

**Scripture:** Psalm 104:1–30 (Rev. 11:18; Psalm 24:1; Genesis 1:1—31; Acts 14:17)

**Subject:** The meaning of biblical stewardship and its importance for believers

---

### Introduction

The platypus is a mammal which has the body of a beaver, a bill like a duck, lays eggs like a bird, and the males have poisonous barbs on the hind legs which it uses to defend its territory. It seems to have no discernible purpose or reason other than it simply exists. Why? Why this curious creature made up from the spare-parts bin? And why should we care if it lives or dies or has a clean, safe habitat in which to live? By extension, why should we care about the environment at all?

As we begin our second week in our four-week series on stewardship, we come to the topic of Environmental Stewardship, or as some label it, “Creation Care.” This is a controversial subject in some circles, and one of the questions we must answer is, “Why preach on it at all?” As Christians shouldn’t we be much more concerned about soul-care and salvation? Professor Michael Bullmore (who was Associate Professor of Homiletics and Practical Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) answers:

...if [the environmental issue] is considered separately, as some interesting *topic*, it does pale in comparison to the importance of other Christian categories. It is only when it is seen as of a piece with our larger responsibility before God that it assumes the place of something worthy of our time and careful consideration.<sup>1</sup>

Creation care, or environmental stewardship, is indeed a part of our “larger responsibility towards God” (I use the terms “environment” and “creation” synonymously; God’s creation is the environment we inhabit). Bullmore goes on to say:

...preaching and teaching a Christian environmentalism *can*, in our day, play a significant role in facilitating the movement of people away from lives of self-interest and toward an earnest devotion to a Christian way of life, and *must* occupy a place in the total teaching of Christians to pursue and honor the accomplishment of the purposes of God in his earth.<sup>2</sup>

Last week we laid the foundation for our series on Stewardship, and we discovered the two Guiding Principles of Stewardship:

1. **God owns everything**
2. **We were made to oversee what God owns**

We found in the opening chapters of Genesis God’s command to be caretakers of the gift of creation:

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to **tend and care for it**” Gen 2:15

We were told to “keep” the garden, meaning to guard it, to watch over it, to preserve it and be careful with it. But just because we are no longer in the Garden, that doesn’t mean that we are free from this obligation! When Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, we read:

---

1 Bullmore, Michel A. “The Four Most Important Biblical Passages for a Christian Environmentalism”. Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 142.

2 Bullmore. *Ibid.* Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 143.

The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. ... So the LORD God sent him away from the garden of Eden to **work the ground from which he was taken.** (Ge 3:17–19, 23)

So the tending and caring for God's creation is infinitely harder, but not done away with! In fact, because the production of food and necessities is so much harder, and so much more vital now, should we not take greater care to tend, guard and serve this world? Says one author:

The mandate to care for the earth, a mandate fundamental to man's being and seminal in his relationship to God, has not been abrogated (*ended, done away with*). Environmental stewardship is therefore **a matter of both Christian obedience and Christian piety.**<sup>3</sup>

"A matter of both Christian obedience and Christian piety." A rather strong statement when you recall Jesus' words:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. (Jn 14:15) He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. (Jn 14:24)

Put simply, if we love Jesus, if we desire to bring glory to the Father, then we will take proper care for the creation he has entrusted to us. But let us step back and ask, "Where in the Bible do we find the theological basis for Creation Care?"

Scripturally, if we had to pick one passage to support the mandate of creation care, it would be Psalm 104; and if we had to pick one verse from that Psalm as the key it would be verse 24:

How countless are Your works, LORD! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your creatures. (Ps 104:24)

What does Psalm 104 reveal to us about God's creation?

