



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: Romans 8:20-22; Colossians 1:15-20*

- “The creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope 21 *that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage* to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.” (Rom. 8:20-22 CSB)
- “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For everything was created by him, in heaven & on earth, the visible & the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—*all things* have been created through him & for him. 17 He is before *all things*, & by him *all things* hold together. 18 He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in *everything*. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 & through him to reconcile *everything* to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Col. 1:15-20 CSB)

### I. The Scope of Christ’s Redemptive Work—“*all things*” (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20)

#### A. Reconciling humans (Eph. 1:5, 7; 2:11-20)

1. To God (Eph. 1:5, 7) – adopted into God’s family
2. To each other (Eph. 2:11-20) – part of God’s new humanity, dealing with divisions
3. Needing reconciliation with the rest of creation  
– “The same deep flaws in our nature that set us at odds with God and other humans also make us *enemies of other creatures*. When God deals with those flaws, he surely heals all our

relationships. *Peace with God should create peace in all creation.*” [Richard Bauckham, “*Reconciling a Wounded Planet*,” (July 2015) p. 2]

## B. But, it’s bigger—Reconciling “all things” by the blood of his cross (Eph. 1:9-10; Col. 1:15-20)

- God “made known...his will...*to bring everything together in Christ...things in heaven & things on earth.*” (Eph. 1:9-10)
- “God was pleased...through [Christ] to reconcile *everything* to himself, whether *things on earth or things in heaven*, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Col. 1:19-20 CSB)
- “God...through [Christ] *reconciled to himself all things*, whether *on earth or in heaven...by...his cross.*” (Col. 1:19-20)
- “The repeated words ‘*all things*’ [5X in Col. 1:16-20] highlight that salvation is comprehensive in scope; it is about more than personal salvation. Because sin is so comprehensive, redemption is equally cosmic in scope...‘*He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found*’ [Isaac Watts, ‘Joy to the World’]. Salvation is not only about the forgiveness of individual sins, but about restoring all of creation to its intended state...*Christ’s redemption involves the restoration of all things* in creation & we are called to participate in this process.” [Derek C. Schuurman, *Shaping a Digital World...*, p. 72]
- “Interpreters...struggle...with the cosmic scope of this claim [Col. 1:19-20]. *We’re accustomed to think of reconciliation as something that happens between God & humans or between humans & fellow-humans.* Paul himself... remind[s] his readers that God has reconciled them to himself through the cross of Christ (1:22). But the [Col.] hymn says that God has reconciled “*all things*” through the cross. The phrase ‘all things’ is a thread that runs through the whole passage. Each time it picks up the reference to ‘all creation’ with which the [Col.] hymn begins & each time it relates ‘all things’ to Jesus Christ. From the beginning he was related to ‘all things.’ As the pre-existent divine Son, he created ‘all things.’ As the incarnate Son he reconciled ‘all things.’ The scope of *reconciliation is as broad as the scope of creation.* This passage... challenges our habit of confining God’s purpose & activity within narrow bounds. *Salvation is bigger than we thought! God’s love is more encompassing than we thought.* The...*power of Christ’s cross is greater than we thought.* Jesus Christ himself is even *more significant than we thought.*” [Richard Bauckham, “*Reconciling a Wounded Planet*,” (July 2015) p. 1]

## C. Reconciling creation (Rom. 8:20-22)

1. Everything God made was ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31)

2. Cursed is the ground (Gen. 3:17b-18a)

3. Creation to be set free—liberated (Rom. 8:20-22)

– “The creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope that the *creation itself will also be set free from the bondage* to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.” (Rom. 8:20-22 CSB)

– “Romans 8...[is] perhaps the most explicit NT text linking the reconciling & redemptive work of Christ with *not only humanity but all of creation.*” [J. J. Leese, “*Reading Scripture in an Era of Ecological Crisis*,” Religions 2019, 10, 154]

– Creation’s future is...bound up with the future of God’s children, & this future consists in resurrection & *the liberation of creation itself*...The earth does not finally belong to us; & its future too has been ‘bought at a price,’ since in Paul’s conception creation cannot attain its *telos* unless & until those human creatures to whom its fate is linked become who they are intended to be in Christ. Col. 1:20, where God through Christ ‘was pleased to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross’, is perhaps more explicit in presenting Christ’s atoning work as having cosmic significance in & of itself; but in Rom. 8 the ramifications of God’s redemption in Christ are no less significant for the *entire creation*.” [Jonathan Moo, “CONTINUITY, DISCONTINUITY, & HOPE,” TYNDALE BULLETIN, Vol. 61.1 (2010) pp. 27-28]

