

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

(Gen 1:26-28; 2:15; 9:3; Matt 6:26,28-30; 10:29-31; Rom 1:20-25; 8:19-22)

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Thesis: Christianity and the Scriptures alone provide the basis for a correct view of nature and man's relationship with the environment.

Current Environmental Issues: Global warming, extinction of species, destruction of habitats, production of hazardous chemicals, depletion of the world's fishing stock, population expansion, water rights, economic exploitation of resources....

Reasons for Christian apathy:

- (a) God is sovereign and man has no real control;
(However, God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are always linked)
- (b) The earth is going to be destroyed some day so what we do now is irrelevant;
(This is true of our bodies also yet we treat them with respect)
- (c) The Christian's focus is to be on saving souls not rescuing a decaying earth.
(While Lord's Commission is a priority we should also value what God values)

A. ERRORS OF THE MODERN DAY ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

The environmental movement has brought about much that is good: cleaner air, purer water, preservation of animal species from extinction, awareness of man's need to take care of the earth, preservation of parklands and ecosystems, etal. However, the underlying philosophies of environmentalism are often opposed to the Biblical worldview.

1) Error #1 - Based on the foundation of evolution.

Most environmental organizations subscribe whole-heartedly to an evolutionary ideology of origins. The evolutionist's basis for preserving the environment is at best centered around man's self-interest and the needs of future generations.

Biblical Response:

- a. God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1; John 1:3).
- b. God not only created the world but has a purpose for the world which is centered in the reign of Jesus Christ as the Son of Man (Dan 9:13-14).

2) Error #2 - That Nature is one in essence with God.

This flows out of a pantheistic worldview that everything is a part of God. In this view the universe is permeated with God. God is in all and all is part of God. Therefore, god is in man, in nature, in the trees, in grass. No distinction is made between Creator and creature. In this view, Nature becomes an impersonal force that controls us. Nature is seen as a "goddess". Nature is to be respected and valued because it is part of the essence of god. While pantheism elevates nature it devalues man by refusing to recognize man's place of responsibility over creation. Man has no more value than a blade of grass and consequently nature ultimately has no purpose.

Biblical Response:

- a. God is the Creator of all things (Gen 1:1; John 1:3).
- b. God is separate and distinct from His Creation (John 1:10).
- c. God has designed each part of creation and each organism for a specific purpose within Creation. God values each creature within its role but not equally (Matt 10:29, 31).

3) Error #3 - Belief that animals have the same value as men.

Believing that men evolved from animals and that Nature is supreme, the modern man has no basis for valuing any one species above another. All living things are placed on the same plane. They have no basis for assessing the role of man within his environment or man's right to exercise control or management over nature. This has resulted in the development of the "animal rights" movement.

Biblical Response:

- a. Man and animals have this in common that they are created beings (Gen 1).
- b. Man is unique - man is "made in God's likeness" and "in the image of God" (Gen 1:26-27)
 - i. Man is a tri-part being, an everlasting soul, capable of abstract thoughts with the ability to reason and to communicate with God.
 - ii) Image involves the idea of representation and manifestation. Man is to be a representative of God with authority to act for God. Man was to express and articulate God's policies on the earth.
- c. Man was given "dominion" over creation (Gen 1:26, 28).
Dominion – word means control or reign. Dominion – can be either benevolent or destructive. It is best understood in the positive sense of stewardship.
- d. Lord Jesus reaffirmed the higher value of men over birds and animals (Matt 10:31; 12:12).
While sparrows and sheep have intrinsic value Man has a much greater value.
- e. The Bible establishes that plants and animals were given to man for food and clothing for the blessing of man (Gen 9:3).

4) Error #4 - Worship of the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25).

Environmentalism in its extreme elevates either Nature (as an impersonal force) or creatures to become objects of worship rather than worshiping the true God.

Biblical Response:

- a. God intended that nature and creation should turn men toward the true God (Rom 1:20)
God's power and wisdom are demonstrated in creation.
Those who reject truth ultimately end up worshiping the creature – either animals, self, or nature (Rom 1:25).
- b. Christians value both creatures and the created environment but we worship the Creator.
Contemplation and respect for creation should lead to worship of God (Ps 8 and 104).

5) Error #5 - Substitution of an alternative moral code.

In recent years environmental organizations have promoted a morality based on the treatment of the earth or the environment which is given higher authority than God's moral code set forth in the Scriptures. Environmentalists hold that recycling, abstaining from SUV's, eating a vegetarian diet, preserving animal life are higher forms of morality than the morality encapsulated in the Ten Commandments.

Biblical Response:

- a. N.T. forewarned that in last times men would establish their own moral codes (2 Tim 4:3).
- b. Lord Jesus stressed moral righteousness as set forth in the Scriptures (Matt 5:20).
- c. "It is not what goes into a man that defiles but what comes out of the heart" (Mt 15:11)

6) Error #6 - Christianity is the cause of today's environmental problems.

