

LAW AND CREATION

THE LAW OF GOD AND PUBLIC POLICY: PART 10



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Law and Creation
The Law of God and Public Policy: Part 10
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Welcome to *Law and Creation*

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. He has entrusted it us for our benefit and His glory, and He expects us to love and use it as He would.

But where we can find out His intentions for the world He has entrusted to our care?

We must begin in the Law of God, beginning with Genesis 1 and 2. There we find that God made everything very good and He appointed people to care for, protect, and develop the gift of creation. Other aspects of the Law of God outline a program of creation care that we must not neglect.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Earth Is the Lord's

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Genesis 1.1, 2

*The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein.
For He has founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the waters.* Psalm 24.1, 2

Creation vulnerable

All human wealth ultimately derives from the resources of the earth. In an economy in which the acquisition of wealth is the driving force, the creation is vulnerable to being exploited by those who regard it merely as a means of aggrandizing personal wellbeing. We must admit, that is not an entirely unfounded fear. The record of human history, as Wendell Berry (among others) has shown, is one of exploitation and waste when it comes to enjoying the riches of the created order.

The environmental movement has grown up in recent decades to resist individual and corporate practices that threaten the integrity and continuity of the environment. What began as a campaign against pesticides and littering has grown into a full-blown movement focused on saving the planet from the harmful effects of human self-interest. So appealing has “saving the environment” become that certain aspects of it have grown into a worldwide political movement espousing catastrophic visions and pursuing specious courses of action.

The Law of God is clear—from the very first words—that the earth and its creatures belong to God. Therefore, they must be used in a manner consistent with His justice. Love for God and neighbor requires that we regard the creation as a resource to be used and developed with care, respect, and proper foresight. God created and sustains all the creatures of the world; they are His to give as He pleases. He expects those to whom He entrusts His creation—the land and all its creatures and resources—to receive and develop it in ways that reflect His holy and righteous and good character and will.

It is altogether appropriate, therefore, to work for public policies that reflect the divine ownership of the creation and mankind's calling to exercise good stewardship over the gifts of God. God has given the earth to humankind as a gift to be understood, developed, and enjoyed (Ps. 115.16). We are stewards of His creation. The role of a steward is to receive and invest the gifts of God so that His purposes are realized and His glory is exalted (Matt. 25.14-30). The creation must not be regarded either as a resource to be exploited or a tool for achieving political ends. It declares—and our use of it must gratefully refract—the wisdom, beauty, majesty, wonder, and goodness of God.

Creation and God's purpose

At the same time, it is important to remember that God has created the environment and everything in it to be developed and used for human wellbeing and unto His glory. The creation and its creatures are God's servants for His purpose (Ps. 19.89-91), and His purpose is for human beings to glorify Him in all things (1 Cor. 10.31).

The environment must not be treated as something to be revered and preserved for its own sake. The creation and its creatures are not to be worshiped. As good stewards of the creation we must learn to use it in ways that benefit all human beings and honor God by bringing out the glory and purpose of the Creator in all our use of His creatures.

Further, the environment must not be used as a staging-ground, or to support, wicked and self-serving

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practices that dishonor God. The pagan peoples of Canaan were rejected from their land precisely for this reason.

The earth is the Lord's; we must learn to use it for His glory and honor. And, while the Law of God does not offer anything like a full-blown environmental program, there is enough in it to frame out our thinking concerning the kinds of public policies that can reflect the Lord's purposes for His creatures.

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In this part of our study of "The Law of God and Public Policy" we will consider those statutes and precepts which have a bearing on the ways human beings must use the creation if our use is to line up with the purposes of God. We will see that both conservation and development of the environment, as well as profitable and enjoyable use, are sanctioned by the Law of God, which can thus serve us as we think about contributing to discussions of public policy in this arena.

At the same time, the Law will teach us to regard the creation with wisdom, to restrain our lust to consume, to take the long view of creation, and to practice a kind of stewardship that refers all our use of the creation to God for His glory.

