

Chapter 10a – The Environment

What policies should governments adopt concerning the use and care of the environment?

1. Biblical Teaching – Short Review.

- A. The original creation was “very good” (Gen 1:31, 3:18).
 - a. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden *to work it and keep it*” (Gen. 2:15).
 - b. “And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth *and subdue it and have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ ” (Gen. 1:28).
- B. Because Adam and Eve sinned, God placed a curse on the entire natural world (Gen. 3:17–19).
 - a. The earth would now contain “thorns and thistles” and many other dangerous and harmful things (Gen. 3:18)
 - The creation is not now perfect, as it someday will be. At present, nature still exists in a “fallen” state. Therefore what we think of as “*natural*” today is *not always good*.
 - b. God did not destroy the earth, but he left much that is good in it
 - It is *amazingly resourceful* because of the great treasures that he has placed in it for us to discover, enhance, and enjoy.
 - In the same verse which God said, “thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,” he added, “and you shall eat the plants of the field” (Gen. 3:18). This implies that there would still be much good for human beings to discover and use and enjoy in the earth.
 - Paul said that God “richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). This implies that human beings should feel free to use the earth’s resources with joy and thanksgiving to God.
 - c. God promises a future time when the abundant prosperity of Eden will be restored to the earth (Rom 8:21, Isa. 11:6–9, Amos 9:13, Acts 3:21,
- C. God now wants human beings to develop the earth’s resources and to use them wisely and joyfully
 - a. Before the fall: *subdue it and have dominion over it* (Gen. 1:28), and *work it and keep it* (Gen. 2:15)
 - b. Subduing the earth after the fall
 - The responsibility to develop the earth and enjoy its resources continued after Adam and Eve’s sin (Gen 3:18, Ps 8:4-8)
 - Evidence that our responsibility to “subdue” the earth continues after the fall is the very necessity of cultivating the earth in order to grow food to eat. We have to “subdue” the earth to some extent or we will all starve! (Gen. 9:3 – God told Noah every moving thing shall be food, Rom.14:2–3; 1 Cor. 8:7–13; 1 Tim. 4:4; also Mark 7:19, where it says that Jesus “declared all foods clean”)
 - However, these commands to subdue the earth and have dominion over it do not mean that we should use the earth in a wasteful or destructive way or intentionally treat animals with cruelty (Prov. 12:10, Deut. 20:19-20, Matt. 22:39).

2. Contrasting a biblical view of the earth and a radical environmentalist view.

- A. “Untouched nature” as the radical environmentalist ideal - i.e. medical research, building projects, *delta smelt*...
 - a. Fear of use of the Earth’s resources (opposition to hydroelectric dams, windmills, oil and natural gas development, any burning of coal or oil or gas, and any use of nuclear energy)
 - Objection to the killing of mosquitoes with pesticides even when the mosquitoes spread West Nile Virus and (in Africa) spread malaria that kills millions of people.
 - b. The major problem of the earth is *the presence of human beings!* (human beings are the *AIDS of the Earth*, and the world’s population must be reduced).
 - “Curing a body of cancer requires radical and invasive therapy, and therefore, curing the biosphere of the *human virus* will also require a radical and invasive approach.” – Paul Watson
 - Parents ought to consider the environment first when they plan to have a child. John Guillebaud, co-chairman of Optimum Population Trust and emeritus professor of family planning at University College in London, said, “*The greatest thing anyone in Britain could do to help the future of the planet would be to have one less child.*”
- B. *By contrast*, God’s perspective in the Bible is that the creation of human beings in his image and placing them on the earth to rule over it as his representatives is the crowning achievement of God in his entire work of creation.
 - a. *We should view the development and production of goods from the earth as something morally good.*
 - God placed in the earth resources that would enable man to develop much more than food and clothing. here are resources that enable the construction of beautiful homes, automobiles, airplanes, computers, and millions of other consumer goods. While these things can be misused, and while people’s hearts can have wrongful attitudes about them (such as pride, jealousy, and coveting), *the things in themselves* should be viewed as *morally good* because they are part of God’s intention in placing us on the earth to subdue it and have dominion over it.
 - b. *Jesus taught that human beings are much more valuable in God’s sight than animals*
 - “Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!” (Matt. 12:12). He also said, “Look at the birds of the air. . . . Are you not of more value than they?” (Matt. 6:26). And again he said, “You are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:31)

