



ISIR Journal of Multidisciplinary (ISIRJM)

ISSN: 3049-3080 (Online)

Frequency: Bimonthly

Published By ISIR Publisher

Journal Homepage Link- <https://isirpublisher.com/isirjm/>

Creation Groans: A Romans 8:19–22 Perspective on Environmental Degradation – Linking Eschatology with Ecology

By

Tony Aku Amba

Nigeria Environmental Society (NES) Headquarters, 41, Moses Majekodunmi Crescent, Utako District, Abuja, FCT.



Article History

Received: 25/09/2025

Accepted: 02/10/2025

Published: 04/10/2025

Vol – 1 Issue – 5

PP: -07-11

Abstract

The ecological crisis continues to intensify, with climate change, deforestation, and pollution threatening the integrity of creation. This paper explores Romans 8:19–22, where the Apostle Paul vividly describes creation's groaning and longing for redemption, as a theological framework for addressing environmental degradation. By linking eschatology with ecology, the study argues that Christian hope does not promote environmental neglect but provides motivation for active stewardship. Drawing on biblical exegesis, eco-theology, and empirical realities of environmental degradation in Nigeria, the paper demonstrates how eschatological perspectives can foster ecological responsibility. The study concludes that Christian eschatology, rightly understood, calls for faithful care of creation as a foretaste of its ultimate renewal.

Keywords: Romans 8:19–22, Creation groans, Eschatology, Ecology, Environmental degradation, Stewardship

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary environmental crisis has been described as one of the greatest moral challenges of our time (Tucker & Grim, 2016). Rising global temperatures, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and widespread pollution reveal the extent of human impact on the planet. Fawole & Olokesusi (2020) explained that in Nigeria, and particularly in regions such as Jos Plateau, environmental degradation has led to soil erosion, water scarcity, and declining agricultural productivity. For Christian theology, such realities demand renewed reflection on how Scripture addresses the relationship between humanity and creation. Romans 8:19–22 offers one of the most compelling New Testament passages linking creation and eschatology. Paul describes creation as groaning in bondage to decay, yet awaiting liberation through the revelation of the children of God. This metaphor captures both the suffering of the natural world under sin and its future hope in redemption. Scholars such as Moo (2019) and Middleton (2014) argue that this text provides a theological lens for understanding environmental crises not as final, but as part of God's larger plan for cosmic renewal.

This passage has often been interpreted narrowly in spiritual or anthropocentric terms. However, when viewed in light of ecological challenges, Paul's imagery of groaning creation resonates powerfully with current experiences of environmental breakdown. As Bauckham (2010) insists,

eschatology should not encourage passivity but should instead ground a hopeful ethic of ecological care. Thus, linking Romans 8:19–22 with environmental stewardship provides both a theological critique of human exploitation and an eschatological vision for ecological restoration. This paper therefore examines Romans 8:19–22 as a theological response to environmental degradation. It argues that eschatology, far from diminishing ecological responsibility, motivates Christians to engage in sustainable living as a witness to the coming redemption of all creation.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the intensifying global ecological crisis, many Christians have adopted an attitude of detachment, believing that eschatological hope negates concern for the environment. This dualistic view, according to Habel (2011) which separates spiritual salvation from creation care, has contributed to theological passivity in the face of environmental degradation. Yet such disengagement fails to account for Paul's description of creation's groaning in Romans 8, which underscores the interdependence between human sin, ecological suffering, and God's plan for redemption.

In Nigeria, widespread environmental degradation caused by mining, deforestation, and poor waste management continues to destroy ecosystems and harm vulnerable communities. However, theological engagement with these issues according



to Mwale & Chita (2021) remains limited, with churches often emphasizing spiritual matters to the neglect of ecological realities. The problem, therefore, is twofold: a worsening ecological crisis and a theological gap in linking eschatological hope with ecological responsibility.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to analyze Romans 8:19–22 as a theological foundation for ecological responsibility, linking eschatology with environmental sustainability.

The Objectives of the study is designed to;

- i. Exegete Romans 8:19–22 in light of contemporary ecological challenges.
- ii. Explore how Paul's description of creation's groaning resonates with current experiences of environmental degradation.
- iii. Assess how eschatological hope can motivate ecological stewardship rather than passivity.
- iv. Highlight practical implications for Christian communities in Nigeria in addressing environmental crises.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative theological research design that integrates biblical exegesis, eco-theological analysis, and contextual application. The exegetical component employed historical-critical and literary methods to analyze Romans 8:19–22 within its immediate literary context in Paul's letter to the Romans and the wider biblical canon. Particular attention was paid to Paul's imagery of creation's groaning and longing for redemption, which was interpreted using insights from contemporary biblical scholarship. This exegetical grounding provided the theological foundation for exploring how Paul's vision of creation's future liberation intersects with contemporary ecological concerns.

