

intelligent design isn't." Rhetoric like that hardly disposes conservative Christians to trust the impeccably researched articles the magazine publishes about climate change.

All science is ultimately a matter of trust. The tools, methods, and mathematical skills scientists acquire over years of training are beyond the reach of the rest of us, even of scientists in different fields. Thanks to the creation-evolution debate, mistrust between scientists and conservative Christians runs deep. But those scarred by battles with evolutionists might still consider heeding the scientists who are warning us about climate change.

As an evangelical scientist said to me recently, the debate over climate change is very much like Pascal's wager, that famous argument for belief in God. Believe in God though he does not exist, Pascal argued, and you lose nothing in the end. Fail to believe when he does in fact exist, and you lose everything. Likewise, we have little to lose, and much technological progress, energy security, and economic efficiency to gain, if we act on climate change now—even if the worst predictions fail to come to pass. But if we choose inaction and are mistaken, we will leave our descendants a blighted world. As Pascal said, "You must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? Let us see."

Andy Crouch

For Further Study:

The Spiritual Practice of Caring for the Earth is defined as
“caring for the earth by honouring God as Creator, and celebrating his handiwork, recognising his delight in creation.”

- By contributing to the beauty of, and mending the brokenness of, this planet
- By sharing Gods earth - my backyard my flowers my vegetables—with others
- By growing in the realisation that all created things ultimately belong, not to humans, but to God.

Caring for Creation - four studies from Baptist World Aid Australia

<https://www.baptistworldaid.org.au/assets/Uploads/Caring-for-Creation-BOOK-FINAL.pdf>

Real Urgent and Personal - twenty page document from NZ's own Interchurch Bioethics Council

http://www.bioethicseducation.com/attachments/027_Climate%20Change%20Study.pdf

Greening the Church from US Presbyterians

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/ecc-guide-to-greening-presbyterian-churches.pdf>

Flourish e-zine

<http://www.flourishonline.org/2011/03/five-basic-creation-care-bible-studies/>

Vivian Coleman

DISCIPLESHIP COACH

www.godshapedlife.com

Email: reverendviv+website@gmail.com

godshapedlife

Spiritual Practices

Practice Six



Caring for Creation

“In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.” Job 12: 10

“Practice” means the repeated performance of a task or action regularly over time. A spiritual practice is exactly what the word suggests, a way to be deliberate about matters of the soul. But when we think of Spiritual Practices, we usually think of something inward, solitary, subjective. We don't realise that there are intensely practical virtues, like caring for our earthly home, that also benefit from deliberate and attentive practice.

“A godshaped life is a flourishing tree”

Proverbs 11:28

Vivian Coleman

www.godshapedlife.com

Caring For Creation

“The LORD God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it.”
Genesis 2: 15

“Global warming is a hoax”.

“There are plenty of animal and plant species left for us to use”.

“There’s still enough oil to last for years”.

You may have often heard these comments in casual conversation. In spite of the constant news reports that tell us our world is in serious trouble, there are those who argue against changing the way we live in light of impending ecological disaster. Among the voices raised on this issue, have you heard a Christian response? Is there even such a thing? If so, how are we addressing these complex challenges as followers of Jesus?

The Bible has many profound insights into “environmental issues” or what we might term “caring for God’s Creation”. Both within and outside the church, Christians can offer the environmental movement a valuable spiritual understanding and a response that ultimately evokes hope.

Some years ago Howard Snyder preached one of the “Greatest Sermons on Earth” to remind us of **four key Biblical truths** that undergird our thinking about this earth that God has made. They may seem obvious at first glance. But we often forget them, and talk and act as if the earth were of little concern to God — as if it were merely a warehouse of resources for us to use as we see fit. It is important that we have a biblical view of the earth, especially in these days of ecological concern and crisis.

