

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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ESCHATOLOGY: Eco-Eschatology

Synopsis: From a biblical perspective, man is granted dominion over nature but must exercise proper stewardship. In contrast, radical environmentalism dethrones God and man while deifying nature.

Introduction

In 2019, a teenage activist named Greta Thunberg burst onto the world political scene. Like a sandwich-board-wearing prophet of catastrophe, she predicted disaster if the people of the world did not repent—in this case, of the sin of abusing the environment. In a speech at the 2019 U.N. Climate Action Summit, she warned, "People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction."

Though shrill, Thunberg expresses the fears of millions. A steady drumbeat of scientific studies over the past several decades has foretold a dramatic change in the earth's climate as a result of the burning of fossil fuels. Proponents of this view foresee apocalyptic consequences: coastal cities flooding, continents being scourged by superstorms and drought, and possibly even the end of the human race.

As others have observed, these premonitions of doom have distinctly religious and even biblical overtones. Judgment is coming! Unless we repent, we will all surely perish! This is even more ironic because most diehard environmentalists are materialists. They believe in sin, but they don't believe in God. In His place, they have turned to a reverence for the planet and the environment. This fragile jewel's fate is in our hands, and unless we act soon, it will be everlastingly too late!

Three Problems

Though this appeal is compelling to many, it has three serious problems. First, it elevates the situation on earth right now to privileged status. If the climate changes, if species die, it's an unthinkable tragedy.

However, according to scientists' and materialists' own convictions, this is nothing more than planetary business as usual. They believe that the history of the earth is replete with dramatic climate changes and mass extinctions. If the spotted owl and the snail darter go the way of the dinosaur, what makes that particularly tragic? Given time, something else will evolve to take their place (or so we are told).

Second, this way of thinking elevates humankind to an illogically privileged position. Its adherents set up a dichotomy between nature on the one hand (beautiful, delicate, pristine) and man on the other hand (corrupting, befouling, destroying). They think we're something different.

Again, though, this is not something that their philosophy allows. They affirm that we are animals. We are part of nature. We evolved up from the primordial slime like the bears and the wombats, and in our essence, we are the same as they.

If people are part of nature, their works are part of nature also. A bulldozer is just as much an instrument of Darwinian triumph as more powerful legs, or more efficient lungs are. Survival of the fittest, baby! Why does the wolf have a moral obligation not to prey upon the sheep?

Third, it presumes that humankind can predict the future and is in control of its own destiny. The materialist conception of the universe leaves no room for any powers greater than us. We must act to protect the planet because both our salvation and our uttermost destruction lie in our own hands.

This, too, is silly. Even the godless must admit that the human race isn't that wise or that powerful. As anyone who pays attention to weather forecasts knows, we can't predict, with more than coin-flip accuracy, whether it's going to rain next Tuesday. Yet, these folks are dead certain about what the climate is going to be like 50 years from now.

One of the great internal proofs of the inspiration of Scripture is biblical prophets' ability to foretell the future accurately. Outside of the Bible, the record of fortune-tellers is demonstrably and uniformly lousy. Thunberg et al. want us to believe that "Things Are Different" when it comes to climate change. I'm guessing that it's not.

Additionally, even if people expend every effort to turn the climate clock back, there are no guarantees of success. If the Yellowstone super-volcano erupts, or a sufficiently large asteroid comes crashing into the planet, it doesn't matter whether various nations hit their emissions-reduction targets or not. We're all doomed anyway.

Man's Role in God's Creation

An appropriately biblical view of the relationship between man, God, and His creation addresses all these problems. First, we have reason to understand ourselves as different from all other living creatures. God did not breathe His Spirit into the nostrils of the bears and wombats. As Genesis 2:7 reports, that dignity is unique to man.

We stand apart from the rest of the physical world. Indeed, we stand above it because God has put us above it. According to Psalm 8:6, God has given us dominion over His handiwork. When we impose order on the planet, it is because we have the right to do so.

As with all of God's other grants of authority, we should exercise this one with restraint and wisdom. It is not godly for us to wantonly destroy and despoil the beauty that He has made. If herds must be slaughtered and forests must be felled so that humanity may be fed and housed, so be it. We are worth more than many sparrows, after all. However, when we act from greed rather than need, the ugliness we create only mirrors the ugliness already existing in our hearts. A good Christian is a good steward of the creation.

