

## DOES NATURE REVEAL GOD'S LOVE?

No, God's love is not revealed through nature.

Some of the characteristics of God are made known through the material universe and its marvelous workings. "*The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork*" (Psa. 19:1). We all have discovered that truth for ourselves by observation. "*Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made*" (Rom. 1:20). Nature's demonstration of the glory, power, and divinity of our Creator has left peoples of all ages without excuse for failing to honor him. No mention, however, is made of his love! Is not God's love likewise exhibited in his creation?

In the cool of these summer mornings I often sit on our patio and enjoy the world about me. The sunshine brightens our day, sending its life-giving light. Clouds floating above remind me that God refreshes the earth with rain. Both cultivated flowers and wildflowers add much beauty to my life. The flourishing lawns and trees offer many blessings to our existence. My little garden almost always offers some delicious morsel. Birds are everywhere with their early morning chatter and calls. The serenade of the mockingbird delights and fascinates me. Growing up on a farm as teenagers, my brother and I would sleep outside during the summer, and there we would marvel at their repertoire repeated almost continuously evening and morning. The pets of the neighbors are out -- those dogs and cats which offer so much love. Don't all of these beautiful and pleasant things which enrich my life loudly proclaim the care of a loving Creator?

Who but a pessimist or cynic or killjoy could deny that the whole of God's provision for us in his universe is an emphatic declaration of his concern for us? Since "God is love," is not that characteristic of his evident in all his creation?

Although the sunlight is pleasing in my backyard, I am aware that its heat is almost unbearable to people in other regions at the same moment. It is scorching the earth and contributing to starvation of countless living creatures. Not only do the clouds drift lazily over me, but they are failing to give moisture to sustain life in some places and devastating homes and crops in other areas by their turbulence, hail, and flooding.

While I am enjoying the cool breeze, millions of people are shivering in the miserable cold without proper food, clothing, and shelter.

Rather than serenading me, the mockingbird is yelling out its territorial claim in the language of each other bird that might encroach.

Even though I enjoy the colorful and cheering flowers, they were not created for my enjoyment. They serve to attract bees and other insects for pollination. Those insects, in

turn, live off of the vegetation making it almost impossible to grow fruit, vegetables, or flowers without controlling the insects.

Most every living creature depends upon eating other living things for survival. Nature presents a selfish, cruel world of creatures preying mercilessly on earth's other inhabitants. It is the food chain that God set in order.

We can visualize the bobcat finding and greedily devouring the nestlings of the chaparral, or roadrunner. Then the bobcat may be killed by a rattlesnake bite. In turn, chaparrals kill rattlesnakes. That is the cycle of nature; the "balance of nature," we call it.

To aid in survival, most living things develop some sort of defense like thorns, unpleasant odor, bitter taste, irritant, toxicity, height, shell, speed, horns, claws, fangs, or protective coloration. But even if they survive the predators, disease, weather, and accidents, each member of every species will grow old and die. The creation declares its own futility.

If the beautiful and pleasant things are put here for our pleasure, we are still disappointed and we lament with Robert Burns:

"But pleasures are like poppies spread.  
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;  
Or like the snow falls in the river,  
A moment white, then melts forever."

Paul assured pagan listeners at Lystra that God "*did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness* (Acts 14:17). However, Jesus reminds us that God "*makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*" (Matt. 5:45). Are we not forced to conclude that the same God sends or permits the destructive forces of his creation to affect the just and the unjust also?

Because they enjoy good health and abundant earthly provision, some disciples think these to be rewards for their righteous living. Such self-congratulation is not fitting. God's provisions are given to the just and unjust. That self-righteous concept would demand that those who endure poor health and impoverishment are unrighteous. Only the sinners would become poor or die!

Nature, considered alone, portrays such a harsh administrator that the essence of pagan religions has been fear. Pagan rituals of worship and sacrifices (even human sacrifices) were efforts to appease angry gods and entreat their favors. To them their supposed divinities were harsh and vengeful, even capricious, and as likely to harm as to help. Their gods were thought to be rulers over the natural world and at best they offered a mixed message about the natural order. It was mostly a message of fear and futility.

God's love, however, was made known by revelation. God introduced his love to us, and us to his love. "*But God shows* (RSV; commendeth: KJV, ASV) *his love for us in that*

*while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Shows" and "commendeth" are translations of a word which means to introduce one person to another (Vine). God's love has been made known through a Person who was a revelation of his Father. God introduced his love through Jesus and we are filled with it by the Holy Spirit, "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (v.5).*

Such a concept of divinity dying for the vilest of humanity and entering human hearts was not conceived in the minds of men nor derived from a study of nature. This unique quality of God was revealed.

Nature sends a mixed message at best. God introduces us to his love by introducing us to his Son, and likewise our love is introduced to God by our acceptance of his Son. This mixed message is seen in the scriptures also, leaving us with many profound, unanswered questions. More is planned for next week when we write of "*The Dark Side of the Moon.*" []

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(Cecil Hook: September 2005)

Talkin' Texas: Some humor must have influenced the naming of the communities of Bug Tussle, Goober Hill, Gun Barrel City, Hoop and Holler, Pep, Pert, Pluck, Earth, and Looneyville.

*"I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).*