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Groaning Creation

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Groaning Creation

Abstract

"What does the Bible mean when Paul writes about the frustrated and decaying creation? What should scientists expect to see in their investigations of creation given that the creation is frustrated and decaying? How does sin adversely affect the most basic laws by which the creation operates?"

Posting about creation from the perspective of a Christian scientist from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/the-groaning-creation/>

Keywords

In All Things, creation, God, sin, science

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

The Groaning Creation

 [all in allthings.org/the-groaning-creation/](https://allthings.org/the-groaning-creation/)

Carl Fictorie

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. Romans 8:20-21(NIV)

For a while now I have been pondering a question. **What does the Bible mean when Paul writes about the frustrated and decaying creation?** At one level the interpretation is clear enough; creation suffers because of human sin. The passage refers back to Genesis, where Adam's first sin resulted in God's judgment, including a curse to creation itself, which would now bear weeds and thorns.

It is pretty obvious that human actions have caused creation to suffer in various ways. We routinely dump toxic waste into waterways or into holes in the ground, resulting in the death of fish and animals and polluting groundwater. Many species have become extinct or been driven nearly to extinction by hunting. Vast amounts of plastic, none of which has natural origins, are floating in the oceans. Excessive and careless use of CFCs in the 20th century seriously damaged the ozone layer. And the list goes on and on.

So let me narrow the question down a bit more. **What should scientists expect to see in their investigations of creation given that the creation is frustrated and decaying?** How does sin adversely affect the most basic laws by which the creation operates? The question arose in my thinking as I again encountered Kuyper's notions of normal and abnormal science. To the scientist whose basic beliefs are grounded in naturalism, the science that this person does and the nature he observes is normal. It has operated the same way for all time. Thus this scientist believes that all he sees in creation is normal, and thus all phenomena result from the normal behavior of creation. Conversely, to the scientist whose basic beliefs are grounded in Christianity, the creation she observes is abnormal because of the stain of sin. Adam's sin created a fundamental discontinuity in the history of creation. Consequently, not all phenomena are normal, some are a result from the bondage and decay of a fallen creation.

So then the question around the coffee pot with my fellow faculty turns to how this abnormality manifests itself in how we do our scientific work and the results that we obtain.

Some have suggested that natural disasters are a result of sin. People suffer because of earthquakes, floods, and volcanoes, but these appear to be a result of the normal functioning of creation. Some note that animals kill other animals for food, in seeming contrast with a notion that there was no death before the fall of humankind. However, many creatures are biologically designed to consume meat. Some bacteria and viruses make us sick, but others are necessary for good health, and all are just trying to live out their existence. And how do sinful human actions affect the stars we observe in the night sky, stars that we have never touched?

Biblical commentators point out that the frustration under which the creation suffers is in the same notion as vanity or futility. That is, human sin leaves creation in a state where it is unable to fulfill its original purpose. It cannot flourish as it was intended to, to glorify God and provide the stage upon which humanity develops. This is a good answer, but it is a theological one. It only affirms the dilemma presented above, that Christians believe there is an abnormality in creation that is a result of sin.

So what does this look like when scientists look at creation? I am not sure we can say. Perhaps this is a reminder to scientists that they need to be humble. Perhaps it is a call to Christian scientists to stand up for their religious principles, even if the result is some scientific persecution. Perhaps it is a reminder that humans do not and cannot understand everything.

But in the end, what matters is that God understands. We are reminded again that humans are not able to fix creation on their own. We can learn, we can create, we can build, all in an effort to fix the problems around us. But only God gives us hope that God alone will liberate the creation from its bondage and bring creation into his freedom and glory. Maybe then we will more fully understand.