

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO TO EVERY SINNER

God has no desire to punish a single person. “*As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*” (Ezekiel 33:11). He wants to have mercy upon all (Romans 11:32) and sent His Son to “*taste of death for every man*” (Hebrews 2:9).

God has no desire to send a single sinner to the place of punishment. He “*is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (II Peter 3:9).

So if God does not want to punish sinners, what does He want to do to them?

He wants to hug them. The first thing the loving father did to the prodigal boy was to hug him; he “*fell on his neck, and kissed him*” (Luke 15:20). That father represents God and that boy represents a sinner returning from the devil’s far country, so a fair deduction is that God longs to—spiritually speaking—wrap His omnipotent arms around each sinner who turns to Him.

He wants to take them home with Him. The second thing the loving father did was to restore the boy to his former position as a son in the family (Luke 15:22-24). Sleep in the servant’s quarters? The father wouldn’t hear of it. His son would get back his old room at the big house. When God forgives, He restores the offender to his former position of love and grace.

As the Civil War neared its conclusion, the war hawks of the North asked Abraham Lincoln what he would do with the rebellious southerners. He replied, “I’ll treat them as if they had not gone away.” That’s what God longs to do, and ultimately He wants all of us to live with Him in the “big house” (many mansions) of heaven (John 14:1-2).

He wants to adopt them (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5-7). The devil is the father of sinners (John 8:44), but God longs to adopt each person into His eternal family. One concept tied to forgiveness is reconciliation, which is a social concept. With sin, we are estranged (separated) from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). In forgiveness, Jesus’ blood satisfies God’s justice and allows us to draw near to Him as He draws near to us (Romans 3:23-26; Ephesians 2:13; James 4:8). He wants to give us a new name (Isaiah 62:2; Acts 11:26), new standing, new brothers and sisters (I Timothy 3:15), and an inheritance (I Peter 1:4).

He wants to heal them. Sin renders our souls sick, cut, and diseased (Isaiah 1:5-6; Matthew 9:12; I Corinthians 11:30), but the Great Physician longs to bind every wound, pouring in oil and wine (Matthew 13:15; Mark 4:12). He wants to make us “sound” (II Timothy 1:7; Titus 2:2).

He wants to pay their bills. Most of us dread the monthly debits and bills that have become a part of most Americans’ lives. But there are debts that we incur for which there are no monthly reminders. Our sins have racked up quite a debt in God’s court. (The word *sin*, in its various forms, occurs 825 times in the Bible, and many more times than this in our lives.) Just as violations of civil laws (speeding, fishing out of season, failure to pay taxes) have fines assigned to them, so violations of God’s laws get us “fines” with God (Matthew 6:12). These debts will come due on Judgment Day.

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

THE KICKER

The place of the kicker in NFL history is an interesting study. For many years, kickers were not held in very high esteem. Consider the following.

In 1971 when Marv Levy went to the Washington Redskins to coach special teams for George Allen, there were only two full-time special team coaches in the league. Usually, special team duties were simply added to another coach's responsibility and received little work. However, the next season when the Redskins blocked fifteen kicks, including one that pulled them to within seven of the undefeated Dolphins in Super Bowl VII, others teams in the league took notice.

The fact that Jan Stenerud is the only player in the Pro Football Hall of Fame for his kicking speaks volumes about how kicking was viewed in the early days of the NFL.

If you are a professional football fan, then you know that a great deal more emphasis is placed on kickers and special teams today. Today, top kickers command multi-million dollar salaries. With just over 46 percent of games being decided by 7 points or less and 24 percent of games being decided by 3 points or less (in the last 20 years), the emphasis on kicking seems warranted. The kicker can be, and often is, the difference between a win or a loss.

I have told you all of these football facts to make a point. I am afraid that many congregations look at some of their members in the way the NFL teams used to look at kickers and other special teams players. They emphasize a few "important" players but overlook others.

Of course, God in His wisdom has always emphasized the importance of every member. Paul emphasized to the Corinthians that the foot was not to say, "*Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body*" (I Corinthians 12:15). Furthermore, the head was not to say to the feet, "*I have not need of thee*" (I Corinthians 12:21). God put every member into the body for a reason. Every member in the body is important—even the foot.

The health and happiness of the body are dependent upon each of its members. Whether the team that we are a part of wins or loses will depend in part upon how we see the "little" members of the team. If we realize their importance and give time and attention to them, they will often make the difference in the success that we enjoy.

-Wade Webster

When God forgives, however, He removes the notation of the offense from His record, (Acts 3:19) and He grants remission of the sin debt (Matthew 26:28; Acts 2:38).

When God forgives, He remembers the sin no more forever (Hebrews 8:12). God blots out the knowledge and history of sin (Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34).

He wants to give them a good night's sleep. Oh the agony that many feel in the quiet of the night! They desire to relive life and not make the same mistakes, to be a better person, to fix the hurt they've done to others...on and on the mind runs. This longing for release for many manifests itself in seeking to forget with alcohol and drugs, come-and-go sexual experiences, extra hours, work, and vain pursuits of power, money, and things.

