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**A Theocentric Stance on Environmental Stewardship**

A Thesis Submitted

To the Teacher and Students of Advanced Apologetics

By

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## Introduction

The present, earthly kingdom of God has been left in ruins as a result of mankind's desire to place itself above God and the rest of his creation. This type of anthropocentrism, or human-centeredness, has infiltrated the modern Christian church, allowing for the detrimental ramifications of creational neglect to go unnoticed by the people of God. The self-centeredness of humanity has mistreated the environment and its inhabitants for far too long, destroying entire ecosystems and spawning serious health issues. Christians seem to have completely forgotten their role as stewards of God's creation, which was entrusted to them at the very beginning. A possible reasoning for this abandonment of our duty stems from the Greek-Gnostic values that have become ingrained within the modern Christian faith, thus polluting the final hope of the resurrection.

Several implications arise from the statement that Christians must uphold a theocentric, or God-centered, stance on environmental stewardship. For one, the resurrection of the dead is necessary to prove that the final hope of Christianity is tied to the physical life, as opposed to the spiritual. With this comes the discussion of the interim state that supposedly exists as a temporary, transcendental heaven for those who die in the time period between the resurrection of Christ and the final consummation of all things. However, whether or not this intermediate state of heaven exists is beside the point: the final destiny of a redeemed humanity lies in the

restoration of all things on a redeemed earth. Seeing as God established Earth as the perfect and proper habitat for humanity, it would make sense for the restoration of the kingdom to inaugurate a return to a paradise similar to that of the Garden of Eden. According to the genuine Christian faith, the End<sup>1</sup> involves the Lord finally returning to Earth to be with his creation and work with humanity to restore the created order.

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<sup>1</sup> The consummation of all things.

## Creation, the Fall, and the Kingdom of God

### *In The Beginning*

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*<sup>2</sup> The ultimate Creator established form out of void and order out of chaos, speaking life into existence and setting the cosmos into motion. *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.*<sup>3</sup> God's declaration that his creation was "good" gave affirmation that everything was *built according to his plan* and went on to elucidate the important doctrine known as *creation ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing.<sup>4</sup> God said, and it was so; his blueprint for creation was brought to life physically. Everything that exists has only ever existed because God has willed it to exist, leading to the truth that God, being unlimited, is the sustainer of everything that exists. The declaration of creation as "good" also signifies that it was structured accordingly by the Creator, who has given it order. Throughout the Bible, it can be found that God originally shaped creation according to his will, thus undermining the power of chaos and eliminating its reign over the cosmos.<sup>5</sup> The statement made by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 45:18 suggests that God did not create the world to be empty but rather to be filled with an abundance of diversity in a system that is exquisitely organized.<sup>6</sup> As the physical world has been established with order by the Creator, it follows that human life must be subject to the same type of divine order. In light of God's detailed explanation of his orderly creation in Job 38-41, a significant implication remains clear: the God whose will brought forth an ordered world is the same God who has

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:1

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>4</sup> Badke, William B. *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created*. Multnomah Press, 1991, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 74:12-17; 89:9-13; 93:1-4; 95:3-5; 96:5 & 10; 97:6; 104:7-9; Job 38:8-11; Isaiah 51:9

<sup>6</sup> Badke, William B. *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created*. Multnomah Press, 1991, 36.

ordered human life.<sup>7</sup> Although this conclusion maintains its validity, human life does not always appear to be so orderly, and this is a result of sin's ability to distort the perception of the surrounding world. However, true wisdom allows for a person to see past this mirage and understand that God is in full control of his creational order. Finally, the use of "good" in God's acknowledgment of creation indicates that it is *responsive*.<sup>8</sup> To place this aspect in simplified terms, all of creation maintains an underlying, innate response that brings worship and praise to the Creator and acknowledges his power and grace. Numerous passages in the Bible depict the vitality of the world in response to the source of life provided by the Lord.<sup>9</sup> For example, Psalm 148:3-6 declares, "Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord! For he commanded and they were created. And he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away." A vital truth stems from creation being built according to his plan, being ordered, and being responsive: everything that exists has been set into motion in an orderly fashion and acknowledges the Creator in all his glory.

### *Imago Dei*

In his creation, God gave a function and a purpose to everything that had been brought into existence. Humanity, although a single part of his creation, maintains one specific aspect that distinguishes it from all else: being made *imago Dei*, "in the image of God." Through creating humans in his "image" (Heb. *selem*) and "likeness" (Heb. *demut*), the Lord set his ever-present kingdom into motion here on Earth, establishing a community in his creation that

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<sup>7</sup> Badke, William B. *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created*. Multnomah Press, 1991, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 96:1, 11-13; 97:1

would give all glory to the Creator.<sup>10</sup> Psalm 145:13 confirms this statement by declaring, “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.”

Furthermore, being made as the image-bearers in God’s perfect kingdom, humans were given the responsibility in Genesis 1:26-28 to “have dominion over” and “subdue” the rest of creation.<sup>11</sup> The term “dominion” when translated into the Hebrew language is the word *radah*, which was used in the Old Testament to describe the benevolent rule of the good Israelite kings over their people. In addition, the term “subdue” can be understood as the Hebrew word *kabash*, which relates to working with the soil and is a command to interact with nature and aid in its fruitfulness.<sup>12</sup> Although these words are meant to signify force, they must not be perverted or confused with any connotation of exploitation or harshness. Genesis 2:15 and Psalm 8:5-8 give further foundational ground for the purpose of this thesis as these verses manifest the God-given instructions for humans to be stewards of the rest of creation. As mentioned previously, humans were made *imago Dei* and entrusted with the task of displaying the presence of God in their care and preservation of his wonderful creation. True stewardship seeks to reinstate the wholeness that characterizes the kingdom of God as it was in the beginning.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 50.

<sup>11</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Hodson, Margot R., and Martin J. Hodson. *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation*. Monarch, 2008, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Or before the Fall. DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 45.



### The Fall of Mankind

Of course, at the core foundation of creation, exploitation and harshness were simply unheard of; this was so, until sin entered the Garden in Genesis 3. The Fall of Mankind was where all the perfect aspects of God's Creation began to unravel as a result of the reluctance of humans to carry out God's intentions, leaving the kingdom of God in shambles for following generations to try to rebuild. Contrary to God's command, Adam and Eve took part in eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thus allowing sin to enter into the Garden of Eden. Once cast out of the Garden for their sinful act, Adam and Eve passed on their sinful nature to the next generations and, therefore, established humans as sinful creatures in need of a savior. In accordance with their newfound sin, Adam and Eve gave rise to the origin of anthropocentrism, or human-centeredness, which will be discussed in further detail in the next section. Christians tend to look back on the story of Adam and Eve with scornful eyes, attempting to blame these two individuals for damning the rest of humanity for generations to come.<sup>14</sup> However, modern humans must not think of themselves as better than Adam and Eve. In fact, referring back to the original Hebrew language used in the Bible, it can be gathered that humans must view Adam as the representative authority and covenantal head of all humanity.<sup>15</sup> The Hebrew word for "man; mankind; Adam" is *adam*, which stems from the Hebrew word *adamah*, meaning the "earth."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, all humans are made from the earth and depend completely on it to sustain life.

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<sup>14</sup> It is not necessary to discuss whether Adam and Eve were real, historical figures because the end result remains the same: the ubiquity of sin and the destruction of the kingdom of God. Salvation is aimed at what we are saved *to*, not what we are saved *from*.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, Boyd, and William Mikler. *Christus Victor (The Mystery of Faith)*. Nehemiah Institute, 2012, 5.

<sup>16</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 70.

As a result of the sinful act committed by *adam*, the perfect world God had formed was thus tainted by the disobedience of humanity. Additionally, humans were consequently subjected to the effects of mortality, which can be seen in Genesis 3:19, when God is speaking to Adam: "...for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." In humanity's rebellion, the order and integrity of God's kingdom was broken, allowing the once-perfect unity of creation to be corrupted and torn apart by sin. All Christians must take responsibility for the inauguration of sin into the world so that a collective effort will be made in restoring the kingdom of God to its original state before the Fall of Mankind.

Adam himself lies now scattered on the whole surface of the earth. Formerly concentrated in one place, he has fallen; having been broken to pieces, as it were, he has filled the universe with his debris. However, God's mercy has gathered together from everywhere his fragments and by fusing them in the fire of his charity, has reconstituted their broken unity.<sup>17</sup>

In these words from *The City of God*, Saint Augustine speaks of God's merciful act of redemption after humans have allowed sin to break apart his kingdom. It gives the fallen world hope that God is in the process of reforming and reconstructing the unity that he had originally established on Earth. In order to fully comprehend how God has begun this process of restoration, the portrayal of Jesus Christ as the Second Adam must be examined at the end of this historical review.

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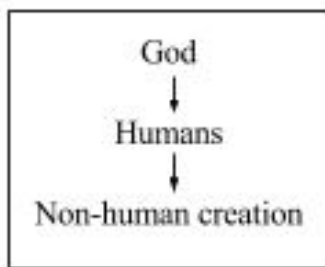
<sup>17</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 45.

### **Are Humans Above Nature?**

To begin this discussion, all Christians must first establish the ultimate truth that humans are in fact part of God's creation and not separate from it. Just like the doves of the sky and the fish of the sea, humans are bound by the limited realm of this physical world, sustained only by the will of an unlimited Creator. What sets humans apart from the rest of creation, as touched upon in the first section of this thesis, is that they were made in the image of God and given the responsibility to subdue and have dominion over the earth. The responsibility of humans to be stewards of the rest of nature comes directly from being made in the image of God, therefore holding them accountable for the quality of their rule in respect to the current condition of the earth.

#### *A Human-Centered Approach*

However, many modern Christians have disregarded the truth that humans are part of creation and instead continue to place themselves above the rest of nature. This approach can be



classified as a form of anthropocentrism, which is the position that characterizes humans as the most significant species on the planet and implies that they are the only creatures in true possession of intrinsic value, meaning that their moral status or value inherently exists on its own.<sup>18</sup> When anthropocentrism and environmental

stewardship are fused together, the outcome holds human consideration at the center of environmental concern. Nature, which is seen as the external environment composed of

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<sup>18</sup> Hodson, Margot R., and Martin J. Hodson. *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation*. Monarch, 2008, 17.

ecosystems and non-human entities, is generally viewed as having instrumental, or extrinsic, value, and thus its preservation and conservation is premised on its capability to satisfy human needs. For example, a marine ecosystem may be preserved for a certain period of time because it happens to be the same location as an offshore oil site, from which humans will profit.

