of the Great Commission is so important. I believe it keeps the civil requirement of the Great Commission from being politicized and radicalized. How so?

A Covenantal Great Commission

The covenantal nature of the Great Commission can be explained structurally or conceptually. Since I have spent considerable space in my book on the covenantal structure of the Great Commission, I will concentrate on

one line of reasoning – I should say covenants logic – to prove the covenantal sense of Christ's commission.

All one needs to do is ask himself what being a **disciple** involves. Christ called His disciples to believe, be baptized, and commune with Him. This communion He called the New Covenant in His blood. Clearly then, being a disciple meant entering God's covenant. Since Christ calls nations to become disciples would any less be involved? I don't think so. And, if becoming a disciple means entering the covenant, is it so far removed to call the Great Commission **covenantal**? I don't think so. Thus, the Great Commission is covenantal in nature as well as structure.

When the Great Commission is understood covenantally it is kept from being interpreted politically in some *nationalistic* sense. First, as to the purpose of the Great Commission, the goal of the Church is to establish Christ's covenant over the nations, that is to make the nations His disciples. The goal is not to create national covenants but to bring the nations into covenant with Christ. There is a difference. National covenants are simply political statements of confederacy. They may or may not be Christian. Besides, they are not the essence of what Christ called the disciples to do. He told them to make the nations disciples, not give them indigenous covenants. He did not want nations to use Christ, He desired the conversion of the nations for His use.

Second, as to the content of the Great Commission the disciples were given a specific message of the covenant. They were told to teach the nations what Christ had taught them. They were not to teach other laws, they were to teach Christ's law. They were not to teach natural law because they were not commanded to do so; natural law is secular and pagan. In so doing, they called, and we know this to be historically the case, the nations to God's righteous standard of rule. By understanding the Great Commission as a covenantal directive to the disciples, therefore, they were not allowed to veer from these specific parameters.

Third, being asked to disciple the nations, they were not supposed to usurp the civil authorities. They were expressly told to obey. They were not permitted any kind of radicalism, for this activity did not fit within the stipulations of God's covenantal commands. Christ had distinctly said, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." In the context of the Great Commission, however, He told the disciples to carry out the commission through submission to the tax structure of the land. He was certainly not saying that there is an area of neutrality. He called for the nations to become disciples in all things, even in taxes, but the road to discipleship was through the obedience of the disciples to those whom they were called to disciple. Thus, by seeing the Great Commission as a covenantal mandate, serious errors are avoided.

Covenantal Civil Fallacies In Dager

Misrepresentations

Now to some particulars. Dager commits the usual blunder of creating a straw man. He argues that Reconstructionists believe the Church can impose Biblical law on a society as well as other totally erroneous notions. He "says,

Therefore, anything the Church wishes to impose upon the civil governments it must do illegally. . . . Granted, the ideal is for civil authorities to rule by God's law. But what should be is not what is. . . . If civil law enforced the Old Testament standards man would not find salvation. They would be put to death after their first rejection of those standards.²

This is completely and totally wrong! I don't know of a single Christian Reconstructionist who believes such nonsense!! And if Dager can find one who does, I would be the first to disagree. But he cannot find these kinds of statements anywhere in my writings.

First, if there is one subject that Christian Reconstructionists have gone out of their way to clarify it is on the issue of coercion. They categorically deny that any nation should be forced to obey Christ and His law. Indeed, I concluded my book on the covenant with a chapter called, "Little By Little." I gave the chapter this title precisely because I wanted to emphasize that God's Word could only properly, Biblically, be established as the rule of the land through evangelism and education. I specifically stated that coercion had no place in the carrying out of the Great Commission.

