

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Text: Deuteronomy 25:4

INTRO: Over the last 4 decades we've heard a lot about rights--human rights, civil rights, states rights, inalienable rights, a woman's right to an abortion--and now animal rights.

This is a complicated subject & probably not as "black and white, cut and dried" as some individuals imagine it to be. It involves among other things, the use & abuse of natural resources.

And tho the Bible has little or nothing to say about animal rights, per se, it does have quite a bit to say about human wrongs. And it does say a number of things that have bearing on our subject.

I. GOD CREATED ALL "NATURAL RESOURCES," INCLUDING ALL FORMS OF LIFE: PLANT, ANIMAL, & HUMAN.

READ GENESIS 1:1, 11-12, 20-25

A. Man is the crowning glory of creation. He did not evolve from lower forms of life. His body was formed from the elements of the earth & his soul or spirit was specially created in the image of God Himself, Gen 2:7; 1:26-27.

B. Man, made in God's image, possesses intellect, emotions & will. Tho man's body is subject to deterioration & decay, his spirit survives death to live on in another realm, Eccl 12:7; 3:18-21.

II. GOD'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE IS THAT OF SOVEREIGN OWNERSHIP. We hear of human rights, civil rights, states rights & even animal rights. The rights that should concern us

most are God's rights. READ PSALM 50:10-12; 24:1-2.

III. MAN'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE IS THAT WHICH HAS BEEN ASSIGNED HIM BY THE CREATOR.

A. Our relationship to God is that of stewardship. We must someday give account for our uses & abuses of the things put within our power. READ LK 12:42-43, 48.

B. Man has been given the responsibility of subduing & exercising dominion over the animal creation, Gen 1:26-27.

IV. LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE VERSES THAT MIGHT BE USED TO TEACH ANIMAL RIGHTS.

A. Deuteronomy 25:4.

1. The statement is proverbial in nature. Tho it may legitimately have a literal application, it is in a context of discussing human rights, vs. 2-5.

2. Paul's application of this text in 1 Cor 9:9 shows that we are on the right track, 1 Cor 9:9-12.

B. Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deut, 14:21.

1. Older commentators saw no significance in these verses beyond that of showing pity & avoiding cruelty.

2. Jewish traditions re kosher foods does not allow meat to be cooked in milk to be sure to avoid violating these verses.

3. In 1930 archaeologists discovered the Ugarit literature, in which "it

was learned that boiling a kid in its mother's milk was a Canaanite [religious] practice used in connection with fertility rites" (Wycliffe Commentary).

4. Again, a look at the context of this command bears out what we have already considered.

5. Thus, this passage is not really stressing animal rights, but human wrongs.

C. Proverbs 12:10.

1. I believe this verse, along with general principles suggested in other passages, indicates that it is wrong to practice animal cruelty.

2. It has been generally observed that those who practice animal cruelty usually graduate to human cruelty.

3. It should be noted, however, that raising & killing animals for food, clothing & other legitimate purposes, using them as beasts of burden, etc., are not viewed in the Bible as acts of cruelty.

V. ANIMAL RIGHTS EXTREMISTS PROTEST THE LEGITIMATE USE OF ANIMALS. Note an article in Readers Digest, June, 1990, detailing vandalism on the part of "animal rights" extremists. And make no mistake about it, when a person refers to killing animals for food or medical research as "murder," that person is an extremist.

A. Perhaps the real culprit here is the atheistic doctrine of general evolution. General evolution theorizes that humans are basically no different from the rest of the so-called animal kingdom--that we have developed from ape-like ancestors & someday will be developed out of existence, giving way to some higher form of life, & that we as individuals have no greater destiny than the grave.

B. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the distinction between human and other life forms. READ MATTHEW 6:26; 8:31-32; 12:11-12; LUKE 12:4-7

C. The following uses of animals are in harmony with the revealed will of God, to whom all the animals belong:

1. Animals, both wild & domestic, can be killed & eaten. In fact, under the OT, certain meats were required--Passover, etc. Gen 9:3

2. Animals, both wild & domestic may be killed to provide clothing or shelter for man. Adam's 2nd suit was made from animal skin. John the Baptist wore a garment made from camel hide.

3. Animals may be used as beasts of burden. Ride them, pull chariots, plows, thresh grain, etc.

4. There is Scriptural precedent for penning animals in a stall for the precise purpose of slaughter as food. They killed the fatted calf.

5. Wild animals were slain for the protection of domestic animals & men. David.

6. Dogs were used in guarding and guiding sheep, Job 30:1

7. Animals were kept as pets for companionship. 2 Sam 12:1-6; Matt 15:27

8. The principles involved in hunting, fishing & trapping harmonizes with the Scriptures. Lev 17:13; Amos 3:5; MT 17:27; JN 21:6

9. It is in harmony with these Biblical principles to use animals in research & development of medicines & safety devices.

10. "Game management" falls within the scope of subduing & exercising dominion over the fish, fowls, etc. This is a difficult & complex problem. Use of a resource might be right for one area, circumstance, or time, & wrong for another. READ ECCL. 3:1-8

CONCLUSION: I believe it is wrong for us to wastefully abuse & destroy animal life--not so much because animals have rights, but because they belong to God, & we must honor Divine rights. I believe it is sinful for us to be cruel to any creature God has made--but this does not preclude our using the things God has put under our dominion to serve & fulfill our needs.

Exton, PA, February 10, 1991

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, December 22, 1991

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, September 21, 1997