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The Fate of Creation in the *Eschaton*

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Apart from the nature and timing of the millennium, God's actions toward his creation at the end of this age mark one of the most debated ideas among conservative Christians. Several views are commonly held, the most common of which are the annihilation view and the restoration view. This essay argues the restoration view is the most consistent with the text of 2 Pet 3:10, that the restoration of all creation is consistent with a canonical view of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that it is the appropriate view to instill a proper motivation for creation care among Christians.

Key Words: annihilation, creation, eschaton, judgment

If the creation is going to be completely destroyed and entirely recreated when Christ comes again, why bother with environmental ethics? That question, according to its common reception, is the supposed point behind James Watt's infamous comment in a Congressional hearing, "I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns."[1] Watt, a Pentecostal Christian, disputes the popular interpretation of his comment as a rejection of concern for the environment.[2] However Watt intended his comments, the reception of his words accurately reflects a common understanding among evangelicals of the fate of creation in eschatological terms. More important than theories of the nature and timing of the millennium, the transition to the New Heavens and New Earth is, possibly, the most significant eschatological concept for environmental ethics.

[1] For example, this is quoted in Steven Bouma-Pediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 71. When viewed in its context, however, the comment has clearly been misrepresented. See Ron Arnold, *At the Eye of the Storm: James Watt and the Environmentalists* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 75.

[2] James Watt, "The Religious Left's Lies," http:// www.washingtonpost.com /wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/20/AR2005052001333.html.

Among evangelicals there are two main views of the fate of creation in the *eschaton*.[3] The first, the annihilation perspective, is the idea that the heavens and the earth will be completely destroyed and re-created *ex nihilo* on the Day of the Lord.[4] The second basic perspective is the restoration view, which holds that at the final judgment creation will be purified and then renewed to a state of glorified goodness.[5]

The annihilation view is a common perspective in some strains of contemporary evangelicalism.[6] It is particularly popular among classical dispensationalists.[7] This perspective holds that the present world will be utterly destroyed and that a new creative act, which is parallel to the Genesis

[3] A third view, the escapist view, which anticipates total destruction of the earth and eternal existence of human souls in a disembodied state, is also popular in some versions of folk Christian eschatology, but it is difficult to document. Representations in popular culture include cartoon depictions of the dead playing harps on clouds and similar ideas that humans exist eternally in a disembodied state. The view is sufficiently common that Norman Wirzba writes, "Many theologians believe bodies to be something that must finally be overcome and left behind" (*From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015], 22). Unfortunately, Wirzba cites no theologians who argue for eternal disembodied existence, in part, because few, if any, examples of published theologians arguing for that position exist. Jaroslav Pelikan shows that the escapist view has roots in early Gnostic heresy (*The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition [100–600]* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971], 81–97.

[4] One danger in using the term "annihilation" here is the potential confusion of those arguing for the complete destruction and *ex nihilo* re-creation of the cosmos with individuals who argue that the unregenerate will escape eternal judgment due to annihilation. The authors prefer the term "destructionist view" but have chosen to refer to the perspective as annihilationist in following previous discussions of the main textual issue. See Gale Z. Heide, "What Is New About the New Heaven and New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," *JETS* 40.1 (1997): 37–56 and Matthew Y. Emerson, "Does God Own a Death Star? The Destruction of the Cosmos in 2 Peter 3:1–13," *SWJT* 57.2 (2015): 281–93.

[5] Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 272–73. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1158–61.

[6] Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13–37. A prime example of this is John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 109–25.

[7] Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1958), 552–53; and *Prophecy for Today: An Exposition of the Major Themes in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 181. It may be noted that Pentecost uses the word

1 creation *ex nihilo*, will occur to establish the new heavens and the new earth. Adherents of this view cite biblical references to a new heaven and a new earth such as Isa 65:17 and Rev 21:1, as well as the ostensible destruction of the earth indicated in some translations of 2 Pet 3:10.[8]

The second common perspective is the restoration view. Proponents of this view hold that the overarching narrative of Scripture indicates that creation will be purified by fire, but then it will be renewed, rather than destroyed, and distinctly re-created. This can also be supported by a textual variant in 2 Pet 3:10, accompanied by an alternate translation with the understanding that the word translated "new" in 2 Pet 3:10 refers to a *renewed* heaven and earth, not a unique, different, or completely new heaven and earth from the present ones.