We come to the end of our study of the covenant. The final question to be answered is, "How do we establish a society based on the concepts presented in this book?" I raise it because I do not want there to be any confusion about how a Christian society is created. I do not want the reader to leave this book thinking a covenantal culture comes from the top down, meaning by some "theocratic elite" forcing everyone to be a Christian, or to believe a certain way. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

God told the Israelites that their Biblical culture would come "little by little." It did not come suddenly, or overnight. It came gradually. The covenantal society that I have proposed can only come the same way. That is, if it is to survive, it must come about from the bottom up. Sure, the reader can implement the covenant structure in his home and can seek to establish it in his church. But its fulfillment in society-at-large will be much more difficult. It can only successfully come about (and stick), if it takes hold at a grass-roots level through evangelism. . . . In Acts, the Spirit of God went forth and created the beginnings of a Christian world from the bottom up.

The instrument the Spirit used was evangelism, witnessing. The sword cannot hold the inheritance for the future; only education, missions, and evangelism can.³

How much more clear can the issue of coercion be? How could Dager have read these statements and arrived at the conclusions that he did? I'm not sure that I can answer this question but I do know that I was clear in my book about the bottom up nature of building a society based on God's covenant.

Second, Dager's comments about people being "put to death after their first rejection" of Old Testament law is an immoral misrepresentation of what has been said. I have never said such a thing nor can it be implied from anything that I've said. Either Dager really didn't read my book or he is deliberately trying to be misrepresentative. If he did read, *That* don't know how he could make such a totally misrepresentative statement. For the record, I said in my book that a Christian society should not try to create a Hebrew Republic because of the transformation of all Old Testament law in the New Covenant era.⁴ I argued instead for a Christian Republic based on Christian law, which is based on the application of the Ten Commandments in the civil realm using the case laws of the Old Testament as a guide as to the proper application of God's moral standard.

Further, if Dager really believes that the law tutors man to Christ, as the Apostle Paul says, then how could he

believe that the enforcement of Biblical law standards would not aid in a true revival? I have often heard others like Dager say that they believed in the first use of the law, namely to show men their sin, as a New Testament use of the law, while at the same time I have listened' as they denied the application of God's law in society. It seems to me that if they really believed in the first use of the law then they shouldn't object to its application by the civil magistrates in the land. If their conviction about the law bringing man to conviction of sin is true, then they should expect a great revival if Biblical law were applied to society! But, I don't think they really believe or understand even the first use of the law!!

As for Dager's comments about people being put to death after their first rejection of those standards, nothing could be further from the truth. Here is what I said in my section, "The Biblical State Covenant":

The second question to be considered is: "How could a modern Christian civilization be legislated?" The answer is: Christian civilization cannot be legislated. To argue that it can would be a return to the humanist heresy of salvation by law.⁵ —

Dager's not only reveals his own ignorance about my writings but the Old Testament as well. Even an unbeliever could live in the Promised Land. He was called a stranger in the land. As long as he didn't actually break the law of God, he would not suffer punishment. He could disagree but he could not commit such criminal acts as bestiality, murder, and so forth.

Misquotes

Aside from the misrepresentations, Dager misquotes me when he refers to my statement,

Someone who wants to argue that the "unbeliever" is not bound by God's covenantal standard ultimately has no basis for presenting the Gospel to the unbeliever. If he is not accountable in the area of civil rule, then he has found a loophole in the gospel, an area of neutrality, a "King's X" from God. He therefore does not need the Christ of the Bible.

The New Testament clearly teaches that civil authorities are supposed to rule by the Bible. Their purpose is ethical. If their purpose is not ethical, then it becomes manipulative.⁶

He then goes on to take this statement as referring to the individual unbeliever when he says, . . . —

First of all, Sutton equates God's covenantal standard with obedience to civil law; but, as stated before, this standard only applies to those under the covenant. It is after the unbeliever recognizes his need for the Christ of the Bible that he enters into the covenant and then becomes accountable to all righteous laws, including civil law.⁷

What is wrong with what Dager has done to my statement? The original statement is correct. But go back and read the first sentence of the second paragraph. It says, "The New Testament clearly teaches that civil authorities are supposed to rule by the Bible." Do you see what Dager has done? He has taken my quote out of the context of discussing the accountability of the civil magistrate to comply with civil law. He had enough of the full quote but he went on with a statement that tries to make it appear that I'm talking about every individual believer. My comments are about the unbelieving civil magistrate at this point in

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper* (Tyler, Texas: I. C. E., 1987) pp. 202-204.

