

Catch The Little Foxes For Us (Song of Solomon 2 15)

by James Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the importance of identifying and dealing with the 'little foxes' that can spoil the vineyard, symbolizing subtle sins, errors, or false teachings that can harm individuals and the church. It highlights the need for personal and corporate vigilance, addressing issues that hinder spiritual growth and unity within the body of believers. The speaker urges the congregation to renew their commitment to Christ, love one another, and protect the church from anything that hinders its fruitfulness and purity.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:14, Titus 3:10, Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 4:29

Topics: "Vigilance Against Subtle Sins", "Commitment to Church Unity"

Description

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Transcript

Go ahead and open your Bible to the Song of Solomon. Who was here when Vess, our missionary to Nicaragua, gave his message on the Song of Solomon? Raise your hand. Who was here for that? Who remembers how long the message was? 90 minutes.

I do not plan to do 90 minutes because many of you heard some of the foundation work that he gave, but I obviously can't just assume you all were here or convinced of that. It was a great message. I don't bring up it being 90 minutes as a negative thing.

It felt like 10 minutes. You agree, Adrian? Yeah, it just went by. It was a sweet message.

Praise God. But if you're new to the Scriptures and you can't find it, just find Proverbs and then go to the right through Ecclesiastes to Song of Solomon 2. We're going to read starting in v. 10. My Beloved speaks and says to me.

So we're going to have to define this character, My Beloved. Arise, My Love, My Beautiful One, and come away, for behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of

seeing has come, the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land, the fig tree ripens as figs, the vines are in blossom, they give forth fragrance. Arise, My Love, My Beautiful One, and come away, O My Dove, in the clefts of the rock and the crannies of the cliff, let Me see your face, let Me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely.

Verse 15 is what I want to consider. Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom. In the ESV, it ends the quote right there indicating that those who compiled the ESV believe what we just read from v. 10-15 is this One, the Lord, My Beloved speaks and says to Me.

So this is what we're going to look at. I want to look at specifically v. 15. And the person's response here in v. 16 is My Beloved is Mine and I am His.

He grazes among the lilies until the day breathes and the shadows flee. Turn, My Beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on the cleft of the mountains. So, amidst the enchanting allegorical as I hope to prove to you, Son of all Songs, amid verses dripping with romance and sweet sentiments, Josh just mentioned the two-year anniversary.

I'm sure Josh was sharing some of these things from Son of Solomon with you the other night at the two-year mark. Probably not. We don't use some of this language.

But amidst all of this, it seems like they're just beginning to really enjoy each other's company and what does he bring up? Suddenly, her husband-to-be received word that foxes had gotten into the family vineyard. And he brings up a matter of fox hunting. Brings up a matter of fox hunting.

And guess who's supposed to be the one hunting the foxes here? If you look at the text, the man is calling the woman to catch the foxes for us. He's calling her to catch the foxes. So it's not him.

It's not him. She must go on this hunt for the sake of their blossoming relationship. And the vineyard, it says right there, it's currently in bloom, so it sure looks like there's this promising outlook for a bountiful harvest that's going to happen.

However, lurking foxes pose a threat to the grape's growth. Now look again what he says to her. Catch the foxes.

Is that where he stops? What's the very next thing he says? Catch the little foxes. He creates two different categories, types of foxes. So he's saying it's crucial not just to deal with the mature foxes, but also the baby foxes.

So clearly in this allegory, as I hope to prove to you, little foxes, whatever they represent, are deadly to the growth of the vineyard. If you let the little fox mature, the blossoms on your vineyard are not going to last. You've got to take out the adult and the little foxes.

And I don't believe he's hinting at a catch-and-release type of fishing trip. We're just simply going to return to the hole. Take this to be a hunt and kill.

Now what does this mean for you and I? Catch the little foxes. If I just read this verse right here, right now, and this is the end of the message, it doesn't exactly leave you with a lot of clarity on what this means. Does it mean that guns should be allowed at this upcoming mintretree again? So we can work on our aim? Is that the point? Is this a hunting trip that you and I need to be on? Can we sit back and hold our hands

and say that hunting foxes isn't my sport? I'm going to leave that for the other guys.

Is that how we should take this? So first, an allegory. I already stated, and Vest gave 13 arguments in 30 minutes on why he believes this is an allegory, this letter. I just want to briefly share some of why I'm taking it that way in order that we can understand what possibly is the right application of what it means to catch the little foxes.

