

Going Green: Is it Black or White?

The earth is filled with His glory

Isaiah 6:3

During past months we've been kept apprised of the situation in the Gulf. It was terrible that lives perished in the explosion, but the subsequent oil that belched into the sea also wreaked havoc on the environment and the region's local industries. Though the toll of this accident might not be known for some time, moment-by-moment we could watch the "spillcam" transmissions of murky billows gushing through the broken pipeline. At a rate of about 2 million gallons a day week after week, I like many wondered if that region could survive such a blow. The underground poured out seemingly endless amounts of the gooey crude, and it amazed me that so much escaped from just one well. However, do we really consider the thousands of other wells currently pumping vast amounts of petroleum in the Gulf? Probably not, since they do harvest the oil for use and do not spew it out to further suffocate the environment.

Yet all the attention on the Gulf's oil serves as a reminder of the good, the bad and the ugly consequences of man's dominion over creation. Crude oil produced into fuel, plastic, fertilizers, detergent, paint, and so forth is useful and good. On the other hand, the hazardous work on offshore rigs or the exposure to toxic refinery materials such as asbestos is bad. But ugly are disasters like this latest accident where poor judgment adversely affected many lives and defaced a portion of beautiful creation.

Still, because someone goofed doesn't make oil drilling inherently bad. After all, God created the earth and gave man authority over it (Genesis 1:26), not excluding the oil in the ground. Yet man's goofs certainly predate the Gulf accident; in fact his first was the worst ever. The resultant Fall not only defaced a local region, but also an entire planet including every occupant whether animal, mineral or vegetable. The physical and spiritual consequences were huge, and the earth's curse remains until Christ removes it under a new order.

Even so, God endowed man with tremendous resources such as our fearfully and wonderfully made brain with its ability to come up with impressive technological inventions. Commensurate with the progression of history is the advancement of science and technology, which includes the means to harvest crude oil by burrowing through the earth's crust under seawater over 5 miles deep.

But things can go horribly awry such as the explosion of the Deep Water Horizon rig and subsequent oil slick. Consequently, along with all that oil, are surfacing further questions about the wisdom and morality of offshore drilling's future development and expansion.

We're all aware that extreme environmentalists have pounded the pavement about this and related causes for years, but should we Christians be concerned about desecrating the earth? Few would argue against the use of creation; rather, it's where the line is drawn between use and abuse. So if we choose to "go green," is this tantamount to being in league with the radical left and coming dangerously close to supporting other of its extreme ideologies?

Although the Bible doesn't contain specifics about preservation of the environment, it's really no mystery why. The Scriptures were written in ancient times when the concepts of modern technology, global warming, greenhouse gasses and smog were inconceivable. Therefore, we won't find any ordinance such as, "thou shall not pollute the environment." Can you imagine Moses' reaction to something like that, or the shock of the ancients had they been given a glimpse of today's airplanes, automobiles, phones and computers?

Since we can't claim chapter and verse, maybe there are other general principles to apply within the realm of responsible stewardship over our earthly resources. In Biblical times, such assets included working animals like oxen, donkeys and camels. With reference to their care, Proverbs 12:10 contrasts the tender mercies of the righteous and the cruelty of the wicked. So can we likewise conclude anything similar about proper care for other wonders wrought in our Father's world, its rocks and trees and skies and seas?

Okay, maybe to infer any prohibition against Cruelty to the Environment is a stretch here. Even so, the Mosaic Law commanded the Israelites a period of rest every 7th year, the "Sabbath Year." The Sabbath was made for man's benefit (Mark 2:27), but a by-product was that the land rested too. Moreover, Israel's judgment in captivity was defined by the number of times the people neglected this ordinance during a 490-year period. So while the Israelites remained captive for 70 years, "the land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah (2 Chronicles 36:21)."

Even today, caring for the earth may not be without spiritual ramifications. Scripture affirms that creation declares God's glory and handiwork (Psalm 19:1, Isaiah 6:3); thus it testifies of God's existence to unsaved man and reinforces the conviction that he falls short of his righteous, Almighty Creator (Romans 1:20).

Therefore, if unsaved mankind views a polluted wasteland or a pristine landscape, might one of these visions tend more than the other to reveal God's work and convict a conscience in need of repentance? Of course there will always be suppressers of the truth no matter how glorious the surrounding nature, like the pockets of occult worshippers planted in spectacular Big Sur who worship creation rather than the Creator. Regardless, if we're to do everything to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31), taking reasonable actions to preserve His creation might not be an unreasonable outworking of a pure conscience convicted in such a manner.

So whether or not oil is our best long-term energy source is debatable. However there's nothing more excellent than to be anointed by the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27), symbolized in Scripture by the finest oil (Hebrews 1:9, Exodus 30:25-32). And though no one disagrees that the Gulf spill was bad, the images of gushing oil down below could be fascinating to watch in light of eternal truth. The flow of oil may have seemed endless, but even vaster still is His Spirit poured out, from whence comes power, comfort and gifts stronger than any force of nature.

Therefore, though modern technology channels the earth's oil poured out for mankind's benefit now, only God pours out His Spirit without measure (John 3:34) for mankind's eternal benefit forever.

And unlike the earth's oil from many fathoms below, the Spirit's anointing from above is unfathomable.