

How to be Green

By Rev. Carl Gnewuch

Open with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study of the Word.

My daughter recently took second place in a German language poetry recitation competition at a heritage festival in Ann Arbor. Part of her award was a t-shirt left over from the previous year's competition. I congratulated her effort and complimented the shirt. She agreed the shirt looked "cool" but sadly said she could not wear it. Surprised, I asked why she couldn't wear a shirt she liked. She said, "Because it is hot pink, and I have red hair!" Oh. So I turned to my wife with her dark brown hair and said, "Well, maybe mom can wear it ..." My wife said she could not wear it either. "Hot pink," she explained, "usually only looks good on blondes."

What colors "work" for you? If you are working through this study in a group, take a few minutes to discuss the colors you can or cannot wear.

bible study



Color often represents our identity. From the color of our clothing to the color of our skin and hair, color displays who we are and with whom we identify. We wear purple at LWML gatherings. We wear black when we mourn. We may wear red, white, and blue to display patriotism in July and green on St. Patrick's Day in March.

We may also use color intentionally to divide us. University of Michigan fans wear blue and maize, while Michigan State fans wear green; and Ohio State fans wear red. In Ireland, Protestants wear orange to distinguish themselves from their political rivals, the Catholics, who wear green. In America, we associate colors with particular political organizations: We say "red states" vote Republican and "blue states" vote Democratic.

While various colors are welcome, divisions have no place in the church. Our citizenship is in heaven, which is white. White light is the full spectrum of color. "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (**1 Corinthians 1:10**). So how do we set political divisions aside when we address the issue of environmental stewardship? Efforts to conserve the environment are said to be "green." How can we be "green" without being "red" or "blue"? We start by considering our motives.

For instance, consider what might motivate you to want to conserve energy by adjusting the thermostat a few degrees warmer during the summer and cooler during the winter. Discuss your thoughts with the others in your group.

Now, for the moment, consider any motivation from your list that is your response to the Good News that as a believer in Christ, you are a new creation. In other words, what motivates you to turn down the thermostat that will make a difference for all eternity?

Let's turn to Scripture to look for the "eternal motivation" for environmental stewardship. In the 25th chapter of Matthew, we learn that Jesus takes personally our regard for the least. The reward that the righteous receive will surprise the recipients, who will wonder when they had the opportunity to serve the Lord. Jesus responds, "Whatever you have done for the least of my brothers, you have done to me" (**Matthew 25:40b**). When we love the least, we love the Lord who loves the least.

The Lord's love for the least extends beyond mankind to include all creation. Read **Jonah 4:5–11**; **Matthew 6:26–30**.

The Lord is not only concerned about the inhabitants of Nineveh — but for the animals in the city and even the vine that sheltered Jonah! Our heavenly Father cares for the spar-

rows in the air and the lilies in the field. **Psalm 24:1** says, "The earth is the Lord's — and everything in it." All creation is precious to the Creator of heaven and earth. The Lord's love for His creation even has eternal implications. Read **Romans 8:18–23**.

Our adoption as God's children includes the hope "that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (**Romans 8:21**).

The great flood was God's most dramatic act of conservation. Through the flood, the Lord set Noah and his family (eight souls in all) apart from the corruption of sin (**1 Peter 3:18–22**). In the same act, He also saved the various species of the world (**Genesis 9:8–17**). Now all creation "groans in eager anticipation" for the day in which the Lord will be revealed. In the meantime, God has signed the sky with the rainbow, sealing His promises for all creation with the colors from His pen.

Our eternal motive to care for God's creation springs from His own care and regard for His creation, including us! "We love, because He first loved us" (**1 John 4:19**). This forms the basis for our unity, our agreement as Christians to be good stewards of the environment. Other additional earthly incentives we might wish to add to the eternal motive may have some value for the present. That's fine. We need not quibble about such things. Earthly motives do not unite us; neither should they divide us.

Take a few minutes now to consider specific ways you can respond to God's love for you and all creation by being a good steward of the environment.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, awaken in my heart a desire to be a good steward of Your creation. Help me see how I can "avoid polluting air, land and water; carefully dispose of waste; use rather than waste natural resources; conserve rather than waste energy; recycle or reuse materials whenever possible; and value and take care of all God's creation;"* that Your name may be glorified in my life, together with the name of Your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.

*Adapted from Note, Q: 112 of *Luther's Small Catechism*, 1986, p.115.

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