

On the Care of Creation

The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. Psalm 24:1

As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the full authority of the Scriptures and aware of the ways we have degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems.

Because we worship and honor the Creator, we seek to cherish and care for the creation.

Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator's work.

Because in Christ God has healed our alienation from God and extended to us the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things, we commit ourselves to working in the power of the Holy Spirit to share the Good News of Christ in word and deed, to work for the reconciliation of all people in Christ, and to extend Christ's healing to suffering creation.

Because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honor and glory of the Creator---whom we know dimly through creation, but meet fully through Scripture and in Christ. We and our children face a growing crisis in the health of the creation in which we are embedded, and through which, by God's grace, we are sustained. Yet we continue to degrade that creation.

These degradations of creation can be summed up as 1) land degradation; 2) deforestation; 3) species extinction; 4) water degradation; 5) global toxification; 6) the alteration of atmosphere; 7) human and cultural degradation.

Many of these degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation. With continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe. Our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth. We respect the institution of marriage as the way God has given to insure thoughtful procreation of children and their nurture to the glory of God.

We recognize that human poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation.

Many concerned people, convinced that environmental problems are more spiritual than technological, are exploring the world's ideologies and religions in search of non-Christian spiritual resources for the healing of the earth. As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe that the Bible calls us to respond in four ways:

First, God calls us to confess and repent of attitudes which devalue creation, and which twist or ignore biblical revelation to support our misuse of it. Forgetting that "the earth is the Lord's," we have often simply used creation and forgotten our responsibility to care for it.

Second, our actions and attitudes toward the earth need to proceed from the center of our faith, and be rooted in the fullness of God's revelation in Christ and the Scriptures. We resist both ideologies which would presume the Gospel has nothing to do with the care of non-human creation and also ideologies which would reduce the Gospel to nothing more than the care of that creation.

Third, we seek carefully to learn all that the Bible tells us about the Creator, creation, and the human task. In our life and words we declare that full good news for all creation which is still waiting "with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God," (Rom. 8:19).

Fourth, we seek to understand what creation reveals about God's divinity, sustaining presence, and everlasting power, and what creation teaches us of its God-given order and the principles by which it works.

Thus we call on all those who are committed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to affirm the following principles of biblical faith, and to seek ways of living out these principles in our personal lives, our churches, and society.

The cosmos, in all its beauty, wildness, and life-giving bounty, is the work of our personal and loving Creator.

Our creating God is prior to and other than creation, yet intimately involved with it, upholding each thing in its freedom, and all things in relationships of intricate complexity. God is transcendent, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and immanent, while wholly other than creation and not to be confused with it.

God the Creator is relational in very nature, revealed as three persons in One. Likewise, the creation which God intended is a symphony of individual creatures in harmonious relationship.

The Creator's concern is for all creatures. God declares all creation "good" (Gen. 1:31); promises care in a covenant with all creatures (Gen. 9:9-17); delights in creatures which have no human apparent usefulness (Job 39-41); and wills, in Christ, "to reconcile all things to himself" (Col.1:20).

Men, women, and children, have a unique responsibility to the Creator; at the same time we are creatures, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical, chemical, and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures.

Men, women, and children, created in God's image, also have a unique responsibility for creation. Our actions should both sustain creation's fruitfulness and preserve creation's powerful testimony to its Creator.

Our God-given , stewardly talents have often been warped from their intended purpose: that we know, name, keep and delight in God's creatures; that we nourish civilization in love, creativity and obedience to God; and that we offer creation and civilization back in praise to the Creator. We have ignored our creaturely limits and have used the earth with greed, rather than care.

The earthly result of human sin has been a perverted stewardship, a patchwork of garden and wasteland in which the waste is increasing. "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land...Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away" (Hosea 4:1,3). Thus, one consequence of our misuse of the earth is an unjust denial of God's created bounty to other human beings, both now and in the future.

God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross" (Col. 1:19-20).

In Jesus Christ, believers are forgiven, transformed and brought into God's kingdom. "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (II Cor. 5:17). The presence of the kingdom of God is marked not only by renewed fellowship with God, but also by renewed harmony and justice between people, and by renewed harmony and justice between people and the rest of the created world. "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12).

