

THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Subduing and Ruling the Earth To the Glory of God and the Benefit of Our Neighbors

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International Church Council Project

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1. ***We affirm*** that the Earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1).
We deny that the Earth or anything else is the result of impersonal, blind chance over time.
2. ***We affirm*** that the Bible—the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments—is the sole, absolute, inerrant epistemological basis for mankind for all knowledge of all things, seen and unseen, and that all claims of truth and moral duty that contradict it are false and harmful.
We deny that the physical universe and human observations of it justify truth claims contrary to those of the Bible, and that liberty, justice, and human dignity can be sustained while rejecting Biblical truth and law.
3. ***We affirm*** that the only true God—a spirit infinite, eternal, and immutable—revealed Himself in creation (which He made out of nothing and includes both physical and spiritual things), the Bible, and His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, and that though God reveals His wisdom and power in the creation, He is, always has been, and always will be absolutely distinct from and transcendent over creation, which He rules at all times and places.
We deny atheism (there is no God), pantheism (everything is God), panentheism (God is to the universe as the human soul is to the human body), animism (there are many gods, and they indwell and animate physical objects as human souls indwell and animate human bodies), and any other view that denies the Creator/creature distinction, because those who hold them exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever (Romans 1:25).
4. ***We affirm*** that human dignity, freedom, and justice can be sustained only insofar as a society affirms the Creator/creature distinction and embraces the truth of Scripture, and that those who deny it become futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts are darkened (Romans 1:21).
We deny that societies built on atheism, pantheism, panentheism, animism (also called spiritism), or any other rejection of the Creator/creature distinction can flourish intellectually, morally, aesthetically, and materially.
5. ***We affirm*** that the creation includes persons—conscious spirits capable of reason, moral judgment, and affection, and therefore morally accountable for their actions—and that some of these persons are bodiless (immaterial, e.g. angels and demons) and some embodied (combinations of spirit and body, e.g., humans).
We deny that the material cosmos—“nature” and its parts, the created world of time and space, matter and energy, planets and stars, energy and material elements—is personal, either in its whole or in its parts; hence ***we deny*** that forests and trees, mountains and rocks, oceans and lakes and streams, and animals are persons.

6. **We affirm** that God made man, male and female, in His own image (Genesis 1:26–27).
We deny that any other terrestrial life form bears the image of God or is of equal value or priority with human beings (Matthew 10:29–31).

7. **We affirm** that though the Earth is the LORD's, He has also given it to men (Psalm 115:16) and mandated that they be fruitful, multiply, fill the Earth, subdue it, and have dominion over everything that lives in it (Genesis 1:28).

We deny that human dominion over the Earth is, in principle, sinful, and that the possibility of its abuse negates the righteousness of its proper use.

8. **We affirm** that the Earth and all its physical and biological systems are the effects of God's omniscient design, omnipotent creation and faithful sustaining, and that when God completed His creative work it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

We deny that an infinitely wise Designer, infinitely powerful Creator, and perfectly faithful Sustainer of the Earth would have made it susceptible to catastrophic degradation from proportionally small causes, and consequently **we deny** that wise environmental stewardship readily embraces claims of catastrophe stemming from such causes.

9. **We affirm** that by God's design Earth and its physical and biological systems are robust, resilient, and self-correcting.

We deny that they are fragile.

10. **We affirm** that godly human dominion over the Earth means men and women, created in the image of God, laboring freely and lovingly together to enhance Earth's safety, fruitfulness, and beauty, to the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbors.

We deny that godly human dominion entails humans' being servants rather than masters of the Earth.

11. **We affirm** that when God had created Adam, He placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and guard it (Genesis 2:15).

We deny that the Garden of Eden represents the whole Earth and that the instruction to "cultivate and guard" the Garden ought to be reinterpreted to mean either that man is to "serve and protect" the Garden or the Earth, or that man is to "worship and protect" the Garden or the Earth, or that man is to "worship and hear" God either directly or through the Earth or its parts.

12. **We affirm** that a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between God's placing Adam in the Garden to cultivate and guard it (Genesis 2:15) and God's commanding Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth and subdue it and rule everything in it (Genesis 1:28) entails a growing population that spreads out from the Garden to till the whole Earth and transform it from wilderness to garden and ultimately to garden city (Revelation 21:2; 22:1–3).

We deny that Biblical Earth stewardship, or godly dominion, is limited to keeping Earth in the condition in which man finds it, i.e., **we deny** that, as many environmentalists put it, "Nature knows best" and its transformation by humans is in principle wrong or harmful.

13. **We affirm** that the Bible normally associates wilderness or wildness with divine judgment and curse (Exodus 23:29; Leviticus 26:22; Deuteronomy 7:22; 1 Samuel 17:46; Isaiah 5:2–4; 13:19–22; 34:1–17; Jeremiah 50:39; Leviticus 16:21–22).

We deny that wilderness is the best state of the Earth.

14. **We affirm** that God placed minerals, plants, and animals in and on the Earth for His pleasure, to reveal His glory and elicit man's praise, and to serve human needs through godly use (Genesis 2:5–16; 4:22; Numbers 31:21–23; Job 38–41; Psalm 19:1–6; Psalm 104).

We deny that recognizing instrumental value in the Earth and its various physical and biological components dishonors God or is idolatrous.

15. **We affirm** that one way of exercising godly dominion is by transforming raw materials into resources and using them to meet human needs.

We deny that leaving everything in the Earth in its natural state is proper Biblical stewardship (Matthew 25:14–30).

