

The Parchment

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Rev. Howard Chang
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A Good Environment to Grow

Spring is just about here. I can always tell the weather is about to change when the cherry blossoms come out in our neighborhood. With all the recent rain, my grass, once dry and barren, is now beginning to show signs of life. Some trees and plants grow well in Southern California while others would certainly languish. Consider trying to grow bananas or pineapples in your backyard. Obviously, they would not survive. God had an idea of what He wanted to grow and where.

Thinking about the Creation can help us appreciate what an awesome God we have (One Who can speak things into being). It can also help us value a “good” approach to understanding the church.

We read in the Bible “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1). There we learn about how God created a wonderful environment by which His Creation would flourish. By the end of the fifth day of Creation, God had spoken into existence the light and darkness, sky and sea, oceans and land, day and night, vegetation and animals. Each day He pronounced His Creation was “good.” He had one more day and one more work to accomplish: the creation of man and woman. When humans were created they were different—they were made in the image and likeness of God. This work marked the culmination of God’s Creation. Then He pronounced this creation “very good.”

What was so very good about God’s creation? First, He had provided a *physical* environment for which the Creation might multiply and be sustained. In the same way, we desire to provide a physical environment for our church growth. Whether it is the church building or a member’s home, a place that exhibits warmth provides a great environment to fellowship and worship.

Second, He provided a *relational* environment for the man and woman to grow in their relationships with God and one another (see the February issues of the Parchment for the series on “One Another”). People can relate to God personally because God has created man in His own image. What characteristics of God’s person can believers follow to provide His kind of relational environment? We can begin to think of the fruit of the Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). These are characteristics of God, and characteristics we can nurture as well.

Both physical and relational environments are important for our church community to grow; but the relational environment is more important. We can have a church without a building or programs. The church consists of a spiritual bond among God’s people and does not depend so much on location or program. The New Testament does not give strict models or guidelines as to the programs we should have. The program and place just provide opportunities for us to grow *relationally* with God and brothers and sisters in Christ. What this tells me is that we are the church. May we nurture the kind of environment among us where we can grow to be Christ-like.