

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANTHROPOLOGY

The Doctrine of Humanity

Created, Fallen, and Redeemable — What It Means to Be Human Before God

UNIT 7

The Cultural Mandate and Human Vocation

Lesson 22

Dominion and Stewardship

Creation Care Without Idolatry

“The Biblical Balance Between Exploitation and Worship of Nature”

Key Texts: Genesis 1:28; 2:15; Psalm 24:1; Romans 1:25; 8:19–22; Proverbs 12:10

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.”

Psalm 24:1, NASB 1995

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Introduction

The cultural mandate of Lesson 20 commissioned the image-bearing creature to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to exercise delegated dominion over every living creature. The theology of vocation in Lesson 21 established that every lawful calling through which the cultural mandate is exercised is a sacred calling, offered to God as worship and rendered to the neighbor as love. Lesson 22 completes Unit 7 by addressing the most practically contested dimension of the cultural mandate in the contemporary moment: the specific character of the dominion that the mandate commissions and the specific form of stewardship that the image-bearing creature's vice-regal status requires. The question that this lesson addresses is not whether the human creature is commissioned to exercise dominion over the created order, that has been established beyond question by the preceding two lessons. The question is what kind of dominion. What does it mean to subdue and rule the earth as God's image-bearing steward? What does the vice-regal accountability of the cultural mandate require, and what does it forbid?

The question is urgent because it is contested on two sides simultaneously, and the church that does not understand its own theological resources for navigating the contest will be co-opted by one side or the other. On the right, the history of the church's engagement with the creation has included forms of exploitation and indifference that have treated the created order as a merely disposable resource for the satisfaction of human desires, without regard for the Creator's ownership, the creation's goodness, or the steward's accountability. This exploitation error has been directly enabled by distorted accounts of the cultural mandate's dominion language that treated *kabash* and *radah* as licenses for conquest and consumption rather than commissions for development and governance accountable to the Owner of the earth. On the left, the environmental movement's most philosophically radical expressions, deep ecology, eco-paganism, and various forms of earth spirituality, have responded to the exploitation error by erasing the distinction between the Creator and the creation and treating the creation itself as the ultimate object of reverence and care. This idolatry error has replaced the biblical account of creation care grounded in love for the Creator with a form of creation worship that replaces the Creator with the creation as the ultimate ground of value and meaning.

This lesson charts the biblical middle course between these two errors: the creation care that is grounded in love for the Creator rather than worship of the creation, that honors the created order as the very good work of the very good God who owns it and who will hold the steward accountable for the quality of the stewardship, and that is motivated by the specific theological convictions that only the biblical account of the creation can provide, the conviction that the earth belongs to the Lord, that the image-bearing creature governs it as His representative, that the creation itself is waiting in eager longing for its own redemption along with the redemption of the creature it has been entrusted to, and that the eschatological new creation will be the perfected expression of the creation's goodness rather than its final destruction. This is creation care without idolatry, the specific form of the cultural mandate's stewardship that the vice-regal accountability of the image-bearing creature requires.

The lesson proceeds in six sections: the nature of dominion as benevolent governance rather than exploitation; the theological principle of stewardship grounded in divine ownership; the case against environmental exploitation as a failure of the cultural mandate's stewardship; the case against environmental idolatry as the fundamental theological error of eco-paganism; the biblical balance that holds both the value of the creation and the exclusive worship of the Creator; and the specific practical ethics of creation care that the biblical framework generates.

I. The Nature of Dominion: Benevolent Governance, Not Exploitation

What Radah and Kabash Actually Commission the Image-Bearer to Do

A. *The Meaning of Radah and Kabash Revisited*

The words that Genesis 1:28 uses for the human creature's commission over the created order, kabash (כבש, subdue) and radah (רדה, rule), have been at the center of the environmental debate in Christian theology since Lynn White Jr.'s 1967 essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" charged that the Judeo-Christian doctrine of dominion was responsible for the West's exploitative relationship to the natural world. White's argument was that the Genesis 1:28 commission, by placing the human creature as the sovereign lord of the natural world and removing any sense of the sacred from the created order, had licensed the exploitation of nature for purely human ends without ethical restraint. The argument was historically simplistic and theologically distorted, but it has been extraordinarily influential and has required the church to engage more carefully with the actual meaning of the dominion language than it had previously done.

The meaning of radah (רדה) is the most important starting point. The word is used in the Old Testament for the governance of kings over their subjects and of masters over their servants, but the governance that the Old Testament consistently commends in these contexts is not the arbitrary despotism of the tyrant who uses those under his authority for his own purposes without accountability, but the responsible governance of the ruler who is accountable to the God under whose authority he exercises his own. Psalm 72, the most sustained Old Testament account of the righteous king's governance, uses radah-related language for the king's dominion (v. 8) and describes the character of that dominion as the defense of the poor, the deliverance of the needy, and the care of the afflicted (vv. 4, 12–14). The governance that radah describes is not the self-serving exploitation of the authority but the responsible, care-giving, accountability-conscious exercise of the authority for the benefit of those who are governed.

Kabash (כבש, subdue) is stronger and more forceful in its semantic range than radah, and it is the word that has attracted the most criticism. But its meaning in the Genesis 1:28 context must be understood against the background of what it was designed to accomplish: the bringing of the wild, the undeveloped, and the potentially dangerous dimensions of the created order under the orderly governance of the image-bearing creature, the cultivation and the taming of the creation's wildness into the productive, habitable, and flourishing forms that the cultural mandate's development commission envisages. The kabash of Genesis 1:28 is the kabash of the gardener who brings the untamed earth under cultivation, not the kabash of the conquering army that destroys what it subdues. And even the most forceful reading of kabash must be held within the vice-regal framework of Psalm 24:1, the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, which establishes that whatever the subduing involves, it is the subduing of the Landlord's property by the Landlord's steward, accountable to the Landlord for the quality of the stewardship.

B. *The Good Shepherd Model of Dominion*

The model of dominion that the biblical testimony most consistently commends is not the model of the conquering warrior who destroys the enemy but the model of the good shepherd who governs and cares for the flock entrusted to his charge. Psalm 23's portrait of the divine Shepherd who leads to still waters and green pastures, who restores the soul and guides in paths of righteousness, this is the model of the governance that the cultural mandate's dominion implies when it is held within the full theological framework of divine ownership and vice-regal accountability. The good shepherd governs the flock for the flock's wellbeing, not for the shepherd's exploitation; and the image-bearer who exercises the cultural mandate's dominion over the created order is called to exercise that dominion with the same quality of care, attention, and protective responsibility that the good shepherd gives to the flock.