This article examines the support for the restoration view of eschatology by studying 2 Pet 3, the fulfillment of the gospel through the renewal of creation as shown by a broad canonical perspective, and argues that the restoration view contributes to a robust and biblical environmental ethics.

2 Peter 3:10 Re-Examined

The restoration of creation is consistent with a careful reading of 2 Pet 3.[9] The discussion of this passage is complicated by the presence of a

"dissolution" instead of "annihilation" or "destruction," but it is clear that he predicts a complete destruction with a completely new creative action to establish the new heavens and new earth, which parallels God's original creation of the present heaven and earth (*Things to Come*, 561). In his commentary on Revelation, Grant Osborne advocates total destruction followed by re-creation (*Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 729–31), particularly 730n4. See also *Bible Truths for Christian Schools*, 2nd ed. (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1988), 97. Cf. J. Vernon McGee, *Second Peter* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 84–87. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, progressive dispensationalists, use language which implies the restoration view of eschatology but do not go into great detail in their *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 264–70. The annihilation view is not unanimous even among classic dispensationalists, as Clarence Larkin argues for the "renovation" of earth after purification by fire in his classic book (*Rightly Dividing the Word* [New York: Cosimo, 2005], 27–28).

[8] The best academic defense of the annihilation view is R. Larry Overstreet, "A Study of 2 Peter 3:10–13," *BSac* 137 (1980): 354–71 (esp. 365).

[9] This essay can hope to do little that others have not previously done well with regard to exegesis and interpretation of the questionable passages. The contribution of this essay is in demonstrating the significance of a proper reading of 2 Pet 3:10 for environmental ethics. See Emerson, "The Destruction of the Cosmos in 2 Peter 3:1–13," 281–93; Al Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism

textual issue which has served to obscure the meaning of Peter's comments on the new earth. The KJV renders 2 Pet 3:10 as saying that "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." In contrast, the ESV translates the same phrases as, "the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed." A major difference exists between the rendering of the same Greek word, στοικεῖα, as both "elements" and "heavenly bodies." Another clear difference exists between the two translations which invites the question how being "burned up" can be confused with being "exposed" since the Greek words for the two are significantly different.

Στοικεῖα may be translated in several different ways. At times it was used to refer to the four basic elements, heavenly bodies, or angelic powers.[10] Another possible translation would coincide with the use of the

in 2 Peter 3:10," *WTJ* 49 (1987): 405–13; Heide, "What Is New About the New Heaven and New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," 37–56.

[10] Peter Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 284; Kittel, ed., *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [*TNDT*] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), s.v., "στοικιον." For support of heavenly bodies, see Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1901), 297. Gene L. Green provides support for the position of στοικεῖα meaning all material things (*Jude and 2 Peter* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 330). Commentaries on the use of this word in other places in Scripture are similarly divided as to the meaning of the word. On Gal 4:3, 9, see Ronald Y. K. Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 181, 190–91. Fung supports the reading of elementary teaching. Cf. Ernest de Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1921), 510–18. Burton supports the idea of "rudimentary religious teachings." Contra Timothy George, *Galatians* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 294–99. George supports the translation "spiritual powers." On Col 2:8, 20, see Douglas Moo, *Letter to the Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 187–93. Moo comments that "the rarity of the expression makes it overwhelmingly likely that the phrase had the same meaning in Galatians as in the Colossians texts" (ibid., 188). By extension this argument can be used to support the same meaning in all books of Scripture. Moo holds that the reading of elementary principles is well attested (ibid., 189) and comes to support the view in Galatians (ibid., 192). See also, Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville: B&H, 1991), 259n179. Melick holds the meaning as "elementary" and comments that it is the most likely meaning in 2 Pet 3:10. Cf. T. K. Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1953), 247–48.

same word outside of 2 Peter; five of the uses of the term in Scripture refer to false or immature moral principles (cf. Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20; Heb 5:12). There are merits of each of the translations of στοικεῖα, but it appears to make more sense for the faulty philosophies to be destroyed rather than the other options when the next textual issue is considered.

