

The Manufacturer's Manual

*A Holistic Handbook of Bible-study, Devotion and Sermon Ideas
From the Hebrew Scriptures and from the New Testament*

Volume 1: Fourteen Biblical Teachings on Creation-Care

*Six from the Hebrew Scriptures
(a.k.a. the Old Testament)*

Eight from the New Testament

*With commentary by Paul de Vries, PhD
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A companion to the positive documentary:
“THE GREAT WARMING”

www.thegreatwarming.com



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NOTE on translations: The Contemporary English Version of the Bible is a thought-for-thought translation published by the American Bible Society, and used here by permission. The texts of the Literal Translation are prepared the author of these Bible-studies, Paul de Vries, PhD, and essentially capture the word-for-word meanings the Hebrew or Greek texts of the Scriptures.

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Preface: Preparation for the Creation-Care Exam

Unfolding the Creation-Care Box[™]

History unfolds. Time and technology move forward. Each generation has new opportunities and challenges. If life on earth is a school, the Lord certainly believes in giving tests. There are the daily pop quizzes, and also the cumulative exams.

A core course in which we are all enrolled is “**Creation-Care: It Matters to Matter,**” based upon personal, community, racial, and national issues so well exposed in numerous professional reports, current periodicals and documentaries, including the positive and riveting documentary, “*The Great Warming.*” In the unfolding of history, learning about *The Great Warming* and what to do about it *is one of the required courses of our time.*

The required textbooks are the Bible—aka the original *Manufacturer’s Manual*—and life itself. This *Manufacturer’s Manual* is a kind of “Cliff Notes” to give you the advantage of knowing highlights of the Biblical text, and also to markedly assist your preparation for the cumulative exam described below and on the next page.

And what will the cumulative exam involve? One challenge only: *How well can each one of us unfold the Creation-Care Box[™] into transformed behavior and improved environment?* You might take a peek at the appendix of the Manual for some of the answer for the exam.

The *Manufacturer’s Manual* is based entirely on lessons from the Creator, recorded in the Holy Bible. This *Manual* is a *holistic handbook of fourteen (14) Bible-study, devotion and sermon ideas—six (6) from the Hebrew Scriptures and eight (8) from the New Testament. All with the highest authority, from the Creator’s hands to yours.*

The Creation-Care lessons of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament are one text, all from the Creator himself. The *most foundational* Creation-Care values and instructions are in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the Creator has never changed these. They are gifts of God to guide us, never to save us. These foundational values and instructions are further developed in the New Testament.

Take the *Manufacturer’s Manual* with you. Use it over and over—in many contexts:

1. Spiritual devotions for personal and/or group use—to draw closer to the Creator and his purposes
2. Bible-study → Action Groups... that is, Bible-study for making a difference
3. Guidance for governance, with a huge inventory of ideas for rising above “politics as usual” and tremendously benefiting people—those alive now and those yet to be born
4. Sermon resources for homilies in churches, ministries, and synagogues
5. OR just read out of curiosity from the greatest source

After all, as a human being, you are already registered for “**Creation-Care: It Matters to Matter**” course, and you are part of its future. So it is time to study the assignments...

A Sneak Preview of the coming...

Creation-Care Exam

Please read all instructions and question carefully before proceeding to the next page.

Only one problem:

Unfold the **Creation-Care Box™** on the next page into a viable solution.

Please read and decipher each face of the box in the designated order as follows:

Base—Side 1—Side 2—Side 3—Side 4—Top

To solve this problem completely, you may need to adjust your behavior in the light of Biblical teaching.

The graphic solution is found in Appendix X.

“Every human must solve the problem, and group answers are encouraged.”

The Challenge: Unfold the Creation-Care Box™

One Lord—Never One Issue

In the unfolding of history, what matters more?

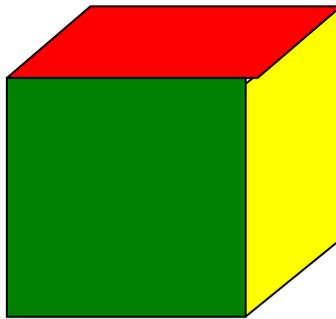
Explore & examine the four sides of Creation-care—as well as its base and top.

The Top: Because he is Lord, *obedience of faith** should define all we do; so we pray in our words and actions, “Thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven.”

Isaiah 6; Matt 5 to 7, & 26; * Romans 1:5 & 16:26

Side 2: At the very beginning, the Creator defined man and woman as his stewards, to do as he would do for Creation, and to “improve and protect” his earth.

Genesis 1 and 2; Lev. 25; Matthew 25; Revelation 22



Side 1: *Everything God made is good*, so “all pollutants are resources out of place.”™ Whatever harm there is in Creation distorts its inherent goodness.

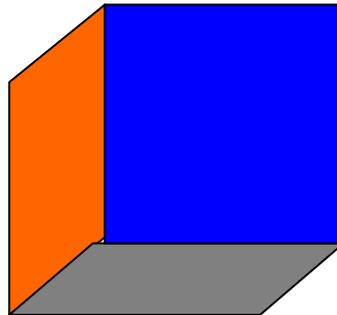
Genesis 1 to 3; Acts 10; Romans 8; 1 Timothy 4

Top-Front View

Bottom-Back View

Side 4: The Creator takes personally our treatment of his world, because Jesus is *life itself* and the “Cosmic Glue”™ that holds it all together.

Exodus 3; Deuteronomy 30; John 1 & 14; Colossians 1



Side 3: The Divine royal law “Love your neighbor as yourself” defines our relationships with all people everywhere, present and future.

Leviticus 19, Luke 10; Romans 13; James 2

The Base: Civic responsibility has one Lord, never one issue. The Lord has many issues for us. “Work for the *shalom* of your city... for in its *shalom* you will find *shalom*.”

Isaiah 58; Jeremiah 29; Romans 13; Philippians 2

BASE.1. Creation-Care Starts with Elemental Hope

Literal Translation	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Genesis 41:14-16</p> <p>Pharaoh send and called for Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh.</p> <p>Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.”</p> <p>Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “It is not in me. God will give Pharaoh a saving answer [or an answer of SHALOM].”</p>	<p>Genesis 41:14-16</p> <p>¹⁴The king sent for Joseph, who was quickly brought out of jail. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to the king.</p> <p>¹⁵The king said to him, “I had a dream, yet no one can explain what it means. I am told that you can interpret dreams.”</p> <p>¹⁶“Your Majesty,” Joseph answered, “I can’t do it myself, but God can give a good meaning to your dreams.”</p>

A massive ecological disaster with wrenching human consequences was about to erupt, potentially devastating Egypt and the entire “known world” around it. Seven years of ruinous famine were about to strike everyone—beginning in just seven years. With time to prepare for the famine through wise distribution of resources and planned food storage, God gave warning to the authoritarian, highly-trained leader of the most powerful nation of the known world at that time: the great Pharaoh of Egypt. The divine warning came in the form of a shocking double nightmare.

¹... the king of Egypt dreamed he was standing beside the Nile River. ²Suddenly, seven fat, healthy cows came up from the river and started eating grass along the bank. ³Then seven ugly, skinny cows came up out of the river and ⁴ate the fat, healthy cows. When this happened, the king woke up. ⁵The king went back to sleep and had another dream. This time seven full heads of grain were growing on a single stalk. ⁶Later, seven other heads of grain appeared, but they were thin and scorched by the east wind. ⁷The thin heads of grain swallowed the seven full heads. Again the king woke up, and it had only been a dream. ⁸The next morning the king was upset. So he called in his magicians and wise men and told them what he had dreamed. None of them could tell him what the dreams meant. – Genesis 41:1-8, CEV

For whatever reasons, none of these numerous spiritual leaders and wise consultants was able to help Pharaoh interpret the meaning of this double nightmare. On the one hand, perhaps none of them understood it, and thus really had nothing to say. On the other hand, perhaps some of Pharaoh's wise men may have understood this dramatic premonition of seven years of severe famine, but they may have been quite *wisely reluctant* to be the bearers of such disastrous news. "Off with your head!" could have echoed through the Egyptian palace. In any case, no one could help, or maybe no one really understood.

Enter Joseph. Consider his complex, roller-coaster resume:

- ❖ When he was only 17 years old, his brothers plotted to kill him, but then just threw him in a well.
- ❖ They were going to leave him to die there in the well, but instead sold him as a slave to traveling merchants.
- ❖ He was taken as a captive slave to Egypt, far from anyone who knew or worshiped the Lord, but there he was purchased by a top official.
- ❖ The top official turned out to be Potiphar, the feared Chief Executioner of the nation, but "the Lord was with Joseph" and Potiphar treated him well.
- ❖ Potiphar's wife tried to trap and then falsely accused Joseph, and Potiphar could have killed him, but his life was saved.
- ❖ He ended up in the dungeon; but again "the Lord was with Joseph."
- ❖ This was the dreaded dungeon for political prisoners, but the chief jailer liked Joseph and gave him some privileges and responsibilities.
- ❖ For several years Joseph was unjustly confined to this stinking dungeon, but had the opportunity to meet and give spiritual advice to someone in the dungeon, the chief butler of the Pharaoh, who then was released and promised to help Joseph.
- ❖ Then for two years Pharaoh's chief butler totally failed to fulfill his promise to Joseph. He remembered Joseph when he saw how desperate Pharaoh was to understand his troubling double nightmare, and to do something about it.

Most of Joseph's adult life had been spent in the dungeon; he had been severely abused by his family and treated like trash by almost everyone else. However, consistently "the Lord was with Joseph," who then brought with him a divine, saving perspective—a *shalom* orientation. Joseph had repeatedly learned, from personal experience, that *in the most disastrous circumstance or catastrophe, there is always hope—always a way to salvation, to shalom*. The key word "*shalom*" is an especially powerful word in the Bible, one with intensely deep and comprehensive meaning. The common translation "peace" is not sufficient. "Shalom" includes the Creator, we humans and Creation all in right relationship with one another and flourishing—experiencing fulfillment, wholeness, health and delight.

Here in the Genesis 41 record, suddenly Pharaoh wants to see this Hebrew dungeon dweller, and he wants to see him quickly. Pharaoh's men very quickly release him and give him a few minutes to wash up, shave, and put on new clothes—and then walk into the presence of the most powerful person of his time.

In this critical moment, the perspective Joseph brings is even more important than the facts. Even before hearing about Pharaoh's double nightmare, Joseph says confidently, "God will give Pharaoh a saving answer" as recorded in the ancient Greek text, or "God will answer

Pharaoh with shalom” in the Hebrew record. His words demonstrate that, *however deep the nightmare horror, hope is deeper still*. This radical faith perspective of “hope” sustained Joseph for years, and would guide him in saving the known world, as Joseph suddenly finds himself Prime Minister of Egypt. The words of hope have a powerful effect.

Contemporary novelist and journalist Tom Wolfe (1930-), author of *The Right Stuff* (1979; filmed 1983), and *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987; filmed 1990), knows about the power of words. He believes that the most defining characteristic of humans is our ability to use words, or even limit word use, especially words that define perspective. Wolfe is a talented word-crafter himself, for which he has been honored with the 2006 Jefferson Lectureship of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

A startling theme of Wolfe’s NEH Lectureship is that we in American and European culture *no longer have enduring “hope.”* He has repeated this theme in published interviews, adding that he is only reporting the fact that hope, deep hope, has disappeared. He argues that our culture is now completely affirming the attitudes of Darwinism, even among the religious in the way we act outside of Church. In this dominant Darwinist perspective, all of us arrived to our present development by chance; *the only sure thing about chance is that it changes*. Today you are lucky and tomorrow your luck runs out.

We have now progressed due to evolution, according to Wolfe, but we really believe that it will all ultimately disintegrate. As a consequence of all this restructuring of values toward the evolutionist worldview, according to Wolfe, no one really believes that there is an eternal or enduring benefit from “right actions” now.

Wolfe fully understands that powerful words like “hope” and “shalom” transform us. The influence of great leaders is more in the words they give us that transform our lives, rather than the number of their followers, money or political leadership. Wolfe believes that the key to Jesus’ success is that he gave “hope,” radical hope like the hope Joseph had. He adds that Mohammed and Marx had their successes trying—consciously or unconsciously—to build upon Jesus’ radical, enduring hope.

Wolfe explains that Darwin’s dominant influence is embodied by the fact that most Americans and Europeans have no enduring, eternal hope. If we are just honest and recognize that all enduring hope is empty, God-talk and religion will no longer suck our energy and attention, according to Wolfe.

Wolfe is in good company. In the face of mounting evidence that we must do something to protect the environment for our children and children around the world, most people are not motivated by hope and faith, but paralyzed by hopelessness and fear. The further we get from the Lord, the less hope we have, because other people and other leaders will always disappoint us.

Surely Joseph can teach us something about deep hope, regardless of what Tom Wolfe says. As we face ecological trauma in our time, Joseph sets two standards

- 📌 Joseph’s confidence that there is a saving answer, and
- 📌 Joseph’s readiness to be part of the saving answer.

BASE.2. See the Brokenness of Creation; Share Its Cry for Help

Literal Translation	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Romans 8:18-21</p> <p>¹⁸I calculate that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the time God will reveal who his children really are.</p> <p>²⁰Against its will, the creation was subjected to being trashed [ματαιοτησ = worthless] by the one subjecting it against its will, and this was allowed so that in hope ²¹the creation itself will be freed from the slavery of depletion [φθορα = decay, depletion] and into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.</p>	<p>Romans 8:18-21</p> <p>¹⁸I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us. ¹⁹In fact, all creation is eagerly waiting for God to show who his children are.</p> <p>²⁰Meanwhile, creation is confused, but not because it wants to be confused. God made it this way in the hope ²¹that creation would be set free from decay and would share in the glorious freedom of his children.</p>

In a superficial reading, this text might suggest that the Creation will be subjected to the “slavery of depletion” until the end of times when the earth will then be renewed and the New Jerusalem will be established. From such a shallow reading, one might think that taking good care of God’s Creation is OK, *but that it really is not going to do much good.* Worse yet, some have exploited Romans 8:18-21 to “justify” their trashing God’s Creation, as if we were *spoiled children*, since Father God will eventually “clean up our mess” at some future time anyway—or just burn it all—in the sweet by-and-by.

How do we avoid such self-centered reading? Always to read in context. Consider how the Holy Spirit framed this point in the development of Paul’s letter.