Proverbs 12:10's declaration, "A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, but even the compassion of the wicked is cruel" (NASB 1995), provides the most direct single statement in the Wisdom literature of the character of the dominion that the cultural mandate commissions. The righteous person's regard for the life of her animal is not merely a pragmatic concern for the economic value of the animal; it is a specifically moral quality, the concern of the one who governs for the wellbeing of the one who is governed, that the Proverbs text explicitly attributes to the righteous character rather than to merely prudential calculation. The opposite of the righteous person's regard for the animal is the cruelty of the wicked whose apparent compassion is itself cruel: the distortion of the governance relationship that the fallen human will introduce into the exercise of the dominion commission. Proverbs 12:10 is the most compressed possible statement of the distinction between the benevolent governance of the cultural mandate and the exploitative distortion that the fall produces.

The good shepherd model of dominion is not a sentimental softening of the cultural mandate's active, developing, subduing character; it is the theological framework within which that character must be understood and exercised. The good shepherd does not decline to lead the flock because leading involves the exercise of authority over the sheep; he leads with the authority that the sheep need and with the care that the sheep deserve. The good shepherd does not decline to protect the flock from threats because protection sometimes requires the use of force; he uses the force that the protection requires while remaining oriented toward the flock's wellbeing throughout. The cultural mandate's dominion is the governance of the creation by the image-bearer who exercises authority with care, who develops the creation's potential with protection of its integrity, and who subdues the creation's wildness with regard for the wildness as the gift of the Creator who designed it.

"A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, but even the compassion of the wicked is cruel."

Proverbs 12:10, NASB 1995

II. Stewardship vs. Ownership: The Earth Is the Lord's

The Theological Foundation That Makes Creation Care Theologically Necessary

A. Psalm 24:1 as the Framework for All Creation Ethics

The most important single text for the biblical theology of creation care is not Genesis 1:28's commission to subdue and rule but Psalm 24:1's declaration of divine ownership: "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (NASB 1995). This declaration is the theological framework within which the entire cultural mandate's dominion commission must be understood, and it is the theological foundation that makes creation care not merely a prudential concern or an ethical preference but a theological necessity. If the earth belongs to the Lord, if the creation is His property, entrusted to the image-bearing creature's stewardship rather than given over to the creature's autonomous ownership, then the quality of the stewardship is accountable to the Owner, and the exploitation or the destruction of the Owner's property without regard for the Owner's character and purposes is not merely an environmental problem but a theological one: a violation of the relationship between the steward and the Owner that the cultural mandate establishes.

The theological distinction between stewardship and ownership is fundamental to the biblical account of the human creature's relationship to the created order, and it is a distinction that the contemporary culture's account of environmental ethics consistently obscures. The contemporary environmental movement typically grounds the obligation of creation care in one of three frameworks: the intrinsic value of the natural world (the creation has value independent of its usefulness to human beings or its relationship to a Creator); the utilitarian calculation of human self-interest (we need a healthy environment for our own survival and flourishing); or the social contract of intergenerational justice (we owe future generations the same quality of environment that we have received

from previous generations). Each of these frameworks has genuine insights, but none of them provides the theological foundation that the biblical account provides: the obligation to care for the created order because the Creator owns it and will hold the steward accountable for the quality of the stewardship.

The stewardship framework transforms the character of the creation care obligation. The person who cares for the created order because she loves the Creator who owns it brings to the creation care a quality of motivation, a comprehensiveness of concern, and a permanence of commitment that the other frameworks cannot match. The love of the Creator is a love directed toward the One who owns the creation and who has entrusted its care to the human creature; and the care of the creation is, in the full theological sense, a dimension of the love of God, the steward's expression of love for the Owner through the faithful stewardship of the Owner's property. Leviticus 25:23's account of the land's Sabbath rest reinforces the Psalm 24:1 principle with specific agricultural application: "The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me" (NASB 1995). The human creature is the alien and the sojourner, the tenant, not the proprietor, in the land that belongs ultimately to the One who made it.

B. *The Landlord's Ledger: Accountability for the Quality of the Stewardship*

The vice-regal framework of the cultural mandate, the human creature governing the creation as the Lord's representative, accountable to the Lord for the quality of the governance, implies a specific form of accountability that the stewardship doctrine makes concrete. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) is the most theologically concentrated New Testament statement of the character of the steward's accountability: the servants who have been entrusted with the master's property are accountable to the master for the use they make of it, and the servant who buries his talent rather than developing it is judged not for stealing or destroying but for failing to develop and multiply what was entrusted to him. The cultural mandate's steward is similarly accountable: not merely for avoiding the most obvious forms of destruction and exploitation, but for the active development and the responsible preservation of the created order entrusted to her care.

The accountability framework has two specific implications for the practical ethics of creation care. The first is the obligation of restoration: the steward who has damaged or depleted the created order has a specific obligation to restore what has been damaged, to the extent that the restoration is possible and appropriate within the fallen world's conditions. The Levitical land law's Sabbath year and Jubilee provisions, the periodic rest of the land from cultivation (Leviticus 25:3–6) and the periodic return of sold land to its original tribal holders (Leviticus 25:10–13), established in the specific context of ancient Israelite agriculture a pattern of periodic restoration and renewal that reflects the steward's ongoing accountability for the long-term health and integrity of the land entrusted to her care. The second implication is the obligation of sustainability: the steward who depletes the created order's resources in ways that compromise the creation's capacity to sustain future stewardship has not merely made a prudential error but has violated the accountability that the stewardship relationship implies. The Landlord's property must be handed on in a condition that reflects the care of the faithful steward rather than the indifference of the exploitative tenant.

The intergenerational dimension of the stewardship accountability is emphasized throughout the Old Testament's land ethics. The land was not merely the current generation's resource; it was the inheritance of the generations to come, held in trust by the current generation for the benefit of those who would follow. The specific provisions of the Mosaic law that protected the land's long-term fertility, the sabbatical year's prohibition of cultivation (Leviticus 25:4–5), the prohibition of cutting down fruit trees in time of siege (Deuteronomy 20:19–20), and the prohibition of destroying a bird's nest while allowing the bird to survive (Deuteronomy 22:6–7), all reflect the same theological principle: the current generation holds the created order in trust for those who will follow, and the steward's accountability extends beyond the present generation's interests to the intergenerational integrity of the created order that the Lord entrusted to the human creature's care.

III. Against Environmental Exploitation: The Theological Indictment of Greed-Driven Destruction

When the Misuse of the Creation Dishonors the Creator Who Made It

A. *Exploitation as Theological Failure, Not Merely Environmental Problem*

The abuse of the created order for greed and short-term gain, the depletion of natural resources without regard for their renewal, the destruction of habitats for purely economic advantage, the pollution of air and water and soil in the service of profit, the treatment of the created order as a merely disposable resource for the satisfaction of human desires, is not merely an environmental problem that can be addressed by the natural sciences and public policy without theological resources. It is a theological failure: a violation of the stewardship relationship that the cultural mandate establishes, a desecration of the property of the One who declared the creation very good and who entrusted it to the human creature's responsible care, and a specific form of the idolatry of mammon that the love of money produces when it overrides the love of the Creator and the creation He has made.