We believe that in Christ there is hope, not only for men, women and children, but also for the rest of creation which is suffering from the consequences of human sin.

Therefore we call upon all Christians to reaffirm that all creation is God's; that God created it good; and that God is renewing it in Christ.

We encourage deeper reflection on the substantial biblical and theological teaching which speaks of God's work of redemption in terms of the renewal and completion of God's purpose in creation.

We seek a deeper reflection on the wonders of God's creation and the principles by which creation works. We also urge a careful consideration of how our corporate and individual actions respect and comply with God's ordinances for creation.

We encourage Christians to incorporate the extravagant creativity of God into their lives by increasing the nurturing role of beauty and the arts in their personal, ecclesiastical, and social patterns.

We urge individual Christians and churches to be centers of creation's care and renewal, both delighting in creation as God's gift, and enjoying it as God's provision, in ways which sustain and heal the damaged fabric of the creation which God has entrusted to us.

We recall Jesus' words that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, and therefore we urge followers of Jesus to resist the allure of wastefulness and overconsumption by making personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self restraint and frugality.

We call on all Christians to work for godly, just, and sustainable economies which reflect God's sovereign economy and enable men, women and children to flourish along with all the diversity of creation. We recognize that poverty forces people to degrade creation in order to survive; therefore we support the development of just, free economies which empower the poor and create abundance without diminishing creation's bounty.

We commit ourselves to work for responsible public policies which embody the principles of biblical stewardship of creation.

We invite Christians--individuals, congregations and organizations--to join with us in this evangelical declaration on the environment, becoming a covenant people in an ever-widening circle of biblical care for creation.

We call upon Christians to listen to and work with all those who are concerned about the healing of creation, with an eagerness both to learn from them and also to share with them our conviction that the God whom all people sense in creation (Acts 17:27) is known fully only in the Word made flesh in Christ the living God who made and sustains all things.

We make this declaration knowing that until Christ returns to reconcile all things, we are called to be faithful stewards of God's good garden, our earthly home.

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Scriptures

Goodness of creation.

Scripture expresses God's delight at the myriad of species. Gen. 1 pronounces them "good" (vv. 21,25). The creation story also repeats the word "kinds" (seven times in five verses, Gn. 1:20-25) showing that God gave special attention to variety. The Creator also commissioned Adam to name each specie: Gn. 2:19-20. Scripture also affirms the goodness of the human creation: Gn. 1:26-28, Ps. 8:3-8, Mt. 10:31. Despite the grandeur of creation, humans must be careful to worship God alone: Is. 42:8, Rm. 1:18-25.

God's Joy.

Throughout Scripture, we find the Creator rejoicing in his works (Ps. 104:24-25, 31, etc.) and paying attention to even the most insignificant (Mt. 10:29). God describes his creatures with awe, admiration and pleasure. Dare we diminish the joy God finds with his handiwork? God's concern. Matt. 10:29-31. Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of the Father. This reveals an intense involvement in the daily, seemingly inconsequential affairs of creation. It reveals a God who is not a scientist collecting cold data, but a Creator intimately leading creation toward the accomplishment of his will. Also revealed is the supreme value of the human creation: If God so esteems slugs and salamanders, what does this imply about me? It could be said that advocating for the protection of species elevates the stature of the human as well. When we know what is out there, it makes the human all the more valuable. Could it be said that a contributing factor to the demeaning of human existence is a loss of contact with the Creator God and his splendid creation?

Human responsibility toward creation.

