

“Another Story of a Couple’s Heartbreaking Experience with an Abusive Church”

For the second time since joining a church which I now realize is abusive, our twenty six year old son has had what we term as a nervous breakdown. This time he spent three weeks in hospital. Our daughter who is twenty four has also been a member of this same church for three years. Neither of our children are married.

I could not believe what I was reading in your article [Abusive Churches](#). It described to a tee, the church that our children attend. This church is called the _____ Christian Center and is in _____, BC. A year ago, the Lord answered a mother’s prayer and standing on Ps 37:4, my husband and I were transferred to British Columbia from Ontario, Canada. We have seen such a pulling away from parents and during my son’s recent hospitalization, I went to be near him and stayed in his apartment which is below and owned by people from their church. I was shunned by the whole church and most especially by our daughter. My husband joined me there until our son was well enough to come home from the hospital.

I made many attempts to meet with the church ministry and most attempts were futile. I have never felt so alone in my whole life. Praise God that when we have Jesus, we are never alone. My husband and I eventually met with one of the pastors and the senior pastor’s wife and were able to voice all our fears. Of course they had answers for all our questions. As an example, I voiced my concern about a phone call from our daughter where she told us that the pastor’s wife called her in for a “counseling appointment.” During this appointment the pastor’s wife told my daughter that she was not flirting enough and should change her hair and the way she wore her

clothes to appear more sexy to the young men in the church. She went on to say that the Lord showed her that our daughter and a young man named Peter would make a wonderful couple and that she could see them as missionaries in Germany (which seems to be a country of great focus in this church. Our son took a year of German at college). The pastor's wife said she did not remember a man named Peter (he has since left the church) however she did have a vague memory of telling our daughter that she should do something with her hair (our daughter is a senior at SFU and has been working part time at a bank for the past three years). She was somewhat taken back when I pardoned myself and asked who she thought she was to think to tell our daughter how to do her hair.

This is just an example of what is going on there. Our son who was an outstanding student five years ago, is now an impoverished basket case. The police can do nothing even though our son was drugged and sexually molested (praise God our son was able to get away before he was actually raped) by a older man from the church, who is still there. Our son refuses to go to the police as he says the whole matter should be handled through prayer and forgiveness. This has been done but still our son recounted the experience in detail during his recent hospitalization.

Our children refuse to listen to us, so we are holding the whole situation up in prayer. Can you offer any pointers? Is there anything we can do to prevent this church from damaging other young people? We need help but we don't know where to turn.

Thank you for sharing your story with us. We pray others will learn from your pain, and that God will show your children the truth.

“Am I Judging When I Recognize Sin in a Friend’s Life?”

Dear Sue,

My question is about judging. There are several of us friends and we are all Christians but go to different churches. One of our friends was widowed several years ago. After several failed relationships where she became sexually intimate with each of the men, she is now in another relationship with what seems like a nice man. She is also very active in her church and is involved in a discipleship ministry. After she leaves the meetings to prepare for these discipleship events, she leaves town to go stay the weekend with her new friend.

I told one of the other friends that I did not think it was right that she was doing that and that may be why she had problems with her relationships, and that I felt it was wrong that she would be speaking before another group of women on this retreat. My other friend told me I was judging and that only God should do that and no one is without sin and that one sin is no greater than any other sin. I do not interpret the bible that way. I feel that if she is putting herself before others as a leader of God she should be striving to live sin free and be repenting when she does sin. Am I judging when I recognize a sin in another person’s life? I do not want to be a judgmental person and am very confused about this. Please help me to understand and how I should have responded to her.

You are right. There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems to stop with “Judge not, lest ye be judged” (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus’ call not to judge hypocritically. But in

John 7:24 He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother's eye (Matt. 7:5)? That's about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another's sin, *not* to ignore other people's behavior.

But then there's the "big daddy" passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. (News to your other friend, I'm sure!) Judging doesn't mean condemning, though; in the case of your immoral friend, it would be a matter of comparing her behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of her choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

It might sound like, "This is a hard conversation but I need to talk to you because I care about you. You're making decisions that are not consistent with the Christ-follower and the woman of God I know you want to be. Sexual immorality is still sin, and sin has consequences, and I don't want you to

be hurt. But even more than that, you are dishonoring the Lord by your disobedience to His word. I am concerned that you are continuing in a leadership position while you are engaged in unrepented, continual sin. James 3:1 says that teachers will be judged more strictly, and I am concerned for what that might look like for you down the road. I just want to plead with you to choose chastity and integrity, and make choices that honor both God and yourself.”

