

Born to Win

Taking God Seriously

by Ronald L. Dart

Should we take God seriously. I know that's a stupid question to ask, in a way, but I'm asking it anyway because it seems to me that a lot of people really don't—they really don't take God very seriously. Dr. Laura, I think it was, who said that the First Commandment reveals that our relationship with God is not *casual*—it's rather *covenantal*. And I am persuaded that a lot of people take God *very casually*, and I want to explain to you what I mean. If you'd turn to the 50th psalm:

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹ The mighty God, even the LORD, has spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof.

God has spoken and he's called *the whole world*, "Come and listen."

Psalm 50

AKJV

² Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shined.

³ Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

Now, I want you to think about this for a moment. We're dealing with someone here who could blink his eyes and start the Big Bang. It was just about like that. God spoke the word, the Big Bang happened, and out of that comes a universe that is (I think they now say) 13 to 14 *billion* light years across. That's who we're talking about here—with that kind of power. But there is coming a time when God will come, not quietly, but in a *storm* of fire devouring before him—very stormy round about him. The people who assembled before God at Mount Sinai, and actually heard the Ten Commandments spoken down off the mountain, got a sample of what this looked like. In Exodus, it says this:

Exodus 19

NIV '84

¹⁸ Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, [...]

Visualize: Here's a mountain, and all over it smoke is just *billowing* out of the thing because God has descended upon it.

Exodus 19

NIV '84

¹⁸ [...] the whole mountain trembled violently,

I'll tell you folks, if you've never been in a major earthquake, you don't have any idea what that feels like. You hear about earthquakes, people talk about earthquakes, you see pictures—but to actually have the earth move beneath your feet and *tremble violently* is a terrifying thing.

Exodus 19

NIV '84

¹⁹ and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. [...]

And so you have this *incredible* manifestation of a thunderstorm. Imagine the biggest you've ever heard—right inside of it. The whole mountain smoking, the rocks shaking and splitting, and then all of a sudden the sound of a trumpet gets louder and louder—the kind of a trumpet that might break the rocks. And then the *voice of God* comes rolling down the mountain. You know, by the time he rolled down that first commandment down the mountainside for them to hear, I expect a lot of strong men had fainted dead away. There have been a few times in my life I've been somewhere where the noise from some kind of a concert or something was just *overpowering*. And, you know, you can actually sometimes *feel* it all the way down in the abdomen. It gives you a cramped feeling, sometimes, whenever that kind of power is coming down around you. And I expect that's the sort of thing that they had experienced there. It could give you abdominal cramps, it can even loosen the bowels of strong men whenever this type of thing takes place. So by the time God got through pronouncing just the first commandment, with nine commandments to go, this was a pretty terrifying experience for these people to go through. So this is God. He said:

Psalm 50

AKJV

³ [...] a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.
⁴ He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.
⁵ Gather my saints together to me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.
⁶ And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.

Do you think we ought to take him seriously?

Psalm 50

AKJV

⁷ Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, even your God.
⁸ I will not reprove you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, to have been continually before me.
⁹ I will take no bullock out of your house, nor he goats out of your folds.
¹⁰ For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.
¹¹ I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.

“Don't think you can bring me anything. Don't think you can pay me off. I own it all!” Do you think we should take that claim seriously?

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹² If I were hungry, I would not tell you: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.

“The world is mine and everything in it.” So, in fact, God says, “You can't give me anything.”

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹³ Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

¹⁴ Offer to God thanksgiving; [...]

“You want to give me something?”, God says, “Be grateful. Just give thanks.”

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹⁴ [...] and pay your vows to the most High: [*In other words, keep your promises.*]

¹⁵ And call on me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

That’s a deal.

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹⁶ But to the wicked God said, What have you to do to declare my statutes [*What business do you have talking about my law?*], or that you should take my covenant in your mouth?

¹⁷ Seeing you hate instruction, and casts my words behind you.

Now, here’s a category of people who simply don’t listen. Instruction comes; they dismiss it. They don’t take God seriously. Here’s what God says:

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹⁸ When you saw a thief, then you consented with him, [...]

You actually saw someone shoplifting at a store; you don’t say anything to anybody. You just watched him go and said, “Ha! That’s interesting.” And he says:

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹⁸ [...] and have been partaker with adulterers.

I mean, your partner...you’ll have them in your house, you’ll bid them “Godspeed”, you have *no problem* with people who will sleep with another man’s wife.