Humans have a very special and exalted place within creation (Gn. 1:26-28, Ps. 8:3-8, Mt. 10:31). However, Scripture provides us with no mandate or calling to destroy; our commission is to serve as stewards of creation: Gn. 1:28, 2:15. Genesis 1:28 is a strong passage that refers to ruling over creation. The ancient Hebrew word is *radah* and it generally is used to describe the righteous and loving rule of a good and kindly king. Genesis 2:15 describes how this rule is to be carried out. The two key words in Genesis 2:15 are "till" (*abad* in Hebrew) and "keep" (*shamar*). In other texts, *abad* is translated to "serve." Joshua 24:15 says "we will serve (*abad*) the Lord." What kind of service would our God require of us? Responsible or destructive? How would our God have us serve (*abad*) creation? *Shamar*, on the other hand, describes the type of keeping that is illustrated in Numbers 6:24 where the Lord through the prophet Aaron speaks of his keeping of

the Israelites. "The Lord bless you and keep (shamar) you." Certainly, God keeps his people in such a way as to demonstrate his great love and care. His keeping would cause his people to thrive. In a similar fashion, we are charged with the "keeping" of creation. Creation deserves our love and our labors that contribute to its health and vitality.

Human Concerns.

Most Scripture would seem to lend support for preserving species for their own sake. Scripture also teaches that humans can enjoy the benefits of creation: Gn. 1:29-30. It would be difficult to enjoy the benefits of something which no longer exists. Also, all creation is to enjoy these benefits as well: Gn. 1:30.

Fruitfulness. Scripture commands us to tend creation so that it can be preserved and regenerate itself. Dt. 22:6-7.

God Sustains. The Bible says that God sustains his creation: Ps. 145:15-16, Mt. 6:26,30. By what calling do humans override God's involvement with what he has made?

Covenant. God made a very specific covenant with all life: Gn. 9:8-17; it is not to be destroyed.

God's Will. In the Noah story, God has revealed his will that all life be preserved, Gn. 6:19-20, 7:1-3, 7:14-16, 8:17, and in such a way that it may regenerate itself: Gn. 6:19b, 20b, 7:3b, 8:17c. Natural extinctions will sometimes occur as a part of God's will, but this is not a human prerogative.

God's Witness. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." (Romans 1:20). Who are we, through our actions, to degrade the witness to God's power and divinity? Who will face him on the Judgment Day and give an explanation for our actions? What will we say to him?

Worship. The Bible says that all creation praises God: Ps. 96:11-13, Rev. 5:13. Silenced voices of praise are a great tragedy, a symphony "finished" in an untimely manner.

Human Worship.

Can one read Psalm 104 or Job 38-41 without experiencing awe and wonder as the Lord describes the creatures of His creation? To know what God has made is to know him better and to be better equipped to worship him.

Human Responsibility.

God gave to Noah and to Adam specific responsibilities regarding the care of creation. Are we called to be any less responsible than Adam and Noah? If we claim to know the Creator and to have a personal relationship with him, then how can we not be grieved at the destruction of the cherished gift that has been placed in our hands?

Ethical questions.

It would be easy to consider some species as more important than others. Most of us are far more appreciative of butterflies than slugs. But can we really make such decisions? Who are we to determine which species are more important than others? Could we call this "playing God?" Are we given a scriptural mandate to destroy? That is the prerogative of the Creator, not the steward. Our responsibility is to tend the garden.

Judgment.

"Your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead... and for destroying those who destroy the earth." Rev. 11:18. Our destruction of species is most often rooted in sin and for this we will be judged. Environmental degradation results from forms of idolatry, greed and pride: our technological pursuits lead us to forget about and be ignorant of God's work in creation; we presume the importance of our work and needs, to the point of destroying God's work; the powerful among us ignore the needs of the weak, destroying what provides subsistence for the poor or forcing them to marginal frontiers where they must live destructively in order to survive. In contrast to God's knowledge, our ignorance is such that we don't know all the different species that exist, how they interrelate, or how they might be useful or even necessary to us.

Species extinction is symptomatic: it is a problem reflecting the sinfulness and unsustainability of lifestyles and our economy. "The sins of the father are visited on the sons," says the Lord in Deut. 5:8-10. We now see that the sins of humanity are visited on other species as well.

Evangelism.

The unbelieving world is waiting for Christians to take a relevant stand on a variety of issues, including species protection. Ultimately, Christian involvement in species protection will be undertaken for its own sake as a way to honor God. Nonetheless, we can expect some in the unbelieving world to respond positively. Our work in species protection will speak powerfully about the very character of our God.