

## **JANUARY 24, 2021 -- Christianity and the Environment with Andy Bannister**

### **Questions Answered During Live Q&A**

1. Many Christians believe that at the end of times God will destroy the world to create a new one. What should be our response to this? Is this true? Would it necessitate an apathetic attitude toward the planet?
2. I believe that individuals have a responsibility to make environmentally conscious decisions. However, how much does the burden rest on the consumer vs larger bodies that have more power and larger impact such as corporations? Especially when eco-friendly options aren't available or affordable to all socio-economic levels of society?
3. How do we convince or argue that human beings have a moral obligation to look after the environment with those who do not believe that God created the World and everything in it? Thank you!
4. Should we not care more about saving souls than saving seals?
5. Is the biblical concept of rejoicing in what we have rather than dwelling on the pleasure of desire, at play in environmentalism?- is it a repeating theme in the bible on other accounts?
6. Would you comment on the modern movement that leads people to develop connections to the Earth without connection to the Creator? It seems that some have made Earth a god they worship.
7. Is there any value in humanity attempting to establish colonies on Mars? In hopes of preserving humanity in case we render Earth uninhabitable.
8. I would like to know what book(s) you would recommend regarding Christianity and the environment? Any books for teaching children about environmental injustice? Or any resources for a "beginner" book on Christian apologetics?

All these questions were answered during the Live Q&A with Andy Bannister can be found here: <https://youtu.be/ch3r7EcdTJE>

### **Questions Answered During Bonus Video**

All these questions were answered during a Bonus Q&A with Andy Bannister that you can access here: <https://youtu.be/pZFx3weuQLU>.

1. Point of clarification. Andy, in the message you pointed out how care for the environment is exhibited in one of the most famous Bible verses, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world..." We had a question come in that asked: Does the original Greek/Hebrew for "world" in John 3:16 include both the people of the world as well as the rest of creation/earth? [2 min]

2. Andy, on Sunday morning there was a question revolving around the idea of individual actions (e.g.: our own relationship with materialism and heart issues) vs. the actions of the general public, of large scale corporations and politics. There were a number of questions that came in wanting to dig deeper into this and I'm hoping you can respond to them, generally, altogether: [7 min]
  - a. Industry is a major driver of environmental devastation. As Christians, what should be our stance, personally, politically, collectively towards overconsumption?
  - b. Sorry to be political but why are so many evangelicals supporting political parties which don't care about the environment?
  - c. Could you elaborate on your thoughts on Christian responsibility with regards to personal decisions/lifestyle and as well responsibility of Christian organizations to instate environmental policy.
3. Some of our Bay Park/Bethel family seem concerned that active issues such as environmental issues and racial reconciliation (what we discussed prior) can overshadow concerns for Gospel salvation and conversion. I am wondering if you can speak to these questions: [5 min]
  - a. How do we ensure good things like sustainability, reconciliation, etc. don't overshadow the primary job we have of making disciples? Where's the balance?
  - b. Any address for Christians that are at the other far end of the spectrum and putting more than usual emphasis on environmentalism than the Bible prescribes?
4. Why do you say ONLY the Christian faith can save the environment when almost every religion has similar things to be said about the environment? Additionally if you argue that the Christian God is the only god then how is that helpful for the millions of people that don't believe in God? You argue that talking about the future generation doesn't work because some people don't have children so it doesn't apply to them. When using the Christian religion as the reason to care for the environment can't people use your same argument? Well I don't believe in Christianity so this doesn't apply to me? [5 min]
5. There were SO many questions involving practical next steps. I think many folks were with you in addressing the whole heart issue (greed, materialism, consumerism) but they wanted to know what they could do next to make a difference: [8-9 min]
  - a. Can you expand on how Christians can reduce our consumerism/materialism? Any practical suggestions?
  - b. What are 3 specific suggestions of actions Christians can take to be more enviro friendly?
  - c. We've heard good reasons why Christians should care about the environment. What would you say are the next steps to helping our world once the heart posture has changed?