Christians must not simply go along with the agendas and policies the secular world embraces with respect to the creation. Though these may be entirely well-intended, they will only work for the benefit of the environment to the extent they follow—or perhaps merely stumble onto—the clear teaching of Scripture about how we must use the world and its resources and creatures.

For reflection

1. Are you involved with any environmental organizations or issues? Should you be?
2. Consider the creation God has entrusted to you—land, creatures, cultural objects, and so forth. What is your approach to being a steward over these gifts for God's glory?
3. What concerns do you have about becoming more involved in thinking environmentally?

Next steps—Preparation: Spend some time in prayer reflecting on the questions above. Ask God to guide you into a clearer understanding and proper use of His creation.

2 No Wanton Destruction

“When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege, for the tree of the field is man’s food. Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued.” Deuteronomy 20.19, 20

War against creation

The violence of war often brings out the worst of men, and not just against one another. Often the creation itself becomes a victim of the savagery of combat.

One of the best-known examples of the wanton destruction of the creation in the name of war occurred during the American Civil War, when General Sherman instructed his army to burn a swath across Georgia from Atlanta to Savannah. Farms and lands were put to the torch. Animals that could not be eaten or used for work were simply destroyed. To bring the South to its knees, General Sherman extended the violence and brutality of war against the very creation itself. Prior to that, to reduce Stonewall Jackson’s effectiveness, Philip Sheridan burned farms and destroyed farmlands throughout the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.

During the Second World War and the Viet Nam War “carpet bombing” of cities and jungles was justified as a military tactic. The use of “agent orange” to defoliate Vietnamese jungles was justified as necessary collateral damage. The wholesale destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan was also regarded as being within the framework of just war theory.

My point is not to pass judgment on such tactics but simply to show how war takes its toll, not only on human beings, but on their culture and the creation that sustains them. The Law of God understands how easy it can be for those engaged in war to let violence get out of hand and become something more than just an aspect of military strategy.

Such wanton devastation of the creation is not limited to times of war, however.

War by other means

Other examples of the violence against creation in the name of human gain could be multiplied: the pollution of local streams and rivers by the discharge of corporate waste; slash and burn policies against pristine jungles and rain forests; strip logging and mountain-top coal extraction; overplanting lands until they become exhausted, overuse of certain fertilizers, carelessness leading to soil erosion in construction practices, the pollution of the atmosphere with excessive carbon-based emissions, and more.

Human beings can become so focused on maximizing material gain or personal convenience that we disregard or minimize the effects of our projects on the creation. In so doing we compromise neighbor-love and offend against the purposes of God by jeopardizing the fruitfulness of the creation for the generations to come.

God loved the *world* so much that He sent His Son for its redemption, to reconcile the world to Himself, deliver it from its groaning, and liberate the creation into the freedom of the sons and daughters of God (Jn. 3.16; 2 Cor. 5.19; Rom. 8.19-21). We fail in loving God when we make war, by any means, against His creation.

The Word of God, beginning with the Law of God, reminds us that we have a duty to steward the creation as *conservators* and *developers*, and not merely as *consumers*, and certainly not as *exploiters*.

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The larger purpose of creation

It is not enough, in considering the use we will make of the earth and its resources, to calculate the most efficient ways of maximizing convenience or wealth. We violate the Lord's purposes for His creation when we fail to treat creation according to the overarching designs of God. His Law reminds us that fruit trees are not weapons for war; they are for sustenance. Similarly, streams are not for discharging waste; they are for beauty and provision. The creatures of the forest are not for decorating our walls, but for bodily provision in a chain of being supervised by the Spirit of God Himself (cf. Ps. 104.14-30).

Whenever human beings are planning a project that will involve significant interaction with the creation, more questions must be asked than simply, "What can we do to make the most money for the longest period of time?"

In recent years laws and codes guiding the development of lands for residential or commercial purposes have begun to reflect something of this awareness of the larger purposes of the creation. It costs more for developers to take precautions against erosion, to landscape in certain ways, to conserve wetlands, or to set aside portions of a development as animal habitat or simply for natural beauty. However, the long-term wellbeing of the environment requires that we develop it not merely for human interests but according to the creational interests of the land itself, and the pleasure of God Who owns it all (Ps. 24.1).

