



EVERY
LIVING
THING

An Evangelical Statement on Responsible Care for Animals: Explanatory Essay

We offer this explanatory essay as a window into our interaction with the Bible’s implications for animal stewardship. It is not a fully-rendered argument or a finished product. We offer it, however, with the prayer that it will provide additional insight and clarity about what we intend and don’t intend by the various claims and conclusions we make in the Statement. Please feel free to interact with us regarding any aspect of this essay.

Preface

First Paragraph

*Jesus Christ is Lord, and “By Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.” (Col. 1:16)
As such we hold that our view of all living creatures, as our view of everything, must be thoroughly shaped, informed and tested against Scripture.*

The first paragraph of the *Preface*, quoting Col. 1:16 explains why a statement like this is both necessary and appropriate. In drafting this statement, we have no wish or desire to place this issue on a pedestal or hold it up as of premier importance. We do, however, believe the apostle Paul when he writes “***All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work***” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).¹

We thus affirm that when we consider living creatures, and specifically animals in this document, that our thinking must come from Scripture, which trains us in righteousness, and reproves and corrects us when we err. This is surely just one area and component of the vast fullness of Christian discipleship, but nevertheless in this area, as in all areas, our minds must not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but instead they must be transformed so that we might approve the good, pleasing and perfect will of God.

¹ Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible® Copyright © 1960,1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Second Paragraph

The following then aspires to be a holistic biblical approach to an understanding of how we treat an especially vulnerable subset of all God's creatures: animals. While we recognize that all living creatures deserve respect as part of God's creation, we want to help focus attention on animals, as these creatures can be most subject to irresponsible and cruel treatment by humans.

This second paragraph narrows our focus from all living creatures down to an especially vulnerable subset, animals. We do this because we think animals comprise the subset of living creatures where most (but not all) of the more complex ethical considerations are manifest. In addition, because of their greater dependence on humans, animals are more exposed to the possibility of irresponsible and cruel treatment by humans.

A Note on Structure

The accompanying Statement has been divided into three sections: Beliefs, Understandings, and Resolutions. The Beliefs section seeks to identify, in contextually appropriate ways, the key passages that shape and inform our theological foundation for responsible care for animals. The Understandings section begins to interpret and apply these theological foundations and to draw out certain key principles from them. The final section, the Resolutions section, seeks to apply these theological foundations and key principles to our current situation.

Beliefs Section

First Paragraph

*We believe that God created the heavens and the earth; that He created a multitude of living creatures, each after their own kind, including animals; that He gave them the breath of life; and that He declared all of this "good."
Gn. 1:1, 20-25, 30; 6:17; 7:15, 22; Ps. 104:29-30*

It is, of course, highly appropriate to begin this Statement at the beginning, in Genesis. In the creation account we see the awesome creative majesty of God at work. God's creative work regarding living creatures begins in verse 20. On the fifth day, God created all the water creatures and birds, each after their own kind. Verse 21 ends with the affirmation that "**God saw that it was good.**" Of interest also is that in verse 22, for the first time in the creation account, we see God giving a blessing and commanding the sea creatures and birds to multiply.

The first paragraph of the Statement also refers to God's creation, on the sixth day, of living creatures from the earth, each after their own kind: the beasts of the earth, the cattle, the creeping things². It is worth noting that there is no blessing or command to be fruitful here for these animals. However there is the divine affirmation in verse 25, "**God saw that it was good.**" Lastly, before moving on to the culmination of the sixth day – man – it is necessary to address the description of animals as having "the breath of life." This term is typically associated with

² The terms are likely meant to be all-inclusive of animals that are not fish or fowl.

the creation of humanity (i.e., Genesis 2:7), however, the same Hebrew term is used to describe animals in Genesis 1:30.”³

Second Paragraph

We believe God uniquely created humankind in His own image and likeness, in contrast to creatures, including animals, who are created after their own kind; that He appointed humankind to rule over all living creatures, including animals; that God blessed Adam and Eve and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth; that God instructed them to subdue the earth; that He gave them every seed bearing plant for food; and that God declared all that He had made, “very good.”

Gn. 1:26-31; Ps. 8:4-8; 1 Cor. 15:39; James 3:9

The second paragraph rightly begins with the absolute belief that humanity is unique, completely distinct, and alone is created in the image and likeness of God. The truth of humanity’s uniqueness is clearly taught by Scripture, both in the creation account and in passages such as Psalm 8:4-8, 1 Corinthians 15:39, and James 3:9.