The difference between being "burned up" and "revealed" is a more vexing problem because it has its root in a textual variant. The *Textus Receptus*, upon which the KJV relies, uses the word κατακαήσεται, meaning "will be burned up." The Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus both contain the word εὑρεθήσεται, which can be rendered "will be found."[11] According to Wolters, every major critical edition of the New Testament text since the late nineteenth century has used the latter word because it exists in the earliest manuscripts.[12] On the other hand, Metzger contends that although many of the oldest manuscripts have εὑρεθήσεται, there is a high degree of doubt about its veracity—this despite the fact that the UBS committee chose the εὑρεθήσεται reading. According to Metzger, the large number of textual variants and relative lack of consistency leave the wording questionable, and the majority of the variants tend to imply dissolution of the earth.[13] Metzger states that generally, "the more difficult

Abbott supports elementary teaching, or things with which the world is concerned. Wilson supports the idea of "elementary principles" in Col 2:8 but argues for the word meaning "physical elements" in 2 Pet 3:10 (R. McL. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* [New York: T&T Clark, 2005], 196–97).

[11] David Wenham, "Being 'Found' on the Last Day: New Light on 2 Peter 3:10 and 2 Cor 5:3," *NTS* 33 (1984): 477–79; Richard Baukham, *Jude and 2 Peter*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), 303; Frederick W. Danker, "II Peter 3:10 and Psalm of Solomon 17:10," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 53.1–2 (1962): 82–86; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 357–87. See also, Gordon H. Clark, *New Heavens, New Earth: A Commentary on First and Second Peter*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1993), 232–33. Clark supports the reading of εὑρεθήσεται but argues that it is a euphemism for destruction. Gene Green supports the textual variant εὑρεθήσεται but retranslates the passage to say the "heavens and earth will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed by burning, even the works that are discovered in it" (330–31). This circumvents the problem. It should be noted that Green's discussion of re-creation v. renewal is somewhat confusing. Green's commentary could be taken as support for either the annihilation or restoration perspective (see *Jude and 2 Peter*, 324–35).

[12] Al Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10," *WTJ* 49 (1987): 405–13.

[13] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed.

reading is to be preferred particularly when the sense appears on the surface to be erroneous but on more mature consideration proves itself to be correct."[14] In this specific case, however, he deems the earlier, more difficult reading to be less trustworthy than later variants. The many variants and the change over time seem to be indicative of redactive work based on a worldview that thought the original nonsensical and sought to right an assumed previous scribal error.[15]

Taking a step back from 2 Pet 3:10 to look at the context, it seems that there may be merit in the reliance upon the older, seemingly more difficult reading of "will be found." In 2 Pet 3:3–7, Peter discusses God's judgment of the earth through the flood, stating in verse 6 that "the world at that time *was destroyed* (ἀπώλετο), being flooded with water" (NASB, emphasis added). Then, in v. 7 Peter writes that "the present heaven and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and *destruction* (ἀπωλείας) of ungodly men" (NASB, emphasis added). The word used for destruction in v. 6 is a cognate of the word used for the destruction of the present ungodly men referred to in v. 7. In the first case the destruction did not result in a new creation, but rather a renewal of the creation; this points to a destruction which is not annihilation or complete dissolution, but restorative in nature.

