

**“Environmental Holiness”  
(Genesis 9:1-17)  
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**Introduction:**

**NIV Genesis 9:1-17**

<sup>1</sup> Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup> The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. <sup>3</sup> Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

<sup>4</sup> “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. <sup>5</sup> And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

<sup>6</sup> “Whoever sheds the blood of man,  
by man shall his blood be shed;  
for in the image of God  
has God made man.

<sup>7</sup> As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup> “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup> And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup> I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. <sup>16</sup> Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

<sup>17</sup> So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

For the past three months about 40 of us gathered every Wednesday evening to study a book written by author Jerry Bridges’ called, *The Pursuit of Holiness*. In that book he says the following statement.

“No one can pursue holiness who is not prepared to obey God in every area of his life.” (136)  
If his statement is true and I believe it is, then there are significant implications for our lives. For most of us we know the major sins we are to avoid. The prohibitions found in the Ten Commandments. There are the obvious sexual sins. There’s lying and stealing. There are the sins of the heart like coveting, bitterness, and pride. And then all of this falls under the two great commands Jesus teaches us to love God and to love our neighbors.

So with this knowledge of what sin is and what it is not, we also have the tendency to prioritize these sins. We know what’s on the top of the list. Murder. Adultery. Violence. And then there

are the smaller things like white lies, not telling the lady at the cash register that she gave us back too much change, and so on.

And then there are things that we don't even place on the list of sins. Often times these are the sins of omission. These are the things we should have done, but decided not to do. So we don't consider these things a big deal at all. It may also include things such as violating copyright infringement laws. Not helping the old lady cross the road and so on. And probably most all of us have not even considered that there might be such a thing as environmental sins. Is there the sin of not-recycling? Is there the sin of littering? Is there the sin of pouring paint down your drain? Is there the sin of not driving a hybrid vehicle? What, if anything, does the bible say about those questions?

We want to look at these not merely because Earth Day is coming up this week, but more because we want to be obedient to God in every area of life. We really do want to be holy.

Where do you begin in trying to answer these questions? I think you begin at creation and God's relationship to all he has made. So how does God view the environment? His opinion is stated in the first chapter of the bible repeatedly. Over and over after significant milestones in his creative work, it says the following words, "And God saw that it was good." He made the land and said it was good. He made the plants and trees and it was good. He made the sun and moon and it was good. God made animals, specifically bird and creatures of the sea and it was good. Then he made animals to live on the land and it was good. After that at the pinnacle of creation, God made human beings, man and woman. He took a step back, looked at everything he had made, and said it was very good.

So God's attitude toward creation, the things that he made, with all his wisdom of science and biology, and geology and other 'ologies' was, in fact good. It wasn't neutral. Creation is not neutral. Animals and plants and natural resources and soil...those things are not neutral. They are good. You can even say they are inherently good. God looks favorably and with approval upon the earth and animals, and plants, and the sun and humankind. So that should be our shared attitude toward creation.

And then one of the first assignments God gave to human beings was to care for, to steward, and rule over the creation that God had made. I believe these commands, like all of his commands were to be carried out in this manner. Do it in the way God would do it. Do it with the heart, attitude and spirit that God would have us do it.

And then entered the first sin of human beings when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, not to eat from the tree. And as we look at the consequences of that sin, we discover a few things. The serpent was cursed. There will now exist an on-going battle and struggle between the race of human beings and the Devil. To Eve, God said that her pains in childbirth will increase. And then to Adam God said this.

*"Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat of it  
all the days of your life.*

<sup>18</sup> *It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

*In some way sin not only affected Adam and Eve, but it also affected the earth. The sin of humankind negatively impacted the planet.*

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And then when we approach today's passage about Noah, what else do we learn? It was because the world of men had become so evil that God decided to bring down a catastrophe beyond comparison not only upon the race of humans, but also upon every living creature that inhabited the planet and the planet itself. (I assume the creatures of the sea were spared.)

So the first thing we notice is that in a general sense our sins have a negative impact, not only upon ourselves, our race, but also upon our planet. Because of our sins the animals were punished, even more, the planet was punished. It was set in motion when Adam and Eve sinned and we see it again with the people in Noah's day. And we of course see it today. The sins of one man, let's say the ruler on the northern side of a small peninsula in the far-east, can have devastating effects on the environment and thus upon his people. Across the African continent we see the same thing as well. We see the greed of evil rulers ruining their land and starving their people. And I'm certain the rulers on this side of the earth are no less guilty with their thirst for oil.

But we also see something very interesting in the Noah story. After the flood and after the waters recede and after Noah and his family and all the animals exit the ark, God makes a covenant. Several times throughout the bible God makes these massive covenants with his people that are cosmic in scale with universal application. This is one of the first ones.

