
COP26 - Is there any word from the Lord?

Peter Carruthers¹, October 2021

COP26

In the first two weeks of November, leaders from 197 nations will assemble in Glasgow to decide what to do about 'climate change'. The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) will be the largest gathering of world leaders ever to take place on British soil. In addition to the leaders, many thousands of other people will attend, both inside and outside the conference centre.

There is no question that COP26 is a momentous and unprecedented event that calls for understanding, discernment and intercession by all who recognise our Christian responsibility to 'understand the times and know what to do' (1 Chronicles 12:32; Matthew 16:1-4), to "seek the peace of the city and pray to the Lord for it" (Jeremiah 29:7), to pray for "all in authority" (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and to care for the earth (Genesis 2:15).

Many individual believers and Christian ministries believe the Holy Spirit is prompting them to respond to this call through personal prayer and prayer gatherings. Some have arranged to be in Glasgow to intercede on the spot.

The immense significance of this gathering of the nations in Glasgow and the impetus felt by many to pray for it, and the wider sense of 'global crisis', urge us, like Zedekiah (Jeremiah 37:17) (also in a time of crisis) to ask, "is there any word from the Lord?".

Climate Change in general, and COP26 in particular, evoke strong views and differing opinions. They are surrounded by a cacophony of often confusing and contradictory voices. In such circumstances, hearing the Lord's voice and understanding His will are even more urgent.

I am not claiming a fast track on His will and His voice! But I am cautioning believers to "walk circumspectly" in these and all matters "because the days are

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evil” (Ephesian 5:15-17). And below, I offer some guidelines as to how we might better hear the Lord’s voice and understand His will in these matters.

Purpose

The stated purpose of the COP26 summit is to “bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.” In simple terms, this means the governments of the world’s nations working together through agreements, policies and actions, to keep global temperature rises below 1.5C.

As with its predecessor summit, COP26 is predicated on the belief that the global climate is changing rapidly as a result of human activity, notably the burning of fossil fuels. This is called ‘anthropogenic climate change’. COP26 and its predecessors are predicated on the conviction that if this process is allowed to continue it will result in cataclysmic changes in the global ecosystem with devastating impacts on all aspects of human life and society. Understood this way, climate change is a ‘crisis’ and an ‘emergency’. If nothing is done about it, it is believed that the human race is destined for extinction.

The Summit has, therefore, been described as the ‘last opportunity’ to save the human race, or at least to save ‘life as we know it’.

Advocacy

As well as the material issued by COP26 itself, there is a plethora of information and resources available to help understand climate change and the climate-change agenda behind COP26 - published by governments, media, NGOs, and many individuals.

Christian agencies, ministries, churches and individuals have also contributed to this. These offer helpful briefings on the issues of climate change and the background to the Glasgow conference. Quite a number of ministries are also urging prayer in the run up and during the event, and provide guidelines and resources for prayer.

Many, if not most, of these, especially churches and denominations, well-known Christian mission agencies and Christian environmental organisations, are not only providing information, but also acting as advocates for the global climate-change agenda behind COP26, and, hence, the prevailing climate-change orthodoxy. In other words, they are not just informing people as to what the Conference is about, but also acting as ‘evangelists’ for the agenda the Conference is seeking to advance.

The abstract of John Ray Initiative’s recent Briefing Paper, ‘Green Gospel: Christian Responses to the Challenge of the Climate Crisis’, provides an excellent summary of this position: “There is widespread acceptance that the world is facing a climate crisis, caused

by the burning of fossil fuels. The Christian response, although initially slow, has gained pace over the last decade and the importance of faith communities in raising awareness and encouraging action was recognised by 2015, when COP21 took place in Paris. Approaching the next major conference, COP26, and in light of the Pope's 2015 environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, the activities of a number of Christian organisations are set alongside the Pope's teaching. As with the pandemic still claiming lives around the world, only global collaboration can ultimately solve the climate crisis."

As I suggest above, we need to approach these issues with caution. If we are to promote a cause, we need to fully comprehend its goals! If we are to present things as truth, then we need to be 100% sure they are true, because we will have to give account.

Hope

The 'slow Christian response' referred to above is true not only of climate change, but of environmentalism in general. In contrast to the evangelical-Christian-led social reform (and animal welfare) movements of the 19C, Christian environmentalism is the tail not the head! Contemporary environmentalism can trace its roots back, not to the 19C evangelicals of slavery abolition, social reform or concern for animals, but to their Romantic contemporaries.

Of course, this is not to say that the environment is not an issue for us: quite the opposite. I, personally, became aware of and concerned for environmental issues in my teens, and have over the years made a small contribution to developing a Christian and biblical response to them.