3. *The Current State of the Earth's Resources* - Correctly evaluating the facts about the current situation of the earth. (The Bible's picture of the earth in general is that it has abundant resources that God has put there to bring great benefit to us as human beings made in his image. There is no hint that mankind will ever exhaust the earth's resources by developing them and using them wisely.)
- A. *We are not destroying the earth* - The importance of using information from long-term, worldwide trends rather than short-term, local stories of disasters.
- a. People have developed their opinions, *not from actual data* showing the true state of the earth as a whole and showing longterm trends, *but from a barrage of media reports* about specific local incidents where something has gone wrong—a certain oil spill, or a crop failure and famine in some country, or the cutting down of trees and loss of forest area in some country, or a polar bear jumping off a piece of melting ice somewhere in the Arctic, and so forth. Fear is one of the great ways of increasing an audience. Therefore, the media have a natural bias toward reporting alarming events.
 - b. *Special interest organizations* that raise more money and keep themselves employed only by putting out press releases declaring that worldwide environmental disaster is just around the corner. Bjorn Lomborg, a Danish environmentalist and economic statistician, cites numerous examples of astoundingly blatant dishonesty in the use of data in publications by environmentalist organizations such as the Worldwatch Institute or the World Wide Fund for Nature or Greenpeace.
 - c. According to Bjorn Lomborg, *reports from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations* show that global forest cover has increased from 30.04% of the global land area in 1950 to 30.89% in 1994.
 - d. *With regard to purported water shortages*, Lomborg writes: - One of the most widely used college books on the environment, *Living in the Environment*, claims that “according to a 1995 World Bank study, 30 countries containing 40 percent of the world’s population (2.3 billion people) now experience chronic water shortages that threaten their agriculture and industry and the health of their people.” This World Bank study is referred to in many different environment texts with slightly differing figures. Unfortunately, none mentions a source. With a good deal of help from the World Bank, I succeeded in locating the famous document. It turns out that the myth had its origin in a hastily drawn up press release. The headline on the press release was “The world is facing a water crisis: 40 percent of the world’s population suffers from chronic water shortage.” If you read on, however, it suddenly becomes clear that the vast majority of the 40 percent are not people who use too much water but those who have no access to water or sanitation facilities—the exact opposite point. If one also reads the memo to which the press release relates, it shows that the global water crisis which Lester Brown and others are worried about affects not 40 percent but about 4 percent of the world’s population.
 - e. If God created an earth for man to subdue and develop, then it is reasonable to think that he created (a) an earth with abundant resources able to be developed, and (b) an earth that would benefit from man’s developing it, not one that would be destroyed through such development. In addition, if God wanted human beings to “fill the earth,” then it seems reasonable to expect that the spread of human population over the earth could be done without necessarily harming or destroying it.
 - f. The “curse” that God put on the earth in Genesis 3:17–18 would make development of the earth’s resources more difficult and more painful, but it would not change the basic character of such development or turn it into something harmful rather than helpful.
 - g. If it is God’s purpose for us to develop and enjoy the earth’s resources with thanksgiving to him, then we would also expect it would be Satan’s purpose to oppose and hinder such developmental activity at every point and in every way possible.
- B. Long-term trends show that human beings will be able to live on the earth, enjoying ever-increasing prosperity, and never exhausting its resources.
- a. *World population*
 - The world population has grown from 750 million people in 1750 to 6.8 billion people today. The rapid increase in growth began in the twentieth century but is already slowing down and is predicted to end at a world population of about 11 billion around the year 2200.
 - Will we run out of space on the earth? No, there is much more available space for people to live.
 - The countries and states that are thought to be most densely populated vast amounts of land area in forests, parks, and agricultural use
 - Increasing population does not seem to change the total use of land in a nation by very much, mostly because people move into cities and much of the rural area of a country is left untouched.
 - For example, between 1945 and 1992 the US population almost doubled (from about 140 million to about 256 million people; it is now over 307 million). But a doubling of the US population resulted in almost no change in the amount of land used for crops, forests, or grasslands. The urban area of the nation increased from 1% of the land to 3% of the land in 2002 and contains 79% of the population, but there is still an immense amount of land remaining.
 - Does an increase in population mean that people are more crowded in their living space? No, because as nations increase in wealth, people tend to build larger houses and have more rooms per person rather than fewer rooms.
 - *In other words, the world population is stabilizing, and there is an immense amount of room left on the earth in which everyone can live comfortably.*