

# → What About ... dogs & cats

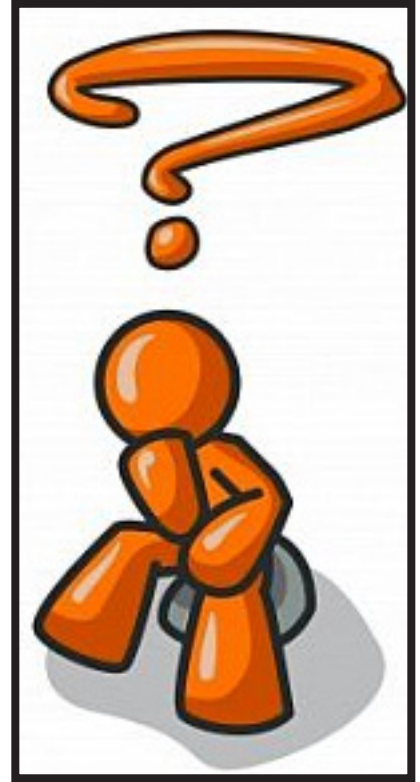
BY DR. DAVID A. DEWITT

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another (John 13:34).*

The Israelites were to love their Jewish neighbors (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus gave a new command, for believers to love one another. But what about cats and dogs? Do you ever get the feeling that some people, even some believers, love their cats or dogs more than one another? Here are some selective comments by veterinary surgeon Dr. Cam Day [pictured here]:



“Dogs are social, gregarious creatures and are most content in a pack situation. For pet dogs, the most important pack members are usually their owners, and owners who provide proper leadership for their dogs are usually viewed as pack leaders. This is the reason why dogs left alone during their owners’ working hours commonly develop separation anxieties. What’s important, though, is that a dog’s attachment is to its group and much less to its territory. For example, a dog taken to his or her owner’s work place to be with its owners will be just as happy as when it is at home. By comparison, a cat taken to its owner’s workplace is usually very fearful and anxious... a cat’s attachment is to its territory, not to its group... dogs learn from observing and interacting with other pack members to which they are bonded. For wild dogs, such as wolves, the interactions generate a cohesive pack that hunts together successfully... a dog continually punished by its owners shows appeasement behaviors, where the dog is effectively saying don’t hit me again. Sadly, most people assume this is a guilt response ... Dogs will learn from punishment, but it confuses them. Cats don’t learn from punishment—they avoid the source” (www.pethealth.com.au).



Animals have personalities. Personality is: (1) intelligence (the ability to receive and process information), (2) emotions (feelings generated by that information), and (3) will (the capacity to make decisions based on those feelings about that information). But animals do not have spirituality. We humans have personalities, but we also have a spirit. Spirituality is: (1) morality (we cannot avoid thoughts about good and evil), (2) purpose/destiny (we will ask: Who am I? Why am I here? What am I for? Am I significant? Where am I going?), and (3) creativity (we continually innovate). Personalities (both animals and humans) form societies. Spirituality generates culture. Animals have languages and social structure, but no matter how intelligent the animal, it will never form a religion, write a poem, compose a song, or invent something new.

In many dog programs and movies, such as “Marley and Me” (2008), the dog is praised as not caring whether you are rich or poor, famous or unknown, a success or failure. It doesn’t want to marry you or change you. It doesn’t need expensive toys, an average stick will do. It loves you unconditionally.

When I hear that I want to say: Yeah, but ... your dog (or cat) also doesn’t care if you are a rapist, murderer, cheater, liar, blasphemer, gossip, homosexual, or pedophile. They don’t care if you are lazy, careless, or irresponsible. They don’t care about your politics, but they also don’t care whether you worship God or the devil. So yeah, your dog or cat loves you, but it’s not the same as love from a spiritual being. It’s easy to love and be loved by your pet. But its love is restricted to

the instincts programmed into its personality by nature. We tend to think it feels things like affection and guilt, when it is just feeling attachment and fear. We think a cat is lazy or a dog is protective when it is just resting or defending the pack. We think it misses us, but it actually has separation anxiety from its pack leader. We think those things because we read our spiritual notions back into its (personality) responses.

They are not judgmental. But neither are they holy. They don’t impose guilt or hold grudges, but neither do they believe in sin and repentance. So we like them because they treat us like an animal, a superior animal, a leader of the pack or a primary provider of bonding, territory, or nourishment. But if you relate well with your dog or cat, and not with (say) your spouse and children, that indicates a spiritual problem.

But isn’t that what post-modern or emergent speakers are doing when they preach a God of love without judgment? Isn’t that what we do with our friends and relatives when we refuse to respond to their sin? Is it really better to be treated like an animal? The reality is, most people don’t like the God and the Jesus of the Bible because God requires holiness, repentance, and separation from sin. The God of the Bible is a jealous God, Jesus claimed to be the only way, and the apostles preached repentance from sin. It is much easier to focus on an animal-like “love,” good works’ projects without discretion, tolerance without doctrine, grace without repentance, and no moral laws other than to not invade each other’s space. But Jesus said: *This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you (John 15:12).*