Davids offers the idea that 2 Peter is referring to the "exposure and expunging of evil; thus, the 'elements' are 'melted' and 'destroyed' only insofar as is required for the exposure and destruction of evil."[16] Davids holds that this is consistent with language used in Old Testament prophecy. Concerning 2 Pet 3, Calvin writes that "heaven and earth will be cleansed by fire so that they may be fit for the kingdom of Christ."[17] Luther makes the connection between the flood and the final judgment, stating that "everything must be changed by fire, just as the water changed everything at the time of the Flood."[18] According to Wolters, "Just as the

(New York: United Bible Society, 1994), 636–37. The textual apparatus of the UBS 4th edition lists nine different variants, with the largest number of witnesses supporting the two main variants εὑρεθήσεται and κατακαήσεται.

[14] Ibid., 12–13.

[15] Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10," 405.

[16] Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 157.

[17] John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, trans. William B. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 365.

[18] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* vol. 30, *The Catholic Epistles*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 195. Note that in the same paragraph Luther also said that "everything in heaven and on earth will

second world is the first one washed clean by water, so the third world will be the second one even more radically purged by fire."[19]

This idea of the continuation of the same earth through the Day of the Lord seems to disagree with Peter's statement that the judgment will result in "new heavens and a new earth, in which the righteous dwell" (2 Pet 3:13). How can the heavens and earth be "new" if they are the same objects which were created by God in Genesis? The word "new" in this passage, as in other passages that refer to the new heavens and earth, is καινός. This word is typically used when something is new in nature, superior, or distinctive. Had Peter meant to say that the new heavens and earth were something that had just appeared, or were new in time, he would most likely have used the word νέος. Notably, John's Revelation uses the word καινός in chapter 21 when describing the new heavens and earth, and the LXX uses the word καινός in Isaiah's description of the new heavens and earth in chapters 65 and 66.[20] Peter holds that the fate of the earth on the Day of the Lord is to be purified with fire, and to be renewed, not re-created. In order to be accepted as a normative view, however, the view must be evaluated in comparison with its larger canonical context.

Broader Canonical Perspective

In evaluating the restoration view of eschatology, the nature of the creation event should be considered first. God spoke everything into existence, and after he completed each phase of creation he declared the creation "good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), with the creation of man being declared "very good" (Gen 1:31). The creation was unambiguously good before the Fall. This tends to point to an understanding that God

be reduced to powder and ashes." This is not inconsistent with the coming of judgment significantly changing the shape of the earth with regard to shape and form prior to divine renewal and does not support the idea that the earth and heaven will be completely obliterated. Luther's commentary on this passage seems to be much more concerned with the need to live rightly before the Lord because of the inevitability of judgment than in the degree of continuity of creation in the eschaton; however, annihilation seems beyond his intended meaning since he makes much of the previous judgment of sin on the earth through the flood.

[19] Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10," 405–8.

[20] *TDNT*, s.v. "καινός." See also Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 275. Swete comments that καινός "suggests fresh life rising from the decay and wreck of the old world."

could conceivably want to renew and restore the world, rather than annihilate and re-create the world.

However, the goodness of creation did not remain uncorrupted. Shortly after the creation was complete and humanity was installed in the Garden of Eden, they were tempted by the serpent and disobeyed God's direction (Gen 3:1–7), which led directly to their banishment from the Garden and subjection to the curse. Adam's curse was not simply that he would die and that women would have pain in childbirth; nor did the curse stop with the serpent crawling on its belly. Rather, the whole of creation was cursed for man's sake, and previously unknown difficulties came into being (Gen 3:17–19).[21] Man was to work for his living among the thorns which sprung from the ground because of his sin. The creation's suffering is a pointer for man, to remind him that things are not the way that God created them and to point toward a renewal of all things (cf. Rom 8:18–25).

