

THE
BANNER
OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

A photograph of a large, woolly white sheep with a lamb in a barn. The sheep is on the left, looking towards the right. The lamb is on the right, looking towards the left. They are standing on a wooden floor with some straw. The background is dark and out of focus.

SPECIAL THEME:
Animals of the Bible
**The Lamb—Behold the
Lamb of God**
The Ant—Busy Wisdom
The Eagle—Lord of All Birds
Persevere in Prayer
The Preciousness of Christ's Blood

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CHRIST'S EXHORTATION TO *Persevere in Prayer*

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened (Matt. 7:7–8).

Which upright Christian would not readily confess that his prayer life is often deficient and inconsistent? Are we not painfully aware that rather than being instant in prayer, our prayer life can at times be so halting and intermittent? So often we fail to persevere in prayer as Jacob did who wrestled all night with the Angel of the covenant, the pre-incarnate Christ, saying, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26). What spiritual blessings could be ours if we would but persistently open our mouth wide to the God who has promised to fill it (Ps. 81:10)? What need there is, therefore, to be confronted regularly with our anemic prayer life, and to be exhorted that we ought to pray without ceasing!

Our text is one of many such exhortations in the Word of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the Shepherd of His needy sheep, communicates His loving concern for them. With simplicity and clarity, He not only gives us a triple command to persist and persevere in prayer, but He also gives us a triple and repeated promise that our asking, seeking, and knocking will not be in vain.

Christ uttered these words near the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, He had set before His hearers the divine standard of righteousness. He did so on the one hand by saying, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20), and on the other hand by saying, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

Sensing that His disciples by now were overwhelmed by the realization that they could not measure up to this standard, Christ wanted to encourage them to lift up their hearts in prayer to confess their spiritual bankruptcy and to seek enabling grace from their heavenly Father to do what He requires. He wanted them to understand that apart from availing themselves of the abundant supply of God’s grace they could not possibly prosper spiritually and live a godly life.

This is an important lesson we need to learn from Christ’s exhortation. Recognizing this immediately dispels the foolish

and popular notion that whatever we ask for we will get. James admonishes us by saying, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3). Such self-focused and self-oriented petitions will not be granted!

The context clearly implies that Christ is commanding us to pray perseveringly that our *spiritual* needs may be met and that our lives may be ordered in conformity with God’s revealed will. In other words, we must pray without ceasing that our heavenly Father (the focus of our text—verse 11!) would bestow upon us the grace needed to live a truly Christ-like life—a life that will be ordered according to God’s priorities rather than our own. Though there is room in such praying for making known our temporal needs to our heavenly Father, our primary desire ought to be that we might prosper and flourish spiritually.

We should covet such spiritual prosperity and thus we ought to pursue it daily and fervently. Christ therefore not only exhorts us to ask but exhorts us to do so intensely (seek) and persistently (knock). Furthermore, He tells us to do so repeatedly, for the thrust of the original text is this: keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking.

Such persevering prayer for every grace we need to live the Christian life will not go unanswered. Christ tells us that our heavenly Father is far more inclined to “give good things to them that ask him” (v. 11) than an earthly and sinful father will be inclined to give his children what they ask of him. Luke removes all doubt as to what the good things are that our Father will grant His children upon their request: “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13).

Let us therefore ask, seek, and knock for those good things that only the Holy Spirit can bestow upon us. Paul undoubtedly had this in mind when he wrote, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). Though our heavenly Father may answer our petitions differently than we had anticipated, His word will nevertheless be affirmed when He says, “Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10).

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The Preciousness of Christ's Blood

If something is precious, it is valuable. The Bible uses the word *precious* seventy-five times. It speaks of human life as precious (2 Kings 1:13), as well as the soul's redemption (Ps. 49:8). Psalm 139:17 says the thoughts and lovingkindnesses of our God unto us are precious. In 2 Peter 1:1 and 1:4, the apostle Peter speaks of faith and God's promises as being precious. In 1 Peter 1:7, he describes even our trials as precious, for they refine us as gold.

But most of all, the Bible speaks of Jesus as precious. He is precious in His sympathy, precious to those who believe, precious as the cornerstone of our salvation, and precious in shedding His blood. Octavius Winslow wrote a great and moving three-hundred-page book on this theme alone. Let me focus here on the preciousness of His blood for afflicted believers. First Peter 1:18–19 says, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Nothing is more precious than the blood of Jesus Christ. His blood is precious because of three things: 1) its centrality, 2) its value, and 3) its capability.

The Centrality of Christ's Blood

The Bible speaks of blood more than four hundred times. Blood is precious, for it is the most valuable thing in our bodies. Blood is essential to life. Our bodies may be perfectly framed, but if drained of blood, we die. The life of the flesh is in the blood, the Bible says. Spiritually, the blood of Jesus Christ received by faith gives us spiritual life. In God's eyes, blood is sacred. Hebrews 9 tells us that God cannot be approached without blood (vv. 7, 18) and that “without shedding of blood [there] is no remission” of sin (v. 22). That is the primary message of the entire Bible. When Adam and Eve fell, God shed blood to clothe them and cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:21). In Genesis 4, God indicated that He was pleased with Abel's sacrifice, which involved sacrificial blood. Hebrews 11:4 confirms that there can be no approach to God, no fellowship with Him by faith, and no enjoyment of His favor, apart from blood.

Exodus is a blood-filled book. In it, God commands the Israelites to sprinkle their door frames with the blood of a lamb so that He would pass by their homes without killing their firstborn. The foundation and power of God's covenant are in sacrificial blood. Life is preserved by means of a substitute. Only by blood can God and humankind be brought into covenant fellowship. This is reinforced by God's prescriptions to Israel on how to worship Him. Blood is central to worship. The Holy of Holies was unapproachable without blood. Wherever you look in the Old Testament—be it at the birth of a child, in the highest festival, or in the deepest repentance—the way to life and fellowship with God is through the shedding of blood.

The New Testament also teaches this. When John spoke of Jesus, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away

the sin of the world” (John 1:29). When Jesus spoke of Himself, He said His death on the cross was the reason He came into the world. His bloody death was the necessary condition of the redemption that He came to accomplish and apply. He linked the salvation of sinners to His own blood-shedding. His death gave birth to life. That is what we must focus on when we speak of the precious blood of Christ. The expression “blood of Christ” is not intended to mean something crass or crude but to serve as a synonym for the gospel, for redemption, and for the salvation of sinners. The blood of Jesus is a synonym for His suffering and obedience that satisfied the justice of God so that He could justify those who believe in Jesus.

Jesus repeatedly teaches that His blood must be believably and experientially received if we are to be saved. He says, “Unless you drink my blood, you have no life in you. The one who drinks my blood has everlasting life. My blood is drink indeed. The one who drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him” (see John 6:53–56). When He instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, “This cup is the new testament in my blood that is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. Drink ye all of it” (see Matt. 26:27–28).

Paul's epistles underscore the centrality of Christ's blood. Paul repeatedly uses expressions such as “being now justified in his blood,” “faith in his blood,” “the blood of his cross,” “redemption through his blood,” and “made nigh by the blood of Christ.” The author of Hebrews repeatedly speaks of Christ's blood: “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (9:12).

From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, from the closing of the gates of Eden to the opening of the gates of the heavenly Zion, blood runs through Scripture, uniting all. Substitutionary blood gloriously restores what sin has destroyed. Through His blood, the second Adam undid what the first Adam did, thereby reconciling sinners to God.

Are you resting in Christ's atoning blood for salvation? Do you believe that God's justice is satisfied only by means of Jesus's blood? Do you value the blood of God's Son as highly as your heavenly Father does? Or are you a Christian in name only, taking this blood for granted, seeing little or no beauty in Christ and His atoning sacrifice?

The Value of Christ's Blood

Christ's blood can do what no one else's blood can do—not the blood of believers, animals, or angels. Christ's blood alone offers full satisfaction for sin. His precious blood is *intrinsically* valuable. The divine Son suffered as a perfect man, shedding His blood, which is of infinite value. Christ is the tabernacle of the deity; in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. He is the perfect image of the Father.

Christ's blood is precious to the Father, for He is Jehovah's favorite and only begotten Son. His blood is precious in the Father's eternal plan, not only because of God's parental affection for His Son, but because the Father views the salvation of His elect as fully and forever secured by that blood. Christ's blood is precious to the Father, precious to every pardoned sinner on earth, and precious to every glorified soul before the throne.

There is nothing more precious in this world than Christ's blood. Bring your every affliction to this justifying and sanctifying blood and you will find so much comfort that you will forever thank God for all your afflictions!

Through our afflictions, and the need they arouse in us, let us pray for grace to know and experience more fully the value and power of Christ's blood. Ask Christ to open your understanding to the efficacy of His blood, to grasp its necessity, to embrace its satisfaction, and to receive its beauty. Trust Christ to give you a deeper insight into His blood, that you may think of His blood as God thinks of it. Trust the eternal High Priest to work out in you the merits of His blood so that you may abide in the sanctuary of God's presence. Ask for grace to draw nearer to God, to meditate more on His blood shedding, that His blood may become spirit, life, power, and truth to you.

The Capability of Christ's Blood

Christ's blood, dear believer, procures inexpressibly great and precious blessings for us. Consider the following:

First, Christ's blood accomplishes *full-orbed redemption* for us. Peter says Christ's blood is precious because it redeems us. It buys us back from the way of sin. It is our ransom price. You are redeemed not with silver or gold or mere tradition but with the precious blood of Christ. You are redeemed to be set free from the slavery of sin (Rom. 8:12–16), from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13), from the enslaving power of Satan (Heb. 2:14), and from the bondage of everlasting death (Rev. 21:1–9).

Second, Christ's blood accomplishes *complete atonement* for us. Christ gave His blood as our atonement price. That atonement covers all kinds of sin. By Christ's blood, we become united with God again. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many (see Heb. 10:11–14). Even chief sinners are covered (1 Tim. 1:15)!

Third, Christ's blood *justifies and cleanses* us. Paul said to the Romans: "Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:9). God makes the unjust just through Jesus's blood. Christ literally died in our place, dear believers. We are justified through His active obedience to the law and His passive obedience in paying for our sin. When we receive this gospel by faith, as the Heidelberg Catechism says, God regards us as having never committed sin (Q. 60).

Christ's blood is precious because unspeakable peace flows out of our justification in Christ (Rom. 5:1). We experience peace with God, peace with Christ, peace with the Holy Spirit, peace with those around us, and even peace with nature. Heaven and earth seem to meet and kiss each other.

Fourth, Christ's blood *sanctifies* us. Through the process of sanctification, we are made holy to serve God. Blood separated

the Israelites from the Egyptians. Likewise, Christ's blood calls us to separate ourselves from the world's sin, the world's religion, the world's sense of goodness, and the world's vile-ness. The more we rely on Christ's blood, the more we will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Precious blood provides a *melting power*. Nothing can melt the soul like the blood of Christ. Nothing is so humbling as that He "loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Precious blood provides *pacifying power*. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan said that the law is like a maid sweeping dust in the chamber of the soul until the dust of sin clouds the soul and threatens to choke out its spiritual life. Only the precious blood of Christ can remove the dust, clean the room, and quiet the soul.

Precious blood provides *invigorating power*. Just as the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper provides us with spiritual nourishment, so the blood of Jesus nourishes our faith, offers us hope, gives us joy, and makes us sing. There is no cordial for the heart like the blood of Jesus. "Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved," God says (Song 5:1).

Fifth, Christ's blood *preserves and assures us and makes us victorious*. Christ's blood provides *confirming power*. Jesus's blood is the blood of the new covenant; it seals His last will and testament. His covenant blood confirms and assures us of our salvation. Christ's blood also provides *intercessory power*. Christ sprinkles His precious blood within the Holy of Holies in the heaven of heavens. He lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). Christ's blood provides *victorious power*. As Revelation 12:11 says, "They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb." Those who cling to the blood of Jesus have a weapon that makes hell tremble, heaven subservient, and earth obedient. Sin dies at the presence of Christ's blood; doubts and fears flee. Heaven opens its gates by that blood. Hell would lose its grip if that blood could operate there. Truly, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us by giving His own blood. What glorious victory we have now and forevermore through the blood of the Lamb!

Finally, Christ's blood *opens heaven* for us. By Christ's blood, *we are made fit for heaven*. There is no other way to enter heaven but by His blood passport. By Christ's blood, *we enter heaven*. Christ is our only altar, our only sacrifice, and our only entrance into heaven. When He comes again, the trumpet will sound, the dead will rise, and everyone will surround the great white throne of judgment. There, wherever God sees Christ's blood, He will pass by in avenging justice. Sheltered under Christ's blood, believers will be washed from every stain of sin. Not a drop of divine wrath will fall upon them.

Oh, the joy of that moment when we find Christ to be all in all! Let us then, by the Spirit's grace, bring all our needs to Christ's blood and rely upon it alone.

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Lessons in Worship from the Tabernacle (4)

The Tabernacle pictures gospel lessons not only from its structure and furniture but also from the rituals that occurred there. Pre-eminently, the Tabernacle was the place where the rituals and ceremonies of worship occurred. The sacrificial system that was so specifically defined under the Mosaic administration was a graphic but intentionally imperfect picture of the work of Christ. In part, the sacrifices were typical events, but they were such an integral part of the Tabernacle economy that any consideration of Tabernacle theology necessitates an explication of them. In every way these sacrifices were types which prophesied of Christ, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). Since these sacrifices had no independent significance apart from what they pictured about Christ, to obey the ritual—in faith, looking beyond the visible—was tantamount to obeying the gospel. The sacrifices were picture sermons of the gospel. The general and regular sacrifices fell into two broad categories: sweet savor offerings and guilt offerings. Leviticus 1–7 records the most detailed instructions about the sacrifices.

THE SWEET SAVOR OFFERINGS

The *burnt offering*, the most general of the sacrifices, was a sweet savor offering. It shared some common features with the other sacrifices and taught key lessons about the atonement.

(1) The animal selected for this offering had to be a “male without blemish” (Lev. 1:3, 10). Symbolically, this taught that the only acceptable sacrifice had to be pure, perfect, and blameless. Since the offerer was guilty of sin, this strict requirement made it clear that atonement had to come from a source outside the self. Typically, this pure victim was a picture of Christ, the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). The lamb without blemish points to the whole active obedience of Christ, which offered to God a perfect righteousness and demonstrated to the world His absolute perfection and sinlessness.

(2) The offerer leaned on the animal (Lev. 1:4). The forcible laying on of hands symbolically represented the transfer of guilt from the sinner to the perfect animal—the otherwise innocent animal becoming the substitute for the guilty party. Leaning one’s weight on the sacrifice suggested something as well of the nature of faith that rests on the object of sacrifice. The result of this transfer

and substitution was that “it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him” (Lev. 1:4). Peace with God was the goal, and propitiation (atonement) of God’s wrath was the means to achieve that goal. This detail proclaimed vividly the gospel truth of vicarious atonement. Typically, it declared that Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin for us “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

(3) The offerer had to kill the animal (Lev. 1:5). The death of the substitutionary sacrifice symbolically taught the terrible penalty of sin. The demand of God’s holy law was absolute and its penalty was severe. God’s gracious mercy provided a substitute, but His holy justice could not overlook the broken law. Wages were earned, and wages had to be received (Rom. 6:23). That the offerer had to slay the animal impressed on him the solemn reality that it was his sin that required the penalty; he was personally responsible for the death of the sacrifice. Typically, the slaying points to Christ, “who was delivered for our offenses” and who “died for the ungodly” (Rom. 4:25; 5:6). Christ’s dying as the perfect sacrifice was the only way that God could be both just and the justifier (Rom. 3:26).

(4) The priests sprinkled the blood of the victim on the altar (Lev. 1:5). This use of blood shed through death achieved something positive. Whereas death was the necessary penalty of sin, the blood shed through death was the specific means of propitiation, satisfying the wrath of God. Sprinkling the blood on the altar, the first piece of Tabernacle furniture, symbolically showed that there was no approach to God apart from blood. Typically, it pictures Christ’s presentation of the blood of His atonement (Heb. 9:12) whereby the believer has access into the holy place (Heb. 10:19). This is the gospel: approach to God is only through the blood of Jesus Christ.

(5) The priests burned the entire sacrifice on the altar (Lev. 1:9). Whereas each of the bloody sacrifices paralleled the first four steps, the burning of the whole victim was unique to the burnt offering. It was this burning that was a “sweet savor” to the Lord (Lev. 1:9). This “smell that placates” represented that which was pleasing and acceptable to God; it put His wrath to rest. Atonement having been accomplished by the death and application of blood, the burning was a sign of reconciliation, satisfaction, and consecration. Typically, this is a clear prophecy of Christ,

who gave “himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (Eph. 5:2).