### *A God-Centered Approach*

Instead of this anthropocentric form of environmental stewardship, which discounts the overall purpose given to humans in the Garden, Christians must shift to endorse a correct approach that balances the reality of being part of a good creation that has value in and of itself with the perception that humans were made in the image of God. This alternative approach, known as theocentric environmental stewardship, secures the blessings of every part of God's creation, distributing value that is each to his own with a specific focus on glorifying God at the center of it all. It is important to acknowledge that although the Bible distributes much more authority and power to human beings, it does not separate them from the remainder of creation. The same creation story that brought about the doctrine of *imago Dei* also states that the Lord saw that the other creatures he created were good apart from their relation to human beings. In fact, God did not declare the creatures of the earth to be good, but instead, he saw that they were good after he had created them.<sup>19</sup> Jesus' teaching in Matthew 10:29-31 that a human is of more value than many sparrows only has meaning in the first place because of the implicit affirmation that God believes sparrows possess value and worth on their own.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cobb, John B. *Sustainability: Economics, Ecology, and Justice*. Orbis, 1995, 93.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 92.

The idea of anthropocentrism, even when it becomes involved with environmental protection, is inherently wrong because of its underlying principles that seek to promote the well-being of humans at the expense of everything else. Furthermore, anthropocentric environmental stewardship denies all the glory and goodness of God and his creation, placing humans at the center of all things. In his book, *World and Environment*, Odil Hannes Steck thoroughly examines the approach a believer should take when it comes to the preservation of creation:

The world of creation the believer lives in is a world dominated by the madness of man's rejection of God... [But] Christian action is not centered on, or motivated by, fear. Its center is the connection between the divine future and the view of the world as creation... What faith "can" do, by the power of God in Christ, to preserve the world of Creation is to perform untiringly token acts as signs, manifestations of the future salvation in the sphere of the natural world, which testify that God has opened his new world for all created things; crystallizations which give concrete form in life to the unity of God, the creator and redeemer, and to the unity of the divine activity directed toward the world.<sup>21</sup>

It is the duty of Christians to lead by example, illustrating how doing the right thing for the right reason (theocentric stewardship) carries much more weight than doing the right thing for the wrong reason (anthropocentric stewardship). Theocentric environmental stewardship finds the perfect balance between humans as image-bearers and the rest of creation, initiating a sense of harmony that was once present on Earth in the beginning.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Steck, Odil Hannes. *World and Environment*. Wipf & Stock, 2007, 289-90, 293.

<sup>22</sup> Before the Fall.

### Humanity's Detrimental Impact on the Environment

Many Christians seem to be quite familiar with the phrase “love your neighbor as yourself,”<sup>23</sup> yet they fail to realize its full significance. Of course, the basic understanding of this command teaches to treat others with an overarching sense of equality and peace. However, if the meaning of this phrase is extended even further, it can be concluded that a person cannot love his or her neighbor without first taking care of creation.<sup>24</sup>

Pollution can injure and literally kill one's neighbor. The poor use of natural and other resources represents theft from the neighbor, indeed from our own children and grandchildren, who may someday curse us for this. People destroy the earth and do “wrong to a neighbor” because they covet more than the Creator has allotted to them.<sup>25</sup>

Stepping further into the comprehension of theocentric environmental stewardship, this section must allude to the previously mentioned truth that all of creation plays a role in praising the Creator. Just as humans worship in many different ways—singing, dancing, praying—nature worships the Lord by carrying out its various functions according to God's original design. Psalm 148 expands the vision of how nature worships, giving rise to the concept that although a tree or a mountain may not possess a brain, they still carry out their purpose in praising the Lord. The entire cosmos and everything that it holds were made for the glory of God, and it must follow that they worship him by being exactly what they were created to be and doing exactly what they were created to do. Unfortunately, nature has experienced a difficult time in

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<sup>23</sup> Mark 12:31

<sup>24</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

continuing its praise as a result of the sin that mankind allowed to enter into the world. The impact of mankind has prevented portions of nature from being able to carry out their original functions as careless, man-made actions have tampered with their inherent capabilities. The prophet Hosea speaks of how creation mourns in Hosea 4:1-3:

Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

In speaking to the people of Israel, who had not kept their covenant with the Lord, Hosea reminds them of the human obligation to be stewards of the earth and of the responsibility that stems from their covenant relationship with him.<sup>26</sup> Rather than supplying an overload of evidence for environmental degradation, this thesis focuses mainly on proving the implications that come with taking a theocentric stance on environmental stewardship. For additional information and evidence on the human impact on the environment, read through Kennedi Kirk's *The Divine Role of Humanity*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hodson, Margot R., and Martin J. Hodson. *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation*. Monarch, 2008, 47.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.hendyamps.com/kingdomapologetics/resources/Environmentalism---Kirk-Thesis.pdf>

### Politicized Science

Is climate change a real issue, or is it just a hoax? This seemingly simple question has been circulating the media for the past fifty years, and people all over the world have engaged in the controversy surrounding the topic. All this quarreling and bickering over the question of its existence has resulted in nothing but the institution and penetration of politicized science into modern society. Especially in the United States, it has become painstakingly evident the amount of power political parties possess in their ability to control people and inhibit them from thinking for themselves. If humans stop wasting valuable time and money researching the question of climate change's existence and start working to create a cleaner and more sustainable world, then there would no longer be a need to worry about the proposed long-term effects of climate change.

In summary, the fostering of politicized science has unjustly created a schism in society, degrading the importance of environmental stewardship. Rather than becoming fixated upon controversial misunderstandings surrounding the topic of climate change, humanity must take real action and find solutions to the indisputable ramifications of their current detrimental impact on Earth.

### Pollution

The disobedience of the people of Israel mentioned in Hosea 4:1-3 can easily be viewed as similar to the way modern society exploits and degrades the terrestrial, atmospheric, and hydrospheric realms of the physical world for the betterment of humanity and their selfish desires.



### *Deforestation*

Tropical forests around the world are currently being destroyed at a rate of roughly twenty-five million acres per year.<sup>28</sup> Between 1980 and 1995, at least two hundred million hectares of forests had vanished.<sup>29</sup> In relation to air pollution, roughly one quarter of all the atmospheric carbon produced by human activity comes from the many methods of deforestation, which include logging, ranching, plantation farming, cutting for fuelwood, and road construction.

“Thus do the causes—direct or indirect—proliferate, a growing list of human actions that so modify the natural environment that tree death and forest decline eventuate: too much ground-level ozone and not enough stratospheric ozone; acidic soils over vast forest regions; a pattern of nutrient loss and an excess of other nutrients, such as nitrogen, that prove toxic; the deposition of heavy metals—cadmium, lead, copper, zinc, mercury—and the mobility of poisonous aluminum normally locked in the soil; the loss of beneficial mycorrhizal fungus; the destructive edge effects of clearcutting; the genetic weakness of replacement trees in impacted ecosystems; a host of plagues and diseases anxious to take advantage of the debilitated trees and forests.”<sup>30</sup>

It should not be forgotten that humans rely on the forests of the world for purification and regulation of water and air, decomposition of waste, cycling of nutrients, maintenance of soil, and medicine. It is fairly simple to comprehend that humans put themselves at risk when they continue to destroy the forests.

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<sup>28</sup> Bouma-Prediger, Steven. *For the Beauty of the Earth: a Christian Vision for Creation Care*. Baker Academic, 2010, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Little, Charles. *The Dying of Trees: the pandemic in America's forests* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 188.

### *Agriculture*

In terms of humanity's impact on agriculture, intensive farming practices have resulted in the salinization and alkalization of the irrigated ground, pesticide residues in the food that is consumed, and nitrate contamination of ground waters.<sup>31</sup> Soil is constantly being depleted of its natural nutrients, leading to the need for more chemical fertilizer to produce the same yield.

### *Ocean Acidification*

As of recent events that have devastated the world's oceans, it is time to reflect back onto the natural beauty that has been bestowed upon the world by God.. The largest contributor to the ocean's substantial affluence are the coral reefs that preside all around the globe. However, something has gone terribly wrong and has potentially triggered an immense decline in the well-being of the oceans in their entirety.

Through a rapidly increasing process known as coral bleaching, over half of the world's coral reefs have been lost in the past 30 years. Bleaching occurs when corals experience stress from waters being too-warm or acidic. As a result of this stress, the corals expel the symbiotic algae that lives inside of them, leaving but a bare, white skeleton of the ill-fated animals. Although there is a slight chance that corals are able to recover from this bleaching, most end up dying. For instance, many may be familiar with the extravagant beauty and vast variety of life that is held by the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. However, over two-thirds of all this beauty and life was eradicated in a detrimental bleaching event in 2016. Being only one out of thousands of other coral regions, the Great Barrier Reef is a perfect example of the pressing

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<sup>31</sup> Badke, William B. *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created*. Multnomah Press, 1991, 26.

problem that people fail to realize: coral reefs are essential not only for the ocean, but for the entire planet, as well. The coral reefs are worth so much, and it is time to take notice of all the benefits that they bring to the world, not just for marine environments but for cities, as well. Coral reefs protect coastal cities from tropical storms by acting as a barrier and maintaining the responsibility of withdrawing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, which reduces the severity of climate-change effects and generates oxygen. Whether they know it or not, over 500 million people around the world rely on coral reefs for food and income every single day.<sup>32</sup>

### *Air Quality*

The worst consequences that come with air pollution are the ones that are not able to be seen or smelled. Humans must realize that the earth is fully equipped to neutralize only natural pollutants. By distributing man-made pollutants into the atmosphere, humans are in effect tampering with the natural process of neutralization. Since the United States has not yet reached the level of poor air quality as other less-developed countries, many Americans have dismissed the thought of air pollution as a vital threat to their ultimate health. However, if Mexico City is offered up as an example, it would be fairly easy to comprehend how their residents are breathing in toxins equivalent to smoking two packs of cigarettes per day.<sup>33</sup> The city of Cubatao in Brazil has reached such a high level of air pollution that attempts to breathe can on some days trigger vomiting, and that the rain has become so acidic that it can burn a person's skin on impact.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The information presented in the *Ocean Acidification* section comes from a personal research paper written in 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Badke, William B. *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created*. Multnomah Press, 1991, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

