

NATURE

GOD'S GROANING CREATION

Biblical Perspective

for the Environmentally Concerned

By Maurice Hamel

NATURE, GOD'S GROANING CREATION
Biblical Perspective for the Environmentally Concerned

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"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ... 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."

Romans 8:22 & 20

"The flame will not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine."

George Keith, from "*How Firm a Foundation*"

"And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong."

William W. How, from "*For All the Saints*"

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DEDICATION

To my peers in the environmental community:

This book is dedicated to the people working to preserve the environment, whether professionally or in their homes and communities. It is meant to be an encouraging reminder that even though at times the magnitude of the problems can be discouraging, nothing happens that has not been allowed as part of God's plan. My goal is for this book to help us all focus on the cause of our environmental problems, rather than just the outward symptoms.

I hope that my 20 years as an environmental geologist involved with the investigation and remediation of hazardous waste releases have shown that seeing the world through a Creationist rather than an "evolutionary" perspective does not impair a person's ability to interpret technical information. If anything, the concept of being personally responsible to the Creator for my actions has enhanced the integrity of my work and my professional relationships. This has been especially valuable in situations when thoroughness and candidness have become casualties in the tension between environmental regulations and the financial cost of clean-ups.

To Laura:

Thank you for letting me invest the time needed to complete this effort. It could never have happened without the confidence and support you gave me.

PROLOGUE: ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP FROM A BIBLICAL WORLD VIEW

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" - Proverbs 1:7

I have found few who have an understanding of what God has told us in the Bible on the matter of our stewardship of nature. Since this topic, what some have come to call "*saving the planet*," has become such a priority to our generation, it is important to be certain that we see our relationship with the creation in the proper light, in the light of God's Word.

There are many people talking about environmental issues who claim to be speaking in the name of God. They will state their opinion, point to one or two Bible verses to illustrate their point and claim that God is on their side. To properly use Scripture, we must compare our ideas to the full teaching of the Bible. We need to search the Scriptures looking for truth and build our theories around that truth. But too frequently, people go to the Bible having already formed their opinions and are unable to objectively consider whether the Bible is in fact supporting their perspective.

The Bible is the word of God and so we must learn to take God at his word. That is to interpret what he said as though he meant it, without trying to force the Scriptures to comply with today's popular scientific theories.

The presupposition used in my researching this topic has been that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training"¹ and "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."² The pronouncements that God has made in the Bible include the account of creation and the curse in Genesis, with its promise of redemption. There is instruction on how we are to show respect in our dominion over the creation, even as we obey the edict to be "fruitful and multiply."³ There are prophecies of both coming plagues upon the land and of a time when the lion will lay down with the lamb. This book provides a discussion of how the Bible further expounds on those concepts. I have tried to rightly reflect what the whole body of Scripture teaches about the creation in which we dwell, our relationship to it, our mandate to use it and our stewardship of it, simply by repeating what is accepted to be God's Word. These foundational truths of Scripture are then compared to our basic scientific understanding of the world we live in to correct many errors in our way of looking at the world.

If at the time of the creation it was stated that plants were meant to serve as the source of food for animals, then originally all animals were herbivores, regardless of how they might behave in the fallen world of today. If God said that he made the birds on the fifth day of creation before the creatures that move along the ground on the sixth day, then obviously birds could not have evolved from reptiles regardless of what comparisons of physiological family trees might suggest to be true.

The theories presented here hold to the idea that there is no cultural mythology in the Bible. It is because of our unbelief that we consider parts of the Bible to be simply legend. Our understanding has been clouded by centuries of error resulting from misinterpretation and over-confidence in our own wisdom. The Holy Spirit of God is more than able to accurately represent the truth in his revelation to the writers of the Scriptures and to preserve it through the centuries.

Even though the writer or writers of Genesis were not scholars in biochemistry, they were physically and mentally more similar to being what God had created and called good than we are. We use only a small fraction of our brain today. We live to only about 70 years. What we eat only vaguely resembles our original food. We have thousands of years of human genetic deformities taking off our "*mental edge*" and an equal period for beneficial bacteria and viruses to mutate into forms that assault our bodies. Because of these things, it is not unreasonable to say that Adam, who lived 930 years,⁴ had a much greater ability for understanding than we do. Despite all

this, we still presume that we are advancing.

This text also looked at a cross-section of the body of writings by environmentally-concerned authors to weigh their scientific, social, philosophical and religious claims against the only reliable truth as presented in God's Word, the Bible.

There will be those who will argue that religious philosophy has no place in scientific discussions or policy decisions. Yet without the correct world view to build our concepts upon, the theories resulting from science are simply science fiction, not something which can give understanding to our leaders.

This book is not going to encourage you to vote conservative, liberal or Green. It will not try to convince you to think pro-development or pro-conservation. That is because changes in economic policies and environmental laws are not going to get to the root of our problems. It will require changed hearts, and only God can do that. So the theme repeated over and over will be listen to what God has said in the Bible, understand your misconceptions about nature, then respond accordingly (i.e. humble yourself and pray.)

I have divided the text into three parts. First it describes "Our Situation," proving an overview of environmental issues and the progress we have made in environmental protection. Then it offers "A Different Perspective" to our view of nature and our place in it, applying the biblical concepts of creation, the curse and God's ongoing process of redemption. Then, with those concepts in place, you will be better equipped to understand the presentation of "The Desired Response" to what God has said he is doing in the world around us.

This book is meant to serve as a hazard sign along the road, pointing out dangerous bumps, curves, intersections and blind spots which result from our culture having embraced unbiblical ideas. It is their flawed basic assumptions that cause scientists and policy makers to look at scientific facts, place them on the map of human thought and unknowingly lead those who are following them into a ditch.

I will not spend much time offering evidence that life could not have evolved from lower forms or that the universe is not ten billion years old. Specialists in those various fields have already written on these subjects. I will assume that my readers have already seen the short-comings of these ideas. They are imaginative stories made-up by those whose picture of God is too small for him to have ever communicated his truths to us.

For those who are not ready to abandon the idea of the "*inerrancy of science*", I will try to show that those ideas have been sufficiently undermined to allow the concepts that I am presenting to be both feasible and relevant.

There are many who do believe all these basic biblical concepts, but have no interest in considering the implications. These things may seem of secondary importance to people who are dealing with the more pressing issues of keeping their job, raising their family and being good citizens. I would argue that the errors being taught to us and to our children are foundational. They deal with our day-to-day interpretation of facts and undermine our image of who God is.

This book is the end product of research which began as an attempt to provide direction to the environmentally concerned. What things can we do to help preserve God's creation and to use it more wisely? Are there specific things we are doing that are wrong which are not apparent? To what extent are the solutions that we are trying likely to help restore the damage, rather than being simply an expensive and unproductive distraction, diverting our energies from the real issues? What can we do that will make a difference in caring for this remarkable world?

Four main themes appeared as the book took form:

- I. The first theme deals with our lack of understanding. Nature is what God's creation looks like after the curse. We do not comprehend that the "*survival of the fittest*" struggle which we see in nature is not part of the original "*good*" creation that we were given the responsibility to tend.
- II. Our response to this struggle is to react out of fearfulness. We are too proud to admit that we are unable to solve the environmental problems that we have caused.

- III. Another theme is one of hope rather than fear. Though ultimately our own efforts to repair the environmental degradation are futile, every event and condition that we see around us is part of God's plan. The deterioration that is impacting the world has not caught God unprepared. God has provided the means for our restoration to himself and the restoration of the creation.
- IV. The final theme is one of repentance. This does not concern simply changing our wasteful habits, or the need for us to gain a better understanding of our relationship with nature. Rather, it is the biblical reality that like a parent correcting us, God has progressively withdrawn his extravagant provisions over the course of history as part of his disciplining us for our rebellion against him.

So this book is offered as a fresh perspective to those in this fallen world who seek to discern God's truth. This is an attempt to search the Scriptures, with its divinely revealed truth, and see how much of the present environmental debate and teachings about nature are really correct. It is my prayer that it would provide insight into what our society is assuming to be important and foundational, in contrast with what God declared to be true. For many, the result of this approach will be to open up a whole new way of thinking about our relationship to God's creation.

Remember God has promised us "that he rewards those who earnestly seek him"⁵ and that if anyone "lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault".⁶

PART I - OUR SITUATION

CHAPTER 1 FEARFULNESS ABOUT THE FUTURE

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." - Isaiah 55:9

CONCERN OVER OUR DETERIORATING ENVIRONMENT

Beginning in the 1960s, people started to become concerned about the condition of our earthly home. This was in response to serious issues about our poisoning of nature and depleting of resources being brought to light in books like *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *The Closing Circle* by Barry Commoner. Since then, there has been a growing public awareness of our wasteful misuse and depletion of resources, especially as a result of our behavior in the Twentieth Century.

Because of the diversity of the world's population, the priorities, outlooks and approaches to these issues vary greatly. Some of us focus on modifying our wasteful habits. Some are motivated to defend the rights of the under-privileged or of other creatures. Others want to preserve disappearing habitats or to defend the sanctity of "Mother Earth." All are responding to a concern for the "environment", but that term has come to represent different causes to different people, who are each responding to concerns that they feel strongly about. Some act out of a mild sense of responsibility and some act out of a sense of urgency with great zeal.

Can all these points of view be correct? The more zealous groups express contempt for those with less revolutionary philosophies. This is obviously not a unified movement. Which ideas and ideals are worthy of our support and which are promoting things that are in conflict with the teachings of the Bible and the kingdom of God? The Scriptures say, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"⁷ An appropriate paraphrase for modern ears might be, "What good is it to work to save the planet, which is temporary, if you fail to save your eternal self?"

In trying to understand man's relationship to the creation, people have focused on various specific aspects of nature to the exclusion of others. Each then claims to understand reality better than their contemporaries who do not see things from their perspective. Environmental philosophy has become like the group of blind men trying to describe an elephant using their sense of touch. To the man touching the nose, it is like a snake. To the man touching a leg, it is like a tree. To the man touching its side, it is like a wall. None of them have an understanding of what an elephant is.

In a similar way, there are many points of view exist about our relationship to nature. Is it a resource for our use? Is it an inheritance given to us which we must pass on to our children? Is it a limitless commodity for our profit? Is it mechanical, or alive just like we are, or our creator-mother? Is it a snake, a tree or a wall? Obviously there are so many opinions because each of us can only comprehend a small piece of the whole.

FEAR OF A GLOBAL CATASTROPHE

The media and environmental groups fear for our ecology and express a sense of urgency over the impacts of pollution, the potential for climatic changes and the loss of habitat. This is to a large degree based on the concept that the balance of nature is in perfect harmony and must not be disturbed. I certainly agree that we should not randomly cause changes to our environment as we have been doing. That approach has been equivalent to letting a group of children run loose in an antique shop. Our releases of chemicals, clearing of forests, filling of wetlands, diverting of rivers and burning of fossil fuels have done damage to things we do not even understand.

But we must be careful in our feelings of urgency and fear to not forget that the balance we are seeing in nature is a very temporary one. The earth's climate has always been changing and will continue to do so, even if we were each environmentally righteous in all our actions.

Seeing our inability to stop the wastefulness that is harming the beauty of our home, leaves us frustrated and fearful about the future. Our frustration is that the degradation is not necessary. Our fear is that the damage might be beyond repair. We are afraid that changes in climate will be brought on by man in generating greenhouse gases. We fear that the loss of rain forests will cause drought. We fear the extinction of species will at some point make the land uninhabitable for us too, irreparably altering the current "*balance*" in nature.

There is a fear that man will disturb the onward progression of nature. We are taught to view nature as advancing like clockwork from its original randomness at the Big Bang into an ever-increasing order. Many feel man's genetic identity is striving, along with the other "*higher*" species, to reach a state of harmony with the "*energy*" which has given birth to all the balance in nature. The fear is that if man is allowed to continue to disturb and destroy the delicate stability, this advancement might be irreparably harmed. Our hope to progress beyond our present wretched behavior would be derailed. Homo Sapiens are viewed as an intermediate step between our past and our future. We are taught that our genetic predecessors advanced out of the trees and into caves. The "*logical*" progression of that line of thinking says that we will continue to advance until our ultimate harmony is eventually found when all nature is finally perfectly tuned.

A commonly accepted approach to the problems we face is the idea that with proper education and financial security people will behave in a socially and environmentally responsible way. Education and prosperity can prevent some of our problems. We are learning to be less wasteful of water and to recycle a portion of our household wastes. We have the knowledge to properly handle hazardous wastes in industry and to treat air and water used in industrial processes before they are discharged to the environment. Education has also helped reduce topsoil erosion from farmland, slowed the destruction of wetlands and many other good things. But education has not improved ethics. If you desire something, taking from what is collectively "*owned*" by us all is still the quickest way to get the possessions, profit, pleasure or power you desire. To justify our actions we call this utilizing "*untapped resources*." It could be a mineral in the ground, an unused piece of land or a wilderness yet to be "*conquered*."

Growth can be done responsibly or it can be done destructively. Yet if everyone is trying to get ahead, why would you expect that people will make sacrifices for the greater good. It should be no surprise when something which has a more subjective value is damaged by thoughtless actions. We cannot even get people to not drive when they have been drinking, which openly threatens themselves and others.

As a result of the accumulated impact of these actions, the good land has become unable to replenish itself at the rate that it is being used. Bill McKibben decreed that "*the end of nature*" was close at hand in his 1989 book of the same name. He expressed the fear that something essential to our future is being lost. Increasingly, environmental writers are warning that nature is in the process of decaying. Some point toward our own wastefulness. Others just remind us that the world is finite and our growth will eventually overtake our limited resources.

We deceive ourselves in saying that man is advancing, when in fact both man and nature are in a steady process of decline under the curse and its entropy. The whole concept of man advancing to perfection under the care of

our mother, the earth, is in opposition to what the Bible teaches. Isaiah describes the rebellion which caused Satan to be cast down from heaven as being the attitude that "I will make myself like the Most High." It was not enough for Satan to be serving under God; he wanted to have equal standing. Similarly, the serpent in Eden convinced Eve that God was no different than she was, "When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God."⁸ This is appealing to us. We want to be united with the fullness of nature. We desire to expand our power to its full "*potential*". We assure ourselves that if we restore our balance with nature that our hearts will begin seeking harmony. Although we consider ourselves to be inherently good, our hearts deceive us from recognizing that we are corrupt, seeking only our own benefit.

A FRESH LOOK AT OUR GOALS

What have our environmental efforts since the 1960s accomplished? We have been pumping billions of dollars per year into environmental protection. The use of toxins is now better controlled so they are not released into the environment. We are reusing resources rather than wastefully discarding them. We have made progress in controlling development to try to minimize the ways that the ecology suffers as a result of human activities. The environmental movement has made great strides forward toward the goals it has set.