The *meat offering* had nothing to do with “meat” as we understand the word today. Rather, it was a non-bloody cereal or grain offering that was presented to the Lord in association with one of the bloody sacrifices—usually the burnt offering. This offering of grain could be in the form of whole grains, fine flour, or baked loaves roasted in fire. Oil, incense, and salt were required for every offering, but honey and leaven could never be used. The materials for these offerings were produced by man’s labor. By presenting the fruit of his labor, the offerer demonstrated his devotion of life, possessions, and occupation to the Lord. Of all the details specified for the cereal offering (Leviticus 2), the prohibition of honey and leaven and the requirement of salt were the most significant for the symbolic and typical truths about the gospel. Whereas the leaven and honey would cause the offering to spoil, the salt would preserve it. It is specifically called “the salt of the covenant of thy God” (Lev. 2:13). The association of this preservative with the covenant symbolically declared that God’s contract with the people was eternal and inviolable. God would not refuse any who came in faith by way of the sacrifice that He had prescribed. Typically, the cereal offering points to Christ, the surety of the covenant, who is completely devoted and consecrated to God and His divine commission.

The *peace offering* was the last of the sweet savor offerings, and its restrictions were not as rigid as those of the other offerings (Lev. 3:1–17; 7:11–34). The animal could be a male or a female of any age. The ritual was like the other sacrifices except that it was offered at the entrance to the outer court. The choice inward parts were burned, and the breast and the shoulder were given to the priest. The priest could share them with his family, something he could not do with the other sacrifices. The rest of the animal was returned to the offerer for a communal meal with his family, his friends, and the Levites. This was a time of fellowship between God and man. The peace offering was an object lesson showing that man was reconciled to God; there was peace between them because of the atonement. Typically, the peace offering points to Christ, who reconciles believers to God, having made peace through His blood (Rom. 5:1, 10). Christ’s blood satisfies all the parties concerned: the offended God, the mediating Christ, and the offending sinner.

GUILT OFFERINGS

The *sin offering* (Lev. 4–5:13; 6:24–30) and the *trespass offering* (Lev. 5:14–6:7) were the guilt offerings that

pictured both the satisfaction of God’s wrath against sin (propitiation) and the removal of sin’s guilt (expiation). Both of these sacrifices were for specific sins to teach that every sin was intolerable to God and that confession should be as specific as the sin. Although the initial steps of these sacrifices paralleled those of the burnt offering and declared the same general lessons, certain specific emphases were especially apparent. The main objective was to put an end to the separation between God and man caused by sin. Sin pollutes and prevents fellowship with God. In each of these sacrifices blood was shed, a reminder that blood was the only means whereby God would forgive sin. These sacrifices particularly pictured expiation, the effect of the atonement manward, made possible because of propitiation, and the effect of the atonement Godward. Because divine wrath is satisfied, a sinner can be cleansed from the defilement that offends God. This aspect is a vivid object lesson of 1 John 1:7, 9 and 2:1–2, which explicitly state the importance both of confessing sin and the relationship of Christ’s blood to receiving forgiveness.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the guilt offerings was the disposal of the sacrificial victims; they were burned outside the camp. This feature finds ultimate significance in Christ’s suffering “without the gate” (Heb. 13:12), the place of shame and uncleanness. In addition, the trespass offering required compensation to the offended party as an evidence of genuine repentance. This act of compensation points directly to Christ, who positively rendered to God everything that the law required and then paid the penalty of the broken law on behalf of His people. The trespass offering combined both the active and the passive obedience of Christ. Significantly, Isaiah refers to the suffering servant as the trespass offering (Isa. 53:10) who offered to God everything necessary for the salvation of the promised seed. That Isaiah rightly saw Christ as the reality and the fulfillment of this picture prophecy demonstrates how every Old Testament saint saw the sacrifices.

The bottom line is that the ritual ceremonies told the story of redemption. The message they preached in picture is the same message that we must preach in plainness of speech. To repeat the rituals of the Tabernacle would violate the finished work of Jesus, but we can still look at the old pictures and learn lessons about worship and the good news of the gospel.

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How to Train Your Children to Listen to Sermons

Every pastor receives the question from distraught parents: How can I train my children to listen to sermons?

In answering this question, I need to stress that everything I'm about to write is dependent on the Holy Spirit's blessing. If you do everything I'm suggesting in this article, your children will not automatically listen well to sermons without the Spirit's benediction. In all our endeavors as parents, no matter what sphere of parenting we have in mind, we need to remember, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Ps. 127:1). All our efforts, therefore, must be salted with earnest prayer, as we labor to pull down the benediction of our heavenly Father upon our family and homes.

In conjunction with Luke 8:18, "Take heed therefore how ye hear," I will offer some Reformed and Puritan teachings along with my own observations on listening to God's Word, dividing the subject into three thoughts: how to prepare our families for the preached Word, how to receive the preached Word, and how to practice the preached Word. While studying each point, we should ask ourselves: Is my family really hearing the Word of God? Are we good listeners of the proclaimed gospel at church? Am I teaching my children how to be good listeners?

PREPARING FOR THE PREACHED WORD

1. Before coming to God's house to hear His Word, prepare yourself and your family *with prayer*. As the Puritans were fond of saying, we should dress our bodies for worship and our souls with prayer.

Pray for the conversion of sinners, the edification of saints, and the glorification of God's triune name. Pray for children, teenagers, and the elderly. Pray for listening ears and understanding hearts. Pray for yourself and your family, saying: "Lord, how real the danger is that we will not hear well! Of four kinds of hearers in the parable of the sower, only one kind heard properly. Help us, Lord, to concentrate fully on Thy Word as it comes to us, so that we may not hear the Word and

yet perish. Let Thy Word have free course in our hearts. Let it be accompanied with light, power, and grace."

Pray that you and your children will come to God's house as needy sinners, purging your hearts of carnal lusts and clinging to Christ for the cleansing power of His blood. Pray for the sanctifying presence of God in Christ, for true communion with Him in mind and soul.

Pray that your minister will receive the energy of the Holy Spirit, so that he will open his mouth boldly to make known the mysteries of the gospel (cf. Eph. 6:19). Pray for an outpouring of the Spirit's convicting, quickening, humbling, and comforting power to work through God's ordinances in the fulfillment of His promises, so as to impact your entire family for good (Prov. 1:23).

2. Stress with your dear ones the need for every family member to come with a *hearty appetite* for the Word. A good appetite promotes good digestion and growth. Peter encouraged spiritual appetite, saying, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). Likewise, Solomon advised, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to offer the sacrifice of fools" (Eccl. 5:1).

A good appetite for the Word means having a tender, teachable heart (2 Chron. 13:7) that asks, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). It is foolish to expect a blessing if we come as families to worship with hardened, unprepared, or worldly minded hearts.¹

If possible, try to follow the advice of the Puritans who said that preparation for worship should start on Saturday evening. Just as they baked bread on Saturday evening so it would be warm on Sunday morning, so your family would profit if you would study the Word on Saturday evenings a bit longer and more in depth than your normal family worship, thereby warming their hearts for worship on Sunday.

If you know the passage that will be preached on the Lord's Day, spend some time studying it on Saturday night with your family. Make sure that you and your children get



enough sleep on Saturday night, then get up early on Lord's Day morning to prepare for worship without rushing.

3. Discipline yourself and encourage your children to meditate on *the importance of the preached Word* as you enter God's house. The high and holy triune God of heaven and earth is meeting with you and your family to speak directly to you. Thomas Boston wrote, "The voice is on earth, [but] the speaker is in heaven" (Acts 10:33).² What an awe-inspiring thought! Since the gospel is the Word of God, not the word of man, come to church looking for God. Though you should deeply appreciate your minister's efforts to faithfully bring you the Word of God, pray together with your family that you see "no man, save Jesus only" (Matt. 17:8). Teach your children that ministers are simply God's ambassadors, bringing you the Word of God (2 Cor. 5:20; Heb. 13:7). Say to your children, "Do not focus on the minister but on the Word of God he brings, remembering that one day you will give an account before God of every sermon that He has brought to you."

Teach your children that every sermon counts for eternity. Salvation comes through faith, and faith comes through hearing God's Word (Rom. 10:13–16). So every sermon is a matter of life and death (Deut. 32:47; 2 Cor. 2:15–16). The preached gospel will either lift us up to heaven or cast us down to hell. It will advance our salvation or aggravate our condemnation. It will draw us with the cords of love or leave us in the snares of unbelief. It will soften or harden us (Matt. 13:14–15), enlighten or darken our eyes (Rom. 11:10), open our heart to Christ or shut it against Him. "The nearer to heaven any are lifted up by gospel preaching, the lower will they sink into hell if they heed it not," wrote David Clarkson.³ "Take heed, therefore, how ye hear!"

Furthermore, teach your children that every Sabbath they are receiving spiritual food and supplies for the coming week. The Puritans called the Sabbath "the market day of the soul."⁴ As the Puritans went to market each week to stock up on supplies, so we should stock up on our spiritual goods for the week by listening to sermons, then meditating on them throughout the week to come. All of that must be reinforced with daily devotions and Christian living.

4. Remind your family periodically that as they enter the house of God they are *entering a battleground*. Here's how to talk to your children: "Dear children, many enemies will oppose your listening. Internally, you may be distracted by worldly cares and employments, lusts of the flesh, cold hearts, and critical spirits. Externally, you may be distracted by the temperature or weather, behavior or the dress of others, noises, or people moving about. Satan opposes your listening to God's Word with might and main, knowing that if you truly hear it, he will lose you. So Satan tries to disturb you before the sermon begins, distracts you during the sermon, and dismisses the sermon from your mind as soon as it is

finished. Like a bird plucking away newly sown seed, Satan attempts to snatch the Word from your mind and heart so that it cannot take root. When you are tempted during worship by Satan, follow the advice of Samuel Annesley who encourages you to rebuke him, saying, "Be gone, Satan! I will parley no longer. If others neglect salvation, therefore must I? Will their missing of salvation relieve me for the loss of mine? Through Christ, I defy you."⁵ Pray repeatedly for strength to overcome all your enemies by listening well."

5. Finally, teach your children to pray that they might come with *a loving, expectant faith* (Ps. 62:1, 5). Teach them to come pleading God's promise that His Word will not return to Him void (Isa. 55:10–11). Teach them to come with reverential fear of God, with reverential delight in God, and with reverential expectation and faith in God's Word (Ps. 119:97, 103). Ask them to pray that they might be able to say like David in Psalm 119, "Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it" (v. 140), and to love God's testimonies "exceedingly" (v. 167), more than gold (v. 127), to the point where it nearly consumes you (v. 20). David's love for God's Word was so fervent that he would meditate upon it "all the day" (v. 97). In dependence on the Spirit, cultivate such love for the Word of God in yourself and your children.

RECEIVING THE PREACHED WORD

Here are some guidelines for you to teach your family about listening rightly to God's Word.

1. Dear family, listen with *an understanding, tender conscience*. Jesus's parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3–23; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15) presents us with four types of listeners, all of whom hear the same word. First, the stony-hearted, superficial listener is like a hard path. The sower's seed, or the Word of God, makes little impression on this hard heart. If a minister addresses this person's conscience, this hardened heart shifts the blame to others. Second, the easily impressed but resistant listener is like rocky ground. A plant begins to spring up from this seed, but it soon withers and dies because it lacks sufficient nutrients. The plant cannot survive because it cannot grow roots among the rocks. Jesus presents here a listener that initially seems to listen well to the Word. This listener would like to add religion to his life, but he does not want to hear about the kind of radical discipleship that involves self-denial, taking up his cross, and following Christ. Thus, when persecution comes, this listener fails to live out the gospel in practical ways. He wants to be friends with the world, the church, and with God. Third, the half-hearted, distracted listener is like thorn-ridden soil. As Luke 8:14 says, "And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." This kind of listener tries to absorb the Word of God with one ear while thinking with the other about business, interest

rates, pension funds, and inflation. He only serves God partially. His conscience is quickly quieted and the Word of God is quickly choked by the thorns.

Finally, the understanding, fruitful listener applies the gospel teaching he hears on Sunday to his conscience and life throughout the week. He believes with his heart that if Jesus Christ has sacrificed everything for him, nothing is too difficult to surrender in grateful obedience to Christ. Before all else, he seeks the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33). Grace reigns in his heart. He brings forth fruit, “some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matt. 13:23).

2. Dear family, listen *attentively* to the preached Word. Luke 19:48 describes people who were very attentive to Christ. Literally translated, the text says, “they hung upon him, hearing.” Lydia showed such an open heart when she “attended” or “turned her mind” to the things spoken by Paul (Acts 16:14). Such attentiveness involves banishing wandering thoughts, dullness of mind, and drowsiness (Matt. 13:25). It regards a sermon as a matter of life and death (Deut. 32:47).

We must not listen to sermons as spectators but as participants. The minister should not be the only one working. Good listening is hard work; it involves worshiping God continuously. An attentive listener responds quickly—whether with repentance, resolution, determination, or praise—and God is honored in this.

Jesus commands us to understand what we hear. He challenges us to *think*, and that takes work. We are to *attend* to His Word. The word *attend* is derived from two Latin words—the first means ‘to’ and the second, ‘tendo,’ which means ‘to stretch or bend.’ From this we get the word *tendon*, or a sinew that stretches. Thus, the word *attend* literally means we must stretch our minds by listening. This implies reaching out with all our mental and spiritual powers to grasp the meaning of a message. Are you stretching your spiritual muscles as you listen to the Word? Are you *attentive* to the preached Word?

As you listen to the Word of God, ask yourself, *how does God want me to be different on account of this sermon?* Ask what God wants you to know that you did not know before. Ask what truths you are learning that He wants you to believe. And ask how He wants you to put those truths into practice. In every sermon you hear—even those on the most basic gospel themes—God offers you truths to believe and put into practice. Pray for grace to work at listening.

3. Dear family, listen with *submissive faith*. As James 1:21 says, “Receive with meekness the engrafted word.” This kind of meekness involves a submissive frame of heart, “a willingness to hear the counsels and reproofs of the word.”⁶ Through this kind of faith, the Word is engrafted into the soul and produces “the sweet fruit of righteousness.”⁷

Faith is the key to profitably receiving the Word. Luther wrote, “Faith is not an achievement, it is a gift. Yet it comes

only through the hearing and study of the Word.” If the chief ingredient of a medicine is missing, the medicine will not be effective. So be sure not to leave out the chief ingredient, faith, as you listen to a sermon. Seek grace to believe and apply the whole Word (Rom. 13:14), along with the promises, the invitations, and the admonitions as they are spoken.⁸

“The whole Word is the object of faith,” wrote Thomas Manton. Therefore, we need “faith in the histories, for our warning and caution; faith in the doctrines, to increase our reverence and admiration; faith in the threatenings, for our humiliation; faith in the precepts, for our subjection; and faith in the promises, for our consolation. They all have their use: the histories to make us wary and cautious; the doctrines to enlighten us with a true sense of God’s nature and will; the precepts to direct us, and to try and regulate our obedience; the promises to cheer and comfort us; the threatenings to terrify us, to run anew to Christ, to bless God for our escape, and to add spurs to our duty.”⁹

4. Dear family, listen with *humility and serious self-examination*. Do I humbly examine myself under the preaching of God’s Word, trembling at its impact (Isa. 66:2)? Do I cultivate a meek and submissive spirit, receiving God’s truth as a student while being intimately aware of my own depravity? Do I seriously examine myself under preaching, listening for my own instruction rather than for the instruction of others? We must not respond like Peter, who said to Jesus, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” We must listen to Jesus’s admonition: “What is that to thee? follow thou me” (John 21:21–22). When the marks of grace are set before us, we must ask: Do I experience these marks? Do I listen for the truths of God, wanting to be admonished or corrected where I have gone astray? Do I relish having the Word of God applied to my life? Do I pray that the Spirit may apply His Word, as Robert Burns put it, to my “business and bosom”?¹⁰

When a doctor tells you how to maintain your health or that of your children, do you not listen carefully so that you can follow his directions? When the heavenly Physician gives you divine directions for your soul, should you not listen every bit as carefully so that you can follow God’s instructions for your life?

PRACTICING THE PREACHED WORD

The Word attended must also be practiced. Here are some ways to counsel your family on how to practice the preached Word.

1. *Strive to retain and pray over what you have heard.* Hebrews 2:1 says, “We ought to give earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” Thomas Watson said we should not let sermons run through our minds like water through a sieve. “Our memories should be like the chest of the ark, where the law was put,” he wrote.¹¹ Joseph Alleine said one way to remember the preached Word

is to “come from your knees to the sermon, and come from the sermon to your knees.”¹²

An elderly woman once told me, “I take thorough sermon notes. When I bow my knees on Sunday evening, I put my notes in front of me, underline those things that I should strive to put into practice, and then pray through them one at a time.” Encourage your children to imitate this woman.

2. *Familiarize yourself with the truths you have heard.* The Westminster Directory for Public Worship advises parents to engage in “repetition of sermons, especially by calling their families to an account of what they have heard.”¹³ When you come home from church, speak to your children about the sermon you have heard in an edifying, practical manner. Talk about the sermon in words that your youngest child will understand.