I. The Earth is Good, Not Evil.

The Psalms affirm that the earth is good. “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” (Psalm 24: 1) Genesis 1 tells us the first light of creation was “good” (Gen. 1:4), and that having created the earth and the whole universe, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Because the earth is good, it is proper to love the earth. *God* loves the earth! It is an expression of his goodness. We should love all that God has made, and rejoice in it, as do the psalms over and over again. But here we face a problem. Are “the earth” and “the world” the same thing? Doesn’t the Bible tell us, “Do not love the world or anything in the world” (1 John 2:15)?

Yes, but it also says, “God so loved the world” This seeming contradiction goes away if we remember two points:

- a) When the Bible says not to love the world, it doesn’t mean the creation—Nature—that which God has made. There is nothing wrong with loving all the beautiful things God made, they are a part of earthly existence - gardens, art, music, etc.. This is why Paul says, Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever

Environmental Wager

Why evangelicals are—but shouldn’t be—cool toward global warming.
By Andy Crouch, Senior Editor (Christianity Today, August 2005, Vol. 49, No. 8)

The theory is taken for granted by nearly every scientist working in the field. But because it is difficult to confirm experimentally, a few vocal skeptics continue to raise pointed questions. The skeptics find a ready audience among evangelical Christians, with groups like Focus on the Family saying that “significant disagreement exists within the scientific community regarding the validity of this theory.”

I’m not talking about evolution. Or maybe I am.

The issue in question is not our distant past but our near future. The theory is the all-but-unanimous scientific consensus that human beings are changing the climate by emitting gigatons of carbon into the atmosphere, and that if we do nothing to change our behavior, the warming trend that has taken hold for the past century may well become a runaway gallop.

Prompt action could not only avert the worst consequences—extreme drought and ocean levels rising as much as three feet by 2100—but could actually open up a new era of prosperity through the development of new, more efficient technologies. Some evangelical leaders have called for action to address climate change. But the US administration, which generally listens carefully to conservative Christians, apparently hasn’t heard enough to reconsider its indifference. For many churchgoers, the issue seems murky, its complexity amplified by claims of “significant disagreement.”

There is in fact no serious disagreement among scientists that human beings are playing a major role in global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, whose scientific working group was chaired for many years by the evangelical Christian Sir John Houghton, concluded in 2001 that “most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities.” These conclusions, Houghton points out, were vetted by more than 100 governments including the United States: “No assessments on any other serious scientific topic have been so thoroughly researched and reviewed.”

Unfortunately, there is another politically loaded issue where scientific agreement has failed to convince the public. If evangelicals mistrust scientists when they make pronouncements about the future, it may be because of the history of antagonism between biblical faith and evolution. As pro-evolution philosopher Michael Ruse points out in a recent book, evolution began as an alternative to Christianity before it acquired scientific respectability. It was evolutionism — a naturalistic worldview that excluded the biblical Creator—before it was science.

The resulting battle between evolutionism and Christian faith has had countless unfortunate consequences. Some Christians resorted to a wooden interpretation of the first pages of Genesis that was no better as science than evolution was as a worldview. More recently, some scientists have reacted with fanatical hostility to the questions that proponents of Intelligent Design ask about evolution.

But perhaps no result of the creation-evolution stalemate is as potentially disastrous as the way it has stymied courageous action on climate change. A few years back, in a serious article about Intelligent Design that described one proponent’s books as “packed with provocative ideas,” the editors of *The New Yorker* chose the snippy headline, “Why

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Dunedin ecologist Bill Lee (<http://presbyterian.org.nz/publications/spanz-magazine/2008/september-2008/living-sustainably-in-gods-world>) notes that although many Christian traditions have a long history of living simply with minimal possessions, nowadays we are often linked to the materialistic lifestyle of the West. Some historians even argue that Christians are responsible for global pollution and resource depletion, because some of us have little concern for the present and feel that we can consume as much as we want. To break out of this caricature, we have to demonstrate by the way we live in our local communities, that we care for God's Creation, and for our neighbour, whatever their faith. tradition. So how are today's Christian communities practising this spiritual discipline? Across the world, Christians are working within and across denominations to create projects and programmes that meet the most pressing environmental concerns. In New Zealand, a number of churches and Christian ecological organisations have begun to make an impact.

