

Origins

Stewardship and the Environment

Lesson #10 for March 9, 2013

Scriptures: Psalm 8; Genesis 2:15; Revelation 4:11; Exodus 20:8-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

1. As we look at our world today, it is very clear that rapidly expanding human populations are decimating habitats for other creatures and damaging the environment. Is global warming a real fact? Why are the polar ice caps apparently melting away? Will this have long-term implications for the human race? What should be man's relationship to his environment?
2. If we scan through the Bible looking for environmentally-related passages, we notice several significant things including that in the original creation, it was God's intention that nothing—not even a plant—would perish. Human beings were given permission to eat fruits, nuts, and grains produced by plants in the field and by trees; animals were designed to eat green leaves and herbs while not destroying the plants. (Genesis 1:29,30)
3. Jesus Himself said that God cares even for the sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 12:6,7) By contrast, look at Job 1&2. As soon as God allowed Satan to have access to Job and his environment, he destroyed everything he possibly could!
4. There are those who would argue that given what we know about the seven last plagues and the second coming and then the third coming, there is no question that our world is headed for destruction. At the time of the third coming, all traces of sin, sickness, death, etc. will be completely destroyed in the "cleansing flames" that burn up the corpses of the wicked. (Isaiah 66:24; GC 673.1; 4SP 489.1) So, if the entire world is to be destroyed in the end and if we are to get a "new heaven and a new earth," (Revelation 21:1) why waste a lot of time and effort trying to preserve our world now? God is going to remake it like the Garden of Eden anyway. In light of all of that, how should we relate to our environment? As we multiply, will we expand to other planets?
5. First of all, we should recognize that everything was created by God in the beginning. We know that we have deteriorated a great deal since that first creation.

God endowed man with so great vital force that he has withstood the accumulation of disease brought upon the race in consequence of perverted habits, and has continued for six thousand years. This fact of itself is enough to evidence to us the strength and electrical energy that God gave to man at his creation. It took more than two thousand years of crime and indulgence of base passions to bring bodily disease upon the race to any great extent. **If Adam, at his creation, had not been endowed with twenty times as much vital force as men [139] now have, the race, with their present habits of living in violation of natural law, would have become extinct.** (3T 138.2)

6. We know that animals have deteriorated a great deal also. The sizes of many animals that died in the flood are a clear evidence that we are shrinking in size and power. To what extent is this the result of our misuse of, or abuse of, our environment or even of each other and other creatures?
7. Read Psalm 8; Genesis 1:26. What is implied by the phrase, "dominion over" all other creatures that God gave to Adam and Eve? We have already noted that God did not intend for even a plant to die. So, man's dominion could not have included killing any of God's other creatures. Genesis 2:15 suggests that man was supposed to "care for" and "protect" the other creatures in his environment. Of what do you think Adam's dominion consisted? Was he to control the animals? To use them in any way to assist him in his labor? Or, did it mean that since human beings do not have horns, tusks, or claws, God put a natural respect for man in animals so that we would not be attacked? Or, is it possible that those horns, tusks, and claws, etc. were not there in the Garden of Eden because they would not have been needed for fighting or protection?
8. Seventh-day Adventists have taken the three angels' messages as our final assignment in preparing the world for the second coming. It is very instructive to note that these three angels'

messages included respect and honor for the Creator of “heaven, earth, sea, and the springs of water!” (Revelation 14:6,7) But, then followed very severe warnings for those who do not respect God’s creation and His laws and a description of what will finally happen to them.

9. Read Psalm 50:10. What is implied by the fact that every beast of the field and the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God? Is God telling us not to abuse other creatures made by His hands? Can we truly honor and glorify God’s name and at the same time abuse the things that He has made? (Revelation 4:11) Very specific instructions are given in both the Old Testament and the New Testament about how we should care for domesticated animals. (Exodus 20:8-11; 23:5,12; Proverbs 12:10; Luke 14:5) Ellen White had some very strong words on the same subject.