The renewal of the creation comes through Christ, as is pointed to in the so-called *protoevangelion* (Gen 3:15).[22] However, it can also be clearly seen in John's Gospel, "God so loved the κόσμος that he gave his only begotten son" (John 3:16). Κόσμος was commonly used in the New Testament to indicate the sum of all creation.[23] It seems possible that the significance of John's choice of words goes beyond the extent of the atonement to the grand redemption narrative that can be found throughout Scripture.[24] In fact, if Christ's ministry is not seen as the redemption of all things, then the careful preservation of every kind of animal through Noah's Ark is somewhat of a mystery. If God's plan was merely to save humanity, then he could have accomplished that by preserving man and

[21] Some translations render Gen 3:17 to say that the ground was cursed "because of you" (NASB, NIV, NLT, ESV, CEV, HCSB), while others read "for thy/your sake" (KJV, NKJV, ASV, *Young's Literal Translation*, *Darby Translation*). The latter seems a more likely rendering because it matches closely with Rom 8. The former rendering catches one aspect of the text, that man's sin was the cause of the ground's cursing, but it fails to get the second sense of the text, that it was for man's benefit that the ground was cursed. Wolters captures the main point of the passage when stating, "All of creation participates in the drama of man's fall and ultimate liberation in Christ. . . . This principle is a clear scriptural teaching" (*Creation Regained,* 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 56–57).

[22] Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found*, 70.

[23] *TNDT*, s.v. κόσμος; Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found*, 59; Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 63–68.

[24] Derek Carlsen, "Redemption versus the Fall," *Christianity and Society* 14.4 (2005): 48.

only those animals that would be useful for man.[25]

Romans 8 describes the creation as being cursed "in hope" of being "set free from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:20–21 NASB). According to Paul, creation was cursed by God for man's sake and will be restored when man is redeemed. Creation longs for the coming restoration just as Christians long for redemption. Paul does not recognize a coming destruction of the created order but a judgment followed by redemption. While Paul is using the longing of creation for restoration as a metaphor of the longing of Christians for the return of Christ, it seems unlikely that he would use an untrue example to prove his point. In view of passages such as these, one must raise the question of the meaning of other prophetic passages concerning the Day of the Lord.

Prophecy and Redemption

One verse which has been used to support the annihilation view is Mic 1:4. Micah's message was directed to a particular time and audience, but he uses language similar to Peter in describing the coming judgment. Fire is pictured in the judgment that Micah predicts for both man and creation, but notably the earth is melted, the surface of the earth is re-formed, and the end result is the destruction of evil in the world (Mic 1:1–4:13). As Samaria is judged, the marks of its existence are removed and made into fertile vineyards, pointing toward restoration, not destruction (Mic 1:6). Micah's book passes through judgment, the prediction of the Messiah, and into restoration which images the narrative of redemption found through Scripture.

Isaiah 24 offers a vivid picture of the coming judgment of the earth but seems far from depicting a total annihilation. Instead, Isaiah writes that the earth will be "broken asunder," "split through," and "shaken violently" (v. 19). At the end, however, the "Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem" (v. 23). It is on the same mountain that the kingdom will come to fruition, according to John's apocalypse. While the earth is dealt with violently, the same mountain is there for Christ to reign on after the judgment is complete.

A classic picture of the coming restored state is found in Isaiah's description of the new heavens and earth. Here Isaiah describes a part of the coming restoration in which creation exists along the same pattern as it does under the curse, except the goodness is restored. Death is no longer feared (Isa 65:20), man's work is not spoiled (Isa 65:23), and even

[25] Tigers and bears, for example, are traditionally dangers to humanity. If the point was to preserve only man, then the Ark's preservation could have gone forward with the preservation of a few assorted farm animals.

nearly all the animals are restored to their pre-Fall state. It is of interest that although "the former things will not be remembered" (Isa 65:17 NASB), the serpent will still exist in its post-Fall, dust-eating state (Isa 65:25), perhaps as a reminder of the greatness of God's restorative miracle which blots out the memory of the unpleasant past.

