

WHO TAKES CARE?

- a call for Christians to care for God's creation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is addressed to anyone who shares the belief articulated in the Bible that God is the Creator. He created the earth and everything in it, including us human beings whom he made the caretakers of his creation. This is a big subject and will be posted in four bites, as follows:

- Executive summary and introduction
- The Biblical framework for creation care
- Global warming and climate change
- Population growth and carelessness with God's creation and a conclusion

After a brief introduction, Section Two examines what the Bible teaches about our creation care responsibilities, cautions against both complacency and despair and points to grounds for hope linked to the second coming of Christ.

Section Three examines how and why the world's climate seems to be changing and the possible consequences. These include rising sea levels that could submerge low lying coastal areas and precipitate mass migrations from countries such as Bangladesh. Fresh water supplies are threatened when climate change brings extended periods of drought. Farming is closely dependent on climate and climate change will inevitably affect agriculture and food supply. Pollution, water shortages and heat waves will also affect human health. Coping with all these effects will cost money and have an impact on national economies, budgets and taxation.

The rapid growth of the world's population, which is expected to double in the next 50 years, raises questions about the planet's capacity to provide sufficient food, clean water, energy and medical provision which are discussed in Section Four. Our Creator has given us all we need to sustain the way of life he intended for us but we are using up those resources faster than they can be replaced. We examine such issues as the depletion of energy resources, clean water and air as well as fish stocks. Soil erosion and deforestation reduce our capacity to feed the world and waste disposal is another huge problem.

Future generations will pay the price for our negligence as caretakers. We reject both the view that the earth is finished and the naïve optimism that thinks technology and human ingenuity will find a way out of the mess. Instead, hope is to be found in the biblical conviction that God sustains all that he has created. Nevertheless, we caretakers still have our part to play and will have to give account for our conduct on the Day of Judgement. The Conclusion gives three reasons why we should not downplay our creation care mandate and offers some practical examples of how we can be better caretakers.

INTRODUCTION

Rarely a day goes by without the broadcast or newsprint media somewhere in Europe reporting some new information or story about an environmental issue or problem.

Sometimes it concerns the effects of climate change, or the pollution of the land, sea or atmosphere. On other occasions, the report focuses on population growth and the future difficulties in feeding everyone. Then again, it could be stories of rare plants, animals, birds or fish that need conserving. For some, such as those employed in the fishing industries, these measures could mean unemployment and poverty. For those living at sea level in areas prone to storm surges and flooding the future could be one of homelessness and the need to migrate. All is not well with planet Earth and we, its inhabitants, can no longer pretend otherwise. There are tough questions and even tougher answers.

Christians have dual citizenship; we are citizens of both the Kingdom of God and of our nation state. In the former capacity, we are commanded to go into all the world and make disciples. As we seek to do this, it is highly likely that eventually we will be challenged with some of those tough questions; such as where was God when hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc in New Orleans. Or why did God allow that tsunami off the coast of Thailand that killed so many people? If we want to tell them about their need of a Saviour, a need they might not yet have recognised, we must be prepared to respond intelligently to such questions and do so with biblical consistency.

This study examines some of the major environmental issues and problems that are causing concern today. There is nothing original here; we have simply searched through the Bible and the writings of people¹ whose expertise we trust in the hope that this brief review will help others who have not the time, resources or opportunity to do this for themselves. We have done this out of a conviction that God's people have a prime responsibility to understand and fulfil the very first command that God gave us and if we do not our collective impact, as evangelical Christians will be impaired. This conviction is totally different from contemporary attempts to make creation the meta-narrative. The only meta-narrative informing this paper is the Bible, which teaches us that the earth is God's creation and he made us its care-takers. The following section unpacks that teaching.

¹ The writers on whose work we have drawn are identified in footnotes and in the Resources section at the end of the paper but we owe a special debt to John Stott, Roy McCloughry, Chris Wright and Sir John Houghton. They are not responsible for the use we have made of the material.