Such practices, albeit reluctantly adopted, reflect a concern for justice more than for the bottom line and thus demonstrate both the reality of the works of God's Law being written on the hearts of all men and the viability of the Law of God as a guide to public policy. Since the public must exist in an environment, we do well to understand how God sees His world and what He expects of us in making the best use of creation's potential.

For reflection

1. Have you ever been troubled by something people have done to disturb or destroy the environment? Why did this bother you?
2. Are you aware of any local opportunities to contribute to caring for the creation? A conservation group? Zoning commission? Public parks department? See what you can find out.
3. What about that part of the environment God has entrusted to you? How conscious are you of using all your space and its resources for the beauty, bounty, and blessing of God?

Next steps—Preparation: Using some of the verses mentioned in today's installment, draw up a prayer list to guide you in praying for God's world.

3 The Purpose of Creation

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. Genesis 1.31

*Forever, O LORD,
Your word is settled in heaven.
Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
You established the earth, and it abides.
They continue this day according to Your ordinances,
For all are Your servants.* Psalm 119.89-91

Creation, not nature

We are looking at the teaching of God's Law with respect to the creation and how we must use it. God, we remember, loves His world so much, that He sent His only Son to die for it so that it might be set free from its groaning in sin into the liberty of the sons and daughters of God (Jn. 3.16; Rom. 8.19-21).

The creation is not "nature", common usage to the contrary notwithstanding. That is, creation is not a mass of "stuff" and "things", naturally occurring and just waiting out there, without identity or purpose, for man to assign some meaning and place to it. This is the view of those who see creation as nature, the product of chance and time and not the handiwork of a loving Creator.

God made the cosmos and everything in it. It is His, and He made it to serve His good purposes. In His Law, as well as throughout His Word, He is careful to remind His people that we are called to be stewards of the creation so that it can fulfill its divinely appointed charge (cf. Gen. 1.26-28; Ps. 8). We may begin the process of rethinking our view of the world and everything in it by referring to what God has made as creation rather than as nature.

But we must be diligent to understand God's purpose for His creation so that we may perform our stewardship of it by every available means, including, to the extent it is possible, through public policy.

The purpose of creation

The overall project of God is to glorify Himself, that is, to make His presence known so that His goodness, beauty, truth, and blessings reach to and bless all His creatures, and a circle is completed as praise and thanksgiving return to Him. In this design, the creation plays a large and important role.

God is continuously revealing Himself and His goodness in the things He has made (Ps. 19.1-4). He is determined not only that His glory should be *revealed* through His creation but that it should be *known* by us as well (Hab. 2.14; Prov. 25.2). All the creatures and things of creation are God's "servants" toward that end. Human beings make proper use of the creation when we employ it to bless the world and for the glory and honor of God. From the beginning of the Law of God, He made it clear that man's duty over the creation is to "work and guard" it (Gen. 2.15) so that it can continue to develop, flourish, and thus serve the purposes of God for good, as He originally intended (cf. Gen. 1, the many uses of the word, "good", to describe God's work).

The land of Canaan

That this was God's intention in giving the land of Canaan to Israel is clear throughout His Law. The pagan peoples of the land had, by their idolatry and other wickedness, forfeited the right to enjoy the benefits of the creation (Lev. 20.22-26). They were to be ejected from the land God had promised to His people and replaced by Israel, so that the good provision of God could continue and abound, without being attributed or devoted to false deities and used for abominable practices.

God promised His people that He would cause the fields and skies and forests and hills to bring forth plentifully so that they might know His blessings (Deut. 28.1-14). When this happened, God warned His people, they must not fail to glorify Him by turning away from His Law. Only by continuing in obedience to the Law would justice and love obtain among them, and they would be a witness to the surrounding nations of the greatness of God, as we have seen. Israel's faithfulness in using the creation for God's glory and abiding in His justice and love would draw the nations to seek the Lord and to glorify Him (Mic. 4.1-8).