So first, let's think of an allegory. There are numerous grounds to assert that this passage as with the letter is an allegory representing Christ's love for His Bride, His Bride being the church. Now, if you haven't heard the term allegory, an allegory is just a story where the characters and the plot serve as symbols for deeper meanings or messages.

They're often conveying lessons or truths through symbolic narrative. So they're symbols being used. And if you take it literally, you miss what the real message is that's being communicated.

In the King, most believe in Son of Solomon as referring to the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the woman being the believers whom Christ has come to save. Now, if you take Son of Solomon, even just the section we read, to primarily be speaking of something literally referring to an actual woman, let me just ask you this simple question. Why is the wealthy King Solomon instructing his future bride to catch foxes in a garden instead of delegating this task to a servant or taking care of it himself? Is this King really saying to the woman, go get whatever weapon they would use and go catch these foxes? However, if the man represents a heavenly husband who's perfect and without blemish, pointing to Christ, and they're not yet married, he lives elsewhere in a far country awaiting his bride, then that makes absolute sense that he's giving this task to the woman, to the church, to catch the foxes that are going to destroy the blossoms in the vineyard and thus prevent this fruit that looks like it's going to happen, it's going to come to fruition, but something might prevent it.

So who is the man? The one speaking to this woman? The man in this letter, it seems he never has a blemish. We know this is not consistent with Solomon, right? Solomon is absolutely full of blemishes when you look at his life. So clearly, Solomon, if this is about him literally primarily, a lot's being left out here.

Yet, the bride in this letter does have blemishes. And who does that remind you of? Yourself, right? Doesn't that remind you of yourself? Of the church? So many rightly conclude this is symbolic. She's not being called to hunt literal foxes, but the foxes are symbolic of something else.

And I remind you, as believers, when we read the Bible, we think of verses like John 5.46. We think of Luke 24-27 in the road to Emmaus, where Christ said the Old Testament Scriptures were speaking about who? Yeah, things concerning Himself. So that's the Lord Jesus' interpretive tool given to us. So Christ Himself teaches us to see Himself throughout the Scriptures.

And so by seeing Christ in the Son of Solomon, we're obeying, I would say we're obeying what Christ said as far as how to read the Bible. I'm obeying the Lord and what He has said and how to interpret the Scriptures. To add to this, in Ephesians 5, Paul highlights how a literal marriage between a man and a woman symbolizes a deeper spiritual truth.

The relationship between Christ and the church. And if you really look at Ephesians 5, Paul brings up a literal marriage, but does he stay on that topic? No. I mean, he abandons it and goes to the greater reality.

You see, that's what Christ does. That's what Paul does. They don't just look at the literal reality of the marriage.

They go to that which is greater. That's where their attention is drawn. Paul wanted us to look beyond the symbols that are momentarily here in this life only and look to the ultimate reality that is the real world that we will experience for all of eternity.

And so, is your marriage to your wife going to be the ultimate reality of marriage that you're going to be experiencing for all of eternity? No, it's not. It's this picture right now that points to a greater reality. So whether there are direct points of application in the Song of Solomon for real marriages, isn't it true that Christ wants me to see my relationship with Him as a greater, truer reality than my relationship with my wife? Do you get that sense from God's Word? Now, there's many other places we could go to justify this interpretation, but one is Psalm 45.

And if you want, you could flip there, but keep your spot in Psalm of Solomon 2. Psalm 45, which is also a love song. If you look right at the start, it's a masculine of the sons of Korah, a love song. Verse 2, You are the most handsome of sons of men.

Grace is poured upon your lips. Therefore, God has blessed you forever. Are the sons of Korah writing about King David? Go on to verse 6. Go on to verse 6 right here.

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Is this about David? Is it ultimately about David right here? And where is this psalm quoted that makes it very clear? It's clear right here by itself, but where does it make it all clear who this is ultimately about? Where's that quoted? Hebrews 1. This is referring to God the Son right here in this passage. It's a love song like the Son of Solomon, the Son of all sons.

It's a love song. If this was literally speaking about King David, He's being referred to God as being God in this passage. So if you take the man in Psalm of Solomon to be King Solomon, then he would be perfect.

And this just isn't so. You have to borrow Christ's words. Christ said a greater than Solomon would come speaking about Himself.

And then in Psalm 45, one other verse to look at there. Look at verse 13. All glorious is the princess in her chamber with robes interwoven with gold.

In many colored robes, she is led to the king with her virgin companions following behind her. You've got the same type of language in Psalm of Solomon. You've got a woman and you've got her companions coming along with her.

