

Go Easy on the Trees

As evangelicals we often ignore the topic of the environment because 1) we think of eternal life as more important than temporal life, 2) we think of spiritual things as more important than material things, and 3) we fail to see the connection between creation and redemption.

Deuteronomy 20:19–20

¹⁹ When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you? ²⁰ Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it falls.

This week's text is very interesting because Moses tells the children of Israel, before they go into the holy land, that their warfare is to be constrained in a particular way: when they besiege an enemy's city, they are not to destroy the fruit trees in order to build siege works. All of the surrounding nations typically destroy the fruit trees as part of the act of war; but Israel was to be different. Why? Because of what God had taught them about creation and their relationship to it. These things are the rich theological background behind His commandments to them and to us.

What are the central truths about creation that we must know and embrace?

1. God is at the center of creation.
We are neither Cosmo centric nor anthropocentric, but rather theocentric. We do not worship the world nor do we believe the world is here primarily for our exploitation. We believe the creation's primary purpose is to display the glory of God. cf. Genesis 1:1 and Psalm 24:1.
2. God is personally related to His creation.
We are neither deistic nor pantheistic, but rather theistic. Genesis 3:8 teaches us that God Himself dwells here among us.
3. We are God's image-bearers who are called to rule by serving the creation and preserving it. Cf. Genesis 2:15.
4. Our natural tendency is to despoil and destroy God's creation. We, therefore need the directions God gives us, as in Dt. 20:19,20.
5. God will redeem and renew not only our bodies at the resurrection, but also the entire heaven and earth. We, therefore, are a people who labor with a sure and certain hope.

How are we doing as stewards of the earth? Let's look at this under five categories:

1. Land
The number of arable acres per person in the world is now decreasing significantly. We are also losing gradually our topsoil. The amount of area becoming deserts each year is 23,000 square miles. That is the size of West Virginia!
2. Water
Both the quantity and the quality of our water supply is diminishing. This is true both internationally and nationally.
3. Air
Our air contains 30% more carbon dioxide today than 250 years ago. At the same time, acid rain is destroying many of the fish in our fresh water lakes and ponds.
4. Plants
Presently in the world we destroy 25,000,000 acres of forests per year. That is equal to the size of the state of Indiana. In America alone we bulldoze 400,000 acres of land per year
5. Animals
From the animal kingdom we lose three species every day. Two thirds of our bird species are in decline. One third of our fish species are in danger. 11% of our mammals are in danger. This is what some call a biological holocaust.

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Where do we go from here?

1. Develop deep Biblical convictions.
2. Pray
3. Personally practice creation care
4. Engage issues and efforts in your community
5. Influence public policy

Remember that above all other things in His creation, God cherishes you the most. He will one day receive you happily into the new heavens and new earth that He is preparing for you.

Discussion Questions

- 1) As a result of reading and studying this text, how has your view of creation and our role in it changed?
- 2) Of the current trends regarding the environment, which of them concerns you the most? Why?
- 3) What are some of the practical things we can do to help serve and preserve our environment?
- 4) What public policies most need to be changed in our country?

Suggested resources:

For the Beauty of the Earth
by Steven Bouma-Prediger

Pollution and the Death of Man

By Francis Schaeffer

[Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation](#)

(PDF)