- At the very beginning of the Romans letter—in Romans 1:20 and 21—Paul describes Creation’s role, now as ever, in revealing the Creator’s “power and deity.” Our response is to “honor God and give thanks” for his splendid Creation. Since nature reveals God, how dare we pollute or deplete it!
- Earlier in Romans 8—Romans 8:3—Paul frankly describes the work of Jesus Christ’s salvation within our nature, even using the vivid word “flesh” three times in one verse: *because our flesh is weak, Christ came into the flesh in order to destroy sin in the flesh.* Our nature is the hallowed location of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

- Perhaps most importantly, in the immediate previous paragraph—in Romans 8:14-17—the Apostle Paul defends the true children of God as those who now are led by God’s Spirit. Here he urges us to refer to God as “Daddy” or in Aramaic, “Abba.” Creation is far better off when we are restored to our heavenly Father and actively live within our divine family ties, treating carefully what he has created and shared.
- Finally, in the related comments that immediately follow this text—Romans 8:22 and 23—the Apostle adds that God’s Spirit speaks to us deep within to confirm to us that we are God’s children. Remember that this same Holy Spirit was the nurturing Spirit for Creation at the very beginning (Genesis 1:2), and he confirms our family ties and responsibilities.

The context makes it clear that if we now call ourselves children of God—*especially as we desire to see and show the evidence that we truly are his children*—we will serve God and labor to free Creation from its “subjection to being trashed.” Moreover, if we freely call upon the loving Father and claim to have a personal relationship with him, we will then work to release Creation from its “bondage of decay and depletion.”

Notice that the two key issues of pollution (“subjection to being trashed”) and depletion of resources (“slavery of depletion”) were issues for the Holy Spirit already 2,000 years ago. Perhaps we are now able to measure the *consequences* more easily, but the actual abuse of Creation has been evident to anyone who honors and loves God and lives in gratitude for his splendid Creation. Even before there were measurable consequences in pollutants and resource depletion, ungodly attitudes toward the Creator’s workmanship were obvious enough to careful observers.

Who is the one that subjected Creation to being trashed? Paul does not say, and modern translations (like CEV) *incorrectly presume* that God himself was the one who subjected earth to its trashing. However, Paul does not have to say who trashed earth, because he assumed his readers had at least a minimal knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament.

First, chapter one of the first book of the Bible teaches that the Creator put his earth under the stewardship of man and woman. From that point on, the earth was our human responsibility in accountability to God. Clearly, it was under our watch that the earth was trashed, and we know very well who did it, through our own pride and selfishness.

Second, the Bible itself records how this wrecking of Creation had a dramatic early start with the abuse of a forbidden tree (Genesis 3) and the trashing (killing) of a fellow-human life (Abel) on earth (Genesis 4). Such self-centered behavior put us out of right relationship with the Creator and his Creation. We cannot hold God responsible for that rebellious behavior any more than we can blame him for the consequences of our subsequent trashings of his splendid Creation. We know very well who is responsible.

Third, the early Biblical record makes clear that human behavior has consequences that impact Creation, for better and for worse. The famous original garden, the Garden of Eden, was itself measurably benefited by Adam and Eve’s work to “improve and protect” it. Then when they rebelled, the Creator moved them to a harsher environment. The net result was doubly tragic. (Genesis 3:16-24)

- ❖ Our ancestors had to labor much harder to work the ground that had been cursed because of their choice.
- ❖ At the same time, the original garden was deprived of their improvement and protection.

Sin has consequences within us and within the entire earth.

When Paul makes his point about the condition of Creation and its evident dependency on our spiritual status, his point is all the stronger because he *does not have to remind* us that we humans are responsible for this tragic subjection of Creation to trashing. Was God involved? Yes. He allowed Creation to be subjected to trashing and enslaved to depletion, in order that we humans will experience the consequences of sin and repent with good behavior. Then we and Creation will be “*freed ... into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*” (Romans 8:21, literal translation)

Is this really why God allowed us to subject the earth to such trashing? Another way to look at the issue is to ask why the Creator put his earth under human authority in the first place, knowing full well that we would fail, that we would miss his goal, that we would break his rules, that we would act selfishly.

Good question. “Why would God give humanity any responsibility at all?” is a valid question going right back to Genesis 1 when he designed us humans as his appointed stewards. If we trust the Lord’s wisdom, we can assume he has deep purposes putting so much of his work at risk. Only by giving us the gift of free will and the control over all of creation could God show us how desperately we need him—and also allow us to love him, to repent, to do good, to achieve greatness, and to become more like Christ.

In Romans 8, Paul is inspired to provide an ironic answer to this perpetual question concerning divine wisdom. Only by allowing the sinful human subjection of Creation to being trashed by us would it then become so markedly evident when we humans do the right thing in caring for Creation, freeing Creation “... into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” In short, *only by letting our bad behaviors have bad consequences can we fully appreciate redeemed consequences that stem from redeemed behaviors.*

That is why Creation-care must matter for all of us now and for the next generations around the world. That is why it also matters to God, as proof that we are worthy of his trust.

Certainly the work of emancipating Creation from being trashed and depleted of resources will not be completed in our time, just as the work was not completed during Apostle Paul’s time. Nevertheless, the text of Romans 8 makes it clear that Creation-care work is now a definitive part of being the Creator’s children. It is one of the main ways we show *who we really are*: demonstrating our likeness to the Creator by caring about his Creative work.

Paul goes on to say that we will continue to share with Creation and with the Spirit the groaning and pain of the present reality of Creation being trashed and depleting—the pollution and depletion processes—until God’s work is perfectly complete in us and in the restoration of his world.

We know that the whole creation has been expressing groans similar to the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Also, we ourselves, even those who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies. ...and the Spirit himself prays with us with groans too deep for words. (Romans 8:22-25, literal translation)

Such “groaning prayer” expresses our empathy and compassion for Creation, in the distresses of pollution and depletion that we have caused over many centuries. Such penetrating prayer is to be the prelude to redeemed performance. The groaning is all-encompassing in that it touches on every aspect of our lives, the material world and the physicality of our bodies, and our souls and our spirits, which also bear the marks of sin and rebellion.

And by the way, it does not *ultimately* matter whether all the climate scientists and ecology scientists are right about present crises. Creation-care is a constant commitment. In terms of decisions we have to make, there is a kind of “Pascal’s Wager” in our choices now.

- If the scientists are right and we practice Creation-care, everyone benefits, in the present and future generations! If the scientists are wrong and we practice Biblical Creation-care, the environment is better anyway—for present and future generations—and the Creator is honored and pleased. *Either way, Creation-care is worthy, whether the scientists are right or wrong.*

- If we do not practice Creation-care and the scientists are right, there is hell to pay. If the present scientists are wrong and we do not practice Creation-care, we have still made the environment worse for others, and ourselves, including our children and grandchildren—and the Creator is dishonored and displeased. He has made his principles clear enough. *Either way, Creation-care is worthy, whether the scientists are right or wrong.*

Ultimately it is not about the science. It is about holistic consciousness and conduct.

BASE.3. Civic Responsibility Is Always Essential to Godly Living

Literal Translation	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
Jeremiah 29:7 Seek the SHALOM of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because in its SHALOM you too will have SHALOM	Jeremiah 29:7 Pray for peace in Babylonia and work hard to make it prosperous. The more successful that nation is, the better off you will be.

Our civic responsibilities vary considerably, depending on numerous factors, including:

- the level of democracy that has developed where we live,
- the actual level of openness of government to citizens’ influence,
- the responsiveness of official and unofficial leaders to the real concerns of the people,
- the access to the material resources needed to facilitate better government,
- the level of justice, care and accountability achieved by individuals and society, and
- the training, competence, spiritual maturity and personal commitment of the individual citizens.

Nevertheless, while these factors vary considerably, some basic principles of civic responsibility remain universal. We have civic responsibility even in very hostile circumstances, such as the conditions under which, in his chapter 29, Jeremiah is now giving the Creator’s instructions.

In this one rather pointed case in the Hebrew Scriptures, even when the leaders and people of Judah were dragged off into exile and slavery in pagan Babylon, Jeremiah sent them a message from the Lord himself. How can you be Godly people, become Godly citizens, and form Godly community in an intensely un-Godly place? Through Jeremiah, the Lord urged them to do what is right and Godly, even though they were in faraway Babylon against their will as slaves in captivity.

The main point of Jeremiah’s letter (Jeremiah 29:4-23) was that the people even in pagan captivity should “*seek the shalom of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because in its shalom you too will find shalom.*” (Jeremiah 29:7, literal translation) The word “shalom” in this and other texts is often translated as “health” or “prosperity” or “welfare,” words that capture only small facets of the meaning of this richly loaded Biblical term. (See also lesson BASE.1.)

In contrast, the word *shalom* is, in fact, so important to people that it has become a word of greeting—as the first thing you say to someone and the last word to be said when people of

goodwill part their ways. The Arabic word *salaam* in a similar way functions as the central word for shaping and framing the best in human encounters. In English, “Good-bye” (literally: God be with you) serves a similar function. This practice was already captured and used in Scripture, for example, by the Apostle Paul, at the beginning of many of his letters, when he says some variation of “grace and *peace* to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Earlier the multitude of angels who brought good news to the shepherds the night Jesus was born expressed their two heavenly goals: glory to God and *shalom* on earth.

The word “shalom” especially captures the highest of human hopes and aspirations for personal peace within ourselves, and also in the home, church, government, society and the world around us. When Isaiah prophesied of Messiah as the “Prince of Shalom,” he not only spoke God’s truth, but also affirmed the deep longing for lasting personal, spiritual, social, and environmental peace--a longing that with all people of good-well.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. – Isaiah 9:6

The fact that this extraordinary word *shalom*—so central to the Creator’s purposes and so crucial to our desires and needs—appears three times in one short sentence in Jeremiah’s brief letter with instructions to the enslaved exiles should certainly rivet our attention.

Please note the following four observations concerning these triple-*shalom* instructions going to people in exile, in slavery, cut off from the right freely to worship the Creator in his temple.

- The first focus of *shalom* is on the evil pagan city into which they have been enslaved. They should actively seek for the multiple benefits the of Lord’s peace, even for the people that do not know him or seek him.
- Second, they are to pray for the city, seeking the Lord’s benefits for the whole city.
- Third, they should look toward the *shalom* of the city for their benefit.
- Fourth, the enslaved exiles are promised that the Lord’s *shalom* will be theirs, right there in Babylon, as they obey his instructions to seek it for their surroundings.

In a way of speaking, the weak, punished, oppressed, conquered people were to take the role of the Creator’s channel for wholeness and peace. It does not take the majority or even a leading minority to set the tone that would bring benefit into a religiously pluralistic society.

More importantly, instead of anger and revenge, they were to seek the highest good, the *shalom* of the Lord, for the whole pagan city of Babylon. Biblical civic responsibility does not require a Bible-affirming culture or society. Instead, because our lives are always interdependent on those around us, the benefit to even evil people who may be our neighbors generally brings benefit to ourselves. In other words, *shalom multiplies and reciprocates*; it does not subtract or divide. The more shalom others have, the more will come to you. The more you have, the more will spill out to the benefit of your neighbors. In a way of speaking, it is the ultimate renewable resource.

Shalom is truly environmental. The circumstances that nurture *shalom* for some enable it for others, too, including oneself. And your wholesome shalom-environment benefits the others. Ultimately there is no “protective” bubble, either political or environmental. People who care about the Creator work to benefit all of society, not just for “themselves.” The result is a better city, better state, and better nation for everyone, including themselves, their own children and future descendants.

In another place, through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord tells us that if we *cultivate* a free and fair society—a nation with liberty and justice for all—it will be like the needed natural light for normal health and growth, and like a well-watered garden in a desert land.

⁶ "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?...

⁹ “If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

¹⁰ “and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.

¹¹ The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.

-Isaiah 58:6, 9-11

The great prophet Isaiah uses such loaded ecological language because spiritual holiness and natural wholeness are tied closer together. No wonder some of the holiest moments occur within the natural wholeness of a lush garden:

- 🌳 Adam and Eve in the pristine Garden of Eden
- 🌳 Gardens in Babylon as signs of God’s blessing even in captivity (Jeremiah 29:5, 28)
- 🌳 Prophetic hope includes making gardens and eating their fruit (Amos 9:14)
- 🌳 Special love-relationship celebrated in the *Song of Songs*
- 🌳 What else happens in gardens?

Holiness brings us closer to God—as also does the wholeness of unpolluted, undepleted nature. And this holy wholeness is even greater than the sum of the parts—the wholeness plus holiness.

BASE.4. Civic Responsibility Submits to One Lord, Never One Issue

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Philippians 2:5-11</p> <p>⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:</p> <p>⁶ Who, while being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to cling to,</p> <p>⁷ but emptied himself, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.</p> <p>⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!</p> <p>⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the very highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,</p> <p>¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,</p> <p>¹¹ and every tongue agree and celebrate that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.</p>	<p>Philippians 2:5-11</p> <p>⁵Think the same way that Christ Jesus thought:</p> <p>⁶Christ was truly God. But he did not try to remain equal with God.</p> <p>⁷Instead he gave up everything and became a slave, when he became like one of us.</p> <p>⁸Christ was humble. He obeyed God and even died on a cross.</p> <p>⁹Then God gave Christ the highest place and honored his name above all others.</p> <p>¹⁰So at the name of Jesus everyone will bow down, those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.</p> <p>¹¹And to the glory of God the Father everyone will openly agree, “Jesus Christ is Lord!”</p>

If believers are divided on the very basis of civic issues—their issues of choice vs. the Lord—then it is as if the Lord himself is still in the grave. Since Jesus is alive, loyalty to him unites us, and nothing should be allowed to divide the people who know him and trust in him.

Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is Lord. “*Jesus is Lord*” is the primary confession we make as we receive the gift of salvation (Romans 10:8 & 9). This simple statement is also the admission that all verbal beings should freely make in the future, because of Jesus’ unique transformative ministry (Philippians 2:5-11). Just reflect on what it means:

- Jesus = the extraordinary, self-less, humble carpenter, teacher-savior, Divine servant consistently lived what he taught, was totally obedient to the Father, died for our sins, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and now rules the universe from the seat of honor, at the right hand of God the Father.