Malachi uses images of a fiery judgment, much like Peter. In Malachi, the Lord announces that "the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff. . . . But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (Mal 4:1–2). Evil will be burnt up, and healing will come for the righteous. The parallel to 2 Pet 3 seems altogether too close to be incidental.[26]

John's Revelation discusses the coming destruction and renewal of all things. In chapter 7, John writes that there are particular angels assigned to affect the creation but that their work is subject to God's timing (vv. 2–3). Also during an interlude in the narrative of judgment, a brief picture of restoration is offered, where people redeemed from the tribulation on the earth are shepherded by the Lamb and have tears wiped from their eyes (v. 17). There is judgment, but something is preserved out of judgment.

The restorational emphasis of God's greater work is revealed in the last chapters of Revelation. Because of its content, the discussion in Rev 21 is significant eschatologically, in terms of what will happen at the end of days, and it is also important christologically. It appears to connect the two theological categories. Speaking of the fate of all things in the *eschaton*, God says that he is "making all things new" (21:5). The word, again, is καινός, meaning to restore. Providing context for that, Rev 21:3–4 gives a telling indication of what is to come and what came to earth in Jesus as it says:

> And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (NASB)

This seems to resonate with John's words in his Gospel that "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:14). It also reflects the entire narrative of the four Gospels, where every action of Christ, particularly the miracles, is restorative in nature.[27]

[26] Cf. Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10," 409.

[27] The exception to the restorative nature of the miracles is the pericope of

The Gospel as Renewal, Restoration, and Reconciliation

A clear statement of the gospel is that Christ lived on earth as a human, died on the cross, rose again, and bodily ascended to heaven in order to redeem, restore, and reconcile all things to God on man's behalf and for his own glory (1 Cor 15; Col 1:17–20). To an audience that is accustomed to defining the gospel as entirely concerned with individual redemption, this may appear to be a diversion from the pure gospel at best, or a perversion of the gospel at worst. However, given the idea that the culmination of Christ's work in the world, through the cross, is cosmic restoration, it may be seen that this definition of the gospel reflects the greater implications of Christ's work.

Consider the nature of the miracles that Christ performed. It has already been stated that they were primarily restorative in nature. What was the point of the miracles? Jesus himself stated that the things he did and taught were in accord with God's will and designed to magnify God's glory (John 7:16–18). This could lead to the idea that Jesus performed the miracles in order to demonstrate his power. Matthew 11:20–24 would tend to support that argument, but Christ's miracles were not flamboyant demonstrations of power. It is clear that Jesus did not do miracles mainly to get people to believe and to accept his power (Matt 13:58).[28] Instead, Jesus did miracles to affirm the faith of believers and to point them toward his greater purpose, as can be seen by considering the nature of Jesus's miracles.

A representative sampling of Jesus's miracles can include the following events: a paralytic was healed (Matt 9:1–8; Luke 5:18–26), the hemorrhaging woman was healed (Matt 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48), the official's daughter was healed (Matt 9:18–19, 23–26; Mark 5:21–24, 35–43; Luke 8:40–42, 49–56), the blind were made to see (Matt 9:27–30;

the fig tree which was performed primarily to demonstrate the need for continual preparedness. A fair example of two different exegetical approaches to the parable of the fig tree may be seen in Allan J. McNicol, "The Lesson of the Fig Tree in Mark 13:28–32: A Comparison Between Two Exegetical Methodologies," *ResQ* 27.4 (1984): 193–207. As well, the pseudopigraphical interpretation of the parable provides some insight as to the early church's reading of the parable (Richard Bauckham, "The Two Fig Tree Parables in the Apocalypse of Peter," *JBL* 104.2 (1985): 269–87.

[28] One might suppose that if Jesus's objective was to merely demonstrate that he was powerful, he might have done something like fly or shoot lightning bolts from his hands. In fact, he did none of those things and resisted the temptation of Satan to defy the natural order by leaping off the temple to be caught by angels (Matt 4:5–7).