The creation is not ours, but God's

Creation in all its parts fulfills its purpose as a servant of God when it is used in ways that bless men and honor God. Blessing comes in more than material ways, such as providing beauty, provoking wonder and worship, inspiring art and science, and granting insights to the divine being and will. Creation's larger ends—man's blessing and God's glory—must be considered in all our use of the environment, from the way we maintain our own property to the various ways we love and honor creation, including through public policies that affect all human beings and all creation.

The creation is not ours, but God's (Ps. 24.1; Ps. 50.12); its creatures are not our servants, but His. He determines its proper meaning and use as *creation* and not merely *nature*. Thus, we must be careful in all our use of the creation to approach it with the mind of Christ and use it for the purposes of God in blessing the world and glorifying the Creator. For then will creation's bounty, beauty, and blessing increase and God the Creator be rightly acknowledged and praised.

For reflection

1. How can you see that the creation around you serves the purposes of God—to bless people and glorify Himself?
2. What can you do to improve your ability to use creation according to the “very good” purposes of God?
3. What might you expect to learn about God by paying more attention to the creation around you?

Next steps—Transformation: One way to awaken your soul to the glory of God in creation is to become more mindful of the ways creation serves you. Begin today to write down ways that creation brings blessing to your life. How does this help you to see the glory of God in His creation?

4 Honoring the Creation

“You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Deuteronomy 25.4

Love creation

God loves the world, which is His creation. He loves it so much that He sent His only Son to redeem it from sin and to reconcile it to Himself (Jn. 3.16; 2 Cor. 5.17-21). Because God loves His creation, we His people must love it, and we must encourage others to love it as well. Loving God’s creation is a measure of the love we have for Him and the *sine qua non* for right stewardship of what God has entrusted to us. The various creatures of the world fulfill distinct roles within the divine economy. They are all God’s servants to accomplish His (often mysterious) purposes (Ps. 119.89-91).

Further, the creation bears witness to God in all its aspects, whether of the creation *per se* or the peoples and cultures that inhabit and use it (cf. Ps. 19.1-4; Acts 14.17). We may learn about God and His will from the creation, thus enhancing our ability to know and love Him as He commands. And we may honor God and bring glory to Him by using His creation as He intends.

Thus, we who believe in Jesus must work to understand the world as God’s servant and revealer; and we must honor it as such, using each aspect of the creation in ways consistent with the demands of love for God and neighbor.

Proper stewardship of the creation depends on our seeing and using what He has made in ways that reflect His love for the world and its creatures.

Honor God’s creatures

So we must not mistreat the creatures in our own service, whether oxen or waterways or lands, or the resources of culture entrusted to us for doing good works unto the Lord. An ox is not merely a “dumb animal” to be used and used up; it is a gift provided from God to be cared for and used as He intends, to bring out more of His goodness in the world. The Law of God thus instructed that an ox at work must expect proper respect and provision from those it serves. Paul applied this teaching to himself and all those who minister the Word of God (1 Cor. 9.8-12). It applies to all the creatures within the reach of our active will.

We must also take care to honor whatever of the creation has been entrusted to our neighbors, lest we cause our neighbor’s stewardship to suffer impairment or interruption (cf. Ex. 22.1, 4; Lev. 24.18, 21; etc.).

In the divine economy outlined for the people of ancient Israel, even the land was to be honored according to God’s design. Lands were to be given rest from cultivation every seven years, that they might replenish their strength and continue to be fruitful in perpetuity. Farmers today demonstrate their sense of the wisdom of resting the land by rotating crops, liming and fertilizing exhausted soils, and sowing nitrogen-producing plants into fields to replenish them.

We may also honor the creation by creating sanctuaries which preserve flora and fauna untouched by human development or abuse; by feeding the song birds; even by learning the names of particular creatures and understanding something of their unique contribution to the wellbeing of the environment and the glory of God. Naming the creatures was a task assigned to Adam and, in a more limited manner, to us as part of the process of honoring and exercising proper stewardship over the creation (cf. Gen. 2.19, 20).