Encourage your children to take notes on the sermon. After the last service each Sabbath, read through those notes as a family and talk your way through the sermons. Sometimes the discussions help children more than the sermons themselves. Even when conversation does not produce the desired results, continue to attempt this review of sermons. It is better to fall short than not to attempt at all.

Share some of the lessons you are learning from the Word with your children. As you talk with them, these lessons will help others as well as help them become more embedded in your own mind.

Most important, familiarize yourself with the sermon by *meditating in private* upon what you have heard in public. Meditation helps us digest truth and personalize it. One sermon properly meditated upon with the assistance of the Holy Spirit will do more good than weeks of unapplied sermons. Meditate upon each sermon as if it is the last you will hear, for that may well be the case. If additional private study on the text helps you meditate then by all means take time to do it. Read commentaries on the text, such as those by John Calvin, Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole, and contemporary authors who soundly and ably expound the Scriptures.

3. *Put the sermon into action.* A sermon is not over when the minister says “Amen.” In an old Scottish story, a wife asked her husband when he returned from church a bit earlier than usual, if the sermon was done already. “No,” he replied, “It has been said, but it has yet to be done.” Always seek to live out the sermons you hear, even if that means denying yourself, bearing your cross, or suffering for righteousness’ sake. Listening to a sermon that does not reform your life will never save your soul.

James 1:22–25 tells us, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer

of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” Too many people listen to a sermon, see themselves in the mirror of the Word, and leave church convicted, but on Monday morning they abandon all the truths they have heard. Of what value is a mind filled with knowledge when it is not matched with a fruitful life?

True listening means applying the Word of God. If you do not practice the Word of God after you have heard it, you have not truly listened to God’s message. As seed that falls in good soil produces fruit, so the person who truly understands the Word produces fruit in his life.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with two pieces of advice. First, *thank God for all that you receive from sermons.* Give glory to God when you are able to put God’s instruction into practice. Second, *lean upon the Holy Spirit.* Beg God to accompany His Word with the effectual blessing of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44). The preached Word will be a transforming power in our lives under the Spirit’s blessing. If these directions are ignored, the preached Word will lead to our condemnation. As Thomas Watson wrote: “The word will be effectual one way or the other; if it does not make your hearts better, it will make your chains heavier.”¹⁴

Jesus warns us in Luke 8:18, “Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” All of the means of grace will be taken away from inattentive hearers on Judgment Day. It will be too late for them to hear another sermon. The market of free grace will be closed forever, and the door of God’s ark will be eternally shut.

Are you and your family active hearers of God’s Word? Are you doers of that Word? Or do you listen to sermons half-heartedly? If so, repent of your sin and begin to actively listen to His Word. It is not enough for you and your family to attend church. You must be active hearers and doers of the Word. Thomas Watson warns lukewarm listeners: “Dreadful is their case who go loaded with sermons to hell.”¹⁵

1. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 377.

2. Boston, *Works*, 2:28.

3. Clarkson, *Works*, 1:430–31.

4. See James T. Dennison, Jr., *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England, 1532–1700* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2001).

5. *Puritan Sermons*, 4:187.

6. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 377.

7. *Ibid.*, 378.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Thomas Manton, *The Life of Faith* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1997), 223–24.

10. *The Works of Thomas Halyburton* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1835), xiv.

11. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 378.

12. Joseph Alleine, *A Sure Guide to Heaven* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 29.

13. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 386.

14. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 380.

15. *Ibid.*

The Lamb — Behold the Lamb of God

Did you know?

- Sheep are vegetarian mammals that live in groups called flocks (or herds).
- There are about 450 different species of sheep.
- Sheep can live up to twenty-five years and weigh up to 400 pounds.
- Adult male sheep are called *rams*.
- Adult female sheep are called *ewes*.
- Sheep that are less than one year old are called *lambs*.
- Sheep were one of the earliest animals to be domesticated. It is very doubtful they could survive in the wild nowadays. They are prey to wolves, bears, and lions, among other predators.
- Sheep are known for not being very smart. They move in groups and whatever their leader does, they follow (even if it's not a good idea).
- Sheep only recognize and obey the voice of their shepherd. They are dependent upon the care of their shepherd who leads them to food, gives them shelter, and protects them from predators.

There are nearly 200 references to “lamb” or “lambs” in the Scriptures. The greatest concentration is in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers where the word appears more than eighty times. Lambs were used as sacrifices because they are associated with meekness, gentleness, innocence, and dependence. They are a symbol of perfection (no spot or blemish). God commanded the people of Israel to offer two lambs per day

and four lambs on the Sabbath, all year long (Ex. 29:38–42; Num. 28:3–8)! This was to atone (or pay) for their sins.

Do you remember the last plague in Egypt? What was it? The Lord sent His angel to punish the Egyptians for their sins by taking away all of their firstborn sons. But what did God command the Israelites to do? Each family was to choose a lamb without spot or blemish (Ex. 12:5). The lamb was to be sacrificed and its blood was to be put on the doorposts of each family's house (Ex. 12:7). The angel of the Lord would see the blood and *pass over* the house and not punish the family (Ex. 12:13). You see, the Israelites were spared, not because they didn't have sin themselves, but because a lamb was sacrificed to pay for their sins.

The New Testament says that the blood of animals cannot take away the sins of people (Heb. 10:4). So how can a lamb take away the sins of people if the lamb is just an animal? The answer is that the lamb is a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah said that Jesus would be sent by God to be sacrificed as a lamb (Isa. 53:7). When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29b). The apostle Paul called Jesus the Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7b). Jesus is like a lamb, without any spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:19).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is much better than any lamb because—although He is God for all eternity—He became a human being, just like one of us. You see, Jesus never sinned yet He was punished like a lamb in order to take away the sins of all those who repent and believe in Him.

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The Goat—A Picture of Redemption

Have you ever been to a farm and seen a herd of goats? Or better yet, have you seen baby goats? They are enjoyable animals, often calm and friendly. In the Bible we read quite a bit about goats. Sometimes they are spoken of in positive terms (see Song 4:1) and at other times in negative terms (see Matt. 25:31–46). Long before goats were spoken of in this way, goats played a role in one of the most well-known and important days in the Israelite calendar—the Day of Atonement.

In Leviticus 16, God gives instruction as to how Israel’s high priest was to atone, or cleanse, the people of their sins before the LORD (Lev. 16:30). We read in Leviticus 16 that two goats were necessary to cleanse the people (v. 7). The two goats played two different roles in cleansing God’s people from their sins. One goat was for the LORD, and the other goat was a “scapegoat” (v. 8).

The goat that was for the LORD was to be offered up as a sin offering on behalf of the people. Aaron was to take the blood of the goat and “sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat” (v. 15). The mercy seat was the covering of the ark of the covenant where God’s holy presence dwelt with His people. Because God is holy and the people were sinful, blood was needed to restore God’s favor to His people (Heb. 9:22). As the goat was sacrificed, God’s anger was satisfied. We call this act *propitiation*.

The goat that was the scapegoat, however, was to be kept alive. Aaron confessed over the head of this goat “the iniquities of the children of Israel” (Lev. 16:21) and it was then set free into the wilderness. The scapegoat wasn’t allowed to live with the Israelites anymore because he was viewed as unclean. His going out into the wilderness was meant to remind the people that their sins were taken away from them (Ps. 103:12). We call this action *expiation*.

People sometimes wonder why God commanded the high priest to use goats. Some believe it’s because goats were often worshiped by false religions. Others believe it’s because goats were unclean animals. God never tells us why. But we do see in these goats a glorious picture of the work of Jesus for His people. The Day of Atonement points us forward to the day Jesus died on the cross. Jesus served as both the goat for the LORD and the scapegoat. It was by Christ’s blood that God’s favor towards His people is restored. Christ is our propitiation (1 John 2:2). It was by His death that our sins are removed from us—Jesus was cast off that we might be brought near. Jesus has expiated our sins (Rev. 1:5). These goats spoken of in Leviticus 16 are meant to point us to Jesus, through whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.

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The Deer—A Display of God’s Sovereignty and Glory

Growing up in southern Minnesota I saw a lot of deer. Sometimes I’d see one deer. Other times a doe with her fawns. Occasionally, I’d see dozens of deer all at once—especially around harvest time. Deer have always struck me as relatively insignificant animals. They’re certainly no king of the jungle like a lion. They’re not bold and brave like a horse. They’re not funny and entertaining like a monkey. They’re not warm and cuddly like a dog. Despite all this, deer are still part of God’s amazing creation! While deer may be insignificant to us, they are used in the Bible to display God’s sovereignty and power. God is not ashamed of deer, but rather, He uses deer to teach His people a valuable lesson.

Think about Job. He was God’s servant and God allowed Satan to test him. Satan took all of Job’s possessions, killed his children, and even caused him to become diseased. So bad was Job’s suffering that his wife said: “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die” (Job 2:9). While Job remained faithful to God throughout his trials, he still had a valuable lesson to learn. He needed to learn that God was in absolute control over everything. And God used a deer to teach Job this lesson.

As God confronts Job, He uses many examples of His sovereignty and glory. He speaks of thunder and horses and the Leviathan. But it’s somewhat startling that God uses a deer: “Canst thou mark when the hinds [deer] do calve? Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? Or knowest thou the time when they bring forth?” (Job 39:1–2).

Of course, the answer God expects from Job is: “No.” Job doesn’t know these things, neither can Job control when a deer gives birth. While Job cannot, God can and does. God is telling Job: “I can do all things.” These deer, which to many appear insignificant, are under God’s control; it is God who knows and makes the deer bring forth (see Ps. 29:9). His power is magnificent, absolute, and extends over all.

This is a lesson for us! If God knows these things about the deer, then think how intimately He knows you. If He controls the calving and birthing of an animal like a deer, imagine how intimately He knows you! It is a great comfort to know that the all-powerful God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). We are confident of this because God is in control over everything—even the deer!

There’s another lesson we learn too about God’s creation: There is nothing so insignificant in creation that it doesn’t declare God’s glory. Whether it’s the largest star in some distant galaxy or the deer who gives birth when no one sees—God’s glory is on display in everything that He has made (Ps. 145:9; Rom. 1:20). God created everything to reveal something about Himself. And with the deer, God reveals His care even over the animal world. What a glorious God we serve—the One who has control over all things and the One who is glorified through all things!



The Horse — Symbol of Strength

There are many references to animals in the Bible, but there is one animal that is mentioned 166 times! Can you guess which animal it is? Here's a clue: it has the largest eyes of all mammals, has hooves, a mane, and a tail. If you guessed a horse, you are correct!

Horses were very popular animals during biblical times and were treasured for their speed and agility. These traits were needed to fight enemies and pull chariots. If you've ever visited a farm you may have seen a horse gallop across a field with its mane and tail blowing in the wind—its smooth muscles rippling as its feet thunder over the ground. If so, you know how majestic and strong this creature is!

The horse was perfectly designed by God with many special characteristics, one of which is its ability to run extremely fast. In fact, the world record for the fastest horse is 55 miles per hour! That's as fast as some speed limits for cars! In order to run fast, horses use their long, skinny legs. Their legs are so long that it should be hard for blood to go all the way down their legs and back up to their heart. But God designed horses with just the right solution. Under a horse's hoof is something called a "frog." This is not a green hopping creature, but a special triangular pad that acts as a cushion. When pressed, the frog pushes blood up the horse's leg and back to its heart.

Horses are huge animals weighing up to 2,200 pounds, almost as much as a small car! In order to pump enough blood to the rest of its body, a horse's heart weighs a whopping nine to ten pounds! However, a horse's brain only

weighs around one and a half pounds and takes up less space than its teeth! They can smell and hear better than humans and have better night vision than we do. Thanks to sixteen muscles in each ear, horses can turn their ears halfway around. Having eyes on the sides of their head lets them see in almost every direction which allows them to see and run away from danger or enemies before they can even get close. An animal with so much strength and speed makes for a very trusted and impressive tool in war, which the Israelites in the Bible knew very well. They relied on horses to protect them from their enemies.

What does God say about horses and their strength? In Isaiah 31:1, God says, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!" God told the Israelites they shouldn't trust in horses for protection but should trust in Him.

God made the horses, who can't do anything without His help. Like the Israelites, we shouldn't put our trust in earthly things or people to protect us, or trust in our own plans for the future. God made us so He controls our plans and those in our path. Instead of trusting in temporary things like horses, we should trust in Christ, who is all-powerful and eternal.

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The Donkey—Christ’s Humility and Peace

The donkey is not fast. The average height of the donkey is 3 to 5 feet while that of horses is 4.7 to 6 feet. But the donkey is a hard worker. Its hooves are designed in such a way that it could travel rough terrain with heavy baggage. In the ancient days, donkeys were often used to transport goods and burdens. Sometimes they would carry so much that they would lie down under such heavy loads of baggage. Moses wrote that those donkeys need to be helped by people (Ex. 23:5).

We may not fully appreciate how useful donkeys were in ancient days when there were not motorized vehicles because we are so used to these vehicles. The Bible shows how much people relied upon donkeys for transportation. Second Samuel 16:1 records how much baggage could be loaded upon two donkeys. It says that they carried “two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine.” How much labor people could save if they could use the donkeys! They could even ride upon those donkeys that carried such loads of food.

Jesus rode on a donkey as He was entering Jerusalem for His final days of ministry. Zechariah 9:9 prophesied this: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” You would understand that people would shout with joy to see that their king came to them. But what people may not understand is the second part of the verse: The king does not ride on a horse but on a donkey, especially a young donkey.

You may say, “Should not the king ride a horse prized in those days for its attractive, shiny appearance and power?”

Even nowadays some horses are very much prized according to their breeds, and their value is esteemed higher than donkeys. But this prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew 21 through Jesus Christ. The King in Zechariah 9:9 refers to Jesus Christ who came as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus came to bring peace—the peace that men could never achieve through war by using powerful weapons (Ps. 20:7). Jesus proved to be the humble King who came all the way from heaven to earth as being the eternal Son of God. Jesus proved to be humble by riding the colt as the King. Jesus says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

How much we need this peace on earth! Even now tens of thousands of people in some places are suffering from corruption, political unrest, and civil war. Oftentimes, these situations are caused by sinful men and women who are greedy for earthly power. How we and those leaders need the humble spirit of Jesus! How we and those people and places need the salvation of Christ, the King of peace! The donkey symbolizes both the humility and peace of Christ. Let us ask God for the eye of faith to be able to recognize this humble Prince of peace, Jesus Christ, who rode the donkey. Then, we could shout also like those children who recognized Jesus as the King on the donkey, saying, “Hosanna!” “And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:10).

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The Swine — It Matters How You Listen

Jesus was a great teacher who often used pictures from creation to illustrate His lessons. In Matthew 7:1–5, Jesus gives a colorful picture condemning hypocritical judgment. He speaks of a man who sees a speck of wood in his brother’s eye while he has a beam of wood in his own eye. Such imagery helps us understand what Jesus is saying. In Matthew 7:6, Jesus uses another picture to describe the danger of giving instruction to a fool. In order to understand this picture, it’s helpful to know the following.

First, Jesus is speaking about instructing a person when he has sinned. Jesus cautions that we shouldn’t cast our “pearls” before those who will not listen. A pearl is a precious thing. Jesus is saying that giving right instruction or discipline to someone is a “pearl”—it’s like a treasure. While no instruction or discipline is enjoyable in the moment (Heb. 12:11), we’re meant to appreciate people who do instruct us (see Prov. 3:11; 6:23; 12:1).

Second, Jesus says that those who don’t listen to this valuable instruction or discipline are like “swine” or pigs. That’s not a very flattering description of someone! But Jesus says that those who don’t listen are no better than a bunch of pigs. If you’ve ever seen a pig you know that they’re big and smelly. Did you know that pigs will eat anything that is put in front of them? When we eat, we like to enjoy our food and we even take care of how we eat. But pigs will

eat anything cast in front of them, pawing and treading on their food before devouring it. Pigs don’t have a refined taste! They pay no attention to what is in front of them. And Jesus says that those who don’t listen to instruction are like these pigs who pay no attention to what they’re treading on or eating. Those who don’t listen to the pearl of instruction are like pigs.

Using this picture, Jesus encourages us in at least two ways. The first way we are encouraged is to know that it takes wisdom to know when and how to instruct someone who is in the wrong. Not everyone is going to receive our instruction well. Jesus says that there is a time when we shouldn’t instruct someone, lest we just be feeding our pearls to pigs.

But the second way we are encouraged is to ask: “Am I like the pig? Or, with the help of God, am I receiving the instruction given to me?” It can be so easy to disregard, ignore, or forget what our parents, teachers, or pastors tell us. But Jesus teaches us in Matthew 7:6 that wisdom listens to instruction. Wisdom values correction and reproof (see 2 Tim. 3:16). Do we respond wisely when we are instructed? Or do we trample the “pearls” of another’s instruction like a pig?



The Leopard—An Unchangeable Coat

A sleek, tan animal quietly glides through the forest, his body strong and muscular. Silently, he slips through the underbrush, his eyes alert and his ears trained for even the smallest noise.

