

# STUDIES IN THE PSALMS

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## 1. THE MAJESTY OF MAN Based on Psa. 8

King Louis XIV of France was once reminded by the chaplain of his court that he was a sinner and in danger of damnation. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "All true, no doubt, but the good God will think twice before He casts out so good of Prince as I am." Here was a man of pride who thought of himself more highly than he ought. On the other hand, when the medical student defines man as "A highly developed vertebrate, a more or less clever and successful ape, who has worsted his competitors in the struggle for existence," we say this is foolish pessimism, and an all together too low a view of man. What is man anyway?

J. S. Whale wrote, "What is the truth about the nature and end of man? This is the ultimate question behind the vast debate, the desperate struggle of our time. Ideologies- to use the ugly modern jargon-are really anthropologies. They are answers to that question which man has not ceased to ask ever since he began asking questions at all: Namely, what is man?" This question becomes even more relevant when we think of the Incarnation, for our attention is focused on the fact that God became a man. This adds a whole new dimension to our thinking, for whatever man is in his essential nature God became that, and because of it we have a human Savior.

Several millenniums ago David asked this question from the point of view of a believer. He looked into the starry sky and gazed attentively at the moon, and suddenly the majesty and magnitude

of it over whelmed him. In wonder at the great contrast between all of this and himself he cried out in amazement to God, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the Son of Man that you visit him?" If David had cause to wonder what made him an object of God's concern, how much more do we in our age of astronomy? Fred Hoyle of St. John's College says that our earth is only a speck of dust, for in our galaxy alone there are ten billion stars as big or bigger than our Sun, and there are more than one hundred million more galaxies.

Sir James Jeans in his book *The Mysterious Universe* says that the majority of stars could be packed with hundreds of thousands of our earth, and some giants are so large that even millions of millions of our planet could not fill them.

We are so materially insignificant that the universe would suffer no more loss by our destruction than a vast forest would suffer by the burning of one leaf. Who can fail to be humbled by such facts? Someone might say that man has gone a long way by getting to the moon. But this does not change the picture in any measurable way. It is like the boy who, when he heard that the Sun was 93 million miles up, asked if that was from the ground or the top of the house? When you are dealing with the figures involved with astronomy, anything that man does in space is relatively insignificant. We can only stand in awe at the magnitude of it, and ask with David, "What is man that you are mindful of him?"

In our search for an answer to this question we find that men fall into two categories in their conclusions. One group is pessimistic as to what man is, and the other group is optimistic. This is an over simplification, and it does not mean there are not all shade of differences. You can never divide men into two camps on anything, for they have the capacity for a great variety of opinions. Someone said that there are only two kinds of people in the world-those who think there are two kinds of people in the world, and those who know better. We know better, but we are dividing them into two camps on this question. First of all we will look at-

## I. A BIOLOGICAL VIEW OF MAN.

By biological I mean those who, because of ignorance or false intelligence, cannot see that man is anymore than an animal. They see him strictly as a product of fate and evolution, and not of creation. In other words, it is a view of man that leaves out God. The result is pessimism, for although they recognize that man is the animal of supreme intelligence, they also recognize he has a pathetically poor record of applying it. He can develop all kinds of schemes to protect himself, and then go to war and destroy everything he developed, and himself as well.

Bernard Shaw said that the folly of man convinced him that earth was a cosmic insane asylum where the people on other planets brought their cases of insanity. H. G. Wells, who was an optimist at one time, said, "At one time my faith was: Man must go on-conquest beyond conquest-but now I see man being carried more and more rapidly along the stream of fate to degradation, suffering and death." Without God the man who sees only biological man has no goal, and all seems so futile. Other pessimists express their futility by defining man as-

"A bundle of cellulose matter on its way to become refuse."

"A voice crying in the night with no language but a cry."

"Some random mutation on a wayside planet."

"A pigmy among the giants of creation, a puddle reflecting a star."

"The saddest of all beasts of the field." Homer.

The result of this strictly biological pessimistic view of man is the philosophy that says, "Let us eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Man loses his dignity, for he is a mere animal living on an animal level with his life being guided by the lust of his body. This is what leads to all kinds of open corruption on the basis that it is realistic. This is the way man lives, and so this is the way he should be portrayed on TV and in movies. Without the concept of God and the soul people never ask whether or not if what is realistic is right. For biological man what is right is determined by what is being done. To see man as a complex animal only leads to secularism, materialism, and pessimism. Now let's consider-

## II. A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MAN.

No view of man's material origin can be lower than that of the Bible, for it tells us that God formed man from the dust of the ground. The Bible is also clear that all has sinned, and that the heart of man is desperately wicked. If we looked at the biblical view of man in his sin only, we might conclude that it too leads only to pessimism. But the Bible gives us a balanced view that leads to a positive perspective. In verse 5 we see that man is God made. It is true he was made of dust, but God breathed into him the breathe of life and made him just a little less than divine. The word here for angels is Elohim, which means God. And so man was made a little less than God, or a little less than divine. He was made in the image of God, and for the glory of God, and for fellowship with God. Therefore, man is of infinite value.

Leonard T. Towers said, "It is not that we are worth it, but that God has made us worth it." We are worthy of God's consideration because He made us of infinite value. Man maybe small, but he is the crown of creation. He alone has the God like capacity to think and to reason. All the wonders of the universe do not compare with man, for he can appreciate the wonders and beauty of creation and praise their Creator. Not one of the billions of stars even knows that they exist. The heavens declare the glory of God and show it, but only man can praise his Creator and know it.