– “These words of Paul denote *not annihilation* of the present material world on the day of [Christ’s] revelation, to be replaced by a universe completely new, but [rather,] the *transformation of the present universe* so that it will fulfill the purpose for which God created it. There’s no discontinuity between...here & the hereafter...” [F F Bruce, *Romans*, p 170]

– “Creation has been ‘frustrated’ & is in ‘bondage to decay.’ In the background is the curse...in Gen 3...Certainly the praise of creation in the OT [continues,]...the created world continues to reveal...God (Rom 1:19-22), & [Paul] assert[s] that ‘everything God created is good’ (1 Tim 4:4) [This] warn us against too strong an interpretation of this ‘curse.’ But, ...the language... suggests...human sin led to some kind of change in the nature of the cosmos itself. It has been subject, Paul says, to ‘frustration,’ or ‘vanity’...If creation has suffered the consequences of human sin, it will also enjoy the fruits of human deliverance. When believers are glorified, creation’s ‘bondage...’ will be ended, & it will participate in the ‘freedom that belongs to the glory’ for which Christians are destined. *Nature*, Paul affirms, *has a future within the plan of God. It is destined not simply for destruction but for transformation*...The reversal of the conditions of the Fall includes the created world along with...human beings. Indeed, the glory that humans will experience, involving...the resurrection of the body (Rom. 8:9-11, 23), necessarily requires an appropriate environment for that embodiment [–the ‘new earth’].” [Douglas J. Moo, “*Nature in the New Creation*,” JETS, 49 (2006) pp. ]

## II. Creation–Annihilated or Renewed? (2 Pet. 3:10-11; Rev. 20:11; 21:1, 5; Rom 8:21)

### A. Annihilation–Replacement (2 Pet. 3:10-11; Rev. 20:11; 21:1)

1. Earth—“burned up” or “disclosed/exposed”? (2 Pet. 3:10)

– “The day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day *the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn & be dissolved, & the earth & the works on it will be disclosed*. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct & godliness.” (2 Pet. 3:10-11 CSB)

– “The day of the Lord will come as a thief...the earth also & the works...therein *shall be burned up*.” (1 Pet. 2:10 KJV)

– “The day of the Lord’s return will [be]...like a thief...The earth & everything on it will be *seen for what they are*.” (CEV)

– Some translations [e.g. KJV] read ‘will be burned up’ (Gk. *kataka?setai*) because some Greek manuscripts have this wording (instead of Gk. *heureth?setai* [‘disclosed’ CSB]). But the earliest &

most reliable manuscripts have ‘will be found’ (Gk. *heureth?setai*), indicating...that the *annihilation of the earth is not taught in this passage*. Scholars have debated whether the NT speaks of an *annihilation* of the present cosmos & the creation of a new universe, or whether it indicates the *transformation* of the present cosmos, including the earth. The latter [i.e., transformation] seems more likely in light of: (1) the preferred reading of this passage; (2) Rom. 8:18-25; (3) many OT prophecies about the renewal of the earth; (4) Christ’s resurrection body being in continuity with his earthly body; & (5) the fact that Christ’s resurrection body is a pattern for [our] resurrection bodies...(1 Cor. 15:12-58). God seems always to renew, not destroy & recreate [from nothing], parts of his creation that are marred by sin. [ESV Study Bible]

– There’s a debate whether God will replace [annihilating the old] or transform the earth at the end of history, & some argue that this verse [2 Pet. 3:10] supports the replacement view because some manuscripts read ‘burned up’ instead of ‘laid bare.’ [‘disclosed,’ ‘exposed’]...But other passages seem to indicate that God will renovate the earth (e.g., Rom. 8:18-22). Rev. 21 seems to suggest both replacement (Rev. 21:1) & transformation (Rev. 21:5). The tension exists because the Bible describes what is beyond our experience with language & analogies drawn from our own world; those analogies fall short of matching the reality & capture only part of the full picture. ...The shift from the present heavens & earth to the new heaven & earth...involves both continuity & discontinuity. [NIV Zondervan Study Bible]

