



Today we continue our series called Trending Now and we are looking at the topic of ecology and the environment. Ecology is the study of relationships among organisms. Man, as one of those organisms, is having the greatest impact on the environment. I vividly remember seeing this firsthand crossing the border from the Dominican Republic into Haiti. The DR is a lush, green, tropical paradise but just over the border it's an entire different story. For decades Haiti has suffered incredible third world poverty and forced immigration. Environmentally, this has led to deforestation, soil erosion, and even many farmlands have completely stopped producing. Sadly, this is happening all over the world. Advanced technology, industrialization, and the continuing rise of global populations have created a long list of serious environmental problems:

- Deforestation
- Topsoil loss
- Pollution, greenhouse gases, and toxic wastes
- Global warming (whatever you believe about that issue!)
- Energy consumption and waste, use of fossil fuels
- Food: over consumption, waste, industrialized food production
- Species extinction
- Clean water and access to it
- Clean air
- Use of herbicides and pesticides

I'm not a scientist, but as a follower of Jesus we should ask ourselves a few questions:

- What does the Bible say about ecology and the environment?
- Is there any ethical obligation to preserve and protect the environment?
- As a follower of Jesus, what is our responsibility to care for the earth?
- How does caring for the earth impact how we care for one another?
- Why aren't Christians on the front lines caring for the environment?

The first thing we need to do this morning is understand God's view of ecology and the environment. I ask your forgiveness in advance for any oversimplification, but there are at least three competing world views. The first view is ego-centric. This view

places humans at the center of concern. God may have created the universe, but he did so for our sake and has now handed it over to us. We are now in charge and should use the earth's resources for our benefit alone. The earth, land, air, water and other living animals are given worth only in terms of their value to humanity. This view sees no reason to build in some limitations on consumption and greed.

The second view is eco-centric. This view forms much of the modern environmental movement. It's the view that human beings should receive no special status. Humans are just one species among all the others on earth. All living creatures—animals, fish, trees—all have equal worth. So, if you kill a sea lion, it's like killing a human being. Both equally deserve the same punishment. If an eco-centric person speaks of God, they tend to speak of him pantheistically, meaning God is in all things—nature, trees, animals, and in all world religions. Nature and earth itself is worshiped.

The third world view we will call theo-centric. It rejects both the ego-centric and eco-centric views. The theo-centric view puts God, the Creator, at the center of creation and all creation finds their value in him. God is both transcendent (apart from nature) and immanent (involved with creation). Therefore nature should not be worshipped, nor should we devise ways to destroy the environment. We, as followers of Jesus, are called to be stewards (managers) of creation. Creation care is a biblical calling and responsibility that all Christians share. Those are the three predominant views out there.

What I want to do next is look at the Bible and see how we arrive at a proper Christian world view about ecology and the environment. How do we come to embrace a theo-centric view of creation care? To do that, let's go back to the book of beginnings, the book of Genesis. It's here in Genesis 1-3 that we'll see God's original design for creation. I've outlined five biblical principles that support the theo-centric view of creation.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures

of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:1, 11, 20-21, 25).

God's Original Design for Creation—Five Biblical Foundations

God created everything

If we are going to have a Christian world view about creation, it starts here. God is the Creator and everything that exists has been created by him and for him. The first thing God does is he creates. The word in the Hebrew is "bara." Man makes things. But, only God creates something from nothing. And because God created all things, this assumes that all things are under his control. He is both Creator and Sustainer. From the very beginning we see God giving order and life to the dark, formless void. Here's the funny thing: today many people struggle with the idea that God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days. But did you know that all throughout church history the question was different? Many theologians wondered why it took God so long! Principle One: God created everything.

God loves his creation

"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day" (Gen. 1:31).

Like an artist admiring his masterpiece, God steps back, takes it all in, and breathes out, "It is very good." God loves his creation and everything about it. Remember, at this point there was no disease, no natural disasters, no thorns and thistles. Only perfect beauty and majesty. Principle Two: God loves his creation.

God created us and placed us in authority over creation to care for it

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:26-28).

I think we can all see how words like rule and subdue can lead people to think this means domination and exploitation of the world's resources. It doesn't. Rule means God gave humanity the authority to rule over earth as God's representatives or vice regents. Because we've been created in the image of God, this means we rule as God would rule. The idea here is of care, responsibility, and stewardship. We treat the earth and people as God would. The word "subdue" in Hebrew is "kabash" and it means to bring into servitude, to make the earth's resources beneficial for ourselves. It means to develop them and put them to good use, not abuse them.

It's also clear from these verses that man is above all other created things. Only men and women are created in the image of God. That means we are not equal to plants and animals, we are set above them. To be created in the image of God means we represent and rule for God. This distinction sets the Christian world view apart from any atheistic or pantheistic world view. The next thing God does is he places man in the Garden and gives him further responsibility to care for it.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Gen. 2:15).

Even in a perfect world, God gave Adam and Eve work to do in caring for the Garden of Eden. He places them there to work it and take care of it. The Hebrew word for "care" is "shamar" which means to preserve, watch and keep. We imagine the Garden of Eden to be a perfect tropical paradise. Yes, it was incredibly beautiful, but the garden still needed work and tending. The plants and shrubs needed pruning. Fruit had to be cultivated. Animals needed to be named and cared for. Adam and Eve needed to procreate and fill the earth with decedents (it was a tough job but someone had to do it!). That's Principle Three: God created us and placed us in authority over creation to care for it.