The prophetic tradition's indictment of economic exploitation consistently connects the abuse of the land and its creatures to the failure of covenant faithfulness: the same prophets who condemn the exploitation of the poor in the marketplace condemn the depletion of the land and the abuse of the creation's resources as dimensions of the same fundamental failure of justice and covenant faithfulness. Hosea 4:1–3 provides one of the most striking instances: "There is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery; they employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and everyone who lives in it languishes along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky, and also the fish of the sea disappear" (NASB 1995). The ecological devastation, the mourning land, the languishing creatures, the disappearing fish, is presented as the direct consequence of the covenant failures of the human community that governs the land. The creation's condition reflects the quality of the stewardship, and the stewardship's failures are theological failures before they are environmental ones.

The specific contemporary forms of environmental exploitation that the biblical stewardship theology most directly addresses include the depletion of non-renewable resources at rates that deprive future generations of what they will need, the destruction of biodiversity through the elimination of species and habitats for short-term economic gain, and the pollution of the created order's basic systems, air, water, and soil, in ways that compromise the creation's capacity to sustain the human and non-human life that the cultural mandate's commission is designed to govern. Each of these failures is a specific violation of the shamar dimension of Genesis 2:15's vocational commission: the guarding and the preserving of the created order's integrity that the cultural mandate requires alongside the abad's active development. The steward who develops without preserving, who subdues without guarding, and who rules without regard for the long-term integrity of the creation being ruled has not fulfilled the cultural mandate's commission; she has exercised only half of it and has violated the other half.

B. *The Ethical Treatment of Animals as Dimension of the Dominion Mandate*

Proverbs 12:10's account of the righteous person's regard for the life of her animal extends the stewardship theology from the inanimate created order to the living creatures over whom the cultural mandate's dominion commission explicitly extends. The cultural mandate's radah over "the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28) is not the license for the unrestricted exploitation of animal life for purely human convenience; it is the commission for the governance of the animal world with the same accountability to the Creator that governs every other dimension of the cultural mandate's stewardship. The One who feeds the ravens (Luke 12:24) and knows the fall of every sparrow (Matthew 10:29) is the One in whose image the human creature governs the animal world, and the quality of the human creature's governance of the animal world reflects the character of the One whose image the governor bears.

The Old Testament's specific provisions for the care of animals reflect the same principle that Proverbs 12:10 states: the righteous governance of the animal world requires the regard for animal life that reflects the Creator's own regard for the creatures He has made. The prohibition of muzzling the ox while it treads out the grain (Deuteronomy 25:4), cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:9–10 as a principle of worker compensation, reflects the general principle that the animal's labor entitles it to the provision that sustains it. The prohibition of yoking an ox and a donkey together for plowing (Deuteronomy 22:10) reflects the regard for the welfare of animals who are incompatibly matched for labor. And the prohibition of taking a mother bird from her nest while taking her young (Deuteronomy 22:6–7) reflects the regard for the continuation of the species and the basic principles of ecological sustainability that the stewardship mandate implies.

The contemporary debates about factory farming, animal experimentation, and the treatment of animals in the food production system are debates to which the biblical theology of stewardship speaks with specific and practically relevant theological resources. The cultural mandate's commission to exercise *radah* over the animal world does not prohibit the use of animals for food, for labor, or for the kinds of human purposes that the creation's design has made animals suited for; it does not require the kind of full moral equivalence between human and animal life that the animal rights movement sometimes claims. But it does require the regard for the life of the animal, the specific quality of care and concern for the animal's wellbeing that reflects the righteous person's governance of the created order entrusted to her care, that Proverbs 12:10 describes. The way the Christian community treats animals is a specific expression of the theology of stewardship, and the church that has not addressed the ethics of the human creature's governance of the animal world has left a significant dimension of the cultural mandate's commission theologically unaddressed.

“For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.”

Romans 1:25, NASB 1995

IV. Against Environmental Idolatry: The Creator Is Not the Creation

The Fundamental Theological Error of Eco-Paganism and Deep Ecology

A. *The Error Defined: Worshiping the Creature Rather Than the Creator*

The environmental movement's most philosophically radical expressions, deep ecology, eco-paganism, Gaia spirituality, and various forms of earth-centered religion, represent a specific form of the idolatry that Romans 1:25 identifies as the fundamental religious error of the fallen human creature: they have “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever” (NASB 1995). The specific content of this exchange in the environmental context is the substitution of the creation for the Creator as the ultimate object of reverence, care, and devotion, the treatment of the natural world not as the very good work of a very good Creator but as itself the ultimate ground of value, the source of meaning, and the appropriate object of the reverence and the awe that belong to God alone.

The theological anatomy of environmental idolatry follows the same pattern that Romans 1:18–25 traces for every form of human idolatry: the suppression of the truth about the Creator that is plainly visible in the creation (vv. 19–20), the darkening of the understanding that the suppression produces (v. 21), the exchange of the glory of the incorruptible Creator for images made in the likeness of corruptible creatures (v. 23), and the consequent worship and service of the creature rather than the Creator (v. 25). Environmental idolatry is the specific form of this pattern in which the creation itself, the natural world in its beauty, its power, its complexity, and its interdependence, becomes the object of the reverence that the creature's experience of the creation's goodness should redirect toward the Creator who made it. The person who stands before the grandeur of a mountain range

and responds with the reverence that the grandeur provokes but directs that reverence toward the mountain rather than toward the One who made the mountain has committed the exchange that Romans 1:25 describes.

The philosophical frameworks of deep ecology and Gaia spirituality are sophisticated expressions of environmental idolatry that deserve careful theological engagement. Deep ecology, the environmental philosophy developed by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1912–2009), holds that all living beings have intrinsic value independent of their usefulness to human beings, that human beings have no right to reduce the richness and diversity of life except to satisfy vital needs, and that the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in the human population. The theological critique of deep ecology is not that it cares about the natural world, the biblical stewardship theology cares about it too, but that it grounds the care in the intrinsic value of the creation rather than in the value that derives from the Creator's ownership and care. The creation has value because the Creator made it and declared it good; the creation's value is derived rather than intrinsic, and the grounding of creation care in intrinsic value rather than in the Creator's ownership is the exchange of the truth of God for a lie that Romans 1:25 identifies as the root of every form of idolatry.