Now is a time to take a fresh look at the goals that we are trying to achieve. The zeal of the environmental movement has begun to fade. Those taking up the cause of environmental protection are increasingly businessmen and government employees. Business is seeking economic benefit through a market niche in environmental remediation, or earth-sensitive industries. Government dutifully applies the standards which have been set, but too often without checking to see that there is a real benefit being achieved. This has been a major criticism of the US Environmental Protection Agency. As lawyers, engineers and chemists have replaced the visionaries in positions of leadership, the legalistic application of environmental regulations has caused many to lose sight of the goal of a cleaner, healthier environment.

With all of the work being done in the industrialized world to repair the damage and prevent further problems, are we addressing the real issues? Or are we just treating symptoms, hoping that like a cold, the illness will go away on its own?

Out of economic convenience, rather than environmental justice, we simply export the offending actions to a place that is willing to bear that cost for the benefit of economic growth. Industries which are inherently polluting have moved to Mexico, Brazil and Indonesia, because these operations have been regulated out of economic feasibility in the USA. American owned companies are still manufacturing and selling pesticides in Third World nations that have been banned in the US, even though we now know the impact that these pesticides have on the environment. Too much of our environmental protection has resulted in the clean-up of our own backyard by dumping it in someone else's, as though the wind from their backyard does not blow back into ours.

WHAT CAN WE DEPEND ON?

Today our hope, our guidance, our source of truth, literally our god, is science and logic. But this "*truth*" is a moving target. Science will never know everything. There is always more to learn. Yesterday's theories are discarded today as new scientific discoveries show that old theories were wrong or incomplete. Tomorrow, new discoveries will cause today's new theories to be changed once again.

Our confidence in the inerrancy of science is being used to excuse the "*errors*" in Moses' writings due to his lack of a technical background. We simply say that we know better now. Based on what we have "*determined*" through scientific studies, we conclude that Moses had merely sought to convey the concept that God made the

world. It is said that it does not matter how God created the world, only that he did. Because he did, our relationship with God our creator is defined.

The problem with such an viewpoint is that it elevates science above divine revelation. Science cannot know everything. There is always more to learn. Steven Jay Gould, a leading proponent of the theory of evolution wrote in *Natural History* magazine, that science only deals with measurable processes. It cannot answer the question of origins.

"science's inability to specify the ultimate origin of matter is irrelevant because we are not trying to do any such thing. We know that we can't, and we do not even consider such a question part of science."⁹

Why then is Moses considered to be in error when he wrote about the origins of life? There were no scientists there to measure the processes at work. Apart from divine revelation, which is the only way a first hand account of the event could be provided, the idea of the Big Bang is no more defensible than Moses' depiction of God creating out of nothing. We are left with the fundamental difference of opinion as to whether the Bible is the inspired word of God.

If the Scriptures are only a historical narrative mixed with myths, then the teachings of the church are as useless as the preachers of evolution would have us believe. The Bible becomes simply nice to use for our own personal morality. But if the Bible is actually God's revelation to mankind, then we need to take Paul's statement seriously that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness".¹⁰

A PROPER PERSPECTIVE

Several years ago a "*Peanuts*" comic strip had Linus and Lucy looking out the window at a rainstorm. Lucy was concerned about what might happen if one day the rain did not stop and the whole world flooded. Linus could have agreed that the possibility was frightening or told her not to waste her energy on silly thoughts. Instead, he reminded her that in Genesis after the great flood, God promised Noah that such a flood would never happen again. For Lucy, this was comforting to know. Linus then remarked that sound theology has a way of doing that.

As we try to look into the future to see what will happen to the environment, it is easy to be frightened. The "*what ifs*" get bigger and bigger as our knowledge of the physical world grows. Where a child might worry about the rain, adults worry about the lack of ozone in the upper atmosphere or its presence in our cities, the nuclear weapons pointed at us and the nuclear power plant down the road. What if the climate changes? What if we poison the oceans? What if the planet's life support system goes into cardiac arrest and all the science and technology in the world can't put it back together again? Shouldn't we be concerned?

Many of those who are concerned about the fate of the planet are expressing their fears that we are destroying a balance that took hundreds of millions of years to form. They say we are irrevocably changing the future. The path of nature's advancement has been altered. We have messed with the inside of the watch and it will never run correctly again.

Man is portrayed as a villain whose greed and self-centeredness has slain the goose that laid the golden egg, in the hope of getting all the treasure at once. It is true that man is both evil and incompetent. The creation is sick and suffering as a result of man's activities. But the simplicity of Linus' confidence in good theology does not only apply to the "*what ifs*" of rain storms. Although the comics are not the place to determine your world view, the image is useful. Sound theology does have a way of reassuring us in our fears. But what is sound and what is faulty in the things we have incorporated into our world view? What does the Bible have to say about the

environment?

Knowing what God has promised and believing he is able to do what he has promised will put our fears to rest. We need to reassure ourselves that the future is not out of his control. Therefore our actions in this world must be based on priorities that have a perspective focused on eternity. This planet is not all we have, or all we need. We need a world view that includes the world to come.

HUMAN NATURE HAS NOT PROGRESSED

We are repeatedly reminded in the Scriptures to not be afraid. If our heavenly Father feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies, he will also care for us.¹¹ But we do not live as though we believe that promise. Billy Graham writes, "when we see ecological problems, disease and famines, we wonder how much longer the planet can exist. Is there any hope?"¹²

We want someone to do something. We expect scientific break-throughs will provide technologies to maintain our standard of living and protect us from the unpredictable forces of nature. We want governments to make new laws which will provide miracle cures for our previous bad decisions. So we get governments to ban nuclear testing and the use of ozone depleting Freon. We try to prevent the growth of carbon dioxide emissions and the cutting of rain-forests. We try to impose controls on the number of children that some people in some nations can have to reduce population growth with its demands on our shrinking pool of resources.

Again Graham writes, "Our world has changed, technology has changed, but human nature has not changed. We are still human beings capable of any kind of crime. We ask ourselves is there any hope? The great need for the world today is hope."¹³ Despair will kill us faster than pollution. It causes us to strike out at one another and it eats away at our health from inside.

Two thousand years ago the apostle Paul wrote,

"In the last days ... men will become utterly self-centered ... lacking in gratitude ... [having] no control of themselves. ... They will maintain a facade of 'religion'".¹⁴

The clear implication of Paul's comment is that at the time of its writing, things had not gotten as bad as he is describing, yet this could easily be said today about our world. Therefore, we cannot merely say that we are behaving in a more civilized or more educated manner than our under-educated, under-developed predecessors. Paul shows us that we cannot even say that we are no worse than any other generation. Our technology may be advancing, but our character is not.

In spite of all the problems we see growing worse around us, God's promises to us still are a clear message of hope. Since the Bible is true and God is real, what concerns should we have for our environment? How does this compare with the goals of the environmental movement?

Environmentalists have identified many important issues concerning pollution and the wasteful use of resources. But even though much of what they seek to do is in the name of justice and compassion, if their world view is wrong, the solutions that will be attempted to solve these problems are likely to fail. If we don't understand where we are or where we came from, how can we possibly discern where we are going?

It is as though you are a tourist in a foreign land trying to navigate without being able to interpret the road signs. You can follow the lay of the land, but you cannot tell which route is the one you want and which will get you hopelessly lost. Now if you had an interpretive handbook in the car which you refused to use because you were too proud to say that you needed help, you would be considered a fool when your car got stuck on a rutted country road in the pouring rain.

Our Situation

Well, it is starting to rain and the quality of the road we are on is deteriorating the further we go. Isn't it time we look at the guidebook to figure out what all these road signs are saying before our situation gets worse?

That is what this book is trying to do. It is simply someone opening the interpretive guide that we were given, the Bible, and laying out the map for all to see. Then using that map to determine where we are; how we got here; where our destination is located; and how we can get there from here.

As with the road signs in that foreign land and Paul's warning about the last days, we have been warned about the problems we are facing. The Bible tells us that we are not facing them alone. These problems have come for a reason. For those who look around and see the signs of the times, environmental degradation, social deterioration and increased irresponsibility, there is a message of hope. Two thousand years ago we were warned that such things would occur. It was a warning to make us aware, so we would not lose heart when it happened. Jesus assured us:

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."¹⁵

"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He."¹⁶

"you know how to interpret the look of the sky, but you have no idea how to interpret the signs of the times!"¹⁷

CHAPTER 2 WHAT CAN WE DEPEND ON?

*"I will lie down and sleep in peace
for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."
Psalm 4:8*

THERE IS FEAR IN OUR HEARTS

Our prosperity and our technical advances have instilled in us a sense of independence from physical limitations. We have grown accustomed to the idea that humanity can solve all its problems, except now such a statement is prefaced with the qualifier, "*before it is too late.*" We may speak optimistically that we can develop a technology to solve any problem that we will face, still we live troubled lives.

There is always some unknown that we fear. The dominant source of anxiety during the Cold War era was that all life would perish, or that mankind would be returned to the Stone Age, as a result of an all-out nuclear war. Today this fear has been surpassed by the threat, not from war, but from wasteful neglect. Now we are afraid that we will irreparably harm nature with our pollution, causing the destruction of civilization as the ecology deteriorates. We are concerned that the ecological changes happening around us may force widespread starvation as the planet refuses to support so many people. We hope that prosperity and peace will spread across the globe and be sustainable before our ecosystem has so deteriorated that modern culture collapses. Many are warning us of future climate upheavals, famine and disease.

Is there reason to be optimistic that the ecological doom-sayers are wrong? If we all work together can we pull ourselves out of this mess or are we naive to think that people will actually work together for a good cause?

What are the implications of the Bible's claim that man is not basically good and the world is decaying rather than advancing toward a better state? These are the conditions of the "*Fall.*" Humanity and the creation have been corrupted. The creation is moving in the direction of losing its orderliness under the law of entropy. Instead of living in Eden, we have a world with deserts, glaciers and violent storms.

Our skewed perspectives have distorted our image of ourselves, the world and its events. We must not forget that man is living under the curse which we have brought upon this world. The laws of nature changed when Adam and Eve's rebellion contaminated all of humanity, and the good creation in which they resided.

Those who discount that event as religious symbolism, or the mythology of a primitive culture, have chosen to depend on the capability of their own finite brains. They prefer to not accept the idea that an infinite God could have been capable of accurately communicating what he wants us to know and then preserving it from generation to generation over thousands of years.

Modern science has gathered good data about the world around us. But by ignoring the fact of the recent creation, the fall of humanity and the resultant curse upon creation, men of science have too often been asking all the wrong questions. They have focused on the flawed assumption of uniformity in nature over time, and so the conclusions they have come to have little resemblance to the truth. Even so, the foundational thinking for government policy-makers and theorists is still the philosophy that civilization is advancing. This is the basis of the concept that human intellect and social programs can solve all of our problems.

In trying to "*save*" nature, modern science is not unlike an Eighteenth Century doctor sending the ill to the

country. It may cure some diseases and provide some relief to the sick, but it has no potential to cure a serious illness. As an alternative to the so called "*scientific*" theories that are so widely accepted today, I hope the ideas I am offering for consideration will provide a framework for the proper diagnosis of the environment's illness. Certain treatments will logically follow that assessment. Then we will look at the short-term and long-term prognosis which the Bible provides.

THE ASSUMED INFALLIBILITY OF SCIENCE

In Romans 1, Paul writes of a cultural chain of events which occurs as a direct consequence of "godless ... men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."¹⁸ Paul points out that God's "eternal power and divine nature"¹⁹ are obvious. There are things about God which are clear from his creation, needing no special revelation to be understood.

Despite the fact that the Bible says God's position as Creator is apparent to all people, today's theories of origins are constructed specifically to not need God as the original creator or as the one sustaining the creation. To the proponents of such theories, these ideas are antiquated and stem from the superstitions of uneducated men in the past. These "*modern*" thinkers have been able to suppress biblical account of God's involvement in our origins from being transferred from generation to generation. Having convinced themselves that their theories cannot be wrong, they promote their own ideas and belittle or ban the teaching of the Bible in anything more than a religious setting.

Because the existence of the world stares them in the face, they must convince themselves daily that the obvious is not true. Entropy, the physical law of decay, is the movement of natural systems from overall order to overall disorder. To have the material world ruled by entropy demands that the universe had a starting point. It could not have always existed unchanged.

Also, what enables the world to continue to exist? There are forces which act as a glue to hold each atom together. There are restraining forces which have prevented all this from being destroyed by catastrophe or war. Yet even with these sustaining forces, the wise men of our day insist that we exist because of indifferent random chance. Although a large portion of our society does not accept the purely mechanical world view which the theory of evolution is built upon, we passively accept many of the ideas which are based upon such a bleak view.

We have lost track of the biblical principle that all creation, including man, is here for the glory of God. Our departure from this truth has included the concept that science can replace the "*superstitious*" concept of God. Because we can now understand nature and make it predictable through science, people argue that there is no longer a need to attribute acts of nature to God's direct intervention. As a result of the claim a creator and sustainer is not needed to understand the working of nature, many have come to deny that God even exists.

This happened in part as a reaction to the mysticism of the church in the Middle Ages. In our need to explain the specifics of the world around us, men developed elaborate stories, based on the knowledge of the day. There was a time when the earth was viewed as the center the universe, with the stars revolving around it in a sphere.²⁰ The understanding of that day had turned their popular theories into doctrine which both academia and the church taught as the truth.

Of course, when Galileo, Copernicus and others advanced the understanding of science in the Renaissance, these elaborate stories, which by then had become church dogma, were proven to be erroneous. This type of thinking caused some in the scientific community to consider the Scriptures irrelevant to science, since it had produced a church so entangled in mysticism.

In fact, the Scriptures do not teach that the heavens rotate around the earth or that the world is flat. People in their limited mental capacity grasp onto the best theories of their day and build world view around it. The

foundation of the "*scientific*" world view in the Middle Ages was faulty. As a result, several generations were unable to think beyond that initial erroneous assumption.

In much the same way, our culture's education has been built upon the assumption that our origin was through the gradual change of evolution over billions of years. It has become dogma at this point. Today we have elaborate, ever-changing stories trying to explain how evolution created all we see. It has become so foundational to our cultural self-image that what was called "*the theory of evolution*" in the 1950s, is now assumed to be an unquestionable truth. This has happened in spite of its being based entirely on circumstantial evidence. No alternative theory has been allowed credibility, based on the argument that it can not be sufficiently "*scientific*."

Our unwillingness to question such so called "*scientific*" theories has diluted our confidence in the Bible. By discarding the authority of one part of the Bible, the door is opened for "*enlightened*" thinkers to completely abandon the Bible as the authoritative word from the person of God.