## 2. Heaven & Earth—“passed away” or “made new”? (Rev. 21:1, 5)

– “I saw a great white throne & One seated on it. *Earth & heaven* fled from his presence, & no place was found for them... Then I saw a new heaven & a new earth; for the *first heaven & the first earth had passed away*...” (Rev. 20:11; 21:1, 5)

– “The One seated on the throne said, ‘Look, I’m making everything new’...” (Rev. 21:5)

## B. Renewal–Transformation (Rom 8:21; Rev. 21:5)

### 1. Creation liberated, not annihilated/replaced (Rom. 8:21)

– “*Creation...will...be set free from the bondage* to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children.” (Rom. 8:21)

– “These words...denote not annihilation of the present material world...to be replaced by a universe completely new, but the transformation of the present universe...” [F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, p. 170]

### 2. God making ‘all things new’ (Rev. 21:5)

– “The One seated on the throne said, ‘Look, I am making everything new’...” (Rev. 21:5)

– “God does *not* make ‘all new things’, but ‘all things new.’[Rev. 21:5]”—Eugene Boring

– “God who made ‘all things’...will ‘*make all things new.*’ *God’s whole creation is destined for glory.*”—R. Bauckham

– “John’s...language [means] God is taking what is old & transforming it. Out of the destruction [of] various plagues & battles...God will weave God’s new thing. The old will remain...part of the

new, but...fiercely transfigured. [It] is therefore right to say, God does not make ‘all new things’, but ‘all things new’.” [Brian K. Blount, *Revelation*, p. 376]

– “The ‘passing away’...of [Rev.] 21:1 could suggest the destruction of the physical universe, [but,] it could also suggest that it’s the sinful ‘form’ of this world which... pass[es] away rather than the world itself...There are other pointers...to the idea of renovation. In Rev. 21:5, God proclaims, ‘I’m making everything new!’ He does not proclaim ‘I am making [all] new things.’... [This] *suggests renewal, not destruction* & recreation...Rev. 21-22 is full of references to the original creation, suggesting that John intends to portray ‘the reverse of the curse,’ a return to the conditions of Eden ([with] advances beyond...Eden in significant ways...)” [Douglas J. Moo, “*Nature in the New Creation*,” JETS, 49 (2006) pp. ]

– “The God who made ‘all things’ says...he will ‘*make all things new*’ (Rev 21:5). *God’s whole creation is destined for glory*. Humans, embedded...in the natural world, are not to be extracted from the rest of creation, but to find fulfillment along with ‘all things’ in God’s eternal love. This is why the Christ-hymn [Col. 1:15-20] says that all things were ‘created through him & for him.’ Christ is both the source & the goal of all creation. In this...understanding of God’s purpose, it’s not...surprising but *necessary* that...‘God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven’ [Col. 1:19-20].” [Richard Bauckham, “*Reconciling a Wounded Planet*,” (July 2015) p. 2]

### C. Christ’s Resurrection—the Prototype (‘first-fruits’) of God’s New Creation (1 Cor. 15:20-22)

- “But...Christ has been raised from the dead, *the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep* [i.e., died]...22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” (1 Cor. 15:20-22)

#### 1. Continuity between the Resurrected Christ & Jesus of Nazareth

– “The resurrection of Jesus involves God’s transformation of [Jesus’ earthly body, something of] this world into the New Creation... The resurrection of Jesus as the breaking in of this New Creation is both *continuous* with the present [creation] in which we live...and yet immensely *discontinuous* with the present one.” [Robert J. Russell, “...*Theology of Resurrection & Eschatology*,” in G. Gasser (ed.) *Personal Identity & Resurrection*, p. 242]

– “The New Creation [is] *not*...a [complete] ‘*replacement*’ of the present creation –i.e., not...a second creation *ex nihilo* [from nothing]...Instead [it] involves the complete *transformation* of the world by a radically new act of God which began at the first Easter [with Christ’s] resurrection... which emphasizes elements of continuity & discontinuity between Jesus of Nazareth & the risen Jesus...The empty tomb [emphasizes] the *physical/material continuity* of the person of Jesus [the resurrected Christ, with Jesus the Nazarene].” [Robert J. Russell, “...*Theology of Resurrection & Eschatology*,” in G. Gasser (ed.) *Personal Identity & Resurrection*, pp. 244-245]