B. *The Theological Distinction Between Valuing and Worshiping the Creation*

The Christian's response to environmental idolatry must be a response that does not simply negate the concern that drives the idolatry but redirects it toward its proper object. The person who worships the creation has recognized something real and important about the creation: it is genuinely beautiful, genuinely good, genuinely worthy of care and attention and reverence, because it is the work of the One who is genuinely beautiful, genuinely good, and genuinely worthy of worship. The environmental idolater's mistake is not in valuing the creation but in stopping there, in treating the creation's beauty and goodness and complexity as self-grounding rather than as the reflection and the expression of the Creator's beauty and goodness and wisdom. The Christian's correction of the idolater is not the dismissal of the creation's value but the restoration of its proper theological context: the creation is glorious because its Creator is glorious, and the appropriate response to the creation's glory is the worship of the Creator who made it.

Calvin's account of the creation as the "theater of God's glory", developed throughout the Institutes and expressed most memorably in I.14.20's description of the world as "a dazzling theater" in which the divine glory is displayed, provides the theological framework that most precisely distinguishes the Christian's valuing of the creation from the idolater's worship of it. The theater of God's glory is genuinely glorious, the creation genuinely displays the divine perfections that the theater is designed to reveal, but the theater's glory points beyond itself to the Author of the drama and the Builder of the stage. The audience that admires the theater without attending to the drama, or that is so captured by the grandeur of the stage that it forgets to look for the One the stage was designed to display, has not fully received what the theater was designed to offer. The creation's beauty is the invitation to the worship of the Creator, and the creation care that the biblical stewardship theology requires is the care of the audience that loves the theater because it loves the One whose glory the theater displays.

Psalms 104's sustained meditation on the created order, which Lesson 21 introduced as the prayer focus's framework, provides the fullest single biblical expression of the proper theological relationship between the love of the creation and the worship of the Creator. The Psalm celebrates every dimension of the natural world with the specific, attentive, grateful delight of someone who knows the Creator of every creature she is celebrating: the springs that water the mountains (v. 10), the trees that the Lord waters (v. 16), the wild goats that the mountains belong to (v. 18), the lions that roar after their prey (v. 21), the sea that is "teeming with innumerable living things" (v. 25). The Psalm's doxological frame, beginning and ending with "Bless the Lord, O my soul" (vv. 1, 35), establishes that the attention to the creation's richness and variety is itself an act of worship directed toward the Creator: the delight in the creation is the delight in the Creator's work, and the appropriate response to the delight is the blessing of the One who made it.

V. The Biblical Balance: Creation Valued, Creator Worshiped

The Theology of Creation Care That Avoids Both Exploitation and Idolatry

A. *The Groaning of Creation: Romans 8:19–22 and Creation’s Eschatological Hope*

The most theologically profound and the most practically motivating biblical account of the relationship between the human creature and the created order is Paul’s account in Romans 8:19–22 of the creation’s own longing for redemption: “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (NASB 1995). The passage establishes the created order as a participant in the redemptive drama of the new creation, not a merely passive backdrop for the human creature’s redemptive story, but a creation that has its own stake in the eschatological outcome and that is waiting, with a patience and a longing that the passage personifies as eager anticipation and birth-pain groaning, for the liberation that will come with the glorification of the children of God.

The theological significance of Romans 8:19–22 for the theology of creation care is difficult to overstate. It establishes three specific convictions that together motivate the biblical account of responsible stewardship. First, the creation has a future: the groaning of the present is not the final word, and the exploitation and destruction of the created order is not the liberation it is looking for but the continuation of the slavery to corruption it is longing to escape. The creation that groans under the futility of the fall is waiting for the new creation’s liberation, not for the exploiter’s further depletion. Second, the creation’s liberation is connected to the human creature’s glorification: the creation waits for “the revealing of the sons of God” (v. 19) and will be liberated “into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (v. 21). The creation’s destiny is bound up with the human creature’s destiny, and the image-bearing creature’s redemption will be the occasion of the creation’s own liberation. Third, the creation’s groaning is a form of solidarity with the human creature’s own groaning: the same Spirit who intercedes for believers with groanings too deep for words (v. 26) intercedes within a creation that groans with them. The creation care that the biblical stewardship theology requires is the care of partners in the redemptive drama rather than merely of responsible landlords toward the property they are managing.

The eschatological hope of creation’s liberation, the new creation in which the created order is freed from its slavery to corruption and shares in the freedom of the glory of the children of God, provides the most powerful possible motivation for the faithful exercise of the creation care mandate in the present age. If the creation is going to be liberated, not annihilated, in the eschatological consummation, if the new creation is the renewal of the present creation rather than its replacement, then the stewardship of the present creation is the preparation of the creation that will be renewed, and the faithful exercise of the creation care mandate contributes to the inheritance that the new creation will receive. The steward who cares for the creation in the present age is not laboring in vain; she is caring for the creation that the Creator intends to liberate, and her faithful stewardship is a form of the hope that Hebrews 11:1 describes as the assurance of things hoped for.

B. *The Practical Ethics of Creation Care: Stewardship in Practice*

The biblical theology of creation care, grounded in the Creator’s ownership, motivated by love for the Creator, accountable for the quality of the stewardship, oriented toward the creation’s eschatological liberation, and holding the balance between the creation’s genuine goodness and the Creator’s exclusive claim to worship, generates a specific set of practical ethical commitments that distinguish the biblical account of environmental ethics from both the exploitative neglect of creation care and the idolatrous elevation of the creation to the status of the Creator’s equal. These commitments are not the derivation of a comprehensive environmental policy from biblical proof texts; they are the specific practical expressions of the theological convictions that the biblical account establishes, applied to the specific contexts of the contemporary world’s environmental challenges with the discernment that the Spirit’s wisdom and the community of faith’s deliberation provide.

The first practical commitment is the responsible stewardship of the natural resources entrusted to the human community's care, the avoidance of the depletion and the pollution and the destruction of the creation's basic systems that the exploitative misuse of the dominion mandate produces. This commitment is not the commitment of the environmentalist who values the natural world for its own sake, independent of its Creator; it is the commitment of the steward who values the natural world because she values the Creator who made it and who will hold her accountable for the quality of the stewardship. The second practical commitment is the ethical treatment of animals, the regard for the life of the animal that Proverbs 12:10 identifies as the specific mark of the righteous person's exercise of the dominion mandate. The third practical commitment is the promotion of the creation's long-term health and integrity across generations, the intergenerational stewardship that treats the created order as an inheritance to be handed on rather than a resource to be depleted. And the fourth practical commitment is the integration of the creation care motivation with the worship of the Creator, the cultivation of the doxological response to the natural world that Psalm 104 models, in which the attention to the creation's richness is itself an act of worship directed toward the One whose glory the creation displays.