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹⁹ You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit.

²⁰ You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son.

You know, I can’t help but realize, as I read through the Bible, how often this thing of *speaking against a brother* comes up—of judging a brother, of condemning a brother, and slandering people so carelessly in the things that we say and the things that we do. He says, “You do all this stuff.”

Psalm 50

AKJV

²¹ These things have you done, and I kept silence; [*I didn’t say a thing.*] you thought that I was

altogether such an one as yourself: [...]

“You did it, I didn’t do anything, and you thought I was like you are.”

Psalm 50

AKJV

²¹ [...] but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes.

Now, this psalm is *burned* into my conscience. It was many, many years ago when I first noticed the significance of this statement. And its *all too easy*—when you go along through life, living your life a certain way, nothing terrible is happening to you—to think that God has no disapproval, or even may even have *approval* of the way in which you’re living your life (or that he, maybe, just doesn’t care) and to *misinterpret* God’s silence. We sin, nothing happens, and we assume that God looks at this thing like we look at it. We assume that we can dance and not pay the piper.

God is patient (this is what this means) and God gives us *time* to make the turnaround in our lives. We do these things; God doesn’t do anything. The reason he doesn’t do anything is not because he approves; it’s because he’s giving us room to either turn around or to hang ourselves. One way or the other, we’ve got to consider that. It’s a *terrible* mistake to presume upon God’s patients and to not take him seriously.

Psalm 50

AKJV

²² Now consider this, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

“Think about this”, he says, “lest I tear you in pieces and there is, in the end, finally, nobody who can put you back together again.” Should we take God seriously? “Think about it”, he says, “tear in pieces and *nobody* can deliver you; *nobody* can put you back together again.”

Psalm 50

AKJV

²³ Whoever offers praise glorifies me: and to him that orders his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.

So like I asked you: Should we take God *seriously*? Or is this just so much spiritual gas? Because, in fact, if you look around at the way people live their lives, I would have to conclude that either they don’t know about this or, if they do know about it, they consider it just so much spiritual talk and conversation and there’s nothing that they need to *do* about it. And I ask what does this—the way you live your life—say in answer to my question: Should we take God seriously? Matthew 7, verse 12. Jesus said:

Matthew 7

KJ2000

¹² Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Should we take Jesus seriously on this? Should we take him at his word? Are the entire law and the prophets bound up in the way we treat one another? Well, there it is—right on the page. All things that you want men to do to you, you do that to your brother. Live your life by this rule because all the law in the prophets are bound up in this.

Matthew 7

KJ2000

¹³ Enter in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, [*There are a lot of people going that way.*] and many there be who go in there:

¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

¹⁶ You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Now, what could we say about this? Jesus said there would be *many* false prophets that would go out in the world, so therefore it's something we should have to expect to deal with at sometime. But what kind of fruits could he possibly be talking about when he says, "by their fruits you shall know them"? I've heard some incredibly inane discussions about what "fruits" might amount to, but consider what Jesus said:

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹⁷ Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit.

¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

¹⁹ Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

²⁰ Therefore by their fruits you shall know them.

Now, perhaps if we look at this in the context of what Jesus is saying, one of the things we might look at is how a minister treats people, right? How does he treat people? Does he put them down? Does he lord it over them? This is a fruit; this is something you can look at. The fruit is something on a tree you can look up and even pluck off the tree, but you can observe and look and actually *see* with your eyes, *handle* with your hands, *sniff* it, *smell* it, *taste* it, and you can you *know* whether you've got a good tree or a bad tree.

Now, what is it about false prophets that you can look at and tell: this is bad. Well, in context, it has to do with the way people treat people. But, perhaps we could consider child molestation a corrupt fruit of a minister or a ministry. It's a major issue in the news right now, isn't it—of pedophile priests in their dozens (in their hundreds, we wonder)—as to how far that scandal reaches in the Roman Catholic Church? But you should understand something: It's more dramatically exposed in the Roman Catholic Church than it might be somewhere else, but the problem of ministers and ministries who abuse people extends *way* beyond the borders of the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps using ministerial office to take sexual advantage of women or boys or girls in the congregation would be considered an evil fruit. I'd consider it an evil fruit, wouldn't you? And, therefore, if the tree is bringing evil fruit, what does it say about the tree? Well, Jesus is clear as crystal on this.

