



The Care and Feeding of Flies



By Jim Elliff

This is news about a Warren, Arkansas event that took place 89 years ago:

Mar. 3, 1914: Warren, Yesterday closed the fly contest that has been carried on in Warren for the last month. The Democrat-News offered \$10 to the boy who caught the greatest number of flies and the Warren Commercial Club \$5 to the one who caught the next greatest number. The Woman's Civic League of the city offered 5 cents a dozen for all others caught. The hope is to catch all the flies now and stop them from breeding, and thus reduce their number during the summer months. A total of 1,441 dozen flies were caught. Robert Black won the first prize with 5,600 flies; Joe White won second with 3,800, and Roy Berry third with 3,200.

My mother came from Warren and I have visited the old family farm there many times in the past. Warren is not a fly free zone. When I was a child my uncle explained to me the immense value of flies. During our prayer that day in the park, I actually thanked God for them. To my recollection, that is the last time that I was grateful for flies. In fact, I have come to detest them as never before—especially those pesky flies which swarm around the churches. Just when we sit down to enjoy our Lord and each other, here come those flies. Consider them:

Doctrinal imprecision.



This annoying pest shows up on Sunday mornings in many of our churches. Imprecision on certain doctrines in sermons and Bible lessons sometimes spells heresy. I once attended a church Sunday School in which the ten commandments were being taught. They were written in short form on the board and each one got its few moments of discussion by the class.

When the first was bantered about, a sweet lady made the observation that people in other lands worship other gods “and are even more sincere than we are.” And with that unfounded comment, the whole class, nodding in agreement, rewrote the commandment to say, “Thou shalt have any number of gods before you.” It was a little fly to them, but a Stealth Bomber to me.

Moral carelessness.



I think that I understand the biblical place of freedom for the Christian. We are not bound with a legalistic noose choking out the joy and life that we are to demonstrate. But there are prohibitions and commands which are to be followed. Some have taken freedom to such extremes that their message is compromised.

The Scripture promotes purity of life, and no argument for freedom should compromise that bias toward holiness. The Bible states:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 2:11-14

When free believers take their liberties too far and violate the commands of God or demonstrate a bent toward impiety because they wish to press the outer ranges of liberty, or when they laugh at piety as if it is beneath them, then they have stepped out of the spirit of true Christianity. This little fly spoils the ointment—the perfume of an otherwise useful life. Many otherwise potent leaders have lost their effectiveness through such little flies.



An unrestrained tongue.

I heard some disreputable word the other day from a friend who is as close to God as anyone I know. We all turned our heads and tried to make nothing of it, but it was there, lingering in the air like the Goodyear blimp. I had never heard anything like it from my friend prior to this time, and don't think it will come out again. Now, I can handle hearing bad words as well as the next fellow. I know them all. Some of them I have used myself in less careful days, and some may slip out again. I'm forgiving of the person who uses them. But, since I'm talking about flies, I cannot fail to mention the unruly tongue.

What I am saying is that this fly is unbecoming when perched on your lips. It is beneath your dignity. It is risky. I used to know a professor that claimed to be a believer, but delighted in letting an expletive come out from time to time. Back then everyone was big into “identifying” with people. He did it to demonstrate that he was not bound by normal conventions of propriety. He was free to do it. No student would ever speak to him about it; nor was it our place to correct him. However, I am sure that most students thought of him as more foolish than wise. He won a few students over to his way of talking, but alienated many others. When I say foolish, I mean this. He could have been a great influence on all of us if he would have held his tongue. But he chose to limit his effectiveness by his freedom.

This fly shows up not only in unguarded expletives, but in unkind words, jokes that treat lightly the name of God and Christ, criticism of others, and comments that dishearten.

In Warren, Arkansas, there was only one way to take care of flies. Swat them!



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