In answer to the critics of his book, *The Genesis Flood*, John Whitcomb confronts this issue:

"all of this can and must be avoided. Our Lord Jesus Christ stated the basic principle quite clearly: 'Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it at all' (Mark 10:15). This is certainly not intended by our Lord to put a premium upon ignorance. Rather, it places the premium on an attitude of openness of heart to the final authority of God's Word. ... Paul asks, 'Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the World' (1 Corinthians 1:20) Foolishness - in a Biblical sense of that term - is a willful refusal to accept God's explanations of reality in favor of mere human explanations."²¹

Based on the growth of the creationist movement since the late 1970s, this type of thinking is not out of the mainstream of public perceptions. Interest has been especially strong among evangelical Christians with scientific backgrounds.

It has been my experience that Christians who have an interest in ecology are eager to hear the Word of God applied toward our care for and understanding of nature. The logic which should be used seems obvious, if you take the time to think about it. If you believe the Bible is an accurate guide to bring a person to salvation, repentance and Christian maturity, why would you doubt that it was an accurate guide for our understanding and stewardship of the world? If you are willing to trust God to be in control of your eternal future, isn't he trustworthy with the present world?

Why then would we rather try to separate our understanding of his eternal principles from our understanding his creation? It is because the spokesmen for science insist that they can know everything without the help of God. We have let such a foolish and prideful group be our teachers.

Young children accept the idea that there is much that they do not know and much they cannot do for themselves. They accept that they are dependent upon their parents. This is how we have been told to come to God, as little children. But rather than measuring their ideas against the truth that has been spoken by God, these people judge whether God has spoken the truth by seeing if he agrees with their theories.

One discerning high school student asked me how much of what the media is telling us about the "*environmental crisis*" is legitimate and how much is the bias of the media's own point of view. There is a credibility gap in our society as different groups play "*spin doctor*", pointing out the facts from their own preconceived viewpoints. As humans, we are all prone to "*using*" the facts to make our case. This is why we have to look to people who search the Scriptures to see which, if any, of the many opinions on a subject is in fact true. Or even better, search the Scriptures ourselves to see if it is so. If our young people know enough to look into which of the many conflicting views offered to them is true, they are to be commended.

If we, out of realism, will each become convinced that our knowledge, understanding and ability are all limited, we will become eager to hear, see and accept what God says is true. As we trust him, he allows us to increasingly

understand his thoughts and his ways, and to put aside our old ideas.

THE IMPROPER USE OF SCIENCE

I will be accused of poor science because I am getting metaphysical, but that is the basis of my case. The realm of the Creator of the physical universe is inherently beyond (meta) the physical universe. So the instructions given by the Creator to help us view the creation in proper context would logically extend beyond the physical to include the metaphysical. Those who forbid such ideas from technical discussions are attempting to define God out of existence. This does nothing to change God, but only impairs their own understanding.

But how can the metaphysical, which cannot be measured from the physical world or contained in a laboratory, be considered part of science? The question misses the point. Science is the investigation of the properties of the physical world. Any use of the facts collected through science must have a starting point.

The observations and experiments of a polymer chemist or a marine biologist are not effected by whether the earth is 4.5 billion or 6000 years old. That scientist already assumes the atoms are in existence. His measurements are referenced in the here and now. When those observations are applied to assumptions about the past, the nature of the creation comes into play in the science.

The "why" is inherently metaphysical. Technical observations are hard science, but inferences concerning history are not. Past events cannot be measured. We may observe the artifacts of an ancient culture and learn about their lifestyles. We can measure history in that sense. But projecting today's observations into the past has its limitations. Mark Twain made this point in what is now a classic anti-scientific passage from his book *Life on the Mississippi*:

"If I wanted to be one of those ponderous scientific people and 'let on' to prove what had occurred in the remote past by what had occurred in a given time in the recent past ... Please observe:"

"In the space of one hundred and seventy-six years the Lower Mississippi has shortened itself two hundred and forty-two miles. This is an average of a trifle over a mile and a third per year. Therefore, any calm person, who is not blind or idiotic, can see that in the Old Oolitic Silurian Period, just a million years ago next November, the Lower Mississippi was upward of one million three hundred thousand miles long, and stuck out over the Gulf of Mexico like a fishing rod. And by the same token any person can see the seven hundred and forty-two years from now the Lower Mississippi will be only a mile and three-quarters long. ... There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesome returns of conjecture out of such trifling investment of fact."²²

Science is that collection of knowledge from reproducible observations and measurements. Logic then is applied to infer the past and future conditions based on that collection of knowledge.

The principle which is the focus of Twain's parody is one that is still widely applied in today's scientific logic, the "uniformitarian theory". This theory states that physical processes have always happened the way we see them today. For example, if your total observation of the weather were to consist of measuring the rate of rainfall as it varies over a three day rainy weather pattern in your yard, you may rightly conclude from the data that 1.5 inches of rain fell in the three day period. It ranged from a high of 0.5 inches to a low of .001 inches per hour. The sun never showed through the clouds. The temperature ranged from 42 to 57 degrees. It is April in New England. Now you can infer several things based on this limited data. You might conclude that it always rains everywhere, that plants do not need direct sunlight to grow, and that there is an average of 15 feet 2.5 inches of rain per year based on this climatic model. All these physical observations could then be used in the designing of storm

drainage, fashion and automotive performance.

Obviously, this is absurd. The body of data was too small to support the inferences that were made. All the conclusions which were based on that rainfall theory would be exaggerated toward an unrealistically wet environment.

That same principle is at work in using the uniformitarian theory to show that the world is 4.5 billion years old. Our body of data is too small to say such a thing must be true. We only have written records going back about 4500 years. We date archeology based on carbon dating, which assumes a constant rate of carbon-14 is being formed in the atmosphere over time. This presumes that we know the conditions in the atmosphere going back the 14,000 years for which that this method is thought to be effective. We date fossils and geologic formations based on the relative amounts of various radioactive elements and their radioactive decay rates. This is dependent on the assumption that we know the ratio of the original mixture of radioactive elements to the elements they break down to at the time when the rock was crystallized. We "*infer*" what we have not seen based on the facts that we have available to us.

Theories about geologic time and origins are simply working models under constant revision. Theories must change over time to be consistent with field observations, but their support or revision should not be the "*goal*" of the field scientist. If what a person is doing is good science, they study their own little niche. The facts that he records should be unbiased by the theories he may hold personally. After all, how would you react if the research being reported by pharmaceutical companies only included the data that showed their new drugs to be beneficial. Why should a distortion of science by geologists with obligations to the theory of evolution be any less scandalous?

DOUBTING GOD'S ABILITY

Our culture, our government and our scientists are all seeking solutions to the threats that we fear, but the Bible is not respected by our planners and law-makers. For most of them, if they believe in God at all, he is a small god who is a spectator, no longer actively involved in his creation. That is not the God portrayed in the Bible. The Bible is describing these people when it says:

"Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind".²³

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon warns us "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you."²⁴ The wisdom being referred to here, which God has provided for our protection, is the Word of God, the Scriptures. In spite of the foolish thinking in the world around us and errors that each of us may have made in the past, we still have the promise that if we do not abandon the wisdom God has provided for us, he will protect us.

So what assumptions does the Bible give us to form the basis of our world view? Let me begin by saying that on this subject God's Word is clear and plain. There is no need for confusion over what the Bible says about the creation. Is the God who created us unable to communicate his thoughts to us when he chooses? Were the inspired writers of the Scriptures inaccurate in conveying what he wanted them to say? Did God choose his words so poorly that even those who want to understand them cannot? Is the whole of Scripture, even the historical books like Genesis, merely a parable filled with symbolic meaning and a myth that never actually occurred?

I don't think that is how the Bible needs to be interpreted. Taking God at his word is what "faith" is all about. Where Scripture is less specific there is left room for interpretation. Where Scripture is quite specific, there is no good reason for anything less than a literal interpretation.

It was recorded in Genesis, "there was evening, and there was morning - the first day".²⁵ There is no reason to search for interpretations to determine whether he had meant a 24 hour day. The way he chose to express it is obviously the best way he could have communicated it. What possible benefit could there be to the "day-age" theory's position that God meant that he created the universe in six long periods of time rather than six days? Is our understanding so much greater than God's that we can say that he regrettably chose a word here that he did not mean? There are those who argue that this word does not have to be translated as "day" from the Hebrew. But is there another way that we could recommend to God that he should have used to make his point more clear? If doubters won't believe that evening and morning describe a day, would they believe it even if God had expressed it in hours?

We doubt it only because we are more comfortable trusting human interpretations. We doubt that God could have actually spoken clearly if he was telling us something that is not already obvious to us.

The day-age theory for creation was formed by God-fearing men as a reaction to modern science, to try to meet it half-way. Theologians would rather debate doctrine than science. So this allowed them to put the issue behind them and return to the "important" things of God. The renewed interest in literal creationism is related to the present indoctrination of the public with the "infallibility" of the theory of evolution.

It should be noted that the evolutionists cannot agree on a mechanism for evolution. They point to a commonness of features and calling them related organize the kinds of creatures in tree-shaped diagrams. But beyond that they cannot agree on how the leap could have been made from the extinct or generalized "ancestors" to the individuals we see today. If the genetic changes happened gradually, could the transitional stages have survived? National Geographic and Scientific American magazines both confidently reported that whales had as their evolutionary predecessors large antelope-like land animals who had first walked into the water to catch fish.²⁶

Maybe for those species that made major transitions the changes happened quickly in response to environmental stresses? But aren't such stresses today being blamed for the loss of biodiversity?

Evolutionary scientists are in such disarray that they cannot agree on much besides the fact that they cannot let a recent creation blow their whole frame of reference out of the water. The Bible is the one thing that they agree cannot be considered to be true, because it claims a frame of reference that is outside the realm of science.

Why should we, as Christians, doubt the Bible and believe these uncertain scientists? What has been provided to us in the Scriptures is the only thing that we can be sure is true. Good science has always confirmed a sound interpretation of Scripture. If it were otherwise, it would mean that God was not infallible. Because the Bible is infallible, Jesus could say, "it is written" and the discussion was over. Yet we are quick to discard this defense out of our own self-confidence. We assume that we can understand better than God can communicate. We forget that what is important is what he has said, not what we think.

Let Scripture speak for itself. If God states in the Bible that he created every sea creature before the creatures that inhabit the land, then the whale did not descend from a land animal. We know this because it is written.

We need to be working from a correct set of assumptions as a starting point for interpreting what we see. If our starting point is in error, then all the conclusions we reach and the responses we choose are likely to be inappropriate in relation to the true facts.

To illustrate the effect of perspective, take as an example a television comedy from the early 1970s. A miner from the 1870s was frozen in an Alaskan glacier and thawed out 100 years later. He had no knowledge of electronic technology, so when he encountered a television and heard fighting words apparently confronting him personally, he responded, "There's a little man in that box." He then proceeded to kick in the picture tube in self-defense. He had no understanding of cathode ray tubes or radio waves. His inappropriate response was completely reasonable from his own viewpoint, but it was ultimately expensive and unnecessarily stressful.

In a similar way, how can we possibly understand the future of our environment and the trends we see today if we

incorrectly view the world around us. We are taught to think that the universe is 10 billion years old. We read that dinosaurs have been extinct for 150 million years. Most geologists assume that geologic processes always move slowly, exactly as we see them today. Most people even see themselves fitting into this model of an old slow-moving universe, with life itself advancing from disorder to order, from primitive to complex and ultimately greater good.

It is therefore no surprise that our solutions for "*saving the planet*" are not working and our science has reached a point where it is unable to come up with the answers.

BY FAITH THE SIMPLE UNDERSTAND

"The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple."²⁷

If the Bible says that God's commands and instructions make the simple, unscholarly and unassuming, to be wise, there must be truth there to be gathered even by those who do not have a scientific background. How then can it be argued that errors in the scriptural account of creation have been corrected by the "*enlightened*" research and astrophysical theories of origins of Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries? If the word of the Lord makes the simple wise, then the biblical accounts were not merely the myths of the uneducated trying to interpret their world. They are not just symbolic parables being given to a people that God knew would not understand the truth. As David, the future king of Israel, said in Psalm 119, "I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes."²⁸ This was the Holy Spirit speaking through him, not the bragging of a young man showing disrespect for his elders.

God's word is not embarrassing to those who believe it. You do not have to leave your brain behind when you read the Bible. "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart."²⁹

The data from geology and biology fit the case for a recent creation as well or better than they do the case for evolution or for a progressive creation stretched out over geologic time. But the technical research to substantiate the idea of a recent creation is not so overwhelming that all men will be convinced by the strength of the technical justification. Hebrews 11 tells us, "Faith is being ... certain of what we do not see."³⁰ It is not by logic that we take God at his word, it is by faith. "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what is visible."³¹

After briefly defining what faith is, Hebrews chapter 11, lists examples of people whose faith is worth emulating. These are the great cloud of witnesses,³² who serve as examples of how we should behave. It is worth mentioning that the first example of faith given to us in this long list does not refer to a historical figure. It says, "by faith *we* understand that the universe was formed at God's command".³³ (emphasis added)

Since according to this passage, faith is being certain of what we do not see, our certainty that we can take him at his word is fundamental to our belief in God. Without faith we cannot please him. The first example of this certainty, the one in the list that is applied to all of us, is our faith that it was God who created, and he created out of nothing. Without that basic foundation of faith, knowing that God is as he describes himself to be, we place our faith in some imaginative concept of him. Each of us is prone to mold an image of God that suits our personal needs. Such a personalized god is nothing more than an idol. The Scriptures tell us who God is. We are to put our faith in God as he describes himself there. He is the Creator, but he also created out of nothing and remains active, able to intervene in his creation.

The fact that God made the universe out of nothing is repeated throughout Scripture. He did not assemble pre-existing parts into orderliness. There were no sub-atomic particles to be gathered together for the initial Big Bang. He started from scratch, even making the space and the matter, "the heavens and the earth",³⁴ which he shaped and breathed upon to give life.

We are not provided proof that God created the universe through our knowledge of science or of the natural world. If that were the case it would be our intellect that leads us to God. We know that it was Abraham's intellect not his faith that lead to the birth of Ishmael, the child of the flesh. It was Abraham's faith that lead to the birth of Isaac, the child of the promise.³⁵ We know that while Moses was still known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter he resorted to violence to protect the Hebrews. It was not until he had spent 40 years as an exile, being a shepherd in Midian³⁶ that he could be patient enough to listen to God's direction and not strike out on his own.

It was faith that these men were ultimately commended for, not their logic. Scripture commends them for believing what God had said and waiting with confidence over the years for the promises given them to come to fruition. They believed that God "exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."³⁷ And so they sought him and waited.

Too often our intellect and our desire to accept all the teachings of the world around us will cause us to stop being a people of faith. We prefer to live merely by what we see. We each want God to convince us personally, but the one who God commended believes that he meant what he said.

