

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT



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We should be good stewards of the environment. We are commanded in Genesis 1:28 to be “fruitful and multiply” and to have “dominion” over the creation. Taking care of the environment is one important aspect of that command.

But we are told that we must end our dependence on fossil fuels in order to be good stewards of the environment. The push to “repeal and replace” such energy sources

comes from radical environmentalists pushing a “Green New Deal.” They argue that we can and must transition to other energy sources within the next few years.

We should not only be good stewards of the environment but also must be wise stewards of the environment. There are physical limits to these alternative sources of energy, and there are biological, social, and cultural implications to the current push to decarbonize this country.

Energy Policy

Not so long ago, it seemed unlikely that the US would ever become energy independent. We are much closer today because we have more than doubled the billions of barrels of oil we produce each day. And we have more natural gas than any other country in the world.

There is a reason we are still dependent on fossil fuels. They are one of the most energy dense commodities on the planet. Most of our energy needs still come from oil, coal, and natural gas. When environmentalists talk about reducing our carbon footprint through the further development of alternative fuels, they are realistically talking about a reduction of perhaps a few percent.

Before we look at these alternatives, let's acknowledge the political benefits of becoming energy independent. First, we are less dependent on Middle East oil. Economist Stephen Moore wrote an op-ed two years ago with the intriguing title: "Goodbye OPEC." He not only talked about America becoming energy independent but energy dominant.

What a change this is from just a few decades ago. I grew up with environmentalists warning that

we were running out of food and energy. They were predicting future famines and a major energy crisis. It was nearly impossible to imagine any way this country would be on its way to energy independence.

Stephen Moore has been on the *Point of View Radio Talk Show* to explain this remarkable turnaround. Much of it is due to the American oil shale boom which has significantly changed drilling operations in the Permian Basin in Texas and the Bakken Shale in North Dakota.

Second, our decreasing dependence on foreign oil has allowed us to be less involved in other countries and less dependent on oil from countries that fund terrorists. Some have even called the oil shale boom "Donald Trump's Revenge." OPEC and the Middle East have less leverage over our country than in previous decades.

Alternative Energy Sources

Environmentalists and proponents of the Green New Deal want to “repeal” traditional energy sources (oil, coal, natural gas) that are abundant and economical and “replace” them with green energy sources such as solar power, wind power, and biofuels.

According to the federal government (Energy Information Administration) traditional energy sources account for 83 percent of US energy consumption. Nuclear power accounts for an additional 9 percent. By contrast, renewable energy sources account for only 8 percent. The same governmental agency estimates that by 2035, those percentages might increase to 11 percent for solar and wind power and perhaps 4 percent for biofuels.

1. Solar power: Under the

Obama administration there was a plan to install twice as many solar panels in the country, which cost much less because China has been producing and selling these panels to the US.

The problem is that solar power isn't very efficient. Years ago, I wrote a commentary about the attempt by a Los Angeles college to become a paragon of clean energy. Unfortunately, they overestimated how much power the college could generate and underestimated the cost.

They concluded that there wasn't enough room on campus for all the generating equipment required to become self-sufficient. You just couldn't wedge enough solar panels, wind turbines, and other devices on the college campuses to be effective. They also realized that the solar installations would have been too unsightly. The fields

of solar panels would have to have covered nearly half the campus.

2. Wind power: Massive wind turbines are showing up in more and more locations around the country. But most Americans don't like seeing or hearing those wind turbines. It is a classic "not in my backyard" problem.

A typical wind turbine stands 260 feet tall with fiberglass turbine blades that measure 122 feet long. The three of them weigh around 36 tons. The turbines are built in this country with the blades and towers built in other countries. According to the Energy Information Administration, electricity from wind still costs about 50 percent more than conventional coal and 100 percent more than natural gas once you include all the capital, operating, and fuel costs. And since the wind doesn't always blow, power com-

panies have to turn to fossil fuels to provide power.

Animal rights activists hate wind turbines. They are killing birds and bats in record numbers. Many of the birds killed (Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles) are protected by law. Bats are crucial to the ecosystem because they eat insects (including mosquitos that carry diseases), and some species of bats may soon be put on the endangered species list.