12:22; 15:30; Mark 8:22–26; Luke 7:21; John 9:1–3), and evil spirits were cast out (Mark 5:1–15; Luke 8:26–38). The miracles were restorative in nature; they took a fallen state and worked to make it right for the glory of God. Jesus says in John 9:3 that the healing of that particular blind man was done to show the works of God. John 20:30–31 explicitly reveals that Jesus's miracles were performed and recorded so that people would believe—in other words, so that the restoration of individual souls would occur. Matthew 15:31 records that the results of the miracles was that people glorified the God of Israel. The miracles pointed toward who God is and caused people to give him glory; they are demonstrations of the fulfillment of the eschatological promise of the gospel.[29] All things will be made new, and that process began with Christ during his life on earth.[30]

The gospel as a restoration of all things can be seen in Paul's writings as well. Paul discusses salvation as a transfer from one kingdom to another in Col 1:3. In the very next verses, he goes on to discuss the fact that creation was for Christ, is held together by Christ, and that all things on heaven and earth are reconciled to God through Christ (Col 1:14–20). The redemption of the body and all of creation from Rom 8:18–22 was discussed above already. First Corinthians 15, which deals with the continuity of the present bodies of humans with the resurrected, eschatological bodies, also provides an excellent example of the restoration which is to come through Christ's redemptive work. These are just some of the examples that point toward the gospel as the redemption of all things.

The main point is not that the gospel is about cosmic restoration rather than individual salvation in the eschaton. Instead, the main point is that there will be both individual salvation and cosmic restoration on the Day of the Lord. The restoration view of eschatology helps to make sense of the entirety of the Scriptures: both the gospel for individuals and the gospel for all of creation. Looking forward to a restoration of the whole of creation has significant implications for environmental ethics.

Implications for Environmental Ethics

The preceding sections demonstrate why a restoration view of the fate of creation in the *eschaton* is a valid and preferable reading of 2 Pet 3:10; this section briefly explains why that eschatological view is significant for Christian environmental ethics. Geographer Janel Curry-Roper argues, "I

[29] Stephen S. Kim, "The Christological and Eschatological Significance of Jesus' Miracle in John 5," *BSac* 165 (2008): 420–23.

[30] Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found*, 284–85; see also Hans Schwarz, "Eschatological Dimension of Ecology," *Zygon* 9.4 (1974): 333–35.

believe that eschatology is the most ecologically decisive component of a theological system. It influences adherent's actions and determines their views of mankind, their bodies, souls, and worldviews."[31] Curry-Roper joins a chorus of environmental activists in her idea that the annihilation view of the fate of creation has negative implications for environmental ethics.[32]

Such pessimism about the potential for environmental ethics among those who affirm annihilation of the creation is warranted but often overstated. The clear majority of conservative evangelicals who publicly argue in favor of creation care affirm a restoration view of eschatology.[33] The opposite statement is not necessarily true, however. That is, to affirm an annihilationist eschatological perspective does not encourage active abuse or even neglect of the environment.[34] At the same time, critics are right to note that an expectation of complete destruction and re-creation *ex nihilo* does tend to consign creation care to a second-order issue, often well behind personal evangelism and even other social issues like abortion and religious liberty. Thus, the recovery of a restoration view of eschatology is important both as a generic pursuit of truth and because that perspective has potential for encouraging appropriate participation in environmental activism.

The restoration view has at least three significant benefits for the pursuit of environmental ethics. First, it encourages a proper valuation of creation. An annihilation view encourages the view of creation as a temporary reality given by God primarily for human use. It is clear that Scripture affirms that creation has *instrumental* value for human usage, but it

[31] Janel M. Curry-Roper, "Contemporary Christian Eschatologies and Their Relation to Environmental Stewardship," *Professional Geographer* 42.2 (1990): 159.

[32] E.g., Stephan Skrimshire, "Eschatology," in *Systematic Theology and Climate Change: Ecumenical Perspectives*, ed. Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott (New York: Routledge, 2014), 162; Bernard Daley Zaleha and Andrew Szasz, "Why Conservative Christians Don't Believe in Climate Change," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 71.5 (2015): 19–30; Barbara R. Rossing, "'Hastening the Day' When the Earth Will Burn? Global Warming, Revelation and 2 Peter 3," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35.5 (2008): 363–73.