If she gets defensive and starts pushing back, making comments like, “And you’re so perfect yourself?” I would counsel you to not get defensive yourself. Just say something like, “You know, I’m aware that I’m a sinner in need of God’s mercy and grace every single day. I would hope that if my eyes were blinded by my own feelings and sin and I were headed toward a cliff, you would love me enough to warn me and challenge me to live consistently with who God says I am.”

I’m so glad you wrote. I hope you find this helpful.

Sue

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“I Don’t Feel God’s Love or Presence”

I don’t feel God’s presence or love. I know this sounds like a nonchristian “question,” but I know 100% I am a Christian! I’ve been through so many hard things in my life; for instance, my dad, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, died of brain cancer when I was a little kid. That’s just one thing. It feels like the more and more I live for God, the

more my life falls apart. I feel like He has abandoned me. I know David wrote in the Psalms about feeling alone, but I've never heard about anyone not feeling God's love. Please help! I feel completely alone!

I'm sorry for the loss of your father. I'm truly devastated to hear that you don't feel God's presence. If you think you're the only one to feel that way, please don't. I certainly have felt isolation and separation from God. Sometimes it was the result of my unrepentant sin. Other times, I felt that calamity had unfairly fallen on me and wondered if God cared about my situation. Despite it all, I'm still here. I'm still a Christian and a stronger believer because of the things I've suffered.

King David experienced much grief and despair during his reign over Israel. When he wrote much of the book of Psalms, he did not just include the happy times of life; he included the full range of negative emotions: bad, sad, melancholy, depression, hopelessness, fear, sorrow, hurt, anger—you name it. Psalm 88 is probably the epitome of the depths of human brokenness. He felt as if he were in the darkest depths, surrounded only by unrelenting grief. David felt the terrible sting of death—those who were closest to him were taken away and he himself felt abandoned and forgotten by God (which is like death itself). The king had no idea why terrible things were happening to him and his soul was in anguish because of it.

In the face of terrible suffering, there is one thing David never included in the Psalms—faithlessness. Even at the deepest valley of his misery, David gave God praise and appealed his case before the Lord. He understood that no matter what happens, it is the Savior-God to whom he could appeal and the Savior-God who brings peace.

But also know this. God did not create us to be alone and to suffer alone. God called us as believers to “bear one another's burdens” (Galatians 6:2). I would ask you to express

your situation to someone you trust for spiritual support. I appreciate your email to us, but you would do yourself wonders if you could interact face-to-face with a trusted friend, church member, minister, or pastor. If your dad was a professor at DTS, then I'm certain the counseling services are open and available to you. I hope this helps. Remember, God is not far from each of us (Acts 17:27). God has said that He would never leave us, nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Be encouraged that you have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the guarantee that you are God's cherished child (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). God is always there for you.

Nathan Townsie

P.S. My colleague at Probe, Sue Bohlin, also had some thoughts she wanted to share with you.

_____, many, many people have trouble feeling God's love, but they don't feel free to talk about it. There are a number of reasons for the obstacles to experiencing His love, and while I can't know the answer in your case, maybe one or more of these might resonate with you.

First, as I'm sure you know, we live in a fallen world. Nothing works right, including our "feelers." Sometimes our perceptions malfunction. Sometimes we can sense that there are feelings deep in our souls but we can't access them. Life can be like a radio with a broken antenna, unable to pick up the radio signals that are present in the room but we're unable to receive them.

Sometimes we shut our feelers down after a painful experience or trauma, believing that it just hurts too much, and we make a private vow to not feel anything. The trauma of losing your father wounded you and shaped you forever, and I am so very sorry to learn of this. Do you think it's possible you decided, years ago, to shut down your heart so you wouldn't feel the pain of loss and grief from the father-shaped hole in

your heart?

The good news is that God is able to heal broken receivers, broken feelers. We need to give ourselves permission to open ourselves up to both the negative and the positive emotions that are part of life, and ask Him to bring healing to our "feelers." Many people report that when they renounced their inner vow to not feel anything, God gradually restored their ability to feel again.

