

- ***READ Genesis 1:1*** Some weeks back I was at JCS for a basketball game, and during halftime I was on my phone scrolling through my Twitter thread. It was while doing this that I saw something that I sure thought was a joke. It was a post by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) that sought to teach us new idioms that we should use instead the commonly used idioms that I'm sure many of us have used even just recently. I went to the PETA website to do a little more digging to figure out what was behind this post, and found out that this post was actually directed towards teachers who would be putting in time to teach students about literary devices such as idioms:
 - *"The words that we use have the power to influence those around us. Unfortunately, many of us grew up hearing common phrases that perpetuate violence toward animals, such as "kill two birds with one stone," "beat a dead horse," and "bring home the bacon." These old sayings are often passed down in classrooms during lessons on literary devices."*
 - *"While these phrases may seem harmless, they carry meaning and can send mixed signals to students about the relationship between humans and animals and can normalize abuse. Teaching students to use animal-friendly language can cultivate positive relationships between all beings and help end the epidemic of youth violence toward animals. Try using some of the following fun idioms in your lessons this year:"*
 - ✓ *HARMFUL: Kill two birds with one stone. HELPFUL: Feed two birds with one scone.*
 - ✓ *HARMFUL: Let the cat out of the bag. HELPFUL: Spill the beans.*
 - ✓ *HARMFUL: Bring home the bacon. HELPFUL: Bring home the bagels.*
 - ✓ *HARMFUL: Hold your horses. HELPFUL: Hold the phone.*
 - ✓ *HARMFUL: Beat a dead horse. HELPFUL: Feed a fed horse.*
- If you're anything like I was when I first saw this then you're probably thinking this is the most ridiculous thing that you have ever seen in your life. Every time I see this list I just want to laugh out loud at its lunacy, but instead of laughing I want to try to investigate as to why any person or group of people would think this is necessary. You might have noticed that this list was made to stop the perpetuation of violence against animals, and to teach students the proper positive relationship between humans and animals. PETA's goal with this article and all of their endeavors could be simplified to the thought that they want for humans and animals to be on the same level. They see humans and animals as being equals.
- Along the same lines but in a different vein are some recently proposed initiatives that center around ways that we as humans can stop the supposed epidemic of climate change. One well known government official recently proposed that all air travel be halted and the number of cows be reduced so as to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases that they admit through their bodily functions. The goal of this proposal is to greatly reduce our carbon footprint so that we will not destroy the planet within the next twelve years as this same politician claimed we will do.
- This whole discussion from the way we speak to and of animals to the desires of some to completely overhaul how we impact the environment can be traced back to the foundational point that so many in this world hold to, and it is the thought that we are in a position to determine how it is that we ought to interact with the world around us. So many if not all of those who would hold to these ideas believe that this world came about through its own doing by luck and chance. They would believe and teach that we just happened to hit the evolutionary jackpot as humans which is why we are the most advanced beings on the planet. Then there are other who would say that we can do absolutely anything we want to animals and the creation around us. Is there some middle ground? What are we actually to do? I am convinced that this question can be answered by a consideration of Scripture, so this evening we will look to God for answers as to what is our responsibilities to His creation.

I. Foundational Principles

A. God is responsible for the creation of the world.

1. Again, it is stated in the very first verse of our Bibles, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" (**Genesis 1:1**) As a people of faith that believe in the validity and inspiration of the Bible, we must be willing to take this explanation of our origins as being true to the reality of what actually happened all those many thousands of years ago. I personally am very thankful for the entire opening two chapters of Genesis because they do answer some of the most common questions that pertain to man and this world that we find ourselves in. We are able to have a glimpse back to the very beginning to understand exactly how everything came to exist with the bottom line being that the root origin of life rests in the mind, words, and power of God. Paul makes the point in **Romans 1:20** that just looking around at the creation should reveal to us that there is a great divine Creator that is behind all of it. If we understand and believe that God is responsible for this world and everything that it is then we are left with the responsibility to seeking out to know God's will for us as His creation.
2. That point might be precisely why so many people absolutely cringe at the notion that there is a divine Creator who is responsible for the origins of this world. If there is a Creator then we would logically be indebted to considering if that Creator has a desire for His creation. To the evolutionist, this is something they just can't comprehend because it would completely destroy their worldview. They would much rather cling to the idea that we were all created through chance and lucky humans just so happened to develop into the top of the food chain. These thoughts completely contradict what God reveals to us in His Word. We are not here by chance, but we are here where we are and what we are because of God's love!