- ❖ Is = not just some “pie-in-the-sky, by-and-by,” but real, present authority to lead in everything we do now. Serving Jesus helps us to fulfill the Lord’s Prayer that the Father’s will be done now on earth as it is in heaven.
- ❖ Lord = the boss, the sovereign, the one in charge. In each dimension of life, Jesus is the one in charge. In working out the tensions between Church and state, for example, the solution is not to put a Church leader in charge of the state, or a principled politician in charge of the Church. Rather it is to recognize Jesus’ authority over both institutions and to promote leaders of integrity to serve Jesus in Church leadership, and to elect qualified holistic leaders as statesmen to serve Jesus in the political sphere.

Because Jesus is Lord, our good works matter...

- ❖ In gratitude for the good work of God in giving salvation to us,
- ❖ And because he is the Lord, the sovereign of Creation, worthy of our obedience.

Sadly, much of the talk of civic responsibility among Bible-based Christians has been a tremendous disservice both to God and to country. Too often we have identified Christian commitment with one or another urgent issue—rather than the whole authority of God over every dimension of personal and civic life. When people get wrapped up into merely one or two issues, they often can become tone-deaf to other priorities of God. They themselves then “cherry-pick” what they will do “for God”—effectively making themselves Lord, rather than our Lord Jesus.

When people have one issue, that issue in effect replaces Jesus as the one Lord. And always that one issue tends to be a political issue— not the God-issue. One-issue people (OIP) have one attempted impact: strip away all the other issues that the Lord Jesus Christ has made clear in his life and teaching, and in the Scriptures.

Certainly, God wants abortions reduced. Could we affirm life *and give all our attention to the environmental needs of unborn babies in the womb only*? Truly pro-life people act to protect also the Creation in which those precious babies will spend the rest of their lives after birth.

OIP can find themselves threatened by Creation-care for several reasons.

- ❖ OIP can be fearful that the support for their one issue will become weaker or watered down. Thinking that life is a closed add-subtract system, they blindly conclude that energy spent on other issues takes away from theirs. They presume that there is only one pie, so to speak, and the pieces shared with others leave less for themselves. In contrast, if you have given all to the Lord’s leadership, he can multiply the energy and the good effects. In the Lord, so to speak, we can bake “pies” to share!
- ❖ OIP can be alienated because they perceive that your co-laborers on the Lord’s other issues seem to be their “enemies” on their one issue. What the OIP have a difficult time recognizing is that your only ultimate co-laborer is the Lord—and your only real question is whether you are on his side.

- Over time, OIP can so identify their issue with God—and even project their issue onto God—that anything you do on other issues becomes disloyalty to their reconstructed “god,” now an idol. Idolatry is always humanly dangerous, since the poor, lifeless idol cannot defend itself. That is why OIP and other devotees of idols seem always both defensive of their idol and judgmental of others.

Our purpose is to honor Jesus as Lord, and to enjoy his presence, guidance and blessings. He is at the center, not the issue or issues we may want to choose in his name. If we confess he is Lord, then we cannot serve merely the issues we choose, even if they are good issues.

We start with what we know matters to him, including especially the *four sides of Creation-care*—and the four sides of the **Creation-Care Box**[™], now highlighted in this set of Bible studies:

- All the Creation is good, as the Lord made it, and we honor him when we value, respect and enjoy his work.
- The Lord appointed men and women as his stewards to care for the earth and all its plants and animals—to improve and protect them as his accountable representatives.
- The Lord teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves—to be the good neighbor to all fellow humans, wherever they are, to love and care for them and their environments.
- The Lord is intimately involved in his Creation, always present, always caring—so that he takes personally how we treat it.

Because he is Lord, these things matter both to him and to us.

Side 1.1. Pollutants Are Resources out of Place

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Genesis 1:1-13</p> <p>¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering like a mother hen over the waters.</p> <p><i>The First Day</i></p> <p>³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And that evening and morning were the first day.</p> <p><i>The Second Day</i></p> <p>⁶ And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse "sky." And that evening and morning were the second day.</p> <p><i>The Third Day</i></p> <p>⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.</p> <p>¹¹ Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And that evening and morning were the third day.</p>	<p>Genesis 1:1-13</p> <p>¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was barren, with no form of life; it was under a roaring ocean covered with darkness. But the Spirit of God was moving over the water.</p> <p><i>The First Day</i></p> <p>³ God said, "I command light to shine!" And light started shining. ⁴God looked at the light and saw that it was good. He separated light from darkness ⁵and named the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." Evening came and then morning—that was the first day.</p> <p><i>The Second Day</i></p> <p>⁶ God said, "I command a dome to separate the water above it from the water below it." ⁷And that’s what happened. God made the dome ⁸and named it "Sky." Evening came and then morning—that was the second day.</p> <p><i>The Third Day</i></p> <p>⁹ God said, "I command the water under the sky to come together in one place, so there will be dry ground." And that’s what happened. ¹⁰God named the dry ground "Land," and he named the water "Ocean." God looked at what he had done and saw that it was good.</p> <p>¹¹God said, "I command the earth to produce all kinds of plants, including fruit trees and grain." And that’s what happened. ¹²The earth produced all kinds of vegetation. God looked at what he had done, and it was good. ¹³Evening came and then morning—that was the third day.</p>

Every time the Creator makes something, he personally recognizes that what he made is good. As one manufacturer used to say, “The quality goes in before the name goes on.” This case is unique, since the Creator is all powerful and all knowing. His physical resources are not limited, and quality control is immediate in his all-embracing consciousness.

There have been many important debates over the meaning of the first verses of the Bible. How long ago did Creation start? What physical means did the Creator use? How much can we understand? If day-one of temporal reality was an intensely high-energy big bang, what did the Creator do “before” to set that up? Did the Creator build in the extraordinary beneficial mutability into the amino acids, protoplasm, and such like? (What a genius designer!) Or did he command each step in natural history, starting from the first week until now? (What an attentive leader!)

What is clear is that these are not the most important questions answered by the Creation record of Genesis 1. When the people of Israel were liberated from more than 400 years of slavery and Moses began writing this definitive literature to give the people knowledge of who they were and why they existed, Biology 101 was not a priority. When people need a purpose for life, Physics 101 is not where they turn. Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy are very important subjects to all of us now, but they were not the subjects needed by a million or more people who knew only the slave mentality. They needed the deep and holistic truth about their Creator—who himself light, energy, sun, moon, stars, water, rivers, seas, plants, animals, birds, and such like—all things that the Egyptians worshiped and served. Genesis records that the Creator made them all, so the Creator is far above all Egyptian deities.

The people also needed to know their true identity. Genesis 1 therefore defines humans in three dimensions. (See also chapter “Side 2.1” commentary on Genesis 1:26-28.)

- Image of God = At the very core essence, people are personally related to the Creator. “Image of God” connotes both that we resemble him—we have moral, rational, relational and verbal capacities—and that we must be in close relationship to him to experience fully who we are—as an “*image* of our selves” is clearest when we are close to the mirror.
- Male and Female = At the very core we are *inter-dependent* beings, mutually beneficial to one another for companionship, collaboration, procreation, and pleasure. This mutual dependence and benefit helps further *image* the ultimate dependence and benefit all humans experience in relationship to the Creator. As Martin Buber and others have pointed out so well, all meaningful relationships are 3-way, triangular.
- Stewards of Creation = At the very start, we humans are defined also as responsible for the care of the earth. It matters to the Creator, even before any pollution or depletion, how we manage his splendid Creation.

We, too, in our time, need far more than Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy. Microscopes, spectrometers, atomic accelerators and telescopes are not the instruments of personal discovery and spiritual growth. The range of scientific phenomena to be studied and

the extent of acceptable explanations is strictly restrained to the physical realm. As matter of *method*, science is naturalistic, even though most scientists believe that the world itself is much greater and multi-faceted than the physical realm. That is why we are not personally limited to natural science, but we all need openly to engage the whole truth about our purpose and meaning.

Each of these natural sciences is limited by its definition to supply only *natural* explanations of physical aspects of Creation. However, even more important than these, we want and need the big picture of our meaning and purpose—issues that the natural sciences are incapable by definition to address.

Looking to the sciences for help with these personal and spiritual issues is like studying an auto mechanic's manual to plan your vacation. The car may now work fine, but you are still in the driveway! Debates about the age of the earth and the methods the Creator used to bring us into being and to design and make all Creation, these debates do not even touch the main issues—the ones addressed in Genesis 1—concerning purpose and meaning as men and women.

However old a person may choose to believe the earth is, all of us believe that it was made and it was good. Therefore, whatever we **have** done with it has frequently been messing up God's Creation, and we have **a responsibility**. The ways we have polluted and depleted God's world have been shameful, and we should confess and repent. As good children of the Creator, we should "clean our room." Actually, even the bad children should clean it too!

Now the *seven-times* repeated theme in Genesis 1 is the Creator's recognition that each kind of thing he makes is good. Of course the *good* Creator always makes *good* things, while a chance process would only produce *randomly good* things. His own quality feed-back awareness recognizes it as well. One of the ways the Lord is good is that he always pays attention to results.

The *seventh time* the theme is introduced is in the last verse of Genesis 1. There it states, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." What happened? Why the shift from "good" to "very good"? Two steps come to mind:

- The Creator just made us people, male and female. After making us it does not say that what he made was good, but only this recognition that it was "very good." Our Creation adds what is extra special, from God's point of view.
- The whole range of Creation is complete at the end of Genesis 1. However good the parts are, the complete range, including us, is even better yet. The whole Creation is better than the sum of its good parts, because there is a design for the whole—especially in the delicate balance and integration of all the life processes.

So what has now happened to God's "very good" Creation? With all the pollutants, it is sometimes hard to see how "very good" it is. Pollution takes away some of the extraordinary splendor of the Creator's work, and some of it even gets in our eyes to diminish our ability to see the tremendous good that remains.

Nevertheless, pollutants are still part of the Creator's good world, and many can still be redeemed for the good he intended as well. Because of the radical Biblical understanding of the goodness of Creation, we should affirm that in fact "*pollutants are resources out of place.*" The point is that we ought actively to look for ways to utilize for positive ends what we and other people so easily throw off as trash or "pollutants," since pollutants are still part of the Creator's good Creation. Not that we could always solve this challenge, but it is a good attitude toward active Creation-care planning.

Within the Biblical framework that pollutants are resources out of place, we can recognize many models of very positive uses of materials that have been thrown away.

- Rubble from torn-down buildings used for creating recreational "mountains" in parks in the flatter regions of cities. Improve health and decrease land-fill use.
- Grease from restaurants processed into truck fuel. Save oil and reduce land-fill issues.
- Waste-water, even from toilets, piped into scenic aerated ponds, allowing water to percolate through layers of soil and natural bacteria, to be safely pumped weeks later back into human use, even at refreshing drinking fountains. Then we drink healthy water without all the chemicals.
- Industrial carbon dioxide (CO₂) piped into greenhouses to speed the growth of vegetables and flowers. Reduce carbon build-up and increase food production.
- Corncobs and vegetable husks burned in high-intensity, near-zero-emission furnaces for electrical generation to run food-processing plants. Create less trash and generate electricity with almost no pollution.
- Recycled paper, plastics and glass. Less to go into the landfills, good use of resources.
- Since all Creation is good, there are innumerable other resources still camouflaged as mere "pollutants."

Is there any trash or pollution so worthless that no positive use could ever be discovered? That is the challenge that may keep the most creative and intelligent men and women quite gainfully inventive.

Side 1.2. Thank You, Lord!

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Romans 1:20-21</p> <p>²⁰ Since the creation of the world, God's invisible nature—namely, his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen in the created things, so that people are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thank to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were clueless.</p>	<p>Romans 1:20-21</p> <p>²⁰God’s eternal power and character cannot be seen. But from the beginning of creation, God has shown what these are like by all he has made. That’s why those people don’t have any excuse. ²¹They know about God, but they don’t honor him or even thank him. Their thoughts are useless, and their stupid minds are in the dark.</p>
<p>1 Timothy 4:4 and 5</p> <p>⁴ Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanks, ⁵ because it is made holy by the Word of God and prayer.</p>	<p>1 Timothy 4:4 and 5</p> <p>⁴Everything God created is good. And if you give thanks, you may eat anything. ⁵What God has said and your prayer will make it fit to eat.</p>

“Honor those to whom honor is due,” says Paul later in Romans 13:7. Who is due more honor than the Creator? “Honor father and mother” is one of the most trusted and defended of the Ten Commandments, even by some people who do not ordinarily believe in the Ten Commandments. It is well argued that it is only natural, built into each of us, to honor the sources, the human beings that gave us life, even if our father and mother are far from perfect. This desire to know whom to honor often drives adopted children to work tirelessly to locate their biological parents, the very ones who gave them up. How much more honor is due the Creator, whose perfections, love and faithfulness are so very well-established.

However, the “gratitude attitude” is an acquired and valuable way of behaving. How very often do children have to be reminded to say “thank you”? It is not just the words—it is especially the recognition that other persons have done significant good that benefits us. Even if only for a moment, giving proper thanks to others takes our valuable focus away from ourselves and onto a deserving other person.

As Paul explains in Romans 1, *reverence and gratitude* should be our most basic approaches to our Creator. But we people generally fail to *honor him and give thanks*, even though we

know better. (Romans 1:20 and 21) Honor and thanks are the two things that are especially missing in the lives of people out of touch with the Creator. Futility, foolishness, and forms of idolatry replace the proper honor and thanks. These are two essential elements of vibrant relationship with the Creator, and they frame a positive treatment of Creation in Creation-care.

Honor: Honoring God has many forms in Scripture... “He must increase and I must decrease.” (John 1) “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” (John 12) “With unveiled faces we behold... and thus grow from one degree of glory to another.” (II Corinthians 3) Faith (trust) itself is a primary way to honor God. (Romans 1:17) The ultimate honor is to confess “Jesus is Lord.” (Romans 10:9-10; Philippians 2:1-12) and then to obey what he says to do, including consistent care for his Creation.

Thanks: Our thanks puts God back in the center of attention, where he belongs. Gratitude to God is the way we openly recognize the simple truths of the source of all goodness. He is the Creator, and all the things that block the full thanks that he deserves—whether it is atheism, egoism, false religion or just plain forgetfulness—are truly inexcusable rebellion.