Secondly, if we're angry at God, it's really hard to feel His love because the anger gets in the way. I get that—I spent the first twenty years of my life angry at God because He allowed a trauma to shape my life in painful ways. It took me some time to get to the point where I grasped the truth of His sovereignty, the fact that He is in total control, which is balanced by His goodness. If God allows something painful into our lives, it's because He has a plan to redeem every bit of the pain. I'd love to share my story with you, "How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can't Change" here:

www.probe.org/how-to-handle-the-things-you-hate-but-cant-change/. You may also benefit from "The Value of Suffering" here: www.probe.org/the-value-of-suffering/)

Third, different people have different ways of experiencing God's love. Recently, a friend was thinking about the fact that he has trouble feeling loved by his heavenly Father because of his relationship with his earthly father. While on vacation, he wondered what it would take for him to feel God's love, and at that moment he heard the squawk of a flamingo. He turned toward the sound of the animal and smiled with pleasure, and was suddenly aware that he had been touched by an evidence of God's love through His creation. Be on the lookout for unexpected ways that God says "I love you!" I send this with a prayer that God meets you in your feeling of aloneness and assures you of His love.

Sue Bohlin

“Is Shopping at Goodwill Thrift Store For Poor Only?”

I shop at Goodwill. The lady who hems things up for me expressed concern about those who take from the poor by shopping at thrift stores. She believes it's wrong to shop there if you're not poor and in dire financial straits. I believe that Goodwill helps me be a better steward of my resources whether I'm underemployed or not. I chuckle at other shoppers who saunter into the store in fur coats or driving Hummers. I see this as an opportunity to engage in a deeper discussion about Worldviews and ultimately point to my Saviour if handled correctly. What are your thoughts on this?

Thanks for the question. In all honesty, it sounds like your seamstress has some grave misunderstandings about thrift stores. How unfortunate! If I understand their business model correctly, they accept donated clothes and furniture from individuals/companies and then sell the items for profit. The donors receive a tax deductible receipt that can be used to lower their individual or corporate taxes. The proceeds that come from these items are then used to support local homeless shelters and other charitable endeavors.

Everyone has a right to shop where they want. Goodwill is not limited to, or intended for, the poor; if the poor were the only ones who shopped there, Goodwill would not have the financial resources to remain open. The company needs to convert donated items into cash to fund the many generous efforts they support.

As a Christian, we are called to be good stewards of our money. If we can save money by shopping at Goodwill, then by all means, do it. However, we should always make sure that our purchases are meaningful and necessary, not frivolous and materialistic.

I like your idea of using this opportunity to discuss worldviews! It sounds like a good chance to practice using one or more of the “Four Killer Questions” that spur critical thinking skills (see www.probe.org/four-killer-questions-2/).

I hope this helps. Bless you!

Nathan Townsie

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“What Sins Disqualify Me For Ministry?”

I’m a guy in my mid twenties and a few months ago, I resigned from my work as director of a local ministry because I just can’t get over my struggle with pornography. I’ve been “clean” for weeks and sometimes months, but it seems that inevitably I fall again. I really want to break this cycle of sin and live a life of sexual purity, both inwardly and outwardly. To do that I am seeking the Lord in His Word and through prayer (though not as consistently as I should). I have people that keep me accountable. I meet weekly with a few older men for a study on sexual purity. At the same time, I want to serve the Lord in anyway he wants me to serve. But there is some confusion...I have been presented with many opportunities to serve God (leading worship, camp counselor, teaching Bible

study, and doing part-time youth ministry at a local church), but I don't know if I should serve in these ways since I haven't been able to break free of this sin. So my questions: Which sins disqualify me from Christian service and/or leadership? And for which roles would those sins disqualify me?

It breaks my heart to read your question (though I am SO glad you wrote!). Not because of your actual question, but because of the mentality that indeed permeates so many churches and ministries that one has to be perfect (especially in the area of sexuality) in order to serve God. We can't be perfect, so either we allow the enemy to persuade us to disqualify ourselves, or we can find ourselves immersed in an atmosphere of impossible expectations and standards that results in secret sin and resulting hypocrisy.

I prayed about my response and talked to a number of men in leadership at my church ([Watermark Community Church](#) in Dallas), where transparency, honesty and accountability are bedrock values.

First, let me affirm you in your decision to step down from ministry for the purpose of focusing on your relationship with Christ. It's also essential to listen to your accountability group to determine whether and when you are ready to resume a leadership position like the ones you list in your email.

