

Venerate all God's Creation

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March 14, 1954

First Peter, the second chapter, the seventeenth verse, Peter says, honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. Now he's writing in a flowing rhythm of ideas, but what he says is so compact, so profound that I have to break it up into pieces, and I will simply break out verse 17 there, as though it stood alone, and let the admonition of the Apostle come home to us, honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Now, we'll never understand anything very well until we learn that the right understanding of existence is theological, that it's only as things are seen from the sanctuary that they are seen in focus.

We can see bits of disconnected truth here and there, and call it by various names, botany, astronomy, geology, and several dozen others. They are the study of bits, shattered fragments of truth, broken off from the main sphere of truth. But we'll never understand them, and we'll never understand their relation to each other, or their relation to us, until we go into the sanctuary, and there in the presence of the Holy God, recognize that the key to the meaning of existence is a theological key. It is the Theos, the God who gives meaning to life, and to all things that we know.

Now, there are two very prominent and bold branches of study which have claimed to understand life, or at least have tried to understand it, and are trying to understand it. One is philosophy, and the other is science.

Philosophy is reason, searching for the answer to the riddle of existence in its own head. For that's where men begin, you know, in their own heads. There are two, the philosophers have two ideas. One is that all ideas originate when inside your head, and that if you were born into a vacuum and spent your life in a vacuum, and never had any contact with your five senses with the outside world, you'd still generate ideas, because ideas generate inside your head. Now that's one school of thought.

The other school of thought is that an idea never generated inside your head since the beginning of time. They only are there because they have been put there by something on the outside. You have felt something, smelled something, touched something, heard something, seen something. Your five senses have gotten in contact with the outside world, and so you'll get an idea. If they can't agree, I don't know how they're going to help me. They don't even know where their ideas originate.

But nevertheless, they're trying to understand, and I'm not speaking slightly of them, because I suppose it's better to sit down and try to think your way to an answer to the riddle of existence than it would be to attend a horse race or do something else that would harm you. But they, because they're forced to go inside their own heads, they have never learned the answer to the riddle of existence.

And of course, the other major answer, or attempted answer, is science. And science is reason searching for the riddle of existence, the answer to it, not in ideas and in their own heads, but out in nature. It is knowledge obtained by observation and experiment. They do not begin with their heads; they begin with the nature outside. They weigh, and they measure, and they analyze, and they experiment, and they observe, and they put it down, and they check it against other observations and other experiments, and then they arrive at some kind of truth. And this, as long as it touches nature, it's a valid truth.

Science gave us these lights, they had to know what they were doing. Science put your automobile on wheels, they had to know what they were doing. Science built the bridges across which you will go on your way home, they had to know something.

So, we're not saying they don't know, we're only saying that what they know is a shattered fragment of truth, not the truth itself. The key is God. Hence, the godly man is the real sage.

I've said this before, but I must say it again, both for emphasis and because it fits in here like a hand in a glove, that you and I, as evangelical Christians, must get over a bad habit we have. And that bad habit is looking up respectfully to the man who is supposed to be very learned.

My friend, the wisest man in the world is the man who knows the most about God. And the only real sage worthy of the name is the one who realizes that the answer to life is a theological answer and not a scientific one or a philosophical one. It is a theological one. You begin with God, and when you begin with God, then you understand everything in its proper context, and everything fits into shape and form when you begin with God.

So instead of our humbling ourselves and looking up with meek deference to the man of learning, we should remember that he is only learned in shattered fragments of truth, whereas the simplest Christian that came into the kingdom day before yesterday is learned at the center of truth. He knows God. And in knowing God, he knows potentially more than all the teachers could ever teach us, because they're on the outside looking in and he's on the inside looking out.

Now, Peter wrote here some practical things, and I want to talk about them with the understanding that the understanding of it all has got to be a theological one. We've got to begin with God and put God in there and recognize that God belongs in the middle of all this, and that all doors must be opened with the key called God, faith in God, and that any understanding at all of life must be divinely given and must have God as the great central pillar that bears up the universe.

Peter gave us here four things to do, and I want, in order to get it before you, I want to prefix one which I draw from the entire Scripture. I will take the four that Peter has given us here, prefix one to have five for the reasons that will appear and talk to you about the five things that the Christian should do if he is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The five things are to venerate all things, honor all men, love all Christians, fear God, and honor the authorities.

Now, those are the five things. We'll begin with the one that I borrow from the Old Testament, and I'm sure Peter wouldn't care because he quotes from that Old Testament, too, venerate all things.

