

## Minister's Message – July 2011

### Animals

On the sixth day of creation God said 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kind'. And so it was that God made the animals. Then God said 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ... over the livestock' (Genesis 1:26). While humans and animals are biologically similar, they are created fundamentally different. Only humans are made in the image of God. Animals are not made for eternal life. Animals are not rational or reasoning moral beings.

God gave humans the responsibility to rule over the animals (Genesis 1:28). He brought all the animals to Adam for him to name them (Genesis 2:19). Giving a name indicates authority over, and responsibility for, the creature named. The animals appear to have lived in the Garden of Eden in a peaceful manner with man (*cf.* Isaiah 11:6-8).

God feeds the birds and generally cares for animals, legislating that they be given rest on the Sabbath (Matthew 6:26, 10:29, Jonah 4:1, Exodus 20:10). He expects humans, whom he made ruler over the animals, to do the same. 'A righteous man regards the life of his animals' (Proverbs 12:10). A person who is cruel to animals is not reflecting the character of God, nor obeying God.

Why then do we see people being cruel to animals? For the same reason as we see them being cruel to fellow humans – because of sin! There is a difference in that animals are dumb and basically helpless. Animals are not adept at using weapons.

In the Bible we read of a man called Balaam beating his donkey (Numbers 22). Three times this donkey saved Balaam from the angel of the Lord who stood in the road with sword drawn. Balaam did not see the angel but the donkey did. In this unique story God enabled the donkey to speak in its defence.

Without knowledge of God, knowledge of his creation and care for the animals, humans are in the dark with regard to their relationship with, and responsibility towards, animals. 'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel' (Proverbs 12:10). In parts of Asia it is illegal to kill a cow. People actually worship cows. Does this mean they are not cruel? Such people leave sick animals to suffer. They leave animals to die of starvation. A distinction must be made between killing and cruelty. Other people without knowledge of the true God kill animals for meat by cruel methods.

On the other hand some who are without God believe that the life of an animal is equal to the life of a human? Some value dogs more than people. They will die saving their pet. Some advocate killing 'dumb' humans like unborn or deformed babies and old people.

God made the animals. He did not make them in his image. He made them without a soul. He made them for man to care for and utilise for his benefit, and for the glory of God. That benefit may be a special companionship. It may be providing man with food and fibre. That food includes meat which God told Noah he could eat after the Flood (Genesis 9). After sin entered the world God accepted the blood of sacrificed animals as atonement for sin – until full and final atonement was made in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

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