#### 2. The Resurrected Christ—beginning of God’s New Creation (Rev. 3:14b)

– Jesus: “the Amen, the faithful & true witness, the *beginning of God’s creation*.” (Rev. 3:14b)

– “God’s act of raising Jesus from the dead...was the beginning of a new creation...That new creation is still in process ...but for those who believe in the risen Christ the fullness of that new creation is already visible in the resurrection of [Jesus].” [Frank J. Matera, *Resurrection: Origin & Goal of the Christian Life*, p. ]

### 3. Christ's believers—'new creation' people destined for God's new Creation—new Heaven & Earth (2 Cor. 5:17)

– With “Jesus’ death & resurrection...the *new creation has already begun*...The [new creation] ‘age to come’...has already begun, but the ‘present age’ still continues...Who are we? Resurrection people...formed within the ‘new world’ [creation] that began...[the 1st] Easter... Where are we? In God’s good creation, which is to be restored, in bodies that will be redeemed... What’s wrong? The work is incomplete...the [new creation] project which began at Easter...has not yet been finished...What’s the solution? The full & final redemption of creation [new Heaven, new Earth, new Jerusalem].” [Nicholas T. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. ]

### 4. God’s ‘New Creation Project’ climaxes in the Renewed Cosmos (Rev. 21-22)

– “The [phrase] ‘new creation’...occurs only twice in the NT...: 2 Cor. 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, *there is a new creation*: The old has gone, the new has come!” Gal. 6:15: “Circumcision means nothing; what counts is a *new creation*.” Both occurrences are usually given a strictly [human] reference... However...the ‘new creation’ language *refers* to the entire new state of affairs that Christ...has inaugurated...In this age...God’s new creation work focuses [on] the transformation of human beings – in their relationship to God, first... then...their relationship to each other. But... Paul includes the transformation of the natural world in his...eschatological program – explicitly in...Rom 8:19-22 & implicitly in...Col 1:20...[So,] the *relation of human beings to their natural environment* is included in God’s present work of new creation &...the climax of God’s new creation work will include the transformation of the natural world.” [Douglas J. Moo, “*Nature in the New Creation*,” JETS, 49 (2006) p. ]

## D. Annihilation vs. Renewal—It’s not an either/or scenario, but both

- “I’m wary of either/or dichotomies when reading [Revelation]...A binary approach to the annihilation or renewal debate is not warranted...Those who read Revelation ecologically turn too quickly to ‘renewal,’ at the expense of...details that support annihilation...*John’s future [has] both...either category in isolation [is] ‘inadequate.’* John’s text is symbolic, apocalyptic...rarely straightforward...It’s never meant to be literal...*We are not forced to choose one of these two options. John...wants to have it both ways: the earth will be annihilated, but some parts...will be renewed*...The new heaven & new earth in Revelation are both continuous with, but also a break from, our world today.” [Micah D. Kiel, *Apocalyptic Ecology:...Revelation*, pp. 25-26]

## E. The two views shape our attitude towards creation

### 1. Diminished view—Dispensational Doctrines—Believers’ Rapture & Earth’s Annihilation

– The Dispensational “doctrine of a secret Rapture...embodies an *escape from the world*...[This fosters] an annihilation-based pessimism & disregard towards [the] environment... Dispensationalism inevitably leads to escapism.” [Joshua Reynolds, *Escaping Dispensationalism*, (Aug. 3, 2017) pp. 11-13]

– The End-time view “most popular among North American evangelicals & Pentecostals foresees the *future of creation as an inevitable downward spiral ending in cosmic destruction*. By implication, *if* the church is going to be raptured and *the world* [is going to be] *destroyed, what is*

*the need for ecological [creation] care?...When I've advocated energy conservation...I've had students [respond]...If everything is going to burn up in the final judgment...why concern ourselves with the temporary material world?" [R. Waddell, "Apocalyptic Sustainability," in Peter Althouse (ed.) Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies, p. 99]*

– "It is *logically* possible to advocate...creation care even if one expects the annihilation of the world...[Yet,] if a belief in [cosmic] annihilation is united with an expectation of an imminent return of Jesus, then ecological concerns lose all rational support." [R. Waddell, "Apocalyptic Sustainability," P. Althouse (ed.) Perspectives in...Eschatologies, p. 103]