### Climate Change

The accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, due to the burning of carbon compounds,<sup>35</sup> is the main driving force behind human induced climate change.<sup>36</sup> Since the mid-1800s, the global level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 27%, and that number continues to rise today.<sup>37</sup> The carbon dioxide produced in one area of the world is able to diffuse throughout the atmosphere and affect the rest of the planet. From the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to 2005, it has been found that the presence of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased from 280 parts per million (ppm) to 379 ppm, and the number continues to grow larger every year.<sup>38</sup> It is predicted that if humanity does not reduce carbon emissions, the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere could reach 650 ppm by 2100.<sup>39</sup>

Those who are not well-informed on climate science may perceive greenhouse gases to be inherently bad, when in fact, greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are essential for keeping Earth at a reasonable temperature for life to endure. However, human contribution to increasing the amount of greenhouse gases has been linked to a trend of warmer temperatures in recent years. In 2007, the World Meteorological Organization announced that the early 2000s<sup>40</sup> were ranked among the ten warmest years in the period from 1850 to 2008.<sup>41</sup>

Another claim of climate change is the rising of sea levels due to the expansion of water as it continues to increase in temperature. Excluding the melting of ice caps, the

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<sup>35</sup> Oil, gas, coal, wood, etc.

<sup>36</sup> Hodson, Margot R., and Martin J. Hodson. *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation*. Monarch, 2008, 58.

<sup>37</sup> Badke, William B. *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created*. Multnomah Press, 1991, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Hodson, Margot R., and Martin J. Hodson. *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation*. Monarch, 2008, 59.

<sup>40</sup> 2000-2007.

<sup>41</sup> Hodson, Margot R., and Martin J. Hodson. *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation*. Monarch, 2008, 58.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported in 2007 that global sea levels would rise between 28 and 43 centimeters by 2100.<sup>42</sup> Although the rising of sea levels does not have much evidence for support as of today, there is one thing that justifies the warming of the oceans: coral bleaching. As mentioned in the *Ocean Acidification* section, the warming and acidification of ocean water has resulted in the deaths of much of the population of coral around the world. This incident gives a hint of validity to the claim that rapid changes in the climate will leave many organisms unable to adapt quick enough and possibly result in decreased global biodiversity.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the claims and evidence presented on the topic of climate change thus far, it is up to the reader to formulate his or her own views based on the evidence provided, but heed this warning: do not get lost in a sea of arguments and controversies surrounding the legitimacy of climate change's claims; instead, direct all focus towards finding solutions to the indisputable and current ramifications of humanity's impact on the environment.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 59.

### **Misinterpretation of Humanity's Destiny**

Following the truth that there is plenty of evidence depicting the lack of concern of modern-day Christians to fulfill their duties as stewards of the earth, there appears to be a basis for this negligence that stems from a misconception dealing with the popular yet incorrect belief that believers are transported to some other place commonly referred to as “heaven.” To begin an analysis of Christianity in its current state, as endorsed by the modern church, the unjustified dichotomy of the Old Testament and New Testament must be inspected. Paul, a New Testament writer, warned about this when he wrote, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, many millions of Christians, especially in the Western culture, have been taught incorrect interpretations of their faith and their Bible. This section will delve into the history and origin of Gnostic values within the modern Christian faith.

#### *Gnostic Roots and Heresy*

One ancient model that is responsible for the Gnostic values inside the modern Christian faith can be traced back to the heretic Marcion, who was excommunicated in A.D. 144 for rejecting the Old Testament and its Creator God.<sup>45</sup> Marcion believed that the New Testament God...

“...was wholly other than the God who could be known either from the creation or from Old Testament revelation...Marcion separated his authentic Christ from the political Messiah of the Jews by ‘a great and absolute difference.’ This authentic

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<sup>44</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>45</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 59.

Christ could not have assumed a material body that participated in the created world, for such a body would have been ‘stuffed with excrement.’ A material body and a physical birth... were unworthy of the true Christ.”<sup>46</sup>

Marcion’s rejection of the Old Testament stems from the Greek-Gnostic thought concerning the hatred of the created order. He not only concerned himself with rejecting the Old Testament, as he was also found to have edited the New Testament and reinterpreted its key doctrines. For instance, one modern common misconception that Christians hold to be true comes from his misinterpretation of the resurrection of the body to signify the salvation or escape of the immortal soul.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, rather than wishing for the coming of a “new creation” or a “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells,”<sup>48</sup> Marcion abandoned the creation and advocated that salvation was an escape from the shackles of the physical body.<sup>49</sup> In its basic sense, Gnosticism teaches the dualist view that the created, material world (Earth) is evil, and that only the spirit is good. Gnostics also hold true that the God of the Old Testament (the Creator) was evil, and that Jesus Christ was a wholly spiritual, good being.<sup>50</sup> Gnosticism is not about true redemption or salvation, but it instead teaches the concept of self-discovery. In opposition to the idea of the kingdom of God being fulfilled on the earth, Gnostics promote the escape from this earth and from the physical body in search of a heavenly life somewhere else.

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<sup>46</sup>DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>48</sup> 2 Peter 3:13

<sup>49</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 59.

<sup>50</sup> <https://carm.org/gnosticism>

The importance of resurrection in human terms comes directly from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 unfolds the mystery surrounding the resurrection of the physical body:

“We shall not all die [before the return of Christ], but we shall all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet call. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise immortal, and we shall be changed. This perishable being must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal must be clothed with immortality.”<sup>51</sup>

A numerous amount of modern Christians, both in the United States and abroad, maintain the obsessive idea of spiritual freedom, which violates the historicity of the original Christian doctrine that is derived from Jewish thought. Aware of the influence of Hellenistic thought during the time of his writing, John sought to write his gospel in a way that would dismiss any Gnostic values proposed by the Greek.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”<sup>52</sup>

These beginning phrases of the Gospel of John have lost their original meaning in modern Christian thought. John’s intentions of using the “the Word” in this context were not to represent the Bible or any other holy manuscript; they were to discuss the incarnate form of Jesus Christ as God. When translated into the Greek language, “the Word” is brought back to the

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<sup>51</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The American Religion*. Chu Hartley Publishers, 2006, 262.

<sup>52</sup> John 1:1,14



initial denotation of the word *logos*.<sup>53</sup> In ancient Greek thought, *logos* was this divine word that signified a universal force of reason which governed the cosmos and kept it in order.<sup>54</sup> By utilizing the word *logos*, John was able to answer both the Jewish thought, pointing to Jesus as being one in the same as the Creator God of the Old Testament, and the Greek thought, connecting the divine force with Jesus in the form of a man.

Knowledge of Gnosticism and its flaws comes from early Christian theologians, the earliest among them being the heresiologist Saint Irenaeus in the second century A.D. Before becoming Bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus studied in his youth under the great martyr, Polycarp of Smyrna, who was regarded as a disciple of one of the Apostles, specifically John.<sup>55</sup> The idea of apostolic succession, validating a person's teaching based on their association with the apostles of Christ, is important in this matter because it proves the authenticity of Irenaeus' teachings. Irenaeus specifically concerned himself with refuting Gnosticism and the teachings of Marcion, seeing them as a threat to the integrity of genuine Christianity. He wrote *Adversus Haereses*, in which he laid out his organic and eschatological view of redemptive history in opposition to the various Gnostic heresies of the early church, which included a withdrawal from Old Testament. Irenaeus viewed the whole of Scripture as a testament to the incarnational Son of God.<sup>56</sup>

### What of the Soul?

The danger of Gnosticism is easily apparent because it denies the physical incarnation of God as the Son of Man. In doing so, it also denies the true efficacy of the atonement since, if

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<sup>53</sup> <http://ancientroadpublications.com/Studies/BiblicalStudies/Logos.html>

<sup>54</sup> Fr. 50, from Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies*, IX, 9, 1.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.ntcanon.org/Irenaeus.shtml>

<sup>56</sup> *Irenaeus*. Anchor Bible Dictionary, 458.

Jesus is not God, he could not provide redemption for all of mankind, leaving the rest of humanity to still be lost in sin. If Gnosticism is correct in teaching that the physical is evil, then Jesus could not have been fully man and fully God; he either only *appeared* to be physical, or he could not be the Son of God.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, if the physical is evil, there is no resurrection from the dead. Instead, "salvation" is reuniting in spirit with God in a location that is fully detached from the physical world.

Contrary to the popular dualist belief that humans have both a spiritual body and a physical body, it is realistically only through the breath of God that physical bodies, which were formed from the dust of the ground, are given life. Referring to the original Hebrew language for assistance in response to claims for the presence of a spiritual body will reveal that the word for "soul" is *nephesh*, which is seen to have been given by God<sup>58</sup> and departs when a human dies.<sup>59</sup> Although some people translate it as "soul," *nephesh* would be better understood as "life; living being."<sup>60</sup> The word "spirit" when translated to Hebrew is *ruah*, which is what sustains human life and symbolizes energy, consciousness, and vitality.<sup>61</sup>

Individuals do not possess some sort of spiritual body or entity within them that is trapped in the sinful shackles of a physical body, as the Greek and Gnostics would believe. On the contrary, God's breath is what sustains humans' capability to live and thrive. Now, it must be clarified that this section is not attempting to choose a side on the existence of a soul, it merely states that the Greek dualist interpretation of the immortal soul is incorrect. Later on, this

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<sup>57</sup> <https://carm.org/gnosticism>

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>59</sup> Genesis 35:18

<sup>60</sup> Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*. Intervarsity Press, 2015, 148.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

thesis will discuss how these Gnostic values have transferred from historical times to the present day and prove why it is crucial to believe in the resurrection of the dead rather than the immortality of the soul.

