

Making the Biblical Case for Creation Care

Our climate is changing; the results of global warming are seen around the world.

On a trip to the storm-ravaged Caribbean in October 2017, U.N. Secretary General António Guterres urged the world to implement the 2015 Paris Accord on climate change.

He said the world has the tools, the technologies and the wealth to address climate change, but we must show more determination in moving toward a green, clean, sustainable energy future.

In his encyclical "[Laudato Si](#)" (2015), Pope Francis recognized inequality and injustice, where world leaders fail to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

He challenged those economic powers that continue to justify the current global system, where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to consider the effects on human dignity and the natural environment.

Does Christianity support our concern about climate change?

Do the creation texts in Genesis 1-3 help us? Here we learn about God's very good creation, human relationship with the environment, and human rebellion.

Genesis 2 lays out God's design for human relationships: with God, with each other and with creation; after the Fall, we see that each of these relationships is broken by human self-centeredness and desire for power and control. Do we see climate change disaster foretold here (Genesis 3:17-19)?

Yet God's purposes are maintained through the covenant with Noah (Genesis

8:22-9:17). God commanded Noah to conserve nature (Genesis 6:19), and after the flood God establishes his covenant with all of creation (Genesis 9:8-14).

God's saving of creation is seen in God's heart, as he remembers Noah. The land is still to be fertile, but the new covenant after the flood reminds us that we are always looking from the side of a broken creation, which will finally be redeemed in Christ.

What did the people of the Old Covenant think?

Temple worship proclaims God as the good Creator who is worthy of our praise (Psalm 24:1-2; Psalm 104:2-5, 24, 31-35; Psalm 148:1-6).

But more than this, God's creation itself is a witness to God's love and purposes, and as such should be valued (Psalm 19:1-4).

There is more to be discovered in the Old Testament understanding of God and creation; Jesus declared at the beginning of his ministry that the words of the Law and the Prophets should always be listened to (Matthew 5:17-18).

What do we find in the Law and the Prophets?

In Leviticus 25:1-13, we find the laws of Sabbath and Jubilee, which give three principles for farming and food production: sharing - with the poor; caring - for the earth; and restraint - of power and wealth.

We might suggest that we take a sabbath rest in the extraction of fossil fuels and recognize a growing industrialization of agriculture, which is destroying the environment. Instead of keeping the Sabbath, we have a Sabbath-less society.

In Leviticus 19:9-16, we find the law of gleaning. This is an important principle for the ways in which we use and share creation's gifts.

The Jews of the Old Testament were not to harvest to the edges of their fields, but to leave a residue for the poor to collect.

We might ask whether or not this is a pattern for business owners to follow today in our attitude toward the poor and the refugee, the workers on minimum wage and those with physical disabilities.

Together, the Mosaic laws of gleaning, releasing, tithing and Jubilee present the biblical attitude toward wealth and possessions and make up part of the Old Covenant, the keeping of which was called for by the prophets.

We see that the degradation of creation and the destruction of human lives are a result of not keeping the covenant - breaking our relationship with God, with each other and with creation (Isaiah 24:1, 4-6).

Do we find further insight through the New Covenant in Christ?

Jesus certainly reaffirms God's ordered and good creation in his agricultural parables about seed and growth, planting and harvest, but is there more to be found?

The gospel affirms that Jesus is co-creator (John 1:1-4), that God's love and redemption is for the whole of creation (John 3:16-19), that Jesus summed up the law in terms of our relationships with God, people and creation (Matthew 22:36-40), and that he calls us to turn from self-centeredness to a life of cross-shaped love, following as his disciples (Mark 8:34).

Paul states that the created order reveals the nature of God (Romans 1:20) and presents a vision of all creation created and redeemed in Christ (Colossians 1:15-20).

Paul also challenges us to see our Christian calling as the care of creation (Romans 8:18-25).

Creation groans in desperate need of redemption as it waits for human beings to recover their Christ-like humanity.

We look for the restoring of God's image in human beings and in the whole of

creation, through restored relationships, justice and equality.

In the Book of Revelation, John paints a picture of environmental destruction (Revelation 16:2-12) as the result of human rebellion.

John offers his theological assertion that systems of oppression and destruction will themselves ultimately face judgment, something that he vividly depicts in the vision of the destruction of the great whore and the great city - the world empire opposed to God, whether this is the economic and military obsessed "pax Romana" or a current "pax Americana" or "pax Britannica" (Revelation 17-18) (see: Simon Woodman, 'Can the book of Revelation be a gospel for the environment?' in M J Coomber (ed) 2010, Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges, London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, pp.179-195).

Is the situation hopeless? Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you may die (see Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26); or as today's hedonists might say, "Fly, drive and consume for tomorrow you may die."

We recognize the need of a meaning beyond ourselves to give direction, accountability and hope to our lives. We find this in God's purposes and promises.

Can our sinful actions thwart the purposes of God?

The promise of the first covenant, with Noah, is that while human sinfulness and self-centeredness will continue so will God's gracious promise "never again" to destroy the earth (Genesis 8:21-22).

God promises to be present with us in the realities of life (Psalm 23; Isaiah 43:1-5; Matthew 28:20), encourages us to hold on to hope in the face of uncertainty and will ultimately bring about the redemption of creation (Revelation 21-22).

Ultimate hope is in God and is eternal, while human hope is temporal and uncertain.

Christians are called to a hopeful discipleship in the light of our ultimate hope in

God's promises and purposes.

We live as those who are created in the image of God and are called to cooperate with God's transformative action in and for the world.

Christians have a contribution to make. God created and entrusted the earth to us and will redeem the whole of creation.

There are the first fruits of the Spirit, but still creation groans as it waits for God's human creatures to reach their perfect humanity (Romans 8:18-23).

Paul places the redemption of human beings in the context of the redemption of the whole creation (see John 3:16), and creation is brought back into relationship with God through the cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

This takes place as human beings live out their restored relationship with the Creator, through the cross - living as hopeful disciples.

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Editor's note: A six-part EthicsDaily.com series for Earth Day 2018 is available [here](#).