Now, the Old Testament is literally a rhapsody on the natural creation. You go to Moses and get away from the Levitical order and let Moses begin to soar, as he does in the Book of Deuteronomy, and you will find that Moses was acutely conscious of the presence of God in all creation. Go on to the Book of Job and go to the latter sections of the book of Job, and in the mouth of God they have placed language there that is sublime as descriptions of the world around us.

Then go on to the Book of Psalms, and you'll find David literally dancing with ecstatic delight as he gazes out upon the wonder of God's world. And go on into the Book of Isaiah, and you will find such lofty imagery there, and yet imagery that is not fanciful nor flighty, but that sticks very close to the natural facts as Isaiah observed them.

And come on into the New Testament and soar on through the Epistles and on to the Book of Revelation itself, and you will find a creation from the creatures and beasts and elders and angels around the throne of God, down to the simplest believer, all engaged in admiring God and the works of God.

Take for instance that 104th Psalm. I do not suppose that there is in all collected literature anything that is so rhapsodic, so ecstatic, so elevated, so glowing with religious rapture as the 104th Psalm, as the man of God contemplates nature. He begins, Bless the Lord, O my soul, O Lord, my God, Thou art very great, Thou art clothed with honor and majesty. Thou surroundest Thyself with light as with a garment.

Then from there on he begins to describe all in divine context with God in the center of it, like a shining light, he begins to describe all the world that he knew around about him. He said that God had planted the earth in the pillars of the earth deep, and that the waters had rushed up so high they had gone over the mountains, and God had rebuked the waters, and they had been frightened and fled away and collected themselves together into seas, and the dry land had appeared. And that water then had gone into the sky as mists, and those very clouds were the chariots of God in which He rode as He went round the earth, looking at His creation and admiring the works of His own hand.

And then up at the tops of the mountain and out in the blue, blue sky, the chill winds chill the mists, and they come down, watering the hills below from the chambers of God, pouring out the bottles of His refreshing waters upon the thirsty ground below. And that water then seeps away and little trickles and then into larger streams and then on out into rivers and out to the sea.

And beside those rivers, says the enraptured psalmist, the green grass grows, and the wild ass goes stomping in of a hot noon day and slakes his thirst in the moving stream and drinks of the cooling waters, and then gets up lazily and goes out to crop the succulent grass or lie by the hedge somewhere and just enjoy the works of God. But he doesn't stop there. He tells us that and raises our sights until we see standing on the rocks in the hills yonder the wild goat, which is his home.

And we see him silhouetted against the sky yonder, standing majestic and alone, looking down like a monarch upon all the valleys and the little hills below. And then he lowers our sights and lets us see and we smile as we see the little tailless conies as they run into the rocks for their hiding place. Then he says that the pine tree grows and the fir and the cedar and in the branches of the cedar the birds build their nest and sing among the boughs and that the creatures get up at night.

When the moon rides high in the sky, the nocturnal beasts come out of their dens and move out and roar their defiance to the wide world and hunt their prey. And then when the moon goes down and the sun begins to come up like a bridegroom adorned, then the beasts slink back away into their cooled dens and lazily sleep away the hot day. But, he says half humorously, man ariseth and goes forth unto his work until the evening.

Then when the evening shades prevail, the moon takes up its wondrous tale, then man goes back and lazes away the long cool night and the beasts walk around and search for their prey. He gives us these pictures and then goes on to tell us of the creatures that cry to God and God gives them their food. The ravens croak and God gives them the grain and the young lions roar and God gives them their meat.

That 104th Psalm, I say, is a rhapsodic description of nature. The man who wrote it was intensely in love with everything around about him, the very leaf that quivers there on the branch and the very bug that lays eggs under its green fold, everything the man of God loved. And therefore, I say that the Old Testament would teach us, and we can properly introduce here this prefixed point, venerate all things.

My friend, it is a sad and lamentable fact that you and I are like zoo lions born in captivity and that we of this 20th century that are born in hospitals, walk on sidewalks, die again in hospitals, and are taken out by machinery and laid away in memorial parks by morticians. We never get our feet in the soil, we never get down where we can feel the impulses of nature getting into us, and we rarely lift our eyes to look at God's city above, except when an airplane goes by or we wonder whether we ought to wear our overshoes, whether it's going to rain or not. We have lost the capacity to wonder, and that is what's wrong with us.