## The Role of Christ in the Renewal of Creation

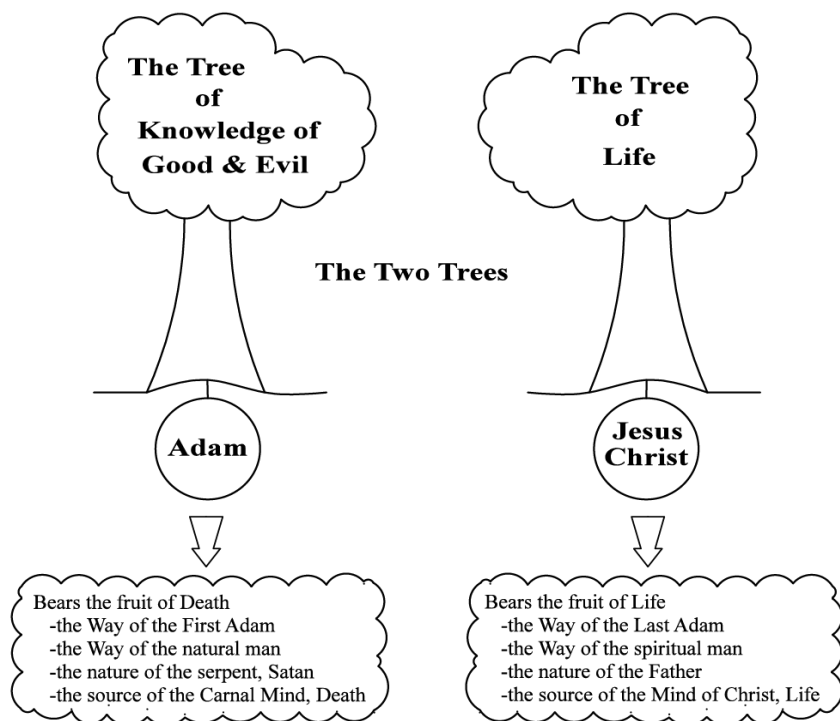
As a result of the sin inaugurated by *adam*, humans are in need of a savior to bring redemption and restoration upon them. Such a Messiah, one that is fully man and fully God,<sup>62</sup> is hinted at throughout the Old Testament, and the New Testament presents the prophesied Messiah in the physical incarnation of Jesus Christ.

### Christ as the Second Adam

In examining the analogy of Adam and Christ, specific instances are able to be found in which Christ is said to undo the damage caused by Adam.<sup>63</sup>

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 makes the relationship between Adam and Christ quite clear: “For as by a man came

death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” In Romans 5:12-21, Paul writes of both Adam and Christ as representatives of humanity; Adam embodies the sin that humans developed in consequence of their rebellion, while Christ signifies the salvation and restoration that humans will gain upon the



<sup>62</sup> Bouma-Prediger, Steven. *For the Beauty of the Earth: a Christian Vision for Creation Care*. Baker Academic, 2010, 148.

<sup>63</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 47.

unification of the kingdom. Christ has a significant role in the renewal of creation by bringing perfect order back to the cosmos because in him all things hold together.<sup>64</sup>

Although Satan was able to obtain power over humanity through the disobedience of the first Adam, he is now defeated through the obedience of the Second Adam.<sup>65</sup> In his victory, Christ reaffirms the task of the first Adam and invites everyone into a renewed fellowship with God, each other, and the earth.<sup>66</sup> This idea of recapitulation was first expressed in the words of Irenaeus:

For the Creator of the world is truly the Word of God: and this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man, existing in this world, and who in an invisible manner contains all things created, and is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things; and therefore He came to His own in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon the tree, that He might sum up all things in Himself...<sup>67</sup>

Through Christ, all things are reconciled to God, resolving the disorder brought by sin and initiating the eventual establishment of a restored creation. Jesus brought life through death, bringing forth a new order of righteousness and holiness.<sup>68</sup>

Throughout the entirety of this paper, it can be inferred that in order to maintain an accurate understanding of the Christian faith, it is crucial to never allow for a schism to form between the teachings of the Old Testament and the teachings of the New Testament. Instead, a

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<sup>64</sup> Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*. Intervarsity Press, 2015, 162.

<sup>65</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 39.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, xviii.3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:546-47.

<sup>68</sup> Isaiah 11:1-9; Ephesians 4:24.

bridge should be built between the two, encompassing ideas from both sides and forming an overview of the kingdom that has come and is yet to come. The kingdom of God entails the renewal of all of creation, taking into account both humanity and nature. It unites creation and redemption through the atonement of Christ, allowing for the proper habitat of a redeemed humanity on a redeemed earth. It is important to acknowledge that the “new creation” begins with those who are in Christ and who are willing to follow the Lord’s commandments.

## The Significance of the Resurrection: Fundamental Texts

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; 35-58

Approximately 20 to 25 years after the resurrection of Christ, Paul writes a letter to the Christian church in the city of Corinth, which is struggling with immorality. His letter specifically addresses various moral issues and misplaced priorities, but most of all, it ends with a profound explanation of the great hope around which Christianity revolves: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that Paul writes this letter after departing from Corinth and learning of the advancement in Corinth of a Gnostic-spiritualist interpretation of the Christian faith. An emphasis on *gnosis* (knowledge) has risen in the city, acting as a threat to the authentic apostolic gospel, which is rooted in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. A Corinthian pride in wisdom and knowledge emerges, placing an unjustified, contradictory emphasis on the divine presence of an immortal soul seeking mystical salvation. The city of Corinth expresses a high level of disinterest in the resurrection as a future event and disinterest in the transformed resurrection body.<sup>69</sup> Alongside the accounts of the original Easter in the four Gospels, 1 Corinthians 15 stands as a fifth witness to the actual event of Christ's resurrection and promotes foundational ground for the final resurrection of all God's people.

### *The Pervasion of Tradition (15:1-11)*

<sup>1</sup>Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was

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<sup>69</sup> Allen, Clifton Judson. *The Broadman Bible Commentary*. Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972, 291.

buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

After having spent over a year immersed in the city of Corinth, Paul begins chapter 15 by reminding the Corinthians about what he has taught already them. He recalls preaching to them *the gospel*, which primarily involves God's activity through Jesus Christ's act of salvation for all men. The Corinthians *received* the gospel, maintaining it as their firm foundation and becoming *saved* by their faith in it. However, they seem to have forsaken the message they once held dear, eliciting Paul's response that if they have *believed in vain*, then the issue is as grave as salvation itself.

The phrases *I delivered* and *I received* constitute a popular Jewish formula that signifies reception and transmission of tradition, *paradosis*. Paul's use of "*as of first importance*" places the greatest significance upon the truth he personally received in the historically-bound resurrection of Christ. In the passage containing verses 3-5, Paul recalls the content of the gospel, which was preached by Christians even before his conversion, depicting how the faith in the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection did not originate with Paul. The lines of confession in verses 3-5 begin in the same way, using the word *hoti* ("that") to depict a linguistic



expression that suggests a formula. The first line, *that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures*, illustrates the death of Christ as a central significance for faith, reconciling man's relationship with a holy God. This line also demonstrates a broad connection with the promises of God in the Old Testament to redeem his people.<sup>70</sup>

*That he was buried* is an indirect way of explaining that Jesus actually died on the cross and accepted the conclusiveness of it all. *That he was raised* presents an opposing idea that is the central affirmation of the New Testament. Furthermore, the verb “*was raised*” translates to the Greek text in the present tense, signifying that Jesus was raised and remains raised from the dead.<sup>71</sup> Although this may appear to be a miniscule detail, it exquisitely paints the resurrection as a past, present, and future reality.

Throughout verses 5-8, Paul's use of the word “*appeared*” signifies that it was not a matter of faith among those to whom Christ appeared, but rather an actual, physical appearance of the risen Lord.<sup>72</sup> He starts to conclude this section by reflecting on his past actions of persecuting the Christians and giving thanks to God, who had saved him. However, he finalizes the passage by explaining that the apostolic message is the same throughout, no matter who preaches it, because the apostles were not the source of the gospel but its channel. The one apostolic gospel preached by Paul concerns the importance of the death and resurrection in order to secure the salvation of men, which is exactly what the Corinthians *believed*.

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<sup>70</sup> Deuteronomy 21:23; Isaiah 53:5-12.

<sup>71</sup> Further use of the perfect tense can be found in 1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 16-17, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Allen, Clifton Judson. *The Broadman Bible Commentary*. Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972, 386.

*The Implications of the Resurrection (15:12-19)*

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope<sup>[b]</sup> in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

After Paul's departure, some of the Corinthians begin to declare ***there is no resurrection of the dead***, most likely as a result of the penetration of gnostic values into their society. As mentioned in the previous section, the verb ***raised*** is in the perfect tense, suggesting that Christ is raised and so he remains raised. A profound implication rises in this passage, expressing that if the Corinthians know what it means to truly believe Christ as raised from the dead, then it is absurd to say that men are not raised from the dead, as well. The faith in Christianity is centered in the resurrection, and ***if there is no resurrection*** then the preaching of the gospel is ***in vain*** since the whole process of salvation is seemingly annulled. Without the resurrection of Christ, believers no longer receive victory over death or the vindication of Christ's lordship. Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit through faith to witness the merciful act of salvation present in the past resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of humanity.

Since the gospel is interpreted and taught in the exact same way by all the apostles, then ***if it is true that the dead are not raised***, it would follow that Paul and the rest of the apostles

have misinterpreted Scripture and are thus false prophets. If Christ is not raised from the dead, then all of humanity still wallows in their sins, begging for a savior who is not able to help them. Furthermore, a major hope for life in the future is denied by the above statement, proclaiming that *those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished*. If the Christian faith indeed holds no meaningful present and no significant future, then why should the Corinthians, or anyone else for that matter, waste their time in believing? In truth, no one can actually fall asleep “in Christ” if Christ has perished; instead, genuine Christianity speaks of Christ rendering the effects of sin useless, ultimately defeating the last enemy, death.

*The Procession of Events (15:20-28)*

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For “God<sup>[c]</sup> has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. <sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

There must no longer be any fear or despair present within the hearts of Christians because *Christ has been raised from the dead*. Paul describes Christ as the *firstfruits* to provide imagery for the first sheaf of the harvest, which is offered at the Temple, symbolizing the

promise of more harvest to come.<sup>73</sup> Considering that Jesus was raised from the dead on the day after the sabbath after the Feast of Passover, the allusion to the firstfruits evokes an understanding of Christ's resurrection as the inauguration of the end-time.

