

God's Children Care For Creation

Genesis 2:15; Romans 8:18-22;¹

Introduction – Show “Making Peace with Creation **CLIP**”

“It is my firm conviction that this miraculous thing we call life, has been fashioned and sustained by the hands of a good and loving creator. But over the course of my life I have also grown increasingly aware of the role played by human hands too. Their ability to both to deepen and intensify the work of creation and, at the same time, to ignore and degrade creation. When I was born there were: 2 billion people...now 7; atmosphere 280 ppm of CO₂ > 400 ppm; oceans 20% more acidic; species extinction; Anthropocene = the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.... This troubles me as a Christian. I believe that God created all things...that his purpose is to reconcile all things to himself...What does this mean for creation, for the way we live, for the way we build our cities, the way we do our agriculture, the way we eat, the way we travel. How can we, in the way we live, bring about the peace that Christ has established on the cross?”

This week's headline news **SLIDE2** included the role played by human hands in the destruction of the world's largest rainforest. As well as one prominent teenager's quest to work for the perseveration of our planet. What I have yet to hear on the news, and don't expect to, is **a Christian perspective** on the environmental issues of our day. But we need one.

Now historically, Bible believing Christians have not be overly active in the environmental debate. Indeed, some Christians still suggest that we ignore the warnings of environmentalists. After all, when we die we will leave planet earth and go to heaven. So why should we devote time and energy to a sinking ship, to what John MacArthur calls a “disposable planet”² (I cringed when I heard that...)

Biblical Contact

So on this Labour Day weekend I thought it was important for us to explore what God expects of us when it comes to caring for creation. While nearly every bible believing Christian know, and have heard sermons on, the **great commission** (i.e. our God-given mission to share the good news of Jesus reconciling work on the cross—Matt. 28¹⁹⁻²⁰), there are many Christians who are unfamiliar with

¹ <https://earthcareonline.org/pages/bibleverses.html>

² <https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA131/do-we-have-a-responsibility-to-care-for-the-environment>

the other great commission that God gave to all people in Genesis 1-2, our **cultural commission**. (Gen. 2:15) **Turn to Genesis 1-2.**

Last week, Pastor Dave gave a very clear and compelling message on why “Children of God Love Their Enemies”. The primary reason that enemy love ought to be a core belief and behavior among those who belong to the family of God is because it is a core belief and behavior of God himself. I believe the same could and should be said about **caring for creation**, and here’s why.

A) Why should we care for creation?

1) God Cares For His Creation (Gen. 1-2; Psalm 104; **Matt 6^{26,30}**) and

2) God Commissioned Us to Care for Creation (Gen. 1²⁶⁻²⁸; 2¹⁵; cf. Mt. 6^{26,30})

The Bible not only shows and tells us that God works, it also tells us that God commissioned us to carry on his work. **Read Gen. 1²⁶⁻²⁸ & 2¹⁵**

- “subdue”make subserviant (כָּבַשׁ) & “rule”govern, have dominion (רָדָה) = strong words, implying the need to impose one’s will (like God did over the chaos to form creation). But subduing & ruling do not imply violence or abuse.
- “work” (*ava'd*) = priestly work, service, manual labour; “take care of” (*shamar*) = preserve, protect (like shepherds with their flocks, like a farmer/gardener)

The story is told of a farmer who took over an abandoned, run-down property and began to fix it up. After a year of a fixing fence, plowing, planting, weeding, etc., the local pastor came to visit. Seeing the beautiful landscaping and plants the pastor remarked, “God certainly has given you a beautiful piece of property.”

“Yes he has,” said the busy farmer, “but you should have seen this place when God had it all to Himself!”

Friends, we are called to be workers together with God in both the great commission and the cultural commission. Work is an opportunity to use our God-given interests and abilities and opportunities in cooperating with what God is doing and wants done in the world (e.g. Psalm 104 = a celebration of God’s work). The essence of our task, as Jesus taught and modeled for us, is to rule like God does so that creation fulfills God’s design for it, present & future because: **SLIDE**

3) God has a great future planned for his creation (Rom. 8¹⁸⁻²¹)

Now it is true that the human sin, in Genesis 3, resulted in widespread fall out and frustration. Some have understood **2 Pet 3¹⁰** to imply that creation is destined for destruction but recent studies have shown that the word Peter uses (*heurethisetai*) is employed in metal work for *purification*, not for destruction.³

This resonates with Paul's words in **Rom 8¹⁸⁻²¹** where God's saving work on the cross is designed to be restorative, not only for us, but also for creation. As our relationship with God is restored by faith in Christ, our relationship and role with creation is also restored. That is why Paul says in Romans 8¹⁹ "*the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed*". As commentator Douglas Moo points out,

"God will one day set the created world free from the decay that mars everything after the fall of human beings into sin. The fate of creation is bound up with that of humanity. As it was through them that creation was marred, so it is through the glorified children of God that it will be restored again."⁴

4) God has made us connected to creation & vice versa

The close link between human beings and the earth is made clear from the start. The generic Hebrew word for "human" is *'adam*. The word for the "ground" and soil & earth is *'adamah*. We are earth-creatures, formed from the dust of the earth and sharing the same basic material make up as the other creatures and the planet itself. We are in a *symbiotic relationship* in the sense that our physical lives are rooted in and dependent on creation—the earth feeds us, clothes us, shelters us. We need to care for our environment because in and through our environment God cares for us and others (e.g. **Psalm 65⁹⁻¹³**).