The mistake of the pessimist is that they think only in terms of quantity and not quality. Man is materially insignificant, but qualitatively he is of the first rank. Man ought to know better, for they will give more for the paint on a canvas than for enough to cover a battleship, and more for a pearl than for a huge bolder. Man has a standard of values that prefers the smaller over the greater because of the quality involved. Are we to believe that God is of less intelligence, and that he prefers, in contrast to us, quantity rather than quality. Is God a child who prefers the nickel to a dime because it is bigger? All of the arguments for pessimism based on the smallest of earth and man are foolishness, for in spite of his smallest man is greater than all the vastness which he sees.

The heavens declare the glory of God, but they declare it to man. All of the beauty of creation only has meaning because of man's God-given gift of intelligence. The Grand Canyon, sunset, snow covered mountains, and flowers are all for nothing without man's capacity to appreciate them. Does the crocodile admire the beauty of the flamingo, or the sparrow that of the cardinal? Man even in his fallen state is great in the sight of God because God made him, and gifted him with the ability to appreciate what He has created. He is corrupted and like a diamond in the mud, but he is capable of being restored to shine again in great beauty.

In verse 4 we read that God has not only made him, but is mindful of him, and cares for him. In spite of man's rebellion and fall God considers man to be of infinite worth. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for the ungodly. Why? Because even in his fallen state man was of great value to God. Even ungodly man is still the most God-like creature. The church was wrong for centuries in holding that the earth was the center of the universe, but spiritually they were right, for it alone, as far as we know, is the only planet with a cross. It alone is the scene of the incarnation where God became man to redeem him and restore him to the splendor in which he was created.

The biblical view gives us a balance view of man in which we can see that he is, in the words of Pascal, "Both the glory and scum of the universe." To God he was worth the cross. "He is divine grandeur mingled with dust." It is true that he made shipwreck and sank in the sea of sin, but he took with him the treasure of an eternal soul of such worth that God was willing to seek its recovery even at the cost of the cross. Christmas is God's answer to the fall of man. Deity descended to the depths to deliver man from damnation, degradation and death, and to restore him to the dignity, which is rightfully his as the image of God.

God so loved the world, that is the people and not the plains-men and not the mountains, that He gave His only begotten Son. When the Christ child was born the brilliant star shown overhead. Which was the most precious to God-the star or the baby? In spite of its material superiority certainly no one would say the star was more precious. The Psalmist goes from the heavens to the infants in verse 2, and the impression is, what a drop, but after God has become a babe Himself in Christ, it is not a drop, but a rise. In Christ man has been lifted to the place of highest dignity. When Christ ascended He did so as God-man, and man was crowned with glory and honor in the highest sense.

Christianity has always held to the high worth and dignity of man. When Constantine was converted and the Roman Empire became nominally Christian, legislation was passed to abolish the branding of criminals and debtors on the face because man was made in the image of divine beauty. In contrast to the practice of the day Christians loved all children. Adolf Deissman found an Egyptian papyrus containing a letter from an Egyptian worker to his expectant wife in which he wrote, "If it is a boy, let it live, if it is a girl, cast it out." It was a common practice to expose and abandon any child, who was not wanted, but in 300 years Christianity abolished all such degrading practices.

God made man, He loves man, he redeemed man, and, therefore, anything that degrades man and makes his life cheap is not the will of God, but is contrary to the whole revelation of God. The incarnation was the act of God whereby He said that man is the masterpiece of His creation, and is just a little lower than divine. James Mackey said so wisely, "The baby came because God could not get enough of Himself into anything else to show forth His true nature. There is more of God in the helpless infant lying in the hay beside the cattle than there is in all of the stars and moons of limitless space." Let the pessimist hang their heads and despair at the smallness of man, but we will rejoice, for no man is small or worthless before God.

Muretus, the 17th century French scholar fell ill while he was in exile for being a Protestant. He was taken to a pauper's hospital in Lombardy. The doctors who were consulting about him spoke in Latin thinking that this pauper could not understand the tongue of the learned. One of them said, "Let us try an experiment with this worthless creature." Muretus startled them by saying in Latin,

"Will you call worthless one for whom Christ did not distain to die?" No man is worthless for whom Christ died, and He died for all men.

It is true that man is a strange mixture of deity and dust, and of love and lust. He has the capacity to murder or to be a martyr; to live a life of crime and ignorance, or of compassion or inspiration. Sin has made him abominable, but grace can make him admirable. Christ can restore the lowest to the place of man's original glory when God said, "Let us make man in our image." A poet wrote,

Hark! The Eden trees are stirring,  
Slow and solemn to you're hearing!  
Plane and cedar, palm and fir,  
Tamarisk and juniper,  
Each is throbbing in vibration  
Since that crowning of creation.      E. B. Browning.

The whole story of the history of salvation is about God's acts in history on behalf of man. The creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are all for the restoration and exaltation of man to the place of God's original intention, that we might praise Him and fellowship with Him forever. The point is, that a Christian should have a high respect for the dignity of his own soul, and of those of all people. Someone has said, "Self-conceit may be objectionable, but self-contempt is ruinous." One can be humble and still have a great sense of self-respect, for both are essential to an adequate Christian life. The pessimist looks at the greatness of all God has made and says, "Man is a microbe clinging to a grain of sand, and if there is a God, He is too great to care for me." In contrast the Christian looks at it all and says, "Such a God calls me to be great."