– "...*Dispensational* postures toward the world...*immobilize Christians with regard to the plight of the Earth and its environment*...It is logically impossible & morally contradictory both to embrace this creation as inviolable & at the same time reject it as hopelessly doomed & excluded from God's future...[This paradigm] *makes impossible the long-range plans & commitments which adequate care for the creation demands*. Until evangelicals purge from their vision of the Christian faith...pessimistic dispensationalist [doctrines], the...[Scriptural] doctrine of creation & the biblical image of stewardship will be 'orphans' in their midst." [Al Truesdale, "Last Things First: Impact of Eschatology on Ecology," Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith [PSCF] 46/2 (1994) p. 118]

– "Dispensationalism...defrauds the creation of the gospel's promise that it too 'will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the glory of the Children of God' (Rom. 8:21)."– Al Truesdale

## 2. Uplifted view—God values & will redeem His Good Creation

– "The Bible has de-divinized nature, but it has not de-sacralized nature. Nature remains sacred in the sense that it belongs to God, exists for the glory of God, even reflects the glory of God, as humans also do." [Bauckham 2011, p. 13]

– "Texts such as Col 1:20, which state that in Christ God was pleased to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether *on earth* or in heaven, through the blood of the cross, have powerful implications for [the] stewardship of creation." [JOHN J. DAVIS, "ECOLOGICAL 'BLIND SPOTS' IN... EVANGELICAL...THEOLOGIES," JETS, Vol. 43/2 (2000) p. 275]

– "The Scriptures tell us that [in the] future...God will pour out his wrath...on the world, and so we can expect some... significant conflagration to afflict this planet. However, that's not the end of the story. *The Bible does not teach the annihilation of this planet*, but *rather its renovation and redemption*. The Scriptures promise a new heaven & a new earth: a cosmic transformation whereby the work of redemption effected by Christ will not only bring renewal, sanctification & glorification to man, but also renewal, sanctification & glorification to our natural world, to our natural environment...Children, for e.g., who lose pets often ask... 'Will their dog or their cat be in heaven?' Most theologians answer that question... 'No. Of course not;...they don't have souls.' I don't know whether they have...or don't have souls – I know they're not created in the image of God [as] we are – but *I've every reason to expect a new earth...populated by glorified dogs & cats & canaries & redeemed snakes...!* But we often fail to notice this magnificent promise that the Bible gives us concerning the future, not only of the redeemed sons & daughters of Christ, but [also] of our planet." [R. C. Sproul, *Gospel of God*, pp. 174-175]

## F. The two views shape our attitude towards our own development

### 1. Diminished view

– The End-time view “most popular among North American evangelicals & Pentecostals foresees the *future of creation as an inevitable downward spiral ending in cosmic destruction.*”—R. Waddell

– “*Dispensational postures toward the world...make impossible the long-range plans & commitments...*”—Al Truesdale

### 2. Uplifted view

## III. God’s Whole Creation is Destined for Glory (2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:5)

### A. New creation (2 Cor. 5:17) – it starts with humans, but reaches as ‘*far as the curse is found!*’

- In “2 Cor. 5:17-21...Paul famously says that “in Christ God reconciled the world to himself” (5:19)... in v. 17: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation...” ...Literally, [it]...translates as: “If anyone is in Christ, *new creation!*” Though he is speaking of what happens when someone becomes a Christian, Paul is deliberately echoing...the coming new creation of all things, as we can see [in]...Rev. 21:1-5. He’s thinking of the transformation God effects in human life through the Gospel & the Spirit as an instance of God’s renewal of all things. It is the new creation happening already, the *same new creation that is God’s purpose for all his creatures*, human & non-human. So when Paul speaks of reconciliation... even though humans are his focus, we [can] include our fraught & fractured relationships with other creatures in the sin that Christ bore for us. When God reconciled us to himself in Christ he had his whole creation in view...God has made peace, but we must embrace peace. Peace with God is there to be had. To embrace it is to become a channel for it, to let it flow for the healing of our broken world, human & non-human.” [Richard Bauckham, “*Reconciling a Wounded Planet,*” p. 3]

### B. God ‘makes all things new’ (Rev. 21:5)

- “God who made ‘all things’...will ‘*make all things new.*’ *God’s whole creation is destined for glory.*”—Richard Bauckham