

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF CREATION CARE

BIBLICAL MISSION AND GOD'S EARTH¹

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1. The earth is the Lord's.

Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to Him."

Deuteronomy 10:14: "The highest heavens and the earth and everything in it all belong to the Lord your God."

Job 41:11: "Everything under heaven is mine."

The earth belongs to God because He made it. God is the earth's Landlord and we are God's tenants. God holds us accountable for how we treat His property!

The earth has intrinsic value. It is good and valued by God because He made it.

2. Creation praises God

Creation exists for the praise and glory of its creator, God, and for the mutual enjoyment between the creator and the created. Glorifying and enjoying God is the chief end of all creation. (Psalm 145:10, 21; 148; 150:6)

3. All creation will be redeemed.

We value the earth, not only because of where it came from (creation) but also because of its ultimate destiny.

4. The new heavens and the new earth

"Behold I will create a new heavens and a new earth....." Isaiah 65 (see also Isaiah 11:1-9).

This vision looks forward to a new, redeemed creation (Romans 8:18-21) in which righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:10-13) because God Himself will dwell there with His people (Revelation 21:1-4). ("New" here means redeemed, not totally new from scratch.)

Most of what is recorded in both the Old and New Testament is overwhelmingly positive in regards to the future of creation. This must be weighed against how we interpret the final and fiery destruction of the present earth that is portrayed in 2 Peter 3:10. Some versions translate this as "will be burned up" but this can be more accurately translated "will be laid bare", that is, the wicked will be exposed to God's judgement.

The purpose of the fire is to purify the earth of all evil and the wicked so as to establish the new creation. This fits in with the previous picture of the judgement of the flood in 2 Peter 3:6-7: "The world of that time was deluged and destroyed". During the flood the world of wickedness was wiped out but God's creation was preserved! So at the end times there will be cataclysmic events that bring about the judgement of sinful

¹ These notes are based on an article by Christ Wright in Perspectives on World Mission (2009). Ed by R. D. Winter and S. C. Hawthorne.

humanity, so that through this process, creation itself will be renewed as the dwelling place of God with redeemed humanity.

5. Why creation care is part of Biblical mission

- a. Creation care continues to be the biblical mandate of humanity. Humans were created with a mission and responsibility to rule over, to keep and care for the rest of creation. In Genesis 1:28 two Hebrew words are used. Firstly, *kabas*, which is translated subdue which implies exertion and effort and relates to working with the environment to meet our needs.

The second word *rada*, describes the distinctive role given to humans - the function of ruling or exercising dominion. It is clear from Genesis 1:28, that God is delegating to humans His kingly authority over all of creation. Humans are to rule creation on behalf of God, to rule as God would rule. This obviously implies care and compassion, and "sustainability". The exercise of human dominion must reflect the character and value of God's own rule.

We see an example of this in the life of Jesus. Jesus, at the feeding of the 5000, miraculously multiplied the bread and fish, but at the end He instructed His disciples to pick up the leftovers "so that nothing is wasted" (Johns 6:12-13).

How does God exercise dominion? Psalm 145 tells us that God is gracious, compassionate, good, faithful, loving, generous and protective, not just to humans but to "all He has made".

God's characteristic act is to bless and it is God's constant care that ensures that the cattle, the lions and even the birds of the air are fed and watered (Psalm 104, Matthew 6:26).

- b. Creation care embodies a biblical balance of compassion and justice. Creation care embodies compassion because to care for God's creation is essentially an unselfish form of love, exercised for the sake of creatures that cannot thank or repay us. It also embodies justice because environmental action is a form of defending the weak against the strong, the defenceless against the powerful.
- c. Creation care springs from the mission of God. The over-arching mission to which God has committed Himself is not just the salvation of human beings but also the redemption of the whole creation.

In Colossians 1:20 we read that through Christ God reconciled everything to Himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. Christians are called to also serve the non-human creatures in ecological projects and this forms a vital part of the mission of God in redemption.

7. Caring for creation as God does.

We are to care for the creation because it belongs to God and He has commanded us to do this. That is enough in itself. But creation care also benefits humans as it provides satisfying meaningful work and long term sustainability.

Creation care can lead to evangelism as we build networks of like-minded people, working together in creation care projects and pointing people to the Creator who is above and behind the Creation.