What is man? He is that creature who is made a little less than divine, but who fell from this exalted position through sin. Nevertheless, like a diamond in the mud he is worth picking up. Even as a sinner he is precious in the sight of his Creator, and so God out of His infinite love and mercy sent His Son to redeem man and restore him to fellowship with Himself. This makes man the greatest object of God's concern in all the wondrous magnitude of His creation. He is the only creature God ever made that was worth the cross. The price which is paid for anything determines its value. This means that man is the highest valued part of the universe, for God paid the highest possible price for his recovery. This means that if your life is not involved in God's plan to rescue the diamond in the mud and restore it to a place of beauty, you are missing out on the highest goal in life. Your answer to the question, what is man will determine so much of what your life will be. The story of the Good Samaritan reveals this clearly. The thieves said, "The world is mine and I will take it." The priest and Levite said, "The world is mine and I will keep it." The Good Samaritan said, "The world is ours, and I will share it." He alone had the mind of Christ for he saw the value of man and desired to contribute to his recovery. May God help us all to have a Christ like view of what man is.

## **2. WE ARE BORN TO RULE Based on Psa. 8:1-9**

David did not need a telescope to consider the heavens and the wonders of God's creation. What he could see with the naked eye left him in awe at the majesty of God. Today we go far beyond the vision of David, not only into the macrocosm of the vast universe, but because of new instruments we know what David could never imagine. We know of the microcosm that God has created that is even more basic to life on earth. Back in the late 80's Sallie Chisholm, a biological oceanographer at MIT made a mind-boggling discovery about how God runs this world. She and her colleagues discovered billions of trillions of zillions of plants that man never even dream existed. Man never dreamed that plants could be so small.

It was only a few years earlier that Bob Guillard, the researcher who built up the famous Bigelow collection of phytoplankton, said of these single cell plants of the ocean that he discovered, "A hundred years of oceanography and the most abundant being in the world wasn't recognized by anybody." But like some kind of sports record it soon fell, and is no longer the record holder, for Chisholm discovered plants and even greater abundance. There are as many as 3 million of them in every ounce of ocean water.

They were not discovered by a powerful microscope, but by a new tool called the flow cytometer. Sea water is compressed into a thin stream and the cells are marched single file two thousand per second past an interrogation point where they are bathed in laser light which causes them to fluoresce. The color of the fluorescence indicates what pigment a cell contains. The cells then can be separated into species much like you would distinguish a flow of Japanese and Swedes without looking at them if you had information about their size and hair color. If you had a flow of people all of whom had red hair, and none of them over 4 feet tall you would know you had discovered a new people. That is how Chisholm discovered the new plant. They are 30 millionths of an inch across with a unique type of chlorophyll.

You might say, "Who cares, and what difference does this make to us?" First of all, God made them the most abundant form of life on this planet. Secondly, they keep us alive. They harness the energy of the sun, and by the process of photosynthesis they produce the food of life for all the creatures of the sea. They also take out of the air half of the carbon dioxide we put into it. If they didn't do it the planet would warm up by the green house effect, and we would be the ones frying instead of the fish of the sea.

The point of all this is that man is ever learning of the delicate balance of nature, and of how God has made all of life to work together so that every part of nature is dependant upon every other part. If man throws a monkey wrench into this beautiful living machine he makes a mess of it, and he risks serious damage to his own well being. Christians are as likely to throw the system of nature into imbalance as anyone. Christians have been major supporters of the philosophy that says nature exists for our benefit, and so if we want to abuse it and misuse it that is our privilege. Much like the Christian slave owners in early America, they feel they have the right to use what is their property anyway they please. And they feel they have Scripture to back them up.

Here in Psa. 8:6 it says clearly, "You made him the ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet." Man is made the ruler of nature, and he is made king of creation by the Creator Himself. If we go back to Gen. 1:28 we read these first words of God to man: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves over the ground." The lion is not king of the beasts. It

is man, and he was put in charge by God and told to rule. None can argue with this clear revelation. The problem comes because of the fall of man. He did not become the kind of ruler over nature that God intended. Just as many of the kings over his people led them astray from his will, so man as a ruler over nature abused his God-given power, and he became an enemy rather than a friend to nature.

If we look at Adam before the fall we see the proper role of man in relationship to nature. In Gen. 2:15 we read, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." You will note that it is a perfect sin free world, and God has said of everything that it was very good. And yet in this perfect environment nature needed to be taken care of. The implication is clear that even a perfect nature will deteriorate without care, and man was to provide that care. Man was made to benefit by nature's abundance, and to reap a harvest for his labor, but he was made to be a benevolent dictator over nature and not a ruthless tyrant exploiting nature for himself with no concern for it as a part of God's creation. In other words, though it is true that God made man the ruler of nature, he made him to be a benevolent ruler who would cooperate with God in keeping nature good, beautiful, and beneficial in the way God intended.