From what you describe, it sounds like you may already have components in place for successfully achieving sexual purity, which is a process and not an event:

1) It's essential to actively pursue intimacy with Christ through prayer, the Word, and developing the habit of daily surrender and dependence on Him. Meditate on the truth of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 until it soaks down into your soul and you "own" it:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for

power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for **when I am weak, then I am strong.**

(This is the part that differentiates trustful empowerment from “white-knuckling” it.)

The fact that you admit inconsistency in your time in the Word and in prayer is really key. Allow me to strongly encourage you to make these disciplines your highest priority in this time of learning to become an overcomer. Otherwise, it would be the equivalent of trying to train for a marathon without eating or drinking regularly!

2) It’s also essential to build an accountability support system as you live in community with other Christ-followers. Naturally, there are different understandings of what constitutes accountability, but what works very well at Watermark is a network of people with whom we can be honest, on whom we can depend to show us grace at the same time that they speak the truth to us, and who are safe people to whom we can confess our sins immediately before getting caught in a downward spiral of secrecy and dread that allows sin to continue, unrepented, for a period of time. Even people in leadership, when they confess immediately and ask for help, prayer and continued accountability, do not lose their jobs or, for volunteer leaders, their opportunity to serve through leading, if they are proactive in confessing and repenting to their accountability “safety net.” One of my pastors wrote, “There are times when we need to step back from leadership positions to devote all our energies to focusing on Jesus so that we can deal with the sin that sometimes entangles us. That has happened to a number of our staff who are back in leadership positions today.”

Watermark has the largest Celebrate Recovery ministry in the U.S., so some of the recovery vocabulary spills over into the rest of the church culture. We are all familiar with the phrase “struggling well,” which means actively denying our flesh’s tendencies and desires to stumble and sin, and when we do fall into sin, we immediately confess and repent, receive forgiveness and cleansing from the Lord (1 John 1:9), and get back up again. And we get that struggling is just an expected part of living in a fallen world, and we all struggle against various temptations. One of the pastors I talked to in preparation to answer your email stressed that what disqualifies someone from serving in leadership is not “struggling well,” which is good, but engaging in continuing, unrepented sin—which also includes a rebellious, increasingly hard heart. That doesn’t sound like it describes you, but that’s something you and your accountability team would determine.

The CR Men’s director wrote, “His struggle with pornography sounds like it has been ongoing with consistent defeat. I am saddened that he felt the need to resign, instead of “sitting the bench” for a season. This indicates to me that he couldn’t be honest with his employer (my assumption, of course). In the future, I hope and pray that _____ will see his struggle with porn as a platform of authenticity that God can use in his life to relate to and minister to others. As he relates to and ministers to others, he will experience freedom and fellowship like never before (1 John 1, 2 Cor. 1). He just needs the opportunity to begin sharing. I would highly recommend CR or some other Christ-centered recovery program.”

You asked for a list of disqualifying sins and “off-limits” places of service and leadership. I don’t know that such a list exists, although I do think it’s important to keep in mind Paul’s command and statement in 1 Cor 6:18—“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.” Sexual

sin (defined as “illicit intercourse,” the meaning of *porneia*, translated “immorality”) is in a different category than other sins. For example, if a man or woman in church leadership has an ongoing sin problem with having sex with anyone they’re not married to, they need to direct their energies into learning chastity and purity, learning to keep their passions under control (1 Thess. 4:3-5), rather than continuing to minister to others in the name of Jesus while practicing the hypocrisy that Jesus condemned.

One of the themes that runs throughout the gospels is the importance of the heart as opposed to outward appearance. What grieved the Lord Jesus was not sinners who came to Him with a broken, contrite spirit (Ps. 51:17), but religious leaders with a hard, rebellious heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, He revealed the way God sees the sinfulness of the heart, even if it doesn’t manifest in outwardly apparent sin. So I would respectfully suggest that what disqualifies someone for a position of responsibility is a hard, rebellious heart.

This may have been more than you expected when you wrote, but I do hope you find it helpful.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

Update 2018: Watermark is no longer using the Celebrate Recovery curriculum, though we parted from the CR folks on very good terms. We have written our own program called “re:generation,” which a growing number of other churches have brought to their congregations: www.regenerationrecovery.org/.

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“Marijuana is a GOOD Thing!”

