



# “Can I Be A Christian If . . . 5. I Believe In Taking Care Of This Planet?”

Text: Genesis 1:26-31

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You don't have to spend much time in Southern Indiana before someone asks you the asinine question, “Hot enough for you?” Honestly, if too many more people ask me that question, I might be persuaded to pulverize them with a chair, or anything else immediately available. At least the humidity isn't quite as bad as we are accustomed to experiencing. There's the silver lining in the non-existent cloud.

After living in this preview of Hell for a while, maybe you, like me, are beginning to wonder about the effect that “global warming” may be having on our weather. When you look at the wildfires in Colorado, where there was not much snow last winter, with much of the state being in drought conditions for a number of years, maybe you are beginning to wonder whether there is something more to this whole business of “global warming” than you had previously thought.

I went looking for some reliable information about global warming. Many still dispute the reality of global warming and call it “voodoo science” among other things. So, I wanted to find some reliable information from a well-trusted source. I found that information and the reliability of a well-earned reputation in the National Geographic Society.

The first question asked as “is global warming a reality?” The National Geographic Society says “yes.” In support of that argument, they offer these observations:

- Average temperatures have climbed 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit (0.8 degree Celsius) around the world since 1880, much of this in recent decades.
- The rate of warming is increasing. The 20<sup>th</sup> century's last two decades were the hottest in 400 years and possibly the warmest for several millennia.

- The Arctic is feeling the effects the most. Average temperatures in Alaska, western Canada, and eastern Russia have risen at twice the global average.
- Arctic ice is rapidly disappearing, and the region may have its first completely ice-free summer by 2040 or earlier. Polar bears and indigenous cultures are already suffering from the sea-ice loss.
- Glaciers and mountain snows are rapidly melting – for example, Montana’s Glacier National Park now has only 27 glaciers, versus 150 in 1910.
- Coral reefs, which are highly sensitive to small changes in water temperature, suffered the worst bleaching – or die-off in response to stress – ever recorded in 1998, with some areas seeing bleach rates of 70 percent.
- An upsurge in the amount of extreme weather events, such as wildfires, heat waves, and strong tropical storms, is also attributed in part to climate change by some experts.

So, let’s agree, for the moment, that the National Geographic Society, the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, and the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are right. The question that comes next is, “are human beings – are we – responsible for global warming.” Again, the National Geographic Society says, “very likely.”

A report, based on the work of some 2,500 scientists in more than 130 countries, concluded that humans have caused all or most of the current planetary warming. Human-caused global warming is often called anthropogenic climate change.

- Industrialization, deforestation, and pollution have greatly increased atmospheric concentrations of water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, all greenhouse gases that help trap heat near Earth’s surface.
- Humans are pouring carbon dioxide into the atmosphere much faster than plants and oceans can absorb it.
- These gases persist in the atmosphere for years, meaning that even if such emissions were eliminated today, it would not immediately stop global warming.

Something potentially catastrophic is happening. Of that there is little doubt. Global warming is real – as are other abuses to the creation that we allow for the sake of keeping the lifestyle to which we have become accustomed.

Now, the question turns to “what does this mean for people of faith?” How are we – as people who believe in the God revealed to us in Jesus – how are we to think about caring for the creation and living in a way that honor both the creation and the Creator?

It is interesting to note that every major mainline Christian denomination has worked on this issue and produced well-thought out and well-written statements on the subject of the stewardship of creation, as well as offering directives and suggestions for how their members might think about and offer

positive action steps to better care for the creation. Recently, more evangelical Christian leaders – many of whom were once skeptical about global warming – have joined together to issue position papers, calling on evangelical Christians to take seriously the work of creation care. Other faith traditions are also coming to the realization that, as people of faith, we have a unique calling to care for the creation and heal its wounds.

For people of faith – especially Jews, Christians, and Muslims – our understanding of the creation holds the key to the life we are to live and the actions we are to take. In the story of creation that we read in Genesis 1, God entrusts the creation to the care of the humans that God created. “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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28)

That word *dominion*, is the catch. *Dominion* might mean to us “power,” “right,” or “say so.” You might hear it as God saying, “Do what you want with the creation.” The Hebrew word is *radah*, which is commonly translated “*reign*,” as in what a ruler does. We are to “rule” over creation.

But that does not mean we may do with it as we please. It means that we must do whatever we can to care for it until it is returned to its rightful owner who is God the Creator. We must be benevolent, caring, compassionate rulers – and even begin seeing ourselves as “caretakers” of creation.

There is a wonderful scene in the movie, “The Queen,” where Queen Elizabeth and her mother are walking in the garden, talking about the death of Princess Diana and what the Queen should be doing. At one point, in exasperation, she says something like, “Maybe it’s time for me to go and hand it over to the next generation.” The Queen Mother bristles at the suggestion and reminds her daughter that she swore an oath to her people and to God that she would rule until the day she died.

When you listen to faithful monarchs, presidents, and other rulers, you will often hear them speak of the office they hold as something that has been entrusted to them for a time. They realize that they are not free to do as they please, but, instead, have a very real responsibility to their people and to God.

That is the kind of *dominion* we are to have over the creation. That is how we are to “rule over” creation. We are to exercise stewardship over the creation, for the well-being of all the creation, and in faithfulness to God the Creator, who entrusted it to our care and keeping.

So, how can we, as people of faith, meet that incredible challenge? How can we, as people of faith, care for “the planet entrusted to our care?” How do we practice an authentic stewardship of creation?

The place to begin is with our individual lives. How can we lessen the strain on creation? Are we recycling? Are we conserving? Are we leaving less of a carbon footprint by the way we are living? Are we pouring chemicals onto our yards in order to keep up with the neighbors, even though the run off can cause greater problems than we imagine? What are we doing – as individuals – to care for the creation?

The next place to think about making a difference is as a congregation. What are doing as a community of faith to care for the creation? We've cut back on the disposable plates and cups and cutlery. We're recycling paper and using less water. But, what else can we do?

In a short time, you'll hear about an organization called Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light. As we begin to share in this new interfaith ministry, you'll be receiving information that will help you as individuals and families – and us as a congregation – make a huge difference in the stewardship of creation. Keep your eyes and ears open and join in the work of Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light.

And we have to think about what more we can do – as the larger, interfaith community of faith – as we witness to the need for creation care to those in places of power and authority. We must learn to speak and act together, so that our voice and concerns can be heard over the voices and money of those who would prefer to keep things just as they are. We must work together to demand that changes to policies and practices become reality and that we work together to restore and heal the brokenness of the creation. And, should it come to this, we must take Thomas Friedman's advice, when he says that it is not enough to change our light bulbs. We may need to change our leaders.

“Can I Be A Christian If I Believe In Taking Care of This Planet?”

Frankly, I don't know how you can be a Christian and not take care of this planet. And, praise God, many, many more Christian people are discovering this to be true.

Christians – along with many other peoples of faith – are called to care passionately for this planet that we call home – practicing a faithful stewardship – ruling benevolently over creation – protecting the preciousness of our world and healing the broken places. The Bible's witness is clear and unequivocal. We are commissioned by God to care for this planet as agents of the Creator.

May we be found faithful to this commission and may we nurture this fragile and small blue-green planet, allowing the life-giving power of God to restore it to its goodness and glory. For now and evermore. Amen.



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