But here's the question: Should we really take Jesus seriously on this? Do we really *have* to take this into consideration? Do we really *have to* live our lives in accordance with this? Now, Jesus goes on to say:

Matthew 7

KJ2000

²¹ Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Now, I've seen on the walls of businesses, on the walls of people's homes, I've seen it on the bumpers of their cars: "Jesus is Lord." That isn't going to cut it, according to what Jesus said. "Not every one of those people shall enter the kingdom of heaven but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven." Should we take Jesus seriously here? Well, it's kind of hard not to, isn't it?

Matthew 7

KJ2000

²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out demons? and in your name done many wonderful works?

Now, that's a *real sobering* thing. Because here we're not talking about some priest of Baal. We're not talking about a priestess of Diana up at Ephesus. We're talking about somebody who would say to Jesus, "Haven't I prophesied *in your name* and *in your name* have cast out devils?" And Jesus will say:

Matthew 7

KJ2000

²³ [...] I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.

The word "iniquity" [ἀνομία, Strong's G458] means *lawlessness*. Now, are we supposed to take him seriously on this—that merely the fact that a person could speak in his name, do miracles in his name, do all kinds of wonderful things in his name, and claim all this, could *still* be cast out because they reject his law? That's what he's saying. Should we take him seriously on that?

Matthew 7

KJ2000

²⁴ Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: [*Bad times are coming.*]

²⁵ And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

²⁶ And every one that hears these sayings of mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand:

²⁷ And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Yeah, I know, but do we have to take Jesus seriously on all of this? Because the implication of this is that there's a category of people who *hear what Jesus says*... He's not talking about people in Malaysia who never heard of Jesus; not talking about the wild man of Borneo. He's not talking about people down in deep, dark Africa before Livingstone ever got there. He's not talking about that. He's talking about people who *hear his words* who won't do them. He says, in the end, great will be the fall of the house that these people built. We have to, I think, take Jesus seriously on this—that the way you live your life, what you do with his teachings, the way you actually construct your life and the things you do—you *have to take these things seriously*.

Matthew 7

KJ2000

²⁸ And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his teachings:

²⁹ For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus did not equivocate. He didn't give them a lot of "if's, "and's, and "but's—a lot of "therefore's, "this is my opinion, but you don't have to do it." He gave it to them with authority. And then the question comes: Since he obviously took *himself* seriously, should *we* take him seriously? Try this one from Paul—Romans, chapter 14. Paul said:

Romans 14

KJ2000

⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself.

⁸ For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. [*We are in his hand.*]

⁹ For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? or why do you despise your brother? [...]

How in the world can you look down your nose at, judge, and despise your brother? Notice how this is a theme that is so strong in the Bible—of the condemnation, the looking down your nose at other people. He said:

Romans 14

KJ2000

¹⁰ [...] for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

¹¹ For it is written [*Isaiah 45:23*], As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

¹² So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Now, understand this; be sure you have a grip on this: When you stand on the sea of glass before Jesus Christ in the Judgement Day, and the time comes where people start answering for the things that they have done, *you* are going to answer for *yourself*. You will not be called to answer for the person sitting next to you right now—no matter how close to you that person is. You will not be called in question for the person who lives in your house with you—no matter married, single, child, mother, father, whatever they are; you will not be called into question for that person. You will not be called into question for the other brothers that you sit with in church week by week. You will not be called in question for *any* of these people. You will give an account to God of only one person on this planet—*yourself*. And that has to do with how you live your life and how you deal with other people.

So, what business do you have sitting in judgment of any other human being on the face of the earth? Paul says, "Don't do it! Don't judge one another. Why do you judge your brother? Why do you despise your brother?"

Romans 14

KJ2000

¹³ Let us not therefore judge one another any more[....]

But this is just Paul. Do we have to take Paul seriously? Should we take Paul seriously in this? Well, the problem is Jesus says pretty much the same thing. In Matthew, chapter seven, and the Sermon on the Mount. Verse one—a simple, clean statement:

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹ Judge not, that you be not judged.

Now, what part of that sentence do we not understand? Do we take it seriously? Should we take it seriously? Well, I'm afraid a lot of people take it *very casually*. You know, "Well, yeah, it's not a good idea, but it's not a big deal if I do." I have to conclude people feel that way because they *do it so much*.

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹ Judge not, that you be not judged.

