

A Biblical Perspective on Climate Change

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Last month we looked at climate change—what it is and how the world is responding to it. We also considered how God provides for life on earth through the greenhouse effect. This month we look at climate change with a biblical perspective. Although scripture does not directly address climate change, there are some biblical principles that we can use when looking at the issue.

First, whether or not climate change happens, God is still in control. He cares for his creation by his providential hand. “We believe that...God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment” (Belgic Confession, Article 13). We read also in Psalm 104:27–29, “These [the creatures spoken of in the psalm, the creation itself also by extension] wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.” If climate change is having negative consequences upon the earth—accelerated warming leading to rising sea levels from melting ice or the acidification of the ocean from its intake of excess carbon dioxide leading to the death of coral reefs (coral bleaching)—this in no way minimizes God's sovereignty. A dynamic earth in no way undermines God's rule over all events or his care for his creation. He opens his hand to the creation, enabling life, and he also closes his hand, preventing life. In God's hand “is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:10).

Second, after God created, he made man steward over the earth—a beautiful and intricately designed, Goldilocks planet. Earth is neither too close to the sun nor too far away. The temperature and atmospheric conditions are just right, enabling earth to support life. The composition of earth's atmosphere is just right, so that it protects the surface of the planet through the greenhouse effect. The preservation of this balance and good order in creation provided by the greenhouse effect, ultimately provided for by God, is to be included in man's duties as steward. In Genesis 1:28 God blessed Adam and Eve and said, “Be fruitful and

multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” With this command of God, man is called to subject the resources of this planet to his use. However, man is to do this in a way that still allows him to care for the creation. Stripping the earth of its resources (fossil fuels) because they are there and we know how to use them is not an option. Man's use of fossil fuels is proper and good in light of Genesis 1:28, but only if it is accomplished through the exercise of stewardship. If man realizes that using too much fossil fuel leads to an increased amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and that this increase is having adverse effects upon creation, he has the responsibility to limit his use of fossil fuels. Let's step away from the hypothetical. It is an established fact that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased. More and more evidence is also being brought to the table that points to man being responsible for this increase, if only in part. Now let's look at one of effects of climate change, briefly mentioned above. It has been demonstrated that increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing the amount that the ocean absorbs. The ocean, created by God to help maintain the wonderful balance of earth's systems, naturally absorbs carbon from the atmosphere. More carbon in the atmosphere means more carbon in the ocean, which acidifies the water. The acidification of the ocean, accelerated by climate change, has been shown to have adverse effects on many marine organisms, especially coral, even leading to coral bleaching (death) events.¹ Now aside from this specific example of the effects of climate change, consider the adverse effects of climate change as a whole. If it is true that man is accelerating the natural process of climate change through his use of fossil fuels, man has the responsibility to put limits on his use of fossil fuels. On the flip side, if we are going to say that climate change and its negative effects on earth are a farce, we had better be sure that they actually are. God has given us stewardship of *his* creation—“the earth is the LORD'S” (Ps. 24:1)—and we will be held accountable for how we used it and what we did with our knowledge of creation. With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility.

Third, remember that the earth was cursed after the fall and along with man suffers the effects of sin and also longs to be delivered. God said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,

¹ Scott C. Doney *et al*, “Ocean Acidification: The Other CO₂ Problem” *Annual Review of Marine Science* 1:169-192.

till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:17–19). Read also Romans 8:19–22, "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." It ought not surprise us when the creation is adversely affected when the natural cycle of climate change is accelerated by large influxes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere and the resulting temperature fluctuations. The creation too suffers the effects of sin and waits to be delivered.

Fourth, as we approach the end of time, we must realize that climate change may be used by God in part to bring about that end. Climate change is a *global* issue, and in the past few years we have seen the world striving to unite around this issue. During the fall of 2015, many world leaders met in Paris at the United Nations Climate Change Conference. The result of the conference was the drafting of the Paris Agreement, which is a commitment by the 55 signing nations to reduce the effects climate change by limiting fossil fuel usage. Here is an issue that is unifying the world. Could this be a way in which the antichrist is ushered in?

Fifth, we are sojourners on earth. Evidence of the creation itself changing or being destroyed should not cause us to worry. We are only here temporarily, until the end and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. Yes, we are stewards and we should govern how we use God's creation, but we do so with the realization that it is only temporary. We do not go about our work as stewards with the concern that we are preserving the earth so that God can establish his kingdom on it.

Conclusion:

The issues of climate change and global warming are complicated issues. Many of the predictions and responses are fruit of an unbelieving evolutionary worldview. With the evolutionary worldview laced through many of the conclusions and predictions, it becomes difficult to sort out the good data from the bad. Add to this difficulty the fact that atmospheric and climate science is extremely complicated. It's not just about industries and automobiles pumping carbon dioxide into the air. There are thousands of reactions taking place

simultaneously in that atmosphere. But let's not miss the forest for the trees here. If we concentrate on all the wrong responses and conclusions that have been made in light of the issue, we are going to forget that it is still an issue that we as Christians need to be aware of and need to discuss. If we dismiss the issues of climate change and global warming outright, we throw the baby out with the bath water. We all need to look into these issues and seriously discuss their legitimacy. More importantly, we need to shape our Christian response.

So, should we all sell our big gas guzzling SUVs and vans and buy Priuses to help lower carbon dioxide emissions? Probably not. This would be highly impractical in most cases. Are there things we can do as stewards? Absolutely. For starters, we can pay attention and stay informed with what is happening.

If we conclude that climate change is a legitimate issue, does that make us part of the "tree-hugger, environmentalist, green movement?" No. The simple and biblical answer is that we are stewards of what God has given us, the creation itself in this case. From this perspective, we can then shape our response to the issues at hand. With this perspective, also we realize that we are sojourners on earth. This world is not our final home and we do not despair if man harms it. No matter how man treats the earth, its ultimate end will not be caused by man, but will be destroyed by God when Christ comes again.

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