However, environmentalism, especially in its contemporary form, is deeply permeated with despair and pessimism, even nihilism. I believe that the Bible and Christian faith offer an antidote to this. Unlike contemporary environmentalists, whose only hope is in humanity getting its act together, we have a message of hope - for both humanity and the earth (eg Romans 8:21) - which depends ultimately on God's mercy and love, and not human endeavour.²

In Christ, we are not doomed, and neither is the earth. Certainly, we shall need to give account of our stewardship of his earth, and there is every need to take responsibility (indeed, Christians need to take much greater responsibility). But the 'emergency' all humanity faces, is not the extinction of the human race, but the coming of the One who comes to both redeem and judge the earth (Psalm 98:9), and who will, in fact, "destroy those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).

² See my recent [presentation here](#).

This, I suggest, must be the foundation of any understanding and intercession for COP26.

Prophetic intercession

Intercession must be informed first by a prophetic insight of 'God's hidden counsel behind visible states of affairs', by understanding things from God's viewpoint, by discernment of the hidden agenda beneath the surface. Things are not always what they seem, and the prophets' duty is to bring such hidden things to light.

As above, we are to 'pray for the peace of the city' - but in accordance with His will and purposes and not those of the people running it! It is not our calling just to provide a Christian imprimatur or add a bit of prayer support to a secular enterprise.

Below are some of the critical issues that I believe should shape our understanding of COP26 and our intercession for it.

Agenda

The agenda, which underlies both COP26, and the advocacy of many Christian ministries, reflects a particular 'narrative', which has become the 'prevailing orthodoxy', the 'global consensus'. In simple terms, this narrative says: 'the climate is changing, it is our fault, it is an 'emergency', we only have a few years before we go extinct'. This account has the (very heavy) weight of mainstream scientific opinion behind it, especially that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

There are other narratives.

The most prevalent alternative position accepts the scientific (IPCC) 'consensus', but not the proposed solutions. Many in this camp believe that while climate change is real and serious, humanity has solved such problems before, through technology and innovation, and can do so again. They also believe that the mitigation strategies at the centre of the UN and COP26 agenda are both unworkable and would do far more harm than good. They favour adaptation in preference to mitigation. This position is more optimistic and more 'pro-human' than the mainstream agenda.

Further out on the scale are alternative scientific views. These argue that the IPCC's models depend on certain critical and questionable assumptions, and that factoring in different assumptions or invoking different mechanisms produces radically different outcomes. Young Earth Creationists, for example, point out the dependence of the mainstream scientific models on assumptions about the age of the earth and the occurrence of multiple ice ages.

At the other end of the scale, there are ‘deep’ or ‘dark’ ecology advocates, who believe that the impending extinction of the human race is a good thing or at least inevitable, eg the ‘will of Gaia’.

I am not, here, arguing for *any* one of these. But we need to acknowledge that they exist, and that the ‘other’ might be partly right. If we are to promote any cause, we need fully to understand its arguments and comprehend its goals. And we should not be too quick to join any faction (John 2:24-25).³

Epistemology

Climate change (like Covid) is a ‘wicked problem’ characterised by “moral and epistemological fog, with multifaceted contours such as misinformation, values pluralism, competing normative outlooks and manipulative discourses”.⁴

Put more simply, ‘epistemological fog’ (excuse the pun) (which is characteristic of much else in post-modern Western culture), means: we don’t know how to know, things are not what they seem.

Just as the earth’s atmosphere is extremely complex, so is the science behind it. The IPCC’s models and its voluminous output are beyond most people’s grasp, even that of scientists, even climate scientists. And scientists, even ‘mainstream’ scientists, do not always fully agree. History has shown us that science proceeds through a process of paradigms and paradigm shifts, and sometimes the minority, the dissenters, have turned out to be right.

Most of us, understandably, cannot work these things out for ourselves. So we decide on the basis of which ‘authorities’ we trust, go with the flow of our peer group, ‘follow the herd’, judge things by ‘preference’ or by what ‘feels right’, and so on. Some are instinctively suspicious of the majority opinion: Mark Twain is reported as writing, “whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to reform (or pause and reflect)”!

As a consequence of this, many Christians will uncritically accept a view if it is promoted by a Christian leader or an organisation they believe in, respect and trust. This, therefore, puts a greater responsibility on those in leadership and with influence.

³ I also believe that understanding the anatomy of these different positions, and bringing a theological and biblical critique to them, is in itself revealing of our current social and cultural condition in the Western world, and the churches’ and Christians place in it. I hope to write some more on this in the coming weeks.

⁴ Anthony, R. 2011. Taming the unruly side of ethics: overcoming challenges of a bottom-up approach to ethics in the areas of food policy and climate change. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, DOI 10.1007/s10806-011-9358-7.