The church's engagement with these practical commitments must be characterized by the same combination of theological clarity and cultural discernment that the broader cultural mandate's engagement requires. The specific policy questions, the specific environmental regulations, the specific technological approaches to energy production and resource management, the specific agricultural and land use practices that most faithfully express the stewardship mandate's principles, are complex and contested questions that the biblical theology of stewardship does not directly resolve, and on which faithful Christians with equal commitment to the stewardship mandate may reach different conclusions on the basis of different empirical assessments and different policy judgments. The church's contribution to the environmental conversation is not the provision of specific policy answers but the theological framework that establishes the stewardship obligation, motivates the creation care commitment, holds the balance between exploitation and idolatry, and orients the entire engagement toward the eschatological hope of the creation's liberation that transforms the present labor of responsible stewardship into an act of faith in the God who declared the creation very good and who will make it new.

VI. The Doxological Conclusion: The Creator's Good Creation Cared for to His Glory

Unit 7's Capstone and the Transition to Unit 8

The three lessons of Unit 7, the cultural mandate (Lesson 20), the theology of vocation (Lesson 21), and dominion and stewardship (Lesson 22), together constitute the Anthropology series' account of the image-bearing creature's calling in the created order. The cultural mandate established the comprehensive commission: fill the earth, subdue it, rule over it as the Creator's vice-regent. The theology of vocation established the sacred character of every lawful calling through which the mandate is exercised: every lawful work is done to the glory of God, as service to the Lord Christ, in the love of the neighbor who is served by the work. And the theology of creation care establishes the specific character of the dominion that the mandate commissions and the stewardship that the vice-regal accountability requires: the creation care of the steward who loves the Creator whose property the creation is, who honors the creation's goodness without worshiping the creation itself, who governs the created order with the benevolent care of the good shepherd rather than the exploitative extraction of the greedy tenant, and who labors in the present age with the eschatological hope of the creation's liberation that transforms the present stewardship into an act of faith in the God who will make all things new.

The doxological conclusion of Unit 7 is the specific form of the doxology that the theology of creation care produces: the worship of the Creator who made the very good creation and entrusted it to the image-bearing creature's stewardship, the gratitude of the creature who has received this extraordinary commission and who longs to exercise it faithfully, and the hope of the creature who knows that the creation she is caring for is the creation that the Creator will one day liberate in the freedom of the glory of the children of God. This is the

doxology that Psalm 104 models, the sustained, attentive, grateful celebration of every dimension of the natural world directed toward the praise of the One whose glory the natural world displays, and it is the doxology that the whole of Unit 7's theology of the cultural mandate, vocation, and creation care is designed to produce in the life of the image-bearing creature who has understood what she has been given and what she has been commissioned to do with it.

Unit 7's conclusion is simultaneously Unit 8's beginning: the series now turns from the cultural mandate and human vocation to the unity of the human race and the headship of Adam. Unit 8 (Lessons 23–25) will address the theological foundations for the unity of the human race, the doctrine of federal headship, and the transition to Hamartiology that the series' final unit will bring. The cultural mandate's account of the image-bearing creature's calling in the created order provides an essential foundation for Unit 8's account of the human community's solidarity under the first Adam: the one human race that the cultural mandate commissioned to fill the earth and exercise the delegated dominion is the same one human race that fell in Adam and that the Last Adam has redeemed. The creator of the one human race commissioned the one human community to exercise the cultural mandate together; the fall brought the whole of that community under the same condemnation; and the Last Adam's redemption restores the whole community, as a community of image-bearers from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, to the cultural mandate's commission in the power of the new creation's grace. The unity of the human race is not merely a biological or genealogical fact; it is a theological fact with comprehensive implications for the cultural mandate, for the doctrine of sin, and for the doctrine of redemption. Unit 8 develops these implications in the three lessons that bring the Anthropology series toward its completion.

“The creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Romans 8:21, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Environmental Stewardship	The biblical account of the human creature's responsibility toward the created order: the responsible development and preservation of the creation entrusted to the image-bearer's care, accountable to the Creator who owns it (Psalm 24:1), motivated by love for the Creator rather than intrinsic valuation of the creation, and oriented toward the eschatological liberation of the creation that Romans 8:21 promises. Environmental stewardship is distinguished from environmental exploitation (treating the creation as a merely disposable resource for human self-interest) and from environmental idolatry (treating the creation as the ultimate object of reverence and worship).
Environmental Exploitation	The abuse of the created order for greed and short-term gain, the depletion of natural resources without regard for their renewal, the destruction of habitats for purely economic advantage, the pollution of air, water, and soil in the service of profit, and the treatment of the created order as a merely disposable resource for the satisfaction of human desires. Environmental exploitation is a theological failure before it is an environmental problem: a violation of the stewardship relationship established by the cultural mandate, a desecration of the Creator's property (Psalm 24:1), and a specific form of the idolatry of mammon that overrides the love of the Creator and the creation He has made.
Environmental Idolatry	The worship of the created order in place of the Creator, the treatment of the natural world as the ultimate ground of value, the source of meaning, and the appropriate object of the reverence and awe that belong to God alone. Identified in Romans 1:25 as the exchange of "the truth of God for a lie" in the worship of "the creature rather than the Creator." Environmental idolatry is expressed in deep ecology, eco-paganism, Gaia spirituality, and other forms of nature-centered religion that treat the creation's goodness as self-grounding rather than as the reflection and expression of the Creator's character. The correction of environmental idolatry is not the dismissal of the creation's value but the restoration of its proper theological context.
Deep Ecology	The environmental philosophy developed by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1912–2009) holding that all living beings have intrinsic value independent of their usefulness to human beings, that the richness and diversity of life has value in itself, and that human beings have no right to reduce this richness except to satisfy vital needs. The biblical critique of deep ecology is not that it values the natural world but that it grounds the value in the creation's intrinsic worth rather than in the Creator's ownership and declaration of goodness. The creation's value is derived from the Creator's character and purposes, not intrinsic, which is the theologically decisive difference between biblical creation care and deep ecology's creation reverence.
Creation as Theater of God's Glory	Calvin's account of the creation in the Institutes (I.14.20) as a "dazzling theater" in which the divine glory is displayed: the created order is genuinely glorious because it reflects the perfections of the Creator who made it, and the appropriate response to the creation's glory is the worship of the Creator whose glory the creation displays. The theater metaphor captures the theological distinction between valuing and worshiping the creation: the theater is glorious, but its glory