Indeed, there is great spiritual value in leaving portions of that creation untouched and unspoiled. My family and I enjoy traveling around the state and the country to visit various parks, and we all feel that the majesty of nature brings us closer to God.

There is a sublimity to a mighty waterfall or a grove of old-growth redwoods or the shattered ruins of a volcano that cannot be captured by words or photographs or videos. In their presence, we are reminded that we are, indeed, very small. Our hearts are provoked to cry out, "What is man, that You are mindful of Him?" Without these reminders, we are prone to forget.

God's Role in His Creation

Most of all, though, the eco-eschatologists err in forgetting precisely this; we are not great and in control. God is. Though we do not know the day nor the hour, God has promised us that He, and no other, will seal the fate of this present creation. The heavens and the earth are reserved for His fire, and until that day comes, no other force in the universe can destroy them.

In this, we can find assurance. Though I regard the environmentalist narrative with considerable skepticism, I do believe that we can harm ourselves and the planet significantly through foolishness and evil. However, we should not think that we can extinguish life that God does not want to be extinguished, and especially not that we can destroy ourselves. We are sustained by His will, and as long as the earth continues, so will we.

Conclusion

Mankind was created to desire and search for meaning. The drive to matter exists in each one of us, and it obviously animates Thunberg and her ilk. We all want to imagine that we are the heroes of our own stories, that our actions will spell the difference between triumph and disaster.

In reality, though, we are not and cannot be the great Mover of creation and fate. God is, and when we behave as though the future depends on us, we arrogate His role to ourselves. If we want to find meaning, then we can't do so by preserving the planet from harm. Instead, we find it by devoting the short season that we spend on this planet to Him.

- Matthew Bassford, via Truth Magazine, April 04, 2020

Clippings . . .

The Tragedy of the Unseized Moment

Again and again there come to us moments of impulse when we are moved to the higher things; and again and again we let them pass without acting upon them. The tragedy of life is so often the tragedy of the unseized moment. We are moved to some fine action, we are moved to the abandoning of some weakness or habit, we are moved to say something to someone, some word of sympathy, or warning, or encouragement; but the moment passes, and the thing is never done, the evil thing is never conquered, the word is never spoken. In the best of us there is a certain lethargy and inertia; there is a certain habit of procrastination; there is a certain fear and indecision; and often the moment of fine impulse is never turned into action and into fact.

- William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1, p. 321.

The Book of Life!

The Bible is worthy of man's honor as the Book of Life! It has permanently recorded the wide spectrum of mankind's thoughts and behaviors with great clarity. New Testament pages describe the righteous standing of Christians before God due to forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God because of the selflessly compassionate sacrifice of Christ. Those same pages warn Christians to carefully guard their behavior. ("Do not love the world" – 1 John 2:15. The "world" is human society as organized without God, under the power of evil.) Christians have entered into divine assurance of eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15; cf. 1 Peter 1:4), but the temptations of life have not ceased.

The Book of Life vividly depicts virtues of the great heroes of faith in all ages (cf. Hebrews 11), but it never deceptively hides their frailties. The Bible is clear: man without God is in a lost condition because of sin. If he remains a sinner, unaware or rejecting the remedy divinely provided for restoring his fellowship with his Creator, only a blunt truth remains: "These will go away into eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:46; cf. 25:30).

The God who loves all mankind (John 3:16) has graciously given us the Book of Life. Its blessed contents inform us of the remedy for our lost condition: the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7). The avenue through which the remedy is applied is the preaching and obedient acceptance of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Hebrews 5:9; Acts 2:38).

The Book of Life has been described as the most realistic book ever given to man. It deals honestly with men, plainly showing not only his high moral characteristics that are worthy of imitation, but also his embarrassing foolishness and wickedness. Yes, man is shown for who he chooses to be, but with God's remedy and God's help, he can be what God originally intended. Man can live with God forever!

- Gary Smalley

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- * "Plastic surgeons can do almost anything with a nose, except keep it out of other people's business!"
 - * "Bad habits are like a comfortable bed; easy to get into, but hard to get out of!"
 - * "Prejudice is a great time-saver; it enables a man to form opinions without bothering to get the facts!"
 - * "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.!' – Psalms 14:1a
 - * "Calling attention to the faults of others never rids us of our faults!"

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)