

All that we are

by

Samuel Perilla

Let all that I am praise the Lord (...)

(...) You placed the world on its foundation so it would never be moved. Mountains rose and valleys sank to the levels you decreed. (..) Then you set a firm boundary for the seas, so they would never again cover the earth. (...)

They provide water for all the animals, and the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds nest beside the streams and sing among the branches of the trees. You send rain on the mountains from your heavenly home, and you fill the earth with the fruit of your labor. (...)

(...) O Lord, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom, you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. Here is the ocean, vast and wide, teeming with life of every kind, both large and small. (...)

(...) May the glory of the Lord continue forever!

The Lord takes pleasure in all he has made! The earth trembles at his glance; the mountains smoke at his touch. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live. I will praise my God to my last breath! May all my thoughts be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord. Let all sinners vanish from the face of the earth; let the wicked disappear forever.

Psalm 104 (New Living Translation, abridged)

I know it may sound blunt after reading such a beautiful passage, but, why don't we, Christians, just take care of this planet that God has given us? Of course, there are multiple and very complex reasons, all coming from different perspectives, but I wanted to pour my messy mind into the matter and reflect a little bit, of course, guided by the Word of the Lord. Here I present to you two reasons why we don't take care of this good planet and what we can do about it.

1. Because we do not have a clear identity in us we do not know how to relate to God, man and nature

a) Our spiritual identity vs our material identity

There are many reasons why our identity in Christ is not well founded. There are the obvious ones such as that we are new to the faith so we know little of who we are in Christ and what is the

purpose of our lives, or that there are wounds in our heart/mind that do not allow us to have the right image of ourselves. There are also the not so obvious ones. For instance there are teachings, doctrines, and interpretations that misunderstand and manipulate what the Bible (and God) says.

To give you an example read the following statement: “God wants to save your soul.” You probably find it is correct. Sadly, the previous statement is a half-truth, a product of the permeation of human philosophies and the misunderstanding of God’s word and his prophets. A more accurate statement is that God wants to save human beings, that is, body, soul, and mind. This is why Paul and John write about the redemption of our body (we will be given a new body that will not perish nor fall short in any way) and the redemption of Creation (there will be new heavens and new earth). As well, they write about the removal of worldly patterns and thoughts from our minds and their renovation through Jesus Christ. The separation of matter from spirit comes from Plato’s theory of forms that entered the early Christian interpretation of the physical realm and saw it as a poor imitation of the spiritual realm. This is a very dangerous doctrine, as Genesis teaches us that the physical realm is no less important than the spiritual realm, and in fact, they influence each other. For example, a spiritual event (sin) brought chaos and destruction to the physical world, but this spiritual action took place within the tangible world when Adam and Eve physically took and ate from the tree of science and knowledge. Both realities are so co-related that sometimes is very difficult to differentiate them.

God created this very physical world and throughout the Old Testament He repeatedly speaks about the importance of the physical realm for His people. There are festivals, rituals, harvest-related laws, soil-related laws, and many food-related laws. God gives the same value to the physical things as he does to the spiritual ones, which totally denies the idea that the physical realm is incomplete, less important than, or a mere imitation of, the spiritual realm. God is God of the physical realm.

God wants to save your soul, body, and mind. When God created man in his own image and likeness, he created him using physical matter. I think this says something about the nature of God. Maybe we cannot extrapolate and say that God is made of the same matter as we are, or the Creation is, but certainly, we can say that God cares about the physical matter because it is what he chose to create the whole universe with. Therefore, as a Christian, I should take care of the physical realms like the earth, and the environment, as much as I take care of the spiritual things. I should never neglect one for the other, always holding both as holy and precious. I should strive for holiness, keeping myself away from littering and also from sexual impurity.

b) Utilitarianism vs stewardship

The Bible says (Genesis 2: 15):

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.

(New Living Translation)

God took the Man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order.

(The Message, Eugene H. Peterson)

And the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

(King James Version)

Now, economy and religion have been deeply correlated throughout human history and, of course, the *development* of the economy and societies has taken a huge toll on the Creation. Didn't God say '*Be fruitful and multiply, Fill the earth and govern it*' (Genesis 1: 28, New Living Translation)? Is not it necessary to take that toll on Creation to do so?



