



Compromise

A LARGE RACCOON WAS DIGGING IN THE FRONT LAWN this morning as dawn gradually illuminated the scene outside our bedroom window. Great chunks of sod were relocated as he scrounged for juicy grubs lying just below the grass.

Earlier we had been awakened by the hideous screams raccoons make when fighting with each other. Feline caterwauling in the dead of night cannot hold a candle to the otherworldly shrieks emanating from agitated raccoons. And having raccoons as frequent visitors means one should abandon all hope for a manicured lawn.

could easily be consumed by our resident groundhog, or the rabbit living in the nearby day lilies. Crickets serenade inside the lower reaches of the house, and in the same regions Jireh is kept busy dealing death-blows to the vagrant mice population.

Over the years we have entertained bats inside the house, garter snakes inside the library, and spiders just about anywhere throughout this rural domicile. Linda knows to poke into the garden weeds with her hoe before sticking her hand in, for one of any number of snake species could be curled up in there. Likewise, if I must open the outside compressor unit of the air-conditioner for maintenance, I will do so very carefully, as there could be something long and unpleasant, with a forked tongue at the north end and a rattle at the south, hiding there.

Since we were just average city folk before we moved here, the presence of some of

After eighteen years living here, we have grown comfortable with the vagaries of living not just in the country, but hard against dense timber from which all manner of wildlife oozes forth to bring both wonder and terror. When we plant a tree or bush, it must be enclosed by fencing to ward off the voracious deer. When we plant a garden, it must be surrounded by a fence for the same reason, and any flowers left out on the deck



Reflections
by the Pond

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A man is likely to become “dated”... precisely because he is anxious not to be dated, to be “contemporary”: for to move with the times is, of course, to go where all times go.

C. S. Lewis

these visitors was initially cause for irritation or fear—even the stuff of nightmares. But over time we adapted, we compromised, we learned to accept the bad with the good. For there is, indeed, an abundance of the good.

If the deer eat some of what we plant, it also means that we are privileged to have them as neighbors. We can marvel at the virile majesty of the buck in rutting season, and chuckle over the heartwarming antics of the newborn fawns in the spring. If we are momentarily alarmed by a bat circling over our bed during the night, we can still appreciate him for the hundreds of mosquitoes he consumes every night (that is, once we get him back outside). If the sight of a rattlesnake sends us running, we can at least be grateful that he reduces the population of mice queued up waiting to get into our house.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:14-16

The church can be a place of strength and encouragement, but, sadly, it can also become a mirror of the society in which it dwells. The modern trend is toward “feel good” churches: low impact, no pain. An article that ran in the *Des Moines Register* a few years back described just such a church (as described by its pastor):

Services will be at 10:30 A.M., late enough for people to sleep in. They will be over by 11:30, usually earlier, to get people home in time for football games and other activities. There will be no collection plates, to avoid the “guilt trips” people have about contributing to a church. A box for offerings will be placed at the back of the church. [The Pastor] also said he does not believe in Sunday School. “You tie up so many people in service activities they don’t get out into the neighborhoods.” The goal is to make church non-threatening.

“Never would I say, ‘Turn to your neighbor and shake their hand.’ People want to be anonymous.”

Reading that article, I was dismayed by what it revealed—how compromised many of our churches have become, whittling away at the abrasive truth of Scripture to mold and shape themselves into something palatable to the lowest common denominator. In so doing they have systematically lost the courage of Christ Jesus.

After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, “Hear and understand. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.” Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

Matthew 15:10-14

Later I was encouraged by an answering letter to the editor that ran the following week:

Churches that chase exclusively after what is “contemporary” in our culture, be it music, preaching or programming, unfortunately soon discover that it is a never-ending game that the church always loses. The church has a timeless message for people in an age of increasingly rapid change. If there is any truth to the maxim, “the medium is the message,” maybe pastors and other church leaders should not be so quick to assume that people will settle for receiving a most precious gift wrapped in cheap, disposable, ever-changing packaging.

There is no place for compromise when it comes to the things of Christ. Either He is Lord, or He is not. Either His word is unflinchingly true, or it is not.

We cannot change the world for Jesus, while changing Jesus for the world.