In verses 21-22, Paul introduces the theme of the first and second (last) Adams, which is mentioned earlier in this thesis. While the first Adam introduces sin and death into the world, the last Adam, Christ, offers believers a vindicated life that is in both the present and future through his resurrection. Although the phrasing of verse 22 shows that *in Christ shall all be made alive*, the true meaning in this can be understood as, "all who are in Christ shall be made alive." As Christ is already raised from the dead, *those who belong to him* will be transformed at his *parousia*, or second *coming*, and given a resurrected existence.

*Then*, after Christ returns, *comes the end* of this present age, otherwise known as the consummation of all things through the restoration of God's kingdom on Earth. Christ will *deliver the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power*,<sup>74</sup> meaning that his reign will work to eradicate all existence of evil on the earth until there is nothing left that opposes him. At this point, some scholars attempt to interpret Paul's writing to draw conclusions about the intermediate, millennial kingdom mentioned in Revelation. However, the blatant absence of this millennial reign suggests that Paul is writing to portray the final destiny and final hope of a redeemed kingdom.

Paul's statement in verse 26 is quite self-explanatory, *the last enemy to be destroyed is death*. Death serves as man's greatest enemy, acting as a constant reminder that, without Christ,

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<sup>73</sup> Leviticus 23:10-14

<sup>74</sup> Philippians 2:9-11

humanity is subject to mortality. Verse 28 follows this somewhat straightforward analysis, expressing that God will be glorified as the Creator, who has made all, and who has subjected all to his loving rule.

*The Resurrection Body (15:35-50)*

<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” <sup>36</sup> You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. <sup>39</sup> For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup> There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. <sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

<sup>42</sup> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”;<sup>[e]</sup> the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall<sup>[f]</sup> also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>50</sup> I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

In verse 36, by exclaiming, “*You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies,*” Paul attempts to make a connection between the resurrection story and the growth of a plant. For a seed to be able to sprout into a plant, it must first be buried in the ground. In the same way, a human body must be buried in the ground, awaiting the resurrection to raise up a transformed, living body. The continuity that exists between the mortal body and the resurrected body can be equated to the same continuity present between a seed that is buried and a plant that emerges from the ground.

In the following verses of this passage, Paul sets up four main differences between the body that dies and the body that is raised. First, the body that dies is *perishable*, meaning that it is subject to decay because it is part of a world that is subject to corruption. The resurrected body is therefore raised *imperishable*, signifying the vindication and fullness of life willed by the Creator. Second, the body that dies is distinguished by *dishonor*, while the body that lives again is marked by *glory* and splendor. Third, the body that dies is characterized by *weakness* that is both physical and spiritual. On the other hand, the body that is raised contains *power*, which has been bestowed upon him by the one who has already defeated death. Lastly, the body that dies is a *physical body*, marked by the limitations of mortality, while the resurrected body is that of a *spiritual body*, which is fully sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this final description of the resurrected body, Paul does not in fact provide proof of the existence of a soul but instead illustrates the spiritual body as made vital by the Spirit and fit to be in the presence of God. A natural, or physical, body is appropriate for this age, while a spiritual body is appropriate for the age that is to come. Paul’s teachings in this passage must not be used to make claims that our present bodies are made up of “soul substance” and our future bodies of “spirit substance.”

Instead, it should be proclaimed that the body stands for the whole man, and that it will be given an appropriate form of life by God in the end.<sup>75</sup>

In order to clarify his position on the spiritual body, Paul refers once again to the relationship between the first Adam and the last Adam. While the first Adam was *a living being* (a person), *the last Adam became a life-giving spirit*. Christ did this by being raised from the dead through the transformation granted by the Holy Spirit. Aware of the Greek-thought popular in his time period, Paul makes certain that he denies the Platonic archetype of the ideal vs the empirical man by stating, “*But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.*” Paul indicates that the historic man, the first Adam who sins, comes before the life-giving spirit, the last Adam who prepares man for an eschatological future.

All men bear *the image of the man of dust*, destined to return to the ground from which they are formed. However, Christ, who bears *the image of the man of heaven*, shall distribute incorruptible bodies to those who are in him. Paul speaks in the plainest language when he says, “*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.*” The “flesh and blood” simply refers to the corrupt, mortal bodies that are plagued by the effects of sin and death. A change in the body must take place in the final resurrection at the time of consummation, when *the perishable* will *inherit the imperishable*.

#### *The Mystery that Awaits (15:51-58)*

<sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable,

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<sup>75</sup> 1 John 3:2

and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup> “O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The mystery articulated by Paul in verse 51 emphasizes a great eschatological event that is complex upon first glance. Not all Christians will *sleep*, or die, before the final consummation of all things; those who are alive will be transformed in the same way as those who have died. When the trumpet sounds, those who are dead in Christ *will be raised imperishable*, taking on a resurrected body that is no longer subject to corruption or decay. The use of the word *immortality* (*athanasia*) represents Paul’s view of man as immortal in the end by the grace of God. The triumphant assurance that the power of death is defeated comes in verse 57, where Paul exclaims, “*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Without dichotomizing the Old Testament from the New Testament, Paul’s exposition of resurrection offers a distinct alternative to the Jewish beliefs in his day, which depicted the resurrection as dealing with the national hope of Israel being raised to life, while the Gentiles



receive their punishment.<sup>76</sup> The hope presented in 1 Corinthians 15 displays a Christianized version of the apocalypse, in which the Gentiles are no longer the real enemy, but instead sin and death are the last enemies that God will destroy. Paul's view of the goal of a renewed humanity in this passage portrays Christians as living in the early days following the resurrection of Christ, which has defeated sin and death and liberated the cosmos.<sup>77</sup> Examining his letter also reveals that God's people will undergo a redemptive, transformative process mirroring the resurrection of Christ in the final days before the full restoration of the kingdom is complete.

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<sup>76</sup> Wright, Nicholas Thomas. *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997, 141.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

The Pauline epistle of 1 Thessalonians is written by Paul around AD 49 after visiting Thessalonica.<sup>78</sup> Keeping central the idea of Christ's resurrection and deliverance, Paul speaks of the kingdom of God in its future state specifically in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11:

<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord,<sup>[a]</sup> that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

**5** Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers,<sup>[b]</sup> you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> For you are all children<sup>[c]</sup> of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we

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<sup>78</sup> Wright, Nicholas Thomas. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Fortress Pr., 2004, 213.

might live with him.<sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

In this passage, Paul clearly defines what he means by “resurrection” by indicating the those who have already died will be raised from the dead at some point in the future. Furthermore, he states that the resurrection of Christ will serve as a model for those who die in him to be raised “in the same way” (*houtos*, 4:14).<sup>79</sup> Rather than being the subjects of the “wrath” mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, those who are currently dead will rise up (*anastesontai*, 4:16) and possess the salvation made possible by Christ. Relating to the second-Temple Jewish beliefs about the resurrection, Paul affirms that the bodily resurrection is something new that those who are dead do not presently enjoy.<sup>80</sup> A parallel can be drawn between 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, in which the imagery of “being caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” functionally corresponds, according to Paul, to the body being changed in a way that renders it no longer corrupt.<sup>81</sup> The metaphor of the cloud evokes the message presented in Daniel 7:13, which concerns the vindication of the covenant people after their suffering. It is another way of Paul’s teaching in Galatians 5:5 that those who belong to God will be vindicated.

In between the time of the bodily death and the time of the bodily resurrection, there lies a problem concerning an intermediate state of what modern Christians refer to as “heaven.” In his discussion of this interim state, Paul references the recurring image of falling asleep as synonymous for death, allowing him to speak of those who are currently dead but will one day

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<sup>79</sup> Wright, Nicholas Thomas. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Fortress Pr., 2004, 215.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

wake up.<sup>82</sup> Some interpretations attempt to justify a time of unconscious, post-mortem existence of the “soul” prior to the reawakening of resurrection; however, Paul does not utilize the soul (*psyche*) when referring to the intermediate state. While it would make sense for Paul to be speaking of the *body* as asleep, he most likely employs this language of sleeping and waking as a way of contrasting a stage of temporary activity, not necessarily unconsciousness, with one of renewed activity.<sup>83</sup>

In 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8, Paul establishes Christians as “children of light, children of the day” to endorse a further connection to the imagery of sleeping and waking. When speaking of staying awake, Paul is referring to someone getting up early before the crack of dawn, as opposed to staying up throughout the night. Although the current condition of the world waits in darkness and night for the “day of the Lord Jesus” to come, true believers should be living as if it is already daytime. The Genesis-based imagery of night and day can be used in this case to describe living Christians as already “awake,” but still in need of transformation. Those who are currently dead, or asleep, await a final vindication in their resurrection in Christ. Throughout the Bible, there is no mention of specific evidence of an interim state for the dead before the final resurrection; however, the eventual reunion at the time of Jesus’ return remains in line with God’s intentions and will occur on a redeemed earth.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 216.

<sup>83</sup> Wright, Nicholas Thomas. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Fortress Pr., 2004, 216.

### **Death is Defeated Once and For All**

Many modern Christians maintain foundational beliefs concerning death that are based on the false teachings of Greek philosophy instead of the correct truth presented in the Bible. This section will prove the element of the resurrection as necessary to Christianity's promise of eternal life.

#### *Death as the Last Enemy: Socrates vs Jesus*

The clear distinction of the experience of death between Greek thought and Christianity can be observed in the final moments of life in the stories of Socrates and Jesus. Plato's account of his master's death presents arguably the most imposing doctrine ever revealed about the immortality of the soul.<sup>84</sup> Death, in both Greek and Gnostic teaching, acts as the "great liberator" by freeing the eternal soul from the corrupt prison of the physical body.<sup>85</sup> Approaching his death, Socrates carries out his doctrine for the immortal soul by retaining a peaceful composure, unafraid of losing his bodily life. Socrates could not fear death since he believed that it would set his eternal soul free from the shackles of his body. Therefore, Socrates, as well as the rest of Greek philosophy, illustrates the physical death as a companion to the eternal life of a soul.

