



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. For our purposes today we'll be considering how humanity interacts with creation.

How have you interacted with the physical world this past week? Did you drink coffee? That's only possible because humanity discovered that the pit inside a coffee cherry or coffee berry could be roasted, then ground up, and then hot water poured over it to produce the world's leading beverage. Most of us drink coffee every day. It's become such a popular beverage that coffee bean exports account for over 50% of some developing nations' foreign exchange earnings. That's a great and simple example of how we interact with our physical world.

As I pulled my kids and nephews behind the boat this past week, that's another great and simple example of how we interact with our physical world. Someone discovered how we could power a boat, attach a rope to it, inflate an oversized tube and pull it over the waves. All of us were laughing our heads off. We had so much fun!

This is a beautiful world, filled with the wonder and beauty of God. Unfortunately, there are countless examples of humanity abusing and neglecting the environment too. It doesn't take an expert researcher to learn this. Advanced technology 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
- Fracking
- Food consumption and waste
- Species extinction
- Clean water and access to it
- Clean air
- Use of herbicides and pesticides

Most of us aren't scientists, but as followers of Jesus we should ask ourselves a few questions: What does the Bible say about ecology and the environment? Should we be trying to balance our role in a capitalistic system designed to maximize profits

with thoughtful environmental care? Why aren't Christians typically the most involved in environmental preservation and care?

These are difficult questions that I can't fully answer for each of you today. But we can walk away with a basic understanding of God's view of ecology and the environment. To begin, there are three views of man's role in the created world. This will be an oversimplification of the issue but it will at least give us a place to begin.

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 dominion over to us.
- We're in charge and should use the earth's resources for our benefit alone.
- The idea is that 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 limitations on consumption or the use of natural resources in the world.

The second view is eco-centric. This view forms much of the modern environmental movement.

- Human beings should receive no special status.
- Humanity is just one species that is equal in value to animals, fish or the general physical world.
- If an eco-centric person speaks of God, they tend to speak of him pantheistically: God is **in all** things, in nature, in trees, etc.

The third world view we will call theo-centric. The theo-centric view puts God, the Creator, at the center of creation and all of his creation finds their value in him. This view is the most Biblical.

- God is both transcendent (apart from nature) and immanent (involved with the creation).
- God is both Creator and Sustainer, therefore nature shouldn't be worshipped, nor should it be needlessly destroyed.
- Followers of Jesus are called to be stewards (managers) of creation.

So, there are the three broad categories that help us understand the different approaches people use when thinking about ecology and the environment. Most of us probably fall into the theo-centric category with varying amounts of ego-centric and eco-centric ideas sprinkled in. What I want to do now is look

at the Bible and see how a person arrives at a proper Christian world view about ecology and the environment. Turn with me to Genesis 1.

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 (1, 11, 20-21, 25).

God Created Everything

A Christian world view about ecology and the environment starts here. In the very first verse in the Bible, God creates. The word in the Hebrew is "bara." It's a word used only three times in Genesis and is only used for God's activity in the entire Bible. While man can "make" things, only God "creates" something from nothing. Scripture calls God both Creator and Sustainer, meaning that after he created everything from nothing, he also rules over his creation and sustains it.

In the first three days:

- God creates light
- Makes dry land appear
- Produces vegetation on the earth

On day four:

- God creates the sun, moon, and stars

On days five and six:

- God creates life in the sea, the sky and on the land
- God created all this by his powerful word, "And God said."

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" (v. 31).

Like an artist admiring his masterpiece, God steps back, takes it all in and sighs, "It is very good." He loves his creation and everything about it. Remember, at this point there was no disease, no thorns and thistles. There was only perfect beauty and majesty.

God Placed Humanity 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" (verses 26–28).

I think we can see how words like "subdue" and "rule" can lead to domination and exploitation of the world's resources. These words have been given license to exploit creation without care for the well being of earth and its non-human inhabitants.

What do the Hebrew words "subdue" and "rule" over creation mean? The word subdue in Hebrew is "kabash" and it means to bring into servitude, to make the earth's resources beneficial to ourselves, to develop them and put them to good use. The word rule means that God gave humanity the authority to rule over earth as God's representatives, or vice regents. We are responsible to use god-like stewardship of God's creation. This is a by-product of humanity being the only part of creation that was created in the image of God. We should rule as he would rule.

When we put the meaning of subdue and rule together, we get an important teaching of scripture: God's plan is for humanity to use and develop the natural resources of earth for our benefit while taking care of the earth and protecting it from exploitation.

George Washington Carver and his work with the peanut is a great example of this. In 1896, farmers didn't view peanuts as a cash crop, but sharecroppers had worn out their fields planting them with cotton year after year. Carver knew plants containing protein, like the peanut, help replenish the soil. He convinced farmers to rotate the planting of cotton with peanuts. Then he had to figure out what to do with all the peanuts! Carver then found ways farming families could incorporate peanuts into their diets and industrial uses. Carver is credited for discovering over 300 different uses for the peanut and he replenished the soil at the same time. His own estimation of himself was summed up in his words, "Without my Savior, I am nothing." He sought his Creator for guidance in all things, and gave God the credit for all his discoveries. That's subduing and ruling like God intended.