16. **We affirm** that because of man's fall into sin, sinful human hearts often fall prey to materialism, the covetous love of money, and the selfish accumulation of possessions (Luke 12:16–21; 1 Timothy 6:10; Colossians 3:5).

We deny that the temptation to materialist idolatry entails that the production of wealth, whether material from the Earth or immaterial from the human mind, is sinful in and of itself.

17. **We affirm** that man is accountable to God's judgment in all he does with the Earth.

We deny that man's accountability to God justifies abolishing private property (Exodus 20:15, 17), adopting collectivist economic institutions, or delegating to civil governments—whether local, national, or global—ownership or control of land, natural resources, or private property.

18. **We affirm** that man's fall into sin (Genesis 3) entails the possibility and indeed the historical reality of human abuse of the Earth and of fellow humans.

We deny that man's fall into sin completely destroys the possibility of godly dominion.

19. **We affirm** that in response to man's sin God cursed the ground so that it would not, as before sin, yield easily even to godly dominion/cultivation, let alone to ungodly, abusive domination (Genesis 3:17–19), and indeed subjected the whole cosmos to decay and corruption until He restores it partially in history by obedience to the dominion mandate (Genesis 1:28), whether by the unregenerate through common grace (Matthew 7:11) or by the regenerate through special grace (Romans 8:18–24), and fully in the New Heavens and New Earth of the eschaton (Revelation 21:1–3, 22–27; 22:1–5), all secured by the redeeming work of Christ (Colossians 1:14–20).

We deny, due to God's faithfulness to His covenant, in which He proclaimed, after the Flood, that He would sustain the cycles on which terrestrial life depends for as long as the Earth endures (Genesis 8:22), that God's curse on the Earth negates either the dominion mandate (Genesis 1:28) or the robustness and self-correcting resilience of the God-sustained Earth.

20. **We affirm** that human multiplication and filling of the Earth are intrinsically good (Genesis 1:28) and that, in principle, children, lots of them, are a blessing from God to their faithful parents and the rest of the Earth (Psalm 127; 128).

We deny that the Earth is overpopulated; that "overpopulation" is even a meaningful term, since it cannot be defined by demographic quantities such as population density, population growth rate, or age distribution; and that godly dominion over the Earth requires population control or "family planning" to limit fertility.

21. **We affirm** that when the Bible speaks of God's judgment on human societies because they have "polluted the land," the "pollution" in mind is consistently not chemical or biological but moral—the pollution of idolatry, adultery, murder, oppression of the weak,[†] and other violations

of the moral law of God expressed in the Ten Commandments (Psalm 106:38; Jeremiah 3:1–10; 16:18).

We deny that Biblical prophets' concerns about the pollution of any land focus significantly on chemical emissions from agriculture or industry, although prudent study of the risks those pose to human and ecosystem health is a worthy task and can lead to proper efforts to balance risks and benefits.

22. *We affirm* that cost/benefit analysis (Luke 14:28) is a proper and critically important aspect of godly dominion over the Earth (Proverbs 14:4).

We deny that cost/benefit analysis is unprincipled pragmatism or indicates a lack of faith in God.

23. *We affirm* that, pursuant to sin and the curse, risk is inherent in every human activity (Hebrews 9:27) and therefore that it is lawful in principle to balance risk against risk.

We deny that the mere existence of risk in an activity makes it immoral in principle.

24. *We affirm* that proper environmental prioritization will address greater risks before lesser risks and take into account the opportunity costs of fighting various risks—i.e., that it will recognize that since resources spent to reduce one risk cannot be used to reduce another, it is wise to allocate resources where they will achieve the greatest risk reduction.

We deny that spending vast resources to reduce small risks, when those resources could be spent to reduce greater risks instead, is good environmental stewardship.

25. *We affirm* that environmental policies that address relatively minor risks while harming the poor—such as opposition to the use of abundant, affordable, reliable energy sources like fossil fuels in the name of fighting global warming; the suppression of the use of safe, affordable, and effective insecticides like DDT to reduce malaria in the name of protecting biodiversity; and the conversion of vast amounts of corn and other agricultural products into engine fuel in the name of ecological protection—constitute oppression of the world's poor.

We deny that the policies named, and many others like them, are morally justified.

26. *We affirm* that, because a clean, safe, healthful, beautiful environment is a costly good, wealthy societies can better afford environmental protection and restoration than poor societies.

We deny that economic development is, per se, a threat to environmental quality.

27. *We affirm* that private ownership of land and other resources, because it harnesses God-given human incentives to overcome the “tragedy of the commons,” is the best institutional system for environmental protection.

We deny that collective economic systems are equally good at protecting or improving natural environments.

28. *We affirm* that local, constitutionally limited, responsive governments by the consent of the governed are better suited to environmental stewardship than central, unlimited governments without regard to the consent of the governed.

We deny that socialism, fascism, communism, and other forms of collectivist, expansionist government offer better solutions to environmental risks than limited, free, constitutional governments with market economies.

29. *We affirm* that truth-telling is a moral obligation and that sound environmental stewardship depends on it.

We deny that intentional exaggeration, as practiced by many environmental advocacy organizations, or minimization, as practiced by many industries, of environmental risks or of the effectiveness of various means of addressing them is righteous.

30. *We affirm* that godly dominion is a responsibility for everyone at all times.

We deny that the expectation of divine judgment, in whatever eschatological framework, negates the need for Biblical Earth stewardship.