And so in Psalm 45, this is a wedding psalm between the Messiah and God's people, which we know from Ephesians 5, this speaks about the church. And so it appears evident in Psalm 45 it's primarily intended as a prophetic metaphor of Christ and the church. And so back to Psalm of Solomon.

So, why would anyone oppose considering the love psalm of Solomon in a similar light? You've got a love psalm right here in Psalm of Solomon. You've got a love psalm right there in Psalm 45. You've got a king and you've got a bride in both situations.

You've got similar language. You've got Paul and Christ coming along saying the Old Testament spoke about Christ. You see, you've got all these reasons that give you the freedom, not just the freedom, but I

would say even the biblical command to look at Psalm of Solomon in a different way than just taking this as some literal relationship between a man and a woman and that all the application, it's meant just for that, for my marriage.

So, back to Psalm of Solomon. Alright, both passages I think have deeper truths. Clearly, Psalm 45 does because it calls the king God.

And I would argue clearly Psalm of Solomon does because Solomon was not a perfect spouse. A perfect man. And yet the way it speaks about him, I think it's clearly there is symbolism here.

So what does this mean in Psalm of Solomon? There's an important application for catching the foxes that you've got to get this point, okay? I've tended to think about Psalm of Solomon when I read it, and I know it's talking about Christ and His love for the believer. It's easy to think in that way and you just get lost reading the whole letter as referring to yourself and Christ. Yourself and Christ.

But you've got to remember here, the bride throughout Scripture is representative of who? Of the church. It's not just some individual believer. And so I want you to think beyond an individualistic approach to look at Psalm of Solomon and thus this command that we have in v. 25.

And so we can tend to read this and interpret it for ourselves solely as the bride and the man is Christ. And it's just us too. And that's as far as we take the imagery.

But how would a Jew have understood this allegory? Prince briefly mentioned Ezekiel 16. If you go read the whole chapter of Ezekiel 16, it discusses an entire nation as an unfaithful bride. The woman in the allegory represents an entire nation, not one Jew within the nation.

Same thing in Hosea. Hosea is called the love of woman. The woman doesn't represent one believer.

It's representative of all of the children of Israel. It's about Israel as a nation. And so, I'm not saying there isn't personal application.

There is. And it's right in many ways to look at this for yourself individually. But I think I personally made the mistake of never considering the corporate reality of what's happening here.

And I think that's really important. Listen to these verses. Think of this.

Think of what it's saying. 1 Corinthians 12. If one member suffers, what's the very next thing he said? All suffer together.

If one member is honored, what? All rejoice together. Why? He gives a reason. Now, you are the body of Christ.

He's talking about us corporately together being the body of Christ. He does say, and individually members of it. So we're individual members of a body.

And Paul uses that type of imagery. You've got a hand and a foot and everything. So Paul's saying if you suffer, if I suffer, if you're honored, if one of you gets great honor, I should actually look at that as I am being honored as well.

Why? Because you and me were part of the same body. So I can rejoice when you're getting shown a certain amount of honor, whatever that looks like. I can rejoice because I'm with you.

We're in the body together. Christianity is a team sport. I was trying to think of sports that aren't.

I mean, golfing? Golfing isn't a team sport, is it? Very individualistic. My score. Brethren, I've got news for you.

There's going to be an individual judgment, absolutely. But you know how much corporate reality the Bible talks about us loving one another and our care for one another. Being the very basis by which we're even going to have at a judgment is our love for one another.

And why would John say in 1 John 3, by this you know you pass from death to life, because you love one another. One of the greatest evidences that we pass from darkness to light is our love for one another. At Corinth, the same church where he says they're one body, he calls the believers to remove something that was a little.

It was a little. A little what? A little leaven. Why? What was the leaven doing? It's like a little fox I think we're going to see.

It was corrupting the whole church. I don't feel like I'm being corrupted by it. Your foot is getting infected.

It might not get to the hand yet, but the foot's being infected. That's your concern too because you're one body. And if they're suffering, you're suffering with them.

We're all in this as a team. So, we're the true Jews, right? The Christian is circumcised of the heart. We are the bride of Christ.

We're the woman whom the greater than Solomon Jesus pursues. And Jesus is telling us to protect the vineyard from the little foxes and the big foxes. And so, in either interpretation, the emphasis is on us being watchful, right? There's something destructive that's trying to destroy your own soul personally and something that's trying to destroy the church corporately.

But don't just narrow it down to some personal thing. Watchfulness is vital. I was thinking of this verse earlier.