	points beyond itself to the Author of the drama. The creation's beauty is the invitation to the worship of the Creator, and the proper response to the creation's glory is the doxology of the creature who sees in the creation the face of the One who made it.
Groaning of Creation (Romans 8:19–22)	Paul's personification of the created order's longing for the eschatological liberation that will come with the glorification of the children of God: "the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (v. 22). The groaning creation is not the creation that will be destroyed in the eschaton but the creation that is waiting to be liberated, that has been subjected to futility not willingly but in hope of the liberation that the new creation will bring. The groaning of creation provides the strongest possible motivation for the faithful exercise of the creation care mandate: the creation the steward cares for is the creation that the Creator intends to liberate, and the present stewardship is a dimension of the hope in the eschatological redemption that the Spirit is already producing in the hearts of those who groan with the creation for the new creation's fullness.
Sabbatical Year / Jubilee	The Old Testament's cyclical provisions for the periodic rest and restoration of the created order. The Sabbatical year (every seventh year) required the land to lie fallow, unplowed and unsown, so that it could recover from six years of cultivation (Leviticus 25:3–6). The Jubilee (every fiftieth year) required the return of sold land to its original tribal holders and the liberation of debt-slaves (Leviticus 25:10–13). Together, these provisions established the theological principle of the creation's periodic restoration: the land belongs to the Lord (Leviticus 25:23), and the human community holds it in trust, accountable to the Owner for the long-term integrity of what it governs.
Intergenerational Stewardship	The stewardship obligation that extends beyond the current generation's interests to the long-term health and integrity of the created order across generations. Grounded in the Old Testament's land ethics (the land is held in trust for future generations, Leviticus 25:23), the Deuteronomic prohibitions of ecological destruction (Deuteronomy 20:19–20; 22:6–7), and the vice-regal accountability that the cultural mandate's stewardship implies. The steward who depletes the created order's resources in ways that compromise its capacity to sustain future stewardship has not merely made a prudential error but has violated the accountability that the Landlord's ownership requires.
Lynn White Jr.'s Critique	The influential 1967 essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (Science, 155:1203–1207) by historian Lynn White Jr. (1907–1987), which argued that the Judeo-Christian doctrine of dominion in Genesis 1:28 was directly responsible for the Western world's exploitative relationship to the natural environment, by placing the human creature as the sovereign lord of the natural world and removing any sense of the sacred from the created order. White's argument was historically simplistic (the ecological crisis predated the specifically Christian cultural dominance he attributed it to) and theologically distorted (the vice-regal accountability and the shamar of Genesis 2:15 constrain the dominion commission), but it has been extraordinarily influential and has required the church to engage more carefully with the actual meaning of the dominion language.

Psalm 104 Doxology

The Psalter's most sustained meditation on the created order as the display of the Creator's glory and the occasion for the creature's worship. Psalm 104 celebrates every dimension of the natural world, the mountains and the springs, the trees and the birds, the lions and the sea creatures, with the specific, attentive, grateful delight of the creature who knows the Creator of every creature being celebrated. Its doxological frame ("Bless the Lord, O my soul," vv. 1, 35) establishes that the attention to the creation's richness is itself an act of worship directed toward the Creator: the delight in the creation is the delight in the Creator's work, and the appropriate response is the blessing of the One who made it. Psalm 104 is the biblical model of creation care without idolatry.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the created order has genuine theological value, not the self-grounding intrinsic value of deep ecology's account, but the derived and genuine value of the Creator's declaration that the creation He made is very good. The creation's goodness is not merely the goodness of its usefulness to human beings; it is the goodness of the Creator's own character expressed in the work of His hands. The Christian who holds this conviction will bring to the creation a quality of care, attention, and delight that the exploitation error's purely instrumental account of the natural world cannot produce, because the Christian cares for the creation as the very good work of the very good God who owns it and who will hold her accountable for the quality of the stewardship.

We must also believe that the creation care motivation is fundamentally different from the environmental idolater's motivation. The Christian does not care for the created order because the creation is the ultimate ground of value or the source of meaning or the appropriate object of reverence; she cares for it because the Creator who owns it is the ultimate ground of value, and the care of His property is one expression of her love for Him. This Godward motivation for creation care is not a weakening of the commitment but a deepening of it, the commitment grounded in the love of the Creator is more durable, more comprehensive, and more theologically coherent than the commitment grounded in the intrinsic value of the creation or the utilitarian calculation of human self-interest.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let Psalm 104's model of doxological attention to the created world shape the specific character of your engagement with the natural order. The Psalm's sustained, attentive, grateful celebration of every dimension of the natural world, from the mountain springs to the sea creatures, is the specific affective posture that the theology of creation care produces in the person who has understood that the creation is the theater of God's glory. The Christian who walks through the natural world with the same attentive, grateful, doxological attention that the Psalmist brings to his celebration of it, who sees in the hawk's flight the artistry of the One who designed it, and in the vineyard's harvest the generosity of the One who sustains it, and in the ocean's vastness the power of the One who bounds it, is practicing the theology of creation care in its most fundamental form: the love of the Creator expressed through the attentive delight in the Creator's work.

Desire also the specific quality of solidarity with the groaning creation that Romans 8:22–23 describes. The creation that groans under the futility of the fall groans together with the believer who also groans inwardly, awaiting the redemption of her body. The solidarity of the creature's groaning with the creation's groaning produces a specific quality of compassion and care for the creation's condition that the purely utilitarian account of environmental ethics cannot generate: the care of those who are suffering together, waiting together, hoping together for the liberation that the new creation will bring.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Psalm 104 in full, attending to each of the specific dimensions of the natural world that the Psalmist celebrates. For each celebration, ask: what does this specific dimension of the natural order reveal about the character of the Creator who made it? How does the Psalm's attention to the natural world function as a form of worship? And what specific practices of attentiveness to the natural world in your own daily life would most effectively cultivate the Psalm 104 doxology as a living dimension of your theology of creation care?
- Identify one specific way in which the environmental exploitation error, the treatment of the created order as a merely disposable resource for short-term human gain, is most visible in the specific context in which

you live and serve. It may be the specific agricultural practices of the region, the specific industrial practices of the local economy, the specific consumer habits of the congregation, or some other form of the dominion mandate's misuse. Then identify one specific, practically feasible initiative through which the congregation could begin to address that specific form of the exploitation error, not as a political program but as a theological act of faithful stewardship accountability.