The second component of the methodology involved a thematic analysis of eco-theological scholarship. Key works from theologians such as Bauckham (2010), Habel (2011), and Moo (2019) were reviewed to identify dominant themes linking eschatology with ecology. This literature was analyzed alongside perspectives from African theological scholarship, including Mwale and Chita (2021), to ensure cultural relevance. By comparing and contrasting these scholarly voices, the study highlighted how Romans 8:19–22 has been interpreted within the growing field of ecological hermeneutics. The theological insights derived were then synthesized into a framework for ecological responsibility rooted in eschatological hope.

Finally, the study incorporated a contextual analysis of environmental degradation in Nigeria, with particular focus on Jos Plateau, to bridge the gap between biblical theology and lived ecological realities. Secondary data from environmental studies (e.g., Fawole & Olokesusi, 2020) were used to describe patterns of ecological crisis such as mining-induced land degradation, deforestation, and waste mismanagement. These empirical findings were interpreted through the lens of Romans 8, enabling a dialogue between text and context. This

triangulation of biblical exegesis, theological analysis, and contextual application provided a holistic methodology suited to addressing the research objectives and grounding theological reflection in practical ecological realities.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Romans 8:19–22 in Environmental and Biblical Scholarship

Scholars commonly treat Romans 8:19–22 as a pivotal New Testament text that extends salvation's scope beyond humanity to the whole created order. Paul's language of creation "groaning" and "waiting" has been read as affirming creation's participation in both the effects of sin and the hope of redemption, thereby offering a theological basis for thinking about ecology within redemptive history (Moo, 2019; Middleton, 2014). Exegetes underline Paul's cosmic imagination—creation is not merely background but a subject that suffers and will be liberated, which challenges sharply dualistic readings that separate spiritual salvation from material creation (Moo, 2019; Bauckham, 2010).

Recent eco-theological work has stressed that Romans 8 moves the discussion from abstract doctrine to ethical implication: if creation shares in "bondage to decay," then human sin has cosmic consequences and human responsibility must be correspondingly broad (Bauckham, 2010; Habel, 2011). This interpretive strand argues that Paul's eschatology should not be used to dismiss present ecological obligations; rather, the future hope functions as a normative horizon that motivates present stewardship (Middleton, 2014). Methodologically, scholars combine historical-critical exegesis of Paul with ecological hermeneutics to demonstrate how Romans 8 serves as both a theological and moral resource for environmental ethics (Moo, 2019; Bauckham, 2010).

A growing body of interdisciplinary literature engages Romans 8:19–22 with contemporary environmental science and ethical theory, showing that the apostle's imagery resonates with modern descriptions of systemic ecological suffering (Tucker & Grim, 2016). These studies bridge biblical studies and environmental studies arguing that theological claims about creation's redemption can inform policy, advocacy, and community-level action without falling into either escapism or naive instrumentalism (Habel, 2011; Tucker & Grim, 2016). Collectively, the literature positions Romans 8 as a theologically robust and practically consequential text for Christian engagement with ecological degradation.

2.2 Eschatology and Ecological Responsibility

Traditional critiques have sometimes claimed that Christian eschatology produces environmental indifference if the world is destined to end or be replaced, why invest in its care? Historical and contemporary scholarship counters this by showing that biblical eschatology often envisages renewal rather than annihilation, which should spur responsible stewardship rather than resignation (Bauckham, 2010; Middleton, 2014). By reframing eschatology as the promise of renewed creation, theologians argue that hope becomes a

motive for present action: Christians work toward signs of the coming kingdom, including ecological healing, as a foretaste of the future (Wright, 2010; Bauckham, 2010). Eco-theologians emphasize that responsible eschatology resists escapist readings and instead grounds ethical urgency: the promised renewal does not absolve present care but demands faithful participation in God's restorative purposes (Habel, 2011; Tucker & Grim, 2016). Several scholars show how eschatological motifs resurrection, new creation, liberation from bondage provide a narrative framework that legitimizes long-term ecological commitment and systemic change, linking spiritual hope to social and environmental justice (Wright, 2010; Schlosberg, 2013). This reframing is important for contexts where fatalism or short-term exploitation is justified by misconceived eschatological expectations.

