

Animal Rights

In Australia's Cape York Peninsula the aborigines call dogs "brothers" and "sons", While the loway and Winnebago American Indians respond similarly to both dogs and horses. How should we relate to animals? Should we join The Seal Action Group or an animal rights association? Are we allowed to do with animals as it pleases us? And what about meat eating? Should we let the animal-rights crusaders force us to become vegetarians?

The animal-rights crusaders have of course an ideal situation. They can get our reaction but not that of the animals as they can't talk. Until recently animal research was accepted as a legitimate practice; today, however, it has become under increasing attack. Animal rights groups caricature medical researchers trying to find a cure for AIDS or cancer as wicked, sadistic profiteers who want nothing more than to carve up animals and protect their own species. This animal rights movement is gaining clout. Even Christians - conservative as well as liberal - are found in the animal rights ranks. The ones who get the most media attention are the "animal liberationists" who don't hesitate to resort to extreme means to get their message across. In the early eighties they claimed to have injected poison into Mars candy bars throughout Britain. Their claim proved to be a hoax. But they did get everyone's attention. In the United States on occasion they spray-paint telltale logos on the homes of researchers and break into research facilities to free laboratory animals. They bear such expressive names as Animal Liberation Front and Guardian Apes. The rights activists readily exploit sentiment and emotion. Do animals have the same rights as man? Do we have kinship with them? Few theologians have addressed the issue.

At the core of the animal rights movement is the belief that animals have the same rights as human beings. "It can no longer be maintained by anyone but a religious fanatic that man is the special darling of the whole universe," argues Professor, Peter Singer, "or that other animals were created to provide us with food, or that we have divine authority over them, and divine permission to kill them." Singer's argument shows his Darwinian bias. According to evolutionary thinking humans cannot have dominion over other species. How can they if they all have the same origin? But Darwinians are not consequent. Many enjoy their hamburgers and steaks. The animal rights position clashes with the Christian view of man and animals.

The Bible has a high view of animals. God put such a great value on the animal that it became man's temporary substitute and shadow of Christ when sacrificed on Israel's altars. Our Lord Himself is more than once compared to a lamb, lion or sheep. Many animals (ant, snake, dove) are mentioned as examples for man to follow (Prov.6: 6, Matt.10: 16). Some other animals (horse, mule, dog), are used as means of warning (Ps.32: 9; 2 Pet.2: 22). The Bible occasionally attributes to animals conduct for which they are responsible and punished (Ex.21: 28). Animals receive God's protection (Jonah 4:11, Matt.10: 29). Abraham Kuyper wrote that animals have souls, but not the same kind as human beings. He spoke of an "animal soul" he referred to Gen.2: 19, Gen.9: 4 and Lev.24: 18 as proof texts. Kuyper also claimed that animals were created after the image

of man. In the order of God's decrees God first thought of man and afterwards He designed the animals.

Is there a difference between man and animal? G.K.Chesterton stated, "It is the simple truth that man does differ from the brutes in kind and not in degree; and the proof of it is here: that it sounds like a truism to say that the most primitive man drew a picture of a monkey and that it sounds like a joke to say that the most intelligent monkey drew a picture of a man." God created man and animals with many similarities, in the same biological pattern. But man is of "more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7), or any other earthly species of life. The first Adam or man is a creation supernaturally made in the image of God (Gen.1: 26), fashioned from the dust of the earth and thus unlike any prior species of life. The most important difference between man and animal, therefore, is the fact that God created only man and woman in His image and likeness. Man reflects an ineradicable God-consciousness. As God's image bearer man is capable of formulating ideas and principles, has a sense of moral duty, awareness of history, and the ability to speak and thus convey his thoughts. God also gave man dominion over the animal world. Man is in charge. He is responsible for animals. He is to care for them as God cares. As Elmer B.Smick observed, "...as God may use all his creation to his own glory in the context of his good and holy nature, so may man use the animals, but with responsibility." If an animal has such a high stature in God's eyes can we still be meat-eaters or should we become Christian vegetarians?