“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.”

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. 2:16-17, 3:6,
3:17-19).

Adam and Eve had absolute freedom in the Garden to enjoy everything that God had created, except to eat from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They had complete fellowship with God and with one another, yet they disobeyed God’s Word, distrusted God’s character and they ate of the fruit.

That act released sin in the world with devastating effect. The one effect we’re looking at today is how that changed the physical world. These verses from Genesis 3 say that God cursed the ground, that food will be produced through painful toil (it must have been easy before!) and that the land will produce thorns and thistles. So after humanity broke God’s creation, subduing and ruling became more difficult. Now we have to deal with natural disasters, difficult work and the sinfulness of humanity which exponentially continues to break God’s creation.

God Provides Hope for His Creation

God made a covenant with all of his creation after the flood to never destroy all life again. This is described in Genesis 6-8.

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).

Other insightful verses in Romans describe how creation longs for the return of Christ.

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 (Rom. 8:19-21).

These five points are a Biblical world view of ecology and the environment:

- God created everything
- God loves his creation
- God placed humanity in authority over creation to care for it
- “The Fall” broke God’s creation
- God provides hope for his creation

This is the theo-centric view of the world I was describing earlier. So the question is, How should Christians apply this to our lives? 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 subduing and ruling over creation. There are many verses in the OT that speak to creation care. Here are some examples: Care for the land, treat domesticated animals properly, respect wildlife, conserve trees, bury your wastes. Don’t allow yourself to get so focused on God’s love for people that you neglect God’s creation. People are more important but creation is important too.

Second, get involved. One Yale study revealed that Christians were the least likely to be interested in ecological issues. Since Christians haven’t been involved in this area, people with an eco-centric world view have greatly influenced modern environmentalism. They work toward protecting the earth because it’s all they’ve got. A Christian should work to steward the earth wisely because God’s entrusted its care to us. We need to get involved.

Now I want to give you some examples of troubling developments in our environment. Remember, I’m not a scientist or expert in any of these areas. I’ve given a lot of effort to be thorough in my research but I encourage you to check me and follow up with your own research if any of these topics interests you.

Paul Ehrlich, President of the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford University identified the major environmental threats to our world in a message he gave to the University of Colorado in 2014, titled, “Distress Signals from Earth.” Two of the greatest threats were less energy return on energy invested and population growth and consumption.

Less and less energy return on energy invested

In the old days of Texas when they were drilling for oil, you'd have to use 1 unit of energy to get 50 units out. Now they have to put in 1 unit of energy to get 4 out. The experts on the care of the environment are greatly concerned about this trend because we're using up the natural resources of earth at an alarming rate. Directly tied to this is ...

Population growth and consumption

Ehrlich said, "I don't know any scientist who's looked at this problem who doesn't think we are far beyond the point of no return." Most experts believe the earth can sustain a population of 2 to 2.5 billion people. We are currently at 7.2 billion.

Honey bees

The 2010 internationally acclaimed documentary *The Vanishing of the Bees* investigates the disappearance of millions of honeybees around the world. It's called Colony Collapse Disorder. Here's why honeybees are important: they pollinate the fruits and vegetables we eat. We need honeybees. Some European countries have stopped CCD by banning the use of certain pesticides on crops. In the United States we continue to see CCD because the government hasn't seen significant proof linking the pesticides to the death of the bees so farmers continue their use and the bees continue to disappear.

Great Barrier Reef

The 2012 documentary *Great Barrier Reef* was produced by the BBC. Ocean acidification, local pollution, climate change and tourism are slowly killing the reef eco system. Experts are saying that the world is now in the midst of the longest and probably worst global coral bleaching event in history. When the oceans' reefs die, ocean life dies too.

One more example I'll give you this morning relates to the food we eat. In the 2008 documentary *Food, Inc.* the industry around

the food we eat is investigated. What effect do the growth hormones and antibiotics have on humans when we eat meat? Is there an ethical and moral issue involved for farmers and the government as they balance maximizing profits and providing healthy food?

It can be difficult today to ascertain accurate information on topics like these. With just a little research you can find support on both sides of these issues. Like I said earlier, I've tried to present information in an unbiased manner and encourage you to investigate any issue that interests you. For most of us, we're just trying to live faithfully to Jesus and subdue and rule God's creation in our sphere of influence.

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 from Costco. Shop locally when you can. Buy organic if you can afford it. Reduce your waste. Eat your leftovers. The list goes on and on.

Third, don't despair. It's normal to get discouraged and for your heart to be troubled by problems in our environment. I think God's heart breaks when he sees the erosion of his perfect creation. There are some big problems in our world today. But followers of Jesus shouldn't let their hearts be ruled by anything other than Jesus. So while we should work toward subduing and ruling the earth, our hope isn't connected to it. We know that at the second coming of Jesus, God will create a new heaven and a new earth. It will be perfect. Until then, our role is to live faithfully to Jesus, spread his message of love, and treat the environment like God wants us to treat it.

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