- d. My question is about application: how have you and your family adapted your lifestyle to take care of the enviro (gas/plastic..etc) and do you have any suggestions?
  - e. What are important, common actions - ideally those that occur on a daily basis - that we can take to have the greatest impact against our own “consumerism and materialism”?
  - f. We are stuck in a western consumer mindset. Very difficult to steward without giving up lifestyle. Please provide recommendations.
  - g. How as Christians do we start rectifying or corporately fixing some of our mistakes with our environment?
  - h. How can the idea of minimalism play into everyday efforts of stewarding the care of this planet in a more tangible way?
6. Should Christians be vegan? [1 min]
  7. Has Andy come across *A Rocha*, a very good Christian creation care organization? [1 min]
  8. When you had your latest convention in the UK what was one of the best questions regarding the environment you received and the answer? [1-2min]

### **Additional Questions**

#### **1. Can the Holy Spirit give a different message/guidance to two different people in the same situation?**

Paul: Yes and no.

1. It really depends on whether or not the “same situation” is a moral matter or not? And whether or not God has already spoken to it in his word? For example, if two people with the same weekly pay are both praying “God show me what to do with my income” I would fully expect the Holy Spirit to guide each one differently. To one God might say “give it all away” and to the other “save it for later.” It’s not a moral matter nor has God prescribed one way to deal with pay in scripture. But if two people are both praying to see if it’s ok to pay a contractor cash and thus avoid the taxes the answer will always be the same. There’s no need to pray about it as God has already made his will crystal clear in his word - *give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s* (Mark 12:17). So it’s important to discern whether the matter is a moral one or not and whether or not God has already addressed it in his word. God never contradicts himself.
2. The other possibility is the Holy Spirit is giving the same message but both are not listening with equal humility and surrender. This by the way is the most likely scenario of all. From personal experience I can testify that hearing God has often

more to do with Paul's wants than God's will. And that often only becomes clear when looking back over time. There's also a tendency in Christian circles to confidently claim "God told me" to win arguments or avoid accountability. We need to be very careful that we're not using God as a trump card to simply get our way. Practically speaking it's not uncommon for Loralyn and I to pray for wisdom re a family situation or finances and to not be on the same page in terms of what we think we're hearing from God. In such situations we don't assume that God is saying different things to each of us but rather that one or both of us is struggling to hear God clearly. So we keep praying. Keep in mind too that hearing God isn't like having a magic eight ball - I prayed and bingo this is the answer that popped up. Often God doesn't answer right away because God has other plans and purposes in mind. Like growing humility in us, perseverance in prayer, and diligence in his word and applying it. Bottom line, we should really be careful when claiming "thus says the Lord."

- 2. Ironically, some of my LGBTQ and non-believer friends are more aware of the environmental injustice. Do you have any practical suggestions on developing constructive teaching to our children about global environmental injustice and environmentalism in God's view? Christians around us are so saturated by consumerism that such a topic is seldom mentioned. North America has enjoyed the fruit of globalization. People here can be incredibly ignorant about the injustice created by capitalism, which has crushed and exploited the most vulnerable groups globally. Children in Africa and Asia who grow up with all the garbage dumped by the developed countries have suffered poverty, high death and malformation rate. I am not an eco-terrorist. I tried to have some conversations with my children. But they feel this issue so far away - why would we care? Our conversation usually ends up in my anger at their ignorance.**

Ryan: Wow, I hear you. The darkness, brokenness and (in this case) literal destruction of the world can all seem overwhelming at times. Often I find myself "doomscrolling" which is a new word to mean spending endless amounts of time on the internet reading negative news. But I think our minds do this as well, even without the internet. We get sucked into this vortex of despair. I do believe that God is showing us another. Christianity has never shied away from bad news but the good news has always trumpeted louder. I believe the same can be said for our environmental situation. There is bad news, and lots of it. But the final say is the ultimate redemption of all things. Ultimately this is our Father's world and he's going to take care of it in spite of sin because of the redemption of all things in Jesus. That doesn't give us an excuse to abuse, but it certainly does provide fuel for hope; hope that the world doesn't seem to provide. As for your question regarding your kids (as well as others) and helping them see the environmental and unjust devastation that often feels so far away from our world - a few thoughts. First, be patient. Like really patient. You cannot make people open their eyes. Only God can. I find it helps to think about something over which I was once ignorant and what it is like to be ignorant - you don't know what you don't know. The Christian instruction is "to do everything with love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). Second, Andy offers some really practical tips in the bonus video (check out the link above). Simple things like sponsoring a third world child ([see Compassion Canada](#)), watching informative