### **1. God not only created the earth and all things in it, He also sustains it by His power**

The unique emphasis of this psalm, however, is on God's sustenance of his creation. "He makes springs pour water. He waters the mountains. He makes grass grow. The trees of the Lord are well watered" (vv. 10, 13, 14, 16). And after providing a representative cataloging of some animal denizens of forest, mountain, badlands, and sea, the psalmist summarizes, "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time" (v. 27). All creatures are completely dependent on God. When God provides, his creatures are satisfied (v. 28). When he "hides his face," they are terrified (v. 29). When God sends his "Spirit," there is new life (v. 30). When he takes breath away, life ceases (v. 29). Here is a significant extension of the Genesis account. Yes, creation exists only because it was called into existence by God. But it continues to exist only because of the continuous care of its Creator.<sup>4</sup>

### **2. All things belong to God and find their reason for being in relation to Him**

We discovered last week that because God has created all things, all things belong to Him. The Psalmist agrees, saying that all creatures are "your possessions" (v. 24); "his works" (v. 31).

3 Bullmore. *Ibid.* Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 143.

4 Bullmore. *Ibid.* Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 145.

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; *for* he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters” (Ps 24:1–2; emphasis added). But we need to understand that not only are all creatures created by God, **they have been created for God**, and thus they find **their primary reason for being with reference to him**. This is a point of important significance as we consider our role in Creation Care.<sup>5</sup> The AV tells us:

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and **for thy pleasure** they are and were created. (Re 4:11)

Paul writes to the Colossians:

For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him **and for Him**. (Col 1:16)

Here’s the thing: all creation exists because God wants it to, and because He takes pleasure in it. Full stop! There needs to be no other reason for this earth, the planets, the sun, the animals to exist, other than that was what God wanted; **all things exist for Him!** Just because God gave us the responsibility to tend his creation, does not mean that it exists solely for our benefit; creation exists for God.

There is no question that creation exists, at least in part, for the purpose of nourishing mankind. “*He makes plants for man to cultivate - bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart*” (vv. 14–15). But just because we get to enjoy creation, does not mean that it exists solely for our benefit, or because we exist! There is no question that nature was made with man in mind but **our needs are an insufficient to entirely explain creation**. Only God can supply such a meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Psalms 104 and other passages clearly indicate that God created some creatures simply for His delight; how else to understand platypuses, or skunks, or the hippopotamus?

The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees. The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the conies. **(Ps 104:16–18)** You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. **(Ps 104:20–22)** There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number— living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there. **(Ps 104:25–26)**

Clearly, it is not just man’s physical needs that explain the wonders of God’s manifold creation; while we are to care for it, nurture and protect it, all plants and creatures exist **for their own sakes, and because God has willed it**. Plants and animals existed before we did!

### **3. The earth and all things in it were created perfectly**

How countless are Your works, LORD! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your creatures. (Ps 104:24)

5 Bullmore. *Ibid.* Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 145.

6 Bullmore. *Ibid.* Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 146.

Every animal and plant species that exists owns perfection as a result of the exercise of God's wisdom in creation. Not only was each individual species made perfectly but that God's wisdom is seen in the perfection of the way individual species relate to each other to form biotic communities occupying well-defined life zones.<sup>7</sup> In other words, everything fits together and has its place, thanks to God's supreme wisdom in creation.

He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. **(Ps 104:10–12)** The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees. **(Ps 104:16–17)**

Why does this matter? What if we can see God's wisdom manifest in nature? Calvin writes:

God has been pleased to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe. On each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse.<sup>8</sup>

All things were perfectly created, and even though sin has entered the world, creation bears the Maker's mark, an indelible imprint of His wisdom, genius and power. This leads us to:

#### **4. Creation bears witness to the perfections of God and moves us to worship Him.**

When God created the universe, and formed the earth and all creatures on it, things were good. Then we came along, and messed it all up. But as the Bible tells us, there is a lingering effect, a persistent witness within nature to the wisdom of God and the perfection of what He fashioned. By the time the psalmist took up his pen, sin had long since invaded and left its mark. He speaks of prowling lions roaring for their hapless prey (v. 21). He knows that terror and death are common among man and beast (v. 29). He does not avert his eyes from the destruction of earthquake and volcano (v. 32). He openly acknowledges the existence of wicked men (v. 35). Nonetheless, he observes creation and cannot restrain his praise.<sup>9</sup>

Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great;  
you are clothed with splendor and majesty. (v. 1)

How many are your works, O Lord!