Empirical and practical theology literature extends these theological claims into ecclesial practice: churches that embrace a renewal-focused eschatology are more likely to engage in creation care programs, public advocacy, and sustainable community development (Tucker & Grim, 2016; Mwale & Chita, 2021). The literature therefore treats eschatology not as an abstract doctrinal niche but as a formative influence on congregational life and public witness, with measurable implications for environmental behavior and policy engagement. Thus, contemporary scholarship increasingly treats eschatology as an essential resource ethically and pastorally for ecological responsibility.

2.3 Environmental Degradation in Nigeria and Jos

Nigeria faces significant and multi-faceted environmental challenges deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, urban waste, and the ecological impacts of mining that have serious socio-economic implications (Fawole & Olokesusi, 2020). In the Jos Plateau region, decades of mining (notably tin) coupled with urban expansion have produced landscape scarring, erosion, and contamination of water systems, which in turn affect livelihoods and public health (Fawole & Olokesusi, 2020; Mwale & Chita, 2021). These realities make Nigeria a clear locus for applying theological resources like Romans 8:19–22, since local ecological suffering can be read as analogous to the “groaning” described in Paul’s text.

Local and regional studies document how environmental degradation disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations smallholder farmers, informal urban settlers, and the poor creating justice concerns that intersect with ecological ones (Fawole & Olokesusi, 2020; Schlosberg, 2013). Scholars working in African contexts stress the importance of integrating theological reflection with socio-economic interventions because ecological problems are often compounded by governance deficits, poverty, and weak regulatory enforcement (Mwale & Chita, 2021). In the Jos context, scholars recommend holistic responses that combine policy reform, community education, and faith-based mobilization to address both the environmental and social dimensions of degradation. Research further indicates that faith communities in Nigeria are influential but underutilized actors in environmental management (Tucker & Grim, 2016; Mwale & Chita, 2021). Empirical studies find examples of

church-led tree planting, sanitation drives, and advocacy, yet these programs frequently lack theological integration and institutional support, limiting their sustainability and scale (Fawole & Olokesusi, 2020). The literature therefore calls for theological reorientation seeing local ecological crises through frameworks such as Romans 8 paired with cross-sector partnerships to translate moral vision into durable ecological outcomes.

2.4 Eco-Theology and the Role of the Church

Eco-theology has grown as a discipline that reinterprets scriptural teaching for ecological purposes, arguing that Christian doctrine, properly understood compels care for creation (Bauckham, 2010; Habel, 2011). This literature critiques anthropocentric and dominion-centered readings that have justified exploitation and instead emphasizes themes of stewardship, covenantal responsibility, and the intrinsic value of creation (Bauckham, 2010; Horrell et al., 2010). By drawing on texts such as Romans 8, eco-theologians propose a theological anthropology that situates humanity as co-custodians rather than absolute owners of the earth. The role of the church in eco-theology is both formative and public: churches are called to cultivate ecological virtues (preaching, catechesis, liturgy) and to act as agents of social transformation through community projects, advocacy, and partnerships (Tucker & Grim, 2016; Mwale & Chita, 2021). Literature from practical theology and religious studies shows that when ecological theology is integrated into worship and formation, congregational behaviour can shift theologically informed programs correlate with higher rates of church-sponsored environmental initiatives (Tucker & Grim, 2016). Moreover, scholars advocate that churches adopt prophetic and pastoral roles simultaneously speaking against environmental injustice while caring for those affected.

Finally, comparative and contextual theology literature emphasizes that effective church engagement requires contextualization: theological language, liturgy, and praxis must address local ecological realities and socio-economic structures (Mwale & Chita, 2021; Habel, 2011). Partnerships with NGOs, academia, and government are frequently recommended to scale impact, while theological education (seminaries, clergy training) is seen as critical for sustaining informed leadership. Overall, the literature positions the church as a potentially decisive actor in translating eschatological hope and ecological ethics into concrete, justice-centered environmental action.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1: Exegete Romans 8:19–22 in light of contemporary ecological challenges

Findings

The exegesis of Romans 8:19–22 revealed Paul’s deep concern with creation’s participation in the effects of sin and its anticipation of redemption. The imagery of creation “groaning” under bondage to decay parallels the visible degradation of ecosystems today, including deforestation, climate change, and pollution. The text suggests that human

sin and ecological suffering are interconnected, with both awaiting liberation in God's redemptive plan.