We have so little faith and are so quick to doubt. In our unbelief we place the theories of today in higher regard than the inspired word given to us in the past. We are too willing to stretch our interpretation of what a Bible passage is referring to in order to conform to a popular theory on our origins, even when there are other passages that specifically warn us against that line of thought.

Enoch "was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."³⁸ Many people around us no longer believe that God exists. Christianity to them is a myth. If they do believe there is a power which created and sustains the universe, as most people still do, it is not a god that is a living entity. To them God is not someone who is aware, can take action and can be pleased or displeased by our behavior. However, it is the fact that our behavior is displeasing to God that is the basis for what is called "*sin*."

As Christians, we claim to be the followers of Jesus, his ambassadors to the world. Why then is it so difficult for us to believe what he has said and to understand what he has done?

Though Jesus said that he came to save the world not to judge it, he followed that comment by saying, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words".³⁹ Now there is no indication in this passage that our salvation is dependent on our mindlessly accepting every word in Scripture. Yet it does clearly say that those who have rejected him have rejected his words. When even Christians show an obvious unbelief that God meant what he said in the Bible, it becomes a stumbling block for those who are wondering if any of what God has said is true. If some of the Bible is not trustworthy even to believers, how can those in the world trust any of it. Our own unbelief causes our testimony of the goodness of God to fail to touch the hearts of others.

Jesus taught people to use the Scriptures as the starting place for their judgment on issues. One example is given when the legal scholars of that day questioned him about his opinion on their long-standing divorce law. His response was in essence to say, haven't you read that in the beginning the Creator specifically made things in a certain way. For this reason, things must be done a certain way. Therefore man must not make laws against what God has said.⁴⁰

The premise here is that what is recorded in Scripture is a trustworthy account of what God wants us to know. Whatever man does it should be rooted in these basic concepts. He is specifically telling them, and us, that we do not have the authority to contradict what we have been told. God expects this of us. Note the tone of impatience, "*Haven't you read?*" We have been told the basic truths. Jesus' response shows that we are expected to apply that truth, not just do what we want and then wonder why God is not blessing our childish behavior.

THE TRUTH IS SIMPLE

The ideas being presenting here do not have strong popular appeal. Realistically, I am not expecting that the general public or the scientific community will place any credibility in what I have to say. But those who actually want to know and do the will of God as expressed in the Bible will find these things of interest.

Paul said he preached the "*foolishness*" of Christ crucified. It was considered foolishness by many because it was too simple to be believable. Remember that God has said, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways".⁴¹ If what is in the Scriptures could be deduced by people studying nature and contemplating the human condition, then a special revelation would have been unnecessary. Each of us would be able to find the truth in the world around us.

But we are warned that the truth is not always apparent. God's hand in creation is apparent, and the wickedness of our hearts is apparent, yet God's plan for dealing with the presence of suffering and decay in his creation is not obvious. It must be revealed. His restoring us from our rebellion against him is also not obvious, but revealed. As Jesus said in Luke chapter 13, it is only implied by the fact that though you are as guilty as the others the tower has not fallen on you as well.⁴²

So how are we to know the things that are not obvious from the world around us? God has revealed what we need to know as tenants in his creation. The Bible is a textbook or a manual for the operation of the creation, provided by God. It is a massive body of information. Just compare its size to an average "*how to*" book. Yet even those of us who claim that it is the Word of God frequently are exposed to that textbook for less than an hour a week on Sunday morning. Few of those who do read regularly from the Scriptures can describe their reading as "*study*."

A professional will spend four years in college studying his general field. Then to become a specialist, another three years may be necessary. Even tradesmen have apprenticeships, a period when they are exposed to important knowledge in their field and gain practical experience.

The Scriptures contain both basic principles and narrative accounts of a hands-on application of those principles. Our clergy, the spiritual professionals, are exposed to this level of training for their chosen field. Yet other fields of practice neglect the study of God's word as though the administration of government, the operating of a business or our relationship to the land and its creatures are not covered in the operator's manual we have received.

Most of these subjects are assumed to have only a handful of relevant verses to instruct us. A good example would be the passages commonly used in weddings: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church"⁴³ and "Love is patient. Love is kind. ..." ⁴⁴ Of course every reference of Christ to his church is a further teaching on the marriage relationship. Similarly, every example of marriage in the Scriptures provide us with positive and negative role models.

So then every field of study can realistically expect to benefit from a knowledge of God's written revelation. Environmental studies and policy certainly should not be excluded from this generalization. The Bible's teaching on the environment is not limited to a few sections in Leviticus where the treatment of animals and rules for giving the land a Sabbath rest are given.

CHAPTER 3 SCIENCE'S LIMITATIONS

*"Then the Lord answered Job ... 'Who is this that darkens my counsel ... without knowledge?
... Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?'" - Job 38:1, 2 & 4*

WE ASSUME THAT WE ARE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND

Have you ever sat in front of a fire and watched it flicker and dance? Have you studied the patterns in a sea shell or veins in a leaf? We love to figure out how things are put together. Mankind desires to understand nature. That is what science is all about. Science is a technique that provides an organized system of gathering and interpreting knowledge from the measurable traits of the universe. With each new discovery we comprehend the universe a little better.

Then we desire to create, to apply that knowledge and mimic the patterns we see. Technology is the outgrowth of science. We apply understanding of the physical traits of nature to our practical needs and develop new technologies and new products. We get our ideas for everything from Velcro and radar to penicillin from what surrounds us in the creation.

Man is not an original thinker, but he is a good student. We are apprenticed to the Creator to learn to care for his creation. But we have tended toward arrogance. With each scientific discovery we feel more advanced. We consider ourselves more independent, more in control of nature. So much so that many involved in science now consider the idea of God to be outdated. They no longer understand the need for him as the Creator, thinking, "We can figure it out for ourselves quite nicely, thank you." But they forget that they have never had an original invention in their lives. All science is the discovering what God has already engineered and assembled.

We have forgotten as a culture that the observable, measurable world is a creation. We did not create it and it did not create itself. Because of this we neglect to extend our desire for knowledge to what may be known about the Creator. We attribute transcendent characteristics to the universe and spend much time and effort trying to understand how it arose out of nothing. We speculate that through a Big Bang followed by random change over sufficiently incomprehensible periods of time an unseen random force has woven all this complexity together for good.

Some have taken steps toward acknowledging God within this evolutionary process. Their ideas range from God causing the Big Bang and now being a spectator, to God having programmed the design for evolving structures and creatures in the universe. In that world view, evolution is not random, but pre-determined.

In both cases, God is portrayed as a non-entity, uninvolved with the ongoing activities in his creation. The initial premise of each of these perspectives is that God is not communicating to our world or physically intervening in it. Those favoring these viewpoints argue that if God could intervene in our world it would upset the concept that every physical measurement is consistent and reproducible. That is one of the foundations of science. The certainty that the universe is infinitely orderly and knowable becomes tenuous when the "laws" of science cease to be valid under all conditions.

Fresh water will always freeze and boil at a specific temperature under certain atmospheric conditions. These things have been measured again and again, and the results are consistent. But physical properties such as these are no longer "universally" true if we consider God to be able to intervene in nature. The processes of nature are no longer infinitely predictable. The universe is no longer in a closed system. We cannot measure the input God provides from outside the universe or predict scientifically under what conditions he will intervene in a certain

way. An engineer cannot build a highway on the assumption that the Red Sea will always part and provide dry land in a certain place at a specific time. That is the type of certainty that science depends on. The knowledge of God's ability to intervene is not critical to our predicting the physical characteristics of nature, so God has been left out of our attempts to explain them.

Because we can understand parts of the world through our science, we make the mistake of assuming that the world can be understood simply through the mechanicalness of its chemistry and physics. We attempt to oversimplify reality to include only those things that are unknowable so that it can be wholly understood by our perspective from within the creation.

This is like an over-confident child that claims to know the workings of the stereo because he has mastered the on-off switch and knows where to insert the cassette. He understands none of the properties of magnetics that allow a signal to be read from the tape or anything about the speakers which transform electric impulses into sound. Similarly, we assume, that because we are mastering the mechanicalness of the creation, a knowledge of God and his actions are unnecessary for science to comprehend the universe. Just because we cannot measure the methods God uses to sustain the creation and work within it, does not mean that God's hand is not or never has been involved.

FAITH IN SCIENCE

Most of us are children of the Space Age. We have grown up being infatuated with what science can do. We have seen it put men on the moon, create miracle drugs and perform electronic wizardry. It is no surprise that we are convinced there is nothing that science cannot do. That overly optimistic assessment has led this generation into major errors. We have become convinced that the laws of science, rather than God, govern the physical universe. So many mysteries of nature have been deciphered by physics and biochemistry that we have been lulled into believing that we have replaced the "*myths*" of religion with the "*truths*" of science.

This new "*truth*" that we are following has left us blinded to the real world around us. Our replacing faith in God with faith in science, has caused people to be over-confident in what they think they can accomplish using their knowledge. We think we have mastered our own fate. But because of the corruption of our hearts and our limited understanding, we are unable to solve our problems with our own strength and knowledge. More often than not, a new solution brings with it unforeseen problems years later, often of a greater magnitude than the original problem being solved.

"*Better living through chemistry*" has given us some amazing creature comforts and bountiful harvests, but at a cost that is not apparent at first glance. The comforts which cause us to have such confidence in what science can do, also have produced the subtly destructive reminders of what man's limited understanding of nature cannot do.

The disastrous effects of our trial and error approach to technology are becoming apparent in the changes we have caused to the relative balances in nature. For many people the day is past when they believed that man's science could know and do anything we applied it to. People are losing confidence in the idea that we will be able to control all of nature's complexities through science.

The decline of our unwavering confidence in the infallibility of science has been a key component to the growth of the environmental movement. For example, the decline in the nuclear industry is a result of the public outcry that the technology was not sufficiently safe and there was no means to properly dispose of the nuclear waste.

Yet many of us still hold on to the past "*successes*" as a source of hope. People still expect science to find another miracle product or technological breakthrough to solve each of the problems that other technologies have unleashed upon us. In dealing with this subject in his book *Entropy*, Jeremy Rifkin notes:

"History shows that every technical application from its beginning presents certain unforeseeable secondary effects which are more disastrous than the lack of the technique would have been.' The standard answer to these problems have been fix it with new technology".⁴⁵

In making and mass marketing technological breakthroughs around the world in the 1940s and 1950s, people failed to anticipate the side effects. As these man-made chemicals were released to the environment, it was not recognized that they would influence more than just the things they were designed to do.

Consider some of the more recognizable exotic chemicals such as DDT, PCBs and CFCs. DDT was a miracle cure in the 1950s, for controlling agricultural insect pests. It was even sprayed on people as an insect repellent. We did not learn until later that it also interfered with the viability of egg shells for the birds which later fed on these insects. As a side effect to performing admirably as an insecticide to protect our crops, the spread of DDT through the food chain threatened a whole variety of avian species, from song birds to predators. Another side effect was the increase of rodents and insects which were formerly naturally controlled by those birds. A quick fix for profitability resulted in far reaching ecological impacts that have taken decades to restore.

Probably the most infamous industrial chemical of this century is PCBs. They are a coolant and fire retardant in electrical components. As a result of the manufacture and servicing of electrical transformers, they were released into the environment and found their way into the fine grained sediments of many industrially developed rivers and harbors. They are persistent in the environment. They do not readily degrade. Therefore, this chemical accumulated in the fatty tissues of marine life and through the food chain has spread throughout the globe into most every animal across the planet. Its potential for being a carcinogen was not understood when it was first marketed. Its manufacture has now also been banned, though existing fixtures using PCBs are still widespread.

CFCs or chlorofluorocarbons are better known as Freon. This gas is a man-made chemical which collects heat from around it as it is allowed to expand. That heat is released again when the gas is once again compressed. Technology has been devised to use that trait as part of our air conditioners and refrigerators. The heat is taken from the inside of the refrigerator where the food is stored, then released in the grill of decompression tubes on the back or bottom of the refrigerator. That is why the cat will park itself next to the fridge on a cold day in winter. It throws off heat.

This same chemical has also been used for other purposes. Freon has been released to the atmosphere primarily through its use as a propellant for things like hair spray and as an expansion gas formerly used in making rigid foam packaging. Though these practices have been substantially discontinued, this was another man-made chemical whose fate in the environment was not understood for decades after it was put into use.

Freon is not toxic to humans or wildlife, but ultraviolet radiation is. Freon in the environment is linked to the build-up of chlorine in the stratosphere, which in turn causes ozone to breakdown. The result is that in southern polar regions during the months when the sun barely rises above the horizon, chlorine monoxide forms breaking down the ozone and at the same time additional ozone is not being produced because of the reduced sunlight. The result is the radiation which this ozone layer had absorbed, now penetrates through the atmosphere to the ground. This has manifested itself in a noticeable increase in human skin cancer and blindness in wildlife, primarily in the Australia, New Zealand and in the southern tip of South America.⁴⁶

These are just a few of the visible signs that our trial and error approach to the growth of new technologies has caused a deterioration in our environment. In response to this tendency for side-effects from technology, part of our culture is telling us to doubt that more technology is inherently better. Yet another part of our culture is telling us that there will always be a new technology to rescue us again. The philosophy that trial and error will lead to advances is being used as our hope for providing the technological solutions for our future. We should be concerned that most of us are using both of these conflicting lines of thinking at the same time. We are hoping for the solutions to come from the same folks that gave us the technology that got us into this mess in the first place.

That same contradiction can be applied to another aspect of our world view. Taken to its logical conclusion, our trial and error experimentation with technology presents an interesting dilemma for us, the "*Space Age children*".

We know that the use of new technologies has taken an extremely complex good thing, nature, and done it harm. But at the same time, we hold to the philosophy that the trial and error in mutations in nature have led to an increasingly ordered system, according to the theory of evolution. How could such an extremely complex system have been formed out of nothing by random trial and error?

I suggest rather than the world advancing through trial and error, entropy has brought us a decline from the orderliness of creation's original design. Technology has only served to quicken the rate of this deterioration as we over-utilize the world's finite pool of resources. As the lushness of nature's bounty has declined, man has implemented increasingly complex technologies to acquire the things that he needs. We have had many of the outward signs of physical prosperity accompanying this technology. Yet at the same time, the resources being consumed to maintain even a basic standard of living have continued to increase over the centuries. We have to work harder and use resources more intensively to stay even.⁴⁷

FALSE PROPHETS OFFER FALSE HOPE

In speaking to his disciples, Jesus says, "Watch out that no one deceives you. ... you must be on your guard, you will be tested".⁴⁸ He is obviously concerned that there will be those teachings which will deceive even the leaders of his Church. Similarly, Paul wrote Timothy saying "watch your life and doctrine closely."⁴⁹ Peter cautions us to "be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men ... there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies".⁵⁰ Are we on the look-out for such subtleties, or do we ignore the warnings that those who came before us and the Bible itself is giving us? What are these deceptions which even Jesus is concerned will weaken and test us? Have God's people embraced flawed concepts into our perspective of reality? Why did Jesus leave us with the question, "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"⁵¹

Addressing this issue, Jude writes to warn believers about following others into error:

"I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."⁵²

He warns that errors will infiltrate what has been entrusted to believers to hand down to each following generation.

