

Q 1.1 What does it mean for humanity to have dominion in God's image and Likeness?

Having dominion in God's image and likeness means ruling over all creation and leading in God's way of peace through loving service. It is granted to humanity in Genesis 1:28, and the very next verse suggests that this dominion entails eating a diet that entirely consists of fruit and vegetation.

Misunderstanding Dominion

People often cite '*dominion*' as justification for harming animals. They claim that since God gave humans dominion over animals, we can do whatever we want to them. The passage in question: "*Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'*" (Genesis 1:28, NKJV). But if that is what was meant by dominion, then God would not have told us in the very next verse that our diet should consist entirely of fruit and vegetation: "*And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.'*" (Genesis 1:29, NKJV). As one author correctly points out, "*The dominion granted to man over animals before the fall did not involve killing them. Food was vegetarian*" (Sorabji, 198)¹.

¹ Sorabji, Richard. *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Consequences of Misunderstanding Dominion

As a result of this misunderstanding of dominion, people often fail to properly understand the purpose of God's design for creation and our divinely appointed role therein. As Adams states, *"The more the word dominion is broken away from its context of Genesis 1, the more likely it is that what one is defending is a broken relationship between humans and the other animals and the world they inhabit"* (Adams, 5)². We were created in God's image and likeness and given dominion over the whole earth, but this does not mean we are to do whatever we want with this authority. Instead, it means we are entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out God's will and God's purpose for His created world.

The Meaning of רְדָה (Radah)

The Hebrew word רְדָה (radah) means 'to rule over' or 'to have dominion'. God instructed humanity to rule over all the animals and over the whole earth: *"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"* (Genesis 1:26, NKJV). Phelps provides further context: *"Radah is the verb typically used in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to the authority of governments and monarchs over their citizens. We expect government officials to use their authority for the good of those over whom they exercise it. Rulers who abuse, enslave, and murder their citizens for their own enrichment, enjoyment, or convenience we invariably condemn as unjust and unfit. There is no reason to*

² Adams, Carol J. "What about Dominion in Genesis?" In *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals*. Edited by Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker, 1-12. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.

judge our dominion over animals by any other standard" (Phelps, 40)³. Just as God appointed humans to rule over the animals, God appointed Christ to rule over humanity as Lord⁴. We should therefore reflect the image of God⁵ by ruling over the animals the way Christ rules over humanity—with love and compassion⁶.

In God's Image and Likeness

In order to carry out this instruction of ruling over the whole earth, God created humanity in His own image and likeness: "*Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'*" (Genesis 1:26a, NKJV). Being created in God's image and likeness means to reflect God's character in everything we do. God's character is love⁷, so reflecting this character would mean doing everything in love⁸, ruling over sin⁹. Christ is the express image of God¹⁰, and He "*did not come to be served, but to serve*" (Mark 10:45, NIV). We are told to emulate his

³ Phelps, Norm. *The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA*. New York: Lantern Books, 2007.

⁴ "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God put everything under His feet and made Him head over everything for the church" (Ephesians 1:21-22, BSB).

⁵ "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19, NIV); "You, however, are controlled not by the flesh, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9, BSB).

⁶ "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble" (1 Peter 3:8, NASB).

⁷ "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them" (1 John 4:16, NIV).

⁸ "Do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14, NIV).

⁹ "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7, NIV).

¹⁰ "who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3, NKJV).

example of humble service¹¹. The image of God is also fearless: “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV). When we embody this spirit of power, love, and sound mind, we bear the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit in everything we do¹².

Dominion in God’s Image and Likeness

Ruling over animals and the earth in God’s image means treating animals with love, knowing each by name¹³, and being responsible sustainers of the earth and its inhabitants¹⁴ in the way of God’s character¹⁵. As Clark points out, “*The likeliest meaning of the verse in Genesis, as it was first intended, was only that Adam was to be God’s viceroy here on Earth, and given talents to understand and guide all other earthly things*” (Clark, 149)¹⁶. As part of our dominion over the animals and the earth, we are told to cultivate and keep the garden¹⁷. So we are to grow vegetation to feed to the animals¹⁸, and we are to grow and eat a diet of

¹¹ “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children” (Ephesians 5:1, NIV); “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV).

¹² “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23, BSB).

¹³ “So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field” (Genesis 2:20a, NKJV).

¹⁴ “And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?’” (Luke 12:42, NKJV).

¹⁵ “All creatures look to You to give them their food in due season” (Psalm 104:27, BSB).

¹⁶ Clark, Stephen R.L. “Does ‘Made in the Image of God’ Mean Humans Are More Special than Animals?” In *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals*. Edited by Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker, 138-149. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.

¹⁷ “Then the LORD God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it” (Genesis 2:15, BSB).

¹⁸ “And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so” (Genesis 1:30, NIV).

fruit and vegetation ourselves¹⁹. As King puts it: “*To be made in the image of God is not a license to conquer and kill; it is a charge to keep and till*” (King, 41)²⁰. The peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts²¹, and we are to lead the animals in the way of peace: “*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them*” (Isaiah 11:6, NIV). With all the animals eating plants and living at peace with each other, and humans not harming them, there would be no reason for any animal to be afraid of being harmed or killed²². When humanity lives by the Word of God, there is no reason for us to be afraid either²³ since: “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. The one who fears has not been perfected in love*” (1 John 4:18, BSB).

Transformed to Reflect God’s Image and Likeness

Although we as humanity are presently being ruled largely by sin instead of by the Word of God, this will not last. Our hope is that we are being transformed back to reflecting God’s image: “*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NKJV). As we reflect God’s image more fully, our dominion over the earth and over the animals

¹⁹ “Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.’” (Genesis 1:29, NIV).

²⁰ King, Sarah Withrow. *Vegangelical: How Caring for Animals Can Shape Your Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

²¹ “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful” (Colossians 3:15, NIV).

²² “For the violence done to Lebanon will cover you, And the plunder of beasts which made them afraid, Because of men’s blood And the violence of the land and the city, And of all who dwell in it” (Habakkuk 2:17, NKJV).

²³ “‘I heard Your voice in the garden,’ he replied, ‘and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.’” (Genesis 3:10, BSB).

will look more like it did in the beginning, ruling with love²⁴ instead of ruling as a means to serving the sinful desires of the flesh²⁵. We will remember the love we had in the beginning, and return to the first works God gave us²⁶ when everything was very good²⁷. To accomplish this, we must first allow God to restore our vision²⁸ and repair our broken relationship to the earth and to our long oppressed animal neighbors who God ordained to share the earth alongside us²⁹. By wholeheartedly and selflessly loving our fellow inhabitants of the earth, both human and animal, we fulfill the whole law of God: “*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*” (Galatians 5:14, NIV).

²⁴ “Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10, NIV).

²⁵ “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on earthly things” (Philippians 3:19, BSB).

²⁶ “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works” (Revelation 2:4-5, NKJV).

²⁷ “And God looked upon all that He had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31a, BSB).

²⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed” (Luke 4:18, BSB).

²⁹ “Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’” (Genesis 1:22, BSB).