Discussion

This finding aligns with Middleton (2014), who emphasizes that Paul's eschatology is holistic, extending salvation to the entire cosmos. Moo (2019) also stresses that creation's suffering must not be spiritualized away but taken seriously as a theological basis for ecological concern. In the Nigerian context, the visible scars of mining and desertification make Paul's imagery especially poignant, as they reflect what Bauckham (2010) calls "the community of creation" in distress.

Furthermore, Habel (2011) argues that texts such as Romans 8 should be read ecologically to challenge human exploitation of nature. This study corroborates his view by demonstrating that Paul's groaning creation vividly corresponds with modern ecological crises. Thus, Romans 8 provides a biblically grounded framework for interpreting and responding to environmental degradation as both a theological and ethical concern.

Objective 2: Explore how Paul's description of creation's groaning resonates with current experiences of environmental degradation

Findings

The study found that creation's groaning resonates with the ecological suffering of communities in Nigeria, particularly in Jos Plateau where mining and deforestation have left the environment severely degraded. Water bodies are polluted, soils are eroded, and biodiversity is under threat. These ecological realities embody the "bondage to decay" Paul describes, linking the biblical text directly to lived environmental experiences.

Discussion

This finding echoes Fawole and Olokesusi (2020), who document the severity of ecological degradation in Nigeria and its socio-economic impacts. It also supports Schlosberg (2013), who highlights how environmental degradation disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, resonating with Paul's notion of creation's suffering as comprehensive and systemic. In this sense, ecological crises become not only environmental but also justice issues. By connecting Romans 8 to contemporary degradation, this study corroborates Bauckham's (2010) and Tucker and Grim's (2016) assertion that biblical theology can serve as a moral compass for ecological responsibility. The groaning of creation in Nigeria provides both a warning of the consequences of unsustainable exploitation and an invitation to participate in the hope of redemption through ecological care.

Objective 3: Assess how eschatological hope can motivate ecological stewardship rather than passivity

Findings

The study found that eschatological hope in Romans 8 does not justify neglect of the environment but instead motivates ecological stewardship. Paul's vision of creation's future liberation implies that present human responsibility anticipates and participates in this renewal. In contrast to

fatalistic interpretations of eschatology, Romans 8 suggests that hope should fuel, not hinder, ecological action.

Discussion

This finding supports Bauckham (2010), who argues that eschatology envisions the renewal rather than destruction of creation. Wright (2010) similarly insists that Christians should live as "signposts" of God's coming kingdom, which includes caring for creation. In the Nigerian church context, this means that eschatological teaching must be reframed to emphasize renewal instead of escape. The study also corroborates Habel's (2011) warning against "inconvenient readings" of Scripture that justify ecological neglect. Instead, aligning with Tucker and Grim (2016), it shows that when eschatological hope is correctly understood, it motivates active participation in sustainable practices. Thus, Romans 8 bridges theology and practice by turning hope into responsibility.

Objective 4: Highlight practical implications for Christian communities in Nigeria in addressing environmental crises

Findings

Christian communities in Nigeria were found to have significant but underutilized potential for ecological engagement. While some congregations engage in tree planting and sanitation drives, these initiatives are often ad hoc and lack theological grounding. Romans 8 provides a framework for linking these practices with eschatological hope, thereby deepening their spiritual and ethical significance.

Discussion

This finding aligns with Mwale and Chita (2021), who argue that African churches hold immense potential for ecological advocacy but require theological integration to sustain their efforts. It also echoes Tucker and Grim (2016), who emphasize religion's unique capacity to shape ecological values and mobilize communities. By rooting environmental action in Romans 8, Nigerian churches can move from fragmented initiatives to sustained, hope-driven stewardship. Furthermore, the prophetic dimension of the Church is highlighted by this study. Just as Amos and Jeremiah denounced exploitation in their contexts, Nigerian churches can speak against exploitative mining, deforestation, and waste mismanagement. This corroborates Bauckham's (2010) call for a prophetic, creation-centered theology that challenges destructive structures while fostering ecological renewal.

Objective 5: Recommend strategies for integrating biblical wisdom into faith-based education and community sustainability initiatives

Findings

The study identified several strategies for integrating biblical wisdom into sustainability initiatives: incorporating ecological themes in theological education, embedding creation care in sermons and worship, and fostering church-community partnerships for environmental advocacy. These strategies were viewed as critical in aligning Christian practice with the eschatological vision of Romans 8.