On the other side of the spectrum is the story of the death of Jesus Christ. Unlike the Greek acceptance of death as a friend, Jesus, who is both fully human and fully God, depicts a natural fear of death.<sup>86</sup> Although Jesus is afraid, his fear must not be confused with cowardice,

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<sup>84</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 19.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>86</sup> Mark 14:33; 15:34; Luke 12:50

as he never once strays from the duties entrusted to him by God. Contrary to the mindset of Socrates, Jesus views the face of death to be something dreadful rather than delightful. In fear of his great enemy,<sup>87</sup> Jesus cries out to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking to deliver him from this terrifying situation; however, Jesus knows what must be done. “And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’”<sup>88</sup> Christ’s statement does not regard death as a friend but, instead, acknowledges that if the greatest enemy must take him over according to the Father’s will, then so be it.<sup>89</sup> In his submission, Jesus understands that since death is the last enemy of God, to die means to be utterly forsaken, to no longer be in the hands of God.

The contrast between Socrates and Jesus is apparent as Socrates enters death calmly, ready to achieve the immortality of his soul, while Jesus is pictured to be weeping and crying in the face of death. 1 Corinthians 15:26 discloses the whole contrast of Greek thought and Christianity by stating that, “the last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

The importance of Jesus’ death becomes apparent when the Resurrection takes place three days after the crucifixion. Although Jesus undergoes the death of both body and soul, since he is regarded as the Mediator of salvation, he must be the one who conquers deaths and renders it powerless. He could not obtain this victory by simply living on as an immortal soul; he had to be subject to the power of death and enter its realm in order to defeat death, the last enemy, once

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<sup>87</sup> “Death”

<sup>88</sup> Matthew 26:39

<sup>89</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 22.

and for all. “When one wishes to overcome someone else, one must enter his territory. Whoever wants to conquer death must die.”<sup>90</sup>

Although the effects of sin issue such a harsh death in the present reality, God’s future vision demands a divine creation and a resurrection that restores the man, establishing a resurrected, transformed body. If genuine Christianity is to be upheld, then believers must reject the Greek-Gnostic thought that the material is bad and should be destroyed. For the believer, since death of the body is in effect death of life created by God, it is death that must be conquered and the body that must be resurrected. Furthermore, immortality of the soul is a negative assertion: the soul does not pass away but continues to live on for eternity. On the other hand, resurrection is a positive assertion: the person, who has actually died, is recalled to life to be a new creation in the name of Christ.<sup>91</sup>

If Christians are able to fully grasp the true horror of death, just as Jesus did when he endured the burden of dying on the cross, the significance of Paul’s outcry of victory in 1 Corinthians 15:54 will finally be made clear: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

### *Power: Flesh vs Spirit*

Death is not natural. It is not something God intended to have in his perfect creation; it is not willed by the Creator. The Genesis story of the Garden of Eden teaches that death came into the world by the sin of man, and that death is a curse that affects the entirety of creation.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death...”

Although the Resurrection of Christ has not yet fully eradicated the presence of death from the world, it surely has undermined the temporary power of death.<sup>93</sup>

In the very beginning, God formed man out of the dust of the ground and gave him life through the breath of the Spirit. As Creator of *all* things, God established everything to be perfect according to his will—this includes the production of human life through the combination of the body and his life-giving breath. The Greek dualism of body and soul, which expresses that the body is the evil entrapment of the eternal soul, has no foundational ground in the genuine Christian religion. Alternatively, Paul describes the body to be a temple of the Holy Spirit and confirms by standing firm in the original Hebrew system of thought that there is neither combination nor opposition of “body” and “soul” found anywhere in Scripture.<sup>94</sup>

The Christian interpretation of man takes into account the anthropology of the New Testament in continuity with the Jewish concepts of flesh and spirit that reside in the Old Testament.<sup>95</sup> For the Christian, the true juxtaposition occurs between the creation that has been defiled by sin and the new creation that is yet to come, as well as between the corruptible, fleshly body and the incorruptible resurrection body.<sup>96</sup>

This establishes another important concept that discusses the roles played by the flesh (Gk. *sarx*) and the spirit (Gk. *pneuma*). Instead of being misled by the secular use of this Greek terminology, focus should be placed on the New Testament’s explanation of the flesh and the

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<sup>93</sup> Complete annihilation of death will occur when Christ returns and brings restoration to his kingdom.

<sup>94</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 30.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>96</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 31.



spirit as “two *transcendent* powers which can enter into man from without; but *neither is given with human existence as such*.”<sup>97</sup>

Flesh is the power of sin and death, while spirit is the power of creation and life. Both flesh and spirit are thought to be able to seize and take control over individuals. As a direct consequence of the Fall, the power of the flesh currently holds all of creation, humans and nonhumans alike, in captivity. As the flesh’s great antagonist, the spirit promotes the power of life and takes effect through the process of resurrection. Though believers are currently subject to the power of the flesh, they need not fear death, for Christ has already defeated the flesh and inaugurated the spirit, the Holy Spirit to be exact, within the individual person. In the writings of Paul, it can be drawn that the resurrection of the *body* is crucial, and not the resurrection of the *flesh*, since the flesh is the power of death, which must remain destroyed.<sup>98</sup>

It can be observed that the deliverance paramount to the Christian faith consists not of a release of the eternal soul from the corrupt body, as the Greek would suggest, but rather a release from the power of the flesh and the redemptive transference to thrive in the power of the Holy Spirit, who already resides in every believer.<sup>99</sup> Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 4:16 portrays the Holy Spirit as already taking possession of the believer, causing him to be renewed day by day: “So we do not lose heart. Though the outer self is wasting away, the inner self is being renewed day by day.” The Holy Spirit is needed to save, empower, and sanctify the Christian by constantly renewing him.<sup>100</sup> Believers in Christ must remove themselves from the thought of the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 36.

<sup>100</sup> Morris, Boyd, and William Mikler. *Christus Victor (The Mystery of Faith)*. Nehemiah Institute, 2012, 22.

soul as immortal or fully good, and realize the dire need for the whole man to be made a new creation.<sup>101</sup>

It seems to be common thought that when an ordinary man dies, he goes to be “with Christ;” however, it is not as simple as people perceive it to be. In fact, when a man dies, he does happen to draw nearer to God, but that is only because he is taking part in the first blessings of the Resurrection. When a person dies, they shed the power of the flesh because Jesus has already defeated the last enemy. Even though a man is divested of the physical body in death, he draws nearer to God because, through the work of the Holy Spirit, he is grasped by the power of life and the resurrection; he only awaits a resurrected body to become fully complete and a new creation. Believers are living in end times, considering the fact that sin and death have been defeated; however since Jesus has not yet returned, death has not yet been fully abolished. Nevertheless, Christians should consider mimicking Socrates’ composure, but not his mindset or beliefs, in the face of death. The Holy Spirit dwelling within the Christian allows him to draw closer to God in death, simply awaiting a resurrected body that establishes a new creation through the power of the Spirit.

In conclusion, it is extremely important to remember the difference between Greek and Christian thought when discussing what happens when a person dies. The Greek teach the soul’s escape from an evil, physical body and the immortality of the soul. Christianity teaches the removal of the power of the flesh over the whole man, and the drawing nearer to God in death, waiting for mortality to be clothed with immortality through resurrection in the End—when all of creation is made new by the Lord, when death is finally abolished and sin is no more.

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<sup>101</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 37.

## Heaven is a Place on Earth

### *The Proper Habitat*

After proving the resurrection of the body to be humanity's final destiny, it must now be determined where exactly that renewal process will take place. Before delving into Biblical evidence, a logical standpoint can be formed in attempts to reveal the answer using previous knowledge about the original creation of the world. In the beginning, the Creator established Earth and all its inhabitants in pure perfection according to his will. It was the result of mankind's selfish desires that sin and death were able to enter into the world and spread corruption to all parts of creation. Now, if God's first creation was made perfect, then why would Christians hope for a new creation that is somehow "more perfect?" Would it not make the most sense to believe in a restoration of the created order on Earth to its original state of perfection, the renewal of God's creational intent from the beginning?<sup>102</sup> Although many Christians fantasize about an otherworldly, spiritual heaven as the final dwelling place of the kingdom of God, this just does not make much sense. If something is already made perfect, then attempting to alter its structure or location would in effect cause it to be less perfect since perfection is the highest level of anything. Furthermore, if the resurrection of Christ is observed, it can be seen that he physically resurrected on the earth, and if he is the perfect representative for humanity, then the resurrection of humanity in the End should appear quite similar to that of Jesus. In conclusion, from a logical perspective, since humanity and the rest of creation were first made to dwell on this perfect earth, it has thus been the proper habitat since the beginning and will remain that way for the rest of eternity.

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<sup>102</sup> Middleton, J. Richard. *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. BakerAcademic, 2014, 237.

Three main passages from Scripture concerning future salvation speak of the proper habitat for a restored humanity to be Earth, as opposed to some disembodied spiritual existence in a transcendent heaven.<sup>103</sup> The first verse to investigate is Matthew 5:5, which states, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” The most significant aspect about this verse comes through the realization that “inheriting the earth” in the Beatitudes is equated with receiving the kingdom.<sup>104</sup> Accompanying the meek, those who care for the earth in a theocentric, nondegrading way are truly qualified to inherit the kingdom. Another verse to inspect is Matthew 6:10, which addresses the kingdom theology of earthkeeping:<sup>105</sup> “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” This simple verse contains a double reference to the present reality of hope for the arrival of God’s order, as well as to the future transformation of everything in a new creation.<sup>106</sup> In both cases, this passage affirms that humanity’s proper habitat is a redeemed earth that houses the restored kingdom of God in its fullest glory. This final vindication of God’s kingdom is seen as a newly-established order on the face of the earth. Rather than simply serving as a reference to a temporary state before the consummation,<sup>107</sup> this passage portrays the final earthly kingdom, where God’s people will act as true stewards of his restored creation.<sup>108</sup> It is a common misconception to think of the phrase “kingdom of heaven” as some type of proof for the existence of an otherworldly place called heaven. However, the

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<sup>103</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 82.

