

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About... Man and Beast

In the news this past week a four year-old boy fell into a gorilla's habitat at the zoo. Officials from the zoo made a decision to shoot and kill the gorilla in order to save the boy. This has caused an uproar from people who do not totally understand the relationship between men and animals according to God's word.

First, animals were created by God to be inferior to man. On the sixth day God created the animals and declared His creation "good" (Gen. 1:25), but that same day "God created man in His own image" (Gen. 1:27). God, in making man according to His own image and likeness, gave man a spirit just as "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Animals do not have this spirit that makes us "in the likeness of God". Though both man and beast suffer a common fate, both returning to dust, man will face God in judgment (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Secondly, once Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness, "the Lord God made tunics of skin and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). It is altogether appropriate for animals to die so that men and women will be adequately covered. John the Baptist, the messenger who prepared the way for Christ, "was clothed with camel's hair and a leather belt" (Mark 1:16). While in Joppa, the apostle Peter stayed in the home of a disciple named Simon, who made his living as a tanner (Acts 9:43; 10:6, 32).

Thirdly, animals are suitable for consumption. As Noah's family emerged from the ark, God informed them, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs" (Gen. 9:3). Some extremists have boldly asserted that Jesus was a vegetarian, but the scriptures teach otherwise. Between two distinct miracles, Jesus fed no less than 9,000 people with the meat of fish (Mark 6:35-44).

Fourthly, dangerous animals can be put to death. Prior to the law, God said, "Surely I will require your life blood; from every beast I will require it..." (Gen. 9:5). Within the Law of Moses, the Lord reaffirmed this teaching. "If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned...(Ex. 21:28). Penalties were also in place for animals that harmed other animals (Ex. 21:35-36).

Animals are not to be treated cruelly because of the dominion of man over beast. It is written, "A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal..." (Prov. 12:10). Under the Old Testament, animals were protected while they worked: "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing" (Deut. 25:4).

Animals are suitable for companionship. Nathan the Prophet when he confronted David for his sin with Bathsheba made a comparison of a rich man who stole a poor man's precious pet (2 Samuel 12:3).

In summation of God's word, man does have dominion over animals and especially if a wild animal is threatening a human being. The killing of the gorilla in the zoo is not contrary to scripture.

Please send any comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:

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