B. Mankind is the height of God's creation.

1. Further, God reveals to us within His Word that we as humans improved all of God's creation to the point of it being very good for a reason. God desired to have fellowship with us, and through His power He created us in His image. (**Genesis 1:27**) We alone have a soul that will live on eternally past this life. Actually, it might be better said that we are souls who have simply been given a body in which to reside while we are here in this life and world. Regardless of the way we look at it, we as humans have a soul that was created by God and this thought is seen expressly stated by King Zedekiah in **Jeremiah 38:16**. Additionally, we are created in the image of God meaning that we alone have the ability to reason morally as we do. We are able to truly discern what is good and what is evil. We alone have the ability to be in spiritual fellowship with God. These attributes and characteristics are only found within mankind.
2. Nowhere in the Bible is it ever said that animals or plants or any other living earthly beings have souls besides human beings. Animals do not have the ability to truly make moral decisions. They might understand as my dog does that they had done something wrong, but they cannot comprehend the truly serious nature of sin and how it relates to God's holiness. As an aside... animals don't have the ability to have their feelings hurt when we see certain idioms or figures of speech. Nonetheless, it isn't that we just so happened to evolve into this type of level of moral sophistication. No, we are what we are and animals and other living things are what they are because God created all of it in this order.

C. God values the entirety of His creation.

1. However, just because we might be at the top of the earthly food chain doesn't mean that God doesn't care about His creation. We are all well aware of how much God loves us because of His sending His Son to die for us, but He also seeks to provide for the needs of all of His creation besides us humans. In fact, I would argue that the Bible clearly shows us that God cares about all of His creation, not just mankind. At least five times in **Genesis 1:5** we find it recorded that

everything God created was good. It wasn't just ok, but it was good, exactly as it needed to be. The creation is not just some by product of God's power, but He put real care and consideration into how things were made and what they would need. God had made provisions for all of His creation, and they would be perfectly satisfied and content in the state in which He created them. It only makes sense that God would create all things in perfect balance to serve as a sign to us that He is truly the great God of life and creation.

2. It wasn't until sin was introduced into the world through mankind that things took a bad turn, but even after this takes place we can see that God continues to care for His creation. It is in **Matthew 6:26-30** that we read of Jesus speaking to the type of care and provision that God gives to His creation. Jesus states that God is well aware of the needs of the birds, and he feeds them. He is well aware of the lilies of the field, and He helps them to grow and prosper. It simply cannot be argued that God doesn't care for or not love the world that we see all around us.

D. The world will one day be destroyed.

1. And yet...the Bible also tells us that this world will one day come to an end. By every indication it seems that life in the garden was perfect and without strife, and I don't see why things would have ever changed except for sin being introduced. Because of the sin of mankind God had to enact His great plan for man's salvation through the sending of Jesus to the cross. This sending of Jesus guaranteed that there would be a coming judgement when by His words, mankind would be judged for either their obedience and faithfulness or disobedience and unfaithfulness. (**John 12:48**)
2. It is on that day, which will come as a thief in the night, that the heavens will pass away with a loud roar and the earth and all that is in it will be destroyed with intense heat. Everything will be burned up, and yet Peter says that there will be a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. (**II Peter 3:10-13**) Could this being what Paul is referring to in **Romans 8:18-22** when he speaks of the creation groaning and suffering in its subjection to futility? Could it be that everything we know will be reborn in some sort of way? I suppose that could be the case, but I just don't know what exactly that will be like or look like. I simply have to trust that God will make everything good just as He did in the beginning. These are the foundational points that we can look to in order to understand the part that we play in God's creation and how we ought to behave towards it, so let us draw a few conclusions.

