

Christianity and environmental issues 1

Should Christians be concerned about environmental issues?

I have heard a variety of views on this. At one end of the spectrum some say that Christianity is about eternal, spiritual matters, whereas the world is only temporary and we should not waste time and effort on it. Anyway, God promised Noah that he'd keep the earth's cycles going and he doesn't need help from us. I have also heard the view that Christianity primarily relates to this world and our physical lives, and so ecology *is* the Gospel. Most of us would fall somewhere between these two extremes, but have we tried to establish a Biblical perspective?

Psalm 8 is a good starting point. It is a hymn of praise, not a systematic theology, but it does contain theology found elsewhere in the Bible, for example that human beings are specially created by God in his image and that the rest of creation, although not on an equal footing with humanity, still matters to God. Basically, God is the great Creator; we are insignificant compared to him but are still important to him; and with our special position goes responsibility for the rest of creation.

So, ***whose world is it?***

Ours? We behave as if it is, often feeling we can do as we like with it and that it is only there for our benefit.

Or does it really belong to other creatures? After all, they were here before we were and are much more numerous.

Of course it actually belongs to God. Psalm 8 speaks to him of 'your heavens', 'the work of your fingers'. He created it as something good for his pleasure. In Leviticus 25:23 he tells his people, 'The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.'

Then, ***what is our place in God's world?***

We live in the world and cannot detach ourselves from it. We depend on it and if we wreck it we harm ourselves, as we see in relation to global warming and environmental disasters.

Read Deuteronomy 28, where the natural world is inextricably involved in the effects of human obedience and sin.

Also, the second commandment as encapsulated by Jesus is to love our neighbour as ourselves, and what we do to the world affects others living now and future generations. The Bible teaches that all creation fell when we did, and of course our sin directly causes a lot of the world's problems.

We are in a special position in the world as human beings created in God's image, but that does not give us the right to do what we like with it. God is King, not us; creation is there firstly to please and glorify him and only after that to meet our needs - our *needs* not our *wants*.

Our special position gives us responsibilities rather than rights - responsibilities of stewardship, as outlined in Genesis and in the Old Testament law, to care for creation not to exploit it. Our freedom is always limited by God's laws and by obligations towards others.

As Christians we are to be different to other people, not to be selfish, greedy and arrogant, but to be caring and self-controlled. Are we sometimes outdone in this by people who make no claim to know the Creator, but are very concerned for his creation?

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