I know your article [“Is smoking marijuana okay for Christians?”](#) It’s misleading and untruthful. You don’t take into account of people’s lives and their suffering. You don’t care to think that maybe marijuana relieves depression, anxiety, stress, other mental illness symptoms, and other ailments. If marijuana is a sin to partake, then God made one when he made marijuana. To say marijuana is a sin, is to say God is a devil because he put right in front of our noses and didn’t say anything. It’s not an intoxicant because it does not poison us, it works with us. Please explain to me exactly where in the bible it says we can’t make moral decisions? My point I’m trying to say is this, if it weren’t for marijuana I would have been in jail or dead from alcohol. You can’t overdose on marijuana.

Let me respond to your email one point at a time.

I know your article “Is smoking marijuana okay for Christians?” It’s misleading and untruthful. You don’t take into account of peoples lives and their suffering. You don’t care to think that maybe marijuana relieves depression, anxiety, stress, other mental illness symptoms, and other ailments.

Actually, marijuana doesn’t relieve these troubles; it medicates the symptoms. It’s a cover-up, but it doesn’t solve anything. Medicating the negative parts of life does not make them go away, even if it gives a feeling of relief in the moment. They’re still there when the high wears off.

There are lots of things that people can do to relieve stress and anxiety. A large number of men feel better after they’ve taken their stress and anger out on their wives and girlfriends by beating them. Simply relieving symptoms doesn’t justify using that method.

Then you've got the lingering effects of pot smoking. I did an informal survey of a wide range of people to answer your question, and several shared their experiences of self-induced ADD, muddled thinking and forgetfulness, overwhelming paranoia, and brain changes that resulted in a permanent state of schizophrenia. And then there's the damage to the bronchial passages and lungs. Several told me heartbreaking stories of family members whose lives were ruined as a result of their pot use.

The problem with marijuana is that it can temporarily numb emotional pain, but it can leave even bigger problems in its wake.

If marijuana is a sin to partake, then God made one when he made marijuana. To say marijuana is a sin, is to say God is a devil because he put right in front of our noses and didn't say anything.

God made a number of plants that He never meant us to ingest. Consider poison ivy and hemlock. Plus, we don't know the impact of the Fall of man (when Adam brought sin into God's perfect creation) on plants. It's possible some plants were very different before the Fall.

It's not an intoxicant because it does not poison us, it works with us.

Google "marijuana intoxication." You will find almost half a million entries. The DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) disagrees with you:
www.justice.gov/dea/marijuana_position.html

Please explain to me exactly where in the bible it says we can't make moral decisions?

I don't think this is what you mean to say. We make decisions

all the time. God gave us the gift of volition (the ability to make choices) and then calls us to use it well. Using marijuana is a choice that we are free to make, but since it's illegal, that makes it a moral choice. Legal or illegal, there would be consequences to smoking marijuana. See above.

My point I'm trying to say is this, if it weren't for marijuana I would have been in jail or dead from alcohol. You can't overdose on marijuana.

I'm glad you didn't go to jail (though you could have, since it's illegal) and especially that you're not dead from alcohol. But you did have other choices for handling your stress and pain. And while you can't overdose on marijuana, that doesn't make it wise.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin

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“What Does Circumcision as a ‘Seal’ Mean?”

Hello, I am writing because I recently had a baby boy. My son was born with a heart defect, and required surgery when he was about a week old (that's a great story you can read about [here](#).) Since he had to have surgery right after birth, we did not have the opportunity to get him circumcised in the hospital due to the risk of infection. Now he is five months old, and I am having a really hard time deciding whether or not to have him circumcised.

I know that circumcision is not required for salvation, but I know that the New Testament mentions it. I have read Romans 4, where circumcision is called a "sign," and I understand what this means, but the part where it is called a "seal" is confusing to me. My husband is just not convinced that circumcision is necessary, and my reasons for wanting to have it done are mainly cultural. It would be really nice to hear a biblical perspective on the matter. Thanks!

Thanks for your letter. First, let me say "hearty congratulations" on the birth of your son! My wife and I recently had a baby boy as well, so we can certainly share your joy.

Second, you're right about physical circumcision not being necessary for salvation. Indeed, to claim such a thing would be completely contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the New Testament (see, for example, Romans 3:27-30; 4:9-12; 1 Corinthians 7:18-19; Galatians 2:1-5; 5:6, 11; 6:12-16). Salvation is a gift of God's grace, which we receive through faith in Christ alone.