More positively, when we give thanks to our Creator, we recognize that all the Creation is an expression of his divine goodness and grace. We often rank how much we treasure items we own by the way we value the people that provided them or gave them to us. Items given by a brother or sister may not have received much distinction, but a gift from a favorite uncle or aunt, or a present from a favorite teacher might be treasured much more. We might even put in a locked cabinet an autographed item from a famous musician or honored politician—or even from that favorite teacher.

But what if the gift is from the Lord, the Almighty, the one and only Creator of all things? The Creator is above all humans, including famous musicians and honored politicians. How should his presents be handled, treated, protected? We should certainly respect the Creation and care for it much more attentively than any gifts from even the most elevated and respected human sources.

The source elevates the gift. So also goes the giving of thanks itself. The Apostle Paul was eager to clear the air and make this point in his first letter to his most famous student Timothy. In the context, Paul critiques anyone who puts burdensome regulations on our human enjoyment of God’s Creation, because the Creation is good. (See also chapter “Side 1.1.”) The real focus should not be upon some supposed “limited” goodness of God’s Creation we are allowed to enjoy if some cult leader or religious legalist or spoil-sport permits, but upon all of it being good.

Furthermore all of Creation is even “sanctified” – or made holy – in the right context of both the reading of Scripture and the prayers of thanks. (See I Timothy 4:4 and 5.) When we are properly thankful for Creation, we treat it better and we enjoy it more.

If we are grateful, we will treat Creation well. If we treat Creation poorly, how can we obey the command to give thank to the Creator? We show our thanks by our behavior.

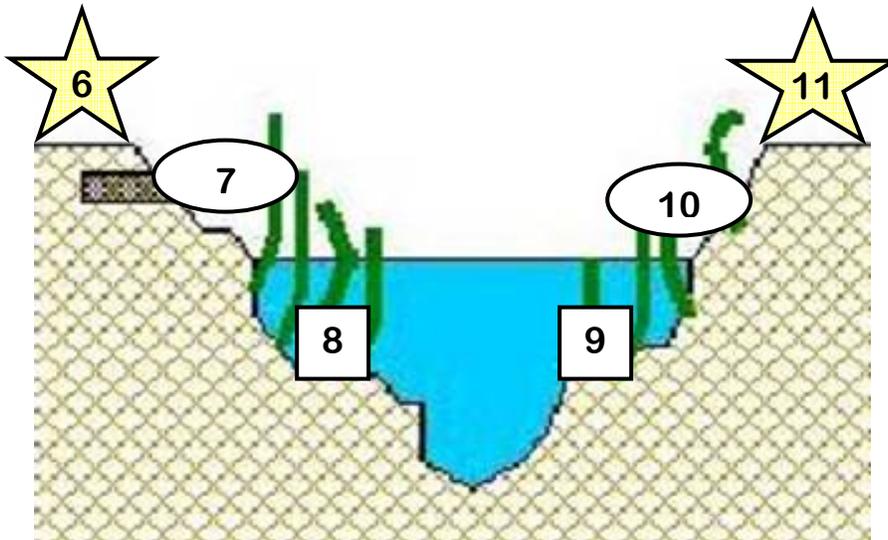
In the next chapter, Romans 2:6-11, Paul goes on to make four strong statements about the importance of what we do – or our “works.” God’s judgment is based on our “works.” Good works are a proof that we seek God’s glory and honor and our immortality and peace. Clearly, then, there is a place for glory and honor as true Godly goals in our responsibilities and relationships here on earth. In these verses Paul uses the same word for *works* that James uses (εργα) in James 2:14-26.

A similar point is made in Ephesians 2:8-10—we are saved by grace, *not by* good works—but *for* good works. David makes the same point in Psalm 62:11 and 12: The fact that God will reward us according to “what we have done” is based upon the fact that He is “great” and “loving.” Why do we assume that His love protects us from a measured reward system? The Creator certainly expects results from his investment of grace.

To make the point especially strongly, Paul writes Romans 2:6-11 as a dramatic *chiastic unit*, with the form “a-b-c-c-b-a.” [See also chapter “Side 4.3.”] For striking emphasis, Paul makes three vivid statements and then restates the same claims in reverse order. All the while he attends to “works” four times, twice concerning good works for the Creator.

Romans 2:6-11

- 6 – Everyone will be rewarded according to his works.
 - 7 – If you are patient in good works, you will receive eternal life.
 - 8 – If you are self-seeking and disobedient, you will receive wrath and fury.
 - 9 – You will receive affliction and distress if you do evil works.
 - 10 – Glory and honor go to those who do good works.
 - 11 – God has no bias.
-
-



Imagine turning this chart ¼-twist clockwise: This chiasm emphasizes the Lord and his fairness at the top (6 and 11) from the start to the finish: “God will judge each one according to works...God judges impartially.” The middle level (7 and 10) is our good works, and the “pit” (8 and 9) is the level of self-seeking, disobedience and other evils. Self-seeking especially hurts his Creation. In contrast, we fairly receive glory and honor as we honor his masterpiece of Creation and work to restore its glory.

There are no special privileges. God’s grace must result in good works, or else it was not truly received. Because he is Lord, his grace is sovereign, and that grace will have its dramatic effect in our behavior, including especially in relation to the Creation over which he is Lord.

What is the point? *Saved people will try to save Creation.* To repent of our human “trashing and depleting” of Creation (Romans 8:18-21)—to repent of the tragic mistakes that we and our ancestors have made—requires redeemed behavior now and for the future. After all, Jesus is Lord.

There is one Lord; he has many issues. If we know and respect him, there will be good works in our lives and his Creation will show the benefits.

Side 2.1. All Men and Women: the Creator’s Stewards—Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Genesis 1:26-28</p> <p>²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness, and let them be care-takers over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."</p> <p>²⁷ So God created humans in his own image, God created them to be like himself, both man and woman. ²⁸ God praised them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and manage it well. Be my care-takers of the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."</p>	<p>Genesis 1:26-28</p> <p>²⁶God said, "Now we will make humans, and they will be like us. We will let them rule the fish, the birds, and all other living creatures."</p> <p>²⁷ So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women. ²⁸ God gave them his blessing and said: Have a lot of children! Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the ocean, the birds in the sky, and every animal on the earth.</p>

There are plenty of reasons to give special attention to this text, Genesis 1:26-28.

- Of all the acts of God’s creative work at the beginning, this is the final crowning step: the Creation of man and woman.
- All the things God made up to this point were parts of a splendid, vibrant world of purpose and adventure, into which we humans, Creator’s special children, are now placed.
- Right after making man and woman, God observed that all he made was very good, and then he rested.

In these three brief sentences, Genesis 1:26-28, three definitive aspects of our humanity are made emphatically clear, and are stated at least twice.

1. Men and women are images of God, reflecting the Creator’s excellence and splendor, both back to him and also to one another—introduced in verses 26 and 27.
2. We are definitively male and female, prepared to relate and to pro-create in what only the Creator could design: one-woman-one-man-one-God-relationship—introduced in verses 27 and 28.

3. We have an assignment as his only images (as the only beings “like him”): to rule the earth in a way that is accountable to him, according to his design and direction—introduced in verses 26 and 28.

In short, we humans are (1) relational, (2) sexual beings, (3) responsible to the Lord for everything around us. That is why the Creator is called Lord.

Both the context of Genesis 1 and the word used for “dominion” or “rule” in these verses make it crystal clear that the Creator never turned over to man and woman the ownership of his earth. There can be no grounds for misreading this text to justify selfish exploitation of the Creator’s assets. In fact, Adam and Eve were doing just fine until they started to act as if they owned Creation. Then they tried to hide when the real Owner came calling.

- ❖ The Hebrew word for our role as Creation’s care-takers means that we are to rule or manage earth as Creator would rule it.
- ❖ We are defined as Creator’s images, as the earthly beings most like the Creator; so we are deeply dependent upon him. We do not exist on our own, but at best always reflect his reality. Since we are so radically dependent on the Creator, we are not independent “owners,” but accountable, high-level care-takers of his awesome earthly assets.
- ❖ From the beginning until now and to eternity, the Creator continues to instruct men and women how to behave on his earth.
- ❖ In Genesis 1—as in the rest of the Bible—there is never even a tiny hint of the Creator granting the earth to us humans. Nor did the Creator ever release us to do with his Creation *just as we please*.
- ❖ God remains God, and we are responsible to him. The first sin was ignoring this eternal fact. All human success or failure starts here.

By any measure, the earth still belongs to the Lord. What King David states as an inspiring exclamation of worship in Psalm 24:1—“*The earth is the Lord’s*”—was, in fact, first used by Moses as part of a dire warning to the arrogant, oppressive and possessive Pharaoh of Egypt (Exodus 9:29). So, “*the earth is the Lord’s*” is first a standard of justice and a prelude to social transformation, hundreds of years before becoming an expression of worship.

Since the earth truly belongs to the Lord, we must treat it in ways that honor and please him, or there will be tragic consequences that we will have brought upon ourselves. Pharaoh learned the hard way that the Lord did not turn the ownership or control of the earth over to people... For whatever reason, the Lord *seems* more patient with us in the 21st century. Will that last? How long?

How does anyone dare think that we humans literally own earth or that we can do with it just as we please? We disapprove of spoiled children who selfishly try to run their parent’s homes, and yet we children of God so often just do as we please with the Creator’s earth, as if

we are not accountable to the God who created and provides it all. We are appalled at belligerent dictators and aggressive nations that wantonly take over and exploit the territories of other people, and yet nearly every human being since Adam and Eve has trampled over some portion of Creator's good earth under the spiritual delusion of absolute ownership. The errors we see in others we can and must correct in ourselves.

Now, it is true that we generally talk in a somewhat loose manner about "owning" our condominiums, houses, land, and such like. What this "ownership" talk really means is that (1) in the economic system we have a financial stake in this property which we can then later sell, give, or pass on to our children and other inheritors of our "estate," (2) there is a piece of paper somewhere in the local government file drawers that assigns to us the responsibility to pay various taxes on those properties, and (3) we have some limited liberties in using them.

In human history, those "ownership" claims have frequently been re-defined, burned or stolen. New regimes have taken over and altered every "ownership" claim. Legislators of existing governments alter zoning, redefine ownership rights or redistribute property. Dictators and tyrants have generally exploited properties seemingly at will, even murdering the property's "owners" for good measure. Claims to property ownership are not always assets. While dictators are responsible to the Creator for their abuse of property and people, so we too are all accountable to the Lord for our use and abuse of his earth—as well as for the ways our behavior impacts the other people whom he wants to benefit from the earth.

All the earth belongs to the Creator. All land is holy ground. Moses, the human author of this Genesis record of creation, caught a rather special personal glimpse of that reality when he saw the Lord's vital, blazing presence in a little bush. The fire was the Creator's presence, because the bush was not burned at all or damaged. When Moses noticed what was happening, the Creator called out to him not to come any closer to the bush, but to take his shoes off, because he was "standing on holy ground." (Exodus 3:5) The divine holy presence in the bush was also in the ground itself upon which he was standing, even some distance away from the blazing, holy bush. What to do? How to show respect? The Creator's answer is so simple: take off your shoes and make direct personal contact with the holy.

Paying attention to the Creator's voice coming from the little bush converted Moses, who then led in the liberation and transformation of a nation. The Lord may not call our name from bushes around us today, and we may not have the eyes to see his vital blazing presence. Nevertheless, the consistent Biblical truth is that all of the earth is holy ground, and not one square inch—not even one square centimeter—ultimately belongs to anyone else. Elizabeth Barrett Browning captured this truth in a profound three lines of her poetry.

Every bush is aflame with fire.
Only those who see take off their shoes.
The rest just sit around and pick blackberries.

As a good parent, the Creator likes repeating himself in different words, both to catch our attention better and so that we have no excuse. For example, as a way of reinforcing his authority over his earth, the Creator's assignment of human stewardship that we have seen in Genesis 1:26-28 is further explained in pithy terms soon after, in Genesis 2:15. The Bible states that the Lord God put our first ancestors in a splendid garden and told them "to improve

it and protect it,” or in the older version, “dress and keep” the earth, in particular the garden where they were. Clearly there is nothing in the Bible to support the dangerous myth that the first garden was simply a place of pleasure, without responsibility. We may want to believe that popular myth more as an excuse for our own failure to always care for, improve and protect the Creation.

The Lord uses words powerfully, and in such a way, that so much is suggested in these few words of instruction to man and woman. His *original Creation-care commands* were two plain principles that still completely express our present responsibilities to the Creator for his splendid earth today.

The simple truth is that, in the immediate environment of their beginnings, our earliest ancestors were commissioned to accomplish two matter-of-fact goals, living up to two simple standards that still make all the difference to us today:

-  To “take care of” the earth—to improve it, not deplete it. The King James Version (KJV) states that we are to “dress” the earth, but too often we have *distressed* and exploited earth. “Dress” the earth means to improve it – making wild fields productive farm lands, putting resources to beneficial use for wisdom, work and worship.

-  To “look after” the earth—to protect it, not pollute it. The King James Version (KJV) states that we are to “keep” the earth, but we have made it *unkempt*. “Keep” the earth means to protect it, watch over it, keeping it safe from the hands of abuse and ignorance.

Genesis 2:15	What people have done	What to do
<i>Dress the earth</i>	<i>Distressed</i> and exploited it	<i>Improve</i> , not deplete
<i>Keep the earth</i>	Made it <i>unkempt</i> and cursed	<i>Protect</i> , not pollute

Since resource depletion and pollution of the earth are increasingly important issues, the incomparable wisdom of Creator is increasingly more evident. Whether in that splendid garden with our first ancestors or anywhere else on earth, these two simple standards of our down-to-earth behavior remain the absolute bedrock of our responsibilities to the Creator as his personal care-takers of his Creation.

What does it mean to “improve and protect” Creation now? What does it mean to “dress and keep it”? As usual, the Scriptures do not spell out all the details. The Creator has given us sensory perception and minds to develop those appropriate details responsibly. Besides, the details change for lots of reasons, but the pure principle of the human role set by the Creator is unalterable:

-  We are all stewards of the Creator’s earth.
-  Our human responsibilities always include improving and protecting his earth.

