



Lovely Lord of the Lord's Day

16. Dog Sense

What kind of positive thinking is biblical?

When I was a boy going to a little red schoolhouse, I had to pass my uncle's house. He lived right next to the schoolhouse. Every day, it seemed, he would stand on the front porch and make fun of me as I passed by. He told me I looked like old lady Dianthy, and then he would laugh out loud and taunt me.

Now the lady he accused me of resembling was an aunt of mine. She was a good elderly lady; absolutely nothing was wrong with her. But I was a little boy, and no little boy wants to be called "an old woman" no matter how good the old woman is. Nor was that all.

With a sneer and a tone that betrayed certain feelings, he would tell me that I was the homeliest boy he had ever seen. Then he would whinny like a horse and point his finger at me. All that, truly, from a man at least forty years of age.

You can imagine how a little boy would react. I came to the place where I shuddered to go past my uncle's home. I dreaded his voice. I cringed from that awful laugh. I associated his laugh with the taunts that I was an ugly little boy that looked like an old lady. In fact, I became conditioned not to like to hear laughter at all—of any kind. Without realizing it, I had set up in my mind some false associations.

Years passed; I became a young minister in the nation's capital. One afternoon I was eating in a nearly empty restaurant. The manager and one of his helpers were taking advantage of the slow time and were eating as well. I can still recall how these two men, sitting about twenty feet from me, looked in my direction from time to time as they ate. Then, for some reason they laughed. I promptly got up, and leaving my meal unfinished, walked towards the door. The manager, noticing my disturbed countenance, said, "Sir, was there something wrong with your meal?"

"No, sir," I replied, "but I am not going to sit here and be laughed at!"

It wasn't until years later that I realized they weren't laughing at me at all. But I had associated the mere act of laughing with the unpleasant experience of my childhood when my uncle laughed at me. It had made a lasting impression. For years after, every time I heard a person laughing, I wondered if there was something wrong with me. My subconscious mind had interpreted all laughing as directed at me.

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Now, you see, what I did was a foolish thing for a boy to do. What my uncle did was a foolish thing for a man to do, too. But something that seemed trivial to him seemed very large to me. This reaction occurs very often in young minds!

Years after my wife and I were married, we returned to her home in Massachusetts. She wanted to look once more at the "big hill" where she and her sisters played as girls. When we arrived, the "big hill" turned out to be a gentle rise in the terrain. But to her, as a child, it seemed like a large rise, the "big hill." You see, we are all more or less, influenced by the law of association.

This connection begins when we are very young, and some things that may seem trivial to another take on large dimensions that often follow through right into adulthood.

The devil is past master at associating beautiful things with sin. But remember this, he got the idea of association from Jesus Christ—for the law of association belongs to God. God want us to associate everything good with Him and with His plans for the human family, since everything truly good does indeed spring from Him and from His plans for us. His Law is a delight, and this duty can be beautiful and delightful in Him.

The devil realized this long ago when he said, "I am going to prove to the world that sin is lovely. If I can get the human race to associate wrong with loveliness, I will lead them from God in revolt. They will be lost! Forever!

That's how the great battle for the mind and heart began. It is a battle between Christ and Satan for the affections of mankind. Because Jesus is the One "altogether lovely", Satan has transformed himself into an angel of beauty and light. He has made himself attractive to us gullible humans. He has tried, and successfully, to associate sin with loveliness. He has made sin scintillate with excitement! He has made it look very attractive.

Now you and I step into the picture. There's an immediate battle for our attentions and interests. Everyone who professes the name of Christ can attest to this. In every case this battle is waged. The born-again Christian realizes that true beauty is associated with right and that duty can be delightful. God made it so. We should always consider it a privilege and an honor to associate sacred things with lovely things and enjoy them as such.

