

Why should we care for creation?

As Christians we are stewards of all the things, which the Lord has entrusted to us for us to use and enjoy. This includes the physical world around us. Long ago in the sixteenth century John Calvin said: “Let him who possess a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavour to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated Moreover, that this economy, and this diligence, with respect to those good things which God has given us to enjoy, may flourish among us; let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses.” Clearly Calvin thought that caring responsibly for the created world around us was part and parcel of Christian discipleship. Indeed that is the witness of the Scriptures as is evident in the following brief overview:

1. Creation

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit act together in creation; they brought it into being and continue to sustain it. The Triune God has made a good world which reflects His own character. Everything made, both physical and spiritual, reflects something of God’s goodness. Creation care is therefore a natural extension of recognising God’s goodness in creation, His handiwork. Our responsibility for its care is an inevitable consequence of our allegiance to our Creator as we live in a world belonging to God, created for us.

2. The Fall

The entrance of sin into God’s good world has disrupted the relationship of humankind with both God and His physical creation. The Old Testament repeatedly highlights the link between man’s sin and its disruptive effects on the environment, spoiling and marring God’s good creation. Creation care explores the connections between human selfishness, greed and exploitation on the one hand and the adverse effect that such behaviour has on God’s creation. Creation care will particularly highlight the way that many of the world’s poorest suffer through changes in their environment due to the effect of human greed in the more industrialised parts of the world.

3. Redemption

Christ changes everything. His incarnation affirms the goodness of God's physical creation and this is underlined in His teaching ministry where parables draw on the natural world and in His healing ministry where physical bodies are restored to full health. Further His resurrection is the decisive demonstration that God's physical creation is good. It inaugurates the new creation where death is no more.

The cross of Christ is key. The cross is ultimately the answer to all the disrupted relationships produced by sin. As we turn to Jesus as our Saviour who forgives our sin and restores our relationship with God, so we embrace Jesus as our Lord and start to live joyfully under His rule in the power of the Spirit. This involves loving God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and loving our neighbour as ourselves. Our priority in seeking to love God and our neighbour is to be involved in enabling people to be reconciled to God through the work of Christ as we proclaim this gospel. As a consequence of the gospel and our new relationship with God, one aspect of loving Him involves respecting the created world which belongs to Him. Further as a consequence of the gospel and our new relationship with our neighbours, one aspect of loving them involves seeking to alleviate the suffering many experience due to the effects of man's sinfulness on the environment, particularly the world's poorest.

Creation care therefore arises as a natural outworking of the gospel as we respond in love towards God and our neighbours.

4. Consummation

We look forwards to the great Day when the Lord Jesus Christ will return when believers will receive new resurrection bodies and the physical world will be renewed as part of the new heavens and the new earth. This decisive action will finally undo all the disruptive aspects of the Fall in such a way that God's goodness and glory shines even more brightly than at the beginning. Our involvement in creation care cannot achieve this transformation but we work in hope, pointing towards this glorious future which Christ will establish. Therefore creation care will always point forwards to God's new creation as we anticipate our proper role within the new heavens and the new earth, serving God and living in harmony with others.

Summary

Our involvement in creation care should help us appreciate Christ as our loving Creator refreshing our adoration of our Triune God as we recognise ever more clearly that He is the author and owner of the world. It should help us to see sin and its effects more clearly highlighting the world's need for Christ and the proclamation of the gospel. As an entailment of that gospel, creation care will be amongst the ways in which we live under the Lordship of Christ. Through loving God and our neighbour we learn to live under God in His creation as originally intended, seeking to show love to those in need. Finally, creation care will point to the return of Christ and His glorious new creation.

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