

# Creation Caretakers—a Christian View of Environmental Stewardship

by Michael Lodahl

Nazarenes, with all Christians, believe the world we live in is essentially a good place. We read in Genesis 1 of God’s recurring approval over each stage of creation: “And God saw that it was good.” Even sin, for all its damaging and perverting effects in human life and society, cannot change Scripture’s fundamental estimation of the world as God’s good creation. “For everything created by God is good,” wrote Paul, “and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude.” Indeed, in the same letter he later wrote that “God... richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 4:4, 6:17, NASB).

We do not need much convincing; like all people, we Christians can and do appreciate the often exhilarating beauty of the world and its creatures. We do enjoy life and its blessings of air, water, food, friendships, warmth, and love. The Bible, far from condemning such fundamental blessings and goods of life, urges us to celebrate such sources of enjoyment, to be quick to thank God for them, and to “be generous and ready to share” them with others (1 Timothy 6:18, NASB). It is incumbent upon us to do all we can to ensure that all people experience God’s creation as “good” and full of enjoyment.

It is altogether too easy to forget that God entrusted this responsibility to us human beings.

We must continually remind ourselves, though, that most of the “others” with whom God calls us to share the goods and enjoyments of life are not yet here with us. They are our descendants, the people who are yet to come—children, grandchildren, offspring of our offspring. They are our “neighbors” of the future, and we are as surely called to love them as ourselves as we are called to love the neighbor next door today. For this reason, among others, God also calls us to care for the world of air, water, plants, and animals that we inherited from those who enjoyed God’s gift of life and earthly blessings before us. It is a legacy we are responsible to share with those yet to come.

It is altogether too easy to forget that God entrusted this responsibility to us human beings. After God repeatedly affirmed the goodness of creation’s elements, He created the human being as male and female in the divine image (Genesis 1:27). Part of what this means, according to Genesis, is that we human beings are to “rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (1:28, NASB). Essentially, then, we human beings are created by God to “image” or reflect who God is, and what God is like, to the rest of His good creation.

This implies that we have a responsibility not only to our “future neighbors,” the human beings who will live after us, but also to the creatures with whom we presently share God’s creation and over whom we are called by God to rule in His name.

Perhaps Christians have not had a particularly sparkling track record in this matter of caring for creation. But Nazarenes who teach and profess the Wesleyan and scriptural doctrine of entire sanctification ought to be front-runners. After all, Wesley on many occasions described entire sanctification as our “renewal in the image of God.” If God’s purpose in saving and sanctifying us is to restore and renew us in God’s own image, then according to Genesis 1 we are being restored (among other things) to care for and properly rule over God’s good creation.

To demonstrate that God’s compassionate care extends beyond human beings to include all creatures, Wesley often cited Psalm 145:9: “The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (KJV, emphasis added). Wesley preached that our recognition of this theological truth “may encourage us to imitate him whose mercy is over all his works. [It] may soften our hearts toward the meaner creatures, knowing that the Lord careth for them. It may enlarge our hearts towards those poor creatures to reflect that... not one of them is forgotten in the sight of our Father which is in heaven” (“The General Deliverance,” *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 6).

Commanded to build an ark to save God’s creatures from impending destruction, Noah provides a compelling model for the human role in preserving God’s creation. If we often assume that God is indifferent to the nonhuman world, we should recognize in this biblical narrative His commitment to saving creation as a whole. Indeed, the very first covenant in the Bible, initiated in the aftermath of the Flood, is between God and “every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth” (Genesis 9:16, NASB)! It is a covenant between God and creation, and not at all simply between God and human beings.

Further, the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8 that all creation groans to be saved, to be delivered from the suffering and futility that human sin has generated. And God hears its groaning! “Creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption,” Paul wrote confidently (v. 21, NASB). Since God’s plan of redemption includes this vast and wondrous creation in which we live, then how carefully and lovingly ought we to live in it today!

### **A Christian Worldview of Environmental Stewardship**

- We human beings are created by God to “image” or reflect who God is, and what God is like, to the rest of God’s good creation.
- In sanctification, we are restored in God’s image to care for and properly rule over His good creation.
- Most of the “others” with whom we are to share the goods and enjoyments of life are not yet here with us—our children, grandchildren, and offspring of our offspring—our “neighbors” of the future.
- We also have a responsibility to the nonhuman creatures with whom we presently share God’s creation and over whom we are called by God to rule in His name.

- It is incumbent upon us to do all we can to ensure that all people experience God's creation as "good" and full of enjoyment.
- Since God's plan of redemption includes this vast and wondrous creation in which we live, then how carefully and lovingly ought we to live in it today!

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