The leopard is an incredible animal, known for his strength and impressive hunting skills. However, his most common distinction is probably the brown spots, or “rosettes,” scattered across his coat. It’s hard to picture this cat without his brown and gold speckled coat. Picture him with the stripes of a zebra or with fur the color of a flamingo! Obviously, he would look ridiculous. God designed the leopard with just the right pattern on his fur.

It is impossible for the leopard to change his coat. Even so, it is impossible for man to do anything good apart from God. Jeremiah 13:23 says, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” As the leopard cannot change his spots and humans cannot change their skin color, even so, humans are incapable of doing anything good. We cannot change our sinful, black hearts to hearts of pure, white holiness. However, unlike a creature’s skin, our entire heart is sinful, not just the outside. Romans 7:18 says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.”

We are unable to do any good at all. Isaiah 64:6 says, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” Even our best efforts are as worthless as muddy rags. Our souls are black

with sin, not just speckled in a few places like a leopard, but totally, entirely, pitch black.

While it is impossible for creatures to change the way they are made, our wicked souls are not without hope. When the Holy Spirit shows us our sinful hearts, and we call on God in faith to save us and mold us into His image, God will never turn us away. He will make us new again in His image. “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10). When God renews our hearts, we are stripped of our filthy rags and clothed in the pure, holy robes of Christ. Instead of being black with sin we are made glistening white, as white as snow. God said it perfectly in Isaiah 1:18: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Unlike the leopard, who can’t change his coat, sinful humans can hope in their LORD who can change them to be holy as He is. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Can the leopard change his spots,
Or the human switch his skin?
Can a sinful man all on his own
Save his black soul from sin?
As creatures’ skin can’t be exchanged,
One can’t his state atone.
It’s through the grace and mercy
Of our Christ and LORD alone.



The Lion — King of the Universe

¡Hola (Hello)! Have you been to the zoo lately? Just this morning, while reading the newspaper, I learned that four little lions were born in the Quito Zoo. In the pictures they look like big, sweet cats who enjoy playing around. Nothing threatening really, but as lions get older they are not so cute. They become strong and powerful animals, especially when they begin to hunt and protect their “pride” (group of lions).

It is interesting that the Lord Jesus is called a “Lion” in the Bible. In Revelation 5:5, when describing a vision of the throne in heaven, the apostle John writes: “But one of the elders said to me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”

What do you think this passage means? The apostle John had been given the great privilege of seeing the throne from where God rules all the world; and Jesus, our Mediator, is found to be the only one worthy, as Matthew Henry said, to “open and execute all the counsels of God towards men.” The point is that Jesus, our Savior, is governing the world. All events in history—every joy, every suffering—are not outside of His control. You know, being a Christian child can be difficult at times. Our flesh is tempted to disobey. Some people get upset when we obey God. And we know that Satan hates it when we worship the Lord. But know this my friend: Jesus is on the throne; He has conquered Satan, sin, and death.

Jesus Christ is the Lion of Judah. He has conquered our enemies so that God’s children may serve and belong to Him only. Isn’t that good news? I think it is! You can trust in this good news because God never fails to fulfill His promises.

Did you know that the Lion of Judah was promised by God in the times of Genesis? That’s right. In Genesis 49:9–10, we are told that Jacob, father of the tribe of Israel, prophesied about Jesus while blessing his son Judah: “Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [Jesus] come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

Fear not, dear friends, when things get difficult. Trust in Jesus, the Lion of Judah. No one dares to fight Him. He is ruling from the throne! God has promised that the scepter will never leave Judah. By faith, you can be His! He will protect you like a mighty Lion so that you may serve Him in joyful obedience.

¡Gloria a Dios (Glory to God)!

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The Fox—Small, Sly, but Significant

Have you ever seen a fox in real life? They are red and small, and they live in the wild. They are not easy to spot, because they are sly and like to hide from humans. In the book of Nehemiah, we read of an enemy of Israel mocking the wall Nehemiah built. He mocked that it was of such poor quality that it would break if a fox were to jump on it (Neh. 4:3). That would be the same as saying in our days: “This bridge is so weak—if a bird lands on it, it will collapse!”

We can learn a lot about foxes from the Bible. In fact, there were many foxes in Israel. This is evident in the story about Samson. Samson caught three hundred of them! We know he was very strong, but he must have also been very fast! After he had captured the three hundred foxes, Samson tied their tails together and put torches in between. Then he sent the foxes into the grain fields of the Philistines. The foxes ran through the grain and set the fields of his enemies on fire (Judg. 15:4)!

In the story of Samson, foxes caused great destruction. The Bible frequently warns of the harmful nature of foxes. Song of Solomon says, “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes” (Song 2:15). What this verse means is that little things—though they may seem cute and small—can cause us a lot of harm. Jesus once called a man a fox because he wanted to kill Jesus. This man was King Herod, who wanted to destroy God’s people (Luke 13:32).

Jesus once said that “the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20). Jesus meant that God cares for all the animals—even foxes. The birds have nests, the foxes have holes, but Jesus Himself did not have a home because people did not welcome Him.

What can we learn from the fox? Think about your own life. Perhaps you once did something small that you know was bad. It hurt your parents, your brothers, your sisters, and God. It seemed small to you at the time. It was only a small lie, a small theft, or some other sin that maybe nobody noticed. But the Bible compares these types of sin to little foxes. It is hard to believe they will really hurt you, but little foxes grow bigger and they can do a lot of damage. When they grow bigger, they are much harder to get rid of, just like our sins.

The Bible says it is best to fight our sins—even when they seem small. Don’t let your sins get bigger and bigger until they ruin your life. Bring all of your sins to the Lord in confession, repentance, and cleansing—in the blood of Jesus.

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The Unicorn — The Horn of the Unicorn

What is a unicorn? You're probably thinking of a horse-like animal with a spiraling narwhal tusk coming out of its forehead. As you well know, such an animal does not exist. Yet, the unicorn is mentioned nine times in the Bible. What does the Bible mean by this?

That's hard to tell exactly. It probably refers to an extinct, one-horned animal something like a large wild ox. Many writings from ancient times describe such an animal. If you like digging up old things, you'll like this: scientists have dug up an ancient stone tower called an obelisk. It belonged to a king of Assyria who lived before King David. Chiseled onto that stone obelisk was a story that he slew what he called "the destructive wild ox, at the foot of mount Lebanon." Clearly, this ox was not like our ox. Such a great king would not have bothered to proudly record himself killing an animal similar to today's ox! Therefore, this creature must have been very strong, dangerous, and destructive. Other ancient writings speak of an animal like this that was not much smaller than an elephant, and of immense might, having one large black horn.

In the book of Job, the Lord states that this animal is impossible to tame, and that "his strength is great" (Job 39:9–11). It was unafraid of human beings, so people had to hunt it to extinction in order to live safely. This animal

was so feared, that people considered it a hunting trophy as great as a lion! No wonder the Assyrian king wanted to record that he had killed one!

The Bible draws two spiritual lessons from this wild ox, or unicorn.

1. **Man's weakness.** In Psalm 22, David felt spiritually weak. He felt such fear and anguish that he says it was like a unicorn was tossing him into the air with its horns. If you have seen a bullfighter being thrown by a strong bull, you will know what David was saying when he said he felt weak, lost, and defeated! Have you ever felt like that spiritually? Satan is strong and wants to make you feel weak so that you will despair. In times like this, all you can (and must!) do is look to God, as David did, which leads us to the second lesson.
2. **God's strength.** The Bible also compares the horns of the unicorn to God. When God brought Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus, the Bible says God's strength was like that of a unicorn (Num. 23:22)! Spiritually, the psalmist says, "Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns" (Ps. 22:21). As strong as the unicorn was, God was stronger! The psalmist couldn't save himself, but God could. Remember: God is stronger than Satan and all your enemies.

The Fly — Swarms of Flies!



It's that time of year again: flies, flies, and more flies. Maybe if you live in farm country you especially agree with that! Fly swatters, sticky fly traps hanging from ceilings, and many other inventions can be seen in use throughout the summer. Lots of money is spent every year just to get rid of those pesky flies! No, we don't like flies. They're annoying, noisy, dirty, and maybe worst of all: they lay wriggly little maggots in the trash!

But no matter how much we may detest flies, there was once a people who had a real reason to detest them: the Egyptians. You know the story: The Lord had sent three plagues to Pharaoh already, but Pharaoh had not listened. So, in Exodus 8:20, the Lord again told Moses to meet Pharaoh and proclaim the next plague: swarms of flies!

Once again, according to God's Word, the plague came: swarms of millions of buzzing, annoying, irritating, and invading flies. They filled the land of the Egyptians! Imagine them, crawling on the Egyptians' backs and legs and heads, getting into their hair, biting their skin, swarming around their heads, flying into their eyes and ears and mouths! In Psalm 78:45 we read "He sent divers sorts of

flies among them, which devoured them." In other words, the flies *attacked* the Egyptians. They didn't just fly around or sit on the ceiling, as our houseflies do. They were persistent, stubborn, attacking flies, like the blackfly that buzzes around your head.

There was no relief anywhere! We read that they came "into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt." Not a house in Egypt was safe from this infestation. However, the Lord did something new in this plague, which He did not do with the first three plagues: He protected His people. Not one fly came into the land of Goshen. Doesn't this show that God is Lord over everything and in control of all things?

God sent flies into Egypt as a punishment. When you are bothered by a blackfly, do you ever see that as a punishment? In a way it is, because it is part of God's curse on creation due to sin. Each biting blackfly is a painful reminder of what our sin brings. How wonderful that when God re-creates the earth, no pesky, biting flies will be there. Will you be there?

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The Fish — Food and Fisherman

¡Buenos días! Good day! This time I am going to tell you about fish. Ecuadorians really like fish, especially those who live on the coast of the country, close to the Pacific Ocean. White rice, lentils, and fried plantains come to mind when I think of fish. Starting to get hungry? Me too!

I remember going to the beach with my parents when I was a child. A fresh image in my mind is seeing the fishermen heading out into the ocean in the middle of the night, and later in the morning, selling the fish they had caught with their nets to the curious tourists.

Hunger and nets are closely related to fish, not only in my memories, but most importantly in Scripture. The Lord Jesus fed five thousand people once, and later four thousand hungry souls with just a few fish (Matt. 14:13–21, Matt. 15:32–39.) The greatness of these narratives is not only the huge provision of bread and fish needed to feed such big crowds, but the way our Savior did it. They were miracles. The first time, Jesus multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish. And the second time, it was seven pieces of bread and a few little fish that He used to feed many people. Clearly, the apostle Matthew wants us to understand that Jesus has the power to provide for all our

needs. Just as the Father provided manna in the desert for the Israelites, Jesus provides food for our body and soul. He is God, and provides, even miraculously, for His people. Are you in need, dear friend? Come to Jesus. He will satisfy all your longings.

If multiplying a few fish into many fish is amazing, you will find the next truth even more amazing. Jesus is not only willing to provide, but He will use the people He has “caught” for a better type of “catch.” In Luke 5:1–11, Jesus, the great fisherman, catches not only a large number of fish, but He catches men in order to make them fishers of men. He does not only save sinners, He transforms and uses them as instruments of His saving ministry. What a great privilege we have if we are true Christians!

Don’t forget. Jesus is able and willing to satisfy all your needs. Most importantly, in the process, He will transform you into a fisher of men. Do not fear, throw the net, a large catch has been promised.

Qué Dios los bendiga siendo instrumentos del Reino (May God bless you as instruments of the kingdom)!



The Snake — A Picture of Pride, Punishment, and Peace

Did you know?

- Snakes are reptiles.
- Snake are *vertebrates*—they have a backbone or spine.
- Snakes are cold-blooded animals from the family of lizards, crocodiles, and turtles.
- There are around 3000 species of snakes and they can be found all around the world (except Antarctica).
- Snakes differ in size and color. The longest species of snake in the world is the Anaconda, which can grow up to 28 feet long!
- Snakes are fierce predators and *carnivores* (they eat meat).
- Some species of snake are venomous—some of the deadliest venomous animals on earth.
- Snakes are feared by around one-third of the human population which makes this the most common phobia (fear) among human beings. The fear of snakes is called *ophiophobia*.
- Worldwide, there are an estimated one million snake bites every year. About 90,000 people die each year of venomous snake bites!

Are you afraid of snakes? Even if you don't have *ophiophobia* (the fear of snakes), you would most certainly run away or be petrified if you saw one, wouldn't you? You would rightly do so. Most snakes are dangerous. Throughout the history of humanity, people from all cultures and nations have feared snakes.

In Scripture, snakes are generally viewed negatively. Do you remember any Bible passage where a snake or serpent is mentioned? The first passage that comes to my mind is the episode of the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. In this passage, the devil is represented by a serpent who comes into the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve and leads them to distrust God and disobey His commands. After this episode, God punishes and curses the serpent (Gen. 3:14). No wonder people fear serpents! Many times in Scripture, serpents are said to be sent by God as a punishment for sin (Num. 21:6–7; Amos 9:3; 1 Cor. 10:9). They are also a representation of evil men. “They sharpen their tongues like a serpent” (Ps. 140:3a).

But this dark picture is not all that the Bible has to say concerning snakes and serpents. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah prophesied: “And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp (cobra), and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s (viper’s) den” (Isa. 11:8). Sin has destroyed the harmony between God’s creation. It has brought division and enmity between God and human beings, but also between us and animals. However, the prophet Isaiah spoke about a time when this enmity and fear between us and the animals would end. Even a nursing child would have no need to fear snakes and would be able to play with a cobra.

The restoration of the beauty of creation is only possible because of our Lord Jesus Christ who, through His death and resurrection, was able to remove sin. We don't see this harmony yet, so don't try to play with snakes, okay? But, when our Lord Jesus Christ returns again from heaven, He will make all things new again and all creation will be beautiful and harmonious.



The Worm – What Does a Worm Have to do with Christ?

Did you know?

- Worms are a very diverse type of animal. There are about 4,400 species of earthworms alone!
- Most are invertebrates (which means they do not have a backbone).
- All earthworms are both male and female.
- Earthworms have up to five pairs of hearts. They do not have lungs—but breathe through their skin.
- Earthworms can grow up to twelve feet long!
- If you cut off a piece of the worm (up to 1/4 of its body) it will continue to live and will regrow the lost part.
- Worms have the ability to move both forward and backward.
- Some worms are parasites (an animal that lives in or on another animal), and some of these can infect humans. For example, a tapeworm can enter the human body through drinking contaminated water. It can grow up to eighty feet long and live in a person's intestine for up to thirty years. Fortunately, there is treatment against this parasite.

Worms don't seem very nice, do they? They don't seem to kindle warm, fuzzy feelings in us. As someone said, it is hard to put a good face on a worm. For most human beings, worms are repugnant little creatures. They are disgusting

and make people feel sick. In several cultures, the worm is used to describe a cowardly, weak, or pitiable person.

The Bible speaks of worms in negative, repulsive terms. Do you remember the food that God provided for the Israelites in the desert? It was called manna. The manna spoiled from one day to the next. If the Israelites kept manna for the next day, “it bred worms and stank” (Ex. 16:20). It almost makes me sick thinking about that! What about king Herod—a bad and disobedient king—who was “eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:23)? What a sickening image, right? No wonder the Bible uses the image of worms to describe hell. Hell is a place for unrepentant sinners where “their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched” (Isa. 66:24; cf. Mark 9:48).

There is still one more use of the worm in Scripture that is important for us to know. The worm is used to refer to people that are in a very humiliating position. In one of his psalms, King David cried out, “but I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people” (Ps. 22:6). The New Testament says that this psalm refers to our Lord Jesus Christ. “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: They shoot out the lip, they shake the head” (Ps. 22:7; cf. Matt. 27:39; Mark 15:29). Can you imagine, the One who was God from all eternity, the One who was above all things and all people, became like a mere human being? Even worse, He let himself be humiliated, mocked, and threatened like a worm. He was despised and ridiculed. He was punished for the sins of all those who repent and believe in Him.



The Moth — Earthly Treasure is Temporary

If you walk into my grandmother's home, you will notice a beautiful Persian rug lying on her living room floor. Passed down from my great-grandmother, this rug is truly a work of art; the rich red, blue, and yellow threads have been woven together to create a beautiful work of art. However, with all of its beauty, the rug is not perfect. If you look closely, you will see bare patches where the fabric has been nibbled away. What sort of creature ruined this expensive carpet with its nasty jaws? The answer may surprise you: it's the moth!

Actually, it's the tiny babies (or *larvae*) of the common clothes moth that do all the damage. The process starts when a female moth lands on something made out of animal products like silk, wool, cashmere, fur, feathers, or hair. Moths love things like carpet, blankets, or even your favorite sweater! They lay up to fifty eggs on the fabric, then fly away and later die. After a few days, the larvae crawl out of their eggs and begin eating the fabric around them. After eating large sections of the fabric, each moth forms a cocoon out of the material it has eaten. After around two weeks, each moth emerges as an adult moth.

