

# A CHRISTIAN LOOK AT THE ENVIRONMENT

## Study 2. What is man that You are mindful of him? (Psalm 8)

Lead in. Make a list of five or six of the outstanding discoveries made by people in the last 150 years. e.g. penicillin, the nuclear bomb, computers, the ability to clone a sheep, how to make an aeroplane, and so on. What determines whether a discovery is good or bad? Should research be controlled by ethical issues? If so, who decides what those issues are?

Bible Passages Genesis 1, vv26-31; Genesis 3, vv1-10, Psalm 8; Psalm 72, vv1-14; John 13: vv1-17.

### Questions for discussion.

1. Look at Genesis 1, vv26-31. What does it mean to say that man is made in the image of God?
2. Professor Lynn White said in a lecture some 30 years ago. "The present increasing disruption of the global environment is the product of a dynamic science and technology.....which cannot be understood apart from distinctive attitudes toward nature which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma. ....we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man."  
<sup>1</sup>Is it true that Christian teaching believes that creation is purely for the good of man and for no other reason? (recall the previous study. Also look at Job,38, vv22-30; and 39,vv5-8;)
3. God told man to fill the earth and subdue it, and to rule over it. Strong

language, but what exactly did God mean? Compare with the description of the right kind of king in Deuteronomy 17,vv16-20, and the words of Jesus in Mark 10, vv41-45.

### Prayer

1. Think of our own lives and sins which need confessing to God, especially as regards the environment. Spend some time in silence asking for God's forgiveness for our own sins and the sins of our society.
2. Thank God that He always listens to us, and is ready to forgive our sins when we ask Him.

### Background notes.

1. What being made in the image of God means has been very much debated. Obviously it does not mean in a physical sense. We cannot see or hear him with our eyes and ears. We are, however, creative with a moral sense which other creatures do not have. We are able to plan for the future and therefore can in various ways care for the rest of creation as God's stewards. We can make relationships with God and others which go further than those of other animals which are apparently simply for mutual benefit. We should, if made in the image of a good and loving God, reflect that image in our own lives, including the way we care for the creation. The final and perfect image of God in a human being is in Jesus.
2. The ideal for a king in the O.T. is that of the shepherd king, who holds his authority and power purely in order

to serve his people, especially the poorest and most unfortunate.

3. The Biblical word “abad” (Genesis 2, v15) used for “tilling” the earth also means “serve”, and was very often used in the sense of serving God. In Numbers, it is often found with another word meaning “guard”, and this is translated in the NIV as “take care of”. So the meaning of this would be, “cultivating, caring for and protecting the earth as service to God.” No place for exploitation here!

4. Note that the temptation of Eve begins with questioning what God said. (Genesis 3, v1 ) Only then did the serpent deny the truth of what God said and appealed to the human desire for power and authority. This resulted in Eve’s and then Adam’s disobedience. The consequence was the Fall, exile from God, and the introducing of suffering, sin, and death into the world. Putting ourselves at the centre of our lives always results, sooner or later, in disaster for ourselves and others.

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2002, reports began to come in of an oil tanker, the “Prestige”, which was breaking up off the northwest coast of Spain. It contained 77,000 tons of heavy black oil. It was 150 miles away from the coast, but the single hull had been pierced. It was 26 years old, whereas the shipping regulations state that no tanker should be on the sea if more than 23 years old. All new tankers have to be double hulled, giving more protection, but some single hulled ones are still in use. The thick sticky oil formed a big slick on the sea surface, and was gradually washed up on the Spanish coast, where it destroyed shellfish and other marine life which became stuck in it. There were pictures of sea birds, covered in it, and

no longer able to fly and fish. A few were saved by the efforts of marine biologists and volunteers but many of them died. The tanker is now resting on the sea bed, but no one knows how much more oil will escape to damage the sea and the coast. This was an ecological disaster of huge proportions. But not only that. The local people depended on shellfishing for their economy. This had to be stopped at once, and it is not known when it will be possible to start it again. Any beaches which might have attracted tourists are spoiled by the thick deposit. Care of the environment and human poverty are closely linked, and we cannot ignore the one without bringing trouble on other people. What we do to the environment matters.

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<sup>i</sup> WHITE, Lynn: 1967. “The historical roots of our ecological crisis” in: *Science* 155: pp1203-1207. See R.J.Berry (ed) *The care of creation*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press. pp31-42.

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