The Bible also calls attention to what theologians calls "a strong moral link" between how humans behave on earth and the state of the earth itself—for good or ill.⁵ For example, the prophet Hosea makes the point that human wickedness produces ecological distress (**Hosea 4¹⁻³**). Jeremiah will even speak

³ Al Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10" *Westminster Theological Journal* **49** (1987) 405-413.

⁴ Douglas Moo, *Romans* (NIVAC), p. 141 in my copy.

⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, p. 55.

of human sin as causing an undoing of creation, a return to ‘uncreation’⁶ (Jer 4²³).

The moral link also extends to the impact that our use & abuse of creation has on others. For example, on a global scale, the most industrialized countries of the world are the biggest polluters yet many of those most impacted by it are the poorest people & countries (e.g. my visit to Colombia...impact of Canadian gold mining companies on land & water).

B) How should we care for creation?

1) Practical examples of creation care in the OT – While Gen. 1-2 lays the biblical foundation for the care of creation, the OT also has practical examples of how creation care was to be carried out in daily life. Some examples include care for the land, for the animals, and for the trees.

a) **Rest for the land** (Ex. 23¹⁰⁻¹¹; Lev. 25¹⁻⁷; cf. Lev. 26³³⁻³⁵ & 2 Chr. 36¹⁷⁻²¹)⁷

Lev 25¹⁻⁷ says the land was to be given a sabbatical year, to rest and rejuvenate. When Israel broke their covenant with God and were exiled **notice** that included in the account of the exile is the point that the land was finally able to enjoy the sabbath rests it had been deprived of (2 Chr. 36²¹)

- The land was never theirs to own, but theirs to use & care for (Lev. 25²³)⁸

b) **Rest & care for the animals** (Prov 12¹⁰; 27²³):

- **rest** (Ex. 20¹⁰)⁹ (see Waltke quote in footnote)
- **compensation** for their work (Dt. 24⁵)
- **preservation** even when most tempted not to (Ex. 23⁵ & Dt. 22⁴; 22⁶⁻⁷; Lk. 13¹⁵; 14⁵)

c) **Care for the trees** (Dt. 20¹⁹) even during war. Unlike the Egyptians and other military powers in the ANE, Israel was not to practice a scorched earth policy.

⁶ See TNIV Study Bible note on Jer. 4:25; cf. William B. Badke, Project Earth, p. 85

⁷ The land had to wait for the exile to finally get the rest it had coming to it, which begs the question, Does the earth have to wait for our extinction to finally get its rest?

⁸ “*The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in it as foreigners and strangers.*”

⁹ As Bruce Waltke notes, “The [sabbath] commandment applies not only to humans but to the rest of creation as well, including animals. Animals need rest yet our modern technology and our efficiency have reduced animals to purely their function, making chickens into egg factories and cows into milk factories, bearing witness to human greed in their sovereignty over the creation. This use of human ingenuity violates the fourth commandment.” An Old Testament Theology, pp. 421-422. This has profound implications for factory farms.

- “Centuries before environmentalist...pressure groups, Israel’s law called for ecological restraint in the conduct of war.”¹⁰ (be guided by need, not greed)
- Landmines ruined the land in Cambodia...¹¹
- In DR Congo successive wars in the eastern part of the country have contributed to the destruction of its national parks.¹² The city of Kinshasa, once called ‘*Kin la belle*’ [Kinshasa the beautiful] is now described by the people of Kinshasa themselves as ‘*Kin la poubelle*’ [Kinshasa the trash can]. Unsanitary conditions reign everywhere. Plastic bottles are thrown out in gutters, streams and rivers. Erosion has washed away parts of neighbourhoods in the city.

d) **Avoid** the dangers & warnings of “uncreation” (from greed, abuse, etc.)

- The OT prophets... (e.g. Jer. 4²²⁻²⁶; Hosea 4¹⁻³)
- The warning in Revelation... The destruction of the earth is caused by human hands... (Seals, Trumpets— 1/3, Bowls of Wrath)

“Christians ought to be in the lead in preserving earth’s ecology. Christians, more than any others, have the best reasons to take care of the planet, for this is our first calling. Tragically, many of God’s people have given higher priority to efficiency and profits.”¹³

2) Practical **examples for today** – the principles of stewardship & sustainability

- **Stewardship, Not Ownership** (Psalm 24¹)
 - “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” (Ps 24:1)

“Creation is mine, you are its stewards,
freely use it for what you need, never abuse it in your greed.”¹⁴

- **Sustainability** (& generosity...like God does & made creation to be)

One important way to care for creation is to simply *use less of it*. For a long time we have been taught about **the 3 Rs**, Reduce, Reuse Recycle - but there are several more in the mix. That's right, there are now at least **5 Rs** - Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle in that order. The order of the **Rs** is also important. The closer to the start of the list, the better the option.

¹⁰ Christopher Wright, Deuteronomy (NIBC), p. 230. The practice of clear cutting trees and laying waste the land like the Egyptians and other military powers in the Near East amounted to ecological war crimes. ANET, 239ff.

¹¹ Although 50% of Cambodia's minefields have now been cleared it is still one of the most landmine impacted countries in the world with over 64,000 casualties recorded since 1979 and over 25,000 amputees.

¹² See Kukedila Nduzi Muller, “Creation care: a biblical mandate” <https://mwc-cmm.org/content/creation-care-biblical-mandate?language=en>

¹³ Bruce Waltke, An OT Theology, p. 422 n.29.

¹⁴ My own variation on Dr. Richter’s suggested proverb. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHn1TrRgQ-E>