"there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit."⁵³

"these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings ... These men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals - these are the very things that destroy them. ... They have taken the way of Cain."⁵⁴

The Bible warns us to expect that there will be "scoffers," those who ridicule whatever is contrary to their own "ungodly desires." In saying that they "understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals," Jude is not calling them uneducated, but humanistic. "*Instinct*" here is the Greek word "*physikos*." We get from it our words physical, physics, and physician. All of which focus on the natural properties of matter, the realm of science. The word translated "*unreasoning*" is "*alogos*." "*Logos*" in this context being reason, thought and logic. Logic is the measure used to determine if a line of reasoning is valid. They are "*a-logos*" translated here as "*unreasoning*," essentially "*illogical*." They are being described here as physically oriented people, understanding only by what they see, science. They put reason aside and limit their logic to what even animals can comprehend. They deny that there is anything more than the physical realm.

Among Jude's accusations against these men are that they "pollute their own bodies, reject authority, and slander

celestial beings."⁵⁵ This is an interesting combination of immorality, rebelliousness and spiritual blindness. They are dealing with things that they really do not understand. Paul describes them this way:

"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man ... and animals."⁵⁶

They are described as having "taken the way of Cain," who offered to God what he thought was best, rather than following the requirements for making peace with God which had been expressed to his father, Adam. It is this dependence on their own ability to understand, while neglecting God's clear instruction, that Jude warned "are the very things that destroy them."

We are warned that these people will be accepted by the Church, and will bring in naturalistic ways of thinking. They will claim to honor God, even as they are in rebellion against his instructions.

Jude 11 says, "they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion." This refers to a challenge to Moses' leadership of Israel while in the desert. Korah and others questioned why only Moses and Aaron were chosen by God for the role of spiritual leadership of the people:

"The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"⁵⁷

God responded to this rebellion with an earthquake and fire from heaven upon these people. Moses spoke of them stating, "you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt."⁵⁸

Jude's description of these scoffers in the context of Korah's rebellion brings out the point that they claimed each man is enlightened by God and has no need for submission to any person that God has placed in authority over them. This is consistent with the religion of our day where each person "*seeks*" to find what truth is for himself. People deny that God has already given them such instruction. In their rebellion they "have treated the Lord with contempt." The instruction that God has given to us through Moses, and by inference through the rest of the Bible, is clearly described as being the acceptable pattern for our behavior. What is to be considered proper conduct is not dependent on ideas that come out the minds of men. That is why Jude warns us to "contend for the faith" against them because they "deny Jesus Christ."

In summary, Jude cautions us to beware of the illogical reasoning of men who come in the name of science, but deny God. This is a warning the church in our day needs to consider. We have welcomed the philosophies of men who openly ridicule the Scriptures and now we try to use their flawed concepts to interpret the Scriptures.

KNOWLEDGE IS NOT ENOUGH TO CHANGE US

What are some of the misconceptions that we have accepted? Let's begin with some basic concepts which are commonly held but scripturally wrong. Because we like to think the best of ourselves, let us assume that man's heart is basically good rather than self-serving. We want to believe that even though we each have our character flaws, we are not all bad. If we are basically good, then with proper instruction we can be taught right from wrong and so learn to do good. Using that concept, the Western World in the Twentieth Century, with its stress on education and high literacy would be an idyllic time where man does good to his neighbor and lives in harmony with his environment.

Since that is obviously not the case, perhaps man is not good. The Bible says that fallen man is wicked, "the thoughts of his heart ... [were] only evil all the time."⁵⁹ This way of viewing the world considers man to be out of harmony with the creation.

Similarly, some have said that man is a cancer on the planet, causing havoc in the balance of nature. They feel that left unchecked man will cause the destruction of the Garden. Quite simply, a cancer is when cells change to no longer perform their function for the whole of the body. Yet they continue to live within the body, using the body's resources to grow beyond their previous limitations. A malignant tumor spreads to the cells around it, causing them to also cease to perform their function. Eventually this will bring on the failure of a vital organ and the whole body will die.

It is not totally inaccurate for ideological environmentalists to see man as a cancer. He is acting as a non-functioning part of the whole, using resources and impacting the proper functioning of parts of the system. To those who see man only as part of nature, rather than nature as having been created as a habitat for man, man's behavior is causing the failure of biological systems and threatens the "organism" of the earth as a whole.

The prophets of doom of the 1970s were incorrect in their predictions that warned our ecological systems would fail in one to two decades. Yet their assessment was correct that eventually we would end up living in our own wastes as we continued to put too many pollutants in the air, the sea and our bodies. The Book of Revelation says the productivity and natural bounty of the land and sea will ultimately fail. So will our health. The world is big, but not infinite. It is complex beyond our understanding of its subtleties, but the earth is not infinitely self-healing.

The question must be asked: what is the solution to man's continuing impact upon nature? Shall we impose drastic social changes to prevent the rich from further hoarding the earth's wealth? Would impoverished nations then be able to achieve a tolerable standard of living without over-utilizing their tired soil until it is reduced to wasteland? Would a showing of generosity and restraint by the prosperous cause the landless to no longer clear lush rain forests seeking marginal farmland?

In the early 1900s, a social revolution occurred on the premise that it was wrong to have wealth and power accumulated in one segment of the population. A social experiment was begun to distribute prosperity evenly and encourage full participation in this new ideal. A group supported by the people set out to implement these changes. Over the next 70 years in Russia, Eastern Europe and China, millions of people who questioned the idea died at the hands of men like Stalin and Mao. The worst in men came out as they tried to implement a program to have everyone working toward what some believed was a greater good. It seemed reasonable at the time to try to use whatever means was necessary to purify the thoughts of the society in order to remove greed and teach only equality and community sharing.

In retrospect, the environmental damage done by the economic system which supported this attempt to redistribute wealth is even more dismal than the record of those who were spoiling the land for profit.

Of what use then is a plan for the redistribution of wealth? Foreign aid to African nations has coincided with an overall decline in African economies, not an improvement. A lack of monetary resources was not the only problem. Using our own best ideas of fairness have lead to oppressive totalitarian governments on one hand and

welfare states draining themselves of resources and work ethic on the other.

IS THE BIBLE MORE THAN A HISTORY BOOK?

The people of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land. As a nation they had been 40 years in the desert dependent on God's provision and learning to follow his leading. Now they were to become like other nations living on farms and in cities. Before entering the land which God had prepared for them to dwell in, this is what God told Joshua, Moses successor:

"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the laws my servant Moses gave to you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; mediate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ... do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."⁶⁰

God was removing the Canaanites from the land, because of their failure to yield "good fruit." This was the land that he was now giving to the nation of Israel, with specific instructions on how they were to live on the land. They were commanded to focus continually upon their dependence on God's direction. "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; mediate on it day and night." He did not say simply memorize it or obey it without variation (turning to the right or the left). He said mediate on it. It is to be your way of thinking for life in the land, not just a set of rules. "Then you will be prosperous and successful." The Scriptures were going to equip Joshua to lead. While Moses had received God's direct revelation to equip him to instruct Israel, God's guidance of Joshua was to be by indirect revelation, through Joshua's familiarity with the Word of God.

At this point you might be thinking: Wait a minute, wasn't this book going to talk about the environment? What does this ancient history have to do with today? This world has been handed down to us from past generations and we are stewards of it for future generations. We are concerned that the future will not be as prosperous for us as it was for our parents, and even less so for our children.

A closer look will show that God's briefing to Joshua is surprisingly relevant to us today. There is much that we can learn about our relationship to the land today from this briefing by God.

Our labors on the land are often not "successful". When we consider our condition and the plan for our future, we are "discouraged" at the state of the world. Our leaders are weak and indecisive, not knowing what to do next and not even agreeing on what the problems actually are. We long for leadership that is "strong and courageous".

Along with this promise to Joshua came a command to be obedient. If we lack the courage to act and lack success in our actions, it is because we have "turned" from the direction we were clearly given. Our industrial society has tried to replace faith in God with faith in science. We have reduced the Bible to being relevant only on Sunday morning, if at all. God's promise to give us success was provided in the context of obedience to a set of directions.

"do not turn from it ... that you may be successful wherever you go."⁶¹

We are in no position to be upset with God for the situation we are in. Without being able to observe the universe from the outside, we cannot possibly understand all of its workings. God knows that we cannot discern these things on our own from our study of the world around us. This is why he has provided us with special instructions for the land which he has placed in our care. If we ignore his instruction and don't maintain this place properly, what makes you think the warrantee will be valid when we find that we have broken the land?

CHAPTER 4 THE IMPACT OF OUR CHOICES

*"I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce.
But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable."
Jeremiah 2:7*

CULTURALLY ACCEPTABLE IMPACTS

War, drought, disease and malnourishment plague much of our world. In many Third World countries, the environment is being degraded in the taking of resources to maintain or improve what by western standards is a relatively marginal standard of living. As a result, it is common to see clear cutting, soil erosion, untreated industrial waste and sewage, air pollution and the use of pesticides that have been banned in the more "developed" countries. Why does such abuse of the environment still happen?

People are first and foremost concerned about surviving, then later about the quality of that survival. If you and your family are concerned about staying alive until the next harvest or a fragile government is concerned about economic instability, both will choose to utilize the resources at hand to try to improve their conditions. It is instinctive to work for your own survival.

In developed countries, we have attained sufficient prosperity to be preoccupied with leisure activities and our own physical beauty. We no longer are actively involved with the struggle against the elements for our daily bread. Famine and suffering are a TV news item, not a daily reality. We are the ones with the perspective to see the damage we have done on the way to becoming prosperous. From that perspective, we also see the damage others are doing as they also try to prosper to a western standard of living.

There are many hidden costs to the environment which occur as a result of the way our culture behaves. The town green in colonial America is the classic example used to illustrate this point. When a sheep was grazing on the town common there was no real cost to its owner, only benefit. So if he added another sheep, then he increased his profit at only the cost of the new lamb. At some point, as each resident sought to maximize their profit, the growing flock would require more resources than the common could provide. Over-grazing would harm the health of the grasses, erosion would remove nutrients needed for maintaining the pasture, and the land would become infested with diseases and parasites harmful to the grasses and the sheep.

In the same way cities and industries have used the air and rivers to dump their wastes into the "commons". They did not have to pay for the air or river, so it was essentially free disposal. But as with the sheep, there was a hidden cost. First, the river was unsafe to swim in. Then the more desirable species of fish died off. Later the shellfish in the harbor downstream died off. Finally, the odor of the river itself would become so foul that the waterfront property was abandoned as uninhabitable by all but the poorest inhabitants of our cities. The cost was to the ecosystem and the community, while the profit was to the industry, the stockholders and the wage earners in the community. As a by-product of the level of profitability of the industry, there was a hidden cost to the commons, (in this case the river).

It is the excess profit of a community or a culture that is used to protect the rivers and other resources from such spoiling. If the profitability is not there, the industry is essentially not viable. In that situation the industry is unable to sustain itself without knowingly or unknowingly hiding its real costs by impairing natural resources. Unfortunately, this is the point at which decisions must be made concerning whether it is more important to that community or nation to have the products, income and jobs provided by that economically marginal industry or to have clean drinking water, clean air and healthy rivers.

An example of how that question is being answered can be seen along the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, where jobs and profits have taken a priority over treating the chemical wastes and sewage being dumped into the river.

The laws for environmental protection that we are living under in the West today are largely dependent on the political will to keep them there. Preserving clean air and water through the proper handling of hazardous chemicals and pesticides are concerns that arose with the expansion of industry and the growing use of chemicals. These concerns were only addressed after the coming of affluence provided the capital and the free time to address them.

During the Depression, earning enough to provide for your family was the issue. If you were homeless and hungry, your priorities would be to meet those needs, not to address theories about the need to "*save the planet*." To those with no bread on the table, closing down an industry because it was inefficient and polluting is foolishness. At least it provided paying jobs.

In the 1940s there was a war going on. The priority was to sustain our way of life. Quality of life, and for many life itself, was given a secondary priority for the greater purpose of stopping the aggression which was over-running Europe and the Pacific rim nations. Rapid industrial growth, even with its resultant pollution, was widely supported as necessary for the sustaining of the war effort.

In the early 1990s, during the Serbian siege of Sarajevo, the trees in the parks were used for fuel and the animals in the zoo for food. Even though there will be long-term consequences, the short-term economic reality is that environmental protection is ultimately considered a luxury item. It is perceived as dealing mainly with incremental quality of life issues. Only when personal needs are met do we begin to restrain our taking "*wealth*" from the land.

Presently, America is being over-burdened by debt from deficits, defense spending and the cost of health care for an increasingly ill population. Nations are having to make decisions about how to sustain their economies or face the upheavals resulting from a major decline in their standards of living. If we see a further collapse of the world economy, then issues of food, shelter and employment will surpass the desire to know that our grandchildren will still have all the biodiversity that we have. At that time, the continued clean-up of Superfund sites and the sustaining of current levels of water and air pollution controls will cease.

Today China, India, Russia, Mexico, Brazil and other nations focus more on economic growth than ecological health. Half a century ago so did we. Do we have the power or the resources to prevent their cultures from making the same mistakes that we did? Do we even have the ability to sustain environmental concern in our own country?

A GROWING ECONOMY AND EXPANDING FRONTIER

The expectation in North America is that each generation will have a standard of living which surpasses that of its parents. We are raised to believe that there will be a good job for us when we get out of college. We expect to own a home with heat, running water, two cars and an expanding variety of technological amusements. We want an assortment of stores with an affordable array of food and consumer goods. Implicitly, these expectations carry with them the assumption that there will be growth in the economy and advances in technology.

Will there come a time when we no longer have the space for each of us to expand into a new single family home? Japan and Europe reached that point some time ago. The expansionist philosophy of America pushing westward into "*open*" land has fed our high expectations. We expect that there will always be some untapped resource there for us to expand into. We extend our suburbs a little farther from the city. We drill for oil a little farther into the wilderness. We look for raw materials in more remote nations.

The same is true of the technological growth of the past several hundred years. As we look back to 1800 or 1700, there were far fewer consumer goods available than we have in the Twentieth Century. This limited variety of consumer goods was also available to a much smaller segment of the population. Can the growth that we have experienced continue? Will there be adequate resources available for our children's children to do as well as we have done materially? Or is there some validity to the claim that we will have to choose between reducing our present standard of living or accepting the idea of population control.

