

International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: The Christian's Responsibility Toward the Environment

People around the world talk about environmental sustainability which is our ability to continue to use the earth's resources while protecting its resources in order to provide for future generations. Another way to understand it is stated in the Brundtland Report of 1987. It defines environmental sustainability as, "...the development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Describe environmental sustainability in your own words.

Environment sustainability refers to three areas: renewable resources (trees or solar energy), pollution (air, water, and land), and nonrenewable resources (coal or oil). To put these concerns another way, no one wants to live in a world full of pollution, dead oceans, and suffocating heat. Do Christians care about such things?

A quick look on the internet affirms that Christians do care about the environment and many church denominations have issued statements (greenfaith.org) affirming their commitment to a healthy sustainable environment. In addition, there are Christian mission organizations that express a commitment to the environment and evangelism. What would be the Biblical basis for attention to the environment? It would begin with Genesis 1.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. ~Genesis 1:26-31

Tell the story in your own words.

In verse 28 the man and woman were to subdue and rule the earth. Those words have the idea of controlling or using the earth to serve people. Note, it does not say to take advantage of the earth. In what good ways do people subdue the earth (plants and minerals) and rule over the animal kingdom? In what ways do people take advantage of the earth and the animal kingdom?

There are many Psalms where God's creation and care over the earth is described.

Praise the Lord, my soul.
Lord my God, you are very great;
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.
⁵ He set the earth on its foundations
¹⁰ He makes springs pour water into the ravines;
it flows between the mountains.
¹¹ They give water to all the beasts of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
¹⁴ He makes grass grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to cultivate—
bringing forth food from the earth:
¹⁵ wine that gladdens human hearts,
oil to make their faces shine,
and bread that sustains their hearts.
²⁴ How many are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures
³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
³³ I will sing to the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
Praise the Lord. ~Psalm 104

Describe God's work in caring for the earth.

How would you describe the benefits people receive from the earth?

In what ways can you help sustain a good environment, whether in your career or in your personal life?

The New Testament does not emphasize our responsibility to the environment directly. It does emphasize our responsibility to share God's love with others by telling the story of Jesus, his death, resurrection, and coming again.

Is it possible to be committed to both values; the values of caring for the earth and the value of bringing the good news of Jesus to others?

How do you balance both responsibilities?