Here are some suggestions for practising stewardship of Creation:

- Many churches promote recycling and energy conservation.
- A church in Hawkes Bay headed up a project with the wider community in restoring the Karamu Stream.
- Another planted 20 native trees around the church to encourage bird life into the area
- Some are growing and sharing food in their community, eg the church in Marlborough where young mums arrive at the church pre-school to find a table laden with free freshly-grown vegetables donated by the congregation.
- One of these churches developed a worm farm and others keep a composting bin.
- All ages are getting involved in picking up rubbish in the shopping centre, cleaning up beaches or weeding the graves in the church cemetery .
- In one local project to reduce car use, a DVD called "What would Jesus drive?" was shown and discussed.
- Another completed a study series on living simply, and watched and discussed the "Wasted" television programmes.
- A Wadestown congregation included "Lenten eco-walks" as part of their Easter preparation.
- A South Island church have stopped printing orders of service, in order to conserve paper.
- One city-based pastor made a commitment to cycling wherever possible and has not made a claim on the congregation for petrol for two years.
- Important insights can be gained by conducting an environmental audit of the church See <http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/env-audit.pdf>

is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Phil. 4:8).

- b) The physical creation, is not evil. It is God's good work; the result of his wonderful creative genius. In this sense, it is all right to love the earth, to enjoy it, as long as we first of all, and deeply and continually, love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. What the Bible says is that we should not love the sinful world system—that is, the corrupted set of values that have become dominant in the world, and the twisted, tainted things that have come from these wrong values.

So we should not love the sinfulness of the world. This leads, however, to our second major point:

II. The Earth is Diseased and Disordered because of Sin.

The earth is not in its normal state. It is not as God created it. It suffers the effects of sin. Not its own sin, of course, because the earth cannot sin. But the whole earth suffers the effects of human sin.

How did this happen? We don't know for sure. There is a mystery here. In some way, the Fall of Adam and Eve disordered the whole creation. There are many hints of this in Genesis. The picture of the environment in the first few chapters of Genesis is much different from what we see following the Fall and the Flood. The dialogue of science and Scripture may someday help us to understand this better. But clearly after the judgments of Genesis 3 and 6 we see increasing disorder, shortened life spans, and a partially ruined yet still beautiful earth. In the biblical picture, men and women sin but not only against God. They also sin against one another and against the earth. The Bible shows us that mistreating the earth is one of the clearest evidences of human sinfulness. We continue to sin against the earth - God's creation! - when we pollute the earth, or when we waste earth's resources, or when we fail to practice good ecological stewardship.

Romans 8 puts this graphically. It says the *whole creation* is in "bondage to decay." In fact, "the whole creation" *groans* "as in the pains of childbirth, like a pregnant woman groaning to deliver her baby. A painful image. (The Old Testament speaks about this in several different ways) And yet the image also contains hints of hope, of the possibility of liberation.

III. The Earth is Our Responsibility as God's Stewards.

The Bible teaches a third key lesson about the earth. We do not own it. There really is no such thing as private property in the biblical worldview, because God is the owner of everything. But caring for it is a shared responsibility. God has placed us humans on the earth to care for and take care of it. This is clear from Genesis 1 and 2. Man and woman, *together*, are to care for the earth which God has made; this was the first great task God gave humanity. And it has never been revoked. It wasn't cancelled by sin, although sin explains why humankind have massively failed to

fulfil the call to stewardship. We have done to the earth what we have done to each other: Exploited, harmed, oppressed, raped, and ravaged the earth. In this matter, the human race has disobeyed God.

Stewardship means “taking proper care of,” as those entrusted with this responsibility by someone in authority. This is a basic biblical theme. We see from Scripture that stewardship is not just about time and money. In fact, there are two areas of stewardship mentioned in the Bible that are often neglected:

- a) the stewardship of creation, of all the world God has made and given us, and
- b) the stewardship of God's grace. 1 Peter 4:10 tells us that we should be “good stewards of the poikilitic (literal translation = many-coloured) grace of God”.