This complete and utter distinctiveness of humanity is not only ontological in nature. There are also functional distinctions. The second clause of the paragraph notes that God “appointed humankind to rule over all living creatures, including animals.” Humans were given the sole appointment to rule over animals.

We think it is important to note that the word “rule,”⁴ used to describe human authority over animals, however, does not imply severe treatment. The same word occurs in Leviticus 25:43, 46, and 53. In these passages, Moses tells the Israelites not to “rule over” (*radah*) indentured Israelites “harshly.” So, it’s possible to exercise *radah* in a way that respects the one being ruled.

The first half of verse 28 includes the second and last blessing in the creation account, where God blessed Adam and Eve and commanded them to “***Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.***” We wish to fully affirm this divine command, still in force today.

We also wish to be as clear as possible about our affirmation that God gave Adam and Eve “***every seed bearing plant for food.***” Our intent here is simply to be faithful to the whole creation account and note this part of Genesis 1:30. Our Statement goes on to say that this situation passed away after the flood⁵ and that eating meat is affirmed in the New Testament.⁶ Thus, while we include this clause for biblical faithfulness, we reject the belief and strongly disagree with any who would seek to use this verse (or consequently this Statement) to argue that the Bible mandates a vegetarian or vegan diet.

³ נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*) חַי (*chay*). We are not claiming there is an equivalence between animals and humans. But we believe it is important for our better appreciation of animals to understand that this term is also used to refer to them.

⁴ Hebrew, רָדָה (*radah*)

⁵ Genesis 9:3

⁶ Luke 24:42 and Acts 10:13-15, for example.

The last clause reminds us of the final affirmation that God gives in verse 31, that all of creation together is “**very good.**” While this affirmation by the Creator of the exceeding goodness of all creation is well known to us, we must not let that familiarity dull the wonder and power of this truth and its implications for our view of all creation, including animals. The God of the heavens has declared all He made exceedingly good.

Third Paragraph

We believe that when sin entered the world through human rebellion it corrupted all relationships, firstly between humanity and God, but also relationships between people and between humankind and animals.

[Gn. 3:14, 4:8, 6:12-13, 49:6; Ex. 23:4-5; Prv. 12:10; Hos. 4:1-3; Hb. 2:17; Rom. 5:12, 8:20-21]

This third paragraph acknowledges the consequence of sin not only for humans but for the whole of creation, including animals. While we must never lose sight of the primary consequence of sin on humanity, that as the apostle Paul writes, “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**”⁷ we are right, nevertheless, to recognize the systemic effects of sin upon all of creation.⁸

We see the initial impact of this consequence in the Fall itself and the curse meted out on the serpent. God told the serpent it is “cursed more than any livestock and more than any wild animal” (Genesis 3:14). But, the curse did not stop there. The use of the comparative “more than” tells us the curse on the serpent was more severe, but that the serpent wasn’t the only recipient of the curse. All animals fell under the curse to some degree.

Furthermore, in the account of the flood in Genesis 6, we read “**all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.**”⁹ This asserts some sort of corruption of all living creatures, including animals.¹⁰ In response, God decided to wipe out most of humanity, birds, and land-based animals. The birds and land-based animals were not destroyed because of any moral failure on their part. Their corruption was due either to the effects of the curse at the Fall, or, as some commentators suggest, as a result of the failure of humans to appropriately fulfill their responsibility toward them. In support of this latter theory, we note that after the Flood, we continue to see a call to responsible treatment of animals.¹¹

Fourth Paragraph

We believe that after the flood God caused all animals to fear humankind and gave them into our hand and for food; that God included animals in the covenant He made after the flood and commands us to show the same respect and concern for the life and welfare of

⁷ Romans 3:23

⁸ Romans 8:20-21

⁹ Genesis 6:12

¹⁰ The exact phrase “all flesh”, כָּל (kol) בְּשָׂרָא (basar) appears eight times in Genesis chapters 6-8 [6:12, 13, 17, 19, 7:15, 16, 21, 8:17], with six of these occurrences referring specifically to the creatures taken on board the ark. It is for this reason we think the Gn. 6:12 reference suggests the wider understanding of corruption, though, clearly, this is primarily about human corruption.