What was the reason Paul gave why he wanted to remain and not to depart and be with Christ? What did he say? It was more necessary for me to remain in the flesh for who? Yeah, for other believers. Paul was so much about killing the foxes that were affecting other churches. You don't exactly read through the Apostle Paul's life and see a lot of his own things affecting him.

But you see him seeking to kill all manner of things that are affecting other believers. And he even says, I desire to be with Christ. That's far better.

I'd love to be gone. But you know what? There's a concern here for all these brethren, their progress, their joy in the faith. You see, Paul really thought about the accountability that we have to one another as the body.

So my leaven works to corrupt you and vice versa, just like an actual vineyard would happen. If one part of the vine is getting corrupted, it's going to corrupt everything else. It doesn't matter if you're on the other

side.

It's just a matter of time. If you look back in Psalm 1, verse 5, you find the lady in the allegory speaking to the other maidens. She then says in verse 6, my brothers, they're angry with me.

They made me the keeper of the vineyards. Alas, my own vineyard I could not keep. So it's no wonder the groom-to-be tells her to guard the vineyard from the foxes.

She seems to have a history of not protecting the vineyards from foxes. And amazingly, that really does describe Israel. Doesn't it? You go read through Israel, Moses goes up to the mountain.

They're making a golden calf. It's just astonishing how much corruption. But that was a nation of mostly unregenerate individuals.

The true bride of Christ is a nation of fully regenerate people. Now, he tells us here to protect the vineyard from foxes. So what are we looking for? What would come to mind for the Jew when they heard of a fox? What would come to mind for a Jew when they heard of a fox? Because that could be something possibly that this allegory is bringing to mind.

And many commentators rightly point out in Ezekiel, you find the exact same term being used. In Ezekiel 13, just let me read this. Thus says the Lord God, woe to the foolish prophets.

Foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. Your prophets have been like foxes or jackals among ruins, O Israel. And he goes on in v. 7, Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination? Whenever you have said, declares the Lord, although I have not spoken.

So here, the Jew, when they hear of fox, one of the possible things that would come right to their mind is these false prophets, which is what were false prophets doing. They were doing exactly that. Damaging the people of God with their errors, with saying something that the Lord never even communicated.

You find the same thing in Jeremiah 12. Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard. In that whole terminology, vineyard.

You find in Isaiah, the people of God is represented as a vineyard that's being protected and the Lord is putting stones around it. And the idea is a fox would dig a hole that would go under the wall and it wouldn't just eat the fruit on the tree, on the vine, but it would also go right for the roots to destroy it. So it might even look like it's healthy and it's blossoming, but right there at the roots, it was being dug up and destroyed.

Didn't Jesus say foxes have holes? But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. The foxes had a home. A hole.

So, a false shepherd can be a fox. The way the term fox is used elsewhere, it just seems foxes here, possibly it could refer to false teachers and their false teaching. Which many that I read in the commentators, that's exactly how they take it.

Think of this language even with the hole in a fox. Jude 1, certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago pervert the truth. And what does he then go on to describe them? These are hidden.

Hidden reefs that your love feasts. They feast with you without fear. Shepherds feeding themselves.

It's the same way you've got religious individuals who are within the body, corrupting the body through false teaching. And it might look like everything's blossoming and it's going to bear fruit, and then something is coming in and it's corrupting that. And we read about this damage, a root of bitterness that springs up and how it defiles people in Deuteronomy 29.

He says, beware lest there be among you a root... referring to a person bearing poisonous and bitter fruit. One who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, he blesses in his heart, saying, I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart. You hear that? This guy, he's part of the professing religion and he says I'm okay to continue in sin that grace may abound.

And you know what this does? This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. You see, that's what this root of bitterness does. This person with this wrong idea about what it means to be a Christian, if they start springing up in our midst and they're teaching this false idea that you can have this covenant with God and you're safe, even though you walk in the stubbornness of your heart, it doesn't just affect them and their deceit.

Brethren, it can spread and corrupt the body. This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and the dry alike. So the branch that there's still something coming out of it, it gets taken out by the false teaching of the false teacher.

So, that puts us here. Some have titled their message on this sermon, The Voice of Christ to the Church Against Heretics. That's what many of the reformers, how they title this passage.

You see where they're looking at the bride, they're looking at the woman as being the church, and they're looking at in the allegory, the man who speaks to the woman to catch the little foxes, that's Christ, right? Which would go right with Psalm 45 in this imagery. There's this bride and there's the Savior, the King who's coming for His bride, and He's calling His bride, He wants His bride to bear fruit. And there's that which is coming in and it could prevent the vineyard from bearing that fruit.