4. *Ibid*, p. 188.

5. *Ibid*, p. 191.

6. Dager, p. 217

7. *Idem*.

the book. I'm trying to make the point that the unbelieving civil magistrate who argues that he is not accountable to God's standard in his given calling in life has found a "King's X," a loophole in relationship to God. And, it is to him, the civil magistrate that there would be no basis for presenting the Gospel if he is not responsible to God for his actions as a civil magistrate.

Misinterpretation of Scripture

I would agree with Sutton that, under a theonomic system, civil law enforces the penalty for breaking the moral law. But the only government that is ordained by God to operate under a theonomic or theocratic order is the Church. And the Church may dispense penalties for breaking the moral law in order to keep itself pure from contamination, but its jurisdiction ends with its members.⁸

Dager's statement is not too uncommon: Old Testament civil laws, especially the capital sanctions, become ecclesiastical law in the New Covenant. The Church inherits the sanctions of the Old Testament as a guide for church discipline but the civil laws of the Old Testament are no longer applicable in the New Covenant. The Church of the New Testament fulfills the Theocratic State of the Old Testament. What's wrong with this view?

First, the ecclesiastical fulfillment of the Old Testament theocracy interpretation is based on a misunderstanding of the Old Testament, to wit, that Israel was not an **ecclesiastical** society. Stephen speaks to the issue in his famous sermon given immediately before his death when he says,

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:37-38).

God's covenant community was called the church in the Old Testament. This means that the church society existed but civil law was not applied exclusively to the Church. The Biblical community of the Old Testament was an ecclesiastical society. Theocratic law applied to Family, Church, and the State. It will not work to coalesce civil and ecclesiastical law in the New Testament, as Dager suggests. The New Testament doesn't. So why should we? I know why this approach is commonly taken. It is done for the purpose of rendering the State neutral to Biblical law in the New Covenant era. But the Bible teaches that the presence of the Church in the Old Testament did not remove cultural and civil accountability to Biblical law. Everything

in the New Testament points to a similar structure, especially the central passage in the New Testament on the civil magistrate.

Second, the Church fulfillment of the Old Testament theocracy contradicts the New Testament's view of the civil magistrate. Consider the words of the Apostle Paul,

Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Romans 13:1-4).

The real question is: Is there anything in the language of the New Testament to indicate that the **theocratic** role of the civil magistrate changes? Clearly this passage indicates that even Gentile rulers are considered part of the theocracy. First, Paul uses an ecclesiastical title to refer to the Gentile, pagan, civil magistrate, who was Nero at the time. He calls him a minister, a diakonos, the same word from which we get the English word deacon.

Second, Paul assigns the Gentile, pagan, civil magistrate to an ecclesiastical role, that of avenger. He specifically says the magistrate is to be the avenger of the wrath of God, a role that the priest/prophet assumed in the Old Testament as in the case of Phineas (Numbers 24) and Elijah (1 Kings 17).

Thus, there is nothing in the Romans 13 passage to indicate that the role of the civil magistrate is not within an ecclesiastical structure of society. Granted, he is not given the responsibility of deacon, presbyter, or bishop. He and his role are not to be confused with the officers of the parish, what is commonly called the church in its localized sense. He is part of the civil realm. In this way the three institutions are preserved. But the New Covenant society is ecclesiastical in nature with the Church in the center. The civil magistrate is not neutral and part of this ecclesiastical order. He is accountable to apply God's wrath on the basis of God's standard to God's society. According to Dager, the State is secular. According to the Apostle Paul, the State, Church, and Family are sacred. All of society is an ecclesiastical order, with the institutional Church in the center of culture and life. As for me and my house, I'm sticking with the Apostle Paul and not Dager!

8. Dager, p. 219.