What applies to the creation—honoring and caring for it, using it in ways consistent with the purposes of God’s glory—applies as well to the cultural products we make from the creation and use for our own

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sustenance and enrichment. Does it glorify God to change our oil every 3,000 miles? I find no contradiction, nor do I think it trivial, to answer that question in the affirmative. To keep our homes in good working order? Our yards properly maintained? If we keep our cultural resources in good repair, we will share in God's love for them and our ability to use them in the Lord's service will be enhanced (Eccl. 10.10).

Learn about creation

We honor the creation when we love it as God does. When we delight in the creation the way God does, we will use the things of His world to know and serve Him joyfully and fruitfully.

It follows that, if we love God and delight in His creation, we will study to learn about the creatures within our purview and take care to use them in ways that reflect God's purposes and further His blessings and glory on earth (cf. Ps. 111.2). Indifference toward and ignorance of the creatures around us does not honor them. Which of us would feel honored if some supervisor couldn't remember our name or if our pastor didn't take the time to learn anything about us? Refusing to learn about the creation is an insult to God, Who gives us these glorious gifts. Love the songbirds that visit your feeders, the trees that adorn your yard and community, and the humble wildflowers that wave at you wherever you go, and you will love Him more Who sends these precious gifts to you freely.

They who take the time to learn about the works of God in creation and culture are more likely to appreciate the beauty and utility of His works and less likely to abuse them in ways that violate His purposes and contradict the goals of His economy. And they will honor God and glorify Him more consistently and with joy.

The Law of God assumes people understand that the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (Ps. 24.1). If we hope to use the creatures and culture of this world in ways that demonstrate love for God and for our neighbors, we must be willing to invest the effort of study, learning, and careful use that such effective, God-honoring stewardship requires.

For reflection

1. Are there aspects of the creation in your immediate environment that you find beautiful? Delightful? Do you know their names?
2. David wrote that the heavens declare the glory of God. How much do you know about the night sky? Where do you see God's glory there?
3. What role does Psalm 111.2 have in your relationship with the Lord?

Next steps—Transformation: Make a point to learn the names of aspects of the creation around you. Give God thanks daily and specifically for the gifts of creation He provides.

5 Creation as Witness

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. Genesis 1.31

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.* Psalm 19.1

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.* Proverbs 25.2

A witness to God

Speaking to a group of pagans in Lystra, the apostle Paul commented in passing that the Lord had left a “witness” to Himself in the productive lands they had enjoyed for generations (Acts 14.17). The work and fruit of farming bear witness to God, as men use His creation for the good purposes He intends.

The creation, as we have seen, bears witness to the glory of God. Not all men see that glory—the pagans of Lystra apparently had not—but God is determined that His glory should not only be *present* but *known* in His creation (Hab. 2.14). In His Law, God promised His people that they would see His blessings in every aspect of their lives, including the productivity of creation which resulted from their work (Deut. 28.1-14). And He instituted annual feasts to allow them to gather as a people so that they could celebrate His goodness to them in providing their harvests and bounty.

Creation’s beauty and bounty would remind the people of God’s goodness and of the goodness He intended should come to them from the creation.

The work of drawing out the witness to God which creation bears falls to those who know the Lord and know how to appreciate and use creation in such a way as to glorify Him. We are being good stewards of the creation, according to the purposes for which God entrusted it to us, when we point out the witness it bears to the glory of God.

Public policy and the witness of creation

Part of our concern for public policies designed to ensure the right use of the environment is that those policies should not inhibit, impede, or deny our ability to “search out” the glory of God which may be discovered in creation. Our nation, after all, sets aside one day each year to observe a season of Thanksgiving for the Lord’s bounty in every aspect of our lives. And, while this has become more a day of bingeing rather than of giving thanks, still, the principle is valid: As a people we should not neglect the use of the public square for acknowledging the goodness of God as we discover it in the creation.

