

Confronting Christianity

Week #7

Small Group Notes

Introduction:

Ice breaker: Would you rather spend a vacation in the mountains or at the beach? Somewhere else? Explain.

This week we are going to look at a very controversial topic: The environment. Global warming, climate change, and environmental conservation are pressing issues for many today and political acceptance finds itself on both sides of the aisle as well. For environmentalists, the list of criticisms and fears is long but the question many in the church may be asking is, "Are we really killing our planet?"

Discuss:

1. Genesis 1 -2

Explain: In Genesis 1-2, we see how God created everything, including humanity and how He intended mankind to relate to that creation. The world is His property. This is foundational to everything the Bible says about the world and our role in it. We clearly see that God is in charge. He is sovereign, meaning He has the authority and power to do what He chooses. No physical portion of creation and no social institution is outside His control. Let's look further.

Ask: 2-3 Discussion questions related to the content.

- ❖ **How would you characterize your awareness and involvement in environmental issues?**
- ❖ **What aspect of God's creation would you say you admire the most? Why?**
- ❖ **[Have a volunteer read Genesis 1:28–31.] After making and blessing mankind, God indicates that this creation is "very good." What is the significance of that phrase?**
 - *It means that the earth itself has intrinsic value. Whatever we do to the earth and with the earth, we must be aware that we are handling what belongs to God.*
- ❖ **(Read 1:28, 2:15) What responsibilities did God give to mankind?**

- *To rule over/subdue/steward creation. God gave people the responsibility to rule over the world. Ruling over and subduing does not mean merely “being the boss.”*
- ❖ **What do the concepts of subduing the earth and ruling over its creatures mean? What are the limits to our ruling and subduing?**
 - The implication for us as stewards is that we’re free to explore but not exploit. We subdue and rule under God’s authority, maintaining His creation to glorify Him rather than to merely satisfy our selfish desires. Thus, we are to care for God’s creation, maintain its beauty, and exercise responsible stewardship of its resources.
- ❖ **Why is it important for us to think about our responsibility to care for God’s creation?**
 - *We should care about what God cares about. (Psalm 19:1-2)*
 - *{Illustration} How would you treat someone’s car/house if they let you borrow it?*
- ❖ **What is the danger in caring too much about the environment?**
 - *There are those who end up worshipping creation rather than stewarding creation and worshipping God.*
- ❖ **[Have someone read Romans 1:22-23] What are some ways you see people worshipping nature?**
- ❖ **What are some ways you see that we as humans are caring well for God’s creation? What are some ways we are failing to care for it?**

2. Genesis 3, Romans 8:19-23

Explain: In Genesis 3 we see that the first humans decided to rebel by disobeying God’s instructions (Gen 3:1-7). We can look around and see the results of the fall on the rest of creation (Romans 8:19-23). But the biggest problem with the world is deeper than raising temperatures or the practice of refining petroleum. Rather, the root issue is that human wills are bent against God: We refuse to rightly worship the good God who created this good world and as a result, sin has had a direct impact on the environment.

- ❖ **What were the consequences of Adam’s sin?**
 - (Genesis 3:17) The ground is cursed. Work would now be toil.
 - (Genesis 3) Death and separation entered the world.
 - (Romans 8:19-23.) Creation itself was subjected to futility.

- ❖ **What does it mean that, “creation was subjected to frustration/futility”? And, what does it mean that “creation itself will be liberated from bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and the glory of the children of God “?**
 - Futility/Corruption is a cycle in which conception, birth, and growth are relentlessly followed by decline, decay, death, and decomposition. (e.g., Natural disasters, chaotic weather fluctuation, etc.)
 - Not only will mankind be in a state of futility, but the environment too, will be in a state of futility until the end times when God creates a new heaven and earth. (Revelation 21:1-4; Isaiah 65:17)
- ❖ **How does Jesus save us from sin? How does Jesus redeem mankind? How does Jesus redeem the environment/world?**
 - *Jesus paid the penalty for sin on the cross. In Him, mankind has justification, sanctification, transformation, & glorification. (See Romans 8:28-30)*
 - *The environment will ultimately receive “re-creation.” (Revelation 21:1-4; Isaiah 65:17)*
- ❖ **Do you think that since this world is not a Christian’s ultimate home, that excuses a lack of stewardship and care of the environment in the meantime? Why or why not?**
 - {Illustration} We know that our human bodies will ultimately die, but we also know deep down that we should take care of them in the meantime. Stewardship still matters.
- ❖ **Do you think the church has been silent on the environment? Do you think you have? Why or why not?**
 - There are some in the culture that use environmentalism for other ulterior motives. It is hard to discern.
 - There are some proposed measures/legislations that are actually worse for the environment. However, it is easier for Christians to just avoid the topic because of how hotly these issues are debated.
- ❖ **What new insights have you gotten from scripture today?**

Application:

- ❖ **In light of today’s lesson what adjustments do you need to make *personally* in regards to environmental issues?**

- ❖ **How has the natural world helped you encounter God? What steps can you take to more fully experience God through his creation?**
- ❖ **What could you do personally and what could you do together as a group in the next month to explore some of God's glorious creation?**
- ❖ **How might you "build bridges" with those who are un-churched and overly passionate about the environment? How can we deliver the truth of the gospel in a loving way to our environmentalist friends?**
- ❖ **(Consider the criticism: "We're destroying the planet!": Could you give an "elevator speech" (a concise speech deliverable in a short time on the essence of a matter) answer to this question from a biblical worldview, now that you've studied it as a group? (As time allows, ask each of your group members to practice their "elevator speech" on environmentalism and the bible.**

Close: How can we be praying for one another? How can we encourage one another this week?