

A theological basis for our response to the Climate Emergency



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The climate emergency already affects many millions of people and will affect us all over coming decades. We don't need any theological understanding to appreciate this. On the other hand, Christians are called to proclaim the Gospel, good news, to all people. We will need a solid theological foundation to determine what that Gospel is in such challenging times.

The Bible doesn't say anything directly about climate change. A two-stage approach is needed – the first is to identify the broad themes that comprise the Gospel and the second to work out how to apply these. Since the reformation, western Protestants have tended to assume that the Gospel is primarily about personal salvation. The Bible is much richer than this and there are many other aspects of the Gospel that may be as, or even more, relevant to the current emergency.

Truth

A veneration of truth runs throughout the Bible. "Truth" is generally used as a shorthand for whatever has been revealed through scripture, reason, logic and experience. In the modern world we need to extend this to incorporate other sources of revelation. We need to acknowledge the truth of what scientists are saying and oppose those who spread falsehood, conspiracy and fake news.

Justice and Love

The themes of justice and love interweave through both Testaments. Our commitment to justice calls us to question a world order in which the most vulnerable and those with least responsibility for climate change will be most affected by the past profligacy of western (often Christian) lifestyles. This is not just about justice, it is about keeping love of our neighbour at the heart of how we live.

Goodness and sufficiency

In the first book of Genesis, God looks at creation and recognises that it is good seven times. Many other passages endorse this. As Christians, we are called to proclaim the inherent goodness of the natural world and cherish it. We are called to stewardship for the rest of creation.

Another recurring Biblical theme is that we have been given all that we need. This is accompanied by multiple warnings against taking more than we need or mindlessly

accumulating wealth. Our Gospel must offer a vision of all people living simply and harmoniously within the resources of our fragile planet.

Relating to God

For many centuries, Christians have assumed that our relationship with God, particularly our worship, should be rooted in praise and thanksgiving. Now, when it is clear that all is not well, and when so many people struggle with their mental health, we need to explore other ways of relating to God. Lamentation for a world that is not as God intended recurs throughout both testaments. Our Gospel must offer people a language to express their despair for what is happening as well as their thankfulness for blessings received.

Prophecy and protest

Along with a language of lament we need to cultivate a prophetic imagination to proclaim a vision of how the world can be different. Biblical prophecy is essentially the art and practice of speaking truth to power. We need a theology of prophecy and protest to guide individual Christians in advocating powerfully for a different way of living and opposing the dark powers in our contemporary world.

Repentance and transformation

Biblical repentance requires not only the admission of our sinfulness but a determination to turn from it. Any Gospel for our current world must offer models of living that allow an escape from the lifestyles that have led us into this situation. It needs examples of repentant Christians who are living visibly transformed lives.

Mission

The climate emergency offers many opportunities for mission but not necessarily as the church has traditionally conceived it. All the people on the planet are in this together and need to live and work together. Our models of mission may need to reflect this, conceiving Christianity as the leaven or salt working to realise God's Kingdom within a broader world community.

Hope

We are called to live in hope and offer this to the world. Our most pressing theological need may be to articulate what our hope looks like in the specific context of this current and future emergency. We need to do this in language that both empowers us and is meaningful to a world so desperate for good news.