documentaries, praying grace over your meals, routinely praying for third world countries, having a Zoom call with a missionary, and so forth can spring forth greater awareness. Our system of exploitation and injustice did not happen overnight and things will not be correct overnight either (unless Jesus returns tomorrow). When I get frustrated by the darkness I remember that my holy God has more reasons than I do to be frustrated but instead he is incredibly patient and longsuffering (Numbers 14:18, 2 Peter 3:9). Also. Always keep in mind: *it's the shocking, negative, horrible statistics and stories that make good headlines*. There is always a faithful remnant of God's people who are working to follow him wholeheartedly and there are many good things happening in the world today... we just barely heard about it. Every once and a while I head over to Good News only networks to remind myself of this. Checkout <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/>.

**3. How do we enact a cultural revolution around environmentalism when it seems like there is a divide within the Church (e.g Mark Driscoll) around environmental protection?**

Paul: I love how the Bible describes the church as a family (cf Eph 2:19, Gal 6:10, 1 Tim 3:15). The church isn't *like* a family (metaphor), it *is* a family (spiritual reality). We are daughters and sons of God and brothers and sisters all belonging to the same "household." And just like any family, there will be gaps, disagreements and differences of all kinds. We won't be all at the same point of maturity or understanding but that doesn't make us any less family in Christ. Check out Ephesians 4:9-16 for more on this. What you'll see is that our unity is not based upon mutual agreement or like maturity but on our commitment to pursuing Christ and loving one another. In fact, the assumption in Ephesians and elsewhere in the New Testament is that there will be *many points* of disagreement and friction. This is how God grows us. So though I'm pained by Mark Driscoll's comments, I remember that he's a brother in Christ and that his journey is not in my hands but God's. And given that this is God's story in his life, who knows where he's at now? Maybe God has changed him on this point or maybe God is more concerned about something else in his life. This is what I love about the church and what makes it so different from the fragile and graceless unity we see in today's "intolerant and cancel" society. The revolution we are called to enact is not first and foremost that of environmentalism but of *love* from above, the love of Christ. So let's pray for God's family, for our unity despite our differences, for our love, and for our witness.

**4. The Indigenous world view is also based in gratitude and stewardship. How does your message fit with that?**

Ryan: I think, to put it pretty simply, this is one element of our Indigenous' friends' perspective and worldview that we can celebrate, embrace, learn from, and (in ways) adopt. It is something the Bible affirms. People can know biblical moral behaviours without necessarily knowing the Bible. See question #2 from last week for an explanation on how to welcome cultural aspects so long as they do not compromise biblical, Gospel realities. Caveat: There are probably elements of Indigenous environmentalism that do not quite fit Christian perspective, so we will need to be wise.

**5. How can we change our western focus on the monetary value of everything... to a focus on values where money is not the priority?**

Ryan: I do think our focus should not primarily be outward (e.g.: on society at large) but first inward. Before asking how I can change the western world's monetary idolization I need to ask myself if I have any traits, habits, or rhythms of monetary idolization.

Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." I know it sounds trite but God really does want you to focus on, well, *you*, first. Society is transformed by a million choices of a million individuals to transform their value system and worldview. If you live in such a way that Jesus is your master vis-a-vis money, you will be a living, breathing example of how incredible life is without monetary idolization. Winsomely, others will notice. For more largescale, societal action I would personally choose to involve myself in activism and charitable work that emphasizes human dignity and community (e.g.: ministering to the poor, boards that brainstorm ways to create affordable housing, value-driven business endeavours, etc) rather than investing time (and, well, money!) in typical upper-middle class behaviours that flaunt wealth (e.g.: luxurious vacations, unnecessary upscaling of homes, etc). That's just me though! Caveat: Remember, it's not money itself that is evil, but the *love* of money. It's not rich people who are evil, but the *love* of riches. 1 Timothy 6:10.

Economic activity can most certainly be used for God's glory.

**6. How is today's church involved in bringing believers to a place of admission of sin, repentance, and then moving them into action?**

Paul: Prayer: both personally and corporately. Ephesians 6:12 tells us that our battle is not with "flesh and blood but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." There's no way for us to advance the kingdom of God unless it's the will of God and in his power. And after talking through what spiritual armor we need for this battle the apostle Paul went on to say "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (6:18ff). Though we are Christ's ambassadors calling people to be reconciled to God, we are not the ones who do the spiritual soul work of conviction that leads to repentance and belief. That's God's work and why our starting, staying and end point needs to be prayer. What does that look like at Bay Park? Joining our biweekly Thursday prayer Zoom led by Doug. Joining a LifeGroup and participating in corporate prayer together. But prayer also needs to be a personal habit and priority. Praying for those God has put on path and for the courage and opportunity to point them to Jesus.

Of course prayer isn't the only thing we do to partner with God in his work of salvation. We also share our faith as God opens doors and gives opportunity. This too has both a personal and corporate dimension. Corporately we run Alphas, Freedom Session and have Back Pack Drives, Family Fun Days in our park and Christmas outreaches and much more. It's as simple as getting involved and/or inviting a friend. But we need to be careful not to relegate outreach to an activity led by pastors that happens on church property or on a Sunday morning. We gather together for corporate edification so that we can then scatter for Kingdom impact. That's the pattern we see in the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts. It wasn't just the apostle Paul pointing people to Jesus, it was believers talking and loving their relatives, neighbours and coworkers. So in some ways the question really comes down to "what are you doing to seek God and his empowering in sharing your faith with those around you?" That's how the Kingdom of

God is being built, upon our prayerfulness and love for our neighbours near and far.

## 7. Why in the OT does God keep telling the Israelites to do terrible things and kill everyone?

Paul: There are definitely some difficult passages in the Bible. I've been reading through the Old Testament for my daily devos and struggle when I read in Joshua. It wasn't just soldiers that were to be killed but women and children too. Such passages were not meant to make us feel good but to actually cause us to stop and grapple with the horrible consequences of sin, our own included. There's no way to do the subject true justice in a few words, so anything I say here will be sorely lacking. But there are few helpful handles that I would like to share as a starting point in this conversation. The focus will be on Israel's conquest of the "promised land" as this event is really the epicentre of the "terrible things."

- When God freed the Israelites from generational slavery and gave them a home of their own, he was also bringing long overdue judgement on those occupying the land. As usual, there is more than one story going on. In Deut 9:4-5 we read: *After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations.*
- The heart and character of God combines both perfect compassion and justice. That means that though God is long suffering and allows sinners to thrive, there also comes a day of accounting. As with Sodom & Gomorrah (cf Gen 18:20-21) there comes a point when God can no longer look the other way (cf also Gen 15:16). Just how bad can it get, how far will the human heart go? We have plenty of sad examples today, but in the case of those dwelling in the promised land, their many grievous sins included that of child sacrifice (cf Lev 18:21). If we think that thought is sickening to us it's even more abhorrent to God, the giver of life in his image.
- God's judgment only comes after generation upon generation of unyielding to his calling and warnings (cf Gen 15:16). What takes place in a couple passages of the Bible is an era of time. We only hear echoes of that story because the Old Testament is focused on Israel's story - birth, rescue, rise and fall. So we need to be careful not to assume God wasn't deeply involved in calling the nations Israel drove out to repentance. In fact it's safe to assume God was. And just as their stubborn refusal to hear God eventually led to their downfall and judgement, so too with Israel. Israel was not exempted.
- The reason it wasn't just the soldiers of the land that were punished but everyone is because this was a total eviction. Almost like a mini localized flood 2.0. In Deut

7:3-4 and other similar passages God states that without a full eviction the Israelites would themselves turn to the very broken ways of the people they evicted. Which is exactly what happened.