¹¹ Genesis 49:6, Exodus 23:4-5 and Proverbs 12:10

animals that He does. [Gn. 3:21, 6:19, 8:1, 8:9, 9:1-17; Ex. 23:4-5, 12, 19, 34:26; Dt. 25:4; Jon. 4:11; Acts 10:13-15]

The fourth paragraph begins with the event of the flood. Here we see manifest God's concern for the preservation of all the different kinds of living creatures and the responsible rule and care for them required of humanity. God commanded Noah,

“And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive” (Genesis 6:19-20).

We continue to see God's concern manifest in Genesis 7:24 and 8:1 which states,

“the water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days. But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided.”

We wish to also note that Noah emulates God's concern for all creatures later in chapter 8 with his care for the dove:

“Then he sent out a dove from him, to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; but the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the ark, for the water was on the surface of all the earth. Then he put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark himself” (Genesis 8:8-9).

After the flood, we see God causing all animals to fear humans. He gives us authority over them and gives them to us for food.¹² Further, this paragraph reminds us that the covenant God made in Genesis 9 is not just with Noah, but with all living creatures on the ark. Four additional times God reiterated their inclusion in the covenant.¹³ The fact that God considered it right to include animals in such a covenant is an important consideration for us as we think about our attitude toward animals.

The inclusion of animals in the Noahic covenant is just one instance of His obvious concern for animals. Scripture also contains numerous instances in which humanity is expected to show the same respect and care for animals that God does, most notably Exodus 23:4-5, 19 and 34:26; Deuteronomy 25:4; and Jonah 4:11.¹⁴ While human behavior is of primary concern in these passages, we note that this is in relationship to animals. For example, Jonah 4:10-11 reads:

“Then the LORD said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

¹² Genesis 9:2-3

¹³ After the initial reference in v. 10, the following four are verses 12, 15, 16, and 17.

¹⁴ Others include Leviticus 22:26-28, 25:7, and Deuteronomy 22:1-4, 6-7

Fifth Paragraph

We believe that all animals ultimately belong to God, are sustained by Him, and exist to bring Him praise and reveal His character.

[Dt. 10:14; Jb. 12:7-10, 41:11; Ps. 24:1, 36:6, 104:11-14,21, 24-25, 27-30, 145:16, 21, 148:7, 10, 150:6; Mt. 6:26; Lk. 12:24; Rom. 1:20]

A key motivation for the care and concern for animals mentioned in the previous paragraphs is the truth affirmed throughout Scripture that because God created animals, they, along with all of creation, belong to Him, are sustained by Him, and exist to bring Him praise and reveal His character.

The fifth paragraph affirms that God is the ultimate owner of not only the earth, but all its inhabitants. Psalm 24:1 is perhaps the most well-known passage expressing this truth: ***“The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.”*** Other passages that echo this theme include Deuteronomy 10:14, Job 41:11, and Psalm 104:24-25. All these passages affirm that while humans have rule over the animals, they ultimately belong, like all of creation, to God. Thus by implication, we are responsible to Him for how we treat them.

Along with God’s ultimate ownership of animals, Scripture speaks of God’s ongoing provision for animals. Passages including Job 12:7-10 and Psalms 36:6, 104:10-14 and 145:16 all express the continued dependence of animals on God.

The third clause of this paragraph highlights the repeated refrain in Scripture that part of God’s purpose for animals is that they would bring Him praise and reveal His character. We must rightly reject any attempt to idolize or divinize animals and be vigilant against this distortion.¹⁵ Nevertheless, we see the Old Testament, Jesus, and Paul, pointing to the role of creation, including animals, in helping us to understand God.

For example, the same passage in which Paul rightly warns against idolizing creation, he also earlier notes, ***“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse”*** (Romans 1:20).

Psalms 145:21, 148:7-10, and 150:6 offer additional examples of this function of animals. Jesus helps us here, as well. He says, ***“Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?”*** (Matthew 6:36). Clearly, the consideration of the worth of animals is not Jesus’ primary focus in this passage, but we note that our Lord said the way God cares for birds tells us something important about His commitment to us.

¹⁵ Romans 1:22-23

Sixth Paragraph

We believe all creation, including animals, will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God; that God will bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, Jesus the Christ; and through the Lord Jesus Christ will bring about a new heaven and a new earth that will reflect right relationships in all of creation, including between humans and animals.

