

first is, . . . “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” [Mark 12:28-31]

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus elaborates on what this entails [Luke 10: 25-37].

With the Pharisee lawyer we must ask ourselves “*Who is my neighbour?*” [Luke 10:29]

Are our neighbours only human beings or **does our community of neighbours extend to all creation of which God made us part:** the rivers and mountains, the oceans and air, the trees and flowers, all living beings?

How far does God’s love, mercy and compassion stretch?

Is God’s love not infinite?

“Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.” [Ps 36:6]

In Christ “*all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*” [Colossians 1:15-23]

Clearly something has gone awfully wrong in our relationship with our fellow beings, with the Earth and with God.

How can we put our wrong relationships right?

WHAT TO DO?

Pray! for compassion, understanding and guidance.

Study! the Holy Bible looking afresh for the light that it shines on our relationships with God, with our fellow creatures and with all God’s creation.

Become a more mindful eater! “*See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.*” [Genesis 1:29]

Become a more conscious consumer! Try to buy only what has been ethically produced. Ask yourself: ‘Has the production of what I am buying, violated, injured or exploited other people, animals or the Earth?’ If ‘ethically produced’ products cost more, buy less or don’t buy at all.

Support! with your time or money an organisation that works for the rights, welfare or protection of animals (and remember farmed animals).

Spread awareness! Help your family, friends, members of your congregation, work colleagues, people at the shops where you buy your groceries, and whatever communities you are part of, to become more aware of the plight of factory-farmed animals. Write a letter to the newspaper or phone in to the radio talk show that you listen to. Encourage your worshipping community to care for all life.

FIND OUT MORE

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Photos: Lamb by Peter Neish. Animals in strip by Sonia Mountford and Nic Proust



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Is the Gospel good news for animals?

Questions for prayerful reflection



Living Faithfully



WHAT DO ANIMALS MEAN TO ME?

How should I, as a Christian, treat animals?

The answers lie in what animals mean to God.

God created animals alongside humans and all other life on Earth.

From Genesis we know that

God created *“every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good.*

God blessed them, . . .

. . . And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. . . . And God saw that it was good.” [Genesis 1:21-25]

We can see from the beginning that **God values all life**. God regards animals as good in their own right, not because they would be good for humans (who were still to come in the Creation story.)

It is God who gives life to all living beings.

“In his hand is the life of every living thing. . . .” [Job 12:10]

After the Flood, God says to Noah:

“I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth . . .” [Genesis 9:9-10]

Like a good parent, God loves and cares for all that God has brought into being.

“He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry.” [Ps 147:9]



“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.” [Ps 145:15-16]

God commands that the Sabbath rest is for animals too [Exodus 20:10, Deuteronomy 5:14].

“The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.” [Ps 145:9]

Not even a single sparrow

“is forgotten in God’s sight.” [Luke 12:6]

Surely the Gospel is Good News for animals too?

We pray to God:

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.

What kind of Kingdom is God’s?

What is His will?

We get some idea of the answers through the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” [Isaiah 11:6-9]

So God’s will is for peace on Earth.

What then do we make of God giving humankind

“dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” [Genesis 1:26]?

Against all this background, we must be clear that the Biblical meaning of “dominion” has nothing to do with ‘domination’. Rather it is about **nurturing, caring for and protecting**.

The “dominion” with which God charged humankind does not give us the right to do what we like with and to our fellow beings. Nor does it give us the right to destroy the Earth that we share. Rather, it is **a commandment to take responsibility**.

What does this mean for us in practice?

What are we required to do?

How should we be and behave?

When Jesus was asked,

“Which commandment is the first of all?” He answered, *“The*