It is safe to assume that the toll we take today on creation to fuel our version of '*Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it*' was never part of God's original plan because we know that the sin of man drove him out of God's perfect plan. The Fall of Man (a spiritual event triggered by a physical action) altered the human relationship with creation. For example, if humans had never fallen, they would have been able to be guided by God Himself in each step of their development and economic growth and so no sin or its consequences would have touched this earth. To put it in modern-day words, no envy, no ambition, no empires trading slaves, no genocide, no deforestation, no soil over-exploitation, and no contaminating sources of energy would have touched this earth. The reality, however, is different. Our sins and their consequences are here today, and for that reason we need to be redeemed together with the Creation by and through Jesus Christ. Luckily, we are not alone until the restoration is fulfilled, because we have God's Word and his Spirit to guide our endeavors in this fallen world, so we can navigate in such a way that balances the consequences of our sins upon this world. All I am, including my intelligence to accept that God wants me to take care of his creation, shall praise the Lord.

c) Local monotheism vs the God of the whole creation

There has been one particular misconception about God's relationship with humanity. This delusion has been evolving through ages and history and nowadays it is hard to put it into simple words, but we can take a brief look at what it used to be in the times of the prophets and how we are following similar patterns today.

When Jonah was commissioned by God to preach to the Assyrians in Nineveh he hesitated for many reasons, and what happened is left as a valuable lesson on what a Christian should not do when disagreeing with God. Yet there is another crucial part of the story we often miss: the fact that Jonah thought he could fly away from God's presence and that he could hide from God (something similar to what Adam and Eve tried to do in the Garden). The reason behind this is the wrong belief that stated that God was a local god to the Jews. He was indeed superior to the other gods of the other people but, one of the many other gods still.

Thankfully, later in the Bible, we are taught that there is no other God but God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Continuing with the story of ancient Jews, people believed that they should praise exclusively the local God, but there were other gods for other people, nations and places and therefore God had no jurisdiction in other countries or continents. Sadly, that sort of thinking is still present today. Some Christians believe that God is only God to them and confine him to the four walls of their church, forgetting that He is the Father to all creation, to all humans and to all nature; nature we know and that we do not, and people we like and people we do not.

Everything belongs to him and it is under his authority. Everything happening on earth is God's business and He is present everywhere, whether it is our prosperous country or a developing country where our national mining company is taking its natural resources. We must have the same respect for the forests, the oceans, other nation's soils, our own house, our office, as we have for the Church we attend every Sunday, for God's presence is also there in all those other scenarios.

2. We don't take proper care of God's creation simply because we don't know how to

This is a sincere struggle of many Christians, including myself. We are so ignorant that we do not exactly know how to materialize our good intentions. In response to that need, I made a study of the Scriptures and what they teach us about the matter. I came up with four biblical principles to take care of this earth:

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. (New Living Translation). We can see how God places the man to take care of the earth. This is humanity's first call after, of course, longing for God. We are called to take care of the earth knowing that it was given by God, and belongs to him, not to us. And to care of it like our own household. It is the job of every Christian to look after the earth, the oceans, the animals, the ecosystems, and all Creation. You may argue that in our time, life may seem more complicated and the problems more severe than in the garden, but also science and knowledge have increased. We may not have the resources

to go off on a trip to clean up beaches in south Malaysia, but we can donate to the cause. We may not be able to dive in the oceans and save animals from dying choked in plastic, but millions of Christians around the world can prevent millions of plastic items from going into the ocean. How? By recycling, reusing, or just eliminating plastic of our lives. There are many other ways to take care, to tend and watch over the earth, so there is no excuse not to do so.

Now let's read Leviticus 25. Please take the time to read the whole chapter. Now that you have done so, we can see a God that wants his people to prosper, develop and multiply and also to take good care of the earth. There are two very important concepts here. First: *"The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenant farmers working for me"* (v23, New Living Translation). This resonates with what we previously stated. The Earth is not ours, and therefore we cannot do as we please with it since we will be held accountable for it before the Lord. A practical response would be to go out to the park, take a walk and think how all of this belongs to God, and one day you will be held accountable for it. So if you see trash other people have littered in the park, go ahead and pick it up, put in the recycle bin what needs to go there, and so on. Take care of the public spaces knowing God owns them and you are his keeper.

The second concept of Leviticus 25 is that we must give the earth, the environment, a good rest. Israel was a farming country. The totality of Jewish economy depended on the agriculture, but even so, the Sabbath year (yes, 365 days) must be kept Holy. That meant literally for the soil not to be planted, nor used or exploited, and God was there during that whole year supporting his people and prospering them along with the earth. Now imagine that we stop every human industry on which our countries entirely rely for a year, and then we stop polluting for a year, just trusting God. Sadly, this is just a utopian idea, but God is very clear about his desire for nature to have a break from humanity's burden. We should find ways in which we can contribute from our own place to let the earth rest, at least a little bit every day. Maybe using a little less electricity, consuming less gas, and wasting less food.