The creation account implies that in paradise neither man nor animals ate flesh (Gen.1: 29f). Adam and Eve were vegetarians in paradise. Eating of meat came after the fall. Modern vegetarians want to return to paradise. This is impossible. Animals were not used for food until after the Flood (Gen.9: 1-3) and it was then that animals began to live in "fear and dread" of man (9:2). Neither the Old nor the New Testament forbids eating of meat. Our Lord was not a vegetarian. He cooked a meal of fish for His disciples and miraculously turned a few fish into dinner for thousands.

He and His disciples ate the Passover lamb. He placed higher value on man than on animals. "You hypocrites!" He said to those who criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath. "Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"(Luke 13:15-16). No one can use our Lord's example or teaching to encourage a vegetarian diet.

The Bible makes a distinction between murder and killing animals. Abel offered "fat portions of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering" (Gen.4: 4). Cain killed his brother and God punished him (vs.10 -12). The sixth commandment does not include every living thing. Its context shows that it refers to man and woman as God's image bearers. While all life must be respected, it is never at the expense of man. This so-called "reverence for life" as taught by some eastern religions results in cruelty that allows sick cows to live and vermin to spread filth.

Cruelty toward animals is strictly forbidden. Unnecessary infliction of pain must be avoided. For example, certain practices within the cosmetic industry raise serious questions. In order to test whether a given cosmetic is safe, laboratories often place a product into an animal's eye, sometimes injuring it. John R. Boyce and Christopher Lutes pointed out in a *Christian Today* article *Animal rights: How much pain is a cure worth?* (Sept. 6, 1985) that consumer safety is important, but Christians may honestly wonder if the world really needs another mascara or eye shadow. The testing of unnecessary drugs and products at the expense of animals could be challenged from the Christian context.

Dr. A. Kuyper rightly noted that we have a duty over against animals. And he said that preaching, which in the length of years never mentions it, is not faithful to God's revelation in Scripture.

Man has often been a tyrant for animals and abused them. Though man has dominion over them, he has no *carte blanche* to maltreat them. Man is responsible to God for all what he does. He is God's steward, a temporary caretaker. He is governed by God's laws. "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animals," writes the wise man in Proverbs (12:10). The Sabbath is a day of rest also for the animals. Their owner should give them that day off (Ex.20: 10, 23:12). God commanded, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" (Deut.25: 4). A strayed sheep or ox must be returned to the owner. If the owner of the animal is unknown the finder must take it with him and keep it until the owner comes looking for it (Deut.22: 12). Humane care must be given to animals, not because they are rational beings, or possess inherent rights but because God made them and put them in our care. Man and animals are on earth to glorify the Creator. However, being responsible for animals does not mean that man has to fall for the "all or none" trap, refusing experimentation with animals for genuine health-care research such as the need to find a cure for leukemia or a child with cystic fibrosis. Humane protection of animals should neither lead to abdication of God given stewardship responsibilities nor to weak sentimentality. Some animal rights activists claim that it is better to live with human suffering than to experiment with animals for the sake of the health and well being of man. This view equates man's needs with those of animals. As have shown from Scripture-in God's creation order man is over the animal world. "Carefully designed experiments, where the justification is for human benefit, could be justified by the creation account," says Robert Nelson of the ethics commission of the Christian Medical Society. "But when you say we have dominion to use animals in research-to use to what end? We need to look at the ends to which we're using anything. Stewardship is an eyes-open recognition of what really needs to be done."

Over against the New Age Movement, the Greens and the animal rights activists the Biblical creation account must be stressed. Not all forms of life are equal in the sight of God. Man is at the top in the order of creation. He alone bears the Creator's image and reflects His nature. But in our fallen world man has often been destructive. What we need in our embattled world is the proclamation of the Gospel of grace focused on the transformation of human beings; new creatures in Christ having a constructive role in God's design for creation.

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