This can be a huge problem, especially when there is more than one moth in your home. Imagine hundreds of tiny worms crawling in your living room carpet. It's not a pretty picture! To make matters worse, larvae are very hard to get rid of. Clothes must be dry-cleaned, rugs vacuumed, and if all else fails, an exterminator may have to be called to spray chemicals and kill them. Thousands of dollars are spent each year on moth removal, yet no matter how much money or time is spent, the moths still seem to come back.

Clothes moths are so well known for causing damage that they are even mentioned in the Bible. Matthew 6:20

says, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Nothing will last forever; it will all wear out or be destroyed someday. God wants to remind us not to focus on things on the earth that will eventually be ruined, thrown away, stolen, or eaten by moths. Instead, He wants us to focus on Him and eternal life.

Moths are difficult to get rid of, but it is impossible for us to get rid of our sins. Only Jesus can cleanse our hearts and get rid of the sins that plague us. Only Jesus can give us everlasting life and an eternal home with Him in heaven for eternity. With this in mind, why would we focus on things that only last a few years? Nothing can take our love for God away from us. No moths can eat it, no rust can wear it away. On the final day, when God's children are taken up into heaven, all sin and all earthly things will be done away with, never to return. Instead of focusing on things in this life that will be destroyed (like my grandmother's treasured rug), focus on the greatest thing of all: eternal life with our Savior and Lord in heaven.

Mixed with dross the purest gold:
Seek we, then, for heavenly treasures,
Treasures never waxing old.
Let our best affections center
On the things around the throne:
There no thief can ever enter;
Moth and rust are there unknown.

—David E. Ford



The Locust—Edible Weapon of Mass (Vegetable) Destruction

In the year 1954, locust swarms invaded the African country of Kenya. The largest of these swarms included an estimated 10 billion locusts and covered an area of over 200 square miles! Locusts have the largest swarms of any insect and are also the most devastating. They will eat every green thing in their path and leave nothing behind. Joel 2:25 mentions “the years that the locust hath eaten.” Their eggs have an amazing power to stay dormant for years in a dry climate, yet hatch as soon as the ground is wet enough. The wind carries these swarms across great distances. God primarily used locusts for judgment, although, since they are also edible, they were also used as food for humans (John the Baptist being the most famous example). The main thing they are famous for, however, is their ability to wipe out an entire country’s crops in a matter of hours.

Exodus 10:1–20 tells the story of the eighth plague against Egypt. This plague looked backwards to the seventh plague, since the locusts devoured everything the hail had left behind. It also looked forward to the ninth plague, since the clouds of locusts made everything dark.

The eighth plague was a judgment on Egypt’s gods, not just on Pharaoh himself. Egyptians worshiped a number of gods related to agriculture. One of the main gods they worshipped was Osiris, who was the god of vegetation. He ruled over everything that was green. There was a lesser god named Henkhisuesui, who was the god of the east wind

(they had a god for each of the winds on the four points of the compass). Then, of course, there was the goddess Hekt, who was the goddess of fertility. The god Senahem was supposed to be in charge of pest control. Min was the god of crops, Nepri was the god of grains, and Anubis was the god of the fields. However, none of these gods could protect the Egyptians from the plague of locusts! God used these little animals to bring down the supposedly great gods of the Egyptians—so who was the true God in this story?

The plague of locusts makes a comeback in the book of Joel, which pictures locusts as invaders. The locusts might be literal locusts, or they may be a figure of speech used to describe human invaders. Either way, in Joel 1:4, the Lord sends His “locust” army against His own people because of the sins they have committed!

God uses the small and foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He can use the tiniest insects in vast numbers to bring down a whole country. This means that we need to humble ourselves before God. It also means that—in God’s eyes—we are no larger than a locust. But even so, there is something encouraging about this, since God still cares for us, no matter how small we are.

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The Ant—Busy Wisdom

Although some estimate that there are 22,000 different kinds of ants, the Bible is really only interested in one of them: the Harvester Ant. The Harvester Ant makes its nest underground, and is famous for gathering food at harvest time in order to eat it in wintertime. The one quality of the Harvester Ant which the Bible mentions in both passages where the ant appears is its foresighted busyness. This critter works hard! It works hard because it knows that the onset of winter is near, and there has to be food to “put on the table.” Proverbs 6:6–11 is the first passage where the ant appears, and it is a rebuke to lazy people:

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

Lazy people have no foresight. They don't look ahead to see what they might need to do to prepare for what is coming. They only think about what is happening right in front of them at that very moment in time. Wisdom, however, knows what time it is. Is it a time for rest? We all need rest, and frequently! However, wisdom also knows when it is time to work.

The second passage about the ant is also in Proverbs (30:24–28), and mentions its great wisdom, along with three other animals:

There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.

All four of these animals are relatively small, but they do not regard that small size as a problem. Instead they use the instinctive wisdom that God gave them to live as they are supposed to live.

Jesus Christ came to earth as a newborn baby, small and seemingly defenseless. But the wisdom and busyness that Jesus Christ displayed while growing up, going to the temple and debating with the rabbis, and later on teaching His disciples, is something that the little ant showed ahead of time.

Children are typically smaller than adults, but that does not mean that they are of no value. Nor does it mean that they can have no wisdom. They can be busy for the kingdom of God, and they can be increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man, looking to Christ (Luke 2:52). Are you working while it is still the day of grace—working to know the Lord and working for Him?



The Rooster—A Reminder of Repentance

This bird does not fly high or fly at all, even though it was created with wings. It provides a very good source of food for most people. It also serves as a good time-keeper in the early morning. It loudly and repeatedly makes the same crowing sound. This bird is not only kept as a pet, but can also be used for food. Yes, it is the rooster, or cock.

It seems that God used this bird for a special purpose. God used it for bringing repentance to one of the disciples of Jesus. His name is Peter. The rooster could not fly and so it could not bring meat and bread like the ravens brought to Elijah. However, it could do something else, like making noise to awaken Peter's conscience. He did not realize what he was doing when he repeatedly denied Jesus, saying, "I do not know the man" (Matt. 26:72). He was denying Christ three times in a row on the night when Jesus was betrayed and arrested to be taken to the religious leaders. Even though Peter made such a bold remark, saying, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee," he was now completely falling into the trap of the devil (Mark 14:53 ff.).

Like Peter, you are living in such an environment where your faith could be easily endangered. The fear and fleshly temptation within us easily connects with those pressures outside of us. The world seems to know which strings to pull, so that Christians under pressure might be trapped in their deceitful devices. The Apostle Peter after his repentance boldly advises the early Christians, saying, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Peter was entrapped in that kind of very dangerous situation where his faith was greatly tested. The devil was trying to subvert the faith of Peter, putting him under such a trying circumstance. Peter kept denying Christ until he

heard the rooster's final awakening call during Good Friday's early morning hours, likely around 3 a.m.

Jesus was arrested, accused, and abused by evil men. Jesus was greatly humiliated by those nasty and evil religious leaders. People were lying against Jesus by making false accusations, but Jesus did not respond to these false accusations. Jesus was going through the night of suffering. But none of His disciples was around except Peter. Even Peter was sadly and embarrassingly not standing with Him! Peter was right there in the courtyard trying to get some heat from the fire in the late night hours while the servants of the High Priest were hitting Jesus's face (Mark 14:65). Then, Peter denied Jesus three times until the rooster crowed twice.

Peter kept denying Christ even after his Galilean accent was pointed out as an evidence of the relationship between him and his Lord and Savior. He was awakened by the rooster's crows. Once. And then twice. Through the rooster, he was instantly led by the Holy Spirit to realize his grave sin of denying Jesus Christ. However, God who foreknew this, used it to strengthen Peter's faith through the process and this turning point was marked by the rooster's crows. Once Peter heard it, he was convicted of his sins. He looked at Jesus, and then wept bitterly.

What a surprising use of that rooster! God could use such a common and even annoying bird to awaken Peter, and it was instantly causing Peter to repent. This is God's little creature to help Peter's repentance. What are we ignoring around us if God could use such a reminder like the crow of a rooster! God's work is so marvelous in His creation and in His salvation work in us! Let us be ready to be reminded of God's word and Christ's salvation any time through such a bird like that rooster crowing on that day!



The Quail—Undeserved Food!

Did you know that the only time quail are mentioned in the Bible is in connection with the wilderness travels of the children of Israel? Two quail-feedings are recorded: one in Exodus 16, the other in Numbers 11. These are remembered in song in Psalm 78:27 and 105:40.

In Numbers 11, God sent quail in response to Israel's complaining spirit. Do you ever complain about the food Mom makes? Maybe you've even said: "Why do we always have to have *this* meal?" That's what the Israelites said to Moses. They were sick of the manna God provided every day. They craved the Egyptian meat they used to eat.

Complaining is always a poor choice. It shows that we are not thankful, not content, and are being selfish. These are bad character traits to have.

Yet, in spite of their complaining spirit, God gave Israel meat: millions of small but tasty quail. Quail are still hunted today because they are a good meat bird. This shows that God knew just what good thing to send Israel. These quail are a testimony to God's kindness and rich provisions even to those who do not deserve it. Is that not a picture of what God gave to sinful man in His Son Jesus Christ? The perfect solution to our problem of sin and guilt is found in Him, but

even that is undeserved. That is what grace means: receiving that which we have not deserved.

But there is another lesson these quail teach us: God is angry with sin. Someone once said: "Be careful what you wish for: you might get it." That saying is teaching us that things we crave for are not always as good for us as we think. That's what Israel found out. God gave them their meat, but he also punished them for their sin. Their sinful craving cost many of them their lives. This teaches us that God takes sin very seriously. He hates sin. He detests it. Do you?

How thankful we ought to be that in Jesus Christ, God does not give rich provision only to destroy us. He gives rich provision in order to save sinners. That's because in Jesus Christ, God's wrath is removed. Let us learn from the Israelites and their episode with the quail, that "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). Let us learn that we must humbly and gratefully receive all things from the hand of a faithful Father in Christ. The next time you want what someone else has, remember the Israelites sinfully craving quail. Ask God today to give you a heart that is happy with what you have been given. That will be pleasing to God.



The Raven—Bird of God’s Provision

Elijah was told by God to go to the brook Cherith in 1 Kings 17. The days of Elijah in Israel were difficult, especially for those who believed in God. The king of Israel at that time was a notorious king. He served Baal instead of the God of Israel.

Elijah had come from the region of Gilead, from the northeast of Israel, boldly approaching this idol-worshipping king, Ahab. He said that there would be neither dew nor rain for some years as a punishment. Surely the prophet was warning the king through such confrontation and alarm, so that he would stop worshipping idols.

Then the word of God came again to Elijah and said that he should go eastward where he would find a brook. God also said that he would drink out of the brook and the ravens would feed him. At that time, there was no rain. The water of brook Cherith was drying up. The fields were getting brown due to no rain or dew. The plants were not growing normally. The animals eating plants were also suffering. Overall the people themselves were going through very tough times due to lack of rain. Elijah, too, was not having an easy life, though he was the prophet that carried the word of God. Nevertheless, Elijah trusted in God’s word and he obeyed God according to His word.

How would you respond to such a command from God? People were suffering from not having enough food due to the famine in Israel. Then, God told you to go to the brook called Cherith which is in isolation from the villages. God said that He would send the ravens to feed him by the brook.

Elijah, who did not fear to go to confront the notorious king Ahab, obeyed, and went to the brook Cherith. Then, an amazing thing happened to Elijah, and this is recorded in the Bible for our benefit. First Kings 17:6 says, “And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.”

God’s providence is shown in the actions of those ravens. We never know what is going to happen. But God knows what will happen in His providence. God has His master plan for everything. Christ reminds us of God’s providence for His children in Matthew 10:30, saying, “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

The raven is known as a “universal symbol of dark prophecy,” namely, death, pestilence, and disease. It is also known for its cleverness and fearless habits. When Noah released the raven to check out the situation when the rain finally stopped, it did not return, while the dove returned to Noah once it was let out (Genesis 7). Proverbs 30:17 even says that the ravens should pick the eye out of children who disobey their parents. The raven is a scary bird!

Elijah may have been captivated by the idea of death in the middle of nowhere when he was isolated from the rest of the world by brook Cherith. But God was faithful in providing for the need of His servant Elijah in such a solitary place through the ravens. How amazing it must have been to see these ravens carrying the bread and meat morning and evening for Elijah!

What did Elijah think when he heard the sound of ravens in the sky? Usually they make big noises like guttural croaks. Such an ominous black bird could be useful in providing food for such a prophet! Nothing is wasted in God’s plan.

What is your situation today? Does the circumstance look very gloomy like the black ravens? Do not forget God and His promises in Christ (Rom. 8:32). He can use even the dark ravens of His providence to bring good. God is such a mighty God but He is also such a caring Father to His children who trust in His Word. John Newton writes in his hymn, “More likely to rob than to feed, Were ravens, which live upon prey; But when the Lord’s people have need, His goodness will find out a way.”¹

1. S. F. Paul, *Bible Animals* (Harpenden, Herts, England: Gospel Standard Baptist Trust, 1972), 53.



The Eagle — Lord of All Birds

The eagle is famous for two things in the Bible: (1) its power (and therefore its majesty) and (2) its long life. Eagles regularly live 50 years in captivity. They are majestic animals and are not fit food for humans to eat. Some eagles have lived over 100 years!

It is not surprising that the Bible uses the imagery of the eagle to describe power and majesty, as well as long life. Only three times is the eagle mentioned in a completely literal way. In all other instances—twenty-nine times—the Bible mentions the eagle in a figurative way.

In Exodus 19:4, the Lord God tells the Israelites, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.” Here the power of the eagle is a metaphor for the Lord’s mighty outstretched arm.

That the eagle is viewed as the king of all birds is evident from the vision that Ezekiel has in chapter 1 of his prophecy. Ezekiel sees angels that have the form of four kings for their faces: the eagle as the king of all birds, the ox as the king of all domestic animals, the lion as the king of all beasts, and man as the king of creation. Power and majesty are the point of the vision.

Similarly, in Isaiah 40:29–31, the Lord is described as the source of all strength. Even young people can get tired. Waiting on the Lord, however, renews our strength:

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

On occasion, since the eagle flies so high up, the metaphor can turn into something bad. If people get too proud, they can be compared to the eagle in a negative way. They are, quite literally, “getting too uppity.” In Obadiah 3–4, Edom is described this way:

The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.

The eagle can be a symbol for us of the Lord’s power and strength. Our strength comes from the Lord, as does our long life. We should flee all pride, since every good thing we have is something we have received from God. Young people, in particular, are prone to forget this.



The Dove — Sacrificial Bird of Peace and Innocence

¡Hola hermanos! Hello brothers! This time I want to speak to you about doves. I am sure you have seen some flying around or trying to find food on the ground. Did you know the Bible has a lot to say about them? They were birds used for sacrifices. But they were also symbols of peace, examples of innocence, and one was somehow present during Jesus's baptism. Interesting, right?

The Old Testament tells us that doves were offered as sacrifices by the people of God to the Lord (Lev. 1:14–16). Sometimes, doves were offerings given by those who could not afford to give a lamb (Lev. 5:7). You might be thinking, why did God require such sacrifices and offerings? The answer is that “the wages of sin is death.” You see, our brothers and sisters that lived during the times of the Old Testament needed to deal with their sins through continual animal sacrifices which pointed to the final, perfect sacrifice: our Lord Jesus Christ.

Doves were also symbols of peace. Remember the story of Noah and the ark? Noah sent out a dove three times in order to try to find out whether or not the waters had stopped covering the land. The third time the dove did not return. The flood had ended—which meant God's judgment was over. It was time for peace.

We are also commanded to behave like doves because of their innocent character. The Lord Jesus called His disciples

to be “harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). Acting in an innocent or harmless way means to stay away from evil and to love God and our neighbor, according to His will.

Finally, a beautiful picture of the Lord's baptism is given to us in Scripture. And yes, a dove is involved! We don't really know whether the Holy Spirit came in the shape of a dove or not. I am afraid that is not what the Bible is trying to say. See what the verse says: “And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him” (Mark 1:10). Note the word “like.” Whatever the case, Mark's intention is to remind the reader of a scene that happened thousands of years before. Just as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were present in creation (Genesis 1), so they were present at the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ. His incarnation marked the inauguration of a new creation—one that we start living here and now in the power of the Spirit—thanks to the person and work of our Messiah.

So friends, next time you see a dove, remember: Your sins can only be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. When God has given peace to you who believe in His Son, you should stay away from evil in gratitude for what He has done for you, and live a new life in the power of the Spirit.

¡Bendiciones en el Señor! Blessings in the Lord!



The Sparrow — Safe and Sheltered

The sparrow is a small bird that lives in our country. You have likely often seen them around your house and in the trees. Sparrows are very common in the Middle East as well. They sit high on the housetops of homes where they are safe from animals that prey on them—where they can safely oversee the world. Yet they also hop around on the ground, coming fearlessly close to human beings. Sparrows live relatively unconcerned lives of about three years, unless they are eaten by animals such as cats, dogs, snakes, foxes, and larger birds.