- **Read Al Wolters's *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (1985, revised 2005), chapters 3–4.** Wolters's account of the structure and direction of the creation, the creation's God-given structures as the framework within which the cultural mandate is exercised, and sin as the misdirection of those structures away from their Creator's purposes, provides the most theologically precise Reformed account of the relationship between creation, fall, and cultural engagement available in the contemporary tradition. For the specifically environmental dimensions of the theology, Eugene Peterson's essay "The Gospel of Place" (in *Subversive Spirituality*, 1994) and Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man* (1970) provide the most pastorally accessible evangelical treatments of the creation care mandate's practical implications.
- Conduct a brief creation care audit of the congregation you serve: what specific practices of the congregation's common life, in the use of the building, the management of the grounds, the consumption habits that the congregation's activities produce, most clearly reflect either the faithful stewardship or the exploitative neglect of the creation care mandate? Identify one specific area where the congregation's practice most significantly falls short of the stewardship accountability that Psalm 24:1's divine ownership requires, and propose one specific, concrete step toward more faithful stewardship in that area.
- Spend time this week reading Romans 8:18–25 meditatively, attending to Paul's account of the solidarity between the believer's groaning and the creation's groaning as they both await the eschatological liberation. Reflect on the specific ways in which the creation care mandate's present exercise is connected to the eschatological hope of the creation's liberation. What difference does the eschatological hope make to the present stewardship? Does the knowledge that the creation will be liberated, not annihilated, motivate the present stewardship with a quality of hope that the purely secular environmental account of creation care cannot provide? And what specific practices of creation care in your daily vocational life would most directly express the eschatological hope that the creation's groaning and the believer's groaning together produce?

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Where would you locate the congregation you serve on the spectrum between the exploitation error (treating the created order as a merely disposable resource for human self-interest) and the idolatry error (treating the created order as the ultimate ground of value independent of the Creator)? Is the congregation's primary temptation the neglect of creation care in the name of prioritizing the specifically spiritual dimensions of the Christian life, or the absorption of environmentalist concerns in ways that risk the idolizing of the creation? What specific evidence from the congregation's life and culture most clearly demonstrates the direction of its primary temptation?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Psalm 24:1–2 in the context of the Psalm as a whole. What is the primary theological claim of verses 1–2, and how does it ground the Psalm's subsequent account of who is worthy to ascend the Lord's mountain (vv. 3–6) and of the Lord's entry into His city (vv. 7–10)? What does the connection between the Creator's ownership of the earth (v. 1) and the Lord's worthiness to be welcomed as the King of glory (vv. 7–10) establish about the theological relationship between the creation's belonging to the Lord and the Lord's claim on the worship of those who dwell in it?
- Read Romans 8:18–25 in full. What is Paul's specific account of the creation's present condition and its future hope? What does the personification of the creation as "eagerly waiting" (v. 19) and "groaning" (v. 22) suggest about the character of the creation's relationship to the eschatological liberation that Paul promises? And what is the specific connection Paul draws between the creation's liberation and the glorification of the children of God? How does this connection between the human creature's redemption and the creation's liberation bear on the motivation for faithful creation care in the present age?
- Read Romans 1:18–25. What is the specific theological anatomy of idolatry that Paul traces in this passage? How does the idolater's exchange of "the truth of God for a lie" (v. 25) proceed through the suppression of the knowledge of God that is available in the creation (v. 19–20), the darkening of the understanding (v. 21), and the worship of the creature rather than the Creator (v. 25)? How does environmental idolatry specifically instantiate this general anatomy of idolatry?
- Read Proverbs 12:10. What does the juxtaposition of the righteous person's regard for the life of her animal and the wicked person's cruel "compassion" suggest about the relationship between the character of the person and the quality of her governance of the created order? How does Proverbs 12:10 ground the obligation of ethical treatment of animals in the character of the righteous person rather than in the intrinsic value of the animal? And what does this character-based account of the animal care obligation suggest about the relationship between the theology of virtue and the theology of stewardship?
- Read Leviticus 25:1–12. What is the theological rationale the passage gives for the Sabbatical year ("the land shall have a sabbath to the Lord," v. 2) and the Jubilee ("you shall have the trumpet sound on the tenth day of the seventh month," v. 9)? How does Leviticus 25:23's statement that "the land ... shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine" relate the specific agricultural provisions of the Sabbatical year and Jubilee to the broader theological principle of divine ownership? And what does the Sabbatical year's provision for the land's rest suggest about the stewardship obligation of periodic restoration and renewal?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson distinguishes between the creation's genuine value (as the very good work of the very good Creator) and the Creator's exclusive claim to worship, and argues that the appropriate response to the creation's beauty and goodness is the worship of the Creator who made it rather than the veneration of the creation itself. Is this distinction as clear and as easy to maintain in practice as it is in theory? What specific circumstances, the experience of the natural world's grandeur, beauty, or complexity, most directly tempt

the spiritually sensitive person toward the idolizing of the creation rather than the worshiping of its Creator? And what specific spiritual practices and theological convictions most effectively maintain the proper distinction?

- The lesson argues that the biblical motivation for creation care, love for the Creator who owns the creation and accountability to the Creator for the quality of the stewardship, is more durable, more comprehensive, and more theologically coherent than the alternatives (intrinsic value, utilitarian self-interest, intergenerational justice). Do you find this claim persuasive? Are there specific dimensions of the environmental ethics question for which one of the alternative motivations provides more practically useful resources than the theological motivation the lesson commends? And how does the distinctively biblical motivation for creation care most clearly distinguish the Christian environmentalist from the secular environmentalist?
- The lesson treats the groaning of creation in Romans 8:22 as providing one of the strongest motivations for the faithful exercise of the creation care mandate in the present age: the creation the steward cares for is the creation that the Creator intends to liberate, and the present stewardship is a dimension of the eschatological hope. Do you find this eschatological motivation for creation care compelling? Does the prospect of the creation's liberation in the new creation genuinely motivate present creation care, or does it risk producing the opposite effect, a quietism that says the creation's liberation is God's work rather than the steward's responsibility? How does the lesson's account of the relationship between present stewardship and eschatological hope avoid this quietist misreading?
- Lynn White Jr.'s critique argued that the Genesis 1:28 dominion language was responsible for the Western world's exploitative environmental practices. The lesson argues that White's account was historically simplistic and theologically distorted. Having worked through the lesson's account of the dominion language, the vice-regal accountability, the shamar's preserving care, the divine ownership of Psalm 24:1, and the good shepherd model of benevolent governance, how compelling do you find the lesson's counter-argument? Are there dimensions of White's critique that the lesson's theological account does not adequately address?
- The lesson closes with the observation that the specific policy questions of environmental ethics, specific regulations, technologies, agricultural and land use practices, are complex and contested questions on which faithful Christians may reach different conclusions on the basis of different empirical assessments and policy judgments. Is this observation adequate and appropriate, or does the biblical theology of stewardship provide more specific policy guidance than the lesson suggests? What specific environmental policy questions do you believe the biblical theology of stewardship most directly addresses, and what specific questions does it leave open to the kind of prudential deliberation the lesson describes?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson identifies four practical commitments that the biblical theology of creation care generates: (1) responsible stewardship of natural resources; (2) ethical treatment of animals; (3) intergenerational stewardship; and (4) doxological engagement with the natural world. For each commitment, identify one specific way in which the congregation you serve currently honors the commitment and one specific way in which it falls short of the commitment. Then identify the single practical initiative that would most effectively develop the congregation's faithful exercise of the most underdeveloped commitment.
- The lesson argues that the ethical treatment of animals is a specific dimension of the cultural mandate's dominion commission, grounded in Proverbs 12:10's account of the righteous person's regard for the life of her animal. How adequately does the congregation you serve engage with the ethical dimensions of the human creature's governance of the animal world? Is the ethical treatment of animals a topic that receives sustained theological attention in the congregation's preaching, teaching, and formation, or is it treated as a peripheral concern of animal rights activists rather than a dimension of the cultural mandate's

stewardship? What specific formation would most effectively develop the congregation's theological engagement with the ethics of animal governance?