² For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Now, I don't know how you feel about that, but it really leads me to think that I would like to use a *short* yardstick. I'd really like to shorten up on the Bureau of Standards just a little bit. Because if I take a nice, long measure, and I put it up and say, "Aha, brother, you've come in short on that thing!", the problem is: I'm going to have to measure up to the same stick. Whatever it is—whatever standard I insist that you must be judged by—I will have to be judged by that same standard. So this should lead me, I would think, to want to cut you a little more slack—to want to cut a shorter stick for you, to not measure you by such strict standards as I might otherwise feel like doing.

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹ Judge not, that you be not judged.

² For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.

³ And why behold you the mote that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?

⁴ Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and, behold, a beam is in your own eye?

⁵ You hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye.

"Hypocrite"—that's a strong word. Should we take it seriously that Jesus feels that, whenever we take in hand to try to straighten *somebody else* out when we haven't been able to get *our own* house in order, that he will judge us as severely as we judge somebody else? Should we take that seriously? Here's Paul again, in the second chapter of Romans. Having made his case in the first chapter, he starts off the second by saying:

Romans 2

AKJV

¹ Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are that judge [*You just don't have any excuse.*]: for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you that judge do the same things.

² But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.

³ And think you this, O man, that judge them which do such things, and do the same, that you shall escape the judgment of God?

Can you take this seriously? Or do you think, really, that you can judge other people for doing things that you also do and that you're not going to be judged for it?

Romans 2

AKJV

⁴ Or despise you the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

That it's God's grace—God's goodness—that has actually brought you to the place where you have repented. If you hadn't been *brought* there, you wouldn't *be* there.

Romans 2

AKJV

⁵ But after your hardness and impenitent heart treasure up to yourself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;

⁶ Who will [*Get this straight.*] render to every man according to his deeds:

⁷ To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life:

⁸ But to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, [*he will render*] indignation and wrath,

⁹ Tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man that does evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;

¹⁰ But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:

¹¹ For there is no respect of persons with God.

How about it? Should we take Paul seriously in this? Because what Paul seems to be saying here is that the way we live our life—the way we walk the road, the way we encounter other people on the road, the way we treat the people we run into—is going to have a *major* impact on where we stand in the judgement and how we, in turn, are treated by God at some later time. Should we take Paul seriously in this, or can we afford to take it casually? Or perhaps this scripture from Galatians, chapter six:

Galatians 6

AKJV

⁷ Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.

⁸ For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Man, I can remember a song back when I was just a little boy that my dad used to sing: “We reap whatsoever we sow. Whatever the seeds, they will grow. Be careful, indeed, sow only good seed. You reap whatsoever you sow.”

Good, old gospel song. Comes *straight* out of the book. Ah, but then, do we have to take it seriously? Do you really mean that the things that we do are going to come home to roost—that we *are* going to reap what we sow; that is we sow *good* seed, we're going to reap *good* things; that if we sow *evil* seed, we're going to reap *evil* things. Yeah. Yup, afraid so. That's precisely what the scripture says. And the question is: Does it have any effect—or *should* it have any effect—on the way we live our lives and the decisions we make? Well, if we take God seriously in these things, then we should take seriously the way we live our lives and the way we make decisions. Now, thankfully, there is another side to this question. And I want to turn to that other side right now. Isaiah 55, this time. Isaiah 55, verse six:

Isaiah 55

AKJV

⁶ Seek you the LORD while he may be found, call you on him while he is near:

⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Now, that's something we can also take seriously: that *if* we will turn around; *if* we will make the changes; *if* we will put our heart in the right place and begin to let our lives show it; that God will have mercy and he will *fully, abundantly, totally* pardon us. Now, what does it mean? You know, you're on death row and the governor of the state of Texas writes out a pardon for you. Well, it means that you can go out of that jail. You're not on probation. You don't have to be chased around by probation officers. You don't have to report anywhere. You're a free man. That's what a pardon is. When God pardons you, it's gone. You can take this as seriously as anything else. God says:

Isaiah 55

AKJV

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, said the LORD.

The fact is, you and I might bear a grudge. Somebody tells us, "I'm sorry", and we say, "Well, that's okay", and we'll say we'll let it go, and then we *don't*—that oftentimes we still have a hard time being nice to people we have forgiven (at least we *say* we have forgiven). We forgive and yet, at the same time, we bear a grudge. God doesn't do that. He's not like that.

Isaiah 55

AKJV

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Can we take that seriously? I think we can.