The sparrow is such a small bird—with such a short life—that it has little value to humans. In Israel, the people knew how little these birds were valued, because two of them could be bought for one cent (Matt. 10:29)! They were sold so that the poor could sacrifice them as a sin offering. People who had very little money couldn't afford to buy expensive animals to sacrifice, so God made a way for everyone to be able to sacrifice to Him—both rich and poor.

Jesus mentions the sparrow in order to explain how much God values people. He says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.” Nothing will happen to a single bird—one of millions of birds worth half a cent each—that the heavenly Father doesn't know about and doesn't allow to happen. It's as if Jesus were saying, “If this is how much my Father cares for and controls everything, no matter how

small and insignificant, then imagine how much more He will care for you!” “Ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:31). If God cares about this tiny little bird worth half a cent, then how much *more* will He care for you, His own child?

The Psalms speak about God's care for the little sparrow. “Yea, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God” (Ps. 84:3). This psalm tells us the same thing that Jesus told us about this bird—that God will take care of it. The sparrow will find a house, along with the swallow, near God's altars, close to where God Himself has made His home. David knew that if this bird could find a home with God—and be close to where God lives—then so could he! David loved God. Just like the sparrow, David wanted to live close to God, and shelter in His presence.

Remember this: A sparrow cannot fall from the rooftop of a house apart from God's will. Even so, nothing in your life can and will happen without God knowing about it and being in control of it. That is why we can say that everything that happens to us is for our own good when we love God (Rom. 8:28). God's children are worth so much to the Lord that He sent His own Son to die for them. God will care for His children every single day!



Leviathan — Mighty Dragon of the Deep

Have you heard about sea monsters? Some people today still say they have spotted them—and there are lots of rumors about them—but there is a lot we don't know. The Bible talks about something called Leviathan (Job 41:1; Isa. 27:1; Ps. 104:26; Ps. 74:14). Almost all of Job 42 speaks about him. Maybe he was some kind of dinosaur from the sea. Maybe he was a very big sea creature. In one place he is even called a dragon (Ps. 74:13).

Let's see how God speaks about Leviathan in Job 41. He describes him as a great, scaled monster. His hide is so thick that it cannot be broken through. His teeth are fearsome—all around his mouth. His eyes radiate light. Out of his mouth comes fire. Out of his nose comes smoke. The moment he rises up, everybody is afraid! God asks Job if he thinks he can tame this monster. He asks questions such as this: "Can Leviathan be brought in with a fish-hook, just like a normal fish?" "Will it beg Job for mercy once it is caught?" "Will it be kind?" "Can it be a pet in the home?" "Can you cuddle and touch it?" Job knows the answer to all these questions is "Absolutely not!" It is as if God says, "If you dare touch him, you will learn your lesson!" (see verse 8).

Why does God speak of Leviathan like this? Why does God make Job afraid? Listen to verse 10, where God says, "None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me?" God says, "Don't be afraid of Leviathan!

I am much greater, much more powerful, because I made Leviathan. In fact, I made everything. Therefore I am the greatest and strongest of everything that lives!" God is not afraid of Leviathan at all. Psalm 104:26 says that God made Leviathan to play in the sea. Play! To God, the sea monster is no more harmful than the little yellow duck you may have in your bathtub. Nothing even comes close to how great God is.

Because God is all-powerful, we never have to be afraid—of anything! God is much more powerful than the most powerful sea monster! God's children are safe with Him. When you are God's child, you never have to fear! We see in the later books of the Old Testament, and in the books of the New Testament, that the dragon will eventually be destroyed. Isaiah tells us that God will punish Leviathan, the dragon that is in the sea (Isa. 27:1). In Revelation (which describes the end of time), Jesus says that the dragon will be held captive and bound, and at the end of time will be destroyed. God's teaching about the dragon should be very comforting to us. There is much evil in the world that is stronger than we are—evil that we cannot tame—but God is much stronger than every evil thing. When we are afraid, we know that we can run to God who has the power to kill the greatest monster.



PREACH THE WORD

Every season of reformation and every hour of spiritual awakening has been ushered in by a recovery of biblical preaching. This cause and effect is timeless and inseparable. Noted Reformation historian, J. H. Merle D'Aubigné, wrote, "The only true reformation is that which emanates from the Word of God."¹ That is to say, as the pulpit goes, so goes the church.

Such was the case in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformers were raised up by God to lead this era. At the forefront, it was their recovery of expository preaching that helped launch this religious movement that turned Europe—and eventually Western civilization—upside down. With *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) as their battle cry, a new generation of biblical preachers restored the pulpit to its former glory and revived apostolic Christianity.

The same was true in the golden era of the Puritans in the seventeenth century. A recovery of biblical preaching spread like wildfire through the dry religion of Scotland and England. A resurgence of authentic Christianity came as an army of biblical expositors—John Owen, Jeremiah Burroughs, Samuel Rutherford, and others—marched upon the British Empire with an open Bible and uplifted voice. In its wake, the monarchy was shaken and history was altered.

The eighteenth century witnessed a similar awakening. The Bible-saturated preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and the Tennents, thundered through the early colonies. The Atlantic seaboard was electrified with the proclamation of the gospel, and New England was taken by storm. The Word was preached, souls were saved, and the kingdom expanded.

The fact is, the restoration of biblical preaching has always been the leading factor in any revival of genuine Christianity. Philip Schaff writes, "Every true progress in church history is conditioned by a new and deeper study of the Scriptures." That is to say, every great revival in the church has been ushered in by a return to expository preaching.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, preacher of Westminster Chapel London, stated, "The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the church, it is the greatest need of the world also." If the doctor's diagnosis is correct, and this writer believes it is, then a return to true preaching—biblical, expository preaching—is the greatest need in this critical hour. If a reformation is to come to the church, it must begin in the pulpit.

In his day, the prophet Amos warned of an approaching famine, a deadly drought that would cover the land; not an absence of mere food or water, for this scarcity would be far

more fatal. It would be a famine for hearing God's Word (Amos 8:11). Surely, the church today finds itself in such similar days of famine and drought. Tragically, exposition is being replaced with entertainment; doctrine with drama; theology with theatrics; and preaching with performance. What is so desperately needed today is for pastors to return to their highest calling—the divine summons to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:1–2).

What is expository preaching? The Genevan Reformer John Calvin explained, "Preaching is the public exposition of Scripture by the man sent from God, in which God Himself is present in judgment and in grace." In other words, God is unusually present, by His Spirit, in the preaching of His Word. Such preaching starts in a biblical text, stays in it, and shows its God-intended meaning in a life-changing fashion.

This was the final charge of Paul to young Timothy: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4:2). Such preaching necessitates declaring the full counsel of God in Scripture. The entire written Word must be expounded. No truth should be left untaught, no sin unexposed, no grace unoffered, no promise undelivered.

A heaven-sent revival will only come when Scripture is enthroned once again in the pulpit. There must be the clarion declaration of the Bible—the kind of preaching that gives a clear explanation of a biblical text with compelling application, exhortation, and appeal.

Every preacher must confine himself to the truths of Scripture. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. The man of God has nothing to say apart from the Bible. He must not parade his personal opinions in the pulpit, nor may he expound worldly philosophies. The preacher is limited to one task—preach the Word.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, "I would rather speak five words out of this book than 50,000 words of the philosophers. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God's Word into our sermons."² This remains the crying need of the hour.

May a new generation of strong men step forward and speak up—and may they do so loudly and clearly. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church.

1. J. H. Merle D'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1872), 606.

2. C. H. Spurgeon, "Come from the Four Winds, Oh Breath!" in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 38 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987).

PSALTER REVISION

Governing Principles (6): Music

In my last two articles I developed three reasons why the interdenominational committee was proposing changes to some of the music (tunes) of our *Psalter*:

- 1) the tunes must serve the lyrics well;
- 2) the tunes must serve the congregation by enabling her to sing the lyrics well, and
- 3) some Psalter numbers are rarely sung, raising the question whether a change of music would serve the congregations well. Although I developed these reasons, I did not invent them. One reason why some initially explored the idea of revising the Psalter was the recognition that “some tunes are difficult to sing due to their range or simply the nature of the tune.” When the PRC Synod approved the PRC’s participation in the project, it did so recognizing that “not every tune is appropriate to the content of the Psalm” and that “some tunes need to be re-pitched/re-keyed.”

As is the case with proposed changes to the format (layout) and text (words) of the Psalter, the committee is also guided in proposing changes to the music by principles which it has adopted and which the respective synods have approved. Having previously explained the principles regarding changes to the format and text, I now explain those principles regarding changes to the music.

PRINCIPLES REGARDING CHANGES TO MUSIC

The principles governing our evaluation of the music of the Psalter are these:

Music. We affirm the desire to sing excellent music in the Psalter. It is then the purpose of the committee to review the general quality of the music of the Psalter. It was noted that the Psalter should be designed for congregational (not choral) singing, while maintaining a range of simple to more complex tunes.

The general quality of the music/tunes will be considered along the following criteria:

- 1) Is the tune too difficult? Does it have too wide a range, inconsistent or difficult rhythms, awkward leaps, etc.?
- 2) Is the music aesthetically pleasing? Is the melody pleasing? Is the harmony appropriate?
- 3) Is the music suited for the text to which it has been assigned?
- 4) Does the music call undue attention to itself?
- 5) Does the music or tune have inappropriate associations?
- 6) Is the music pitched too high? Would this selection sound better in another key?

Again, the general quality of the music must be considered in relation to what is already familiar and will be

revised only if the music of worship would be stronger because of these changes.

Principles 1 and 6 pertain to the singing of the music; principles 2, 4, and 5 pertain to the nature of the musical selection; and principle 3 pertains to the relationship of the music to the lyrics.

PRINCIPLES 1 AND 6

In reference to principles 1 and 6, the committee is proposing to revise or replace some of the more “difficult” tunes. These tunes are not as well known, possibly because they are too difficult to sing. Psalter 180 may well be a case in point but it may also include some tunes that are well known and sung regularly, but are pitched too high, have too wide a range (for example, the lowest soprano note is a middle C and the highest is a high F), include awkward leaps (when one note is followed by a note that is about an octave or more higher than the previous), or include difficult rhythms.

In this regard, the committee proposes removing the notation to *ritard* (slow down) in most, if not all, instances. Often the music does not warrant a *ritard* and if the words in one stanza do warrant slowing down, the words in other stanzas do not necessarily call for a slower pace at the same point in the song. Psalter 220 is a good example of this.

Psalter 206 is an instance of a song with an awkward leap. In the soprano line, the fifth note is an A and the next note is a middle C (I am referring to the notes that accompany the syllables “we ren-”). In the next line of music, the third note is an A, followed by an E (“Thy won-”). Although the song was written as it currently appears in our Psalter, the downward leap from A to middle C seems unnatural, especially in light of the downward move from A to E in the next line. The congregation often—perhaps without realizing it—sings the soprano middle C as an E. The committee recommends raising the soprano and alto in the first line of music to an E (soprano) and middle C (alto).

In keeping with principle 6, several tunes are being lowered a half or in some cases a whole step. Many of these tunes had at least one high F in the soprano. Others, even if not having a high F, have a long sequence of notes in a high range (see the soprano notes above “mercy to me afford” in stanza one of Psalter 235). In other instances, the committee judged that a different key was more fitting to the lyrics or the emotions expressed in the song.

An inevitable consequence of a lowered tune is that, if the soprano note is lowered, so are the alto, tenor, and bass notes. Before deciding to recommend lowering a key signature, the committee recommends researching what effect this will have on these other parts.

PRINCIPLES 2, 4, AND 5

In reference to principles 2, 4, and 5, the committee is asking whether or not a tune is appropriate for congregational singing.

Because our Psalter is primarily intended for *congregational* singing rather than singing by a *choir*, the committee desires every tune to have complete harmonization for all four parts. This does not refer to instances in which the song combines the soprano and alto notes or the tenor and bass notes (for example, the tenor and bass of Psalter 45). Rather, it refers to those tunes in which one of the four parts includes rests while the others are to sing (the bass in the third system of Psalter 31; tenor and bass in the first four measures of Psalter 204, second tune; Psalters 219 and 226, among others). This is one reason why the committee is not recommending using the second tune of Psalter 204 and the tunes to Psalter 219 and 226. It is possible, though not certain, that the committee will recommend fully harmonizing some tunes (Psalter 190, for example).

Some harmonies, although written out fully, are still not conducive to congregational singing. For this reason, the committee proposes replacing the tune to Psalter 205. Also, although the committee has not yet begun to treat Psalters 244–413, it will evaluate the tune to Psalter 254 with this in mind. The tune is popular, at least in the PRC, but its harmonization is such that it requires a trained group of singers to sing the harmony well.

Not uncommonly, before a tune was set to a Psalter arrangement, it had been set to secular or Christmas music. The committee is evaluating whether or not this makes the tune less appropriate for congregational singing (principle 5). Several examples can be given. The second tune of Psalter 212 is set to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne.” Perhaps the association of that tune with a song commonly sung in bars is not as great today as it has been in the past, but this association is one reason why the committee proposes eliminating that tune. Another tune that is the committee is recommending to replace is “Materna” (Psalter 126), which is the tune to “America the Beautiful.”

The fact that a tune is set to other words is not in itself a reason to replace the tune. But the committee asks the question whether the association which is formed in our minds by using the tune of a popular hymn or other song makes the tune preferable for our use or not.

PRINCIPLE 3

Evaluating the relationship of tune to text requires a good understanding of the emotions that the Psalmist conveys in the Psalm, and a good sense of how music affects our moods and emotions. Some might consider these points to be entirely subjective. Without a doubt, there is a measure of subjectivity. However, those who study the Psalms and who understand music can come to conclusions about these matters which are not merely subjective. Many minds are helpful at this point. Even on the committee, some have a better sense of these

matters than others, and we only make a decision after hearing the input of all committee members.

Perhaps the classic example of this is Psalter 136. “Dust to dust, the mortal dies,” is sung to a tune that is constantly moving. But these words constitute a warning to God’s people and would be better sung with a more somber tune.

The current tune to Psalter 205 has a lilt to it, indicated by its rhythm, as well as by a wide range of jumps from lower to higher notes and down again. However, Psalm 74 is an expression of profound grief because of the judgments which God has sent on Israel. The tune and text do not match. Psalter 209 is another instance of a cry of grief on the part of the child of God. Although the tune to Psalter 209 is simpler and easier than that of Psalter 205, the tune does not inherently fit the mood of the lyrics. In some instances—Psalter 209 being one of them—the tune which is proposed for replacement is in a minor key, rather than a major key, in order to better convey the emotion of the Psalm.

One more example must suffice. Although the committee did not originally know whether it would reuse the second tune to Psalter 201, we judged that this tune fit well with the lyrics of Psalter 57. The tune is triumphant. Playing it with a clear trumpet at a lively pace makes the tune seem different than when played slowly with a soft flute. The words of Psalter 201 are more appropriate to a tune played slowly with a soft flute, but the words of Psalter 57 are majestic. We judged that the second tune of Psalter 201 fit the words of Psalter 57 well.

CONCLUSION

This brings to an end my explanation of the principles the committee is using to review our Psalter and recommend changes. In future articles, Lord willing, I will present case studies showing how the committee has applied these principles to specific Psalter numbers.

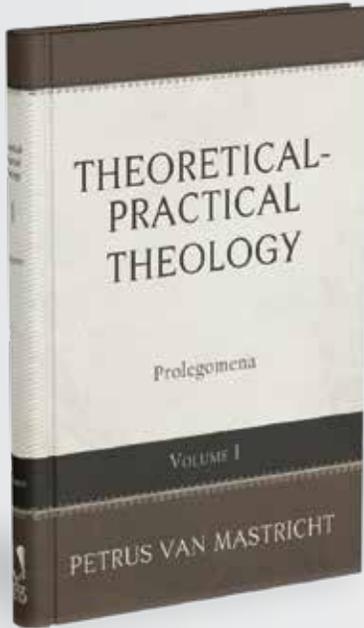
I conclude by restating what I said when I began these articles: my purpose has been to demonstrate that the revision committee is consciously asking the right questions and striving to find good answers to these questions. Evaluating music and poetry is inherently subjective; one likes one thing better, and another likes that. It follows that deciding whether any tune or set of lyrics should be revised is also at least partly subjective. However, the committee is doing its work according to these principles in order to minimize the subjectivity of the work.

1. Minutes of the Joint Psalter Revision Exploratory Meeting, January 13, 2015, Art. 4. a. 3), as found in the PRC Acts of Synod 2015, page 131, and the FRC Acts of Synod 2015, page 137.

2. PRC Acts of Synod 2016, Art. 49 B. 3. b. 2), page 62.

3. Report of the Interdenominational Psalter Revision Committee to the Synods of 2016, PRC Acts of Synod 2016, pages 168–69.