God has a better way to get a good night's sleep. Sin does render us guilty (Exodus 34:7; Romans 3:19; I John 3:4) and punishable (Matthew 25:46; Mark 16:16), but forgiveness "justifies" (Romans 3:24-25; Acts 13:38-39). God grants us a full pardon (Psalm 25:11; Numbers 14:19-20). This means that God no longer holds us accountable for the offenses—the guilt is gone!

The New Testament word *forgiveness* (*apo*, "from," and *hiemi* "to send") literally means, "letting go; forgetting—as though it never happened; loosing from a debt; to send away (as from a debt); to bestow a favor unconditionally." Every bad thought we ever thought is as if we had not thought it; every bad deed we ever did is as if we had not done it; every bad word we ever said is as if we had not said it; and every good deed we should have done, but did not, is as if we had done it.

Jesus never met a man He would not save. Look through the Gospel records and see for yourself. You will never find Him saying, "I wish I could help you, but there's nothing I can do." You will never hear Him say, "Your case is too difficult for me." He doesn't leave any inkling of unwillingness or inability. He died for the sins of the world—all of them. He shed His blood for "the remission of sins" - al sins.

Every accountable person has sinned and therefore is eligible for this treatment from God (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10-23; Galatians 3:22; I John 1:8). Many Christians have become weak and fallen back into sin (I John 1:7-9) and are thus again eligible for these blessings (Isaiah 53:5; I Corinthians 15:3; Ephesians 1:7; I John 2:1; 3:5).

-Allen Webster

WHEN ALL OF GOD'S SINGERS GET HOME

Perhaps one of my favorite songs that we sing is the song mentioned in the title. There are few things in this life that can lift a downtrodden spirit better than a period of time spent singing praises to Almighty God. Good singing is so aesthetically pleasing to the ears of those involved. Even more pleasing to God is hearing praises flow from the lips of His children whose hearts are brimming with thanksgiving. As one who has the privilege and responsibility of directing the song service from time to time, there is nothing more disturbing than seeing a child of God sitting in silence while others sing praises to the God of heaven. This is a direct violation of God's will. Truly, it is a blatant sin to refuse our praise of Him Who rightfully deserves such. As bad as that is, there are other terrible consequences that arise when we as God's children fail to worship God in song.

When we refuse to worship God in song, we fail to give Him the glory and honor that is due Him. It is not that God needs our praise, but we should be more happy to laud and magnify Him (Psalm 139:14). He created us. He blesses us every day of our lives. He has redeemed us from sin. How, then, can one of His children refuse to praise His heavenly Father? Singing beautifully according to the standards of men is not a requirement to worship God in song. The sound that emanates from the vocal cords is not important, as long as we sing from a heart bursting with praise and thanksgiving. This is what pleases God.

When we refuse to sing, we fail to teach and admonish our brethren. Not only are we praising God when we sing, but we also instruct and encourage those who hear us. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"* (Colossians 3:16). *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:19).

The one who sits beside us in the pew may be teetering on the brink of apostasy, ready to turn his back on the Lord. If we engage in the singing wholeheartedly we may cause this soul to reconsider his commitment to the Lord. By refusing to sing, we may have let the last chance to rescue this distressed soul slip through our fingers. Souls may be in heaven one day because of our heartfelt singing. Souls may be in hell some day because of our refusal to sing.

When we refuse to sing, we fail to prepare ourselves for heaven. Of all the acts of worship in which we are engaged each Lord's day, singing is the only one mentioned as continuing into eternity. *"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation"* (Revelation 5:9). *"And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints"* (Revelation 15:3).

Those who are allowed to enter into heaven shall spend all eternity praising Father, Word, and Holy Spirit. As the old song goes, when we've been there ten thousand years, we will have no less days to sing God's praise than when we first began. If we do not enjoy singing praises to God now, what makes us think we will enjoy singing praises to God for all eternity? The truth is that those who refuse to sing now will not have the opportunity to praise God for all eternity.

-Patrick Morrison

VALUABLE ORANGES

One of the most tragic accidents that has ever happened came about in the mid-Atlantic, April 14, 1912.

The *Titanic*, one of the largest vessels of all time, hit an iceberg, and sank within a few hours. Many stories of heroism and courage have been written about this incident. Many women chose to go down with their husbands. The band played "Nearer My God to Thee."

One woman who was allotted space on one of the rescue boats asked permission to return to her stateroom. She was given three minutes. In that stateroom money and jewels were scattered all over the floor, but she took no heed of them. Rather, she snatched three oranges and hurried back to the boat.

It seems almost incredible that the woman preferred oranges to diamonds. But, you see, death had boarded the *Titanic*, and with one blast of his awful breath, transformed all values—precious things became worthless and worthless things became precious.

Death has a funny way of changing things. All of the things we work for and worry about seem reasonable until they are viewed in the light of our own death. The pursuit of pleasurable things seems most reasonable until one thinks about death. Striving for fame would also seem reasonable until one ponders the grave. Death just has a way of changing one's perspective.

The thing that happened on the *Titanic* actually happens every day—but remember: values transformed at death are values transformed too late. Will you transform your values now?

-Norman Martin