When public schools prohibit meaningful and measured discussion of things religious and pursue a curriculum that furthers an economy of material wealth, they are impeding, if not denying, the witness God makes through His creation. Schools should be places where students learn to think and reflect on the world in which they live, and their world includes many people for whom God is real and who care for His creation as a matter of stewardship. Is it too much to expect that, at least in some ways, students should be given the opportunity to observe the glory of God through the work of science, to express God’s beauty in their artistic endeavors, and to celebrate His goodness together as friends, families, and worshipers?

This is not to say that public schools should be turned into Christian schools; rather, it is simply to insist that public policy which deliberately works to obscure the glory of God or impede the discovery of and testimony to that glory cannot expect the blessings of God which might otherwise attend to their efforts.

In work and culture

The vocations Christians pursue within their callings from the Lord, while not matters of public policy *per se*, should also come onto the radar screen as areas to be improved by our living according to the requirements of justice and love. We are to do all that we do as unto the Lord (Col. 3.23), and I cannot but believe that if this were our policy in all our work, we would bear a more consistent witness to God's grace.

The members of the believing community can demonstrate the Presence, work, and glory of God in their fields of endeavor. How does the practice of law bear witness to God? What about running a business? Governing a community? Caring for the sick? Managing a household? Operating various kinds of equipment? Being an artist or a poet? And how do we bring out that witness to the people we serve by such means? What "policies" should guide us as we do all that we do for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31)? Should Christian students, as they prepare for such vocations, not be instructed in how to see them as a witness to the grace and goodness of God?

As Paul pointed out to the Lystrans, a witness to God exists in every aspect of the creation—both the environment and our culture – and part of our concern in an economics of justice must be to bring that witness out so that God may be glorified appropriately.

Begin here

Christians should oppose all public policies—whether in the form of legislation, peer pressure, or media outrage—which hinder our ability to remark God's glory and celebrate the beauty, goodness, and truth of God in creation and created things. The creation and all culture strain to bear witness to God, Who has concealed His glory in them. The duty of those who are His "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2.9, 10) is to pursue policies and practices that make it possible for us to "search out" God's glory and to glorify God in all things.

This must begin, of course, within our own lives, in our families and congregations, where we learn to talk freely and to encourage one another in "discovering" the witness to God's glory everywhere to be found in the things He has made. Pastors and teachers who do not equip their congregations for such stewardship are failing in their charge to nurture God's people as witnesses for the Lord.

But we must not draw back from carrying that witness into public space, whether in our conversations and demeanor or through the legitimate avenues of public policy available to us. We must make the most of every opportunity available for bringing the light of God's witness into the lives of our neighbors, both to glorify Him and to benefit them.

For reflection

1. How would people at your school or workplace respond if you were to talk freely about the glory of God as it can be seen in your work?
2. How confident are you that you could even do that? That you could discover the glory God has "hidden" in your work or studies and talk about it as a witness to the Lord?
3. What can you do today to see more of the glory of God in your work?

Next steps—Transformation: Set aside some time to meditate on the three questions above. Write down some thoughts. Commit yourself to being, like Paul, more faithful in seeing and testifying to the witness of God in creation and culture.

6 Conservation

“If a bird’s nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.” Deuteronomy 22.6, 7

A blessing for all times

This extract from the Law of God seems counter intuitive. Should we not eat the mature bird, which has so much more flesh, and leave the young ones to grow to maturity?

Except that those young ones would not likely flourish in the absence of caring parents. And the parents which produced those young ones, being consumed by our short-sightedness, will not be available to produce more.

The Law of God which teaches us to conserve fruit-bearing trees amid the ravages of war also teaches us to conserve generation-bearing creatures of all sorts, “*that you may prolong your days.*” The work of conservation has its origins early in God’s Law. In Genesis 2.15 God instructed Adam to “serve” the garden, to continue God’s own good work there, and to “guard” it against destructive influences.

