



"God, we may be sure, is not a God who can deal with sinners as if they were not sinners."

—B.B. Warfield

24-Jun-11

## Should We 'Sweat the Small Stuff'? (Part Two)

As we saw in Part One, [Song of Songs 2:15](#) contains an intriguing metaphor: "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes." What are the "little foxes" in our lives? They are the seemingly little things that can do the greatest damage: a little "white" lie or perhaps just a little less than the whole truth, a little [gossip](#), a little exceeding of the speed limit, a little stealing by downloading songs or software that we did not buy, a little grudge or lack of forgiveness, a little idolatry, a little neglect of [God](#), a little Sabbath-breaking, or a little salty language. We could add ignoring people in need, watching inappropriate movies, and stealing time from our employers by getting in late, leaving early, or wasting time during the day. The list goes on and on, and before we know it, our entire future as fruit-bearing vines is at stake.

These little things seem so harmless on the surface, but as we yield to them, the "little foxes" subtly nibble at our vine, as the analogy in [John 15:1-8](#) illustrates. Before long, our connection to the Root, Jesus Christ—the Source of our spiritual nourishment—weakens. The result is a gradual separation from God until our vine is withered. Soon, we no longer produce fruit, becoming as dead wood to be gathered and put on the fire.

Examples and warnings against "little foxes" are found throughout the Bible. We see God's reaction to such seemingly minor things in the story of Uzzah (see [II Samuel 6:1-7](#)), who did a "little" thing by reaching out his hand to keep the Ark of the Covenant from falling off the cart, when God's Word clearly instructs that the Ark must never be touched but always carried by the sons of Kohath using poles ([Numbers 4:15](#)). There is also the story of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who were guilty of a "little" infraction of the laws regarding the incense offering (see [Leviticus 10:1-3](#)). To them, fire was fire, but to God, there was a great difference between using the fire He provided—and commanded to be used—and common fire.

The Israelite King Saul made a "little" change to God's commandment to destroy the Amalekites completely (see [I Samuel 15:1-9](#)), sparing the life of the Amalekite king, Agag, and the best of the livestock. Joshua 7 tells the story of Achan's disobedience in taking a "little" of the accursed treasure after the battle of Jericho, and [Genesis 19:26](#) informs us that Lot's wife took a "little" look back at the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the New Testament, the example of Ananias and Sapphira, who told a "little" lie, is narrated in [Acts 5:1-11](#).

In every one of these examples, God's reaction to these "little" breakings of the rules is quick and severe. In most of these cases, the one who disobeyed died! That should make us stop and think about our "little" sins.

A less well-known example appears in Exodus 4, not long after God's discourse with [Moses](#) at the burning bush concerning bringing Israel out of Egypt. Subsequently, Moses obtains permission from his father-in-law to return to Egypt, and preparing for departure, loads up his family and begins the trip back to Egypt. [Exodus 4:24-26](#)

And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely, you are a husband of blood to me!" So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!—because of the circumcision.

After just speaking to Moses and convincing him that he was going to represent God and free the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, God was ready to kill him? Why?

For some reason—perhaps he thought it was a "little" thing or maybe it was sheer neglect—Moses had not circumcised his son, as all the sons of Abraham were to be circumcised under God's covenant (see Genesis 17). Judging from the reaction of Moses' wife Zipporah, we could suppose that Moses may have given in to her opposition to circumcision. He probably wanted to keep the [peace](#) at home and thought he could get by without completing a "little thing" like circumcision. Moses put Zipporah's desires above God's commandment. In doing so, he had failed to keep the covenant that God had established with Abraham.

God had commanded this covenant for Abraham *and* all his descendants, and He had even warned them that "the uncircumcised male child . . . shall be cut off from his people" ([Genesis 17:14](#)). It was a commandment—it was no "little thing" to God. We learn here that, when we neglect the little things of God, it is a sign that we undervalue the awesome promise of His covenant. It tells God that we are displeased and unwilling to comply fully with the conditions He has set. This is indeed no little thing!

As humans, we have a proclivity to worry about the things that we should not worry about. But worse yet, we have a proclivity not to worry about the things that we really should worry about.

Likewise, many modern-day [Christians](#) feel that God does not care about little things, taking a very human perspective of God to justify this philosophy. We can easily see the fruit of this warped perspective. They do what is right in their own minds (see [Judges 21:25](#)), thinking that as long as they are not out there committing the "big sins"—one of the "big Ten"—they are just fine. Yet, we see that they consider the [Sabbath](#), one of the Ten Commandments, a little thing. This shows us that once they begin to compromise on the things they think are not significant, they soon move on to disregarding bigger matters too.

However, if we are to be true followers of Christ, we must be united to Him—our Vine and Root—by [faith](#). As Christ tells us Himself in John 15, it

is through our connection with Him that we derive our spiritual strength and produce fruit. Following Him and being united with Him means that we must do what He instructs us to do, no matter how "little" it may seem.

The "little foxes" of [Song of Songs 2:15](#) threaten our faith and our connection with Christ. These little foxes are not little to God—and they cannot be little to us. Throughout the Bible, we receive stern warnings of the danger of "little foxes" through God's fierce reactions to seemingly inconsequential things. Where are the "little foxes" in our vineyards? We must take action to seek them out and remove them from our daily lives.

As Paul tells us in [Romans 11:16](#), "If the root is holy, so are the branches." God has called us to be holy, and when it comes to [holiness](#), God does "sweat the small stuff"—and so must we!

- Bill Onisick

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Justice and Grace](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Some of us may have been disturbed, maybe angered, because our sense of fairness is disrupted by what God did in the past. We have difficulty with this because we do not understand holiness, justice, sin, and grace. All four of these interact, and it is important that we understand the relationship between them. However, one thing is certain. None of us has ever received the slightest injustice from the hand of God. As we grow in understanding and humility, we begin to see that we have received an overwhelming abundance of grace.

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

### [The Sin of Partiality](#)

by Dan Elmore

We all have many biases—toward the food we eat, the cars we drive, the clothes we wear, and even the detergent we use in our washing machines! However, not all biases are good. Dan Elmore provides biblical examples of partiality that caused no end of troubles. More importantly, we need to avoid partiality for the problems it can cause in the church.

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