[Is. 11:6-9, 65:17, 25; Hosea 2:18; Romans 8:22; Eph 1:9-10; Col. 1:15-23; Rev. 5:13, 21:1-5]

Both the Old and New Testaments are clear that Christian eschatological hope encompasses all of creation. As John Stott observes regarding the Romans 8 passage:

“Paul now writes from a cosmic perspective. The suffering and glory of the old creation (the material order) and of the new (the people of God) are integrally related to each other. Both creations are suffering and groaning now; both are going to be set free together. As nature shared in the curse, and now shares in the pain, so it will also share in the glory.”¹⁶

This new heaven and new earth will reflect *shalom*, the harmonious right relationships that the prophets speak about. Both Isaiah and Hosea included animals in their description of what this will look like.¹⁷

Understandings Section

First Paragraph

We understand from Scripture that humans are uniquely created in the image and likeness of God and so have greater worth than every animal; but that God has given all animals the breath of life, that He sustains them, that they belong ultimately to Him, and that He has declared them “good,” indicating they have value to Him independent of human use.

[Gn. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5-8, 104:11-14; Jon. 4:11; Mt 6:26, 10:31; Lk 12:7, 24]

This first paragraph categorically affirms the uniqueness and greater worth of humans compared to animals, witnessed to in both Old and New Testaments. Yet we also see an affirmation of the value of animals. God declared them “good” prior to the creation of humans. His ownership of them communicates an understanding of their value, as well. These facts suggest that animals have value to God independent of human use.¹⁸ We also see, for example, in Jonah 4:11, that God expressed compassion not just for young children but also for the many animals in Nineveh.

God created animals, declared them good, and owns them. Consequently, while humanity rules over all animals, and they have been given to us for food, we cannot treat them as inanimate objects and in ways that debase their inherent God-given value.

¹⁶ Stott, J, *The Message of Romans*, Bible Speaks Today Commentaries, p.238

¹⁷ Isaiah 11:6-9, 65:25 and Hosea 2:18

¹⁸ Wright, C, *Old Testament Ethics and the People of God*, IVP, 2004

Second Paragraph

*We understand from Scripture that God has given us all animals into our hand and for food as part of our responsible rule; but as we live in a fallen world and are prone to sin, we also have the capacity and inclination to cause suffering instead of care for animals and to act cruelly towards them.
[Gn. 9:1-17; Ex. 26:14; Lv. 17:13; Prov. 12:10; Hos. 4:3; Hb. 2:17; Acts 10:13-15]*

God's giving of animals to us for food began with Noah and continues into the New Testament. Jesus himself ate meat and fish¹⁹ and Paul affirms eating meat in both his letters to the Romans and the Corinthians.²⁰ In addition, Leviticus makes reference to hunting for food and Exodus to the use of animal skins in the building of the Tabernacle.²¹

However, this paragraph reminds us that because of our sinful nature we sometimes act in ways that either directly or indirectly cause cruelty and suffering to animals. Scripture is clear that such behavior is sinful.²²

Indeed, cruelty and suffering is sinful because it is a distortion of the God ordained office we hold and a debasement of creatures that belong to Him. Cruelty towards animals is wrong, not only because of what they are, but also because of who God is and who He created us to be.²³

Third Paragraph

*We understand from Scripture the responsible rule over and care of animals that God has given us on His behalf, and that this rule is to reflect His rule and character. This responsible rule and compassionate care of animals is expressed in God's instruction to His people in His word, regarding the right treatment of animals, and that the principles behind these instructions, rooted in the unchanging character of God, still apply today.
[Ex. 23:4-5, 19, 34:26; Lv. 22:26-28, Lv. 25:7; Dt. 22:1-4, 6-7; 25:4]*

The third paragraph provides an overview of passages that discuss the treatment of animals and the normative principles at play. Of course, with any ethical norms derived from the Old Testament we must be clear how these principles apply today in light of the New Testament. We believe though that these ethical principles are rooted in the unchanging character of God and so with proper exegesis and application they still have relevance today.