For most of human history, large parts of the world have dreamed of prosperity, while struggling with subsistence and survival. We have an image of those in Third World "*developing*" countries, and in pre-industrial cultures of previous centuries, as "*peasants*". In contrast, today we have an image of ourselves as "*middle class*," not excessively prosperous. From our vantage point of relative comfort, we consider a life of low-technology agriculture as being synonymous with poverty and misery, even though mankind has lived that way for most of our history.

While the consumption of resources by the consumers of the industrialized world is assumed to be a "*right*," it is not likely to remain that way for future generations. There are not enough raw materials in the world to give beef to 5 billion people daily or to support 5 billion cars. The land, air and water cannot bear the impact of a hundred American-style economies using minerals, forest products, fuel and farmland intensively and the discarding of the unwanted by-products, human wastes and disposable items. In our affluence, we are too quick to be wasteful with the bounty that we have.

There seems little awareness that the path which the Western World is on is not likely to be one of continued growth and prosperity. America has no outward signs of expecting anything but a continued good life. We are a culture that has no interest in the serious things of today, no desire to understand the past and no plan for the future. Many who are looking at the future have determined that the lifestyle we are enjoying is not sustainable to be passed on to our children's children.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Why do we have a continuing environmental problem? Often it is not that we don't know any better. We have just decided that the symptoms are not important enough to make us want to change what we are doing. To put it plainly, we don't care. Personal and corporate decisions are based on maximizing profit, until the regulators draw the line and say no further than this. We cannot even stop people from throwing trash out their car window. Why should we expect them to be motivated to change their entire lifestyle or lower their standard of living because of someone else's idea of a healthy environment says they are doing something wrong? The need has not touched their hearts.

We can picture no other purpose but to consume. We take what we want and throw it away when we are done. We spend, and advertising entices us to use credit to spend what we have not yet earned. Consume now, pay later. We live as though we want every last drop of pleasure before reaching the frugal future. These are the people that we are asking to be good stewards of our resources.

How long can we continue doing what we are doing before this whole system falls apart? What are the signs that it has already begun? Consider that the 1984 Winter Olympics were held in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, a cosmopolitan city of 250,000 Europeans, an "*ethnic blend*". This was not some third-world country, but today their party is over. The civil war that tore Yugoslavia apart and the subsequent *ethnic cleansing* that Bosnia became infamous for has left that country in poverty. America has failed to see our own frailty in that war. America is not as polarized culturally as the ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia, but we revel in our diversity just as they did.

We are asking the "Me" generation to show some restraint in a society where there are no moral absolutes. If this world were in fact a product of random chance, or even controlled evolution, then the rules of the game are the survival of the fittest. To some extent this is how people are living. There is no acknowledgement of personal accountability for our actions. How can we ask people to play by the rules when there are no longer any rules?

In eliminating rules which are a restriction to personal behavior, society feels that they have been given the freedom to put the confining ideas of the past behind them. Somehow such freedom is supposed to make us better people. The Apostle Peter warned about such unrestricted people, writing, "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity".⁶² The false promise of freedom spoken of here applies to those who assert they are in charge and despise the fact that actually God is. They act as though they have some authority and teach others to do the same. They are slaves to their empty theories and darkened minds. Later in that letter, Peter describes them as "scoffers ... scoffing and following their own evil desires."⁶³

How are we to weigh our freedom to make use of the resources we have been given, with our role as caretakers of another's possessions? Was God describing our generation when he stated:

"I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable."⁶⁴

WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!

At the end of our days when the fruits of our labor will be judged, we all long to hear our Lord say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant!*" Increasingly, we are hearing today a call to conserve for future generations the natural resources which God has provided for us and placed under our care. Conservation is also simply a sign of respect for their Creator, who has made all things. However, in our desire to be faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to us, we need to determine what He has specifically told us He expects of us, rather than assuming that we can instinctively know His thoughts and His ways.

The parable of the "talents" in Matthew 25, from which the phrase "Well done, good and faithful servant!" is taken, is the story of a man who entrusted his property to his servants. (So far, so good. This sounds like us.) Jesus tells us, this man distributed his possessions to each of his servants according to their ability. "*After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled his accounts with them.*" To those who had put to work what was entrusted to them and returned to him a gain, he gave those words of praise. However, the one who returned his master's possessions exactly as he had received them was punished severely as a "wicked and lazy servant" because he had not used what had been entrusted to him.

If you will note the words of that servant in Matthew 25:24-25, he had no love for his master. He was afraid of him. He seems to not have really understood what his master had expected of him. Yet the other servants did and were welcomed in to share their master's happiness.

What was Jesus' purpose in telling this parable? What is it that we are being entrusted with and what "gain" are we expected to show? While the parable specifically refers to money, most Bible commentaries apply its principles to how a person makes use of their abilities. But consider how this teaching applies our having been entrusted with stewardship of the physical world we inhabit.

If we desire to be found good and faithful stewards of God's creation, we too must understand what our Master expects of us. Parables about the workings of the Kingdom of God, such as this, are given to us to help us understand God's perspective on things that we would otherwise not know. This parable clearly praises those who put to use what was entrusted to them. In contrast, the "worthless" servant was the one who had simply maintained what he received, deriving no additional benefits, not even interest from the bankers.

We are left to try and make two seemingly opposing philosophies work together. How can we be both wise users of the land and do it in a way in which we are not handing down to our children something that is defiled? Do we even understand what we are doing that defiles the land? Does Peter have any other advice to offer?

“... what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God ... looking forward to this, make every effort to be found ... at peace with him. ... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”⁶⁵

He is telling us that it is Christ who is being denied by those who are trying to throw-off cultural “restrictions” in the name of “freedom.” The way to live blamelessly before God is to seek to know and follow Christ.

So then, what has caused such environmental degradation on the earth? Is it our squandering of resources? Has our improper use of technology caused the wasting away and poisoning of our world? Surely, God has said something on the subject. Consider that God’s discipline is described by Isaiah in this way:

“See, the Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it ... The earth dries up and withers ... The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.”⁶⁶

If this is how we are to be judged for our stewardship of the resources that God has provided to us, we need to prayerfully consider our current attitudes about what the root of our problems are. I am concerned that there are many who seek to preserve the blessing of resources that God has given us, as a sort of museum piece, with the mistaken expectation He will be pleased with such a “show of respect” for Him. While it is certainly correct to protect God’s creation from those who act out of greed and ungratefulness, is the push to “preserve” more and more land “exactly as God created it” the proper way to show our respect for our Creator? Or is the measure of our stewardship whether we have been faithful in doing the things we have been told to do? The passage from Isaiah indicates that it is our disobedience that causes the land to be devastated.

The parable of the talents is followed by a parable where those who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger and cared for the sick were given rewards, with Jesus concluding “*whatever you did for one of the least of these... you did for me.*”⁶⁷ This is how we will be judged for our handling of the resources we have been given, not by the way we have been conserving “pristine” places as we mistakenly try to return our master’s possessions exactly as we had received them.

The voices of some religious leaders are increasingly being heard regarding public policy issues relating to stewardship. Increasingly, their focus is on preventing “any” disruption of pristine areas, rather than on how it might be used to fulfill our responsibility as stewards who were entrusted it by the Creator. Are these concerns about the future of our environment based on a respect for God and His creation, or are they expressions of fearfulness, like those of the servant in Jesus’ parable? Is their assumption correct, that we have begun to reach the limits of the blessings that God is able to provide us in His creation, or have they merely forgotten the admonition in Proverbs not to “*lean on your own understanding*”⁶⁸?

If we long to be received as good and faithful servants, it is essential that we understand what the Master expects of us. We have His promise that our reward for obedience will be that all these other things that we worry about will be given to us.⁶⁹

CHAPTER 5 THE RESPONSIBILITY OF WEALTH

*"A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor."
Proverbs 22:9*

WE THINK WE KNOW BEST

The difference between world-centered and God-centered environmentalism can be seen in the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning ceremonial washing before meals. In Jesus' day, religious tradition taught that you defiled yourself and became unfit for worship if you failed to wash your hands in a certain way before eating. Jesus responded to this by saying:

"What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'"⁷⁰

He corrected their error by reminding them that God is concerned about the cleanliness of their heart, more than the cleanliness of their body. Similarly, King David, seeking to be acceptable in God's presence, prayed, "create in me a pure heart."⁷¹

In the same way, our concern about the defiling of nature by pollution is focused on our own interpretation of the cause of that uncleanness. We seek to please God, but like the Pharisees we want to please him our way. Jesus referred to this when he quoted Isaiah:

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."⁷²

With this example of what is truly clean and unclean, defiled and undefiled, polluted and pure, we can now begin to consider whether our ideas about what is good and right, are consistent with what the Bible says is pleasing to God.

THE PROPER USE OF WHAT HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED TO US

Contrary to what some people today might teach, the Bible does not teach that those whose situation has provided them with prosperity have done something wrong in accumulating wealth. It is not assumed that they have somehow abused the creation by taking from it more than a subsistence level of material. Wealth itself is not evil. There is nothing inherently wrong with material possessions, if they are received and put to use with gratefulness to the giver of wealth. It is simply God blessing the work of your hands and causing you to prosper.

In the Gospel of Luke, the story is told of a wealthy, law-abiding young man who asked Jesus "what *good things* must I do to inherit eternal life?"⁷³ (emphasis added) The young man had asked about good deeds, but Jesus responded to him by talking about priorities. He instructed him in how to change the orientation of his heart by investing his "treasures" in the kingdom of God, rather than only investing in temporal things. It is easy for us to lose that perspective as we read about Jesus telling this rich man to "Sell everything you have and give to the poor ... Then come, follow me".⁷⁴ We can mistake this teaching to be a condemnation of prosperity. The focus here was not his possessions, but his priorities. Jesus told him to

distribute his many material possessions to the poor, so they would cease to be a distraction for him.

The Bible teaches that material wealth, beyond what is required to meet your daily needs, is more likely to draw you away from your relationship to God than to enhance it. Yet the Bible also teaches that wealth is not inherently bad. For Job, Abraham, Solomon and others, it was described as a sign of blessing. But though this wealth came as a result of their godliness, most godly people described in the Bible did not have much for material wealth. Its mere presence or absence is not a sign of God's approval of your behavior.

Jesus told a parable of a farmer whose land yielded a bountiful harvest.⁷⁵ This man, now wealthy, was going to retire to a life of leisure. His "profit for the sake of profit" mentality only resulted in the God calling him a fool. In contrast, Jesus instructed us to use our wealth like the worldly manager in Luke chapter 16. Once that man realized he would be in need, he became generous in giving from his master's wealth to those who were in debt. His motive was to cause these people to be grateful and generous to him in return once he became unemployed. While Jesus did not commend the manager for the fact that he was being fired for "wasting his master's possessions,"⁷⁶ Jesus did make note of the man's understanding. Even though he was only applying it to his own worldly desires, this man saw that the material wealth which his master had placed under his stewardship was a tool that could be used to provide for the needs of others, which resulted in gratefulness and thanksgiving. In Luke chapter 12, Jesus referred to generosity as seeking the Father's kingdom, providing "purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven."⁷⁷ He continued saying, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master find doing so."⁷⁸ This is the approach which Jesus was instructing us to follow in regard to God's possessions, those things that in the flesh we consider to be prosperity.

WEALTH BRINGS WITH IT RESPONSIBILITY

So then, God expects those to whom he has entrusted prosperity to put it to use. The bounty that we have in material blessings, even though temporal, brings with it responsibility. The Bible instructs us that prosperity has been given to us for the good which we can do with it. Many of those who have not received comparable blessings are afflicted with poverty. If God had not provided anyone else with an excess, who would there be to provide for the needs of those experiencing shortages. Therefore, the commandment that we love one another⁷⁹ applies to the scriptural warning that "from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."⁸⁰ Our prosperity is not ours to waste. As shown in the parable of the talents, wealth was placed under our care until its owner returns.⁸¹ It is not environmentally wasteful to accumulate wealth. Those who are referred to as good and faithful servants were commended for investing what they had been given, putting it to use and yielding an increase. Rather it is when we bury our "talent" in the ground that God is not pleased.

One purpose of this prosperity becomes more apparent when we see that a gift God has provided to some individuals within the Church is the ministry of contributing:

"if a man's gift is ... contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously".⁸²

Had generosity already been in that rich young man's heart, it would not have been necessary for Jesus to tell him that his wealth was separating him from God. When we start thinking that we are owners rather than stewards of our wealth, like that rich young man, we invest ourselves in things that are only temporal. We are prone to treasure the gifts but not God, the giver of the gifts. That is what turns our hearts away from God. As Jesus noted, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"⁸³

Instead of focusing on the wealth we have accumulated, we need to remind ourselves that the Bible portrays those with material blessings as having a special responsibility. It is in giving that people become

concerned and involved with the needs of one another.

In describing one especially poor church, Paul noted:

"their overflowing joy ... welled-up in rich generosity ... [as] they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."⁸⁴

Notice how different this is from having the government tax everyone who has an income in order to provide for the needs of the poor. Government support frequently does not result in gratefulness from the receiver. It certainly does not provide the giver the sense of satisfaction that comes with caring for those in need. Rather than instilling a feeling of generosity and thanksgiving for the bounty that God has provided, these taxes have generated resentment against both the needy and the government.

Giving to the poor only through involuntary taxes, which the government then redistributes as it sees fit, does not satisfy the biblical criteria for what is acceptable charity. Such a program rarely is an accurate representation of our individual desires to be generous with what God has supplied to us. This means that the "*social safety-net*" we have developed to protect the poor, while compassionate, does not in itself satisfy God's expectation of us.

Instead, the Bible teaches:

"if the willingness [to give] is there, the gift is acceptable ... Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed ... At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need ... Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ... You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and ... your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."⁸⁵

God gives to us unequally, so that we can be generous, as he is generous, resulting in a gratefulness to God by both the recipient and the giver.

It is important to note that this request, being made by Paul for donations from the Corinthian church, was in the context of giving to those who are called "*saints*."⁸⁶ The term refers to any Christian believers within a church fellowship. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 makes it clear that God's expectation for us to show love to our neighbor is not limited to those of our own culture or religion. However, Paul here is stressing that our first priority in charitable giving is for the assistance of those who would give God the credit due for the relief received. God is not thanked for his care and generosity by those who consider help from the government to be their right. Nor is he praised by those who either deny he exists or who deny his position of authority over them.