Many in the environmentalist movement lay the blame for today's environmental problems at the Judeo-Christian teaching that man has "dominion" over creation. In assuming dominion Man has felt free to use nature solely for his own benefit with out regard to the long-term effects. The environmentalist's solution is to reject all Biblical teachings.

Biblical Response:

- a. While no doubt there have been abuses, “Christian” lands have not been alone in their abuse of nature – making of Easter Island and Sahara deserts. Nations and cultures with Christian influences have generally had the best track records regarding pollution. This is demonstrated in the environmental disasters left in the wake of Communism.
- b. Teaching of Scripture regarding man’s responsibility toward Creation and the environment is quite protective of the Environment (see below).
- c. The world’s ecological problems are caused by man’s fallen nature (Gen 3) and his resulting abuse of the environment (Rev 11:18).

7) Error #7 - The solution for environmental issues is for man to live in better harmony with nature.

Implicit in this assumption is that aboriginal peoples are assumed to be much more in harmony with nature than western culture. Modern man is told that he must “reconnect” with nature.

Biblical Response:

- a. The Fall of Gen 3 caused a break in man’s relationship with God foremost. However, the Fall also disrupted man’s relationship with man and man’s relationship with nature.
- b. The Bible calls for man to first have his relationship with God restored through salvation, Once we have a right relationship with God then all other relationships can be repaired.

B. THE CHRISTIAN’S PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ENVIRONMENT.

The Christian should value Creation and respect the environment for the following reasons:

- 1) **Creation reveals the character of God** (Rom 1:20; Psalm 19:1; 50:6)
Creation (and its creatures) should lead me to appreciate the character of the Creator.
- 2) **God values the animals/plants.**
 - a. God created them – anything that God makes should be valued.
 - b. God cares for all of His Creation (Psalm 104:27-30)
God clothes the flowers of the field (Matt 6:30)
God values a sparrow (Matt 10:29) – “not one sparrow falls to the ground”...
God feeds the birds (Matt 6:26)
- 3) **Creation has also been redeemed by the Cross of Christ** (Rom 8:19-22).
Creation was cursed and marred by man’s sin. When Man fell, nature also fell.
Christ through His death on the Cross has redeemed a fallen creation.
All creation “groans” and “travails” awaiting its final redemption.
- 4) **Creation will praise God in future day** (Rev 5:13).
Son of Man will one day assume universal dominion over all creation.

C. THE CHRISTIAN’S RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THE ENVIRONMENT

- 1) **Man’s responsibility for dominion** (Gen 1:26, 28; Psalm 8:6-8).
 - a. Dominion is not ownership – “the earth is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1)
 - b. Dominion is the idea of stewardship. “Dominion” means control or reign. Dominion can be either benevolent or destructive. Best understood in the positive sense of stewardship. Man is

given authority over the earth and creation for the blessing not only of man but for nature it's self.

- c. Man was told to "subdue" the earth prior to the fall. Man given responsibility for controlling and mastering the environment. Man to cultivate the Garden (Gen 2:15)
- d. Man will be held accountable for his use of the earth (Isa 5:8-10, Rev11:18).

2) **Biblical principals of Conservation.**

The principles of Scripture indicate that man is responsible for using the land in a way the preserves its productiveness and does not destroy the environment.

- a. Man is called to "dress and keep" the Garden (Gen 2:15)
"keep" – means loving, caring, sustaining. Word used in Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24)
- b. While the Sabbath system of rests in the O.T. had a spiritual meaning it also provided a physical blessing by allowing the land to rejuvenate (Lev 25:1-12; Ex 23:10-11).
- c. Israel told not to cut down all of the trees when they came into the land (Duet 20:19-20).
- d. Lord Jesus caused the scraps from feeding of the four/five thousand to be picked up (Mt 14:20).
- e. Judgement of God against those who used up all the fields for development (Is 5:8)

3) **"Animal rights" according to the Bible.**

While God created animals for man's blessing He commands that they be protected and preserved.

- a. Animals were designed by God for human use and consumption.
God killed the first animals to make skins for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21).
Commandment after the flood to Noah about eating animals (Gen 9:3).
Lord Jesus ate fish and Passover lamb (Luke 22:15; John 21:13).
Lord rode a donkey into Jerusalem (Luke 19:35).
- b. Bible commands respect for animals in their own sphere.
"A righteous man regards the life of his animal" (Prov 12:10).
"You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain" (Deut 25:4).
- c. Need for preservation of species – Duet 22:6 – responsibility to not take the mother bird with her young.

4) **Proper use of nature - to focus on our relationship with God.**

Lord Jesus often withdrew to the mountainside, the wilderness, the garden and the sea – almost always to spend time alone with God.

The created environment should focus attention toward the Creator and cause us to praise Him.