"The Fall" broke God's creation

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:6, 17-19).

Much can be said about this passage but I want to look at it through the lens of ecology and the environment. It's pretty incredible to think Adam and Eve had absolute freedom in the garden to enjoy everything God created. They were in paradise. They could freely eat from any of the other trees. They had complete fellowship with God and with one another. Yet the possibility to sin and do evil was present. God gave them only one boundary for their good and protection—don't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Suddenly the devil, disguised as a serpent, enters the Garden. He doesn't tell Eve, "Hey Eve, how would you like to be damned and destroyed today?" No, he quietly slips in the Garden and asks Eve a spiritual question that will cause her to doubt God's goodness, "Did God actually say?" Eating a piece of fruit was not the sin. Disobeying God's Word and distrusting God's character was the sin. Adam and Eve chose between good and God. They ate of the forbidden fruit thinking they'd become more like God.

The result was God's judgment against man and creation. God strikes at the core of who a man is: his work, his activity, and his desire to provide for his family. Adam and Eve are **not** cursed, the ground is. Did you see that? Work was originally a blessing from God. But, the very ground that was once a sense of joy and fulfillment is now cursed with thorns and thistles. If you have a job you hate, you can thank Adam and Eve for it. Then God gives Adam a painful new judgment: you are dust and you'll return to dust. A reminder for us all that ultimately death is inevitable. The fall broke humanity and broke creation. Adam and Eve were then banished from the Garden.

What does it mean that the ground is cursed by God? First, not every negative effect on our planet we experience is directly tied to man's poor stewardship of the planet. Yes, creation is broken because of man's sin in the garden, but we would be ignorant to think that all disturbances on earth are due to us behaving badly. Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and the effects of changing weather patterns are not necessarily all caused by humanity. They are also effects of the Fall. And in the same way, we would be ignorant to think that humanity's poor stewardship has in no way affected our planet negatively either. Both are true. So, that's Principle Four: "The Fall" broke God's creation. Let's look lastly at Principle Five: God's covenant with Noah.

God made a covenant with all of his creation

"I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth" (Gen. 9:15-16).

Theologians call this the Noahic Covenant. After the flood, God establishes a covenant, a binding agreement, between Noah and all living creatures. Notice how God's covenant, his promise, is not just with mankind, it's with the entire earth, "all living creatures." That means God is committed not only to protecting mankind from destruction but also the earth. Intertwined with God's commitment to humanity is his commitment to all living creatures as well. This means God will one day fully redeem creation as well as redeeming people through his Son Jesus Christ.

This means the earth is not going to hell in a hand basket. The earth will one day be fully renewed and restored. And God's people will enjoy creation on this earth as it was always meant to be. Listen to Romans 8:19-21, "*For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*" As followers of Jesus, our hope is looking forward to that day when God will fully redeem his people and his world. On that day there will be no more sickness, disease, or natural disasters. When Jesus returns senseless violence and death will be no more. Heaven will truly come to earth. Justice will roll like a river. That's principle five: God made a covenant with all his creation.

Let me sum it all up: God created everything, God loves his creation, God created us and placed us in authority over creation to care for it. The Fall broke his creation and God made a covenant with all his creation to never destroy them or the earth again. That's what it means to have a biblical world view of ecology and the environment. Although mankind was given dominion over the world, caring for the earth and its resources have not always been practiced. Therefore an environmental crisis has developed.

Environmental Stewardship

How should Christians respond? Let me give you three ways. First, inform yourself biblically. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ you should study and know what the Bible says about stewardship of creation. There are many verses in the OT that speak to creation care. God actually gave us insight into caring for the land, treating domesticated animals properly, respecting wildlife, conserving trees, and even how to deal with human wastes. In fact, on the Youversion Bible app, under events, we

placed a 30-day devotional about Creation Care. That would be a great way to inform yourself biblically.

Second, get involved. One Yale study revealed that Christians were the least likely to be interested in ecological issues. And because Christians have not been involved in this area, the New Age movement has replaced them and has greatly influenced environmentalism. We need to change that. Why don't Christians get involved in environmental issues? Some Christians see the world as evil and corrupted by sin. In their view, the world is not worth protecting, because, "Hey, we're all going to heaven anyway". But, this thinking directly contradicts Scripture. Others are just plain scared of the people who are passionate about the environment. For the rest of us, we just don't have the time. But, at some level, we all need to think through ways both big and small that we can get involved locally and globally.

Third, practice what you preach. All Christians should practice sound ecological principles. If you don't recycle, please do. Buy yourself a reusable water bottle instead of a case of water bottles from Costco. Shop locally when you can. Buy organic food when you can afford it. Reduce your waste. Start a compost pile. Eat your leftovers. Look into where your clothes come from and how they are made. The list goes on. You can't do everything, but you can do something. As a church, we need to do better in this area

as well. Look around our campus and you won't see any recycle bins, only trash cans. We need to change that. I'd love to see a group of people at CPC, passionate for the environment, helping us do better in this area. If you are interested in working towards that effort, please let me know.

In our culture today it's cool to "go green" because we will look better with that Patagonia vest on, feel better by using all natural products, and we'll fit in with our electric cars. But, as followers of Jesus Christ we have deeper reasons to go green. We serve the Creator of the universe and he created the earth and took the time to tell us his plan for it. The God of the universe has given us the incredible task of caring for our world. And we have an operating manual for our planet right in front of us in the Bible, and we must allow that manual to change our thinking and behavior.

I'll end with this great quote from Pope Francis, "Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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