Man in his fall became a rebel and decided that his will was what mattered, and he would use nature as he saw fit for his own good regardless of how God designed it. In other words, man became an irresponsible ruler. He abused his power and position. It is the same story as in every other area of man's dominion. God gave man dominion over women for the benefit of both husband and wife. But man abused the power of his position and made women slaves. He turned tyrant and robbed women of the benefit of a benevolent leader and perverted the purpose of God. No ruler is ruling as God intended unless the ruled are greatly benefited by that rule. Any ruler who exploits the ruled for himself and does not make those ruled happy to be under that rule is a rebel ruler and not the responsible ruler that God intends.

This can be applied to nations, tribes, and families, or as we are considering in this message, to nature. God's intent was that man would rule nature in such a way as to make man and nature mutually beneficial. Unfortunately, Christians often feel that power means that you have the right to do as you please. If we rule nature, then we can do whatever we want to it, for it has no rights whatever, and it is our slave. Francis Schaeffer in his book, *Pollution And The Death Of Man: The Christian View Of Ecology*, agrees with the critics that say Christians have been a major cause of the problem in our world today. Christians were duped into believing the philosophy of Plato was more Christian than the Bible. Plato said that the material world is not important. All that really matters is the spiritual. This sounds so good to be anti-materialistic and pro-spiritual that Christians felt it was the superior view of life.

What this led to was Christians who felt no responsibility for caring for the material world that God created. Christians became notorious for their indifference to the balance of nature. What do we care about nature was their attitude. "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue." So why should I care if we pollute and damage the ecosystems that keep the earth in balance so that all life can thrive? Under this false world-view man was permitted to destroy the handiwork of God. Christians did not care for the world, for it was all going to be burned up anyway, and so why bother to protect and preserve what was going to pass away? The whole idea of nature having any rights was as foreign to Christians as was the idea of blacks having any rights to Christian slave owners in the old South.

Schaeffer said that he sided with the hippies in the 60's, for they had a biblical view of respect for nature. Christians, on the other hand, linked up with modern technology, which said that man has the right to exploit nature regardless of the damage. Nature is not a friend we need to respect, but a slave we can use or abuse as we please. Schaeffer wrote his book to get Christians off that wrong track of following Plato and back to a biblical view of nature and ecology.

God created all things and said that it was very good. Creation is the handiwork of God, and just as we respect the works of men, so we are to respect the work of God. We have something in common with all of nature. We are the handiwork of God. We are one in our origin, and one in our ultimate destiny, for God will create a new heaven and earth to replace this fallen world, and all creation will be a part of God's eternal kingdom. This means that a biblical view of nature is not one of indifference to it, but it is one of respect. Our dominion over nature is not just so we can exploit it, but like Adam, care for it. We are to keep it operating according to the laws God has built into it so that it benefits man and is a piece of art for God to enjoy.

Matter is not evil as Plato taught. It is a good work of God. Matter is so good that God sent His Son to become flesh to redeem flesh and take the fallen body of man into the kingdom of God where it will be made new, pure and eternal. God did not reject the material world in favor of the spiritual world. He sent His Son to become a part of the material world that it might be saved and be a part of the eternal world. It is heresy to reject the material world, for God made it co-equal with the world of spirit. It is anti-Christ to reject the material world as evil, for nothing God has made is evil. The whole physical world is an object of His love and plan of redemption. Nature is good, and a biblical view of it leads to responsible rule where man cooperates with God to care for it and respect it. Schaeffer wrote, "A Christian is a man who has a reason for dealing with each created thing on a high level of respect."

Only after man came to realize that he was poisoning his own environment by his disrespect for nature did Christians begin to realize the sinfulness of their disrespect. Only in the last few decades have Christians begun to address the theological issues for respect for nature. The first Earth Day was on April 22, 1970. Since then there have been many conferences on the theological issues in environmental ethics. Christians are becoming more and more aware that if God needed Adam to care for a garden in a perfect environment, how much more does nature need care in a fallen world where sin, corruption, ignorance, and pollution abound?

Bruce Allsopp wrote the book, *The Garden Earth: The Case For Ecological Morality*. Ecology and religion newsletters were started and terms like geopiety were born. The religious concern for ecology has changed the history of ecology in recent years. The concern at first was just for the economic issues of being nice to mother nature. It was costly to be abusive of her. Now there is what is called Deep Ecology, and it goes beyond the shallow self-centered concerns to a concern for nature herself. In other words, deep ecology says we respect nature, not just because we can make more money if we do, but because she is worthy of respect as God's creation, and it is right to be nice to her whether we profit by it or not. It says nature is a living thing, and like all living things, it has a right to be respected. It goes even further and says that even non-living things have a right to be respected as God's creation. Everything God made has a right to be respected for what it is, and to be treated in a way that is consistent with the laws God gave to govern it and its purpose.

In 1973 Congress passed the Endangered Species Act that guarantees the right to existence of



any species threatened by extinction. You have a right to make a buck, but if by so doing you send a part of God's creation into extinction you are now forced to seek another way to get your buck, and respect the rights of nature. Many creatures have been saved from extinction because of this new respect for nature. Christians are not always on the side of nature, and have often taken the side of the humanists who say that man is the measure of all things. If it is good for man, then let nature perish. Man is made in God's image, and his good should take precedence over any other creature.