Intercession, then, needs to recognise the limits of our knowledge, and our total reliance on Scripture and the Holy Spirit for direction.

Science

As we saw above, the global climate-change agenda is ostensibly grounded in 'science'; it is 'following the science', and is 'united behind the science' (as Greta Thunberg's anorak urges).

This deification of science should in itself should concern believers and sound warning bells, regardless of its application or veracity. Science helps us to understand how the creation works, and in this case, how we have affected the earth. Indeed, it can be argued that 'science' as we know it is a 'Christian' project. However, we are not to follow the science, but rather follow the Lord and be guided by His Spirit and His word.

Power

While the climate-change agenda is based on science, it is also a political, economic, cultural, social, ideological and religious phenomenon. Understanding it in this way is surely part of revealing the beneath-the-surface agenda, of understanding the true 'nature of the beast'.

Regardless of the truth about climate change, it is also a powerful tool in the hands of the 'powers that be'. In a similar way to the use of other claimed 'existential threats', it is being used, or risks being used, to advance an agenda of surveillance and control.

Canadian psychologist and 'influencer', Jordan Peterson comments (from about 28:20 mins): "I happen to believe, firmly, that global, and even national, attempts to deal with climate change are going to cause way more trouble than accumulated carbon dioxide, not because accumulated carbon dioxide isn't somewhat of a threat, but when it becomes a global planetary threat that's a crisis, well then it's a justification for virtually any political action. So look out man... because of the dangers of systems".

We should not be too surprised over this. Many sober, cogent Christian and secular commentators have for some time been warning us of the impending 'fall' of Western Christian-consensus civilisation and a coming 'soft' totalitarianism.⁵ Back in 1984, the well-known US theologian, Francis Schaeffer, in his remarkably prophetic last book, the Great Evangelical Disaster, wrote: "when the memory of the Christian consensus which gave us freedom within the biblical form is ... forgotten, a manipulating authoritarianism will ... fill the vacuum, [which] will gradually force four-month society so that it will not

⁵ eg see Rod Dreher's, 'Live not by lies' and this article.

go into chaos – and most people would accept it”. When truth perishes (Isaiah 59:14), then, as Nietzsche wrote, all that is left is the ‘will to power’.

There is much in the COP26 agenda to applaud and affirm, that seems good, right, reasonable, even urgent - not only its concern for the earth's environment, but also its concern for the poor. Christians do not need to sign up to the whole package to support and pray for these things.

However, it is also an assembling of the ‘kings of the earth’ to ‘take counsel together’ (Psalm 2:2), a gathering of the nations to ‘make a name for themselves’ (Genesis 11:4). And, unless the ‘kings’ acknowledge the King, unless they ‘kiss the Son’ (Psalm 2:12), there is always the risk that they will instead ‘plot a vain thing’ or build a tower of Babel.

Eschatology

Eschatology is the both the ‘elephant in the room’ and the ‘missing link! None of the Christian resources on COP26 or the environment I have read explicitly declare their eschatological positions. In some cases, it is implicit and significant (although I do wonder whether it is fully understood), running as a subterranean current through much of the content and rhetoric.

We tend not to want to go there, because we know it might divide us. However, eschatology has a significant influence on our environmental theology and recognising this does help understand, to an extent, where commentators are coming from (and going to). I suggest we need a forum or context for those concerned to understand and pray for the environment to share and discuss our understanding of the end times and its significance for environmental intercession, advocacy and action.

Village Hope, is a partner with the World Prayer Centre and the Agricultural Christian Fellowship in the Hope Countryside project. We issue a monthly Seeds of Prayer. An item in this month’s Seeds urges prayer for COP26 as follows:

In the first two weeks of November, leaders from 197 nations will assemble in Glasgow to decide what to do about ‘climate change’. Although contested, the global climate change ‘consensus’ is prompting policies that will deeply impact every aspect of life across the whole world, including farming and the countryside. We are called to care for God’s earth (Genesis 2:15), and Christians need to be at the forefront of this. But we also pollute and destroy the earth (Isaiah 24:5; Hosea 4:1-3; Revelation 11:17-8). Science helps us understand how we have affected the earth, but we are not to ‘follow the science’;

rather we are to follow the Lord and be guided by His Spirit and His word. *Pray that we will understand both the times and the will of the Lord (Matthew 16:1-4; Ephesians 5:17). In the face of complex and multiple agendas, pray for prophetic discernment of 'God's hidden counsel behind visible states of affairs' and clear directions for prayer and action in accordance with His will and His Kingdom. As the 'kings of the earth take counsel together', pray that they will know that "they are but men" (Psalm 9:19-20) and that God's sovereign purposes will prevail (Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 66:18).*