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup> "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

The interesting thing in this covenant is that it is a covenant with all of creation. We may be inclined to think that God only makes promises with human beings, but here the covenant is made between God and Noah and all his descendants after him, which is all of mankind. And with every living creature on the earth. Never again will he issue such a judgment.

You and I all know from our science classes and from that great documentary, the Lion King, of the circle of life—how all living things and the earth are inter-related and inter-connected. But who would have thought that it was scripture to bring out this point. And it brings out in a much deeper way than any science text book can. Science, is based on the presupposition that God does not exist. He is not a factor in the equation of the earth, environment, conservation. Etc. So what becomes the greatest motivation for environmental concern? It's humankind. It's animals. It's the earth itself. So doing environment, absent of God, will make us into idolaters and pantheists.

So for us Christians it is important that we don't buy into science without putting it through the filter of Scripture. We care for creation, first and foremost because God is creator. Everything finds its root with that point. Second, this is our second mandate from the mouth after the first one to make babies. Third, it has a direct impact on humanity. Fourth, for the sake of beauty.

This teaching from Genesis chapter 9, very near the beginning of all things, finds its conclusion in the book of Revelation. The bible's destination doesn't just speak of a new humanity. It speaks of that for certain. Paul writes of how we will be made new in 1 Corinthians 15.

<sup>42</sup>So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; <sup>43</sup>it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup>it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

But the bible also mentions that in the end all the heavens and the earth will be made new or re-created.

In the last chapter of the bible the author writes these words in describing the events of the end times.

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

All this to say that there exists a triangular relationship between God, humanity and the whole created order. We see how sin affects this triangular relationship. We see this not only from scripture, but also from historic and modern day examples. God has a way for us to live out our lives, not only in peace with other human beings, and not only in peace with God our creator, but also in a harmonious peace with all of creation.

Here's what one Old Testament scholar writes.

"It is clear that the Old Testament offers us a very radical assessment of the effects of our wilful rebellion and fall into disobedience, self-centeredness and sin. It is not just that every dimension of the human person is affected by sin. (We learned that last week) It is not just that every human person is a sinner. It is also the case that the totality of our economic relationships with each other and of our ecological relationship to the earth itself have all been perverted and twisted. And this is so because not only are we, as humans, an integral part of the created order such that nothing we do can be unconnected with the rest of life on the earth, but also because we have been placed by God in a position of dominion within creation. Therefore, just as the behaviour of the kings of Israel affected the totality of society for good or for ill, so the way we have exercised our kingly role in creation has had incalculable effects through the whole of our domain." (Wright 136)

So the author is saying two things. The fall of man messed up our relationship with creation. And because of our place at the top of the pecking order, having been given dominion over the earth, what we do as a race has a much greater impact positively or negatively upon the planet.

So where do we go from here? Let's look to Isaiah 65 as the prophet paints us a picture of what's to come.

<sup>17</sup> *"Behold, I will create  
new heavens and a new earth.  
The former things will not be remembered,  
nor will they come to mind.*

<sup>18</sup> *But be glad and rejoice forever  
in what I will create,  
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight  
and its people a joy.*

<sup>19</sup> *I will rejoice over Jerusalem  
and take delight in my people;  
the sound of weeping and of crying  
will be heard in it no more.*

- 20 "Never again will there be in it  
an infant who lives but a few days,  
or an old man who does not live out his years;  
he who dies at a hundred  
will be thought a mere youth;  
he who fails to reach <sup>[a]</sup> a hundred  
will be considered accursed.*
- 21 They will build houses and dwell in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*
- 22 No longer will they build houses and others live in them,  
or plant and others eat.  
For as the days of a tree,  
so will be the days of my people;  
my chosen ones will long enjoy  
the works of their hands.*
- 23 They will not toil in vain  
or bear children doomed to misfortune;  
for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,  
they and their descendants with them.*
- 24 Before they call I will answer;  
while they are still speaking I will hear.*
- 25 The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,  
but dust will be the serpent's food.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,"  
says the LORD.*

This is an image of what's to come. And it will be Jesus Christ who will make this happen. Christ will redeem not only his people through his death and resurrection, but he will also redeem all of his creation. He will be the one that ushers in a new heaven and a new earth.

So in the meantime while we live here on the earth, what are God's people to do when it comes to the environment? I think we are to do what we can, within our power and means, for the glory of God, for the love of humanity and for the preservation of the planet to be environmental stewards.

Shouldn't it be that Christians are the greatest champions of environment and conservation? Shouldn't we be the exemplary ones when it comes to the small things one individual and one family can do? Shouldn't we be the ones influencing national and international policy on the environment? Not only because animals are cute or because people are important, but there's an even greater reason, penned very well in the following lyrics.

This is my Father's world,  
and to my listening ears  
all nature sings,  
and round me rings  
the music of the spheres.  
This is my Father's world:  
I rest me in the thought  
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;  
his hand the wonders wrought.