<sup>104</sup> Matthew 5:3,10

<sup>105</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 82.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>107</sup> Revelation 11:15; 20:1-6

<sup>108</sup> Revelation 22:1-5

fact of the matter is that “kingdom of heaven” is simply synonymous to “kingdom of God,” which has already been proven to be located on God’s original creation: Earth.

The term “heaven” in its association with the kingdom of God has been misconstrued in the beliefs of the modern version of Christianity that is evangelized and preached in churches. The kingdom of God is in fact currently present and dwells among humans on Earth; however, as a result of sin it has been damaged and will not be fulfilled until the coming of Christ. When this event takes place, upon ridding the world of sin, Jesus will finally bring about the fulfillment of his kingdom, redirecting the order of the world and reshaping humanity back to the perfection that was possessed in the time of the original creation. To settle the dispute, it is crucial to remember that the final hope of Christians is being able to participate in the restoration of all things.

### Interim State

The last question to address on the topic of the body and soul deals with the time in which the dead will undergo the final transformation of the body. The teaching provided by the New Testament suggests that this ultimate process will occur at the End, when Christ’s return inaugurates the restoration of the kingdom.<sup>109</sup> The last enemy of God, death, has already been conquered through the resurrection of Christ;<sup>110</sup> however, acknowledging that Christians continue to die every day, one may bring up the question of why death still exists if it has already been defeated. The answer to this predicament can be located in the Greek word *Καταστροφεί*, which is used to describe both the “decisive victory already accomplished and the

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<sup>109</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 48.

<sup>110</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26

not-yet-consummated victory at the end.”<sup>111</sup> Although death has already been conquered through the resurrection of Christ, it will not be fully abolished until the End. This is where modern Christianity dubiously interprets the idea of a temporary, “interim state” of heaven where the dead shall reside during the time between the resurrection of Christ and his return to Earth.

Several “problem texts”<sup>112</sup> occur throughout the Bible that seem to promote the idea of an interim state; however, these will not be analyzed, for they truly do not contribute to the final hope of Christianity. The New Testament passages perceive to give off images of an intermediate condition of the soul, but it must not be assumed that anyone knows what it actually entails, nor should people attempt to make unwarranted conclusions about it. Unlike the Gnostics, Christians cannot assume that they have an immortal soul that escapes the body upon death to be with God. Instead, believers should take what they know to be truth and be satisfied with it. Rather than trying to formulate a heaven that believers go to immediately when they die, Christians should strive to understand the final expectation for a redeemed body as part of a restored creation. Paul describes the condition of the dead to be in a state of “nakedness” or “sleep,” waiting for the resurrection of the whole creation, which includes the hope for the resurrection of the body. There need not be any more doubt since the Holy Spirit dwells in the inner man; he will certainly transform the body in the End. Romans 8:11 confirms this by stating, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” Additionally, Philippians 3:21 speaks of the resurrected body: “...we await a Savior, the

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<sup>111</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 48.

<sup>112</sup> John 14:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:6-9; Philippians 1:23; Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 6:9-10; Luke 23:29-43.

Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Nothing is said in the New Testament, besides the images, about the details of the interim conditions. All that is known is this: in death, Christians draw nearer to God. Those who die in Christ are transformed because they are in the possession of the Holy Spirit.<sup>113</sup> Both the living and the dead wait, neither of which have any advantage over the other. The dead are still subject to time, but they are asleep, meaning that they possibly do not feel the same effects of time as those who are living. It is crucial to remember that, although death does still exist in the world, it has already been conquered through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death has been defeated, but it is not yet abolished. Romans 14:8-9 states, “For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”

Despite these attempts to disprove the dubious interpretation of an interim state, the truth is that, whether or not the interim state exists, the final destination of a redeemed humanity will be established on a restored earth.<sup>114</sup> If mankind hopes for an unjustified, otherworldly salvation, then they may consequently divert their attention from the present, redemptive transformation of earthly life, and enact a blatant disregard towards the necessity to care for the earth and its inhabitants. Rather than worrying about the specifics of an interim state, believers should be confident in Christ's everlasting proximity, which is grounded in the conviction that the Holy

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<sup>113</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 53.

<sup>114</sup> Middleton, J. Richard. *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. BakerAcademic, 2014, 237.

Spirit already resides within the individual Christian, that he has been transformed through the Spirit's power of life, and that he is ready to be reconciled with a resurrected body in the End.<sup>115</sup>

### Concept of a New Heaven and a New Earth

After proving Earth to be the proper habitat for a renewed creation and discussing the interim state, a new implication arises, dealing with eschatology in terms of the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>116</sup> This is where much speculation emerges: Even if the proper habitat of a redeemed humanity is Earth, does not the Bible speak of a new heaven and new earth by suggesting that the old order shall pass away? And, if God is simply going to make all things new again, why should humanity place forth an effort to take care for the current state of Earth? First of all, Christians must not neglect the divine command argument, which holds that since God explicitly entrusted humans to be the caretakers of creation, then his commands must be followed because he is Lord.<sup>117</sup> Authentic faith demands that Christians obey God in every circumstance; this includes the obligation to protect and care for the earth.<sup>118</sup>

Moving forward in tackling the concept of a new heaven and a new earth, the teaching of Christianity not only hopes for the resurrected body, but also for the renewal of all creation. As a result of sin, the whole of creation has become involved in death and eagerly awaits deliverance.

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<sup>115</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 53.

<sup>116</sup> As a side note, the term "heaven" used throughout Scripture never signifies a transcendent, otherworldly realm. In this case, "a new heaven and a new earth" should be seen as a singular concept of a restored creation.

<sup>117</sup> Bouma-Prediger, Steven. *For the Beauty of the Earth: a Christian Vision for Creation Care*. Baker Academic, 2010, 210.

<sup>118</sup> Genesis 2:15

<sup>119</sup> Romans 8:19



“This deliverance will come when the power of the Holy Spirit transforms all matter, when God in a new act of creation will not *destroy* matter, but set it free from the flesh, from corruptibility. Not eternal Ideas, but concrete objects will then rise anew, in the new, incorruptible life-substance of the Holy Spirit; and among these objects belongs our body as well.”<sup>120</sup>

In order to have a complete deliverance from the power of the flesh, there must exist continuity between the first creation and the coming creation.<sup>121</sup> H. Paul Santmire, an experienced ecological theologian and public witness, speaks of this continuity in his book, *Brother Earth*:

The new creation will stand in a relation of *continuity* with the first creation. The creative rule of God will not destroy the first creation and establish something entirely different. That would be no fulfillment. “For the substance of the creation is not annihilated, since he who established it is faithful. Rather the form of the world passes away,” said Irenaeus.<sup>122</sup>

Santmire notes that this continuity does not mean that a new heaven and a new earth will necessarily be exactly the same as the first creation, nor does he advocate for the complete destruction and recreation of all things. In essence, he suggests that the current order of things, one that is plagued by death through the power of the flesh, will pass away and that the world will be restored to life through the power of the Spirit.

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<sup>120</sup> Cullmann, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. WIPF and Stock, 2010, 37-38.

<sup>121</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 123.

<sup>122</sup> Santmire, *Brother Earth*, 109.

According to John of Patmos, once the coming kingdom has embraced the entire cosmos and God has fully established his rule, a new heaven and a new earth will emerge.<sup>123</sup> A common misconception occurs when a Christian thinks of the emergence of a new heaven and a new earth as signifying an instant change in the composition and order of the earth. Although it is true that God is omnipotent and has the power to transform life in an instant, he does not typically carry out his plans in an instant, and Scripture<sup>124</sup> can attest to this. Instead, being the inventor of time, God appears to create, establish, and restore objects and conditions through a variety of processes over time. Therefore, it makes sense that, as God's stewards of the earth, Christians may work alongside the Lord, possibly through divinely-inspired practices in sustainability, to bring about this restored creation—a new heaven and a new earth.

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<sup>123</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 80. AND Revelation 21:1

<sup>124</sup> E.g. The people of Israel wandered throughout the wilderness for 40 years before they were able to enter the Promised Land.

### **Restoration of God's Kingdom**

Modern society depicts just how pervasive anthropocentric standards and values have become. It is apparent when observing the modern global economy and government that humans have assumed cosmic superiority and declared themselves to be the center of all things. They find ways to exploit the remainder of creation to fulfill their fleeting desires. However, when the End<sup>125</sup> comes, Christ will reign over the world, and life will be glorious, just as it was in the Garden before sin perverted the entirety of creation. This new order of righteousness will incorporate various dimensions of salvation, dealing with reform on three different levels: personal, social, and cosmic.<sup>126</sup>

#### *Personal Reform*

Building off of what has already been established in the past two major sections concerning the individual man, comprehending the concept of personal reform is crucial in order to fully grasp the restoration of God's kingdom. The vision of the new kingdom places a large amount of focus on human redemption, justifying the act of resurrection and the idea of eternal life. In the beginning, life, specifically bodily life, was designed to be perfect. However, after the Fall, the evil power of the flesh took control over human life, thus rendering the body corrupt as a result of sin. Luckily, believers in Christ need not worry about this corruption of the flesh lasting for eternity because Christ has already conquered death once and for all. There is confirmation that death has been defeated in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, which states, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of

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<sup>125</sup> When Christ returns.

<sup>126</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 74.

sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In the End, the mortal body of a believer shall be clothed in immortality and he shall be made a new creation.

### Social Reform

On the social level, both the Old and New Testament speak of the kingdom being restored. In Romans 14:17, Paul speaks of the kingdom using three Greek terms that can be found in the Old Testament’s description of the kingdom:<sup>127</sup> *dikaiosyne* (“righteousness”), *eirene* (“peace”), and *chara* (“joy”).<sup>128</sup> *Dikaiosyne* signifies being in right relationship and order, relating to personal righteousness, as well as social justice.<sup>129</sup> The use of *eirene* in this case depicts the Hebrew concept of *shalom*: peace, harmony, wholeness, prosperity, and physical well-being.<sup>130</sup> It follows then that *chara* is the natural state of expression when righteousness and peace are enacted. To express this new social reality, the New Testament frequently uses the image of the banquet, which is a harmonious and direct fellowship with each other and with God. Additionally, all anthropocentric values will disappear and be replaced with strictly theocentric ideals, allowing for humans to finally be content and fully focus on worshipping God in harmony with the rest of Creation. The social reform brought through the restoration of the kingdom will certainly generate the direct fellowship between humanity and the Lord in joy that is both pure and profound.