It is because of man’s sin that “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.” Romans 8:22. Suffering and death were thus entailed, not only upon the human race, but upon the animals. Surely, then, it becomes man to seek to lighten, instead of increasing, the weight of suffering which his transgression has brought upon God’s creatures. **He who will abuse animals because he has them in his power is both a coward and a tyrant. A disposition to cause pain, whether to our fellow men or to the brute creation, is satanic.** Many do not realize that their cruelty will ever be known, because the poor dumb animals cannot reveal it. But could the eyes of these men be opened, as were those of Balaam, they would see an angel of God standing as a witness, to testify against them in the courts above. A record goes up to heaven, and a day is coming when judgment will be pronounced against those who abuse God’s creatures. (*PP* 443.1)

10. Cruelty to animals has also been associated with certain personality disorders in humans.
11. So, what should be the balance between our care of the environment—and God’s creatures in that environment—and our concern for human beings and their salvation? God supports human need, not his greed! We will not be saved because we have been particularly kind to animals. And the gospel will not be finished because we support the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals!
12. Some evolutionists have gone so far as to say that there is essentially no difference between human beings and animals. They say that human beings have just gone down a different evolutionary path from their animal friends.

One philosopher has even argued that a chicken, or even a fish, has more “personhood” than does a fetus in the womb or even a newborn infant. However ridiculous these ideas might sound, they can be derived with a fair amount of logic from an atheistic evolutionary model of human origins. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, March 4, 2013)

13. So, what was God’s original intention concerning the way humans should relate to the animal kingdom? (Genesis 3:21; Exodus 29:38; Leviticus 11:3)
14. Our world is loaded with resources which can be used by human beings for their own benefit. Does the fact that such resources exist imply that God created them for our use and benefit? Does that include our using them in whatever way we want even for personal pleasure or gain of wealth?
15. Many ancient cultures had great respect for the animal kingdom among which they lived. They even worshiped certain creatures because of their strength, wisdom, or even perhaps their ability to fly or proliferate. American Indians are well known for their respect of the environment.
16. Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Why the change between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5? Is it that our recognition of God as the Creator of everything is really not that important? Or, was God through Moses just adding to the many reasons why we should worship God on the seventh-day Sabbath? More on that next week.
17. Does our treatment of other people say anything about our respect for God’s creation? According to 1 Corinthians 6:19,20, we should even respect our bodies because they are temples for the Holy Spirit. There is a mountain of scientific evidence and a great deal of discussion even in the writings

of Ellen White to suggest that what happens in our bodies affects our minds. Since our minds are the only instruments God has given us for thinking about Him, we need to do our utmost to care for our minds in every way possible.

Let none who profess godliness regard with indifference the health of the body, and flatter themselves that intemperance is no sin, and will not affect their spirituality. A close sympathy exists between the physical and the moral nature. The standard of virtue is elevated or degraded by the physical habits. . . . Any habit which does not promote healthful action in the human system degrades the higher and nobler faculties.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 25, 1881.

18. Having recognized that every good gift comes from God, (James 1:17) what should be our attitude toward stewardship? Certainly, we should recognize that everything within our grasp—even those things which we think we have worked hard to obtain—are nevertheless God’s property. This includes a whole host of things and not just our money. Do we honestly recognize that we ourselves and all that we “possess” belong to God? Do we treat our bodies and our possessions as if they belong to God? God has a work for each one of us to do.

To His servants Christ commits “His goods”—something to be put to use for Him. He gives “to every man his work.” Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in co-operation with Christ for the salvation of souls. Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 326, 327.

19. So, what should be the guiding principle in our lives?

Christ’s followers have been redeemed for service. Our Lord teaches that the true object of life is ministry. Christ Himself was a worker, and to all His followers He gives the law of service—service to God and to their fellow men. Here Christ has presented to the world a higher conception of life than they had ever known. By living to minister for others, man is brought into connection with Christ. The law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 326.

