

Is Environmental Concern ‘A New Morality’?

Environmental concern is regarded as ‘A New Morality’ and, as such viewed with suspicion and hostility by many Christians. But is this justified? Below you will find an extract from the Commentary on Genesis by arguably the greatest of the protestant reformers, John Calvin (1509-1564).

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2, vs 15, NIV).

“We possess the things that God has committed to our hands, on condition of our being content with a frugal and moderate use of them... Let him who possesses a field... endeavour to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated... Let every one regard himself as the steward of God in all things he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.”

The verse and comment show that a responsibility to care for God’s good creation is foundational to human responsibilities – it is a ‘creation ordinance’ (as is marriage, for example). Indeed, since Revelation 11, verse 18, predicts that a time will come *“for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants the prophets, and for destroying those who destroy the earth”*, we may justifiably conclude that the teaching is found in the Bible from the beginning to the end! What we are dealing with here is not a new morality, but the application of the old, God-given morality to a new situation, which we have brought about by our carelessness and greed.

We may not possess many fields, but will the climate we hand down to posterity be as good or better than we received it? Are we regarding ourselves as *“God’s stewards in all things”*? Or is our treatment of the environment *“dissolute, corrupt and abusive”*?

David W. Golding CBE PhD DSc HonDCL

Honorary Chaplain at Newcastle University (d.w.golding@ncl.ac.uk)