God’s covenant, which includes His Law, is designed to ensure that His blessings reach to “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12.1-3). This includes the families not yet born. God loves people, His image-bearers, and He is concerned for their welfare, and for the welfare of all His creation. The people whom God has redeemed for Himself and brought within His covenant and Kingdom will practice God’s plans and carry out His will for blessing the world. Thus, they will learn and keep the requirements of an economics of justice to demonstrate love for the generations to come, that those who come after us also might be able to enjoy the blessings of God and thus glorify Him.

As the people of God’s covenant, we do this in part by properly instructing children in the Word and works of God (Deut. 6; Ps. 78.1-8; etc.). We want our children and their children to grow up knowing and loving God and learning from Him the principles of neighbor-love that will benefit all people.

But we also fulfill our calling within God’s covenant by honoring the creation around us in ways that conserve its fruitfulness for the generations to come. In our day, “conservation” has become associated in the minds of many with environmental extremism and liberal politics. But the idea of conserving the fecundity of creation for the generations to come begins in the Law of God, which is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12). Policies promoting conservation within the larger framework of an economy of justice and love should thus be a concern for all believers.

Healthy and productive

Environmental science has learned much about ecosystems and how they may be conserved. It is consonant with an economics of justice and love, as our text suggests, to apply the best principles of conservation to the resources of the environment to keep the land and its creatures healthy and productive for the generations to come.

We may not agree with every environmental policy or group, but we must try to learn from them what we can and to sift their programs through the grid of God’s Law to learn the best ways of conserving the creation for the future. The folly of previous generations, eager more to consume than to conserve, has caused the annihilation or near-annihilation of important species—the buffalo, for example, or the carrier pigeon.

Conservationists are right to insist that we must discipline our consuming passions. We must not exploit the

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creation because of short-sighted, self-serving practices; rather, we must commit to policies and practices that both allow the creation to fulfill its purpose as God's servants (Ps. 119.89-91) and to continue flourishing for the benefit of generations to come.

Culture, too

The same applies to the culture we make and use to bring the blessings of God to men and the praise of men to God. We must take care of our property and possessions, steward our business and work responsibilities, and take an active interest in the "upkeep" of our communities. We should also seek out the best of culture from past generations to enjoy and share with one another and our children.

Further, the Christian heritage abounds with artifacts, institutions, and conventions of culture which it is our duty as God's covenant people to understand, appreciate, and enjoy, as well as to conserve. Christianity has made positive contributions to all facets of cultural life. We must not ignore these nor fail to appreciate and conserve them for our children. Would we enjoy the works of Johann Sebastian Bach as many do today were it not for the efforts of Felix Mendelssohn to make his works more widely known in his day? Would Christian children today have the benefits of home schooling and Christian classical schools without parents and educators who have worked hard to bring forward these benefits from our rich cultural heritage to our own generation?

A rich liturgical heritage is in danger of being lost today—hymns, creeds and confessions, holy days—because of neglect and our lust for all things "contemporary." Would we even have churches and liturgies and glorious music to sing were it not that such cultural creations have been faithfully conserved and transferred to us by our forebears?

An economy based on consumption is not as likely to be thoughtful about the future as one based on justice and love. The divine economy, revealed in the Law of God and all His Word, calls us to conserve the benefits of creation and culture for all generations and points the way for us, as stewards of God's trust, to take steps to accomplish that result.

For reflection

1. How has the failure to conserve aspects of creation or culture negatively impacted us in this generation?
2. How do the ideas of "serving" and "guarding" apply to your use of creation and culture?
3. How does your church seek to conserve our Christian heritage for the generations to come?

Next steps—Preparation: Spend time in prayer, seeking the Lord to understand your role in conserving creation and culture. Ask Him to show you specific ways you can fulfill this aspect of your covenant and Kingdom calling.

7 Rejected from the Land

“You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. But I have said to you, “You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.” I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples.”
Leviticus 20.22-24

Gifts to be developed

The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it. He made it. He keeps it. And He determines the purposes and terms of its use.

God has given the gifts of His creation into our hands that we should develop and use them in ways that further justice, righteousness, meekness, fruitfulness, and love. He intends peace and wellbeing for the world (Jer. 29.7), and He will continue to allow us to enjoy the benefits of His creation as long as we adhere to His purposes and pursue policies in line with His will.