When men and women know that our Savior is a delightful personality and His worship is a delight, they will more readily decide to serve Him. "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." "Call the Sabbath a delight." When we do that, we shall be astonished at the number of our loved ones who will choose God's things in preference to the devil's attractions. To know Jesus is to know the loveliest individual in all the world. He is the 'Lily of the valley": He is the "Bright and morning star": He is the "fairest of ten-thousand." Whatever He asks His children to do, He asks them to do, not because it is right, merely, but because it is delightful. And in time we shall know that the right is better for us too. It is not simply a duty: it is a beautiful thing when we understand it. The Sabbath philosophy teaches us this lesson.

Do you know what our Creator thought when He had made light on the first day? The Bible says, "God saw. . . that it was good." At the end of the third day, as God viewed His handiwork, He had the same opinion. And at the end of the fourth day, the fifth day, and the sixth day He still felt the same way. When He finished the week, the Bible says that "God saw everything that He had made and, behold, it was very good. Then God crowned His work with the jewel of jewels—the

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Sabbath day. He said in essence, "this day stands for all My work. In it I will rest." How God honored the delightful Sabbath day!

In Isaiah 58:13, God is saying again, I made the world in six days. Everything was very good. I crowned My work with the creation of the delightful Sabbath day, and I want you to consider it so.

"Sabbath is a happy day," we sing, and how our children love to sing it with us that way! But in the earthly days of Jesus, 2000 years ago, the people who were called by the name of the Lord had so completely forgotten His Law of delight that they had turned the Sabbath into a backbreaking burden.

Christ healed a man on the Sabbath to make the man whole and allow him to live normally. He was ushering him into a delightful experience. But it filled the ruler of the synagogue with indignation. This ruler said, "Don't you do that on the Sabbath! Let the sick people come here some other day. But let's not get involved with this kind of thing on the Sabbath day!"

Can you imagine that? To them, Sabbath keeping was narrowed down to the observance of a list of rules and regulations, and it had become a burden to them, and these burdens they heaped on the shoulders of the people. A heavy burden, the Sabbath had become—anything but a delight!

My, but the devil surely confused the minds of the people of God, didn't he? Now we are trying to help people see that the religion of Jesus is delightful when we believe it ourselves, and help others to see it too, something big is going to happen!

I recall as a boy going to a special series of meetings held in our church. I sat with my mother. The preacher was as dry as the proverbial "hills of Gilboa", but I had to sit there, and I was supposed to listen to those dry sermons—and enjoy them! I didn't have the slightest idea what he was talking about and cared even less.

I remember my mother wore a fox collar. The two eyes were made from glass-topped pins. After I sat as long as I could, I began to play with that fox. My, did this little Coon and that little fox have fun! I would pull out those eyes and make the fox cross-eyed. Then I would make him look straight ahead. Oh yes, I also was able to adjust his ears and wiggle his nose!

Someone might ask, "Why did your mother permit you to do all this?" I don't know, but I'll tell you what I *think!* I think Mother felt the same about the preaching as I did. Perhaps she would have liked to play with the fox-fur too. But it would not look right for her to do it. She was older and could make the mental adjustment—but I was just a lad, and she did not want me to become weary of religion.

In our home we loved religion. We loved the Bible. We loved the stories of the Bible. Now, the experience in church was not the same, and my mother realized that. She sat and listened patiently, but allowed me to amuse myself until we could get back home where religion could once more be associated with the things of joy.

If we want our boys and girls to love religion, we must let them know that we love it—not just patiently endure it. True enjoyment of one's religion shows! If I had had to sit and listen to that man, whom I could not understand, hating every minute of it, I might have grown up hating

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religion. Now, that's a boy for you. I wiggled as a boy (I still do) and I needed to cope with it. I want to tell you that little fox played a great part in my learning to love the Lord.

We should not be "enduring" the Lord: we should be delighted with the Lord. This kind of delight is contagious. Others will soon catch the spirit, for that is what happens when we are delightful! Yes, when we are enthusiastic and show joy in the observance of the Sabbath, others will want to enjoy the Sabbath too.