Do you know what I believe, my friends? I believe that if the Holy Ghost would come again upon people as of ancient times and congregations were visited by the sweet, hot, fiery breath of Pentecost once more, that we would not only be greater Christians and holier souls, but we would be greater poets and greater artists and greater lovers of God and of his universe. And instead of living in a zoo and eating out of a can, we would feel ourselves a part of God Almighty's great universe, and we would enjoy the return of the birds and the cloud that sails across the sky. And like the simple, naive king of Israel, when we see the cloud, we would not say it's going to rain, we would say there goes God riding in His cloudy chariot.

And when the blue sky shuts down, we would say He clothes Himself with a garment, and we would see God in everything. But we don't see God in anything anymore, only Bible institutes and Bibles. We don't see God in anything but the saints and the mystics and those who walked with God and wrote our great hymns and our great books of

devotion and blessed mankind with their holy presences and left behind them trails of light and beauty.

They were all enraptured with everything around them. They venerated everything. There wasn't a common bush that was anywhere. There wasn't a common hill. They were all hills of God. There wasn't a common mountain. They were mountains of the Almighty. There wasn't a common cloud. They were the chariots of God. There wasn't a common wind. It was the panoply where God Almighty walked, the vast beauty where God walked on the wings of the wind. We've lost it, and I tell you we ought to go back to it again.

I think what we need, ladies and gentlemen, is a compound of Quakerism, Pentecostalism, Methodism, and Calvinism. And I believe that if we had them all shaken together and took a good dose three times a day before our God, we'd be a better Christian than we are. But instead of our venerating all things, we take everything as something usable.

The utilitarian philosophy has grabbed the world. There lies that great hill out yonder, beautiful as can be. Down where below where I was born, you could see it from the little house and barn that were my little world when I was a little boy. And you could see those great blue hills there, and sometimes they would be blue and hazy, and other times the mist would lift and the sun would shine so brightly on them that you could almost make out the leaves across yonder hill and the green patches that lay between. Nobody ever paid any attention to it so far as I know. I don't think anybody ever took a photograph of it.

In all my fourteen years of living around there, as a boy, I never heard one lone man say, isn't that a beautiful thing? Glory be to God, never a man. I don't think any artist ever painted it. I don't think anybody ever wrote a sonnet about it. It just lay there in its green beauty and caught the moving shades and lights as the sun passed along in the clouds between.

And then one day they discovered that underneath that green carpet of beauty there was coal, and they could get that coal by stripping off the top. And so the strippers went in there, coal strippers, and with their huge earth-moving machinery that's got so much attention in later times, they went in and stripped the whole top off the beautiful hills, knocked down the lovely trees and ripped up the green bushes and destroyed the birds' nests and the rabbit warrens, and they turned into a huge desert, whole thousands of acres of beauty so beautiful, so gracious, that the heart of a Christian man ought to beat high by looking at it.

And if I were to go back, as the animal is said to do, to go back to the place where he was born to die, if I were to go back to the little farm above La Jose, Pennsylvania, the town that nobody knows, I would be forced to look not upon the green and brown beauty that once was the hills beyond the little creek, but I would be forced to look at a desert of obscenity and vandalism.

Man has only one interest in life, and that is utility. Can I use it? Will it turn into money? Will it mean money in the bank to me? Will it mean more money and property? And he'll

go in and violate the sanctuary of God together. He'll send his machinery in and rip God's beautiful world apart in order to get at some poor and low-grade coal that lies just below the surface.

Well, that's only an example, and I'm not mad, I'm just grieved. And I don't know there isn't some indignation there, too. When God makes it, it's lovely. When man comes in, he always turns it into a dump, because God Almighty puts it there first for its beauty and then for its usefulness. But man cares nothing for its beauty. He thinks only of its usefulness and ruins its beauty to get it.

But we Christians oughtn't to live like that, and we oughtn't to think like that. I don't say it's a moral crime. I don't say that it is a sin to strip a whole countryside to get coal. But I do say that it is a symptom of a tragic lack of appreciation. Nobody's wondering about anything. Nobody looks up in happy surprise.

As little as I think of Christmas, as we have degraded it in our day, it's been a never-failing delight to me all the years to see little children on Christmas morning. Something that you bought and paid for and brought home and rather more or less took as a matter of course. It is a source of sudden spontaneous and wonderful delight to a child. And to see the incredible look on their face, the incredulous look, rather, on their face, it's incredible that they should have a thing like that. Everything is full of wonder and beauty.

I wonder if Jesus might not have included that in His idea when He said, except you be converted and become as little children, you shall never enter the kingdom of God. There is the ability to wonder and worship. For worship is wonder, and wonder is worship. And when we turn our worshiping wonder toward God, then we're worshipping God in the right sense of the word. O Lord, my God, thou art very great. Thou art clothed with majesty. Garment of the light is thy garment. Thou clothest thyself with light as with robe and rightest upon the wings of the wind.