- Unit 7 concludes with this lesson, and the series moves to Unit 8 on the unity of the human race and the headship of Adam. Before entering Unit 8, reflect on the continuity between the cultural mandate's account of the one human community commissioned to fill and subdue and rule the earth (Unit 7) and the Pauline account of the one human race that fell in Adam and is redeemed in the Last Adam (Unit 8). How does the theological unity of the human race established by the cultural mandate inform the theological unity established by the Adamic federal headship? And how does the cultural mandate's account of the human community's solidarity in the exercise of the vice-regal commission prepare the ground for Unit 8's account of the human community's solidarity in the fall and in the redemption?
- The lesson's account of Psalm 104 as the biblical model of creation care without idolatry suggests that the doxological attention to the natural world is itself a form of worship. What specific practices of doxological engagement with the natural world, what specific forms of attentive, grateful, Psalm 104-shaped attention to the creation's richness, would most effectively cultivate the theology of creation care as a living dimension of the congregation's worship and spiritual formation? And how would you distinguish the Psalm 104 doxology from the environmental idolatry that it visually resembles, both involving sustained, attentive engagement with the natural world, in a way that is clear and practically useful for the congregation?
- The three lessons of Unit 7 together constitute a comprehensive theology of the image-bearing creature's calling in the created order. Write a brief (one paragraph) summary of the theological account of the human vocation that Unit 7 has provided, suitable for sharing with a congregation member who has not worked through the formal lessons. The summary should cover the cultural mandate's commission (Lesson 20), the sacred character of every lawful calling (Lesson 21), and the stewardship responsibility of the dominion mandate (Lesson 22) in a form that is theologically grounded and practically accessible. After writing the summary, identify the single most important theological conviction that the summary must communicate and the single most common misunderstanding of the human vocation that the summary most directly addresses.

Prayer Focus

Open this twenty-second lesson of the Anthropology series, the capstone of Unit 7 and the conclusion of the series' treatment of the cultural mandate and human vocation, with a reading of Psalm 8 and Psalm 104 together, allowing the two Psalms to frame the theology of dominion and stewardship in its full doxological context. Read Psalm 8 first, as the Psalm of the image-bearing creature's astonished discovery of the commission entrusted to her: "Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet" (Psalm 8:5–6, NASB 1995). The commission is a crown, not a conquest; a responsibility, not a right; a trust, not a title to ownership. Then read Psalm 104, as the Psalm of the creation that the commission entrusts to the image-bearer's care: the springs and the mountains, the grass and the cattle, the birds and the trees, the sea and its creatures, all sustained by the One who makes the grass grow and appointed the seasons and provides food in due time for every creature that waits upon Him (vv. 27–29). The creation that Psalm 104 celebrates is the creation that Psalm 8's commission entrusts to the image-bearer's care; and the doxology that frames both Psalms, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!" and "Bless the Lord, O my soul", is the doxology that the theology of dominion and stewardship is designed to produce: the worship of the One who owns the creation, who entrusted it to the image-bearer's care, and whose glory is displayed in every dimension of the very good work He made.

Spend time in Trinitarian adoration, allowing the theology of creation care to deepen your worship of the Triune God who made, sustains, and will renew the creation entrusted to the image-bearer's stewardship. Begin with the Father, the Creator who owns the earth and all it contains (Psalm 24:1), who declared the whole creation very good, who subjected the creation to futility in hope of its liberation (Romans 8:20), and who will one day liberate the creation into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:21). Adore the Father who is the Landlord of the creation, whose ownership grounds the steward's accountability, whose character defines the quality of the governance the steward is commissioned to exercise, and whose purposes for the creation extend beyond the present age's frustrated exercise of the cultural mandate to the eschatological consummation in which the creation will be fully and finally what the Creator always designed it to be. Move to the Son, through whom the creation was made and in whom it holds together (Colossians 1:16–17), who in the Incarnation entered the creation He had made and honored it with the full weight of His personal presence, who healed the creation's distortions by restoring the blind to sight and the lame to walking and the dead to life, and whose resurrection is the first fruits of the creation's own eschatological liberation. Adore the Son who is the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from the dead, who is both the creation's source and its eschatological goal, and in whom the creation's groaning and the creature's groaning will find their final resolution. Conclude with the Spirit, who hovered over the waters of the original creation (Genesis 1:2), who is present in the creation's groaning as the One who intercedes for the children of God with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26), and who is even now at work in the hearts of the image-bearing stewards renewing the image of the One who designed the creation and entrusted it to their care, producing in them the love of the Creator that motivates the faithful exercise of the stewardship mandate.

Pray together at the close of Unit 7 in three specific directions. First, for the faithful exercise of the creation care mandate: that the congregation would develop the specific combination of theological conviction and practical commitment that the biblical account of dominion and stewardship requires, caring for the created order because they love the Creator who owns it, governing the animal world with the regard for the life of the animal that Proverbs 12:10 describes as the mark of the righteous, and stewarding the natural resources entrusted to the community's care with the intergenerational accountability that the divine ownership of Psalm 24:1 requires. Second, for the avoidance of both errors: that the congregation would be formed in the biblical balance between the exploitation error's treatment of the creation as a merely disposable resource and the idolatry error's treatment of the creation as the ultimate ground of value and the appropriate object of reverence, holding the creation's genuine goodness and the Creator's exclusive claim to worship together in the specific form of the doxological creation care that Psalm 104 models. Third, in anticipation of Unit 8: pray for the transition from the

cultural mandate's account of the human community's vocation in the created order to Unit 8's account of the human community's unity and solidarity under the federal headship of the first and the Last Adam. Pray that the theological continuity between the commission given to the one human race and the condemnation shared by the one human race and the redemption offered to the one human race in the Last Adam would illuminate the unity and the comprehensiveness of God's purposes for the creature He made in His own image and entrusted with the care of the very good creation He made for His own glory.

"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!"

Psalm 8:1, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Genesis 1:28; 2:15; Psalm 8; 24:1; 72:1–14; 104; Proverbs 12:10; Leviticus 25:1–12, 23; Deuteronomy 20:19–20; 22:6–7; Hosea 4:1–3; Romans 1:18–25; 8:18–25; Colossians 1:15–17*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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