Here is our greatest calling as stewards: taking proper care of the material world, and being faithful channels of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we often are lopsided here. We may fail to show as much concern for the earth as God does. Yet this is a fundamental part of our stewardship. It has interlocking local, regional, national, and global dimensions. As followers of Jesus and as Christian congregations we need to ask what this kind of faithfulness here means, to take inventory of the ways our lives already touch on these dimensions, and how we can exercise faithful stewardship of the whole earth, the whole planet. Of course this is not just a Christian concern, others have these concerns, and whether they recognize it or not, these non-Christians who work to care for the earth are, in some part, doing the work of God.

How we treat the planet, the whole created order, then, is of concern to God.

IV. The Earth will be Judged and Restored.

Here is the fourth and final truth: The earth will be judged and restored. There is an end of the story of earth and ecology, and it is in God's hands. Notice the promise of Romans 8:21: The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. An amazing promise! Just as we will be saved, so also the earth is to be saved—that is, “liberated from its bondage to decay.” Just as we will be saved from all the effects of sin, so also the whole creation will be saved from the effects of sin. What a cause for wonder, meditation, and praise to God!

In the Bible we see two recurring themes with relation to the earth. One is judgment. The other is restoration. These are not contradictory, because both centre in the work of Jesus Christ. They're part of the same story. Jesus is both the Judge and the Liberator/Saviour. We know this with regard to our own sin. But the same thing is true with regard to the whole creation.

The “model” of what God is doing in the created order, as in our own lives, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Christians we believe in the resurrection of the body, not just the survival of the soul. The fact that Jesus rose again physically and materially, not just spiritually, tells us that the material existence — things like hands and blood, cells and molecules, rocks and quarks and protons — will be

renewed, according to their kind, Paul seems to suggest in 1 Cor. 15:35-44. Perhaps we can speak of the “death” and “resurrection” or restoration of the whole cosmos! What God has done in Jesus, he is doing in us and in the whole created order: Judgment and restoration. Even “the creation itself” will come to enjoy “the glorious freedom of the children of God.” There is hope for the earth.

The Book of Revelation presents a wonderful picture of this. Judgment, but also liberation. The picture of the last chapters of Revelation is really a picture of God's creation liberated and restored. Is this heaven or earth in Revelation? The point is, it seems to be both! It is the joining of heaven and earth. In Rev. 21 and 22, the Heavenly Jerusalem *descends* to earth. This is all part of the *new creation* that we await and eagerly hope for. The earth will be *judged and restored* as part of God's great plan of salvation.

Conclusion.

“The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein”

Psalm 24:1.

This is the deepest reason why we should care for the earth. Nothing in the New Testament suggests that the biblical concern for creation was cancelled by the coming of Christ. Quite the opposite. In the risen Jesus Christ we see the firstfruits of a renewed creation, the promise of creation restored. So we seek God's help in being earthkeepers today.

This is God's world. It is *our* world, but only in the sense of our stewardship and our enjoyment as the good creation of God. So we see these four great truths:

1. The earth is good, not bad.
2. The earth is diseased and disordered because of sin.
3. The earth is our responsibility as God's stewards.
4. The earth will be judged and restored.

How should this make a difference in the way we, as Christians, live?

- a) We may enjoy God's good creation, praise God for it and continue to study Scripture for what it says about the earth.
- b) We may live before the world as good stewards of the earth. Christians should be at the forefront of modelling good environmental stewardship. Minimally, this certainly includes recycling, healthy eating, and supporting sound ecological policies in government and business.
- c) We can teach earth stewardship to our children and honour and support those Christians whom God calls to a ministry of responsibility to the earth.

“This World is Not My Home?” published in *The Best Preaching on Earth: Sermons on Caring for Creation*, Judson Press, 1996. © 1996 Howard A. Snyder