So therefore, we Christians ought to live in a fairer land. We ought to live in a wonderful world. And as Thomas Traherne says, we ought to rise every morning in heaven and we ought to see the very dew on the grass as something of absolutely wonderful to behold.

Mr. McAfee and I were eating out here in the far south side after the broadcast yesterday and we saw a robin, a great big upholstered, beautiful, fresh robin with a breast as red as a tangerine or redder. And hopping around there just, I don't know where she'd come from or whether she'd stayed all winter, but she sure had on her best Easter gown. And I got a lot of joy out of that. I said, now there's so many things I can't enjoy.

Playing games drives me completely to distraction. And many things that people invent that they want me to, "will you sit down and play Scrabble with me, Mr. Tozer?" No, of course not. I wouldn't play Scrabble with you because Scrabble has been invented by, it is popped out of somebody's empty head, I wouldn't be bothered with it.

But I got relaxed and felt younger as I sat and watched that big bird. And then there were two gray squirrels and they also were fat, just, I suppose, ready for the spring and

spring mating. And they chased each other like two kids, round and round and round. And one would run up a pole and literally spring out and lie on his feet and spring up. But he wasn't doing anything. He was just exercising, letting off steam. He was delighted that God Almighty had ever made him. And he didn't know enough to say so. He couldn't have joined in singing a hymn. But in his little squirrelish heart, he was glorifying God the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.

So, we ought to venerate everything and walk around in the world as those who are in the palace of the King. And everywhere we look, everywhere we look, we see something new and fresh. God put it there, so venerate all things as part of the text.

Godless philosophies create godless worlds. And when we forget that God made us, then down we go. And we forget our second point, honor all men. For here we have it, honor all men.

Why do we honor all men? You say, I know men that don't deserve any honor. Well, yes and no. They do and they don't. Let me explain. We honor all men because they were originally made in the image of God. And faith knows their true value.

The godly chaplain who sees that savage, vicious, snarling killer, hard as nails, shut away there waiting the one moment when he shall go out to die a few weeks hence. If he had no faith, he'd turn his back in cold disdain and leave the snarling killer to turn in on his own heart and eat himself to death.

But the man of God, if he's a true man of God, and thank God we have many of them as chaplains, the man of God knows what the poor, snarling man doesn't know. He knows that even though his hands are stained with human blood, he was once made in the image of God. He knows that even though the dirt and silt and unspeakable filth of sin has washed over his soul and left its marks there, he was still made in the image of God.

And the chaplain honors the man about to die because he was once made in God's image. And he was in the mind of God when God said, let us make man in our image and in the image of God made he him. I say the godless philosophies forget this and they make the state everything and the individual nothing. Christianity reverses the order altogether and makes the individual everything and the state to be the servant of the individual.

Honor all men, low concepts of humanity always turn us into beasts. Hitler never could have led his Nazi Germany to victory, temporary victory, if he had not first had his propagandists to instill into the minds of the people the thought that Christianity was false and that there was no God, or if there were a God, he was some ancient god of some Germanic Valhalla. And because they had no high opinion of man, they built their Nazi state, which thank God crashed down under the hammering guns of the West.

And now in communist China and communist Russia, and in her many poor slave satellites, we have the philosophy that makes man nothing and the state everything. That's why they can invent the idea of the wave upon wave business. That is, because they have unlimited manpower in China and in Russia, and China was, but could be in

Russia if we ever go to war, they forget those are human beings, they forget they were made in the image of God, they're simply gunpowder, they're bullets.

And so, they throw them in wave upon wave. And I've talked to those who have seen them, to one particularly who went through the hell and horror of it, and he said, I cannot describe the coming in of those Chinese soldiers in any other language than that of a snowstorm in a wind, a windy blizzard. There would be waves of them, thousands of them move in like a blizzard, and then a little in another wave move in.

And he said, our men with their machine guns mowed them down like grass, and they piled in the next wave over that pile, and they were mowed down, and the next over that, and the next over that, each mown down as they moved in. And the strategy behind all that grew out of the philosophy behind that. And the philosophy was, men are nothing. Pour them in and kill them. The idea that they were made in the image of God is ancient poppycock. And that's the strategy behind all statism and totalitarianism. It is the individual's nothing--he's expendable.