LEAVING AN INHERITANCE

We should not forget that to have plenty is a blessing from God. To abound is referred to by the Bible in the context of joy.⁸⁷ It is not condemned as an indication of man's greed. If a bountiful harvest or a well-paying job has been provided to you, make use of it. Yet use it with the humility and appreciation of one who knows that they have not earned what they have, but rather have simply been entrusted with it. When Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish in John chapter 12, it was an economic dream come true. Jesus had access to resources at no cost to the environment. Even with this being the case, do not forget that after showing his disciples his ability, still Jesus asked that the pieces left-over be gathered. He told them, "Let nothing be wasted."⁸⁸

Those who condemn our culture, as abusing the resources we have, are correct to the extent that the way we behave is often motivated by short-term greed, rather than a sense of the stewardship for another's possessions. Individual rights have taken precedent over individual responsibility. We consider ourselves free to do what we want with our possessions, forgetting that we are not really the owners.

Unfortunately, this perspective has also been applied to our stewardship of the earth. Our ideas about things like land ownership are distorted. We have the tendency to use whatever we want to use, then if there is anything left-over, we leave it for the next generation. In America we have lost the concept of leaving an inheritance for the future. As a result, we are misusing the resources of the earth, depriving future generations of their God-given inheritance.

We are called to show restraint as we work the land, rather than take the land for all it is worth. According to the Law of Moses, the people of Israel were to leave the edges of the fields and the droppings (gleanings) "for the poor and the alien."⁸⁹ So contrary to our short-term perspective on profits, it is not considered wasteful to make use of less than 100% of the resources which God has placed before us. Since we are stewards rather than owners of the land, we should remember that those resources were also given to us so that others would be allowed to benefit from God's land.⁹⁰

"The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens."⁹¹

"every Israelite shall keep the ... land inherited from his forefathers ... so that every Israelite will possess the inheritance of his fathers."⁹²

Israel's agriculture was based on the land being handed down from generation to generation. A family farm would belong to the same family for hundreds of years. If your children's children were to prosper and carry on the family name, they would be using the same fields, vineyards, woodlot and well that you were utilizing today. Their poverty in the future would bring you disgrace as the one who had left them with nothing to live on. As a result, the need to practice proper stewardship was clear in Israel, because it was in the context of the responsibility of a person to a particular piece of land. It was a way to have the land be respected and not abused. If property is bought on speculation, mercilessly developed then left with its value removed, there is obviously no respect for the land. This would not be the case if the land had been yours for generations and was to be the inheritance you leave to your descendants. In this way, the Law which God gave to Moses can provide us with an understanding of how we are to leave the land when we are through with it. Those who take all that they can from the land and then abandon it in a state of disrepair do not understand what the Bible says about our use of the resources God has given us.

Another valuable lesson from Israel's handling of real estate can be seen in its laws concerning ownership of the land. In God's allotting portions of land of Canaan to each tribe of Israel, direction was given so that even if you sold your land to pay your debts, that land would be restored to your family in the Jubilee year, every fiftieth year.⁹³ That was another provision made by God to prevent poverty from continuing from generation to generation as a result of bad decisions made by your family's ancestors. In this way, even if you were not a good steward of your finances, your children would not be left without an inheritance.

We are not the agricultural society that Israel was when they were given the Promised Land. We do not live and work close to the land as they did. Still, the Law of Moses is able to present us with concepts about the land and instruction about our relationship to the environment that our modern culture desperately needs to hear. Today we see an inheritance as a windfall that we might get from our parents or other relatives, if they have anything left over when they die. To get a quick profit, children sell the family farm to developers or to multi-national agricultural conglomerates. Our self-serving outlook causes us to spend what inheritance we do receive on ourselves, rather than holding it in trust for future generations. We plan for our independence in retirement, not for our children to take over what we have established or our grandchildren to have an inheritance to get themselves started.

In response to attitudes such as these is the saying, "This planet is not our own, we borrow it from our children." There is some truth to that, at least in part. God created the world and set us in place as its caretakers. Though we are expected to leave this place suitable for sustaining our children, it is still God's world, not ours and not our children's.

OUR IDEAS ABOUT STEWARDSHIP

In evaluating any teaching, whether in relation to environmental stewardship or any other concept, we should be careful to evaluate the premises of the teaching. Paul warns us to beware of deceptive teachings which will attempt to impose legalistic restrictions on people.

"They ... order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving ... For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."⁹⁴

Anything that is not looked upon with this type of gratefulness, regardless of how good and appropriate the use may seem, is an offense to God. It is essentially using another's possessions without ever asking them or thanking them. In our daily lives, such free-loading by a friend or neighbor would be tolerated for only a very short time. The gifts of God are perfect, even though they may be part of the fallen world, rather than the original "*good*" creation. Therefore, receive all things with humility and gratefulness, even those things which the curse has distorted. God, who knows what is best for his children and his creation, has allowed it.

Gratefulness places value on what God has given, in contrast to an attitude that we are somehow "*owed*" these gifts. If the prodigal son had been grateful for what his father provided him as an inheritance, he would not have squandered the resources that he had not worked for on wild living.⁹⁵ Similarly, if the wicked tenants in the parable had appreciated what had been entrusted to them, rather than trying to take the land for their own, they would not have been punished.⁹⁶

Our world can be seen in both parables. As we take our natural resources for granted, we fail to set aside a portion of them for their rightful owner. God does not forbid our using a portion for our own needs as tenants. But since we do not "*own*" what God has entrusted to us, we do not have the authority to consume all we see.

Like us, the prodigal son took what he felt he had coming to him and used up his inheritance for his own short-term pleasures. Soon it was all spent and he had nothing to show for it. He had reserved nothing for his own future and had set aside nothing for his descendants. In the same way, parts of our world now live in squalor where once abundance was found. After years of their ungratefully consuming what they had, God put an end to the bounty which their land had provided.

OUR EFFORTS HAVE LACKED GRATEFULNESS

Both Christians and non-Christians are now showing an interest in learning how to be better stewards of the creation. The Western World is moving in the direction of expecting responsible stewardship from its people. It is becoming less fashionable to use wasteful behavior as a means to flaunt your wealth. We look favorably on fuel efficient cars. We are training our children to recycle and to conserve water. It is no longer acceptable to pollute the air with your cigarette, your car or your factory. Saving the planet and protecting endangered species is a national priority, at least if you listen to the media.

So if we are trying to learn to be good stewards, what does stewardship mean? Are the changes that we are making going to help? Will it be enough to “save the planet?”

At one time we followed the call of individual enterprise, which told us the world was our resource to use in achieving our goals. Now we condemn those who place their own priorities above nature. What was previously considered acceptable behavior is being recognized as irresponsibly wasting resources and polluting the environment. We are beginning to stress our responsibility to wisely handle the resources that have been entrusted to us. They are not ours alone.

Yet our industrial society is still far removed from sensing our dependence on the land. We are unaware of the harvest, other than in a family excursion out to pick local fruits, or through a news story telling us the price of lettuce will be higher because of a distant frost or drought. Even our celebration of Thanksgiving focuses on the feast, not the harvest or the giver of the harvest. This is one more manifestation of our disregard for the world that we have been given. An awareness of God's involvement in providing the harvest is essential to protect against our becoming excessively focused on materialism.

We are far removed from the survival emotions that the Pilgrims felt in their wilderness settlement which caused them to give thanks to God for the harvest. Today, we imagine them as successful frontiersmen learning the wisdom of the land from the Indians. We have lost sight of the fact that they modeled their thankfulness after Israel's feast at the time of harvest.⁹⁷ This "Feast of Weeks" was an annual reminder that it was God who had provided their sustenance for another year. It caused them to remember that they were tenants on the land of another. A successful harvest was dependent, not just on their labor, but also on God providing the conditions beyond their control. This is the meaning of the passage:

"Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. ... In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat".⁹⁸

Therefore, each day remind yourself to be grateful for the daily bread which God has provided. Then at the same time, give thanks for the extravagant beauty that he has placed all around us. Take time to see the ornateness of a blossom, a cloud or a creature. Those things could have been so much more plain or lackluster. Be appreciative of the little things that sing out that we are loved by the one who has extravagantly provided for us. His abundance has been heaped upon us, but this was not so we could be gluttons as we squander these things on ourselves.

THE CHURCH IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

One of the purposes that God has for the Church is to display his character to the world. If we are to properly depict God's qualities to others, it is essential that we are not found guilty of neglecting the creation, thinking that it is disposable. Even if the world is not eternal, it is still not ours to discard. We are its stewards, not its owners.

This is an issue that Christians living in the world today must face. Those around us are wondering

whether Christianity has any relevance in the midst of the environmental crisis that has captured their attention. Many consider Jesus to be as meaningful to environmental issues as the Easter Bunny. He is considered a powerless image from the past, now only a fairy tale for those seeking an escape from the real issues of life. Christianity has become viewed as focusing on heaven and encouraging its followers to be irresponsible until then.

This accusation is not unfounded. We try to remain separate from the problems of the world and keep our hands unsoiled. We focus on the knowledge that soon we will be beyond this dirty world. Many feel that participation in these things is beneath us. But what about our call to be stewards? We have been instructed to be at work today, not just dreaming about the future. Even though we are told to "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things",⁹⁹ this is not a command to neglect the material means which God has left in our care. We are told to not hide our lamp under a bowl¹⁰⁰ and to invest our "talents."¹⁰¹

The seriousness of our obligation to put these things to use is shown in the parable of the talents through the master's harsh response to the lazy servant who failed to invest the money entrusted to him. Our stewardship of this world is, in part, our testing ground. We have been instructed that the servant who is faithful in the care of these few things will be put in charge of greater things in the age to come. So even though you may believe that what we have here on earth is not of eternal value, that is no reason to not be faithful stewards of the "*little things*."

As God had warned Israel through the prophet Jeremiah:

"Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you ... for you have kindled my anger".¹⁰²

CHAPTER 6

THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR STEWARDSHIP

"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge" - Proverbs 19:2

FEELING THAT WE ARE DOING SOMETHING TO HELP

Since the 1960s, environmental protection has increasingly become a dominant social concern. Even though we have made substantial progress toward changing our behavior, the urgency of the concern seems to keep growing.

We are told to "*save the planet*" so that there will be food and fuel, clean air and pristine wilderness available for our children. Others tell us to save the planet because we are spoiling the only home we and all the other creatures have.

Our world is confronted by issues like the extinction of species, the loss of habitat, the pollution of our lakes and rivers, the hole in the ozone and the increase in cancer brought on by exposure to man-made chemicals. We have tended to ignore the impacts of our conduct until problems occur. This leaves us frantically responding, like a cook trying to keep track of too many pots on the stove. Because of neglect, something is always burning or boiling over. Obviously, the better approach is to change those habits which are destructive, before more damage is done, rather than simply running to repair each problem without ever turning down the heat on the stove. This sounds simple enough, but do we understand the underlying causes of the problems? What cause and effect patterns are at work resulting in these visible consequences?

Many of the major environmental action groups have focused on changing the physically destructive habits of our culture. As a solution they are promoting social change. Some of those things are relatively easy to do. We have become aware that there is a lot that an individual can do to clean up the environment. Some progress has been made toward reducing our wastefulness by using energy efficient lights, insulating our homes and driving energy efficient cars with cleaner burning fuels. Now we recycle more of our household waste. We use less water. We donate money to organizations like the Nature Conservancy and Friends of Animals.

People already want to do something to break the cultural pattern of wastefulness and pollution and get back to basics. People want to feel like they have done something to help. There is an abundance of imagination and energy out there waiting to be devoted to this cause which is dear to the hearts of so many. It makes us feel good to get involved, to sense that we are helping to accomplish something. Efforts that people have made to stop the deterioration of the environment are noble and well-intentioned. Much good has been done to prevent degradation and destruction of the ecology which all creatures depend upon for their food, water, air and health. But are these gestures enough to make a difference? What do we mean when we say that we are trying to "*save the planet?*"

On the whole, society generated less pollution prior to becoming industrialized. This is not simply because there were fewer people to produce wastes. It is due to the fact that most products used were in a form that had little difference from the way the land had provided the resources to make them. Ecological systems could recognize the waste once it was discarded or released to the environment. Our wastes had a biological use as food for some creature or could fit into the chemical weathering process and be returned to the soil. Today we take pride in our many "*improved*" products. There are concentrated cleaners for every stain or film, strong resilient plastics, and treated wood that will last 50 years before it decays. Generally, the improvements which have been made to these products, in comparison to the things that our great-grandparents used, have made them less compatible with the normal processes nature.

Pressure treated wood is great stuff for its resistance to decay, but when its useful life is over the copper and arsenic which gives it that green tint is a liability, not an asset, as it returns to natural systems. Treated wood doesn't rot in your deck because it is poisonous to the insects and fungus. What can natural processes do with

that wood once you decide it is no longer of use to you? If it is left to decay, its poisons will be deposited in the soil. If we burn it, the metals will be cast to the wind. Yet it is also wasteful to not do something to protect products made from lumber, because exposure to the elements will greatly shorten their useful life. This would cause us to cut more trees and use more energy to replace that product.

The changes that we have made to our cultural wastefulness are just changes around the edges, like installing low-flow shower heads and using recycled fibers to make paper towels. So far we have been doing things that are relatively painless. We may have bought ourselves some time, but we have not reversed the over-all erosion of our ecological health. Because of this, environmental action groups are pushing for more drastic changes in our lifestyles. They argue that there are not enough renewable resources to continue living as we are for more than a few more decades. They say we must switch to processes that can be sustained into the future. They have concluded that those who do not think as they do are bringing calamity upon us all. In their urgency, they push for changes that they think must be done.

If we were to alter the way we do things by implementing major social and economic changes, would that solve the problem? This is the solution being promoted by those advocating drastically altering industrial society in the name of the environment. Is this really the cure, or would it simply be distracting us from the real problems as we try to delay facing the consequences of our spiritual problems?

PAIN, THE CONSEQUENCE OF BAD DECISIONS

According to Genesis chapter 3, pain and suffering were not introduced into the world until the "good" creation was impaired as a consequence of our own irresponsible behavior.¹⁰³ Because destructive forces have altered the original God-ordained balance, each subsequent generation has been left to deal with the effects of this disfiguring of the creation. These are conditions that all must live with as part of being in this world.

For example, though Job was described as a "blameless and upright"¹⁰⁴ man, he was still susceptible to crime and illness. This did not happen as a judgment specifically upon him for something he had done. It was a consequence of living in a fallen world. In a similar manner, some disasters appear to be unavoidable, part of a chain-reaction of events that the world is caught-up in. The seven years of drought which came upon Egypt during Joseph's time as prime minister¹⁰⁵ was not described as resulting from a specific behavior or event. It was the consequence of instability in the forces of nature, initiated centuries before by the curse. Instead of turning away this destructive natural event, God used it to accomplish good, even warning of its coming seven years before it happened.