Side 2.2. Obeying Creator in the Face of Calamities—Matthew 5-7

Consider how Jesus shaped the most famous sermon in all of world history. He began it as he ended it—with vivid statements of our responsibility to our Creator. Let us look at his very words in the first seven verses from two translations of Matthew 5:3-9

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p><u>Beginning of the Sermon on the Mount:</u> Matthew 5:5-9</p> <p>⁵ Happy are those with humble attitudes, For they will inherit the earth.</p> <p>⁶ Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they will be filled.</p> <p>⁷ Happy are the merciful, For they will obtain mercy....</p> <p>⁸ Happy are the pure in heart, For they will experience God’s presence.</p> <p>⁹ Happy are the peacemakers, For they will be called God’ children.</p>	<p><u>Beginning of the Sermon on the Mount:</u> Matthew 5:5-9</p> <p>⁵God blesses those people who are humble. The earth will belong to them!</p> <p>⁶God blesses those people who want to obey him more than to eat or drink. They will be given what they want!</p> <p>⁷God blesses those people who are merciful. They will be treated with mercy!</p> <p>⁸God blesses those people whose hearts are pure. They will see him!</p> <p>⁹God blesses those people who make peace. They will be called his children!</p>

Jesus’ active commitment to Creation and to Creation-care are very evident here as he begins this most referenced of all sermons.

-  Jesus speaks his most important sermon outside, even though he also spoke in the Temple, in synagogues, in people’s homes and on city streets at other times.
-  In verse 5, Jesus affirms that it is the meek, gentle, humble people who ultimately will inherit the earth, quoting Psalm 37:11. The humble deserve the earth because they respect it, nurture it and help provide its needed care. Note that they will inherit, *but not conquer*, the earth. It may take a special act of our Father, the Creator. Keep in mind the special Biblical sense of “meek,” in that the Bible calls Moses the most meek person on earth (Numbers 12:3). Their meekness or humility did not hinder either Moses or Jesus from being bold, outspoken, visionary, courageous and transformative in their leadership.

🌿 In verse 6, Jesus affirms hunger for right behavior toward people and Creation. If we were treating everyone right, there would be few if any ecological issues. For example, we would care deeply for people, animals and plants down-wind from our smokestacks and down-stream from our factories. It is when other people are exploited that nature itself also hurts the most, and when nature is abused, people suffer greatly.

🌿 In verse 9, Jesus affirms peacemaking. We can make peace with Creation and with all other people as we improve and protect everyone’s environment.

The Lord Jesus Christ was at home with his Creation, and he both exemplified and taught the values that matter, for the present and the future. These Creation-care lessons were clear enough at the beginning of this most memorable sermon.

While everything Jesus says is worthy of our full attention, let us look especially at the last verses of the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus wants us his readers to know that words, even the best words, are totally empty without the right actions, especially as we face the heavy rains, floods and winds that can always threaten our persons and plans in our lives on earth.

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p><u>The ending of the Sermon on the Mount:</u> Matthew 7:21, 24-27</p> <p>²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the ones who do the will of my Father in heaven. ...</p> <p>²⁴ “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, they are like shrewd persons who built their house on a good foundation: ²⁵ and the rain fell, the floods rose, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was built on a good foundation.</p> <p>²⁶ “But everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, he is like the moron who build his house on the shifting sand next to the river: ²⁷ “and the rain fell, the floods rose, and the winds blew and beat on that house;; and it collapsed with a big crash!”</p>	<p><u>The ending of the Sermon on the Mount:</u> Matthew 7:21, 24-27</p> <p>²¹Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. ...</p> <p>²⁴Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. ²⁵Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock.</p> <p>²⁶Anyone who hears my teachings and doesn’t obey them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. ²⁷The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Finally, it fell with a crash.</p>

Today these same dangers to the life and well-being of the wise and foolish are even more threatening, because of irresponsible ecological behavior and the probable consequences of the ‘Great Warming’ of earth. It is possible and even probable that we may soon experience even more damaging rains, more devastating floods and more destructive wind in the not to distant future; so Jesus’ strong advice on survival is intensely timely.

What does Jesus instruct us to do in the face of such damaging rains, devastating floods and destructive winds? How should we prepare for all the storms of life—including the physical, relational, social and spiritual storms?

For Jesus, the worst behavior is knowing-but-not-doing. (verses 21 and 26) In fact, Jesus’ language is stronger than any standard English translation: Literally he says: “Everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, they are like morons who build their house on the shifting sand next to the river ...” The word he used here is in fact “moron,” meaning an adult with a six-year-old’s mind and behavior.

What are Jesus’ words that we must hear and do? In the Sermon on the Mount itself (Matthew 5-7), these words include the following commands that are central to Creation-care:

1. Being meek and humble in our behavior. (Matthew 5:5)
2. Doing what is just and right for all people, in part defined through Jesus’ Golden Rule. (Matthew 5:6 and 7:12)
3. Making peace with all people and with Creation. (Matthew 5:9)
4. Aiding the poor, the ones most at risk in ecological crises. (Matthew 6:1-4)
5. Voluntarily limiting consumption, without grumbling. (Matthew 6:16-18)

The very most startling of Jesus’ statements in this splendid Sermon appears in Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” We can even repeatedly call him “Lord,” but if we do not *actually do* what he says, we will have Hell to pay—even if we do lots of good things!

In fact we can be so focused on Godly projects that we have made into our projects, that we miss obeying him. Whether the three that Jesus mentions in verses 22 and 23 (prophesies, casting out demons or doing wonders), or other Biblical goals like reducing abortions, espousing marriage, working for racial reconciliation., our well-meaning, even Biblically supported, projects can take on such a life of their own that we miss the holism that only the Creator can provide when he is at the center. How else can we explain how some Bible-based people are devotedly ‘pro-life’ for the pre-born, but unresponsive, even hostile, to the pro-life issues of Creation after birth, when these are even more overtly stated in Scripture?

Honestly, what does it mean to call him "Lord"? There is *one Lord, never one issue.* (See also chapter BASE.4,) Nevertheless, when we see his issues we can often recognize a seamless tapestry interconnecting them. For example, notice how the following issues are clearly interwoven with Creation-care issues:

- 🌱 Promote economic justice and support protections for the poor. Since the poor of our country and the world are the first to be hurt by pollution, resource

depletion, and global warming, Creation-care will help to reduce some of the harmful effects of poverty.

- ✿ *Recognize and protect human rights.* Curiously, the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights written in 1948 did not include safe environment, clean air, fair share of well-managed resources, or any other environmental rights in any of its 30 articles. However, environmental rights are basic to the ones that are claimed in the Declaration. For example, without a healthy and safe environment, the basic right to life is compromised, the basic right to liberty is severely limited, and the basic right to the “security of person” is meaningless. By any measure, Creation-care is increasingly central to the protection of human rights.
- ✿ *Reduce violence and the motivations for violence, and promote non-violent conflict resolution.* Wars and violence in the future more likely will be related to Creation-care issues, especially if the environment is increasingly polluted and resources become more dramatically depleted. Peace-loving people must be proactive on behalf of Creation-care, advocating reducing the temptations for war and the disruptions of civil life caused by a harmed ecology.
- ✿ *Protect the sanctity of human life.* Because God created human beings in his own image as the pinnacle of his Creation, all people possess the divine dignity. Since the Bible reveals God’s calling and care of persons before they are born, pre-born babies share in this dignity. Human dignity is indivisible, so that a threat to the aged, to the very young, to the unborn, to those with disabilities, or to those with genetic diseases, is a threat to all. Creation-care includes a priority care for all human life.

The one requirement is to honor and obey the Lord—to hear and do what he says. Bible-based people should hold all government and community leadership accountable for all the Lord’s issues—including sanctity of Creation-care, economic justice, human rights, non-violence and the sanctity of human life. If we persistently and constantly go back to the Lord, the Creator, for instruction and correction, his issues will not be politicized, our personal and national “house” will stand on the eternal foundation, and we will be welcomed into the Lord’s everlasting kingdom.

Side 3.1. Surroundings Matter: Creating A Biblical Environment and Protecting Other People’s Natural Environment

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Deuteronomy 6:4-9</p> <p>⁴ Listen!, O Israel: JAHWAH our God, the JAHWAH is one. ⁵ Love the JAHWAH your God with your entire heart, and with your entire soul, and with your entire strength. ⁶ And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart: ⁷ And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your houses, and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.</p>	<p>Deuteronomy 6:4-9</p> <p>⁴ Listen, Israel! The LORD our God is the only true God! ⁵ So love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and strength.</p> <p>⁶ Memorize his laws ⁷ and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether night, or getting up in the morning. ⁸ Write down copies and tie them to your wrists and foreheads to help you obey them. ⁹ And write them upon the door frames of your homes and on your town gates.</p>
<p>Ezekiel 34:17-22</p> <p>This is what the Sovereign JAHWAH says to his flock:</p> <p>I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample other pastures with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? ¹⁹ Must the rest of my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?</p> <p>" Therefore this is what the Sovereign JAHWAH says to them: See, I myself will</p>	<p>Ezekiel 34:17-22</p> <p>¹⁷ The LORD God said to his sheep, the people of Israel:</p> <p>I will carefully watch each one of you to decide which ones are the strong sheep and which ones are weak. ¹⁸ Some of you eat the greenest grass, then trample down what’s left when you finish. Others drink clean water, then step in the water to make the rest of it muddy. ¹⁹ That means my other sheep have nothing fit to eat or drink.</p> <p>²⁰ So I, the LORD God, will separate you strong sheep from the weak. ²¹ You strong</p>

judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you are shoving, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, ²² I will save my flock, and they will no longer be abused. I will judge between one sheep and another.

ones have used your powerful horns to chase off those that are weak, ²²but I will rescue them and no longer let them be mistreated. I will separate the good from the bad.

Biblical instruction requires that Godly living—the expression of faithful obedience—must be public. The simple but dramatic commands of the SHEMA, including especially Deuteronomy 6:4-9, make that point quite clearly. Our love of the Lord must show, and it must be public.

Bible-based people in some regions of the world are regularly tortured, brutalized and martyred because their prohibited faith has become public at some point. In those places, although people desire to obey the Creator according to the teachings of the Bible, the urge to keep that expression of faithful obedience private is strong. People who wish to obey the Lord rather than obey intolerant human authority are ready to count the cost, and feel honored to suffer for the Lord’s sake when necessary.

However, in regions in which religious liberty is protected, Bible-based people too often keep our faith personal and private, as the result of our self-inflicted “*velvet persecution*”—where our own personal fears and inhibitions restrain us more severely than vicious dictators restrain people in oppressive lands. Persecution doesn’t stare us in the face today because we have unwittingly “internalized” it!

Whenever we avoid behavior that pleases and honors God because we might get bad personal feedback (a “*velvet persecution*”) from family, friends, neighbors, co-workers or even religious or government officials, that disobedience is often because of “the fear of men’s faces,” not fear of torture. This velvet persecution is more deadly than torture and martyrdom; it destroys our integrity, dishonors the Creator, and debilitates our passion for Creation-care.

This velvet persecution—fear of rejection, fear of seeming old-fashioned, fear of not fitting in—is more subtle than the more physical kind of persecution still experienced in some third-world countries today. Ironically, this “civilized” kind of persecution has the same spiritual dynamic, which keeps us from *doing what is right no matter what*.

Instead of taking a stand on some Biblical teaching or some social issue, Bible-based people now often take a “hear no evil, see no evil” approach—with the end result of their *doing no good at all*, either. Our taking a backseat has allowed small, vocal groups of people, whether “conservative” or “liberal”, toward an agenda that is quite *unrelated* to Biblical values, *unresponsive* to the Creator—and *uncaring* of Creation. How gutless of us; how tragic for the world!

It takes courage to do what is right for the Creator and his Creation, and to forgo the temptation of velvet persecution. Love for the Creator, care for his Creation, faith in the Lord

and obedience to his word—these are all public, not private. They are all embracing, not detaching—holistic, not segmented.

In Deuteronomy 6, the Lord commands us to place Scripture around us, because we are to always remember him, love him and openly obey him everywhere. Scripture and its teachings are not a secret. How can living models of Scriptural obedience be secret?

One of the most public ways we are to live the Scriptures and our obedience to the Lord is in loving our neighbor as ourselves. (Leviticus 19:13-18) This Godly behavior must be lived — outside our private hearts, outside our private homes, and touching and benefiting other people. As God’s active love reaches out to touch us, so our love of neighbors must touch our neighbors.

In terms of “neighborliness,” Ezekiel records a riveting story of the Creator judging the behavior of people as if they were animals -- cattle or sheep. This is a familiar way for the Lord to talk, because we often display animal behavior, as when we act like sheep going astray. (Isaiah 53) Similar to sheep we also want and need a shepherd. No wonder the most often quoted Psalm begins: “The Lord is my shepherd....” (Psalm 23)

Judging between the behaviors of animals also make sense because the damage caused by animals is the responsibility of the animal owners. This is a repeated theme as early as the Book of the Covenant at the earliest stages of the development of the nation of Israel. Exodus 22:5 states: “If you allow any of your animals to stray from your property and graze in someone else’s field or vineyard, you must repay the damage from the best part of your own harvest of grapes and grain.”

So the background for Ezekiel 34 is that (1) we act like animals and (2) we are responsible for what our animals do. What is the result of our behavior and the behavior of our animals? Intentionally or not, other people’s food is destroyed and their drinking water is polluted. The Lord is justifiably upset, because the people and animals that have to cope with damaged food supply and dirty water are *his people and animals*. We may want to limit our care and our compassion to “our own,” but our Creator always has a bigger picture: all nations, all cattle.

Resource depletion and pollution happened even in Ezekiel’s time, about 600 years before Jesus was born: destroying the pastures and polluting the streams so that neighbors’ sheep had nothing to eat or drink. It mattered then, just as it matters now.

And why does it matter how we impact other people’s supplies of food or drink? Ezekiel reminds us that it matters because it matters to the Lord, who considers that his flock is the most poorly treated. However, the Creator gives fair warning:

You strong ones have used your powerful horns to chase off those that are weak, but I will rescue them and no longer let them be mistreated. I will separate the good from the bad. - Ezekiel 34:21,22

The Lord will rescue those that are poorly treated. Why shouldn’t we be on his side now?

Who needs rescuing? What will we do?