3. Biofuels: Congress mandated the use of corn-based ethanol years ago, and is a hot political issue when presidential candidates head to the Iowa caucus every four years. Nevertheless, this makes little sense economically. Using so much corn for fuel is inefficient and has driven up the cost of food which has been hurting poor countries. Corn should be used for food and feed, not fuel. A few years ago, there was a push to

use cellulosic fuel (such as switch-grass) but the industry simply could not meet the mandated goals, even with taxpayer subsidies.

4. Other sources: Another source of renewable energy is hydroelectric power. While that has been a good source of power in certain states, it can't really be expanded to other areas because most rivers that could have a dam are already in use.

Nuclear power is another potential energy source that could be expanded but it is steadfastly opposed by every environmental group. The regulations, lawsuits, and other associated costs make it unlikely any new plants will go online soon.

Green New Deal

Various members of Congress and past presidential candidates have promoted the idea of the

Green New Deal. It is a term reminiscent of FDR's New Deal of the 1930s but even bolder in its approach. It has been promoted as a solution to the problem of climate change. In a previous booklet, I have addressed the issue of climate change. But the Green New Deal deals with much more than global warming or climate change.

For example, the plan would "cut military spending by at least half" and withdraw US troops from overseas. We have 1.3 million active-duty troops, and another 865,000 reserves and another 680,000 civilian employees. Cutting spending by at least half would put about a million military personnel out of work.

The plan also mandates that government will provide everyone with "a job guarantee program to assure a living wage job to every

person who wants one.” It would also include “additional measures such as basic income programs, universal health care programs” along with many other programs.

But relevant to this discussion is the plan that would require the eventual elimination of all fossil fuels and even nuclear power. More than 60 percent of America’s energy comes from oil and natural gas. The rest comes from coal and nuclear, with a small percentage coming from the alternative energy sources we just discussed.

Even if we could achieve the goals set down in this plan, what would the cost be to Americans? The Competitive Enterprise Institute put together a reasonable estimate about “What the Green New Deal Could Cost a Typical Household”. The authors concluded that in four of the five states they

analyzed (Florida, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania), the Green New Deal would cost a typical household more than \$70,000 in the first year of implementation. The cost for households in Alaska would be much higher: more than \$100,000 in the first year. In every case, this cost was more than the annual income of a typical American family.

The reason for the high cost is simple. The goal would be to completely de-carbonize the American economy. That means that anything that contains carbon (oil, gas, coal, even wood) that is burned emits carbon. Eliminating all of these sources of energy would be expensive and complex.

That is why people are starting to argue that the cure may be worse than the disease. Filmmaker Michael Moore produced a docu-

mentary (“Planet of the Humans”) that explores some of the realities discussed here and explores some of the deceptions of the environmental movement.

Bjorn Lomborg is the author of *The Skeptical Environmentalist* and a newer book, *Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist’s Guide of Global Warming*. He called together the Copenhagen Consensus in which Nobel Laureate economists evaluated the costs and benefits of different solutions to world problems. At the very bottom of the list were the various programs that have been proposed in the Green New Deal. There were tremendous costs and very few benefits to the plan.

Biblical Perspective

As Christians, we have a duty to be good stewards of the environment. God commanded us to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the

earth" and also to "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). We should also realize that we are merely stewards. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods" (Psalm 24:1-2).

We have a responsibility to also be wise stewards and consider the costs and benefits of political and economic plans. In the Old Testament, we find many verses that call for us to be good stewards and wise stewards of the resources God has provided for us to use. For example, Leviticus 25:1-12 speaks of the care Israel was to have for the land. We are to properly care for animals and wildlife (Deuteronomy 25:4

and 22:6). We are not to misuse the land (Isaiah 5:8-10). Even in the New Testament we see that Jesus reminds us the Father cares for even the smallest sparrow (Matthew 6:26, 10:29).

We have a responsibility to be good stewards of this creation and must reject political and economic policies that will destroy the economy and hurt families and individuals. Let's bring wisdom from science, government, and economics to the challenges we face in the 21st century.

Additional Resources

Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson 2005), chapter twenty.

Bjorn Lomborg, *The Skeptical Environmentalist* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 1970).

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