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Petrus van Mastricht

translated by Todd M. Rester, edited by Joel R. Beeke

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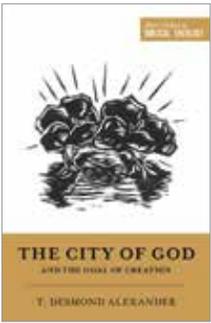


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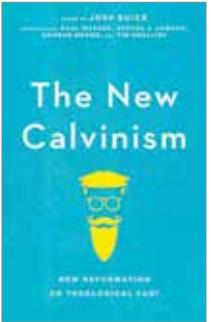


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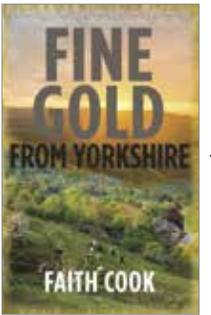
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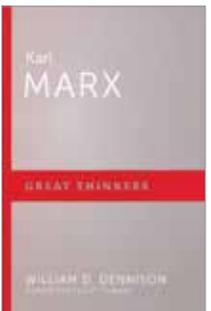
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PEER PRESSURE

Why is peer pressure so powerful? How can I resist sinful peer pressure?

Suggested Reading: 1 John 2:15–17

Friendship is a blessing from God, given to Adam and Eve in Paradise. God did not create us to be alone, but to live in friendship with others (Gen. 2:18). However, since our sinful fall, who we choose as friends is extremely important, since friends can influence each other either for evil or good. Godly friends positively encourage one another to live lives filled with love to God and others. Ungodly friends encourage one another to live lives filled with love for worldliness. Worldliness is described in today's suggested reading as the *lust of the flesh*, the *lust of the eyes*, and the *pride of life* (1 John 2:15–17).

Since the fall, everyone has an innate fear of loneliness. We want to have friends and to feel included—to be accepted, not rejected—to be respected, not laughed at. Even when we pray and strive to be a godly friend and choose godly friends, we still live in an ungodly, worldly culture that exerts a negative influence upon us. This world constantly tempts us to sin—to be accepted and included—and not thought of as weird and ostracized.

How can we resist sinful peer pressure? The following pointers are helpful:

- *Understand its strength*—Avoid people, places, and activities that you know ahead of time will apply strong pressure to be more worldly minded.
- *Be true to God*—Pray and strive to stay focused on—and walk in the way of—God's Word.

- *Be true to yourself*—If you love God, do not give up who you really are; strengthen your convictions and confidence to be true to them.
- *A true friend is one who seeks your best*—"Friends" who try to influence or pressure you to sin are not true friends.
- *Time is short*—Your teen years are only a few years of your life; stand strong by God's grace during these few years when sinful peer pressures can be strongest.
- *Focus on the long-term results*—Many carry life-long painful memories and scars due to sins committed during their teenage years; focus on the eternal ramifications of succumbing to peer pressure.
- *Lead rather than follow*—Pray that God would help you be a positive influence rather than following sinful peer pressure.
- *Retreat is better than defeat*—It is far better to walk away from sinful temptations than to succumb to them.
- *God's blessing is better than man's*—God's blessing for those who are persecuted for His name's sake is far more valuable than the shallow praises of sinful peers.
- *Inward thoughts often differ from outward words and actions*—People who loudly encourage you to sin and outwardly mock you if you do not, may inwardly respect you much more when you stand firmly for your principles rather than bow to sinful pressure.

Are you praying and attempting to be a godly friend? To exert positive influence on your peers? What helps you to do this? What hinders you from doing so? How can you grow in both resisting sinful peer pressure and being a positive influence to those you interact with in the world?



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Comes from Psalm 144:12 where it says, "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; That our daughters may be as pillars, sculptured in palace style."

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Big Weeds and Little Weeds



Have you ever helped your mom or dad with gardening? Maybe you dropped seeds into a little hole, covered them up, and watered them. Maybe you picked peppers or cut flowers. Have you ever had a garden of your own? When our three children were young, I divided the garden into sections and we each planted our favorite fruits or vegetables and tended our section throughout the summer. We had a sense of wonder as the seeds would germinate and sprout or when we saw a flower blossom turn into a zucchini. Then, in late summer or early fall, we had the joy and reward of reaping the harvest and eating the delicious melons, cucumbers, and more.

Adam was the first gardener. He loved his work. As he tended the beautiful garden of Eden, the mist watered it. He and Eve would enjoy the tasty produce. They had sweet communion with God as they walked and talked together in the cool of the day.

But then things went terribly wrong. Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and gave it to Adam. They were driven out of the garden because of their sin. Now Adam had to do the work he had done before, but it wouldn't be enjoyable anymore. He would sweat. Rocks, thorns, and weeds would get in the way. He would have to work much harder to put food on the table.

God could have punished Adam and Eve with death the moment they disobeyed. But instead, He chose to be kind and show mercy. Life would be hard and they would experience sadness. But God offered the gospel right away. He redeemed Adam and Eve, through Jesus Christ, who would later die on the cross to pay for their sins.

The word "redeem" means "to buy back." God has also redeemed many other parts of life so that we will have joy and not total misery. Gardening is difficult work, but we experience joy when we see the work we have accomplished—when we eat the food that we have grown in our gardens. We experience joy when we see the beautiful flowers and marvel at all the living greenery around us.

I don't love gardening, but I do like it quite a bit. One of my favorite things about working in the garden is that it makes me feel closer to God. I love my Creator so much when I see the amazing plants He has created. I feel small before Him because I realize I can't make one single blade of grass yet He makes so many varieties of plants! I can't even draw a realistic picture of a flower yet He sculpts each living flower and makes them grow! Do you realize how awesome God is?

Gardening has taught me many spiritual lessons. Once, when I was very busy, I let the weeds in my garden get out of control. Looking out my window, I thought, "This is bad, but at least they are tall, large weeds. The ground is moist so I should just be able to pull them out and my garden will look much better in no time." So that is what I did. But there were a few problems. The weeds were so big that the roots took big clumps of dirt with them. I didn't want to lose any good soil, so I shook the dirt off of them. But there were still large divots in the ground—huge scars where the large weeds used to be. And then, when I had removed all the big weeds, I saw many smaller weeds that I hadn't noticed before.

Weeds are a lot like sin. Weeds grow everywhere, even though we didn't plant them. Sin grows in our hearts—it lives everywhere—and crops up in unexpected places. Weeds often grow faster than good plants. Sin often grows faster than our good actions.

If we let a weed grow, the roots will grow deeper, making it harder to pull out. When we do pull it out, it will take good dirt with it and leave a huge scar. Likewise, when we let sin grow, it becomes a habit deep within our hearts and minds. Once we finally do uproot it, it will leave a huge scar in our lives. For example, if we tell a few lies, then we have to tell a few more lies to cover up the first ones. When we finally tell the truth, our friends and parents won't trust us as much—so we'll be tempted to go back to our habit of lying.

Another lesson gardening teaches me is that when God convicts us and reveals to us our *big* sins (and the Holy Spirit gives us power to fight them) then we'll also begin to notice the weeds of our *little* sins. Thankfully, the little weeds are easier to pull out and don't leave as big a scar.

Look all around you and you will see many spiritual lessons in God's creation. Have you been redeemed from the weeds of your sins? Pray for God's help to pull out the weeds of the big sins of your life but also to help you uproot the little sins before they get bigger. Nip them in the bud! Be watchful and pray that you will recognize sin, hate sin, and weed it out. Pray that Jesus's death and resurrection would be your life—that you would be a beautiful new creation, glorifying God in all that you do.

Mary Beeke is a homemaker, wife of the editor, and member of the Grand Rapids Heritage Reformed Congregation.

BIBLE QUIZ

for children

KRISTIN MESCHKE

PSALM 19

God shows Himself to us in His beautiful, amazing creation all around us. Psalm 19 says the heavens declare His glory! All of the animals, the mountains, the oceans, the sun and moon tell us *how* great He is, but the Lord gave His Word as a special message to show us *who* He is. It is in His Word we learn that we are sinners and need to know Him as our Savior and Redeemer. You can read about this in Psalm 19 and find the missing words to fill in the blanks and complete the crossword puzzle.

In verses 7–9, we learn how we can know God and live for Him in Christ:

“The law of the Lord is a) _____, converting the soul:

The testimony of the Lord is b) _____, making wise the simple.

The statutes of the Lord are c) _____, rejoicing the heart:

The commandment of the Lord is d) _____, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is e) _____, enduring for ever:

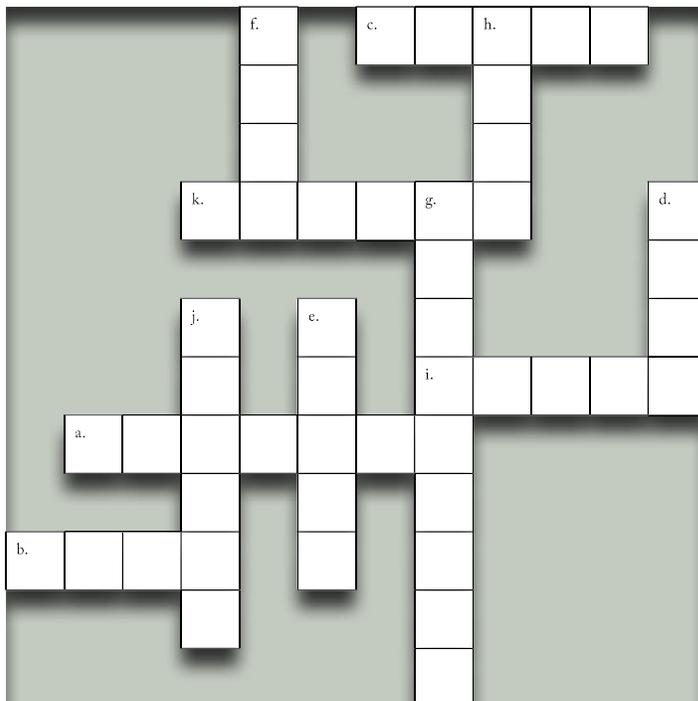
The judgments of the Lord are f) _____ and g) _____ altogether.”

Verse 10 shows us how valuable God’s Word is and how much we should treasure it:

“More to be desired are they than h) _____, yea, than much fine _____: sweeter also than i) _____ and the honeycomb.”

And in verse 11, we read how God’s Word guides us:

“By them is thy servant j) _____: and in keeping of them there is great k) _____.”



ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE

1. Christ
2. salvation
3. justified
4. power
5. tenderhearted
6. great
7. wavering
8. lowliness
9. all things

Desperate for Strawberries (1)

Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil (Prov. 3:7).

“I can bring cupcakes,” volunteered Ella.

“I can bring juice boxes,” Mark announced.

“What about you, Margaret? Is there anything you’d like to bring?” asked Miss Merritt.

The students in Miss Merritt’s class were going to have a special picnic at the end of the school year, and every student was eager to sign up for a contribution. Margaret’s mind raced with different possibilities, and then she smiled. “I’ll bring wild strawberries and whipped cream.”

“Really?” said Miss Merritt. “I didn’t know that anybody could still find wild strawberries. I’ve had them once and they are delicious!”

“I know just the spot,” said Margaret proudly. “I’ll pick enough for everyone!”

By the time Margaret got home from school, ate a snack, and did her homework, it was already 4:30. “Mom, can I go pick some wild strawberries?” asked Margaret. “I said I’d bring them to our class picnic.”

Mom glanced up from her ironing. “Well, it’s already getting late, but we can eat a little later than usual, and if you take Andy along with you I can get more work done. Just be back by 5:30 and don’t go over Mr. Carter’s hill.”

Margaret’s younger brother, Andy, who was three years old, had been listening to the conversation and immediately jumped up. “Take me, take me, take me!” he shouted excitedly. Margaret went to the garage and returned with a large tin pail for herself and a smaller bucket for Andy. “I can hold it myself,” Andy announced, grabbing the small bucket.

The two siblings walked quickly along the fields and, crossing the rail fence, they walked along the edge of the forest. The huge trees cast a cool shade as they sauntered along, their eyes carefully looking for strawberries.

“Here’s one,” shouted Andy, and sure enough, he had found the first red ripe strawberry. “Can I eat it?” he immediately asked.

“Well,” Margaret thought. “We can each eat our first one that we see, but then no more.” Andy popped his in his mouth and smiled. The berry was small but delicious! As they continued to wander along the forest’s edge, Margaret started to become discouraged. After over half an hour of searching, the bottom of her bucket was hardly covered. Andy, who was getting a little tired of the hunt, decided to run ahead. His bucket bounced alongside him as he ran around a bush.

Margaret smiled and bent down to search for another strawberry when she suddenly heard him scream.

“A wolf! A wolf!” Andy turned around and raced back towards his big sister. His little legs were trying to keep up with his body, but he fell flat on his stomach at the same moment a big black animal bounced over him. Margaret stood frozen in fear, looking at her helpless brother and the big beast.

“Rollo, Rollo,” called a cheerful voice. There was a crackling in the bushes and their neighbor, Mr. Carter, appeared. Margaret instantly realized that the scary beast was actually their neighbor Mr. Carter’s big black Newfoundland dog.

Mr. Carter reached Andy first and helped him up to his feet while Rollo sat nearby, looking very penitent. Margaret rushed forward and helped pick up the spilled berries and wiped her brother’s tears away.

“Sorry about that,” Mr. Carter apologized. “Rollo is a big, friendly baby who wouldn’t hurt anyone. I think he was trying to play,” he explained. “But are you kids picking berries? You won’t find many here. But if you go around this field and follow the trail a little ways down, you’ll see a stream and there are a lot of berries that way. But it’s too late to go there now.” Mr. Carter gave a whistle and Rollo bounded to his side. They strode off back into the woods and the two children were once more alone.

For the next ten minutes, Margaret and Andy went back to search for strawberries along the forest’s edge, but they were few and far between.

“Let’s go to the stream, Maggie,” Andy begged. “My pail isn’t even half full!”

Margaret had been thinking the exact same thing, but now she hesitated. “You know, Mr. Carter said that it was too far to go tonight.”

“I can walk quickly all the way,” Andy protested. “And you want lots of berries for your picnic.”

“*Mom didn’t tell us not to go by the stream,*” Margaret thought. “*She only said not to go over the Carter’s hill.*” But in her heart, Margaret knew that her mother had meant that she should not go too far. At the same time, however, she desperately wanted more strawberries and the stream was only a little further on. And so Margaret silenced the voice inside that was telling her to obey her mom, and instead she grabbed her brother’s hand. “Let’s go!” she said.

(to be continued...)

Andrea Scholten is a school teacher, a writer for children, and a member of the HRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Adapted from *Children’s Story Hour*.



and announcements

Obituary notices, church events, and marriage and anniversary notices will be printed free of charge and under no obligation of a gift received. Other announcements and/or requests will be approved by the editorial committee on an individual basis as received.

REPORT OF THE 2018 HRC SYNOD

The concurrent synodical sessions of the FRC and HRC were preceded by a joint prayer service on Monday, June 4, in the sanctuary of the Hamilton FRC. This service was opened by Rev. John Procee (Bornholm FRC). Rev. Pieter van der Hoek (Burgessville HRC) then preached a sermon on Zechariah 4:6a, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."

On Tuesday, June 5, both Synods convened in the facilities of the Jordan HRC. The separate individual sessions of each Synod were preceded by a combined devotional opening session each morning conducted respectively by Dr. Michael Barrett (HRC) and Dr. David Murray (FRC).

The HRC Synod began by reflecting on the following special events that had occurred in the denomination during the previous year:

- In March, Dr. Beeke commemorated 40 years of gospel ministry;
- The Harrison congregation moved into her own church building;
- Children were born to Rev. and Mrs. Slingerland, and Rev. and Mrs. Serafini;
- The Chilliwack congregation purchased a church building and plans to move in September 2018, God willing;
- Rev. David Van Brugge accepted a call and has been installed in the Brantford FRC.

God's continuing provision for each congregation was expressed in all of the spiritual welfare reports. In spite of the fact that each congregation has its own challenges, we were gladdened that, for Christ's sake, our God is evidently blessing the ministry of Word and sacraments in the churches.

Seven denominations with which the HRC has a correspondence relationship were represented. After their delegates addressed Synod, delegates from the HRC reciprocated their warm fraternal greetings.

Synod decided that the Psalter Review Committee should continue with its work and gave approval to local HRC consistories to provide feedback directly to this committee. (For detailed information about the work of this committee, please visit the following web-site: www.thepsalter.net).

After having met in a combined synodical session to discuss the

work and recommendations of the FRC-HRC Unity Committee, the HRC Synod adopted the following statement as a biblical foundation to continue to pursue progressive ways in which unity between our denominations can be fostered:

While we have different histories with each producing its own ethos, and while we certainly have our weaknesses which need ongoing reformation, we believe there are many reasons why we as denominations should unite. Our Lord prayed for the unity of His people in John 17:21, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." In an effort to manifest the unity we have in Christ with all believers, we are committing ourselves to continuing efforts to forge organizational unity.