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<sup>127</sup> Psalm 72:85:10;97:2; isaiah 32:17

<sup>128</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 80.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

By transitioning to focus on the church, this paper engages the most important portion of the social reform brought by the reconciliation of the kingdom. When someone mentions “church,” many people immediately think of the actual, physical building that hold worship services, sermons, and Bible study groups. However, when the New Testament speaks of the church, it reveals a much broader community of believers. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia* denotes “the assembly of God’s people called and invited by name to action.” The church is not just a single gathering, rather it is the continual assembly of God’s people throughout the globe who choose to act in the name of Jesus Christ. The social reform in the restoration of God’s kingdom will entail all denominations to be unified into one association as believers in Christ.

### *Cosmic Reform*

The final stage of the restoration of the kingdom embraces the entire cosmos and deals with returning it to its original state. Peter speaks of this return in Acts 3:21 by referring to the ultimate, “the time...to restore everything.”<sup>131</sup> This passage implies that the restoration is a universal reality brought by the return of Christ. A remarkable thing to note about the phrase “*chronoi apokatastaseos panton*” is that it was also used by the historian Diodorus in the first century B.C. to illustrate the restoration of the whole cosmos to perfection.<sup>132</sup>

Another reference to cosmic reform can be found in Romans 8:18-25, where Paul describes the coming “glory,” which can be paralleled with the coming kingdom of God. The overarching theme of cosmic reform is simple: everything God has created will be restored.

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<sup>131</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 81.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Humanity is redeemed to whole, bodily life in a perfect community, and nonhuman creation is set free from the bondage of evil.

“For the created order awaits, with eager longing, with neck outstretched, the full manifestation of the children of God. The futility or emptiness to which the created order is now subject is not something intrinsic to it. The Creator made the creation contingent, in his ordering, upon hope; for the creation itself has something to look forward to—namely, to be freed from its present enslavement to disintegration.”<sup>133</sup>

The three aspects of reform—personal, social, and cosmic—are all intertwined in the full restoration of God’s kingdom when Christ returns to reign over his redeemed creation.

### *The Reign of Christ in a New Community*

The redeemed community ought to be a social reality made up of the Christian church that demonstrates a new relationship to creation, one that takes upon the notion of theocentrism.

<sup>134</sup> Unlike the current form of earthly form of government, which is globally divided and constantly in conflict, Christ’s government over his restored kingdom will provide everlasting unity and peace. Under this divine reign, Christ’s community will consist of citizens who are a light in the world<sup>135</sup> and fertilizer<sup>136</sup> for the earth.<sup>137</sup> Not only will the people under God’s rule maintain a desire to worship, but their care for creation will also extend to encourage unending

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<sup>133</sup> Paraphrase of Romans 8:19-23 by Paulos M. Gregorios

<sup>134</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 89.

<sup>135</sup> Matthew 5:14-16

<sup>136</sup> For the meaning of the Greek word *halas* as “fertilizer” in this context, see Luke 14:34-35.

<sup>137</sup> DeWitt, Calvin B. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Baker Book House, 1991, 89.

praise of the Creator. Furthermore, the new community will act as “fertilizer” by giving life back to the earth and restoring the degradation of creation.<sup>138</sup>

### *Ultimate View of God's Restored Kingdom*

The kingdom of God, which is the central theme of the New Testament, indicates environmental care as a significant component to the future salvation, involving the renewal of all creation, both human and nonhuman. The final restoration inseparably connects human and cosmic aspects of redemption by proclaiming the ultimate unity of all things, with God dwelling at the very center of his creation. The redemption enables creation to return to its original state before the induction of sin and death into the world. Furthermore, in continuity with the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic hope for the restoration of the kingdom, the New Testament provides unifying information as it portrays the proper habitat for a renewed humanity on a redeemed earth.<sup>139</sup>

The final restoration of the kingdom can be seen as a present reality, in a sense, that not only establishes a new order of salvation, but a new order of conduct, as well.<sup>140</sup> Christians are called by God to order their lives based on theocentric values in order to pave the way for the coming kingdom. Since the righteousness of the kingdom speaks of proper relationships and overarching harmony among the entirety of creation, Christians should be led directly to an ethic of creational care as they continually work alongside the Lord in building his kingdom day by day. Instead of siding with anthropocentrism in promoting the degradation and disregard of the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 92.

environment, Christians must act in a theocentric manner by assuming their role as stewards of creation and fostering a future that spreads light throughout the kingdom.



### **Plan for Environmental Care**

Even after everything that has been discussed in this paper, there still remains a missing item that happens to be most crucial: a plan. Without a plan for the future, all that has been presented thus far would, quite frankly, be meaningless. For possessing newfound knowledge and refusing to act upon it yields the same result as not learning anything at all. The famous idiom that reads, “complacency is the enemy of progress,” applies to this matter in the fullest. God did not bestow upon humanity the role of being stewards just so that they could simply know but not act. On the contrary, God intended for humans to work in harmony with the rest of creation, preserving nature and its inhabitants instead of exploiting them. While anthropocentrism promotes an “ethic of exploitation,” theocentrism promotes an “ethic of responsibility.”<sup>141</sup> With eyes set on glorifying the Creator in all actions, Christians will be able to reform and rejuvenate the proper Christian stance when it comes to environmental stewardship.

### *In Practice*

One of the worst thoughts a man could have is to think that he is not able to enact any type of meaningful change by himself. Not only is this mindset disastrous, but it is also completely untrue. In fact, change occurs when individuals gather enough courage to stand up for what is right, and in doing so they find others who maintain the same set of beliefs. Take voting for example: if individuals never make the effort to go out and vote, then the collective effort would be nonexistent, thus preventing change from ever occurring. People must

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<sup>141</sup> Bouma-Prediger, Steven. *For the Beauty of the Earth: a Christian Vision for Creation Care*. Baker Academic, 2010, 143.

remember that a majority does not simply exist on its own; rather, it is through the clustering of like-minded individuals that proves how the little things in life can seemingly add up to become the majority. Whether it is at home, on campus, or in a local community, sustainable practices must be advocated for by individuals if the correct form of environmental stewardship is to be carried out fully.

One of the major keys of practice is to simply be open to change. It can be just as hard for an individual to be open to change as it is for him to be willing to enact it. However, fixating oneself on God's desires for environmental concern might help alleviate any underlying worries. Being open does not only entail a mental state, but also a practical state, in which one must be willing to alter his daily routine to produce results. This practical openness might involve simple tasks like turning the lights off when they are not needed or large endeavors like minimizing the use of motor vehicles for transportation. No matter the level of the engagement, be open to receive change in everyday life.

Another principal aspect of practice is to be conscious, aware, and educated. Recognizing the fact that today's youth have grown up in a world utterly plagued by pollution, there must be placed a particular focus on educating them about the importance of caring for nature. If humans are conscious of what they do in their everyday lives, they will be able to pinpoint miniscule actions that produce unnecessary waste or pollution and eradicate them entirely. Simple tasks such as limiting the use of non-biodegradable styrofoam and single-use plastics, which take nearly 500 years to decompose,<sup>142</sup> can lessen the exponential buildup of landfills. Christians must pass on this awareness for creational care from generation to

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<sup>142</sup> Badke, William B. *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created*. Multnomah Press, 1991, 140.

generation in order to ensure that the role of stewardship remains in line with God's original plans.

### *In Policy*

Alluding back to the section concerning politicized science, it is clear that the government has overstepped their boundary in dealing with what is meant to be the work of God's faithful servants. The determination of whether or not to care has been placed in the hands of the world of politics, while the natural world has been neglected as a result. Controversial issues concerning global differences and opposing beliefs have disrupted the overall reign of Christ on Earth, allowing for disunity to be spread throughout the world and causing there to be little to no effort directed at achieving global sustainability.

The present state of the world's ecosystems is rapidly declining due to governmental inaction in terms of the energy industry. So much of the world continues to operate on energy economies that rely on a limited amount of nonrenewable resources—coal, petroleum, and natural gas—because they fear change. However, a shift to a green-energy economy, which utilizes renewable resources like wind and sunlight, is necessary to reduce the overall negative impact on both the health of the environment and the health of humans. Although this transition does not need to be immediate, Christians belonging to the world of politics should constantly be inspired to push for acts and laws that promote environmental stewardship and conservation, both nationally and worldwide.

*In Church*

If creational care is such a big concern, then why does the modern church not teach about environmental stewardship? It is evident that the Christian church, especially in the Western world, has been exposed to anthropocentric values for so long that they are now the norm. The modern church operates in a way that praises human efforts and accomplishments while ignoring the natural world as it mourns and groans in pain.

Rather than waiting in idleness for the final consummation, Christians should realize that God has given them the capability to transform communities, cities, and even countries into places of worship that generate a preview of what is to come. Explained in a previous subsection, *ekklesia* signifies the “church” or body of God’s people being called by name to action. This call to action can clearly be linked to carrying out humanity’s role as stewards of creation through working collectively with the church, the congregation of believers throughout the world. God’s calling to the church is quite straightforward: if God’s plan is to be carried out in full, his followers must be the ones who will step up and take action.

## **Conclusion**

Although the world has allowed for anthropocentric values to determine how both society and the church operate, the final hope of the restoration of the kingdom on a redeemed earth is inevitable. Therefore, Christians must shift their focus to encompass the original intentions of the Lord, which hold humanity responsible for creational care and environmental stewardship.

Throughout this entire paper, connections have been drawn relating the present reality of the kingdom of God to the one that is to come. In order to be ready for this transformative process, Christians must quickly become equipped with a knowledge of the Bible that no longer dichotomizes the Old and New Testament but rather unifies the two in a comprehensive message of the restoration of the kingdom. This thesis covers a variety of topics, from refuting Gnostic values ingrained in modern Christianity to proving the validity of the resurrection, but the final goal of upholding a theocentric stance on environmental stewardship is this: establishment of a redeemed humanity in the presence of the Lord on a restored earth.

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