But oh, what a difference. When our loving Savior took a little baby in his arm, a little baby, maybe with a runny nose and certainly with a drooling lip, I never saw one that wasn't drooling, until he was a year old; Jesus took that little baby and patted his little head and blessed him. He was an individual. He wasn't blessing humanity. To God there's no such thing as humanity, they're just people.

And people taken together is what we call humanity, and they're people. And Jesus picked out the little fellows and blessed them. And the happy-faced, timid mothers brought them and looked at each other and grinned in delight as Jesus put his hands on their little bald heads and said, God bless you, sonny, or God bless you, daughter. He was saying to the whole world, people are worthwhile. I love people. God made people.

And every individual, whether he be red or yellow, black or white around the world, whether he be a poor Chinese communist or a man in a death cell waiting in the electric chair, whether she be a harlot walking the streets of the ghetto, or the colonel's lady sleeping in her silken bed, she's a microcosm, a little world all by herself, all by himself, man or woman, boy or girl, old or young, little microcosms, the sum of the world in that individual man. That's what you're worth to God. And that's what they're all worth to God.

And that's why Peter said, honor all men. You don't honor them because they're liars, you grieve because they're liars. You don't honor them because they're robbers, you grieve that they're robbers. You don't honor them because they live for the world and gamble and drink, and you honor them in spite of it, but you honor them because they have in their souls, the little microcosm, the little world. Honor all men.

Communists can't tell us anything about racial equality. Mrs. Roosevelt can't tell me anything about racial equality. We Christians have known all down the centuries that there isn't a deformed black boy lying half-starved in a mud hut deep in the Kisidugi regions of Africa, but what is more valuable than all the stars that shine? We've known that all the time. We Christians have valued the individual. We've honored men because God made them.

And they've turned on us because we have white churches. And they've said, you're violating the teachings of your savior because you're looking down on people. I look down on nobody. I don't look up to very many either. I look out on everybody because God made them all.

And red or yellow, black or white, they're God's handiwork. But God's helped me from ever looking down on a man because his skin is black or because his eyes slant differently from mine or because his hair is tight and curly. God forbid it. We're all alike. And God has made of one blood all men to dwell on the earth.

And that's why I always feel embarrassed when a maid, colored maid, comes in when I'm staying in hotels or when I come in unexpectedly and find a humble, cringing, colored maid telling me, she's so sorry, she's so sorry, she'd be right out, sir, she'd be right out, sir. Just a moment, sir, and she'd be right out. Why should she be sorry at me? Who am I? God made that colored maid too. She has much education. She probably lives in a hut someplace. She's just as worthy as I am just as worthy as you.

And that's why I can't for the life of me ever feel good when I'm being served by somebody. A beautiful Spanish Mexican type of woman down in McAllen, Texas, in the Las Palmas Hotel, where I stayed for numbers of times, came to the door and I wasn't ready to leave. And I tried to tell her I'll be out in 10 minutes. And she said, no sabe, senior, no sabe, senior, no sabe, senior. And she went away embarrassed, and I was embarrassed too.

So, somebody said if they ever, she ever says no sabe again, say poco tempo, and that means a little time yet. And I remembered that, and I'm very prudent. Poco tempo. And they said, if you want a little time, just say poco tempo, senorita.

So she said, she's going to come back later, so I have poco tempo the next time. I don't know whether she understood or not with my Dutch accent, but anyway, I don't feel good being waited on, and I don't feel good waiting on anybody. Except, of course, as we in love wait on each other. That's something else again.

Jesus our Lord waited on folks and ministered to them and loved them, and He knew in His deep holy heart that He was so exalted above them as exalted as the mountain peak above the lowly anthill below, and yet He stooped and washed their feet. So, if we serve, we do not serve because we think we're beneath anybody. We serve because we love God and people for God's sake.

And our fine missionaries from this very church, cultured, well-educated, fine people that have been brought up in good homes in this city, are over there washing sores, our Lois Benke, brought up in a fine Christian cultured home, washing sores over there.

Does she do it because she feels she's beneath them? No, but because they were made in the image of God, and she loves them for God's sake. And yet does she stoop, I wonder? I wonder if she thinks she stoops. I don't think she does. I believe she considers, as I've said this morning, that we're all one, and God has made of all blood men to dwell on the

face of the earth, and it's a privilege in Jesus Christ to wait on each other for Christ's sake.

That is one thing. It's quite another to take a lick, spittle, hand-licking attitude that I am beneath this big man, or a supercilious, proud attitude, he is beneath me. So, either one's dangerous, and I don't want to fall into either trap. More on this next week. Amen.