In wisdom you made them all. (v. 24)

May the glory of the Lord endure forever. (v. 31)

I will sing to the Lord all my life;

I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. (v. 33)

Praise the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord. (v. 35)

Despite the intrusion of sin and its marring effects there remains a powerful and clearly visible witness in creation to, as the apostle Paul puts it, the "eternal power and divine nature" of God (Rom 1:19–20). The heavens still declare the "glory of God" and the skies still proclaim his "handiwork" (Ps 19:1). Particular characteristics of God are revealed in his works. The author of Psalm 104 could actually see evidence of God's wisdom and power. So can we.

7 Bullmore. *Ibid.* Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 148.

8 *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; ed. J. T. McNeill; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 1.4.2.

9 Bullmore. *Ibid.* Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 149.

There are clear environmental implications here. If “all” of God’s works were made with wisdom, then each one has the ability to speak to man of that wisdom. Thus every loss of species is a diminution of man’s opportunity to observe the perfection of God. In John’s vision of the heavenly throne he hears the elders sing to the Lord, “You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things” (Rev 4:11; emphasis added). Any destruction of creation removes from man a cause for giving honor to God. Every species, every ecosystem, reveals the wisdom of God and gives us cause to praise Him. We must remember that God also told at least all the birds and all the marine creatures to “be fruitful and *increase* in number” (Gen 1:22; emphasis added). Thus we must find a way to co-exist with these creatures in a mutual fruitfulness, one which recognizes and honors the wisdom of the Lord and lets “*all* things, their creator bless.”<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion

...what kind of people shall we become if we continually destroy, through greed or neglect, what God has made? If these conditions are allowed to persist, the environment’s own identity and inherent value are lost. Creation becomes only a source of resources that exists to meet human need. And because no environment and no resource can simultaneously meet every human need, every part of God’s creation becomes a valueless and inanimate object to be pulled and pried apart by various interest groups, each a victim of its own special “need.”<sup>11</sup>

“What kind of people” indeed, destroy what God has made, and labelled “good”? All of God’s creation is important to him, down to the last sparrow and blade of grass. The first commission to God’s people is to be caretakers and stewards of the gift of creation, and nothing has happened to change that responsibility. Psalm 104 summarizes what all of Scripture teaches:

1. God not only created the earth and all things in it, He also sustains it by His power
2. All things belong to God and find their reason for being in relation to Him
3. The earth and all things in it were created perfectly
4. Creation bears witness to the perfections of God and moves us to worship Him.

We have a responsibility to diligently tend and care for the world God has given us. We must protect it, guard it, and remember that we are responsible to Him who made us as well. In every way, we are called to be stewards of creation:

...stewardship will bring us well beyond appropriate use to restoration of what has been abused in the past. ... we and many others have abused and degraded the environment unknowingly, and stewardship means that we will work to set things right again—to reconcile and redeem. ... Beyond restoration, stewardship means serving. As we understand that God through creation is in so many ways serving our own lives, we will return this service with our own. This service will include a loving and caring keeping of what we hold in trust.<sup>12</sup>

10 Bullmore. *Ibid.* Trinity Journal, Vol. 19:2 (Fall 1998), p. 150.

11 Van Dyke, Fred. *Bridging The Gap: Christian Environmental Stewardship And Public Environmental Policy* Trinity Journal. Vol.18:2 (1997) page 147. Deerfield, IL: Trinity Seminary.

12 DeWitt, Calvin B. “*God’s Love for the World and Creation’s Environmental Challenge to Evangelical Christianity.*” *World Evangelical Fellowship. Theological Commission. Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 17:2, pp. 148–149.