In summary, we may say that we were mutually encouraged by the evident brotherly fellowship and cooperation between the two denominations. In light of the growing fraternal relationship with the FRC, it was agreed that our Synods will again meet concurrently in 2019, the Lord willing.

With gratitude to the Lord, we may report that, after a period of five years in which no students were accepted, Mr. John Byl, Mr. Daryl Dedert, Mr. Isaac Epp, Mr. Martijn Heijboer, and Mr. Simon Yin were accepted as HRC theological students. We are humbled by the fact that the Lord evidently has been pleased to hear our prayers to send forth more laborers into the harvest.

Synod also interviewed Dr. Adriaan Neele, the director of the PRTS PhD program. His application to be admitted as an HRC pastor was received favorably, paving the way for the transfer of his ministerial credentials from the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk (*Netherlands Reformed Church*) in South Africa to the HRC. The Kinnelon congregation was asked by Synod to extend a formal call to him as a professor in our seminary.

Dr. Neele, on behalf of the board and staff of PRTS, gave a presentation to a joint session of the FRC and HRC Synods regarding the long term strategic goals of PRTS.

Upon the recommendation of the Grand Rapids consistory, Synod agreed to admit the New Hope Reformed Fellowship congregation of Dorr, Michigan, as an HRC congregation on a two-year provisional basis. During this time, the consistory of the



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Grand Rapids HRC will retain oversight of this congregation and report annually to our Synod.

After faithfully serving as our missionary in South Africa, Dr. Arthur Miskin was granted emeritus status. We are glad that his recent cancer-related surgery went well, and we wish our dear brother and his wife, Sonja, the Lord's richest blessings for the future.

One of the churches requested advice on whether the Lord's Supper can be administered to shut-ins. Synod responded that the Lord's Supper can only be administered within the context of a public worship service and thus not in a private setting.

In light of the growing challenges presented by our increasingly apostate culture, Synod adopted the "Nashville Statement on Biblical Sexuality" to provide our consistories and congregations with much-needed guidance and direction.

Finally, it was decided that the 2019 HRC Synod will be held on June 3-5, 2019, the Lord willing, in the facilities of the Dundas FRC.

In conclusion, we wish to humbly acknowledge the King of the Church, our blessed and exalted Lord Jesus Christ, for so evidently guiding us by His Word and Spirit, as He has done so graciously during the 25-year history of our federation. To Him alone be all the glory for having confirmed once more that He will not forsake the work of His hands!

The Moderamen of Synod,
Rev. David Lipsy, *Chairman*
Rev. Jan Neels, *Vice Chairman*
Rev. Bartel Elshout, *Clerk*
Elder Mark Fintelman, *Treasurer*

PASTORAL CALL

The HRC of Grand Rapids, Michigan has extended a pastoral call to Rev. Scott Dibbet who currently serves the FRC in Lacombe, Alberta.

OBITUARIES

SLOTSEMA, Marvin, age 88, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, passed away on Saturday, May 12, 2018. He was preceded in death by his brothers Harv, Andy, and Jim Slotsema, and by his grandson Eric VanRee. He is survived by his loving wife of 64 years, Wilma; his children, Sally and Dan VanRee, Susan and David Gift, Steven and Kristi Slotsema, Shirley and Michael DeBat, and Larry and Brenda Slotsema; 16 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, 2 Timothy 1:12; Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

SYSWERDA, Alice M., age 68, of Grandville, Michigan, passed away on Saturday, May 26, 2018. She was preceded in death by her parents, Harry and Stella Syswerda. Alice is lovingly remembered by her brother and sister-in-law, Joe and Pauline Syswerda; her nephews, Jeffery Syswerda, Eric and Vandy Syswerda, and Brent Syswerda; her uncle, John Syswerda; her aunt, Doris Luchies; several great-nephews, great-nieces, and cousins. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Psalm 62:5-8).



PROJECT HIGHLIGHT:
Russian Magazine
[Print & Distribution]

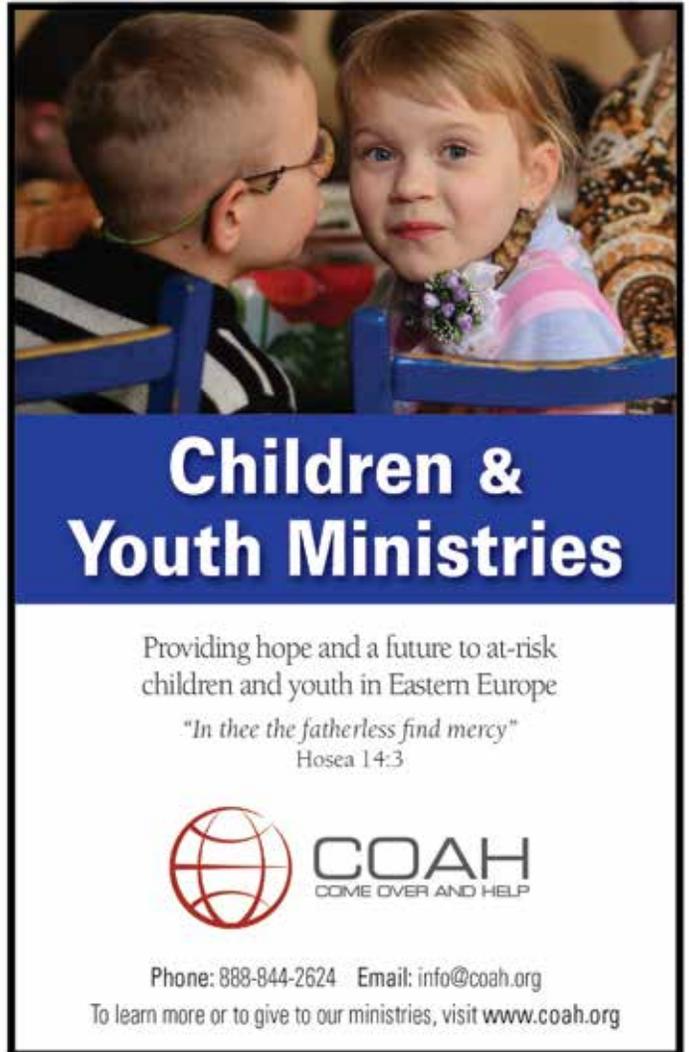
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The 26th volume of the Russian magazine has just been produced and is about to be sent to readers in some 28 countries. The goal of this project is to reach out to Russian speaking Jewish people with articles that present the reformed basis of our faith. The response by the recipients usually results in 300 to 400 letters from the readers, with questions or comments on various theological or other issues. It is a great ministry for proclaiming the whole council of God beyond Israeli borders.
(from Grace & Truth Congregation newsletter)

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NATIONAL NEWS

IN WHOM DO WE TRUST...?

As lava overtakes parts of Hawaii's Big Island, local residents offer sacrifices to the "goddess" Pele, in an attempt to appease her wrath and stop the lava flows. When faced with a similar problem with Baal worshipers on Mount Carmel in 906 BC, the prophet Elijah prayed, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:37). After fire from heaven consumed the burnt sacrifice and the altar, 1 Kings 18:39 states, "And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE VISITORS TOP HALF A MILLION IN FIRST SIX MONTHS

The Museum of the Bible, the newest tourist attraction located near the National Mall in the U.S. Capitol, has drawn 565,000 visitors since it opened six months ago, according to museum figures.

More than 1,700 groups have visited the high-tech Museum of the Bible, which sits two blocks from the National Mall, art galleries, and other museums. Officials said visitors travel an average of 260 miles to the 430,000 square-foot museum.

The museum cost \$500 million and took three years to build. Co-founded by Steve Green, the president of the Hobby Lobby craft store business, it opened with 1,600 items in its permanent collection, about three-quarters of which are Bibles and biblical manuscripts. (**Adelle M. Banks, writer**)

AMERICAN MUSLIMS ARE LOSING THEIR FAITH FASTER THAN CHRISTIANS

Many in the media, as well as many theologians and pollsters, seem to agree that data shows that American Christianity is in steep decline. A series of polls over the past few years has revealed that the church is losing attendees at an alarming rate—particularly millennials. But while analysts will continue to assess and contest the validity of such studies, one thing is clear—there is another faith community experiencing an even steeper decline, and very few are talking about it. That religion is Islam.

A Pew survey taken earlier this year shows that, while America's Muslim population has risen by some 50 percent in the last decade, 23 percent of those raised as Muslim no longer identify with that faith. This means that approximately one in four Muslims in this country have left their faith.

There is also an important factor that seems to increase the likelihood of an exodus from the Islamic faith, and that is immigration. According to Pew, "one striking difference between former Muslims and those who have always been Muslim is in the share who hail from Iran. Those who have left Islam are more likely to be immigrants from Iran (22%) than those who have not switched faiths (8%)."

Pew found that most of those who were converting to Islam had been raised in the Christian faith. "About half of all converts to Islam (53%) identified as Protestant before converting; another 20% were Catholic. And roughly one in five (19%) volunteered that they had no religion before converting to Islam," Pew noted.

Pew Research Center estimates that there were roughly 3.45 million Muslims of all ages living in the U.S. in 2017. The organization also noted that Muslims made up about 1.1% of the total U.S. population. (**Will Maule, author**)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

IRISH VOTERS SAY "YES" TO LEGALIZING ABORTION

Ireland has decided to legalize abortion, despite its reputation as one of the staunchest Catholic countries in the world.

In a referendum on the 8th Amendment, which basically banned abortion, the Irish people—by a factor of more than two-to-one—have voted to repeal that amendment to their constitution.

Election official Barry Ryan says that more than 1.4 million voters—66 percent of those who cast valid ballots—favored repealing the 8th Amendment of the Irish Constitution, while roughly 724,000 wanted to keep the abortion ban in place.

"We are deeply saddened to learn that many Irish people voted against love and life by repealing the 8th Amendment," March for Life President Jeanne Mancini stated. "Americans know from experience that there will be many grave and irreversible consequences of this decision, including the loss of precious lives."

Catherine Glenn Foster, of the AUL (Americans United for Life), pointed out that her group played a pivotal role in creating the 8th Amendment back in 1979, "making Ireland one of the strongest pro-life nations in Europe. Today, the AUL legal team is saddened that the people of Ireland have paved the way for abortion-on-demand in their country." (**Paul Strand | Christian World News**)

FOCUS ON MISSIONS

"MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF HUMANITY WILL NEVER HEAR ABOUT JESUS"

May 20 marked Pentecost Sunday, the anniversary of when the Holy Spirit fell upon and empowered Christ's disciples to take His Good News to the whole world. But this year, Pentecost Sunday was also known as the International Day of the Unreached.

Billions of people aren't getting the chance to learn about the Good News. According to Wayne Pederson of the Alliance for the Unreached, more than a third of humanity will likely never hear a message about Jesus—unless the church does something about it.

"Out of the seven billion people on planet Earth, about 40 percent of the population have no opportunity to hear the gospel where they live, in their location," Pederson told CBN News.

A May 20 Facebook Live event highlighted how the 11 ministries involved with Alliance for the Unreached spread the gospel. For example, each year World Mission puts more than 40,000 solar-powered audio Bibles into the hands of millions of people.

"There are many parts of the world where literacy is less than 30 percent," Pederson explained, "so you can hand out printed Bibles all day long and people aren't going to read them. But putting the Bible on an audio player in their own language, they'll listen."

World Mission's Greg Kelley remembered giving one of these audio Bibles to a senior citizen in Kenya.

"I had the privilege to meet this man who was 82 years old who had never read a word in his life," Kelley shared in a World Mission video. The Kenyan listened for a while, then turned to Kelley and his companions. "And the words that came out of his mouth have impacted us just in a dramatic way as he said, 'Your God speaks my language,'" Kelley recalled.

"If we've been touched by the love of Christ and experienced His salvation, His forgiveness, the promise of eternal life," says Kelley, "if we've experienced that, any of us should want to share it with our next-door neighbor or our neighbor around the world." (**CBN News**)

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP (3): The Problems

Last time we considered several personal issues we face when making confession of faith and joining a local church as a member. This article will consider several other issues you might wrestle with as you make this weighty decision.

Let me ask you this question, “Are you ready to be a communer or do you simply want to be a consumer?” Too often in today’s church, people are tempted to ask, “What’s in it for me?” This runs contrary to every single picture that we considered in the first article regarding the vine, the body, and the building.

Church membership, by definition, is not about you and what you might gain from it. It is about Christ and the rest of His body. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ means dying to self and living for Him—it means giving as He gave. Membership in the church is not an opportunity for us to have the church cater to our needs or our desires. Of course, there are legitimate desires and needs that need to be met as we gather for worship and fellowship, but the first problem we face is this: *our hearts are selfish and naturally want what appeals to us.* We become *consumers* instead of *communers*. It is not a question about what you can gain from the church—there will be much to gain—but the question is “How can you serve?” Christ serves His Bride, and that is the beautiful example you are called to follow when you join His Bride as a member.

Another argument that people often have against joining the church is this: *the church is out of date and out of touch.* Culture, rather than Scripture, often (sadly) influences the way people think about church. As young people, you especially feel the pinch of this challenge in making confession of faith and becoming a member of Christ’s church. The challenge expresses itself this way: the church is out-of-date; the church is dry, boring, and irrelevant; the church does not speak to my life or my situation. How many times have you heard that? The preaching, which must always be central, has to speak to the whole man—head (mind), heart (will and emotions), and hands (actions)—but how many times is this used as an excuse by people to find something that appeals to the flesh and leads to sacrificing truth for emotionalism? Some say the church is out of touch. In today’s digital generation this is a huge challenge. But the gospel truth of God is timeless, bridging the generations.

Another problematic perspective when committing to a church is that *the grass often seems greener on the other side.* Your friends or siblings may speak to you about how their church does things differently. Their preacher may wear jeans and his shirt untucked. They have a band. Their preaching is relevant, genuine, and authentic. People are friendlier there. Their brand is more popular in the area where you live. They put the proverbial “hip” in discipleship. After all, that’s the church where everybody else goes. Your church definitely has flaws from that perspective—it’s too small, it focuses on preaching the gospel,

it focuses on the sacraments, it focuses on faithfulness to the Lord, fellowship, mutual accountability, and evangelism. These apparent “flaws” are not flaws at all, but rather biblical marks of the church. Don’t fall prey to an emotional appeal to join one church or another but weigh your decision according to Scripture and what God says the church ought to be.

There is another phenomenon that young people face in today’s culture: *independence.* In North America we have this sense of rugged individualism that says, “Why do I need the church? I’ll go on Sunday, but why do I need to fellowship after church? Why do I need to go to prayer meetings? Why do I need the accountability and help of others in the church?” But did you realize that a life of holiness in Scripture is almost always carried out in the presence of one another? A life of holiness is lived out in marriage as it is in the corporate life of the church. This appeals to both married and single young people. The Apostle Paul’s encouragements and commands to holiness are rooted in the gospel, but also in the context of living with “one another.” Read through his letters and be convicted of the need to join the church and be ready to be transformed through your interactions with fellow believers, not just on Sundays, but through the ministries of the church such as prayer meetings, mid-week worship, and evangelistic outreach.

While there are more problems that we could highlight, the last one that we will consider in this article is that of *hypocrisy*, of being hurt by people in the church. Perhaps you see people who profess to be Christians who walk contrary to the Word of God. Maybe you were swindled by Christians, suffered abuse from Christians, heard swearing from the lips of Christians, and so you conclude, “The church is full of hypocrites.” Because of the actions and words of others, you might look at the church and say, “That’s not for me.” Hypocrisy and abuse are painful. It might require looking elsewhere for a church. There are instances of abuse that require separation. What I am referring to here though, is simply using the behavior of others to perhaps excuse our own hypocrisy or sin, or a sinful desire to follow the path of least resistance, or the path that best suits our desires rather than Scripture’s mandate.

Be wise in how you approach church membership and confession of faith. Examine your heart and its motives. Remember the advice of Charles Spurgeon who said, “If I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect, I should never have joined one at all; and the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us...the church is faulty, but that is no excuse for your not joining it, if you are the Lord’s. Nor need your own faults keep you back, for the church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by grace.”

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THE LORD MY PASTURE SHALL PREPARE

The Lord my pasture shall prepare
And feed me with a shepherd's care;
His presence shall my wants supply
And guard me with a watchful eye;
My noonday walks He shall attend
And all my midnight hours defend.

When in the sultry glebe I faint
Or on the thirsty mountain pant,
To fertile vales and dewy meads
My weary, wandering steps He leads,
Where peaceful rivers, soft and slow,
Amid the verdant landscape flow.

Though in the paths of death I tread,
With gloomy horrors overspread,
My steadfast heart shall fear no ill,
For Thou, O Lord, art with me still;
Thy friendly crook shall give me aid
And guide me through the dreadful shade.

Though in a bare and rugged way,
Through devious lonely wilds, I stray,
Thy bounty shall my pains beguile;
The barren wilderness shall smile,
With sudden greens and herbage crowned,
And streams shall murmur all around.

—JOSEPH ADDISON

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