The effects on the environment as a consequence of humanity's choices have been compounding since we were first put out of the Garden. Adam and Eve chose to doubt the goodness of God's rules in Eden, even though today we refer to it as paradise. This rebellion brought about the consequences of the Fall: corruption, decay, suffering and death.

The generations which followed immediately after the Fall, lived in a land where longevity and plentiful resources put few physical restraints on humanity. It was a time when mankind, the steward over God's creation, had first become separated from the wise direction of the Creator and set out on his own. Everyone in that civilization, except for a notable few individuals, appears to have chosen to act in whatever way happened to seem right. The accumulated impact of their self-determined standards were so offensive to God that ultimately he erased all physical signs of their culture with the world-wide flood of Noah's day. With that action, he also removed much of the plentifulness from the land.

Years later, the Book of Proverbs also warned us against falling into the error of attempting to chose for ourselves what is right and wrong:

"All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart."¹⁰⁶

Not all suffering in the world can be blamed on the misdeeds of Adam's descendants in ancient history. The examples of affliction found in the Bible indicate the suffering we experience is often directly a result of the wrong choices that people are actively making. We are experiencing the pain of being disciplined. As the Law of Moses warned, at times God does send drought or disease to cause a nation to change its behavior.¹⁰⁷

God's continued disciplining of mankind is noted throughout the Old Testament. Famine, pestilence and war are described as the consequences of the collective actions of nation's people. To some extent these events influence the entire population, from the felon to the not-so-bad.

The present condition of nature's well-being and the state of the resources around us are also the result of human choices. The famine conditions in Africa, the polar ice caps and the existence of hurricanes, all have occurred as a consequence of God limiting the provisions that he allows the earth to provide. These things should serve as reminders that our free will extends only as far as choosing the actions we wish to take. We are not able to choose the consequences that we and others must live with as a result of our actions. Just as choosing to smoke will ultimately have an effect on your body, so also the deteriorating environment is the result of choices we have made in the past based on our view of the world and our use of its resources.

Reversing those choices, now that they are incorporated into our culture, will not be easy or pleasant. Our society has no consensus on what direction it wants to move in or how to reach that goal, yet some are asking this society to have the will to implement significant changes.

We pour waste into our rivers, oceans and air. The amounts released in the Western World are less now than in the past, but practices in the Third World are little different than what we were doing 50 years ago. This certainly will effect our world. There will be a cost for our poor stewardship, as there has always been.

Many claim that the earth is too big and resilient for mere men to effect its climate. Still it is an inescapable fact that we are no longer in Eden. The lushness of the plants found in the fossil record is not widespread in nature today. Our bodies are weakening before we reach the age of 40. The Bible clearly states that each of these things points back to our past behavior.

HOPING THAT WE ARE MOVING FORWARD

It is easy for us to grown numb to the images of the huddled masses that we are continually exposed to on the news. To help us make some sense of it all, Billy Graham wrote about:

"[the] unbelievable suffering [of] ... the people of Sarajevo, and the people of Somalia. It's hard to believe that this torture is taking place in our world at a time when we are supposedly making great progress toward peace."

"The philosophy that the world is getting better and better -- solving its problems on the basis of human intellect, politics, or social programs -- isn't taught with much confidence today. We are living in a day of serious worry about the future."¹⁰⁸

We have had two world wars this century and still large parts of the world are living under oppressive governments. But in spite of the inhumanity of the conflicts that continue in the world today, ideas for solutions to our problems still mainly focus on what people can do. The world view that man can save himself while the world and man evolve into a more advanced state has been a powerful idea. Although history has shown us over and over what motivates the hearts of men, still we cling to the idea that humanity can solve all its problems. The foundational concepts of policy makers and theorists are still based on "the philosophy that the world is getting better and better - solving its problems on the basis of human intellect, politics and social programs".¹⁰⁹

Even with the midst of so much opposing evidence, adherents to that view still build their policies and plans around the concept that man is basically good at heart. They are depending on the assumption that we will be able to solve any problem with a combination of prosperity, education and the right policies.

If prosperity, education and free choice are the solution, why is Western culture in decline? Even in the midst of affluence our culture suffers from a sense of hopelessness and discontent. Economically, we have taken the most prosperous society in history almost to the point of financial ruin through the accumulation of debt. Drugs, crime and the continual expanding of what is considered morally acceptable are all manifestations of a affluent people with no restrictions. We are striving for satisfaction with an unlimited variety of choices. Despite all its wealth, America is among the highest in the world for both its national murder rate and percent of the population in prison.

If the idea is true that humanity is good and has been endowed with the ability to solve its own problems, why are so few at peace with themselves? With all our freedom and prosperity, why are so many violent and dishonest?

One alternative ideology has said that if all people were on equal footing economically, the oppression caused by the economic striving of society would go away. The solution to them is to put people on a level playing field and prevent anyone from working solely for their own profit. It was thought that once we all accepted the idea that our own self-interest is best served by choosing to do what is best for the society collectively, then we would naturally become a harmonious productive society. Three generations lived under the policies of such a philosophy in Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century. It resulted in an unproductive, unmotivated culture, because they could not see the fruits of their own labor. In this case, the "*right*" ideological education did not result in prosperity and evoke the goodness of humanity.

Socialism's desire to free us from oppressive inequality did not solve the problems inherent to humanity. They had depended on the assumed "*goodness*" of humanity to carry the momentum of the opportunity provided by their social structuring.

When the first European settlers came to New England in the seventeenth century, they sought to recreate what they saw as the structure of the New Testament Church. Viewing wealth as a spiritual impediment, the initial structure of their community provided for most possessions to be communally held, except for their own house and a few personal items. They based this idea on the passages from the New Testament such as:

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ... there were no needy persons among them."¹¹⁰

It seemed right to these settlers to try applying this principle in setting-up their religious community in the wilderness of the New World. Since different members of the community had different talents, the best way to serve the common good should be to have each according to their ability supply to each according to their needs (to use a paraphrase of what Karl Marx wrote 250 years later). It seemed right, but motivation was the flaw. There were those among them who saw that regardless of how hard they worked, they still were provided the same ration of food. There was nothing to make them desire to carry their own weight for the good of the community.

The New Testament community had not all shared a common bank account. They each had provided for the needs of others from their own wealth. These settlers in New England learned that without the ability to better your own life, there was no motivation to excel. Consequently, the New England settlement soon became capitalistic rather than communal. That brief precursor to Marxism enabled them to recognize the motivational factor of human nature.

THE FAILURE OF OUR GOOD INTENTIONS

Rather than solving all our problems, the growth of modern society has actually increased man's impact on the land. We are more literate than at anytime before in the history of the world. Our access to books, newspapers and the electronic media is feeding us seemingly unlimited amounts of information. We now understand the impacts of our behavior more than ever before, but what have we been able to do to change our behavior to prevent these impacts? Stopping things like the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons and the manufacture of PCBs has helped. Slowing our destructive practices such as the filling of wetlands, the dumping of wastes at sea and the use of Freon has helped. Our world is less polluted than it would have been otherwise because these things have been accomplished. But still we have not ceased our degrading of the land and we have not found a way to undue the damage that has been done in the past. Men are still driven to do destructive things for the sake of profit. We need to have government agencies to enforce the environmental regulations, because people do not obey the law just for the joy of doing what is right. We continue needing to build more jails for violent criminals who threaten our safety.

We are a people filled with the potential of our good intentions and optimistic plans, yet those things have not been enough to cure what ails us. Take a look at society and ask yourself why this is so. Why we have not been able to change our behavior and stop the destructive effects we have on each other and on nature, which we collectively hold in trust? Though people may rationalize what behaviors are for the greatest good, the heart of man is still focused on himself, not on others. Our good intentions alone will not be enough to change our destructive behavior. Our well-thought-out plans have not prevented the impact of man on the world around him. The right thing to do may be apparent, but if you do not desire to do it, that knowledge has done you no good. Motivation to change yourself, must come from the heart, not the mind. It requires a changed heart to implement a true change in behavior.

GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL

If we use the viewpoint of modern culture to realistically assess our own condition and that of our families, our country and our planet, there is good reason for despair. We are restless and unhappy. Our families face conflicts from within and corrupting temptations from our surroundings. Our kids face crime, violence and immorality far beyond the temptations that caused us to falter when we were young. Our country is in debt, in decline and without clear leadership. Our planet is suffering from being our dumping ground and our cookie jar. Almost anywhere you look you can find people who are doing things that are destructive. It is enough to make us feel overwhelmed. We cannot make all these wrongs right on our own.

From day to day, any one of these issues can cause us to become discouraged. It is no wonder that the generation with the most knowledge of what is going on around them and the most prosperity to do something about it, spends their time pursuing their own amusements. We feel so helpless to change things, why waste our energy trying? We hide ourselves from the problems around us because we feel overwhelmed. After facing "*reality*" all week, many people just want to have a drink to make it all go away for a while.

Yet, this tone of doom and gloom need not be one of despair. We are awaiting the promised restoration of all things. "The creation waits in eager expectation"¹¹¹ to be freed from its bondage to decay. The Bible calls these crises an evidence of good things to come, "the beginning of birth pains".¹¹²

As Jesus warned, the decline of the world's condition has continued:

"These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away. ... there will be ... famines and pestilences in various place, and fearful events ... men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world".¹¹³

In light of this information, it is important to remember that our mental starting point determines our view of the world events around us. If we allow ourselves to look at things from a broader perspective, the sense of crisis can melt away. These environmental problems are bigger than we can handle, but our hope must not be in our own

abilities, or in the expectation that random fate has dealt us a favorable hand to play.

None of what we see around us is outside of God's control. He determined that you should live where and when you are living.¹¹⁴ He specifically placed you in this economy, this population density and these ecological conditions so that you would seek him and perhaps call out to him.

In response to our struggling with despair, God assures us through the prophet Isaiah:

"do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."¹¹⁵

We become fearful when we notice that we are not in control. In this sense, fear is simply taking on a responsibility that is not ours. God wants us to see from the perspective that we are not in charge. He is. God is still in control. He is still able to keep his promises. When we doubt these things and fail to apply that knowledge, we portray God as someone who is small and powerless.

If those who claim to serve God act like they do not believe what he has said, why would anyone else? They become ineffective in their role as God's ambassadors to those who are still in rebellion against him.

"For as Scripture says, 'Because of you the name of God is dishonored among the Gentiles.'"¹¹⁶

Instead of fearing the decline of the world around us, we should be fearing God's disapproval. Does he view you as his "good and faithful servant"¹¹⁷ or was he referring to you when he said, "I bring charges against you"¹¹⁸ and "Are you not a brood of rebels?"¹¹⁹

We have all fallen short of God's requirements of us. Still God calls us to repentance because it is not his desire that any should remain alienated from him, although many still are.

PART I – NOTES

1. 2 Timothy 3:16
2. Proverbs 1:7
3. Genesis 1:28 & 9:1, KJV
4. Genesis 5:5
5. Hebrews 11:6
6. James 1:5
7. Mark 8:36
8. Genesis 3:5
9. Steven Jay Gould, "Justice Scalia's Misunderstanding", *Natural History*, October 1987, page 21.
10. 2 Timothy 3:16
11. Luke 12:24-28
12. Billy Graham, *Decision Magazine*, 1/93
13. Ibid
14. 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Phillips
15. John 16:33
16. John 13:19
17. Matthew 16:3, Phillips
18. Romans 1:18
19. Romans 1:20
20. Don Eicher, "*Geologic Time*", Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976, page 2.
21. John Whitcomb, "The World That Perished", Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, page 144.
22. Mark Twain, "*Life on the Mississippi*", *Readers Digest*, Pleasantville, NY, 1987, page 122-3.
23. Romans 1:28
24. Proverbs 4:6
25. Genesis 1:5
26. *National Geographic*, December 1988, page 884; *Scientific American* April 1988, page 102
27. Psalm 9:7

Our Situation

28. Psalm 119:99
29. Psalm 9:8
30. Hebrews 11:1
31. Hebrews 11:3
32. Hebrew 12:1
33. Hebrew 11:1
34. Genesis 1:1
35. Romans 9:8
36. Exodus 2 & 3
37. Hebrews 11:6
38. Hebrews 11:5-6
39. John 12:47-48
40. Matthew 19:4-6
41. Isaiah 55:8
26. Luke 13:4-5
43. Ephesians 5:25
44. 1 Corinthians 13:4
45. "Entropy", Jeremy Rifkin, Viking Press, NY, 1980, page 81, quoting Jacques Ellul's "The Technical Society"
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48. Mark 13:5 & 9
49. 1 Timothy 4:16
50. 2 Peter 3:17 & 2:1
51. Luke 18:8
52. Jude 3
53. Jude 18-19
54. Jude 8, 10-11
55. Jude 8

56. Romans 1:22-3
57. Numbers 16:3
58. Numbers 16:30
59. Genesis 6:5
60. Joshua 1:6-9
61. Joshua 1:7
62. 2 Peter 2:19
63. 2 Peter 3:3
64. Jeremiah 2:7
65. 2 Peter 3:11-12, 14 & 18
66. Isaiah 24:1, 3-5
61. Matthew 25:40
62. Proverbs 3:5
63. Luke 12:22-31
70. Matthew 15:1-20
71. Psalm 51:10
72. Matthew 15:8-9; Isaiah 29:13
73. Luke 18:18
74. Luke 18:22
75. Luke 12:16-21
76. Luke 16:1
77. Luke 12:31 & 33
78. Luke 12:42-43
79. John 13:34
80. Luke 12:48
81. Matthew 25:14-30
82. Romans 12:6-7
83. Luke 18:24
84. 2 Corinthians 8:2 & 4

85. 2 Corinthians 8:12-14, 9:7 & 11
86. 2 Corinthians 9:1
87. Psalm 4:7, Psalm 126:6
88. John 6:12
89. Leviticus 19:9 & 23:22
90. Matthew 24:45
91. Leviticus 25:23
92. Numbers 36:7-8
93. Leviticus chapter 25
94. 1 Timothy 4:3-5
95. Luke 15:11-24
96. Matthew 21:33-40
97. Leviticus 23:9-22
98. Psalm 127:1-2
99. Colossians 3:2
100. Matthew 5:15
101. Matthew 25:14-30
102. Jeremiah 17:4
103. Genesis 3:17
104. Job 1:1
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106. Proverbs 21:2
107. Deuteronomy 28:22
108. Billy Graham Evangelical Association, Minneapolis, September 1993 monthly newsletter.
109. Ibid.
110. Acts 4:32 & 34
111. Romans 8:19
112. Matthew 24:8 & Romans 8:22
113. Luke 21:9-11 & 26

- 114. Acts 17:26
- 115. Isaiah 41:10
- 116. Romans 2:24, New English Bible
- 115. Matthew 25:21
- 118. Jeremiah 2:4
- 119. Isaiah 57:4