Third, as it's used in Romans 4:11, a "seal" is simply a way of attesting to, or confirming, something. Thus, circumcision (in this passage) is a "seal" (that is, it attests to, or confirms) the righteousness which Abraham had by faith before he was ever circumcised. Thus, circumcision is essentially a "sign" and a "seal" in the same sense here. The terms are basically synonymous.

Biblically speaking, you are under no obligation whatever to have your son circumcised. Medically speaking, however, there do seem to be certain benefits which may be worth considering with your physician. But that's a decision for you and your husband.

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

“Is It a Sin To Mistreat Animals?”

I know that the Bible does not say whether or not animals go to Heaven. My question is, is it at least a sin in God’s eyes for people to mistreat animals? Does God care that animals suffer?

[Editor’s Note: Two Probe researchers have responded to this question.]

From Sue Bohlin:

God shows Himself to be a God of compassion toward animals in Jonah 4:11:

“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?”

He also wants us to be, like Himself since He made us in His image, people of compassion toward animals:

*“A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal.”
(Proverbs 12:10a)*

It’s helpful to look at some big ideas in scripture:

In Genesis 1:28, God tells Adam and Eve,

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it;

and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

This is the principle of stewardship.

Secondly, the Bible says that all animals belong to God:

*O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions.
There is the sea, great and broad, In which are swarms without number, Animals both small and great. (Psalm 104:24-25)*

Since all animals belong to God, and God has put their care and management into the hands of people, we can deduce that it is wrong to mistreat something that belongs to God.

So, while the Bible doesn't come out and say it is a sin to mistreat animals, a case can be made that it's wrong.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

About the Author



[Sue Bohlin](#) is an associate speaker with Probe Ministries. She attended the University of Illinois, and has been a Bible teacher and conference speaker for over 30 years. She is a frequent speaker for MOPS (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers) and Stonecroft Ministries (Christian Women's Connections), and serves on the board and as a small group leader of Living Hope Ministries, a Christ centered outreach to those dealing with

unwanted homosexuality. Sue is on the Bible.org Women's Leadership Team and is a regular contributor to TheTapestryBlog.com. She is also a professional calligrapher and the webmistress for Probe Ministries; but most importantly, she is the wife of Dr. Ray Bohlin and the mother of their two grown sons. Her personal website is suebohlin.com.

From Heather Zeiger:

Thanks for writing. It just so happens that I looked up some verses on this in studying for a discussion on environmentalism and stewardship. I will also tell you that I love animals, and have always had at least one animal, and usually more at one time. I currently have a sweet little cat and a red-eared slider turtle, so the question of animal cruelty is a good question and certainly one I care about.

true that animals are not made in God's image, and therefore, are not capable of sin nor are saved as humans are, so unfortunately I will not likely see my pets in Heaven, although there is some reason to believe that there will be animals (and plants) in Heaven.

Having said that, animals are part of God's creation, and not only that but are apparently a good part of his creation and something that he cares very much about. Here are some important verses (emphasis mine):

And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth"

(Genesis 1:20-22).

“And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:24, 25).

So it seems that not only did God want animals to be part of creation, but he thought it was good to put them here, and he even blessed them. He also seems to have taken care to make them in an orderly way and specific to their environment (the sea, the land). So while God made man above the animals, and even allowed him to use them for food or clothing, he also made man to be a steward over creation. This means he wanted Adam to care for creation. We see elements of this in God’s law when he specifies how the Israelites are to care for both the domestic and wild animals when they enter the Promised Land (Leviticus 25:1-12), and how they are to care for livestock (Deuteronomy 22:1-4, 6, 9, and 25:4). Proverbs 12:10 says that “Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.”

In the New Testament we see that God cares for the birds: “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” Matthew 6:26.

In short, the answer to your question is yes, cruelty to animals is a sin and yes, God most certainly cares about animal suffering. Man is to be a steward over God’s creation. Man is more important to God than the animals, but God obviously expects man to care for creation.

Even when we consider that animals were used for sacrifices, it is not meant to be an enjoyable thing, but...well...a

sacrifice. This particular suffering of animals is ordained by God to foreshadow the suffering of Christ. The sacrifice pleases God because it pleases him that man has obeyed God and repented for his sins. For example, 1 Samuel 15:22 says, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.” There are also places in Deuteronomy and Isaiah that talk about how God desires man’s heart more so than the act of sacrifice. The sacrifice is to turn man’s heart to God.

I hope this was helpful for you. Always feel free to email us with questions.

