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## SPIRITUAL FREEDOM, WISDOM, AND COMPASSION

“Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words.”

—Francis of Assisi

“Our cautious response to these issues in the face of mounting evidence may be seen by the world as uncaring, reckless and ill-informed. We can do better. To abandon these issues to the secular world is to shirk from our responsibility to be salt and light. The time for timidity regarding God’s creation is no more.”

—*A Southern Baptist Declaration  
on the Environment and Climate Change (2008)*

So if our physical bodies will return to dust, and this whole world itself will later be destroyed, then why should we even bother caring about global warming? Good question.

Every day, we Christians go about the business of taking out our trash, cleaning our houses, paying our taxes, and being kind to our neighbors. We do these things because they seem right, and they line up with what Scripture teaches us about love and responsibility. They are proper. They are fitting. They are sensible actions to take.

In addition, we ourselves benefit from making these good decisions. Our living environment is more pleasant, we don’t end up in prison for tax evasion, and we have a good reputation among

those around us. So, both the Scriptures and the tangible benefits we enjoy support the importance of making wise choices.

## Cleaning Up After Ourselves

We moved into our first home right out of graduate school. We were transitioning from being poor students to our first real jobs, so it was a do-it-yourself type of move on a shoestring budget. In fact, the only people we had to help us were a car dealer and his wife who we met while driving our loaded U-Haul around looking for a car. Although we didn't end up buying a car from them, they did become our lifelong friends.

After the move, boxes were piled up to the ceiling in our living room, dining room, and office. With the exhaustion of starting new jobs, we did get some of the basics unpacked—dishes, a set of sheets—but most of the boxes stayed where they were for days, weeks, and then months. A narrow pathway led from the front hall between six-foot-high stacks of boxes to the back of the house. Of the entire first floor of the house, only the kitchen could be truly enjoyed.

We lived this way for a long time, until we had family coming to visit. Given sufficient motivation and awareness of what our house would look like to them, we pulled ourselves together and cleaned out our entire first floor in just one day.

What a relief! At last, we had a sofa to sit on and watch television, a full set of pots and pans for the kitchen, a dining room to eat in, and an office where we could unpack our books and set up our desks. Our lives had taken a dramatic turn for the better, and all it took was motivation (in our case, mostly embarrassment at what our family would think) and much less effort than we had thought.

Similarly, once a Christian is enlightened to the facts concern-

ing climate change and how it can and will affect certain areas of the world and certain people, it seems only sensible to take actions and make decisions that can positively change the situation.

### Permissible but Not Profitable

As Andrew's book *The Naked Gospel* shows, the true Christian message is one of freedom of choice, not guilt of duty. The gospel is about living from "want to's," not from "have to's." The moment we adopt any action out of obligation, we set the wheels of human effort into motion. Then it is no longer Christ in us and Christ through us. Instead, it is merely the human-driven notions of philanthropy or activism.

God the Father measures everything we do by one criterion only: was it done in dependency on His Son? Using our God-given wisdom to comprehend the climate change issue and making decisions that we believe will help the poor and disadvantaged certainly fall within the attitude of Christ in us, Christ through us, and Christ toward others. And we believe that making these choices is a loving thing to do.

God longs for us to fully embrace the freedom of His liberating grace. Once we have done so, we begin to act not out of guilt, fear, or Christian obligation. We act from the sureness of God's affection for us, not fear of reprisal against us. We then reach His intended goal for us, a place of asking what is most sensible and profitable, and then proceeding with an attitude of dependency and delight.

"Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial" (1 Cor. 6:12 NIV).

No condemnation. No guilt. No religious obligation. Walking by the Spirit means acting from genuine, heartfelt *love*.

## Freedom to Choose: Faith in Action

The strangest thing about a grace-based approach to life is that the end result might not look much different to an external viewer. It may not seem to be any different from a guilt- or duty-motivated life. But there is a dramatic difference on the inside. It's not a guilt motivation, but a motivation based on love, and rooted in wisdom.

There are many gray areas with regard to how Christians “should” respond to things that the Bible does not directly address. Climate change falls into that category. Therefore, like any matter, it is incumbent on us to become aware of the issues at hand and then act as our hearts and minds lead us. This is true Christian freedom in action.

If you decide you don't want to individually contribute to a solution to climate change, so be it. You are free in Christ to decide that. Conversely, if you as an individual decide to make decisions that help, that is great. You won't earn status points with God. But you will be doing something that benefits yourself and others along the way, a very tangible expression of God's love to others.

Let's explore our freedom to choose a little further.

### What If . . . ?

We *can* just let global warming happen. We are free to adopt that attitude. But we are also free to let disease reign unchecked, allow crime to happen, and permit financial disaster to occur, as well as anything else simply because we have chosen to do nothing to slow it down or prevent it. As Paul says in Galatians 5:13: “For you were called to *freedom*, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but *through love serve one another*” (NASB, *italics ours*).

Sure, we can sit on our hands and claim our freedom in Christ as we allow crime in our cities to increase and our economy to crash. Or, we can learn the causes for these problems and then treat them the best way we know how. And global warming is no different.

When we consult the Scriptures, we see instruction for living, choices to be made, and outcomes that can go either way depending on our choices. Paul continues this theme in Galatians, telling us: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:7–8 NASB). In Romans 6:21, he also asks, “Therefore what *benefit* were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the *outcome* of those things is death” (NASB, *italics ours*).

Obviously there are choices to be made and there are different outcomes to be experienced depending on what we choose. God makes that clear.

Doing something, anything, about climate change is a step in the direction of caring for people.

We’re all free in Christ to decide if we care. It’s not a guilt thing. But our hope is that knowledge plus caring will lead to action.