



Thou Shalt Not Kill ... Animals?

Truth in Food author Kevin Murphy takes exception to animal rights activists' use of Scripture to promote vegan lifestyle.

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Editor's Note: Kevin Murphy is the owner/founder of Food-Chain Communications, a marketing communications firm devoted to helping companies that touch our world's food supply communicate more effectively. Truth in Food is an online forum that seeks to tackle the most controversial issues in food, but to do so from the unique perspective of having traversed the entire food chain, from conception to consumption.

Before the speaker sat down and rested his case that eating animals for food was morally objectionable, he threw out one last barb, one last argument to bolster his case, one last haymaker, that if it landed would surely do some damage, a kind of final assault on the audience's moral conscience that would have them fleeing the Egypt of food-animal production for the vegan promised land.

"Thou shalt not kill," he said, as he ended his presentation and returned to his seat alongside the other speakers.

I knew the arguments of animal activists were devolving to this. I knew this moral argument was coming. Yet, hearing the speaker quote the Scriptures, there seemed to be something less than genuine afoot. I wondered if he really had a love for sacred Scripture, or was it just a convenient, albeit out-of-context, weapon?

Instead of feeling the need to really ponder the point he was trying to make, I felt like he was Biff Tannen, the antagonist in the *Back to the Future* series, knocking on my head, not with his knuckles but with a *Bible*, exclaiming, "Hello, McFly!"

Our time's 'Great Moral Calling?'

If you haven't been exposed to animal activists, you might relegate this speaker to just an isolated incident. Yet it seems those advocating a vegan lifestyle are carrying this theme of "thou shalt not kill" forward with increased frequency.

► In 2004, when Mel Gibson released *The Passion of the Christ*, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) protested outside his cattle ranch in Montana with signs that read, "Thou Shalt Not Kill" and "Honor All of God's Creations." The group argued that farm animals were the original innocents, worthy of merciful pardon from our plate. PETA's vegan campaign director was quoted at the time saying, "Anyone who sends cows to slaughter mocks God."

► The Vegan Wolf, an Internet vegan blogger, writes, "The *Bible* says, 'Thou Shalt Not Kill.' It doesn't say, 'It's OK to kill animals and Iranians.' It says, 'Thou Shalt Not Kill.'"

► Gene Baur, founder of the no-kill livestock shelter he calls Farm Sanctuary and author of *Farm Sanctuary: Changing Hearts and Minds About Animals and Food*, stresses that animals are "individuals" and that compassion for them is the great moral calling of our time.

Baur, PETA and a legion of Internet authors have suddenly discovered the Holy Scripture as a tool to advance their agenda that meat eating is not only bad for your health, a threat to the planet, and just plain ugly, but has also apparently fallen out of favor with God.

As a professional communicator, I am always willing to hear someone else's perspective on food issues. I even bought Baur's book. However, when I heard the sacred Scriptures wrenched out of context to support an argument about food, I must object and rise to a defense.

Activists are squarely bringing the debate over food issues into the moral arena and, in some cases like this, using the *Bible* as a final trump card. Let's take the commandment of "Thou shalt not kill" in the sequence in which it appears in the *Bible* (Exodus chapter 20 and Deuteronomy chapter 5). Is God really condemning food animal production?

First, in Exodus, the Ten Commandments are given to Moses by God. In Exodus 20:13, God gives the command, "Thou shalt not kill." It is critical that we understand the laws of sound biblical interpretation before we pluck a verse out of the Scriptures and begin wielding it like a sickle. Every word in the *Bible* is part of a verse, and every verse is part of a paragraph, and every paragraph is

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part of a book, and every book is part of the whole of Scripture. The word *biblia* actually means “little books.” Saint Jerome, one of the greatest Scripture scholars of all time, called the collection the “Divine Library.” If you divorce a verse from the rest of Scripture, then you have the ability to distort its meaning, which is exactly what the activists have done.

In their view, God must be schizophrenic. Because, just 11 verses following the proclamation, “Thou shalt not kill,” God goes on to say:

You shall make an altar of earth unto me, and you shall offer upon it your holocausts and peace offerings, your sheep and oxen, in every place where the memory of my name shall be: I will come to thee, and will bless thee.

Surely God is not telling his people to stop killing animals for food and then turning around and telling them to kill animals for holocausts and peace offerings, which, by the way, were eaten. In Deuteronomy (meaning a second law), we have Moses’ discourse to the chosen people before they enter the Promised Land. The commandments are repeated in chapter 5, thus we again hear the command, “Thou shalt not kill.” Following just a few chapters later in Moses’ same discourse we read:

► *However, in any of your communities you may slaughter and eat to your hearts desire as much meat as the Lord, your God, has blessed you with. (12:15) ...*

► *After the Lord your God has enlarged your territory, as he promised you, when you wish meat for food, you may eat it at will, to your hearts desire. (12:20) ...*

► *You may eat it as you would the gazelle or the deer. (12:22) (I threw that in for you hunters!)*

Context is king

Another approach to the Ten Commandments is that they can be broken down into two distinct categories. The first three commandments pertain to our relationship with God:

► *I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.*

► *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*

► *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath or The Lord’s day.*

The next seven are about our relationship with others:

► *Honor your father and your mother.*

► *You shall not kill.*

► *You shall not commit adultery.*

► *You shall not steal.*

► *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

► *You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.*

► *You shall not covet you neighbor’s goods.*

To somehow say that the command “Thou shalt not kill” in this context applies to food animals is to once again wrench the verse out of context. The ancient Hebrews assuredly didn’t take it as such or they would have ceased celebrating the Passover, an annual celebration that consisted of procuring, slaughtering and eating a lamb.

Now, let’s say that perhaps some of these activists are Roman Catholic, thus they not only venerate the Scriptures but turn to Holy Mother Church as their guide on faith and morals. In doing so, they would read in the compendium known as the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” paragraphs 2417 and 2418 something that, even if you were not Roman Catholic, you might find wisdom in:

► 2417 — *God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.*

► 2418 — *It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons.*

I see animal activists circling the moral issue more and more, seeking to cause unrest in the souls of the good men and women who produce our world’s food supply. Instead of thanking them, they bite the hand that feeds them, producing undercover videos that portray farmers as villains, uncaring and cruel, meanwhile never giving credence to the untold sacrifice a farmer makes of his daily life for our well-being.

It is astonishing the level of funding many of these activist groups enjoy. PETA has an annual budget of \$30 million in revenue and net assets of \$16 million. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS; not to be confused with the group that spays and neuters pets, although they greatly benefit from that misidentification), has an expressed mission to eliminate food animal production,

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and they claim more than \$200 million in net assets.

This level of funding allows activists to permeate our culture with their message.

In the end we have to ask:

Are farmers called to respect animals?

Yes.

Are they called to care for the animals’ welfare?

Yes.

Are they called to be a good steward of the animal?

Yes.

Do farmers, ranchers and food producers realize this responsibility?

Yes.

Are there bad actors in the food and agricultural industry?

Yes, as there are in any industry.

But, bad actors will not be weeded out by raising an animal’s status to equal that of a human. They will be weeded out by helping humans realize their full dignity, the dignity they are endowed with by being made in the image and likeness of God.

For the fundamental flaw of the animal equalization movement is not that it champions the rights of the “non-human others,” but that it so squanders the birthright and responsibilities God has vested in us whom He chose to bear his image on Earth. It is not by raising animals to an equal status with humans that we best protect them, but by raising humans to see clearly the identity that was theirs “from the beginning.”

Men and women of the farm community can attend to their farms with pride, free from the moral degradation activists would like to hoist upon them.