Heather Zeiger

“We Need Encouragement After Repeated Miscarriages”

Recently, my wife and I suffered our third miscarriage in a little over a year. I am feeling so many emotions right now from anger and frustration to confusion. We have no kids currently, but would like to one day. I am having trouble reconciling these miscarriages and was hoping for some encouragement I guess. Where can I look in the Bible for something that helps?

My hurt aches for you and your wife. I am so very, very sorry for the tsunami of pain and disappointment and grief you and she are experiencing. My husband and I are also in the “Parents Who Have Lost Babies” club. Burying our daughter after nine days of life was devastating to us, but God has greatly redeemed every bit of the pain in the years since

then.

I think the encouragement you seek will come from being able to see the bigger picture, one that includes God's tender love for you and His tears for your pain as He works out His purposes in your life and character. May I suggest a couple of resources that may help? My Probe article "The Value of Suffering" is intensely practical in terms of understanding a biblical view of pain and suffering: [The Value of Suffering](#)

At our last Probe Mind Games conference, where we equip students to be confident in their faith before they get to college, I recorded my teaching session on this subject, which I sensed was very much anointed by God. I pray you find it helpful and comforting: www.box.net/shared/66gn28bubc (It opens with the sound track to the video I show first, Rob Bell's NOOMA video "Rain.")

You may also find [Caleb Ministries](#) helpful; they help people who are in exactly your position.

I send this with the prayer that you and your wife experience the warmth of God's comfort wrapped around your soul like a warm blanket on a cold and rainy day.

Again, I am so sorry for your losses.

Sue Bohlin

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“My Besetting Sin Makes Me

Doubt My Salvation”

I am almost 70 years old and undoubtedly nearing “the end of the road.” I came to faith in Jesus Christ over thirty years ago but have consistently been plagued by a “betting sin” that I seem not to be able to have consistent victory over. I fall, confess, repent, and have “victory” for awhile, and then fall again. This continual struggle has led me to sometimes doubt my salvation, and I am troubled that perhaps the Lord has grown weary of my shallow commitment and has given up on me. What can I do?? I have recently been diagnosed with prostate cancer and I am in terror of dying and finding myself in hell. Please help!

I am so glad you wrote! You are not alone. I think this secret fear plagues millions of Christ-followers. And I also think that the core of this fear is not knowing how huge is His love for us, and His deep understanding of our broken humanity (Ps. 103:14—“For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”).

Our flesh, the part of us that operates independently from God and in our own strength, is hopelessly corrupted and unredeemable. But even though we can operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, in dependence on Christ, the same way that we can fly in an airplane that is dependent on the laws of aerodynamics to get and stay off the ground, eventually we return to our default position of fleshliness.

God knows this, and He understands it! And He loves us anyway. Consider the strong encouragement from Romans 8. The chapter opens with the astonishing statement that is a sure shame-killer: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” NO condemnation! The Lord has not “grown weary of your shallow commitment,” brother. He understands your weakness and looks forward to the time when you are no longer fettered by the flesh that pulls you down like

spiritual gravity.

But then consider the end of the chapter:

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

The Lord Jesus died for you and, far from condemning you, intercedes for you this very day!

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Nothing can separate us from Jesus' love. Nothing has the power to keep Him from loving us, and nothing has the power to keep us from being loved!

36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

God has pronounced you a conquerer through Christ, and is working to transform you into who He says you are. Even on the days when it doesn't much feel like it. He is still at work!

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Nothing, nothing, nothing! Including our sin. Including our

brokenness. Including our weak humanity.

And including besetting sins, which He allows us to struggle with so that we will turn to Him in dependence and trust. Recently I was blessed to attend a banquet for a ministry that helps people deal with unwanted same-sex attraction. The star of the evening was Jesus, who showed up in testimony after testimony of changed lives. Every person who spoke, uncoached except by the Holy Spirit, said in one way or another that they are now at the point where they can see that their struggle is a blessing because it forces them to depend on Christ with a desperation they never would have known otherwise. And that dependence on Christ has taken them to a place of intimacy with the Living Lord they didn't know was possible.

God is honored in our struggles, even when we slip and fall but continue to repent and get up again. It's all about teaching us to enter more deeply into relationship with Him, a relationship of love and friendship and affection and appreciation. I hope I have begun to reframe your struggle in a way that enables you to go to Him for help rather than hiding from the only One who has the power to help you stand against your flesh.

The Lord bless you and keep you today!

Sue Bohlin

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