

**CREATION, CRISIS AND CONSERVATION CONFERENCE  
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**Creation, Crisis and Conservation**

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(notes to accompany powerpoint presentation)

**Four views on the relationship between environmentalism and biblical Christianity**

1. Environmentalism is *inimical* to biblical Christianity. This view holds that environmentalism is fundamentally anti-Christian, and is rooted in New Age, pagan and occultic thinking. While it is true that environmentalism has been influenced by profoundly unbiblical elements, it is going too far, and ignoring too much of what the Bible says, to claim that concerns for the environment are invidious to Christianity. Caring for Creation does not inevitably mean that we will worship the Creation rather than the Creator.

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2. Environmentalism is *irrelevant* to biblical Christianity. This attitude does not hold that environmentalism is inevitably anti-Christian, but it is irrelevant, because Creation is destined for destruction by fire. This view is based on 2 Peter 3: 7-10, which states: *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.* The problem with this view is that it is not careful in the interpretation of this passage, either in its immediate context, or in the context of the broader biblical revelation. The immediate context of the passage is a review of the story of Noah, and verse 6 states: *By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.* It is clear that the flood did not totally annihilate the world, and likewise we should not interpret future destruction by fire in the subsequent verses as total annihilation. In the broader biblical context, this view does not hold the 2 Peter passage in dynamic tension with other New Testament passages, such as Romans 8 (which we shall review later), which talk of the future renewal, rather than the destruction, of Creation. In fact, Creation exists to display God's glory, and a view which says "the world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through" represents a profound misunderstanding of the meaning of the Christian doctrine of Creation.

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3. Environmentalism is *incidental* to biblical Christianity. This view holds that environmentalism is legitimate, but is not something that we all need to be concerned about. Typically, those who hold this view state that it is fine for those who are called to do so to work on protecting God's Creation, but for most of us, the priority is to get on with saving souls. Obviously there is a degree of truth in this approach, in that evangelism is a particularly important priority for all Christians. However, this view goes too far. We are not free to choose which fruit of the Spirit we like best (Galatians 5: 22-23), or which pieces of the armour of God (Ephesians 6: 10-18) are best suited to our different temperaments. It is all the fruit for every Christian, and all the armour for every soldier. Likewise, we are not free to choose between some basic biblical commands that apply to all of us. All Christians are instructed to share the gospel in all of its wonderful facets, and this requires all of us to evangelise, to witness, to show acts of love, mercy and forgiveness to Christians and non-Christians alike, and to care for the non-human Creation. None of these are optional. The balance of these aspects might vary somewhat according to our different callings, but caring for God's creation applies to all of us, wherever we are, and is not incidental.

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4. Environmentalism is *integral* to biblical Christianity. In this talk, I am arguing that environmentalism is integral to our Christian calling, and much of the rest of this talk is directed to explaining the biblical basis of this view.

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So what is the biblical basis for Creation care? I should first point that as Christians, we do not live in an amorphous concept called the environment. Rather, we live in the Creation which is stamped with the splendour of the Creator, and which directs us to Him. To understand the biblical basis of Creation care, we must first revisit the key biblical teaching on Creation, as follows:

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***God made everything.*** All three members of the Godhead were involved in Creation. The Father: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1). The Son: *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made* (John 1:3); *For by him all things were created: things on heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him* (Colossians 1: 16). The Spirit: *The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters* (Genesis 1: 2). God made the world *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.

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***God made everything very good.*** *God saw all that he had made and it was very good* (Genesis 1: 31). See also Psalm 8: 3.

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***The process of Creation is adornment.*** The Genesis account almost reads as if God makes a mass of clay in verse 1, and then spends the rest of the chapter adorning it and beautifying it in a step-by-step manner. It is as if he is working clay, rather than snapping fingers. The beauty, diversity and complexity of Creation are beyond our understanding. The more that scientists discover, the more they discover how little they know. Everything in Creation seems to work perfectly. Creation has a huge word stamped all over it: DESIGN!

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***God has made people in His own image*** (see Genesis 1: 27). Human beings are different from the rest of Creation in certain important respects. They have personalities that can think, feel, decide, and ultimately know God. Through Christian sanctification, we are increasingly transformed into the image of God. Human beings are made from dust (Genesis 2: 7; Psalm 103: 14), and yet have a special place and role in Creation, as follows: a) to fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1: 27); and b) to work the earth and take care of it (Genesis 2: 15). This balance is important. The bounty of the Creation is there for our use and wellbeing, but we must take care of the Creation if we want the bounty to continue.

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***The ecological crisis is at root a spiritual crisis.*** The ecological crisis stems from the Fall. The Fall lead to separation at three levels: a) between people and God; b) between people and people; and c) between people and the non-human Creation. *Cursed be the ground because of you, through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life* (Genesis 3: 17). The state of Creation is related to human sin in several places in the Bible, for example: *How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished* (Jeremiah 12: 4). *As for my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you trample the rest of the pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet* (Ezekiel 34: 17-19)? *Because of this [i.e., the sin of the people] the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying* (Hosea 4: 3). God holds us accountable to how we treat his Creation. *The time has come for ..... destroying those who destroy the earth* (Revelation 11: 18).

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***There is a mysterious way in which God's saving plans extend to all of Creation.*** *The Creation waits with eager expectation for the sons 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 glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the*

*whole Creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time* (Romans 8: 19-22). This is a passage of critical importance. In some mysterious way that is beyond our understanding, Creation will be restored. There are many other relevant passages. *God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through time to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross* (Colossians 1: 19-20). In Ephesians 1: 9-10, Paul talks about *the mystery of his will ..... to bring **all things** in heaven and on earth under one head, even Christ*. The idea of future harmony being ushered in can be found, for example, in Isaiah 65: 17-25, and in Hosea 2: 18 we see God planning a covenant with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. It is noteworthy that in Mark 16: 15 we are told to preach the good news to **all Creation**, and in John 3: 16, we are told that God so loved **the world** .....

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*Though fallen, God loves and sustains his Creation, and stakes his ownership of it. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it; the world and all who live in it* (Psalm 24: 1-2). In the story of Noah in Genesis 6-8, we see God's care for all creatures. In Genesis 9, after the Flood, God makes a covenant with all life on earth (Genesis 9: 10; 17). Psalm 104 is all about God's design and sustaining of Creation. God stakes his ownership over Creation in very direct terms: *The land must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine and you are but aliens and tenants* (Leviticus 25: 23).

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### **Why Does Creation Exist?**

Creation exists to display God's glory. *All things were made by him and **for him*** (Colossians 1: 16). Several psalms declare the glory of God as a result of what He has made (e.g., Psalms 19 and 148). In Isaiah 55: 12-13 we see imagery of Creation itself bursting out in praise of its Creator (the mountains and hills singing and the trees clapping their hands). And in the famous praise song of Revelation 5: 13, we should note that it is *every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea* that praises God. A passage of fundamental importance in understanding the purpose of Creation is Romans 1: 18-20: *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them. For since the Creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse*. This passage has huge implications. Creation displays God's power and divine nature to all people. God uses the wonders of what He has made to draw people to Himself. And those who reject Him are therefore without excuse. Obviously, Creation does not, in itself, give saving grace, as provided through Jesus Christ, and described in the Scriptures. But Creation is the key component of God's common grace to all people, intended to draw us into His saving grace.