20. Are there some criteria by which we should determine the relative value of God’s creatures and creations? While plants are presumably given to us by God as a source of food, we certainly would not say the same about other human beings. A famous Australian by the name of Peter Singer raised some very serious questions when he wrote in his book:

Far from having concern for all life, or a scale of concern impartially based on the nature of the life in question, those who protest against abortion but dine regularly on the bodies of chickens, pigs and calves show only a biased concern for the lives of members of our species. For on any fair comparison of morally relevant characteristics, like rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, autonomy, pleasure, pain, and so on, the calf, the pig, and the much-derided chicken come out well ahead of the fetus at any stage of pregnancy—while if we make the comparison with a fetus of less than three months old, a fish would show more signs of consciousness.—Peter Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life* (New York: The Ecco Press, 2000), p. 156. But, that fetus has enormous potential!

21. As a Seventh-day Adventist Church organization, we have taken a firm stand on how we should relate to our environment. See adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat5.html
22. We immediately recognize that no matter how well we care for our environment, this side of the third coming we will never be able to return to the ideal state which existed in the Garden of Eden. If we do our best, can we even slow down the deterioration now taking place in our environment?
23. There are some among Adventists who believe that the first six of the seven last plagues are examples of what will happen when our environmental decay reaches a point of no return and God

allows the Devil to take control of our world. Does that seem reasonable to you?

24. While Adam and Eve were, in fact, given dominion over the earth and over its creatures, they were also told that there were some limitations to their dominion. They were not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:17) Human beings were supposed to serve and protect the garden and not to exploit and destroy.
25. If we as Seventh-day Adventists believe that Jesus could potentially return very quickly, should we focus on finishing the gospel? Or, protecting the environment? Environmental changes on any massive scale take fairly lengthy periods of time. Should we just focus on the second coming?
26. In His prayer in John 17, Jesus suggested that we should come into relationship with God just as They are in relationship with Each Other. Earlier, He had stated that love to God and love for our fellow human beings are the two most important commandments. (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-33; Luke 10:25-28) In light of such instructions, how should we relate to those around us?
27. One excellent example of how a righteous person should treat others in a difficult situation is given to us by Joseph who was engaged to Mary. When he found out she was pregnant, he did everything possible in his human wisdom to minimize Mary's shame. Of course, when he found out the truth, he took her as his wife.
28. Considering all of the above, what has been the general attitude of Jews and Christians toward the environment?

In 1973, Lynn White Jr. published a scathing article, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 18-30. White contended that Christian theology, based heavily on the concept of Creation dominion, provided a theological basis for the promotion of an exploitative view of man's relationship to nature, hence our current eco-crisis. White's article did accomplish some good by touching off a chain of reactions within Christianity, including among Evangelicals, causing those Christians to seek to refute White and proponents of an exploitative view, while arguing for a stewardship model of environmental care based in Creation. It is true that some exploitationist theology appears in Christian history, especially during the Industrial Revolution. However, most of the pro-exploitation expositors made poor use of biblical data when framing their arguments. It is likely, however, that the majority of Jews and Christians have not held such views. (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 122)

29. Men and women were created in the very image of God while the animals were not. We share with the animals the ability to procreate, a power which Satan desperately coveted but does not have. It is also true that because we were created in the image of God, He has given us a relative superiority to the animals. In times of real need, human beings were allowed to consume animal flesh. (Genesis 9:5,6) But, if Christians and Jews are to follow the clear instructions in the fourth commandment by allowing their animals to rest one day a week, shouldn't that teach us respect for domesticated animals and other creatures?
30. We live in a world almost dominated by technology. How does the use of technology for accomplishing many difficult tasks change our relationship to the animals who once did those tasks for us?
31. Once again, we need to ask ourselves: If God created us and if we belong to Him, what responsibilities does that place upon us? How does that, or how should that, impact our relationship with other human beings and especially to God's other creatures?

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