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A Christian Response to Global Warming

Should the fact of human-induced global warming have an effect on our attitudes and behavior as stewards of God's creation? Or is the recent media attention focused on environmental issues just "tree hugger" hype? Although many evangelicals see this as a liberal versus conservative issue, I believe Christians have fundamental biblical reasons for being concerned about the condition of the earth. If human activities are a contributing factor in global warming, Christians should be at the forefront of those seeking solutions.

Scientific evidence shows conclusively that global warming is indeed occurring. Indicators of this warming trend include the retreat of non-polar glaciers; the thaw of permafrost in polar, sub-polar, and mountainous regions; the increase of mean sea level height by 1-2 millimeters per year; and the lengthening of the av-

erage growing season by 1 to 4 days per decade in the last 40 years.

The apparent cause of this warming trend is the buildup of "greenhouse gases" in the upper atmosphere. These gases are primarily composed of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and chlorofluorocarbons produced by combustion engines and industrial machinery. This atmospheric disturbance has shifted in global weather patterns, intensifying the frequency and destructiveness of storms in some areas of the world, and producing unusual drought conditions in others.

Although human causation cannot be proven as the principal agent of global warming, increased human production of greenhouse gases and global increases in temperature are strongly correlated. Many Christian and secular scientists agree that the scientific data points to human activity as a major contributor to climate change.

In response to warming trends, the United Nations Framework Convention on

Climate Change constructed the Kyoto Protocol as an amendment to their existing legislation. The stated purpose of the protocol is to further the "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." The countries that adopt the Kyoto Protocol agree to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases below worldwide emission levels from the year 1990.

President Bush has indicated that he does not intend to submit the Protocol for ratification by congress. The President emphasized that the reasons for U.S. non-participation include flaws within the implementation of the treaty (the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, China, is considered exempt from emission limiting due to their status as a "developing" country), but that this does not constitute an "abdication of responsibility" for the U.S. Commendably, nine states and a host of major U.S. cities have

voluntarily agreed to abide by the emissions limits set forth in the Kyoto Protocol.

What role do Christians have in affecting change in global warming policy? Unfortunately, the historical record shows that Christian involvement in environmental issues has been limited. The church has largely ignored the physical creation by placing exclusive emphasis on the spiritual realm. But true spirituality also includes care of the physical aspects of God's general revelation. The Bible is clear that our position as stewards over creation is a fundamental attribute of our *imago dei*.

The global warming issue presents an opportunity for evangelicals to reclaim environmental ground by demonstrating

strating responsibility in the management of God's creative handiwork.

By seeking to reduce emissions we also express Christian love to our neighbors around the world. Climatic changes such as droughts and flooding have made it increasingly difficult for many Third World countries to sustain themselves through agricultural means. It is disingenuous of Christians to minister to a people's spiritual needs without thought of the harm being done to the environment they depend on for physical needs. By helping reducing

greenhouse emissions, Christians demonstrate care that honors both God and man.

Revelation 11:18 presents a sober reminder of the seriousness of viewing the earth as only a resource for our own consumption. In this passage the Apostle John describes the end time judgment of unbelievers: "Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged ...and to destroy those who destroy the earth" (NASB). Christians must re-instate the original role of humanity as keepers of creation, not abusers of it.