Side 3.2. Who Is the Real Neighbor?—Matthew 22, Mark 12, Luke 10

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Luke 10:25-37</p> <p>²⁵ Look! On one occasion a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"</p> <p>²⁶ "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?," he replied</p> <p>²⁷ He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with your entire heart and with your entire soul and with your entire strength and with your entire mind' ; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "</p> <p>²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."</p> <p>²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"</p> <p>³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. ³¹ By chance, a priest went down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a person from a priestly family, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and</p>	<p>Luke 10:25-37</p> <p>²⁵ An expert in the Law of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question to see what he would say. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to have eternal life?"</p> <p>²⁶ Jesus answered, "What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?"</p> <p>²⁷ The man replied, "The Scriptures say, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.' They also say, 'Love your neighbors as much as you love yourself.'"</p> <p>²⁸ Jesus said, "You have given the right answer. If you do this, you will have eternal life."</p> <p>²⁹ But the man wanted to show that he knew what he was talking about. So he asked Jesus, "Who are my neighbors?"</p> <p>³⁰ Jesus replied: As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. ³² Later a temple helper came to the same place. But when he saw the man who had been beaten up, he also went by on the other side. ³³ A man from Samaria then came traveling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him ³⁴ and went over to him. He treated his wounds</p>

<p>wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he gave two days' wages to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any additional expense.'</p> <p>³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"</p> <p>³⁷ The lawyer replied, "The one who had mercy on him."</p> <p>Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."</p>	<p>with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return."</p> <p>³⁶ Then Jesus asked, "Which one of these three people was a real neighbor to the man who was beaten up by robbers?"</p> <p>³⁷The teacher answered, "The one who showed pity."</p> <p>Jesus said, "Go and do the same!"</p>
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The story that begins "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves..." is one of the most often repeated narratives of all time. Thousands of people who know nothing else about the Bible know this splendid story.

Three great questions stand out. First, why did the priest and the Levite - the spiritual leaders - not help the man who was robbed, beaten and left for dead? Let us look at some real possibilities to try to understand their uncaring behavior.

Why did the leaders ignore the need?	What can we now learn?
Perhaps they were in a hurry to get to the Temple or to some other place to fulfill their religious leadership and duty—and had no time to stop to help someone else.	Leave early when you go to Church meetings or to work or wherever, so that if someone is in need of your assistance you can stop to help them. Do not be so busy that you ignore the real needs of others.
Perhaps their ceremonial regulations would create an issue if they touched a dead or dying person.	Figure out the regulations, and pay the price if you need to in order to save a life.
Perhaps they did not know what to do. They may have had no background in first aid, either in terms of resources or skills.	Get EMT training, or at least first aid and CPR training, and keep some first-aid resources in your car.
Perhaps they were worried that the thieves that had robbed and brutally beaten this man could be lurking behind some bush, waiting for the next victim.	Be cautious; call on others to help if they are available, but take some risks when other people's health and lives are at stake. Here is when a cell phone comes in handy.

Perhaps they were suffering from “compassion fatigue,” since they had helped so many needy people already that month.	Through Bible-reading, prayer, community care, and other Godly disciplines, get the inner strength to be responsible in the opportunities the Creator puts in front of you.
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Second, why did this solo Samaritan traveler risk his time, resources—and perhaps life itself—to help a total stranger?

Why did the Good Samaritan help the person in need?	What can we now learn?
Perhaps he planned ahead, giving himself extra time, allowing for the unexpected such as a crisis in his own travel, helping someone in need, or perhaps stopping along the way to smell the roses.	Plan ahead with extra time for the unexpected—a crisis in our own travel plans, helping someone in need, or perhaps even stopping along the way to smell the roses.
Perhaps he took the time to be trained in first aid and cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and traveled with resources to help others: bandages (perhaps just tearing his own clothes), oil, wine, and extra cash.	You and every member of your family and Church over 12 years old should have Red Cross training in first aid and CPR, at a minimum, and have a first-aid kit in your car. Also, do what you can to reduce pollution and depletion of the Creation, because they rob and abuse all, especially the weak.
Perhaps as a member of an ethnic group despised by everyone else in the region, the Samaritan doubtless had been unjustly treated—socially, economically, religiously and probably physically. He had positively permitted his pains and those crimes against him to make him more compassionate to others who suffer.	All of us have experienced some pain. Many of us have been victims of crime at one time or another. How have we let this suffering affect us? Are we hardened? Or rather do we have growing compassion for others? Also, does the suffering induced by climate change make us defensive of our way of life—or eager to reach out in compassion through changed behavior? The choice truly is ours.
Perhaps the Samaritan understood that the Lord had a meaning for his life, and all that he did had to have a purpose for good.	We should always ask for what good reason the Creator may have placed us in the present situations, with its need and opportunities to help—and then act on those good reasons.

Third, why does Jesus turn the questions around? It is no longer, Who is my “neighbor” whom I am supposed to love? Rather, how can I be the good neighbor to all others in need?

Why did Jesus turn the question?	What can we now learn?
Perhaps the real point has to be what is in our own hands. Instead of asking, who happens to be living near-by? We should be asking, are we the loving neighbors?	In assisting the victims of climate change, we must not dwell on the bad choices from the past—either our own or those of the “system”—but now choose to do what’s right.
Perhaps he wants us to think as expansively as he does. After all, “...God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...” remains the model. Ethnic and national boundaries are truly irrelevant when it comes to the love of the Lord.	In God’s family we should be truly international in perspective—for his family includes every tribe, every tongue, and every nation. Every person in need gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our membership in the divine family. Increasingly ecological crises are opening needs to be addressed.
Perhaps Jesus’ core point is for us to start needed changes with ourselves—to be the good neighbor and then to motivate changes in others.	We need to learn what being a good neighbor in our time means—and that will include Creation-care, since depletion and pollution hurt everyone, especially the most vulnerable, the poor, the racially abused, the sick.

Jesus’ focus is always to start change within ourselves. It is not the speck in someone else’s eyes that is the call to action, but the *telephone pole sticking out of our own eyes* that matters. (Matthew 7:3-5)

The lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor?” to justify himself, Luke records. He expected some limits on responsibility, limits he could live with. Jesus “answered” by asking his own question, “Who is the neighbor to the ones in need?” That is the question still today. Are you the neighbor to those in need?

We have plenty of opportunities to look with compassion and act with Creation-care.

- Television news and documentary movies, such as *The Great Warming*, bring the vivid facts of global crises right into the comfort of our homes.
- Multiplied information resources and action plans are available to all, including several mentioned in Appendix Y of this book.

It is not too early to gear yourself up for *compassion action*.

Side 4.1. Choose Life...Because the Lord Is Your Life

Literal Translation	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Deuteronomy 30:19 and 20</p> <p>I call heaven and earth to witness this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life, in order that you may live—both you and your descendants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  By loving the Lord your God,  By obeying his voice, and  By clinging to him, <p>Because he is your life and the length of your days, so that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob.</p>	<p>Deuteronomy 30:19 and 20</p> <p>Right now I call the sky and the earth to be witnesses that I am offering you this choice. Will you choose for the LORD to make you prosperous and give you a long life? Or will he put you under a curse and kill you? Choose life! ²⁰Be completely faithful to the LORD your God, love him, and do whatever he tells you. The LORD is the only one who can give life, and he will let you live a long time in the land that he promised to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.</p>

What would you say if you knew it was your last speech? Your last letter? Your last sermon? Your last phone call? ... Your last earthly communication with loved ones?

When Moses was near death, he gave a final sermon—before then officially appointing Joshua to be his successor, giving final advice to the leadership, warning the people against idolatry, singing a song, blessing all the tribes of Israel, and then climbing Mt. Nebo to die after getting a splendid view of the Promised Land. His last sermon was extraordinary.

The Lord himself gave him the words for the sermon and described it with the highest level of importance: the Lord calls this sermon of equal value to what he gave to Israel on Mount Horeb—another name for Mount Sinai. (See Deuteronomy 29:1.) That is, this sermon is just as important as the Ten Commandments themselves! In other words, it is not only Moses’ last sermon, it is the Lord’s ‘eleventh commandment.’

As he speaks this extraordinary message, Moses is 120 years old. Even though God gave him the sermon to give to the people, the role of Moses as God’s human instrument is intensely clear. Far more than his earlier speeches, this sermon rambles on, and it is quite repetitive. Nevertheless, the key point is clear enough, especially as it is stated in the closing words, the conclusion of the sermon:

Choose life, in order that you may live—both you and your descendants:
○ *By loving the Lord your God, and*
○ *By obeying his voice, and*
○ *By clinging to him,*
Because he is your life. – Deuteronomy 30:19 and 20

What splendid words! Not bad for an old man communicating God’s message. The three points are emphatic, repeating the word “by,” as Moses dramatically described how we can actively choose life. Then he caps this instruction all the more dramatically with a simple explanation: ...*because the Lord is your life.*

How did Moses know this deep fact? Often he had spent time talking with the Lord God face to face, in intimate fellowship with the Almighty. More than any human of his time, he had come to know the Lord, talk with the Lord, argue with the Lord, and listen to the Lord. No wonder we attribute the leading five books of the Hebrew Scriptures to his primary and extraordinary authorship.

The Lord himself is our life. Truly to choose life is to choose God himself. To choose God is to choose life. According to Moses, our ultimate reason for choosing life and protecting life is that the Lord himself is the life, ultimately, for whom we show our care—including especially Creation care—and whom we choose. This revelation has huge implications for our behavior.

- This divine reality is the transformative perspective needed for those who are depressed, even despairing of life itself.
- This divine reality of life should also motivate us to reduce the number of abortions.
- Moreover, this divine reality of life should motivate us to protect ecosystems and other endangered aspects of life in the Creation.
- Because the Lord is our life, we want to preserve and protect life, especially the environments that impact human life.
- Since the Creator is life itself, life and the things that sustain it are all the more precious, wherever it is on earth.

In short, life is precious to the Creator because he is the Life of life, the Breath of breath itself. Therefore, also, life is precious to us, and our behavior must show that we choose life.

Moses’ extraordinary awareness of God’s intimate presence in all of life has been echoed by others. What if we treated every life-threatening ecological condition as an offense to the Lord? How about serving the Lord by reducing pollution? Will the Creator notice when we conserve energy? When we recycle resources? When we find positive uses for ‘pollutants’? When we care for the resources of the next generation? Of course he will notice, for he is the Life of life, the Life itself.

This revelation of God as life itself was already suggested when Moses encountered the Lord about 40 years earlier at the burning bush. When Moses asked that the Lord identify himself, the Lord revealed his deep name as “YHWH.” Generally this name has been described as identified with the *being* verb, as in “I AM,” the name reminding us of his role as the

continuing source of existence for everything. He is the very essence of being, what one 20th-century theologian called the “Ground of Being.”

Linguistically, it is clear that YHWH derives not just from the verb for existing, but also from the verb for living and breathing. The root word is the word “to breathe.” The very “ground of being” is also truly the very “breath of life” for all Creation.

Moses caught a special glimpse of the reality that the Lord is Life when saw the Lord’s vital, blazing presence in a little bush. The fire was the Creator’s presence, because the bush was not burned at all or damaged. When Moses noticed what was happening, the Creator called out to him not to come any closer to the bush, but to take his shoes off, because he was “standing on holy ground.” (Exodus 3:5) The divine living and holy presence in the bush was also in the ground itself upon which he was standing, even some distance away from the blazing, holy bush. It was then that the Lord revealed his name to be YHWH—‘I am as I am’ or ‘I breathe as I breathe.’

This intense encounter with the Lord shaped Moses life and leadership for the next 40 years, and made the earliest Hebrew Scriptures possible. His writing inspires our own intense awareness of the Lord in every breath we take. To breathe in and to breathe out—both are evidences of the Creator’s presence. The Lord is our life.

Because the Creator is the Being of being and the Life of life, we do not merely say that “he was our Creator,” although that is true, affirming that he made us through his command and by his control of whatever processes he chose and designed. Instead we say that “*he is our Creator*,” because we affirm his continued work in enabling and shaping us and his Creation—and as we ourselves as his children also take responsibility in further shaping ourselves and his world.

He is our life that makes our taking our responsibilities possible.

Side 4.2. It’s Pan-en-theism, Not Pantheism

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Acts 17:22-28</p> <p>²² Invited to speak before the Areopagus, the intellectual council in Athens, Paul said:</p> <p>“People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very fearful of gods. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: “<i>To an Unknown God.</i>” Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to make him known to you.</p> <p>²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives to all people life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one person he made every ethnicity of people that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.</p> <p>²⁷ God did this so that people would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’</p>	<p>Acts 17:22-28</p> <p>²²So Paul stood up in front of the council and said:</p> <p>People of Athens, I see that you are very religious. ²³As I was going through your city and looking at the things you worship, I found an altar with the words, “To an Unknown God.” You worship this God, but you don’t really know him. So I want to tell you about him.</p> <p>²⁴This God made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth, and he doesn’t live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵He doesn’t need help from anyone. He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people. ²⁶From one person God made all nations who live on earth, and he decided when and where every nation would be.</p> <p>²⁷God has done all this, so that we will look for him and reach out and find him. He isn’t far from any of us, ²⁸and he gives us the power to live, to move, and to be who we are. “We are his children,” just as some of your poets have said.</p>

We hear that some environmentalists are pantheists, and some pantheists are environmentalists. “Pan” is the Greek word for “all,” and theists believe that all that is in nature is divine. They honor the “spirit of the tree,” “the spirit of the stream,” and “mother nature.” For them there is no Almighty God, no Creator of heaven and earth, and certainly no Savior. However, they themselves may still be responding to an elemental personal

awareness of God’s presence around them. In their efforts to fill the Creator-shaped vacuum inside their own spirits, they are looking only to the finite powers in Creation, not to the infinite and Almighty Creator himself.

Pantheists seek to respect nature and care for it. However, like so many others, they miss the much deeper Biblical truths that *wherever we go, the infinite, almighty Creator is present, and that we are honored to live and move and exist in him*—not in mere finite spirits of nature.

Biblical truth is not pantheism [“all is god”], but pan-en-theism [“all is in God”]—inserting “en,” the Greek word for “in.” Just because some pantheists take active, environmental responsibility should not somehow turn anyone else off from their responsibilities to the Creator. Biblical pan-en-theism is the highest motivation for responsible environmental care, because our responsibility is to the infinite Creator, not to mere finite spirits.

