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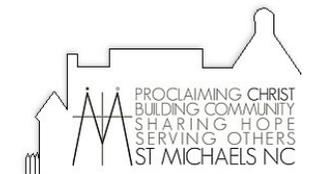
- V. 20-22 speaks of creation’s eager expectation for redemption, in personified language. It waits for the fulfillment of the purposes of God in the light of the Gospel of Jesus, as humans do. As a result, says Paul, it groans as if in the pain of labor over its present condition. As new life is the fruit of such labor, so too, this pain will not be in vain.

All of creation **anticipates deliverance**. One commentator writes, “Since humanity and its world are interrelated, it means that the world will experience whatever humans experience. When humanity fell, its world was bound to fall too. But this is the glorious news as well. When humanity is liberated from corruption, the world (and all creation) shall be liberated as well”

- v. 23 mentions “first-fruits” - Everett Harrison explains: “We are to understand that the gift of the Spirit to the believer at the inception of Christian life is God’s pledge of the completion of the process of salvation” (EBC, vol. 10, pp. 94-95).

For example, God said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field” (Genesis 3:17b-18).

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## CONVERSATION STARTERS

### #8 Climate Change

#### 1. *Warm Up*

- What thing that you’ve created (made, written, sewn, built, painted, drawn) are you most proud of? Describe it, and say why you’re proud of it.

#### 2. *God and Creation*

##### READ Psalm 65

- In what ways does the psalm depict God’s relationship with human and non-human creation. What are some of the surprising descriptions in this passage? (Check out comparisons in Job 38-39; Psalm 8; Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 12:24).
- If Christians are called to be like God, what lessons lie in the psalm for us?

#### 3. *Sin, the cosmos, and the promise of redemption*

##### READ Romans 8:18-24.

- What might it mean that the earth ‘groans’? What does the promised redemption mean for creation?

**READ** Revelation 21:1-5 and 21:22–22:7

- In this description of the new heaven and the new earth, what is similar to the description of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1), and what is different?
- Do you see any similarities between what humans will do in this picture of the new earth and what Genesis says human beings were created to do?
- How do you think this picture of the new heaven and new earth should affect our attitude to creation today?

#### 4. *Having Dominion*

- What might it look like to “rule look like in light of the Gospel, and how can we reflect God in our treatment of the earth?
- If we were to approach our environment relationally, what instruction and guidance might we find in command of Jesus to “love your neighbour as yourself”?

#### 5. *Living Sustainably*

**SHARE** in your group what were the last three things that you purchased, and where did you buy them from? What factors affected your decision to buy those particular items?

- The issue of climate change is an increasingly urgent one, threatening the lives and livelihoods of the world’s poorest people. What could you do differently that would enable you to express love for neighbour more fully in relation to this issue?
- What other benefits might there be for our relationships if we order our lives so that we consume less?

### C. *Creation awaiting redemption*

**READ** Romans 8:18-25

- v. 20, The creation waits in “**eager expectation**”.  
In the original Greek, the word translated as eager expectation in the NIV means “to watch with the neck outstretched and the head upright. It is a persistent, unswerving expectation, an expectation that does not give up but keeps looking until the event happens. Most of the occurrences of this term relate to the Christian’s attitude toward the Lord’s coming. (EBC, vol. 10, p. 94).

J.B. Phillips translates v. 19 this way, “The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.”

We are told in v. 20 that creation was **subjected to frustration**. The word translated as frustration in the NIV literally means “vanity, futility, or aimlessness.” As John Murray points out in his commentary, “the ‘vanity’ to which creation was subjected would appear to refer to the lack of vitality which inhibits the order of nature and the frustration which the forces of nature meet with in achieving their proper ends” (NICNT, Romans, p. 303).

Paul’s expression, creation was subjected to frustration, is perhaps an allusion to the collateral damage to our relationship with the earth described in Genesis 3. The Bible uses the image of blessings and curses in the Old Testament to convey the universally lasting damage to the whole creation due to the broken relationship between humanity and its Creator. For example, God said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your

**abad**, which can also be translated, 'to serve', and the word for 'to take care of' (or 'to keep'), **shamar**, which can also mean 'to preserve, protect'.

There was no one to till the ground, so God formed man (**adam**) from the ground (**adamah**) and gives responsibility to till and to keep it. This Hebrew wordplay (**adam/adamah**) expresses our solidarity with the earth; we are connected to it and dependent upon it for life. For this reason Psalm 139:13-15 can parallel the 'womb of the earth' with 'a mother's womb'. Humans are both physical and spiritual and the two ought not to be separated. To care for creation, then, is to care for a system that we are part of; in caring for the earth, we care for ourselves and others.

## B. Humans & the Earth

READ Genesis 3

The Genesis creation narratives tell us that the original harmony between humans and the earth was ruptured in relation to the breakdown of relationship between humans and God. But even here, the **essential solidarity** between **adam** and **adamah** is reiterated...

- The earth becomes difficult to farm, cursed because of the breakdown of relationship between humans and God
- We suffer when creation suffers, and our 'sinful' disregard for the earth contributes to creation's suffering—a viscous cycle
- Most dramatically, God announces that humanity will revert to the earth upon death, a tragic reversal of the original act of creation: 'for dust you are, and to dust you will return.' (Gen. 3:19)

Adapted from *Christianity, climate change and sustainable living* by Nick Spencer and Robert White (SPCK 2007) pp 81-86

## BIBLE STUDY NOTES

### A. The Image of God

READ Genesis 1:26—2:15



Biblical scholars suggest at least three different ways of understanding what it means for humans to be made 'in the image of God':

- I. **substance**: this is the idea that something intrinsic and unique to humans is the image of God in them. Some things that have been suggested are: reason, moral awareness, creativity and a deep concern for justice.
- II. **relational**: this is the idea that what makes humans uniquely 'in the image of God' is their ability to have relationships with one another and with God. Genesis 1:27, 'male and female he created them', indicates that the image of God is about relationships.
- III. **functional**: this is the idea that the image of God is about humanity's call to 'have dominion' over the earth, and so the image of God is about its role within creation, reflecting the lordship of God.

It's possible to see **all three of these views** as reflecting different aspects of the image of God. The language of being 'in the image of God' is found in other societies around Israel in the Ancient Near East, usually used of kings, who were thought to be representatives of the divine on earth. In some cultures, the king would have to give an annual account of his rule, and would only be allowed to continue to represent God if he had ruled well.

The language of **the image of God** in Genesis is unusual because it makes humanity as a whole God's representative on earth. Together, we have authority to rule the earth, and we should do so in a way that honours God. Note that to have rule (or 'dominion') over the earth (see also Genesis 2:15) is informed by the Hebrew word for 'to work' (or 'to till'),