



CARING FOR GOD'S ANIMAL CREATIONS: ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

An area closely related to, but broader than the focus of this article, is ethical principles for Christians in their interactions with animals under their care. What follows is a summary of Gerald Winslow's chapter, "What Christian Principles Guide Our Relations With Animals?" from the new book *Entrusted: Christians and Environmental Care*,* which offers three premises that orient the reader to a biblical approach, followed by one foundational principle with three specific implications for how we treat non-human animals under our care. The term *care* in this case encompasses a broad definition that includes pets; animals in service to humans (such as horses and dairy cows); animals used in research; residents of zoological parks, science exhibits, and museums; creatures we raise and slaughter for food; as well as those we hunt and fish.

Three Orienting Premises:

1. *How we care for and relate to animals must be informed by the perspective of eternity.* Viewing our present situation in relation to God's plans for a new heaven and a new earth makes us realize that currently, life on earth is not the way it should be. Our current situation is skewed by the reality of human sin and its effects on every part of God's creation.

2. *Sin distorts our relationship with the animals under our care.* This corruption is so thorough and ingrained that we need God's help to discern how best to care for His creation. Due to our sinful condition, the knowledge and dedication that it takes to properly care for animals does not come naturally to humans. By studying Jesus' redemptive life and modeling His character in our lives, we can gain insight into proper relationships with God's human and non-human creations. Acknowledging animals as creations of God should produce tangible results. Since all creatures were created by, loved by, and therefore belong to God, what principles should we as His stewards embrace in our decisions about how to treat the animal under our care?

3. *We must embrace the principle that all God's creatures have moral value.* Humans interact with the animals under their care in a vast variety of ways. We must recognize that too many of these patterns of treatment result in the suffering and death of animals. We are morally obliged to do what we can to minimize this outcome of animals' interactions with us. It is surprising that we humans can love and care for a variety of animals as pets while at the same time killing others of God's creatures to consume as food, and daily interacting with diverse animals in countless thoughtless, uncaring ways. The fundamental premise that should set the tone for how we treat animals calls for us to reduce the pain, suffering, and death we cause them.

With these three premises in mind, it becomes clear that a principled response to God's love of all creation calls us to moral responsibility in relationship to non-human animals. We are morally obliged to do all we can to help these creatures flourish. Three specific assertions emerge from this principle:

- Animals under our care deserve nurture and affection, not neglect or abuse.
- Killing or injuring animals for sport or entertainment is wrong.
- A plant-based diet is ethically preferable.

When we respect and care for non-human animal life, we show our reverence for God and all His creation. He challenges us to be morally responsible believers by allowing our vision of a future eternity to shape our relationships today.

* Gerald R. Winslow, "What Christian Principles Guide Our Relations With Animals?" in *Entrusted: Christians and Environmental Care*, Stephen Dunbar, L. James Gibson, and Humberto Rasi, eds. (Adventist Publications, 2013), Chapter 7, pp. 65-74.

the entirety of creation has value only as it enhances human life. Value is instrumental to humankind.

My theological ethics framework compels me to take the position that all things God created possess at least some moral status; therefore, I have a moral obligation to be a responsible steward of every part of God's creation.

On being responsible. The responsibility that God assigns humankind is a moral one—to engage in a managerial role within His creation. This role is best understood within the theological framework of the principle of stewardship. Stewardship, argues Bauckham, is a "vocation of caring responsibility for other creatures."¹⁶

I am convinced that we must understand the metaphor of dominion through the metaphor of stewardship and responsibility. With Bauckham, I would note that "the human relationship to the rest of creation, as intended by God according to the biblical material . . . cannot be easily summed up by a single term such as stewardship."¹⁷ The expository document of Adventist Fundamental Beliefs blends both metaphors in its reference to Adam and Eve's responsibility: Theirs "was the responsibility to rule graciously over the world, imaging or reflecting God's beneficent rule over the universe." Additionally, the document urges us toward the view that "as human beings, we are to act like God because we are made to be like God. Though we are human, and not divine, we are to reflect our Maker within our dominion in every way possible."¹⁸

Three Official Statements produced by the Adventist Church are relevant in defining our role as stewards of God's creation (listed here chronologically): *Caring for Creation—A Statement on the Environment*; *A Statement on the Environment*; and *Statement on Stewardship of the Environment*.¹⁹ The only one that explicitly mentions animals is *Caring for Creation—A Statement on*