The fourth biblical principle of today is not to look for "easy" shortcuts! Leviticus 19:19 says: *"(...) Do not mate two different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two different kinds of seed (...)"*. The main reason to mate two different kinds of animals back then was simple; it was because you wanted an animal that would exceed God's original parameters, maybe one that would work harder but consume less food or water. Problems arise when we disobey this commandment. For example we pretend to be wiser than God who actually created all animals, and in fact, are not wise enough so we can't measure the consequences that such acts will have on the Creation.

A modern day example is the Africanized bees also known as "killer bees". They are a hybrid of the western honey bee species (*Apis mellifera*), produced originally by human-lead cross-breeding with the East African lowland honey bee (*A. m.scutellata*) to create a strain that would produce more honey and be better adapted to tropical conditions. They basically wanted a more productive animal that would benefit their pockets in a greater way. But today Africanized Bees represent a danger for humans and animals. They are easily disturbed and much more aggressive with other creatures and bee species. Bees have been recognized as endangered, and this is critical to humanity because they



are the most important pollinators in the planet. In some cases, Africanized swarms become dangerous for humans and they need to be removed, which puts us in difficulties. We either cause ourselves severe trouble by removing the swarms, or we cause ourselves severe trouble by not removing the dangerous swarm. Why does removing the swarm cause us severe trouble? Because we need to preserve as many pollinators alive and functioning as well as possible to avoid another environmental crisis, and Africanized Bees are included. All this trouble just because we decided, guided by our ambition, to cross two different species.

And no, I am not saying God forbids genetic engineering and programming, but he does forbid doing such things driven mainly by ambition. That applies to GMO companies, Agro-industrial companies, and some specific genetic engineering

programs. They all claim to care for the planet's sake but we can easily realize that they are mainly, if not only, driven by ambition. For example Monsanto GMO company claims to be concerned about the lack of food in the planet. They imply that the conventional farming methods cannot meet the demands for food in the world, so they "need" to create new GMO's, fertilizers and pesticides to sell to the people so they can have a successful harvest and food on their plates, but the truth is that a third of the food produced in the world is directly wasted. Beating the issue of waste would be a better way to attack famine in the world, making sure food is not wasted but rather well distributed around the planet, but of course this is not profitable for them.

We shall not take shortcuts that may negatively affect the planet in the future, neither support policies that do it. We are members of societies where we can have a voice and vote against such things, where we can raise awareness among our peers. Collectively, we all make sure that science is not used to serve private ambitions and rich pockets, but to actually meet this planet's needs.

Lastly, there is light outside of the church too. Remember that God oversees and rules all creation, including scientists (whether they believe in Him or not). God can use well-educated scientists to teach us how to take good care of the planet. Seek such voices among people that have studied and dedicated their lives to the matter. Process all information with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and apply all that useful scientific data to your daily life. How? By recycling, or maybe changing your lightbulbs for less consuming ones. We can also fund researchers that are trying to fix the problems that we, humans, have created.

To conclude, we may not take good care of God's creation because we do not understand who we are before God and his plan for us in this earth. However, there is light in the Bible that provides a solution for this issue. Study the Bible with a sincere heart so you may know God's will for you and his creation. We may not take good care of the creation because we sincerely do not know how to do it. We saw four biblical principles: 1) God's first call to humanity (after loving him above all) is to tend and watch over the Planet, 2) This Earth does not belong to us, we are just the tenants and

we need to live on this earth with reverence for the Landlord’s property. 3) We need to give the earth some rest, and unburden her in any possible way. We need to reduce as much as possible our carbon footprint. 4) Let’s not take shortcuts when we don’t know about their consequences, but also let’s do whatever is in our power to stop the people who are taking those shortcuts. And finally, we need to understand that God is God of the universities, scientists, politicians, lobbyists, as he is of the churches, preachers, and priests. We should not be afraid of science, because it belongs to God, so let’s educate ourselves outside of the Church too. God has sent us to be a light for the Creation, so Let All that we are praise the Lord!

Biography

Samuel Perilla from Colombia is a Wastewater Management graduate from SRJC in California. He now is studying International Relations in Poland. Please check out Gongali Model (<https://gongalimodel.com/>) a Tanzanian company he volunteers for. They are bringing hope to people that have no access to potable water! Samuel joined the Cross Current Environmental Sciences (<https://www.graduateimpact.org/environmental-sciences-2/>) group in 2018.



Images

‘deforestation-machine-truck’ by Robert Jones at Pixabay:

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The *John Ray Initiative* promotes responsible environment stewardship in accordance with Christian principles and the wise use of science and technology. JRI organises seminars and disseminates information on environmental stewardship.

Inspiration for JRI is taken from John Ray (1627-1705), English naturalist, Christian theologian and first biological systematist of modern times, preceding Carl Linnaeus.

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