Several years ago, my wife and I were traveling across the continent on our way to our next evangelistic appointment. We were invited to spend a few restful days with a couple of friends. Our evangelistic work had been very demanding, so we were glad for the opportunity to relax. But, alas, news leaked out that we were in the area, and it wasn't long before a desperate mother asked if she might come over and discuss with us a problem that she was having. We told her we would be happy to see her.

When the mother arrived, she explained. "Brother Coon, my ten-year old son announced to me the other day that he is not going back to Sabbath School anymore. It came as such a shock to me, especially when I realized he was not kidding, he meant it. What am I going to do?" Her eyes indicated her heart was breaking, and the problem seemed too hard to solve.

I was very happy that she came. I was glad to be of service, when a little boy's future was at stake. I forgot that I was tired, and with a prayer in my heart, I began to ask questions, and probe the problem that had been placed before me. I was charged with the realization that here was a situation that could be duplicated in countless homes; here was a mother who wanted a solution to the problem instead of accepting it as a matter of course.

There is only one place to turn at a time like this—the Bible. It has the solution to every problem. This book is not merely a book containing doctrine: it is an encyclopedia of practical Christian living.

And so I picked up the Bible and shared a few passages of Scripture with her and endeavored to lay the groundwork on which we were going to build. Then I turned to several texts, "Call the Sabbath a delight", "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

I pointed out that religion may be unattractive, but it has to be made attractive by us, so that young minds can catch the picture. Show your boy that Jesus is lovely: make Him attractive and appealing: make Him sound worthy of emulation.

Then I told her the following incident that had made a deep impression on me: Some time ago my wife and I were guests at a rather large church. I was to speak at the worship hour. The superintendent of the primary division asked me to speak to her little people. I always enjoy doing this, so I readily accepted the invitation.

It was still quite early and very few children had arrived, so I sat down and watched the children come in, there must have been two hundred children in that department. After they were seated, they had their opening exercises and sang several songs. Just before it was my turn to speak, the superintendent, a very lovely lady, made two mistakes.

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Her first mistake, as far as I was concerned, was made when she said to the children, "Now children, I hope that next Sabbath you will do differently from what you did this Sabbath. I hope you will be here on time."

I thought this was a mistake, because most of the children were on time. It wasn't fair for her to scold the children who were on time along with those who might have been a few minutes late, for they weren't guilty. She had made the Sabbath School undelightful by scolding innocent children.

She might have said something like this, "Boys and girls, I have something wonderful to tell you. You know when Sabbath School started this morning almost all of you were on time. I think that is wonderful!

Wouldn't that have been better? Those who did come late would have done their very best to be on time the next Sabbath. The superintendent might also have said, "Now I know that there were a few of you who weren't on time. But I believe you wanted to be. Do you know what I think?"

Then she could have become very confidential, "I think Daddy overslept!" that would have taken the blame off of them and made them feel better.

In that crowd of children there would have been at least two or three children frantically waving their hands to tell the teacher that that's exactly what did happen, Daddy overslept.

But do you know, that wasn't all. Then she made her second mistake. She began scolding the children for not sitting quietly when they came into the Sabbath School room. "Oh," I thought to myself, "that's even worse than the first scolding." Boys and girls were not made to sit absolutely quiet, especially when nothing is going on. I remembered my boyhood and the trouble I had sitting absolutely quiet. In fact, I still have trouble sitting absolutely quiet! When I see children wiggle in church, I remember that I wiggled too, and they're just like I was!

The superintendent might have said something like this, "Now, children I want to tell you something else. You know when you came into our Sabbath School room this morning, bless your hearts, I saw one of the finest things I have ever seen. I saw a hundred or more of you come right in and sit down like little Ladies and Gentlemen. I think it is wonderful!

The children would have been thrilled. They would have thought, "She's praising me. I didn't do as well as I might have, but still she appreciates my effort."

Then for the benefit of the few who were not as well behaved as they might have been, she might have said, "I understand how hard it is to sit quiet, especially since we don't have nice soft cushions to sit on. But I know you'll wiggle just as little as possible. Why don't we all wiggle together now as we stand and sing an action song." This would have helped the children to love religion.

