

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ANIMALS

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“For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine” (Psalm 50:10-11, ESV). Though every right perspective on creation begins with the Creator, we live in a strange world where views are skewed and confusion reigns in the minds of well-meaning people who have abandoned God’s word and embraced beliefs and causes contrary to it. Money, energy, and ink are spent advocating “animal rights.” What is the Bible’s perspective on animals?

First, animals are for man’s **COMMANDING**. All the way back to the beginning, God gave a mandate to mankind to subdue and dominate the earth, including its animal inhabitants (Gen. 1:28). It was never repealed, has not expired, and was not instituted with a sunset provision. God did not say to put animals on a pedestal. He did not task man with preserving, at all cost, every species or sub-species of every animal. Rather, God told man to launch out, explore and command the creation entrusted to him. Man has been doing it ever since.

Second, animals are for man’s **CLOTHING**. The very first articles of clothing fashioned from animal hides were made by God himself to cover Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). There is no better precedent than that. Figuratively speaking of his people as a young bride, God talks of clothing her “with fine leather” (Eze. 16:10). John wore a garment of camel hair, as well as a leather belt (Mark 1:6). Clearly, God gave people the right to wear hides, wool, fur, or hair from animals.

Third, animals are for man’s **CONSUMPTION**. God stated it plainly, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you” (Gen. 9:3). While vegetarianism is an option (cf. 1 Cor. 8:13), no one has the right to insist that meat-eating is wrong (see also Acts 10:10-13; 1 Cor. 10:25).

Fourth, animals are for man’s **COMMERCE**. As Jesus asked, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?” (Matt. 10:29). Having dominion over animals certainly includes the domestication of livestock. If God intended animals to be un-eaten, un-worn, un-owned, unused, then he would have told man to simply leave them all untouched and in the wild. But that is precisely the opposite of God’s directive. Man does have the right to buy, sell and trade animals for his own use and profit.

Fifth, animals are for man’s **COMPANIONSHIP**. Once a Gentile mother begged Jesus to heal her daughter (Mark 7:26-28). He told her it was not right to give dogs food that belonged to children. The woman replied that “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Obviously, any dogs under a table where children were eating would be tame. There is no sin in owning a pet dog, cat, rabbit, snake, etc. One parable even spoke of a man so fond of his pet sheep that it lived with his children, drank from his cup, and was “like a daughter to him” (2 Sam. 12:3).

Sixth, animals are for man’s **CONSIDERATION**. After all, how a man treats an animal does say something about the man. Moses’ law stipulated, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain” (Deut. 25:4; cf. also Ex. 23:4-5). Allowing a work animal to eat a little of his work is simply a kind consideration. Interestingly, that verse is twice quoted in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18). Solomon wrote, “Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel” (Prov. 12:10). A righteous heart is not a cruel heart. Using animals in God-approved ways does not make a man cruel. Even medical experiments for the good of people, which carry out trials on animals, are not done from a

motive of cruelty. Nor is sport fishing or sport hunting done from a motive of cruelty. But animals are not people, and people are supposed to know they are not animals.

With rights come obligations. Animals have no obligations; they live by instinct, exactly as God made them to do. Thus, animals have no rights. Men have both rights and obligations, and some of those rights and obligations have to do with animals. As people created in God's own image (Gen. 1:27), there is a tremendous qualitative difference between us and any animals. As Jesus put it, "Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:31).