II. Applications

A. As mankind, we have rule over creation that God has given us.

1. Was all of God's creation good? Absolutely it was, and the Bible is very clear about that. However, when we as humans were introduced...we made it all very good! It was in this very good state that God designated the hierarchy of creation to be mankind over all else. After His first five days of created, God created man to be in the garden so that he could have rule over all of the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, cattle, the earth, and everything that lived upon the earth. (**Genesis 1:26**) It was man who kept watch over the garden to cultivate and keep it running smoothly. It was man who God allowed to name all of the animals that were there with him in the garden. It seems very clear to me that God gave man the creation to provide for his needs.
2. This relationship continued to develop over the years as sin was introduced. I don't see in the garden where there was any bloodshed until the point where sin was introduced. It was at this point that God took the skins of an animal and fashioned them into clothes for the man and his wife to wear. (**Genesis 3:21**) Further along we see God give animals to Abel as a means of sacrifice to God. (**Genesis 4:2,4**) Then even beyond this it isn't until **Genesis 9:1-3** that we see God allowing men to eat meat as food just as He had given them the plants. God's natural order is for men to have rule over animals, plants, and the earth and use them to provide for our needs.

B. God expects us to respect and appreciate what He has given to us.

1. However, that doesn't mean that we are to abuse what it is that God has given to us. While we are superior to animals and plants in nearly every conceivable way, that doesn't mean that God is pleased with we abuse the blessings that He has given to us. If God is gracious, loving, and respectful in His dealings towards us then we ought to reciprocate those same things towards the creation that God has given to us as a fulfillment for our needs. The first half of **Proverbs 12:10** puts it very clearly, *"The righteous man has regard for the life of his animal."* This clearly shows me that we ought to be respectful and caring towards what God has given to us.
2. At the same time...we must recognize that God has given us all of these things for our good. He has given us meat to eat just as He has given us plants. We have every freedom to enjoy the food that God has surrounded us with in the form of meat and veggies. However, let me also point out that we are not obligated to eat meat. Just because God has given it doesn't mean that we have to partake. If we have a conscience against eating meat then that is just fine. That is my and your right per **Romans 14**. However, we must be sure to not bind our opinions upon others. The reality is that PETA can do whatever they please in regards to the "humane" treatment of animals. They have every right and I won't stop them, but things change when they try to bind their beliefs upon others. I only care for what God has allowed for us to do, and His Word very clearly states that animals and other foods have been given for our consumption and benefit.

C. We need to trust that God is in control of the existence of His creation.

1. Along the same lines, there is nothing wrong if a person feels as if they want to do their part in reducing carbon footprint by driving a Prius or getting rid of their cows. However, if these thoughts develop to the point that they think we as humans have control over the earth then they have simply gone too far. We might have dominion and rule over the animals and birds, but the earth as a whole is only controlled by the power of God. David puts it well in **Psalms 24:1,2** when he writes, *"The earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers."*
2. It was God who created the earth and everything in it, and it is He who will ultimately have the say when it comes to it being destroyed. God Himself established the cycles of the sun, the wind, and the water. (**Ecclesiastes 1:5-7**) When generations have come and gone, all of these things have remained the same. This is accurate to the extent that the Preacher sums it up by saying that *"There is nothing new under the sun."* (**Ecclesiastes 1:9**) The earth and everything in it has remained virtually the same because that is how God wills for it to be.
3. We would do really well to consider not thinking too highly of ourselves that we think we could truly end the existence of earth and mankind before God has determined for that to happen. I'm not denying that we very well, as humans, could have an impact on the condition of the earth to some degree, but I am saying that we need to recognize that God is in control and will bring this world to its knees when He is good and ready. That last day will happen on God's time and not a second more. May we only trust in the timing of God.

To sum it all up...we need to make sure that our priorities are in order. This life isn't about saving all of the animals or the plants. It isn't all about making the earth greener. Although we should respect and give thanks for what God has given us, we must recognize that there is more to life than these things. We need to recognize and accept that life is about saving souls and helping for God's name to be glorified. There might be times when we are able to have conversations with others about these issues, and I hope that we will be ready and able to share our worldview and show them God's will for these things and implore them to seek His will above all else. Our God is the great God of all creation. I'm thankful for what He has given to us, and I hope that each of us will go on this week showing nothing but appreciation for the good things we have in this life through properly respecting and using those blessings as God has intended.