Creation-care matters, not to the “spirit of the trees,” but to the Sovereign Lord of the Universe *in whom we live, move and even exist*. He is the same one who died for us and conquered death for us, so that we can now live for him and do what is right for the Creation. Even if some pantheists are hugging trees, we know that those trees belong to the Creator and are in him, as well. Should not those trees receive our responsible Creation-care?

Apostle Paul makes the same point elsewhere. For example, in the verse before the often quoted statement that we should offer ourselves as living sacrifices as the reasonable service to God, Paul establishes the vital context of our physical and spiritual devotion, surrounded by the living God (Romans 11:36):

From him, through him and to him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The old favorite spiritual “*He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands*” reminds us that the Lord has and shows intimate care and compassion for his Creation. True to the Biblical account of God’s nature, the song goes on to affirm that “He’s got you and me, sister” and “...you and me, brother” in his hands as well. God is the macro-manager, of course, and the micro-manager as well, according to Scripture and to the famous spiritual song. His infinite mind, all-loving spirit, and sovereign will completely out-league and outstrip the capacities of all present and future super-computers, even if they were networked together. After all, he made them all possible—all the minds and all the computers conceived and to be conceived by those minds.

The Bible’s paradoxes boggle our minds—including the clear teaching of both God’s imminence (closeness to us) and transcendence (above all). In the first two verses of Genesis, we read that God created the huge “heavens and the earth,” followed immediately by reference to the Spirit’s warm nurturing presence, cuddling the whole earth in the way a mother hen would have hover her eggs.

One of the ways—perhaps the most marked way—God reveals his transcendence is through his love: He loves first; he loves when we are unlovely; he loves unconditionally; he defines love itself by his acts of sovereign love in the Gospel. While his supreme love sets him apart as the one God above all gods and the only Savior, this highly transcendent love is embodied in deeply intimate care for all that he created—from the very beginning of Creation. So

intimately engaged is he the seemingly irrelevant physical levels, that he has even numbered the hairs on our head. (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7) Not that there is no danger or evil here on earth, but we can say with confidence because of the Lord's infinite love, "...I will fear no evil, for you are with me." (Psalm 23)

The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ is the finest expression of this ultimate paradox: the Infinite became the Infant, the Sovereign over all became the Savior and Servant of all. The challenges facing our minds in their attempts to wrap themselves around these paradoxical truths of the Bible dramatically demonstrate our finitude and fallibility—as well as the profound depth of Scripture.

One thing is certain: none of our imagined images of God hold up in the face of his revelation of himself. Moreover, this fact only strengthens our faith. After all, the truths of Scripture, revealing the eternal Lord and his great acts in history—including especially the Creator becoming flesh for us, dying for us, and conquering even death itself for us—are so seemingly preposterous that the human mind could not have made them up! And yet the eye-witnesses to these extraordinary events in history were willing to die for their truth.

We benefit from the best blend as the background for our Bible studies:

- Even the most clever human minds could not have made up the core Biblical truths
- Even the most Godly people, including especially the eye-witnesses, have vouched for these Biblical truths with their lives.

The numerous modern attempts to dumb-down and rationalize the great historic miracles of the Creator as recorded in the Scriptures have only foolishly twisted some people's "faith" into something very foreign: contrived human invention and irrelevant fable. In contrast, we expect to be *educated, equipped and empowered* from our study of the Bible, because the very Word of God always makes things happen, even from before the time the Creator said, "Let there be light," and the temporal creative process began.

Now how can we introduce the Creator, the living Lord? "In him we live and move and have our being," the Spirit records through the mouth of Paul, in his riveting speech at the philosophers' gathering in Athens. Paul wanted to rivet their attention and speak to their need. These Athenian philosophers had a lot of little gods, but all that matters is the one God who is so great that he "swallows up" everything else—including all their gods, their great city of Athens, and even they themselves. In everything we have to deal with the one living God, the Creator, because we are all "in him."

We are "in God." More paradoxes abound, since the Scriptures also say that he is "in us" as well. Nevertheless, our "postal location" of being "in God" or "in Christ" is real, for we are surrounded by his personal presence, provision and protection. This Biblical truth gives new meaning to the old motto about the three things that matter most: location, location and location. In other words, the Biblical "translation" would be "in God," "in Christ" and "in the Spirit"—in whatever order.

The Apostle Paul was intensely aware of this special Divine presence that cares for and encourages all of us. It helps explain why he demonstrated such courage repeatedly to do and

say what was right and timely—even at great risk to his life and safety. For example Paul reports in Romans 8:1 that “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Our location defines our real condition and our vital relationships. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive,” he states in I Corinthians 15:22. This God-defined location transforms us.

Paul’s teaching the philosophers at Athens that “In him we live and move and have our being” reminds us of the *authority* and *intimacy* of the Creator.

- Because we are *in him*, everything we do matters *to him*. Even in the mundane activities of eating and drinking, we should try to please and honor him, and thus bring glory to the Creator. (I Corinthians 10:31) We should always desire and do what we do in harmony with the directions he gives, because he is our Location, our Locus. Wherever we are, the Creator is in charge because we are actually in him. It would be foolish to let our behavior offend the one whom we are so dependent.
- Because we are *in him*, in this close conformity and community in the Creator, in whom we live and breathe, we discover the triumphant joy of celebrating his presence, the splendid excitement in experiencing his power and the deep abiding wisdom of connecting with his purposes. Since we are in the Creator, we do not have to go somewhere else, to some exotic place, to “find him”—or even to “find ourselves.”

These reminders of our being “in Christ” or “in God” are repeated hundreds of times in the Scriptures. They help prompt us to take more active personal responsibility for Creation-care.

- After all, since we are “in God,” we dare not trash our surroundings. Out of respect for him, we respect our physical surroundings, because all are in him.
- Since we are always in the Creator’s presence, we are not wasteful either. How dare we treat his gifts—his presents or presence—lightly?

Creation-care matters completely because Jesus Christ died for all of creation, and we dare not abuse his saving work. (See also Chapter Base.3.) It is a matter of gratitude and duty.

Creation-care is important because we are dependent-upon and surrounded by the Creator as vibrant parts of his creation. It is a matter of both gratitude and duty.

Please excuse us, tree-huggers; and sorry we are late, but the Creator’s servants have some work to do, too.

Side 4.3. Jesus Christ, the Cosmic Glue

Literal Translation	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Colossians 1:12-20</p> <p>¹² Give thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the ones especially set apart in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the domination of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ In him we have deliverance, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.</p> <p>¹⁶ All things were created by him: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.</p> <p>¹⁷ He exists above and before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that he will come to have first place in everything.</p> <p>¹⁹ because the Father was pleased to have all fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood sacrificed on the cross.</p>	<p>Colossians 1:12-20</p> <p>¹² I pray that you will be grateful to God for letting you have part in what he promised his people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ He rescued us from the dark power of Satan and brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son, ¹⁴ who forgives our sins and sets us free. ¹⁵ Christ is exactly like God, who cannot be seen. He is the first-born Son, superior to all creation.</p> <p>¹⁶ Everything was created by him, Everything in heaven and on earth, Everything seen and unseen, Including all forces and powers, And all rulers and authorities. All things were created by God’s Son, And everything was made for him.</p> <p>¹⁷ God’s Son was before all else, and by him everything is held together. ¹⁸ He is the head of his body which is the church. He is the very beginning, the first to be raised from death, so he would be above all others.</p> <p>¹⁹ God himself was pleased to live fully in his Son, and ²⁰ God was pleased for him to make peace by sacrificing his blood on the cross, so that all beings in heaven and on earth would be brought back to God.</p>

The author of these Bible-studies made the following widely quoted comments at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, in defense of a national statement on Creation care.

...[This] point is very personal: that the Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and Lord and is the “*cosmic glue*,” is at the very core of everything that exists. In John chapter 1,

we read that he is the Word and that all things were made by the Word. In Colossians, chapter 1 which is quoted in this statement we read, “In Christ all things hold together.”

We have heard of the “unified field theory.” Well, in a deeper sense there is a “*unified person theory*.” However we treat the world that is how we are treating Jesus, because he is the *cosmic glue*. He is what holds it all together.

- Paul de Vries, PhD, February 8, 2006, at the National Press Club, Washington, DC

National media attention focused on these comments on February 8, 2006 at the National Press Club. My speaking the last sentence was broadcast on NBC Evening News, and that same sentence was also quoted by *Financial Times*, Reuters, Associated Press, *Yahoo News*, Al Franken, MSNBC and other news sources. numerous news outlets and dozens of bloggers. It is quite nice when Jesus makes the secular news.

Colossians 1:12-20 comes from the beginnings of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the followers of Christ in Colossae, a city in western Asia, in what is now the nation of Turkey. In this text Paul repeats the theme from his speech in Athens about all of Creation being in God—and then he takes it to a whole other level.

Paul’s teaching about all being in God—the pan-en-theism mentioned in the previous chapter—is very clear in this Biblical text as well:

Verse 14: **In him** [the Son of God] we have deliverance, the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 17: He exists before all things, and **in him** all things hold together. [The “Cosmic Glue”]

Verse 19: the Father was pleased to have all fullness dwell **in him**.

Location, location, location. We have been liberated and forgiven in him and in him the world holds together; the fullness of everything lives in him. In addition, the phrase “in the light” in verse 12 may be a metaphorical reference to being in him. Perhaps because Paul spent so much of his Christian ministry locked up and chained in stinking dungeons, communing with the Creator and writing his splendid epistles, he came to an especially deep awareness of his *ultimate location* within the Savior, within the Creator himself.

Then, very dramatically at the very center of this praise of Jesus Christ, at the highest apex of this dramatic *chiastic unit*, Paul takes it to another level. [See also chapter “BASE.4” for analysis of another chiasm.] He reveals Christ to be the actual *cosmic glue*, the ultimate *uniting principle* of all Creation, for “in him all things hold together.”

This splendid *chiastic* unit has nine steps: E-D-C-B-A-B-C-D-E

E (13, 20b) – the salvation: through the blood of Jesus sacrificed for us on the cross.

D (14, 20a) – the results: deliverance and reconciliation

C (15, 19) – the information: Christ as the full revelation of the Father

B (16, 18) – the sovereign authority: Christ over Church, family, state and all else

A (17) – the ultimate point: **in Christ all things hold together.**

- ¹³ E: He has rescued us from the domination of darkness...
- ¹⁴ D: In him we have deliverance, the forgiveness of sins.
- ¹⁵ C: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
- ¹⁶ B: He created for himself all thrones, powers, rulers and authorities.
- ¹⁷ A: **He exists above and before all things, and in him all things hold together.**
- ¹⁸ B: And he is the head of the body, the church; ...to have first place in everything
- ¹⁹ C: because the Father was pleased to have all fullness dwell in him,
- ^{20a} D: through him to reconcile to himself all things,
- ^{20b} E: by making peace through his blood sacrificed on the cross.



In the process of honoring Jesus Christ, Paul ends up also suggesting stages of recognition of Jesus' roles. Tragically, even devoted Christians often experience Jesus' presence only at levels 'E' and perhaps 'D'—barely passing, but completely missing out on experiencing the C-level fullness of his revelation, the B-level obedience to his authority in all things, and especially the A-level attention to his constant, vibrant presence in our own lives—and in all Creation. It is time to make the 'A.' Intensive commitment to Creation-care is the essential consequence of honoring the Savior.

Moreover, in just a few words Paul lays claim to one of the chief goals of high-level human thinking: to seek and to discover a *uniting principle* that coordinates seemingly dissimilar phenomena. Consider a diverse set of great historic examples of people discovering unifying explanations that then transformed people's thought and action:

- Heraclitus (540-480 BC), one of the greatest Greek thinkers, was born in Ephesus, at a cross-roads boundary location between Europe and Asia, in what is now western Turkey. Heraclitus was intensely cognizant of the constant fluxes of life. He is especially known for his brilliant observation that you “cannot step into the same river twice.” But what unites all this constant flux and seeming chaos? He insisted that there is something deeper that managed and gave meaning to the constant changes, and that managing reality he called the Word, the Logos (λογος.) And this ultimate unifying coherence of life, the Word, he insisted was God. This discovery by Heraclitus was unlike Greek thinking of his time, but it helped prepare people later for the Gospel.
- Isaac Newton (AD 1642-1727), an intellectual giant at the founding of modern science, made history by discovering the basic laws of motion that apply both in physics and astronomy, two sciences that previously had been kept on separate tracks.

The basic laws of motion that Newton discovered were simple mathematical principles that provided a unifying theory, helping explain a diverse set of phenomena.

- In physics, James Maxwell (1831-1879) developed a theory that provided a unifying explanation for both electrical and magnetic fields. This unified theory of electromagnetism enabled whole new technologies, including radio, television and cell phones. This powerful discovery—that one field unites electrical and magnetic phenomena—then inspired other great scientists to seek to discover a still more embracing field that would include also the gravitational fields. Many over the past 100 years, including Albert Einstein (1879-1955), have sought a unified field in which gravity and electro-magnetism would be shown to be truly different aspects of an even more unifying force field. The search for a unified field of physical forces continues.
- Francis Crick (1916-), James Watson (1928-) and Maurice Wilkins (1916-) discovered the double helix nuclear structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). This discovery was recognized as a unifying explanation of genetic phenomena that also brought together substantial ranges of knowledge from physics, chemistry and biology.

In light of this drive for a uniting principle that coordinates seemingly dissimilar phenomena, Paul's point in Colossians 1:17 is that whatever else helps unify our worlds—including the Word, mathematical principles of motion, unified force fields, and DNA—Jesus Christ is the ultimate unifier, the cosmic Word, as John himself also says. (John 1:1-14) Jesus Christ is intimately involved in making the universe work, and he cares how it is treated.

So far, the search for a unified field of physical forces has not yet produced the desired results. Scientists have yet to come up with a unified field theory that includes electricity, magnetism and gravity. Scientists may or may not succeed in this challenging and significant effort in the future. However well the search for a unified field theory proceeds, we already have a revealing causal explanation on a much deeper level. We have what we can call the "unified person theory." The active person of Jesus Christ causes all phenomena to function, and because he is always present in all the phenomena, our own behavior matters:

- We should never feel alone on earth or feel distant from our Lord.
- We can trust that miracles are possible, especially because all natural phenomena are under the authority of Christ, the Creator.
- Jesus Christ not only brings together electrical fields and magnetic fields, he also is their real-life point of contact that coordinates gravitational fields.
- Jesus Christ is the Lord of Creation, the one who holds it all together. Therefore, however we treat any part of his world, that reflects how we treat him

For too long our culture has denatured nature, treating animals and plants—and the Lord's earth itself—as just *things*, only *objects*, mere *commodities*. Tragically, this secularizing perspective has been adopted even by Godly people, who should know better.

