

## 5. The Environment (2Q 2010—Health and Healing)

**Biblical material:** Gen. 1–2:7; 2:18–24; 3:7, 17–19; Ps. 24:1; Matt. 25:34–46; Mark 2:27, 28; 3:4.

### Quotes

- It was Descartes and Bacon, not the author of Genesis, who propagated the view that man can do as he pleases to nature with impunity. *E Ashby*
- The environment will continue to deteriorate until pollution practices are abandoned. We need to make vast changes in human behavior. *B. F. Skinner*
- Humankind was created in the image of God, thus representing God as His stewards, to rule the natural environment in a faithful and fruitful way.... The ecological crisis is rooted in humankind's greed and refusal to practice good and faithful stewardship within the divine boundaries of creation. *SDA Statement on the Environment*
- The wisdom and goodness of the Maker plainly appears in the parts of this stupendous fabric, and the several degrees and ranks of creatures in it. *John Locke*
- By believing we are the product of random acts, we eliminate morality and the basis of ethical behavior. For if there is no such thing as moral authority you can do anything you want. *Ben Carson*

### Questions

What's the point of worrying about the environment when the whole earth will be burned up soon when Jesus comes? How do we reflect the character of God in our dealings with the environment? How does our broken relationship with God (sin) affect the world we live in? How does God restore and recreate? What does the universe learn?

### Bible discussion

The first chapters of Genesis describe creation, and that God made it good/very good. Humanity's place in this creation is made clear—we are to be stewards of all God has made. Sin however has marred this wonderful creation and the brokenness of our relationship with God and with each other is mirrored in the nature we see, red in tooth and claw... However it is still all God's (Ps. 24:1), and will be restored as the future home for the saved (Matt. 25:34). Part of this creation is the Sabbath that is made for us (Mark 2:27, 28) on which we are to do good, showing our reverence to God and to all he has made (Mark 3:4).

### Comment

God sets about making the universe. As part of his vast creation he makes Planet Earth. Makes it the way he wants it to be. In perfect harmony, all nature in beautiful balance, a wonderful world that is very good.

Only when humanity in its fallen, evil state tries to exploit this God-given world do the problems start. And in our modern world our capacity for environmental destruction is huge...

Burning down an area of the Amazon rain forest the size of Oregon every year. Dumping enough toxic chemicals in the seas off these shores every week to kill the

population of London. Enough oil spilled every day to wipe out sea birds, marine life, even the plankton that produces much of the oxygen we need to breathe.

Holes in the ozone layer. Pollution from cars and trucks and planes. Global warming from greenhouse gases. Spreading deserts and melting icecaps. On and on in a never-ending catalogue of natural disasters—that are *truly unnatural*.

And where is God in all this? Still there, of course, but how much harder it is to know him when all his wonderful Creation is scarred and marred by our thoughtless hands.

Back in the beginning God told the newly-created human beings to subdue the Earth, and to have dominion over every living thing

“Great!” some say. “That means we can do whatever we like. God gave everything to us, so we can use—and abuse—any plant or animal, any bird or beast for whatever we like.”

NO! And God weeps over his raped and ravaged world, exploited and destroyed by the ones he made as the highest earthly intelligences to care for and safeguard his precious planet.

God gave man responsibility, commitment. His promise was to *care* for the Earth God had given to him *on trust*.

How well have we repaid God’s trust? Once the first humans rejected God by believing the exploiter—the Earth fell under a consequential curse. “Cursed is the ground because of you.” Genesis 3:17 NIV. The very *caretakers* of the world had broken faith with the Maker, the whole planet suffered—not from God’s vindictiveness, but as a result of evil that breaks the threads at the heart of the web of life.

The result of rejecting God is a rejection of his creation. At the heart of the rebellion is the spirit of *selfishness*—which is what evil is all about. At the heart of pollution, habitat destruction, resource exhaustion, is that same spirit of selfishness which says, “I want this. I don’t care about the results. Me, me, me.”

That’s the way people go when they leave God out of the equation. The result: a planet full of people using and abusing, doing just as they please, thinking only of themselves. A crisis of broken faith. An ecological crisis. A spiritual crisis.

We’ve learned to exploit and over-develop, to make machines that can do the work for our feeble bodies, to tear and gouge and rip apart this home of ours.

That’s where we are today. Right up at the end, when, if nothing is done, we will fatally and finally wreck God’s wonderful world.

The “eco-friendly” God who made the world is not about to go away and leave it to its fate. Yes, it’s in a mess. Yes, we’re destroying it. Yes, by our sinful selfishness we are proving that we are rebels in God’s universe, and unfit to continue as stewards of his creation. But like a father watching his child about to smash a precious vase, God is not going to let us do it. Not completely. Not fully. Not finally. The promise is God’s: “I will create new heavens and a new earth.” Isaiah 65:17 NIV. God will take this broken old Earth and remake it. We are told to look forward to the day when ‘the elements will melt with fervent heat’ because God will be molding and forming this world into his beautiful creation once more. “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” 2 Peter 3:13 NIV.

A bright hope of a new and perfect world where right is always done. A tremendous future for those who want to be with God and accept his forgiveness and healing.

But that's *then*. What about now? Does the environmentalist Christian say, 'It's okay. In the end God will fix it. It doesn't matter what happens now'?

A thousand times no! Because the way we are now is the way we will be. If we don't care now, we'll never care. And what about that precious quality of life in the present? For ultimately as we damage the environment we are destroying what God made.

What can God's children do except love the world their God has made? God, the very first environmentalist, loves each tiny part of his vast creation, wanting it all to be brought back to beauty and harmony.

### **Ellen White Comments**

So through the creation we are to become acquainted with the Creator. The book of nature is a great lesson book, which in connection with the Scriptures we are to use in teaching others of His character, and guiding lost sheep back to the fold of God. As the works of God are studied, the Holy Spirit flashes conviction into the mind. It is not the conviction that logical reasoning produces; but unless the mind has become too dark to know God, the eye too dim to see Him, the ear too dull to hear His voice, a deeper meaning is grasped, and the sublime, spiritual truths of the written word are impressed on the heart.

In these lessons direct from nature, there is a simplicity and purity that makes them of the highest value. All need the teaching to be derived from this source. In itself the beauty of nature leads the soul away from sin and worldly attractions, and toward purity, peace, and God.

Too often the minds of students are occupied with men's theories and speculations, falsely called science and philosophy. They need to be brought into close contact with nature. Let them learn that creation and Christianity have one God. Let them be taught to see the harmony of the natural with the spiritual. Let everything which their eyes see or their hands handle be made a lesson in character building. Thus the mental powers will be strengthened, the character developed, the whole life ennobled. {COL 24-5}

Before the fall of Adam, not a cloud rested on the minds of our first parents to obscure their clear perception of the divine character of God. They were perfectly conformed to the will of God. A beautiful light, the light of God, surrounded them. Nature was their lesson book. The Lord instructed them in regard to the natural world, and then left with them this open book, that they might behold beauty in every object upon which their eyes should rest. The Lord visited the holy pair, and instructed them through the works of his hands.

The beauties of nature are an expression of the love of God for human intelligences, and in the garden of Eden the existence of God was demonstrated in the objects of nature that surrounded our first parents. Every tree planted in the garden spoke to them, saying that the invisible things of God were clearly seen, being understood by the things which were made, even his eternal power and Godhead. {HL 288}