Discussion

This finding echoes Middleton (2014), who advocates for

integrating biblical eschatology into Christian education to reshape discipleship. It also corroborates Mwale and Chita (2021), who stress that African theological institutions must equip leaders with eco-theological frameworks to effectively guide communities. Faith-based education thus becomes a channel for embedding ecological responsibility in the Christian worldview. In practical terms, this study aligns with Tucker and Grim's (2016) conclusion that religious institutions play a decisive role in shaping ecological consciousness. By mobilizing communities around biblical themes such as groaning and liberation, Nigerian churches can transform eschatological hope into concrete sustainability practices. These strategies ensure that theology informs practice, enabling churches to serve as agents of ecological justice and renewal.

Practical Implications for the Church

Romans 8:19–22 emphasizes that creation groans in anticipation of redemption, and this vision has significant implications for the mission of the Church today. First, it challenges churches to integrate ecological stewardship into theology and worship. Preaching, liturgy, and prayers should reflect creation's suffering and hope, reminding believers that caring for the environment is an act of obedience and worship. For example, integrating environmental themes into sermons and hymnody helps Christians to see ecological care as central to their faith rather than as an optional concern.

Second, the passage calls for the Church to embrace discipleship through sustainable practices. Christian communities can model ecological responsibility by reducing waste, conserving water, planting trees, and promoting clean energy use. These actions reflect anticipation of the new creation, embodying hope in the here and now. Faith-based organizations, in particular, have the potential to mobilize large numbers of people for environmental campaigns, linking biblical teaching with practical acts of creation care.

Finally, Romans 8:19–22 calls the Church to a prophetic role in society. Just as the prophets denounced injustice in their times, today's Church must speak against exploitative practices such as illegal mining, deforestation, and poor environmental governance. This prophetic witness includes advocacy for policies that protect ecosystems and support vulnerable communities most affected by ecological crises. In doing so, the Church not only participates in creation's groaning but also points society toward the hope of renewal in Christ.

REFERENCES

1. Bauckham, R. (2010). *Bible and ecology: Rediscovering the community of creation*. Baylor University Press.
2. Fawole, O. P., & Olokesusi, F. (2020). Environmental degradation and its socio-economic implications in Nigeria. *Journal of Environmental Management and Sustainable Development*, 9(2), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jemsd.v9i2.16672>
3. Habel, N. C. (2011). *An inconvenient text: Is a green reading of the Bible possible?* ATF Press.
4. Middleton, J. R. (2014). *A new heaven and a new earth: Reclaiming biblical eschatology*. Baker Academic.
5. Moo, D. J. (2019). *Creation care: A biblical theology of the natural world*. Zondervan Academic.
6. Mwale, N., & Chita, J. (2021). Eco-theology and the African church: Prospects and challenges in addressing climate change. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 42(1), a2134. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.2134>
7. Schlosberg, D. (2013). Theorising environmental justice: The expanding sphere of a discourse. *Environmental Politics*, 22(1), 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.755387>
8. Wright, N. T. (2010). *After you believe: Why Christian character matters*. Harper One. usa, D., & Jiya, N. (2011). An assessment of mining activities impact on vegetation in Bukuru, Jos Plateau State Nigeria using Normalized Differential Vegetation Index (NDVI). *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4(6), 150–159. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v4n6p150>
9. Oruonye, E. D., Musa, D. G., Bombom, L. S., Anger, R. T., Ahmed, Y. M., Ezekiel, B. B., Angye, G. F., & Emmanuel, J. (2024). The nexus between unsustainable mining, livelihood and environmental degradation: A case of tin and columbite mining on Jos Plateau, Nigeria. *Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 3(4), 67–83. <https://gphjournal.org/index.php/ssh/article/view/1223>
10. Wapwera, N. D. (2024). Environmental degradation and the Ngas people: The harms brought about by tin mining in Jos Plateau, Nigeria. *Journal of Religion and Policy*, 12(2), 88–104. <https://www.acjorl.org/index.php/jjrp/article/view/6494>
11. Okeke, D. C., & Ume, T. A. (2022). Environmental degradation and sustainable development in Nigeria: A review of challenges and policy options. *African Journal of Environmental Science and Sustainable Development*, 5(1), 22–38.
12. Onwuka, E. M., & Anwana, E. O. (2021). Faith-based organizations and environmental sustainability in Nigeria: Prospects and challenges. *Journal of African Christian Studies*, 37(2), 45–63.
13. Uche, C. I., & Okoye, V. C. (2020). Mining and environmental crisis in Jos Plateau: Implications for sustainable development. *Nigerian Journal of Environmental Research*, 18(1), 34–49.