But God can revoke our privileges and remove His blessings when it becomes clear that we are not exercising good stewardship over the resources of the creation entrusted to our care. Jesus taught as much in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25.14-30). They who do not use God’s gifts as He intends will forfeit both the gifts and the opportunity to use them for His glory.

Thus, we must not wantonly consume the creation, as we have seen. Nor should we fail to enjoy and use it without giving proper thanks and praise to God. We must not consume its resources on our own lusts but keep in mind the needs of others, of future generations, and of the creation itself. And we must not use God’s good gifts in ways that further wicked practices, which are abominations in His sight.

We may regard such issues as not all that important. But God does.

Revoked privileges

As God showed with the pagan peoples of Canaan, and as He warned His people, He is capable of suddenly, dramatically, and completely revoking privileges with respect to His creation.

The pagans of Canaan had fallen into idolatry and practices so evil that they were not even to be mentioned or discussed among the people of Israel. By their sinful ways they polluted the land—its hills, groves, fields, and bounty. They abused the gifts of God by selfish and idolatrous practices, thus setting themselves up for God’s judgment at the time of Israel’s invasion. The land of Canaan, rich with blessings and bounty, “vomited” the pagans out before the advancing Israelites. God used their example as a warning to His own people, that they should have steward-like regard for the land He was entrusting to their care, that every aspect of creation may realize His purpose of blessing His people and glorifying His Name.

Do we suppose that God has ceased being this kind of God with respect to the resources of His creation? That He no longer “so loves the world” for which He gave His Son, that it matters not to Him whether we care for it as He intends? Or that somehow such attention to what God has made, what He continuously upholds, and what He everywhere uses to bless us and reveal Himself to us—such concern for creation is optional? Not worth our time?

Individuals and communities

Proper use of the environment and its creatures—including the culture by which we define, sustain, and enrich our experience on earth—begins with each one of us and the believing communities where we gather

to worship and serve the Lord. We deny the stewardship God has entrusted to us if we fail to think as He does about the creation and to use it as He intends. In this matter of caring for creation, believers and their churches have a unique opportunity to set an example for the rest of society and promote policies in the public sector that are more in line with the requirements of an economics of justice than an economics of material wealth.

Christians must not turn a blind eye to creation and its proper use. We have a stewardship of the environment and all creation, beginning right where we are, but extending as far as God enables us to reach, through whatever vehicles and by whatever means—including public policy—we may be able to employ. In the fear of Him Who owns the earth and everything in it, let us work hard to be good stewards over whatever He has placed in our hands (Ps. 8).

For indeed, as the writer of Hebrews lamented, we do not now see the world and its creatures and culture being made, used, replenished, and shared as God intends (Heb. 2.5-8). But we who look to Jesus for our salvation must also see in Him the key to learning, appreciating, restoring, keeping, using, and renewing all creation and culture in line with God's expectations and promises (Heb. 2.9). If we see Jesus and are His followers, we will follow Him in all aspects of our calling, including the work of bringing glory to God through the creation, both by our own use of these great gifts and by policies in the public square that honor creation as God intends.

For reflection

1. What might be an example of being “vomited” out of some aspect of creation because of abuse and misuse of it?
2. How confident are you that you are using the creation entrusted to your stewardship as God intends? How could you improve in this?
3. Why is this matter of creation—and culture—so important to our lives as followers of Christ?

Next steps—Preparation: Pray that God will enable you to share His burden of love for the world in new and edifying ways.

Law and Creation

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Why must Christians care about the creation—its beauty, development, and proper use?
2. God's love for the world means we should expect Him to provide some guidance for how He wants the world to be used. Should that guidance be limited to Christians only? Explain.
3. What standards currently guide your appreciation and use of the creation, including the culture which is made from it?
4. What are some ways that you have experienced creation as a source of God's glory? Have you shared these with anyone?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of study of "The Law of God and Public Policy"?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 103 Reynolds Lane, West Grove, PA, 19390.

Thank you.