There are many court cases where it is man versus nature, and it would hard to give a vote for nature and save a bird, or some other creature, at the expense of man's right to build condos and make a mint, but it is happening, and creatures are winning because more and more people are agreeing that nature has rights that are God-given, and man does not have the right to trample them under his feet. In spite of the growing number of victories for nature, and a growing ecological awareness, the world is getting worse. Man is still an irresponsible ruler, and his abuse has lead to widespread pollution that is casting thousands of species into extinction, and is killing people as well.

Some feel that man has gone so far in his irresponsibility that we can expect an ecological Armageddon. An unknown poet laments-

I was born in the last years of comfort,  
And I'll die in the first years of dearth,  
When the fullness of plenty has vanished,  
And poverty darkens the earth.

My grandson will wrestle with problems  
That only a madman would crave,  
And meet them with measures so ghastly  
I'm glad I'll be snug in my grave.

Others are optimistic and say that man can still become a responsible ruler. He can work with nature to overcome the problems he has created. Garbologists who do archeological digs in the garbage dumps of our nation have proven that the idea of biodegradable is largely a myth. Trash that is buried and compacted so air and moisture does not get to it remains trash. They have dug up newspapers buried in the 40's and they are as good as new. Newspapers are the largest percentage of all landfills. The American people are responding to this waste and are now recycling, but millions of trees need to be cut down each month unnecessarily because of the waste. All of us can make some difference by recycling. It is the least we can do to show respect for the world of nature that we help to rule.

When God said to Adam to fill the earth, he did not mean to fill it with newspapers, beer cans, and toxic waste. He expected the world to be filled with people who could care for His creation. As American Christians we have a greater obligation than most to develop and ecologically helpful life style. False views of Christians have been a major cause of the present problems, and a more honest biblical view compels us to do a better job in obedience to God's will. A world is a terrible thing to waste, and if we are responsible rulers, we can help keep even this fallen world a place where man and nature cooperate to the glory of God, and provide an environment where men can discover the abundant life and gain the assurance of eternal life in Christ.

The ark of Noah was going to be abandoned by both animals and man, but do you think they were careless with it while it was their only environment for living? Do you think they chopped or drilled holes in it, or lunged against its timbers to see if they would hold? You can count on it that they took care of their environment for their survival depended on their doing so. We need to see our whole world as the ark, and see it as our responsibility to treat it with respect as the source of our survival until God makes a new heaven and new earth.

Dennis Hayes was 25 when he founded the first Earth Day. He drove a Honda and often road a bicycle. He took his reusable bags to the grocery store. He was very conservative in his use of natural resources. As chairman of the 1990 Earth Day Anniversary he knew his small efforts would have little effect on the global crisis, but he plugged away because he had a 14 year old daughter and he cared about her future. The Christian is to care about future generations also, for it is the golden rule to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. You do not want the people who lived in your house or apartment before you to leave all their garbage behind, and have poison and toxic waste all over the place to hazard the life and health of your family. The next generation does not want this earth left that way either, and it is our responsibility to see that they have a world where healthy living is possible.

Even if we had no obligation to people, we do have an obligation to God. Psa. 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world an all who live in it." As good stewards of God's world we are responsible to use it and care for it so that it works as He made it to work, and so that it will be a place for the good of man and the glory of God. A polluted world where life is being killed and degraded is not for God's glory. It is sinful abuse, and a Christian is to have no part in it. The Christian is to work to maintain the health and beauty of all that God has made.

Professor Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University, who is a leading writer in the field of ecology, says that one American does 20 to 100 times more damage to the planet than a person in the 3rd world. The problem is not poor people but affluent people who are wasteful and who do not care that their waste robs the rest of the world of a better life. Some might argue that there are greater issues, and there is much to support this, but John Alexander writes, "In my experience people sensitive to the beauty of nature tend to be sensitive to justice and compassion." He also felt that the issues dealing with race and poverty were more important for Christians to pursue, but he had to admit that people who do not care about the world they live in usually do not care about anybody else in that world. People who care about ecology care about the whole of God's creation, and that includes plants, animals, and people.

We are born to rule. Our eternal destiny is to rule and reign with Christ over a redeemed universe, but we are made to rule now in this fallen world where the only hope of the good life is responsible rulers. Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something, and the greatest something any of us can do is to be responsible rulers.

### **3. SANCTIFIED SILENCE Based on Psa. 46:1-11**

You can learn in silence what sound can never teach you. Howard Thurman tells of one of his

University students who was a deep sea diver. He wrote of his experience of being on the bottom of the ocean. The water was clear and he was in the midst of a coral rock garden. He sat down to look around. Occasionally a fish would swim up to take a look at him, and then pass the word to his friends, for soon there were many curious fish about him.

As he sat there, the beauty of the garden became more intense. Plants had opened up revealing what looked like blossoms. He felt like he was in a beautiful flower garden. It was wonderful. He enjoyed it for a long while, but then he realized he could not stay there forever, and he started to go about his business. As soon as he moved all the flowers disappeared. They were living things, and they emerged only when there was silence and stillness. The activist sea diver who comes splashing through such a garden would never see its full beauty. He learned that there are marvelous things you will never see unless you sit in silence.

Professor Johnson from Bethel taught us this is true on land as well. Tens of thousands of people visit Como Park, but only a few ever see the Ruby Crown Kinglet. The only way to see this tiny little bird is to crawl into the hedges and sit in silence. Soon this pretty little creature will come flitting right up to you, and give you a view that the noisy people passing by will never see.