Isaiah 55

AKJV

¹⁰ For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not thither, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

¹¹ So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

You can not only take this seriously, you can take this to the bank. God's word *can be trusted*. Now, this is also a good place to go back to Paul again. Since Paul gave us the other side of the story, let's see what he has on *this* side. 1 Timothy, chapter one, verse 12:

1 Timothy 1

AKJV

¹² And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

¹³ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

Boy, think about that. Here's a man who steps up to the plate and says this. He says, "God had mercy on me. I was a *blasphemer*, a *persecutor*, and I was injurious. But *I* obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief."

1 Timothy 1

AKJV

¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Can we take that seriously? I think Paul would expect you to take that *very seriously*—that God came into the world to save sinners. Paul said that he was chief.

1 Timothy 1

AKJV

¹⁶ However, for this cause I obtained mercy, [...]

This is really interesting. Paul says, "I really think the reason why God called *me*, in particular; the reason why he gave *me* mercy:"

1 Timothy 1

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Paul says, "I think I owe my salvation to the fact that God wanted to demonstrate that if he could forgive *me*, he can forgive anybody. And that, therefore, you shouldn't sit around worrying yourself sick over the things that you have done." Just turn, repent, be sorry, straighten your life out, and God will forgive you as he forgave Paul. Finally, a psalm that we can take seriously and has so much to say. It's the 103rd—one of the favorites of mine down through the years. I've had to turn to it on an awful lot of occasions. Psalm 103, verse one:

Psalm 103

AKJV

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

³ Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases;

Can we take that seriously?

Psalm 103

AKJV

⁴ Who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies;

Can we take that seriously?

Psalm 103

AKJV

- ⁵ Who satisfies your mouth with good things; so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
⁶ The LORD executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.
⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the children of Israel.
⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

Now, after all these things we've read before, can we take God seriously in matters related to judgement? The answer needs to be: Yes, we can take him *very seriously*, and if you take him casually he is going to *bite*. At the same time, we can take *very seriously* these promises of mercy, compassion, forgiveness. Verse nine:

Psalm 103

AKJV

- ⁹ He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.
¹⁰ He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

Now, you should really take that very seriously. What he's telling you is that, up until this point in your life, God has not dealt with you according to your sins. Oh, sure, you're hurting. Sure, there are things in your life that are bad. Sure, there are many ways in which you feel maybe God's hand is heavy upon you. But you need to understand this: He has *still* not dealt with you according to what you have done.

Psalm 103

AKJV

- ¹¹ For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Can you take that seriously? Sometimes, you know, we have a hard time *accepting* the fact that God has forgiven us—accepting the fact that God is not holding something against us, that God isn't bearing some kind of a grudge. But can you take this seriously or are you going to take it casually?

Psalm 103

AKJV

- ¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
¹³ Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him.
¹⁴ For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

You know, one of the reasons, I think, that it is easier perhaps for God to forgive us than it is for us to forgive one another is because God does not have exceptionally high expectations of us. He doesn't have some idea in *his* mind of what we *ought* to be like or what we will be like based upon human standards of conduct. He basically knows we're dust. He knows the weaknesses. He knows all the things we're apt to do, prone to do, want to do. And so, consequently, when we do them he is not surprised; he is not chagrined above measure. For those who fear him he understands. But that doesn't mean he doesn't take it seriously. And it doesn't mean that *you* can afford to not take it seriously when you walk contrary to his way.

Psalm 103

AKJV

- ¹⁵ As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

¹⁶ For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

And you come by a few days later and never even know it was there. That's the way man is.

Psalm 103

AKJV

¹⁷ But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on them that fear him, and his righteousness to children's children;

It just keeps right on bearing fruit.

Psalm 103

AKJV

¹⁸ To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

That's not really that hard, is it? Now, sure, we do make mistakes; we break the law from time to time. But what we're talking about here is people whose *heart* is with God and who *want* to be obedient and who are doing their best to order their life according to the way God laid out that a life should be led—who are willing to treat their brother like they want to be treated themselves.

Psalm 103

AKJV

¹⁹ The LORD has prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰ Bless the LORD, you his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word.

²¹ Bless you the LORD, all you his hosts; you ministers of his, that do his pleasure.

And so I return to my opening question: Should we take God seriously? Can we afford not to?

Christian Educational Ministries

P.O. Box 560 ❖ Whitehouse, Texas 75791

Phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44 ❖ Fax: (903) 839-9311

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Taking God Seriously

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