We hope to persuade all Christians to take on the mission of witnessing to a joyful worship both on the holy worship day and throughout the week. The Bible contains 826 texts which teach us to fulfill this mission. Don't you think we should follow the Word of God and not merely obey, but obey with rejoicing that others may know that His yoke is not grievous?

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Now back to the superintendent, she might have added, "And children, I have some special news to share with you now. Next Sabbath morning we are going to have something very special at the beginning of Sabbath School. You will love it. I'm not going to tell you what it is ; but remember, you'll have to be here right at the beginning of Sabbath School for this special surprise."

This method could have taken care of the problem of tardiness without children associating the Sabbath School with unpleasant scolding. The same group of children could have played a little game of being quiet for one minute—perfectly quiet. The superintendent might have timed them with her watch and made a game out of it. Maybe it would have lasted only 20 seconds. It would have seemed like a minute to them!

With appropriate remarks and appreciation, the superintendent could handle most of the wigglers. On rare occasions she would resort to something more drastic, for order must be preserved. However, each teacher, each officer, each church member has a duty to build into their children's souls a love for worship, a delight in doing right, a beauty in duty. This is a definite command of God.

When I finished relating the experience about the superintendent, the mother of this problem ten-year old boy was in tears.

"I've made exactly those mistakes," she gasped, "But with God's help I will go and do differently."

You see, friends, it is not enough to be religious. We must be delightfully religious. It is not sufficient for us to do right. We must do right "in the beauty of holiness."

You have noticed the title of this chapter is "Dog Sense". I think this idea was first impressed on my mind when I was in the home of my daughter Juanita, when I was recuperating from surgery.

She has a German Shepherd named "Midnight". He is now several years old, but he is the most delightful creature to be around. He still acts like a young puppy. He is kind, joyful, and innocent. He does, however have some bad habits. One of them is digging holes in the yard. He seems to be like a little child, he has to be doing something all the time.

Several months ago, Juanita decided to take a course in dog training. There she learned, among other things, that it does not take a dog very long to learn. When the trainer repeats the same gesture only a limited number of times, the dog associates the gesture with something pleasant or unpleasant. If he is whipped once or twice, he will shy away. He associates the whip with pain.

I have thought of this in connection with the law of association in the human family. It does not take long to associate certain unpleasant things, and to avoid their use or company. If, whenever you are around a certain person, you are made to feel unwanted or embarrassed, it does not take long to avoid that person. Other things sometimes create the same sensations.

Midnight is just a dog, yet he has a keen sense of association. The Lord has placed within the mind of man this same basic law. All of animate creation has, to some degree at least, been endowed with this gift. May the Lord help us adults to awaken to good "Dog Sense" now. May He help us to know that what we instill in our children by way of Association can be in their minds for a long, long time.

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Our Lord not merely commands us to worship Him, He, through the inspired psalmist, commands, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Remember, He said concerning His worship, "Call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable."

He is wooing His children into a worshipful spirit that is beautiful, delightful, and full of joy. He longs to see those who worship Him radiate this delightful joy and beauty and thereby attract others to His lovely worship day. He wants all people everywhere to associate His worship and His worship day with happiness. Such happiness will draw all the world unto Him.

Reflection: May the following scriptures be used by the Holy Spirit as you meditate prayerfully.

Seven Great Bible Facts:

1. We are exhorted to "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm 96:9)
2. We should associate the Sabbath with delight. (Isaiah 58:13)
3. As the Lord completed each day's work during Creation Week, He saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:10, 18, 21)
4. At the close of the sixth day of Creation, "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." (Genesis 1:31)
5. On the seventh day God "ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." (Genesis 2:2, 3)
6. He made the Sabbath for man. "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." Mark 2:27, 28.
7. He gave the Sabbath as a kind of "Keepsake", we therefore rejoice to keep it holy. "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." Exodus 20:8-11; "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed." 31:16, 17.