¹⁹ Luke 24:41-43, 22:7-8, and 13-15

²⁰ Romans 14:2-3, 1 Corinthians 10:25

²¹ Exodus 36:19, Leviticus 17:13

²² Proverbs 12:10, Hosea 4:3, and Habakkuk 2:17

²³ Leviticus 19:2

Resolutions Section

This section seeks to correctly apply the previous acknowledgements rooted in biblical teaching to our contemporary actions and attitudes. We recognize that it is most likely here that differences among followers of Christ are likely to emerge.

First Paragraph

We resolve to rule and treat all animals as living valued creatures, deserving of compassion, because they ultimately belong to God, because He has created them, declared them good, given them the breath of life, covenanted with them, and entrusted them to our responsible rule. So while animals have been given into our hand this does not mean we can treat them as objects or act cruelly toward them.

This first resolution seeks to attest to the imperative of humanity's responsible rule of all living creatures, here specifically, animals. Humans have no authority over animals that is not a delegated authority from God. Our rule over living creatures is not an absolute monarchy allowing us to do what we wish, but a vice-regency under and according to the rule of the King. As this rule has been granted to us by the ultimate Ruler, it must be on His terms, on His behalf, and for His glory.

The resolution also summarizes and elaborates on the inherent worth that God has given living creatures, including animals. It is derived from biblical passages that affirm God's ownership and sustenance of animals, along with the concept of "rule" revealed in Genesis 1:28.²⁴ Animals are not 'objects' but living creatures, valued by God. Our rule over them must reflect this reality.

We wish to be abundantly clear that by affirming animals as valued living creatures, we are not equating them with humans or elevating them to our level. Just as Scripture is clear on their status as living creatures valued by God, it is also clear on humanity's greater value, uniqueness, rule, and sole status as God's image bearers.

Second Paragraph

We resolve to examine all our practices relating to how we treat the domesticated animals that live among us and provide us with companionship, food, and service as well how we treat animals that live in the wild apart from us; and hold them all up to biblical principles for compassionate care and responsible rule, in light of God's view of them and His actions toward them.

This resolution seeks to expound on our mandate from the Creator to rule responsibly. It reminds us all to examine our current treatment of animals to determine whether we are rightly fulfilling this mandate. As the paragraph notes, this includes our treatment of different types of animals in every circumstance.

²⁴ Please see the comments in the explanation of the second paragraph of the Beliefs section.

We must ask ourselves important questions about how we treat individual animals but also what sort of societal treatment we, explicitly or implicitly, encourage and support by our actions and attitudes.

Our answers to these questions must be shaped and thoroughly informed by Scripture. Clearly some of these issues are not clear-cut and require prudential wisdom to discern. Nevertheless, we affirm that this wisdom must find its source in our Creator God and that discussions among Evangelicals on these issues must always be rooted in His Holy Word which “*is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*”²⁵

Third Paragraph

We resolve to exercise our responsible rule in part by confronting any and all cruelty against animals, seeing it as a violation of our rule and an affront to the ultimate Ruler who created, values, and sustains these animals.

This resolution follows naturally from the preceding two. As animals are living creatures valued by God and humanity has been appointed to rule them, we are thus required to name and confront distortions of that rule. Indeed, as the second paragraph of the Understandings section notes, animal “cruelty and suffering is sinful because it is a distortion of the God ordained office we hold and a debasement of creatures that belong to Him.”

By highlighting this responsibility, we by no means wish to elevate this sinfulness above others, but simply wish to recognize that “**there is not one righteous, not even one**”²⁶ and that cruelty to animals is one of the many ways in which we can sin and rebel against our rightful Ruler and Creator.

Fourth Paragraph

We resolve that because all kinds of animals are created by God and are sustained by Him, we need to work for the protection and preservation of all the kinds of animals God has created, while prioritizing human needs.

This resolution draws primarily from the principles found in the early chapters of Genesis. It seeks to blend the truths that all animals have been created by God, that their diversity is part of His creative activity, and that He has taken action to preserve them. At the same time, it recognizes that animals have been given into humanity’s hand for food.

Concluding Words

We are keenly aware that this brief essay leaves many unanswered questions, but we are confident that we have established the exegetical basis for the Statement. We welcome further elaboration on these arguments as well as constructive criticism. It is our prayer that this Statement will help to unify Evangelicals around a basic, essential body of commitments that can

²⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

²⁶ Romans 3:10 (Psalm 14:1)

help us develop a more biblical, consistent, and responsible ethic toward our animal co-inhabitants of planet earth. May God bless this effort for His glory.