[33] Katherine Wilkinson, *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58.

[34] Contra Rossing, "'Hastening the Day' When the Earth Will Burn?": 368–69; Michael Northcott, "The Dominion Lie: How Millennial Theology Erodes Creation Care," in *Diversity and Dominion: Dialogues in Ecology, Ethics, and Theology*, ed. Kyle S. Van Houtan and Michael S. Northcott (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 94–96.

also has *inherent* value as it points humans toward enjoyment of God.[35] As Wolters states in colloquial terms, "God does not make junk, and he does not junk what he has made."[36] Just as people are more likely to treat heirloom china with more care than disposable flatware, so Christians are more likely to pursue the holistic well-being of the environment if they see that it has permanent value pointing toward God's greatness.

Second, the restoration view of eschatology encourages a moderation of extreme environmentalism because it anticipates God's action in the restoration of all things. A common failure of some forms of environmental ethics is the expectation of a re-pristination of the created order; that is, some environmentalists see the goal of environmental action as totally eliminating the impact of humans on the environment through human action.[37] Often this extreme expectation results in misanthropy, sometimes including support for abortion as a means to reduce human impact on nature.[38] In contrast, a restoration eschatology that anticipates the continuity of both human and non-human creation provides an impetus to pursue what Francis Schaeffer calls "substantial healing," which "conveys the idea of a healing that is not *perfect*, but nevertheless is real and evident."[39] As Rom 8:18–24 affirms, all of creation is anticipating a future completion of the redemptive process through the supernatural work of God. A restoration view of eschatology encourages human effort toward "treating nature now in the direction of the way nature will be then," but it recognizes the impossibility of complete attainment of that redemption apart from God's unique restorative act in the *eschaton*.[40]

Third, a restoration view of eschatology tends to encourage a more hopeful eschatology that engenders pursuit of social goods including and beyond creation care. An annihilation view of eschatology allows (though it certainly does not require) a preference toward personal redemption over efforts toward social goods that, in small form, exemplify the nature

[35] Andrew J. Spencer, "The Inherent Value of the Created Order: Toward A Recovery of Augustine for Environmental Ethics," *Theoecology Journal* 3 (2014): 1–17.

[36] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 49.

[37] For example, see James Hefferman, "Why Wilderness?: John Muir's 'Deep Ecology'," in *John Muir, Life and Work*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 102–16.

[38] E.g., Commission of Population Growth, *Population and the American Future* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1972), 78.

[39] Francis Schaeffer, "Pollution and the Death of Man," in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1985), 5:39.

[40] Ibid.

of the coming cosmic restoration. By affirming the permanent goodness of creation, the restoration view more forcefully encourages participation in both personal evangelism and work for the common good, including creation care. A restoration view of eschatology elevates Christ's restorative works to the status of examples Christians are called to emulate within the limits of human capacity in the near term, rather than leaving Christ's miracles as merely signs of his perfect dominion of nature. This perspective applies Peter's encouragement to live "lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming day of God" to both our personal and social ethics as "we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:11–13 ESV).

Assuming a creation-positive Christian environmental ethics is warranted, the restoration view of eschatology provides the best foundation for it. The expectation of God's imminent work in renovating the created order encourages Christians to ascribe appropriate value to the created order, to engage in restorative work in both human and non-human portions of nature, and limits the expectation of the immediate impact of human efforts, which in turn tends to mitigate the sometimes-misanthropic tendencies of popular environmental ethics.

Conclusion

The textual support for the restoration reading of 2 Pet 3 should ensure that perspective on the fate of creation in the *eschaton* continues to be included in discussions in the future. Given the canonical support for the restoration view, there is additional reason to favor that interpretation of such a key eschatological passage of Scripture. In light of the textual and contextual arguments favoring a restoration view on the fate of creation in the *eschaton*, this essay has argued that the restoration view is important as it leads to a proper valuation of creation and encourages participation in creation care within a broader Christian social ethic.