

Faith, Hope, and . . . Sustainability

Posted By [David Warners](#) and [Jeff Bouman](#) On April 21, 2009 @ 9:00 am In [Articles](#), [Environment](#) | [1 Comment](#)

One of our neighbors raised her family in the same house she grew up in. Her home has been a place of nurture and family culture for decades. The analogy of home care to creation care helps explain the connections between faith and sustainability. Indeed, the term 'ecology' has at its root, 'oikos'—a Greek word meaning 'home.'



Image - Chrishna

Ecology is the study of our home, our place. Developing an ethic of care for our place makes sense whether the 'place' is our immediate residence or the broader creation. It is unwise to degrade one's home, to ignore holes in its roof or cracks in its foundation. Failure to care for our homes results in deterioration of our personal well being. When we live in a home for a long time we begin developing affection for it. Homes are more than houses; they become places where cherished interactions and nurture occur.

When they work well, homes are places we love to be, and in fact, places we love. But is the creation something we should love? Christians embrace the calling to love God, but are often uncomfortable with the idea of loving what God has made. Yet, scriptures are clear that God himself loves the creation deeply. In fact, he offered his son *because* he so deeply loved his 'cosmos' (John 3:16). Christ came partly because of God's desire to

heal the collective brokenness of his creation (Col. 3:15–20). If this is the God whose image we bear, how should our love and affection for our home take root?

Love is both an emotion and a commitment that produces altered behavior. One does not love a spouse, an aging parent, a child, or even a home without living in a way that reflects this love. Love requires setting aside self-interest for the sake of the beloved, a response that is not only undertaken when convenient or fiscally advantageous. Developing such a love toward the creation is not only appropriate, but fundamental to Christian faith. Furthermore, working to reorient our lives in a more sustainable way is one means through which this love can be expressed.

So why is the Christian community in North America hesitant to take up this challenge? Below we list five major reasons for this hesitancy and counter each with a response.

A. Since human souls are the primary focus of God's redemption plan, creation care is a distraction that has no ultimate importance.

This hesitancy creates a false dichotomy between the responsibilities of serving our fellow human beings (Gal. 5:13) and serving the creation (Gen. 2:15). Serving Christ

peace is our cosmic hope. When we allow God to use us to promote his coming shalom, we will find ourselves not only directly tending to the needs of other humans, but also working to bring healing to the earth. Therefore, riding bicycles and recycling, composting and planting trees are not simply trendy activities, they can be hope-filled illustrations of his coming kingdom.¹

B. Creation care is unnecessary because the creation will be destroyed when Christ returns.

This idea raises two key questions. First, *where* will the resurrected lives of Christians be lived after they die? And second, is there a future *for the earth itself* after the full realization of Christ's kingdom? Much rests on interpretations of key biblical texts such as II Peter 3:10, where common interpretations have proclaimed that

with examples of God's disappointment and righteous vindication when the expectations he has set are not lived out. God really does care about how we live our lives.

Neither does the bible support the notion that God will swoop in to rescue a people who are reaping what they have sown. Humanity has been created with free will and is expected to act responsibly and compassionately. If we make bad choices—self-serving choices that do not reflect a Christ-like servanthood for the rest of creation (Phil. 2:5–8), justice will come down (Is. 5:8, Ez. 34, Rev. 11:18). While Christ's sacrificial gift is the ultimate rescue package, in the mean time God's vision for shalomic justice is one He expects us to take seriously and fervently practice. Since planetary health is being threatened by our misguided and self-motivated actions, our response should be one of repentance and restoration.

The secular world has found great motivation for taking care of our home here on earth. Much of this motivation stems from considering the rights of future generations, the rights of other species, recognizing the connections between caring for creation and improving human life, and desiring to preserve beauty. Christians have all these motivations to stimulate a response, plus more.

We believe the world is deeply loved by God, a love we are called to emulate. Creation is not ours to do with as we please. It belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). He has entrusted us to steward it wisely, use it responsibly and preserve the conditions necessary for all its inhabitants to flourish. Redefining our lives so that instead of eroding, we help insure the sustainability of the creation, demonstrates our reverence and deep love both for the Creator, and for what he has made.

¹ Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

² Ibid.

³ Peter Senge, Bryan Smith, Sara Schley, Joe Laur and Nina Kruschwitz, *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

Susan Solomon, Gian-Caspar Plattner, Reto Knutti, and Pierre Friedlingstein, "Irreversible climate change because of carbon dioxide emissions," *pnas.org*, <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0812721106>. <12.10.08>

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Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

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