The point of Psa. 46:10 is that there are things about the Creator, as well as His creation, that can only be learned by those who have developed the discipline of silence. "Be still, and know that I am God." An unknown poet wrote:

In every life  
There's a pause that is better than onward rush,  
Better than hewing or mightiest doing;  
'Tis the standing still at sovereign will.  
There's a hush that is better than ardent speech,  
Better than sighing or wilderness crying;  
'Tis the being still at sovereign will.  
The pause and the hush sing a double song,  
In unison low and for all time long,  
Of human soul, God's working plan  
Goes on, nor heeds the aid of man!  
Be still, and see!  
Be still, and know!

The Bible has a great deal to say about the value of quietness, but it is greatly neglected in our culture because we are a sound oriented culture. We specialize in making everything that makes sound portable so that we can have the sound even at the beach, or out on the lake, or camping in the woods. We have made it possible to escape silence completely, even if we find ourselves in the most remote area. We have made it possible to banish silence from our lives almost completely.

There was a tunnel down in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida where radio waves did not penetrate, and there was a 20 to 30 second break as motorists went through. A man got permission to set up a system inside the tunnel to give weather information so drivers would not have to endure the agony of that few seconds of silence. We live in a culture which is anti-silence, and the result is, even Christians have a very difficult time identifying with a Biblical values of quietness. Eccles. 9:17

says, "The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools." Because of radio and TV we tend to hear the shouters and noisy voices rather than the quiet ones.

Psa. 131:2 says, "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." The peace and contentment of a satisfied child is an ideal state of mind. The crying aggravated child whose hunger pain makes it a noise box of perpetual disturbance is not the ideal. Christians tend to fall into these two categories: The bawling baby always discontent, and with spiritual colic, who disturbs the family of God continually, or the contented child who feels loved and satisfied, and gives pleasure to the family by perpetual pleasantness. It takes a lot of silent feeding on the milk of the word to be such a contented child. Most Christians in our culture do not know how to enjoy the silence of being still and knowing God in this way.

Paul wrote in I Thess. 4:11, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life." He wrote to Timothy also, and urged him to pray for kings and all in authority. Why? Because he goes on to say in I Tim. 2:2, "That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." It is obvious that the noisy and riotous lifestyle is not a Christian ideal. We cannot look at all the Bible says about the importance of silence, but we want to focus on the fact that God so often does His greatest works in silence. And anonymous poet wrote:

Silently the green leaves grow  
In silence falls the soft, white snow  
Silently the flowers bloom  
In silence sunshine fills the room  
Silently bright stars appear  
In silence velvet night draws near...  
And silently God enters in  
To free a troubled heart from sin  
For God works silently in lives  
For nothing spiritual survives  
Amid the din of a noisy street  
Where raucous crowds with hurrying feet  
And "blinded eyes" and "deafened ear"  
Are never privileged to hear  
The message God wants to impart  
To every troubled, weary heart  
For only in a QUIET PLACE  
Can we behold GOD FACE TO FACE!

Now, lest we idealize silence too much, as if it was an inherent virtue, and always of value, we want to see some of the negative side before we pursue the practice. Solomon said in Eccles. 3:7, that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. If you are silent when its time to speak, it is no longer a virtue. So for the sake of balance we need to look at the negative side.

#### I. SILENCE CAN BE DESTRUCTIVELY WICKED.

I once knew a church leader who was a good one, and I liked him for most everything about him.

There was one exception, and that was the way he used silence. His wife would call me once in a while and say he had not spoken to her for a week again. When he would get angry over something he would punish her by silence, and it worked. She would cry and beg him to talk to her, and nearly have a breakdown before he would speak again. I thought it was terribly cruel way to deal with a problem. Silence can be just as destructive to a relationship as harsh words. Pascal, the great scientist and theologian, said, "Silence is the worst form of persecution." Jews are still angry that the Pope kept silent when a few words of protest may have saved many Jews from Hitler's persecution.

Silence can convey false messages. Robert Louis Stevenson said, "The cruelest lies are often told in silence." The whole system of the Mafia is a system of silence that lies by saying nothing. Vincent Teresa in *My Life In The Mafia* wrote, "Silence is what protects the Office. Each man is a wall protecting the next guy higher up. Let's say you want to do business with Tameleo. You can't do business with him. You got to do business with someone down the line who does business with him or a guy between. We figured every man is a wall. When you come to me, I'm a wall and I stop. Let's say I did business with you, and after that I did business with Tameleo. You would never know it. You could turn me into the law, but the law would never nail Tameleo because I don't talk about what I did with him."

There is even the negative silence of sound without meaning. Simon and Garfunkel sold their song in vast numbers called *The Sound of Silence*.

And in the naked land I saw ten thousand  
People, maybe more,  
People talking without speaking;  
People hearing without listening;  
People writing songs that voices never shared.  
No one dared disturb the sound of silence.

It was all meaningless racket, and noise that was saying nothing. It was sound, but it was empty, and, therefore, a form of silence, for nothing was being communicated. There has been a lot of study on noise pollution in our world today, and it is a major factor in the stress of modern life. But Americans are so conditioned to it that even when they can escape they take their noise with them. I read a teenage girls statement that describes for me an experience I once had. She said, "When my brothers are upstairs screaming and yelling, that's noise. When they're upstairs playing a game, that's sound."