- It's a shocking reminder that our sin often has consequences beyond us - there are "innocent" victims and bystanders. Nobody is ever 100% innocent, that's why the quotes, but there are 100% victims of sin. From lying to theft, gossip to murder there are always casualties. This is true today as it was then. In the case of the nations being evicted from the land, that's not to say that God punished the children for the crimes of their parents, but rather that they suffered for the sins of their fathers. Never forget that suffering does not always equal guilt, punishment or judgement. Sometimes it's just the heart breaking consequence of living in a sin fallen world where people continue to willfully choose sin over God.
- God has always been and will always be perfectly just and loving. That means God can't simply brush aside offence. And that's a very good thing! Say "Tammy" is a judge. You're brought before her because you were going 70 in a 50 trying to get to church on time. What if she said, "I'll give you a warning this time. Don't do it again." How would you feel? Good! Hopefully the lesson is learned. What if the man who raped your sister or daughter is brought before Tammy and she says "you did a bad thing. I'm going to give you a warning, don't do it again! You're free to go." And what if this wasn't the first time he had raped someone? How would you feel? Angry doesn't even begin to describe how you'd feel. You see we all long for justice and when justice collapses so does our hope.
- The beauty of Christianity is how God ultimately exercises his mercy through his justice by sending Jesus Christ, God incarnate to die in our place (Rom 5:5-10). God hasn't changed throughout the OT & NT he is the righteous one who is always working to save humanity. The shocker, or mystery of it all, is that God is painfully gracious with his perpetually rebellious creation (Jonah 4:11). Ultimately God is the one who pays for the penalty of our sin, the Father sent the Son to die in our place even though the Son was truly innocent and perfect in every way.

Ryan: A great book to read to dig deeper into this conundrum would be *Is God A Moral Monster?* by Paul Copan.

#### **8. How do you think Christians can be a good witness for Christ to people who are atheist and passionate about the environment?**

Paul: Being a good witness means having a good relationship and reputation with people. Relationships take time, work and great care to grow. They also make connections. And a mutual concern for the care of the environment can be a great connection. Obviously the concern needs to be genuine and not faked. So as we do our part to care for the environment God has entrusted us, we have a wonderful opportunity to connect with those who are passionate about the environment. But sharing a mutual interest is not a

witness in itself. It's a great relationship builder but it won't necessarily point people to Jesus. And from personal experience this is where we often fail. The encouraging part is that there are many great God connections when engaging around the environment. Let me share two for starters:

1. Our passion for the environment is rooted in our love of God and gratitude to him. How the beauty, order, intricacy and balance of the natural world all point to a divine artist. So though we are concerned about the environmental impact our actions have on future generations, our passion for the environment is not first and foremost a matter of survival but of gratitude to its Creator.
  2. Environmental issues point to a deeper spiritual reality - namely that we as humans are wonderful and broken. That the root cause of our environmental woes is the human heart - selfishness, greed and apathy. Here's where we can point people to Jesus. As the one who has the power to clean up the most polluted of all environments, namely that of our heart, mind and soul.
- 9. In the idea it could be then that climate change, biodiversity, etc are just symptoms of the real disease. What do you say to the super church pastors who claim since God will come back and burn it all, then why not use it all up?**
- Ryan & Paul: This is a great question. Andy addressed some of the concerns in various ways throughout the message. It might be helpful to check out [the video](#) again and listen to the first live Q&A. What we would say to the megachurch pastor would be similar to what we would say to any other Christian who claims everything is just going to "burn up." Although, as a fellow pastor, I would caution the mega-church pastor that the scope of his influence makes these ideas even more worrisome. Also refer to our answer to question #4 a few pages above.