However, earth is home, plants and animals are fellow creatures of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the *cosmic glue* that holds it all together and gives Creation its meaning and purpose. What we do in Creation-care definitely matters to him.

The Top: “Thy Will Be Done on Earth”

<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Matthew 6:9-13</p> <p>⁹ This, then, is how you should pray:</p> <p>" `Our Father in heaven, May your name be honored,</p> <p>¹⁰ may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.</p> <p>¹² Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.</p> <p>¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen'</p>	<p>Matthew 6:9-13</p> <p>⁹You should pray like this:</p> <p>Our Father in heaven, help us to honor your name.</p> <p>¹⁰ Come and set up your kingdom, so that everyone on earth will obey you, as you are obeyed in heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Give us our food for today.</p> <p>¹² Forgive us for doing wrong, as we forgive others.</p> <p>¹³ Keep us from being tempted and protect us from the evil one. The kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen</p> <p><small>Footnotes were used in the text.</small></p>

The focus of Godly people has often shifted, and not always for the good. Especially at risk is people’s obedience to the Creator’s will for their behavior on earth, often in the Gardens of earth where plant and animal submission to the Creator’s authority is evident. “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” was an unflinching focus in the life and teachings of Jesus. This submission to the Father is a constant Biblical theme from the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve thought they had a better idea, through the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus modeled for us total submission to the Father, and right into the Gardens of the New Jerusalem where God’s authority is no longer challenged.

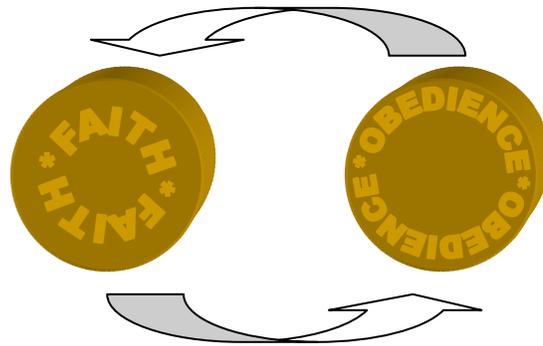
“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth...” are the very first petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, the center keystone of Jesus’ incomparable *Sermon on the Mount*. (Matthew 5-7) Right in the middle of the sermon and right at the beginning of the prayer, our Creator’s supreme *authority on earth* is affirmed. Certainly we should not let our behavior consistently contradict our prayers.

One of the great tragedies of religion has been the separation of behavior from belief, the separation of faithfulness from faith. Professed “belief” without the behavior is really

unbelief. “Faith without works is dead,” says James. (James 2:14-26) *And the funeral was over years ago!*

We have examined some of the Apostle Paul’s strong emphasis on good works for the Christian life in another chapter. (Romans 2, examined in chapter BASE.4). While the letter to the Roman Church is truly a book about faith and belief, the emphasis on behavior is utterly clear. For example, immediately after a long section about the goodness of God’s will in Romans 8:28 through 11:36, Paul appeals to everyone to conduct our lives as living sacrifices, as a reasonable response, a life of total service to God. And why should we do this? “In order to prove that God’s will is good, that it is acceptable, and even that it is perfect.” (Romans 12:2) Simply put, in our good service we are supposed to become the walking proofs of the goodness of God’s ways. Are we ready for the challenge?

The way Paul frames “faith” in the letter to the Roman Church is especially remarkable. The first and last use of the word “faith” is in the same phrase: the “obedience of faith.” Bible translators, unresponsive to the idea that faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin, generally mistranslate this phrase as “obedience and faith”—but this is a disservice.



Literal Translation	<i>Contemporary English Version (CEV)</i>
<p>Romans 1:5 & 16:25-27</p> <p>^{1:5} Through him we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all ethnicities into the <u>obedience of faith</u>—for his name’s sake.</p> <p>...</p> <p>^{16:25} Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of mystery unspoken for long ages past, ²⁶ but now made plain through the prophetic Scriptures by the command of the eternal God, so that the <u>obedience of faith</u> will be know by people of</p>	<p>Romans 1:5 & 16:25-27</p> <p>^{1:5} Jesus was kind to me and chose me to be an apostle, so that people of all nations would obey and have faith.</p> <p>...</p> <p>^{16:25} Praise God! He can make you strong by means of my good news, which is the message about Jesus Christ. For ages and ages this message was kept secret, ²⁶ but now at last it has been told. The eternal God commanded his prophets to write about the good news, so that all nations would obey and have faith. ²⁷ And now, because of Jesus</p>

all ethnicities – ²⁷ for the sake of the only wise God, who deserves glory forever, through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Christ, we can praise the only wise God forever! Amen.

Some of our theologies, even some of our biases, may have fed the process of divorcing obedience and faith. This tragic divorce never worked. Instead, faith and obedience are two sides of one coin. In the Hebrew language, the word for having faith and being faithful are the same. In fact, our own word “faithful” says it all: if we are truly full of faith in the Lord, it will show itself in our faithfulness to him. If we are faithful to him in our decisions and actions, he will see and reward our faith-full-ness.

Dr. Charles Malik, (PhD), was a giant of international statesmanship in the 20th century. A citizen of Lebanon and professor of philosophy at a university in its capital Beirut, Dr. Malik understood from the Second World War that people and nations must work together. As that very bloody war was finishing, he put his substantial talents and wisdom into the process of helping design the United Nations and writing its Charter. In addition, he was the main author of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, a monumental achievement by any measure. This extraordinary *Declaration* was approved by the General Assembly by unanimous vote (with the six members of the Soviet bloc, Saudi Arabia, and the Union of South Africa abstaining) in 1948. In addition, Dr. Malik served as ambassador to the UN from Lebanon for decades, and served as president of the UN General Assembly and president of the UN Security Council for different terms during that time. The world is a much better place because of Dr. Malik’s extraordinary leadership, and international statesmanship.

The *Declaration* he wrote affirms rights to life, liberty, and security of person; freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; and freedom of peaceful assembly and association—as well as the right to education. To a careful reader, the Biblical thought at the basis of the *Declaration* is evident. Dr. Malik was an outspoken Christian, committed to the authority of the Bible and served for many years on the governing board of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

At the end of his career he allowed me to introduce him to about a hundred evangelical scholars. After sharing some ideas with them, some wanted to talk about his approaches to “integrating” Bible truth into international statesmanship. He vehemently resisted the question. He was thrilled when I asked the more personal question: how did he as a devout follower of Jesus bring that core aspect of his life into his role as a profoundly effective international statesman? I will never forget his answer:

There are two ways Jesus helps. First, at the UN it is impossible to make a good decision. There are so many competing interests and values that the best we can do is make the *least bad* decision among all the possible options. The Bible and our Lord help me figure out what are the *least bad* decisions.

Second, every night I fall on my knees and pray, earnestly asking for the Lord’s forgiveness for making all those bad decisions that day, including those *least bad*

decisions. Then I also plead for the Lord to bring his kingdom on earth in its full authority, so that we will not need to make even those *least bad* decisions anymore.

What tremendous insight! Too often we think that we are making good decisions, when by Jesus' standards the eternal principles justice, love, and accountability, our decisions are not good and maybe not even the "*least bad*." Our spiritual brother Dr. Malik wisely chose not to compromise the Lord's principles, choosing to judge honestly about his own failings and the failings of the UN, to seek our Lord's forgiveness, and earnestly to seek the fullness of Jesus' kingdom.

How can we pray the Lord's Prayer casually any more? The Creator-Father's perfect will on earth is clear enough. Let us pray earnestly—and show that we mean it by...

- ✚ Acknowledging him as the one Lord, never of just one issue
- ✚ Respecting and maintaining and as much as possible, restoring the goodness of Creation
- ✚ Being Godly stewards, improving and protecting his Creation
- ✚ Loving and caring about all "neighbors" throughout earth now and in the future
- ✚ Cherishing and caring for Creation, just as we should cherish and care for the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the personal *cosmic glue*.

Why should we do these things? Because his kingdom will come and his will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. What is keeping you from getting with the Creator's program so he may *find us faithful* when he returns?

Appendix X:

Answer Key

for the historic unfolding of the **Creation-Care Box™**:

Creation-Care Exam Answer

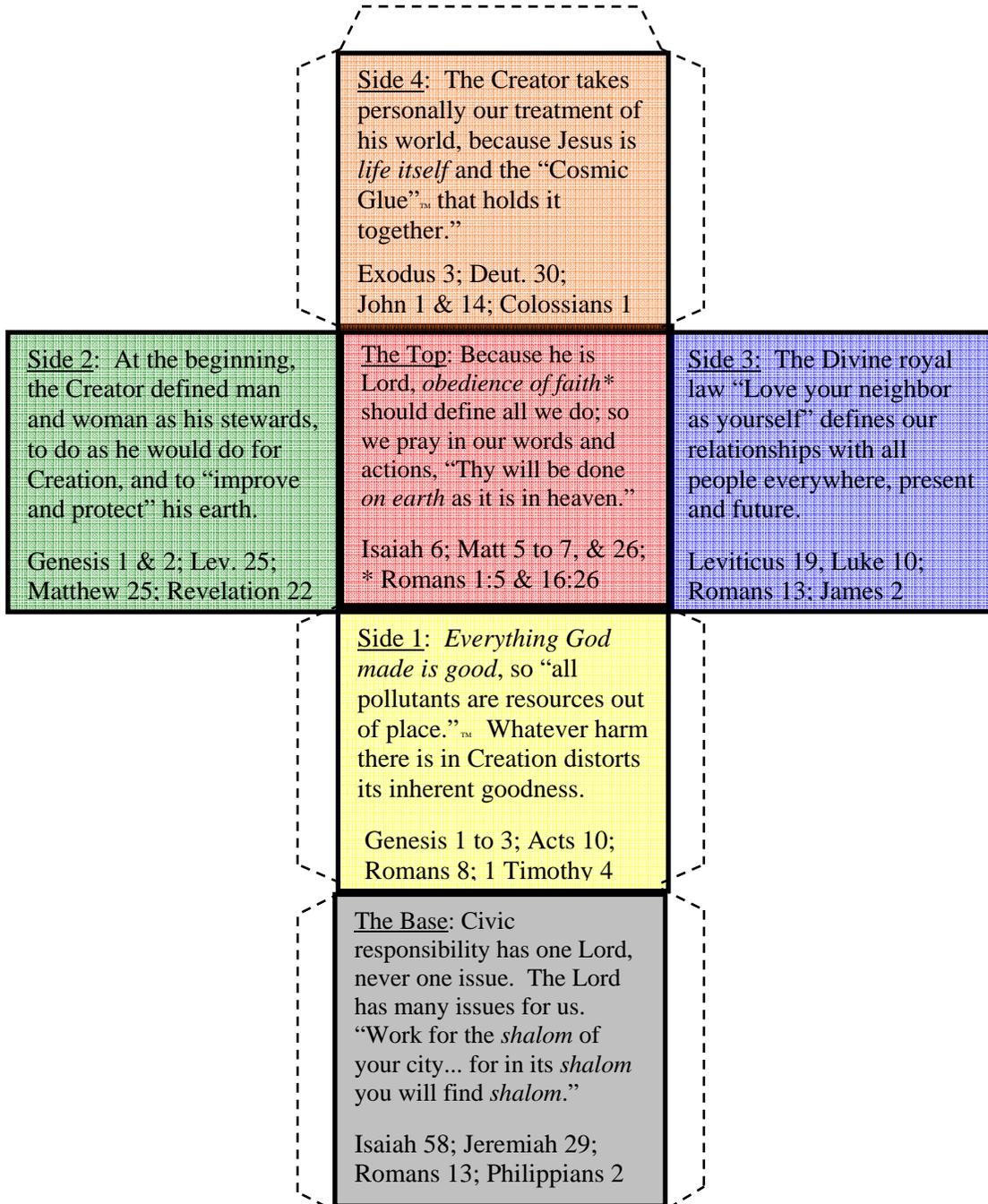
For the problem, see again page 4 and 5 above.

This is your last chance to work on the exam before the answer is revealed. [Please see the **Creation-Care Exam** and examine the graphic of the **Creation-Care Box™** in the Preface of this *Manufacturer's Manual*, pages 4 and 5.]

The answer is only a tool for you *to put to use*, because there is a new Creation-care exam for you every day.

Warning! You may not like the answer you see; but once you see it, you have only two choices: to affirm and repent—or to reject and go your own way. I pray you make the choice that leads to life.

One Lord—Never One Issue
 One Life, One Shalom, One Earth, One Humanity
The Four Sides of Creation-care



Appendix Y:

Resources for Individuals, Churches, Synagogues and others: For following through with your answer to the problem of the **Creation-Care Box™**, please contact the organizations and visit the websites of organizations collaborating with the documentary film, *The Great Warming*—starting with www.thegreatwarming.com

Appendix Z:

Paul de Vries, PhD

Paul de Vries loves the Lord Jesus Christ and seeks to please and honor him in everything. He is the president of New York Divinity School (NYDS), the first evangelical seminary based in the City since 1969. NYDS provides *Christ-centered, Bible-based, Spirit-led* ministry training for pastors and lay people, on the master’s level.



Dr. de Vries earned the Ph.D. (1978) from the University of Virginia, and he has served 25 years in higher education administration, *designing and leading innovative programs to incarnate Biblical truth in people’s learning, living and leading.*

Dr. de Vries founded the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College (Illinois) where he was also an associate dean. He also founded the Office of Volunteer Community Service at the University of Virginia and an affordable housing network in Illinois—all of which remain thriving programs.

Dr. de Vries is on the governing Board of the National Association of Evangelicals, representing more than 30 million Americans. In February 2006, he was one of the original 86 signers of *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*, as a result of which he was interviewed or quoted on NBC evening news, Fox News, Reuters, Yahoo, Ave Maria, Air America and other venues.

Dr. de Vries also has been the lead author of three books, *The Taming of the Shrewd* (1992, Thomas Nelson) *Ethics Applied* (1999, Simon and Schuster) and *Business Ethics Applied* (2000, Pierson Education), and the author of dozens of published articles.

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