Driving the young people to release time is often enjoyable, and I get pleasure in their sounds, but this past week they were wound up and were just making noise and racket. It was both tiring and disturbing. The sounds of children having fun are a blessing, but the noise of children just being noisy is a burden. I learned one thing about kids. If you want to know what they are really like, don't ask their parents, and don't ask their teachers, and don't ask their friends: Ask their bus driver. He or she sees and hears them at their best and their worst.

The weakness of this theory is that sometimes it is the parent who is also the driver. Listen to this description of a cartoon. "Mother is driving home with her four small children, the family dog, and several bags of groceries. On her face you can see a combination of tension, frustration, anger, and near hysteria, as the steering wheel begins to vibrate under her ever-tightening grip. Behind her all

four small children are talking at the same time. Listen to the conversation behind her: 'Tell Billy to stop waving at the car behind us.' 'Daddy's good hat is back here, and Dolly's standing on it!' 'Which bag are the lollipops in?' 'Blow your horn and make that police car get out of the way, mom.' 'Jan just dropped the ketchup bottle in on top of the prune juice, and the bag's leaking.' 'Drive faster, we're missing a good program on TV.' 'Stop bouncing the car, I can't read the message on the cereal box.' 'It's cold back here, sitting on this frozen food.' 'Who put the fingerprints on the back window?' 'Why'd you turn the radio off?' 'Jimmy's opening the cookie bag.' 'You don't smile very much when you drive, do you, mommy?' " She was being bombarded with the sounds of silence-that is, disturbing racket that does not contribute to life, but deprives it of pleasure.

Then there is the destructive silence of not caring about injustice. Paul Rees wrote this back in the 70's. Twice recently I have seen a quotation from Pastor Martin Niemoller so memorable in its diction and, in some respects, so contemporary in its implications that I want to pass it on:

"In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists,  
And I didn't speak up because I was not a communist.  
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up  
Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the  
Trade Unionist and I didn't speak up because I wasn't  
a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Catholic and  
I was a Protestant so I didn't speak up. Then they came  
for me....By that time there was no one to speak up for  
anyone."

Rees goes on, "There are times when silence, far from being "golden," is craven. There are times, too, when the noise we evangelicals make on the safe issues (e.g., drugs and obscenity) makes all the more conspicuous our tight-lipped muteness or own low-keyed generalizations on the gritty causes (e.g., civil rights, war, poverty, wasted) that are abrasively alive for millions of Americans.

Psa. 32 is all about the folly of silence when one tries to keep it hidden. If we confess and deal with it, and get it forgiven, then we are wise. If we keep silent about it and refuse to confess it, we do ourselves damage. So with awareness, we must nevertheless pursue the positive Biblical revelation:

## II. SILENCE CAN BE DELIGHTFULLY WISE.

Eccles. 3:7 says, "There is a time to be silent and a time to speak." It is often hard to know which is the best at any particular moment, but there are some great examples of when silence was the wise choice. A service station attendant foiled a robber without saying a word. It was around three in the morning when the intruder walked into the station, pulled a revolver and said, "This is a stickup." When the man didn't reply, the thief repeated: "This is a stickup." Again the attendant remained silent. This was too much for the thief, and so he turned around and went out the door saying, "All right, then, I guess this isn't a stickup."

The ability to speak in several languages is truly an asset, but to be able to hold your tongue in one language is often priceless. Thomas Carlyle once said, "Silence is more eloquent than words." There were several occasions when Jesus refused to speak. He let His silence do the talking. In

Matt. 27:12-14 we read, "When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, He gave no answer. Then Pilate asked Him, don't you know how many things they are accusing you of? But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge-to the great amazement of the governor."

To be silent in the face of such charges was a guarantee of conviction, but Jesus refused to defend Himself, for He needed no defense for one thing, and secondly, He was submitting to their crime for our salvation. Silence was actually a means to our salvation. We were saved by the Savior's silence, which sent Him to the cross. In Luke 23:9 we read of Herod trying to get all he could out of Jesus, and this was what he got: "He plied Him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer." This was the Herod who put to death John the Baptist; the one Jesus said was the greatest man of the Old Testament era. Jesus would not give him the pleasure of answering a single one of his curious questions. Jesus illustrated that there is a time for silence.

These illustrations might give the impression that silence is only a negative method of non-communication. Not so! It can also be a positive form of communication. The best thing the three friends of Job did was their first week with him. They sat on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and Job 2:13 says that no one said a word to him. Their silence was golden, and it said to him, we care and we sympathize. It was only when they opened their mouth that they became cruel and obnoxious. In silence they were being true friends.

It is good for us to remember that silent caring often means a lot more to people in grief and suffering than some flimsy cliches, or thoughtless efforts to explain things away. Joyce Landorf in her book *Tough and Tender* gives a good example of what professional silence meant to her.

"After our infant son David died, I was recovering from a Caesarian section and went to our doctor's office for a postnatal examination. I had not seen my doctor since David died and I'll never forget our meeting. It was soon after surgery so Dick had brought me to the doctors office in my nightie and robe. I was very weak and the nurses helped me up on the examining table. Then everyone left me alone to wait for the doctor. When he came in he said absolutely nothing. He did not give me a phony, cheery greeting. He merely walked over to me and very tenderly put both of his hands over mine. I looked up at him and with teary eyes he turned his head to the window and continued to hold my hands-but he never spoke a word. What he communicated in those brief seconds spoke volumes to my heart. It even brought a measure of healing, because I knew he deeply cared about my loss; yet nothing was said then or ever."

The point is, don't worry that you don't know what to say to people in crisis. That can be your greatest asset as a comforter. Silence can be healing. Leslie Weatherhead, one of the great preachers of England, in his book *The Significance of Silence* gives this testimony:

"I never realized how dreadfully irrelevant and almost

vulgar words could be in the hour of grief until an experience befell me in a home where a little girl dearly loved one particular doll. The doll was broken by the carelessness of a person who turned on the little child and said, in words that seemed to sear one's brain as they were spoken, "I'll buy you another." A child's grief is so real and so terrible that it seemed as bad as saying to a mother who has lost her child, "Well, you have other children," or to a man who has lost his dearest friend, "well, you have other friends." No newly bought doll, however expensive and marvelous, could make up for that dear treasure on whom love had been so lavished that the very paint had been kissed off its face. There it lay in cruel pieces, and nothing on earth could replace it or make up the sense of loss. With the sublime dignity and the spiritual insight that made Jesus Himself put a little child in the midst of men, this little girl looked up into her mother's eyes and said, "Don't talk about it, please, Mummy." She wanted only to be quiet. There was nothing that could be said. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and healing for that heart is silence."

A picture is worth a thousand words because a picture conveys a powerful message in silence. Sign language is vital for communication and it is done in silence. The Quakers make a science out of silence, and by the power of silence they did things others could not do. During World War II they walked boldly into the Berlin Gestapo office of Himmler's Deputy Chief Reinhard Heydrick. They implored him to let them take persecuted Jews out of Germany. He listened, and then asked them to wait in an adjoining room for his reply. Unknown to them the room was wired, and Heydrick was listening, for he expected them to criticize his cruelty, and blast the evils he perpetrated on the Jews. But the Quakers sat silently in prayer, and did not say one negative word. Their silence impressed even this butcher, and he granted their request. Many Jews were spared by the power of silence.

Many Christians would have been so busy condemning the evils of this monster that they would have, by their mouthiness, condemned their Jewish friends to the gas chamber. Only disciplined silence could have saved them, and only rare Christians know how to be so disciplined. We live in an electronic age where silence is practically a sin. The worse thing that can happen on radio or TV is for there to be silence. It is called dead time. Any pause in sound is the equivalent of evil. Silence is the feared demon, and this spirit invades our culture. We need to go against the grain and be non-conformist to develop the positive side of silence.

Silence has the advantage of being a two way street. By silence we speak to God, and also allow Him to speak to us. Silence is both saying something, and listening to something being said. Let's consider each of these: The language of silence, and the listening of silence.

#### A. THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE.

Thomas a Kempis said, "Thou, O Lord, hearest my voiceless tongue, and my silence speaketh



unto Thee." The Bible urges us again and again to praise the Lord, and to sing and shout to Him in expressing our joy. This is a vital part of worship. But we forget that the opposite of a good thing is not necessarily a bad thing. A liquid is not bad because it is not a solid, and white is not bad because it is the opposite of black.

The point is, silence can also be a means by which we communicate with God. By silence we can convey respect. If the president, or any dignitary, was in our presence speaking, we would listen in silence, and not be blabbing away as if what we had to utter was more important than listening to them. Hab. 2:20 says, "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him." Even praise has to stop at times so you have a chance to listen. Silence is saying that I love your Word Lord, and I desire to know your will. I silently wait and listen for you to speak and give guidance. As much as God loves your flow of praise, He also loves it when you stop praising and start listening. This will lead you to ever fresh reasons to renew your praising. Silence is a vital part of a total worship experience, for silence gives God a chance to love you back.

Since we are a sound oriented culture this is hard for us. We do not like silence, for to us it is like empty time. We have an urge to fill it with sound. In our culture everything that makes sound is also made portable so we can take it everywhere we go, lest we find ourselves stranded in some place of silence. Silence on our part says to God, I am open to you to speak to me. I honor your right to have access to my mind, and to give me that which you desire for me to possess. Psa. 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." Devotional books used to be called the quiet time, and Christians recognized the need to be silent before God. Eveleyn Underhill wrote, "Most books on religion have thousands of words-we need only one word, God-and that surrounded not by many words but by silence." Christopher Crauch put it in poetry:

Thou so far we grope to grasp Thee,  
Thou so near we cannot clasp Thee;  
All-pervading Spirit flowing  
Through the worlds, yet past our knowing.  
Artist of the solar spaces,  
And these humble human faces.  
Though all mortal races claim Thee,  
Though and language fail to name Thee,  
Human lips are dumb before Thee,  
Silence only may adore Thee.

## B. THE LISTENING OF SILENCE.

God listens to us, and He appreciates it when we return the favor and listen to him. Often the answer to our prayer is received by listening. The solution to many a problem is found in having the mind of Christ, and this comes by listening to His Spirit. Friendship between two people is hard to develop if there is all talk and no listening. We miss the depth of the friendship of Christ if we do not learn to listen.

A typical worship service does give opportunity for listening. There is the choir and special music, and there is prayer and the sermon. All of these you listen to, and God can and does speak to us through them. But silence is seldom used as a means of worship. The reason is because we are

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