So where do you belong on this fox hunting trip? Well, we corporately as a group are the bride of Christ and the Lord wants us to hunt foxes and protect one another. All of this just really reminded me of what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11. Paul is dealing with foxes at Corinth.

False teachers. They're destroying a vineyard, the church at Corinth. Listen to what he says.

He says this to them, I betrothed you to one husband. It's not the church. Betrothed them to one husband, and the husband is Christ, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

That was his goal. He wanted to see them walk in purity. And it's the exact same type of imagery here.

Getting to this final marriage in heaven, but Paul says in v. 3, I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. You see what those foxes at Corinth were going for? They're going for your mind. They wanted your mind to be led astray from a simple and pure devotion to Jesus Christ.

Go think about signs. Go think about wonders. Just don't think about Christ.

That's one of the ways they creep in right there. And he goes on and he talks about the serpent who is cunning just like a fox is cunning. He says in v. 13, for such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen,

disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So you see, Paul's in a battle. To see this church at Corinth be presented to Christ in all purity, and there's false teachers, there's foxes, and it's like Christ said, false teachers, they come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

This topic is addressed all over the Bible. I just gave like six references, brethren. It's absolutely astonishing how much false teachers comes up.

And almost every letter that Paul writes deals with some sort of false teaching in a church that he's got to address. So a little fox can destroy the vineyard. You see this church at Corinth bearing fruit.

The relationship with Christ seemed good. Now things have drastically started to shift. There's leaven in the lump.

It made me think about Paul. I think he was a mighty fox hunter. I thought about Samson.

He caught 300 foxes and lit them on fire. I think that's how Paul was. Picturing like Samson going around grabbing these foxes, grabbing these heretics, marking people who were harming the body of Christ.

And you could say, well, that's really judgmental of Paul. You know what? That's not judgmental of Paul. He would be judged before God on judgment day for not judging those who were dividing the church of God.

So would you rather face the judgments of man right now because supposedly you're harsh? Or face God's judgment on judgment day that you stood by and held your hands and said I'm not going to deal with the fox because I don't want to be accused of something? We need to live in light of eternity. And I thought, Paul rarely killed a fox because of how it affected him. It was always about the church.

You see, there's this corporate reality here of protecting this body of Christ. It's all of us. We're in it together, brethren.

There's so much individualism that we can think. Do I individually have a relationship with Christ? You better believe it. But brethren, you can't read your Bible and but see how much that is linked with one another.

Paul lives out Hebrews 13. For leaders are keeping watch over your souls. Some would argue the woman is pastors.

And the pastors alone are called to catch the foxes. Many of the reformers, they take that to be the woman right there. I don't see that fitting into the allegories.

He's just giving this responsibility to shepherds in the church. So, let's move on to some specific examples. If you're going to go catch the foxes for us and you're renewing your hunting license today and realizing this is some responsibility in your own life to deal with personal little foxes that affect your own communion with the Lord Jesus Christ and to deal with foxes that are corrupting and affecting this body, well, let's think about some of this.

And this is important to think about the little ones. Because what can a little fox... What does it do? It grows up. Right? It grows up.

And listen to what Paul says, 2 Timothy. Avoid irreverent babble, thoughtless chatter, strange doctrines, worldly fables, for it will what? What does it do? For it will lead people into more and more ungodliness. It's just a little irreverent babble.

No, no, where does it lead? More and more ungodliness. Where does my thoughts being led astray from pure and simple devotion to Christ lead? You see, it leads somewhere. You've got to think about that which is small.

In the text, it reminded me of two things recently as practical examples of what I would call little foxes. Meaning, not specifically the fox being a false teacher, but an individual believer saying something by which would fit this category of something that's going to damage the body of Christ. It's going to affect, in a negative way, believers.

That's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians. Bad company with false teachers who deny the resurrection corrupts good morals. That's what he's getting at in that chapter.

It affects you. They get to the end of the chapter and they're saying, might as well just die. And Paul's saying no, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord because the resurrection is real, therefore your labor is not in vain.

But if you believe in error, it takes away your motivation to be zealous for Christ. It affects you. It corrupts you.

First, Craig read Clayton's update on Wednesday night. I thought it was very interesting what Clayton... his observation. Many weren't here, but listen to what he said.

He's referring to a church he had labored over. So it's kind of like the Apostle Paul looking at a church and he picked up something. Listen to what Clayton picked up.

He said, I know this might sound overly simple, which little foxes can be overly simple. Preferences were elevated to biblical authority. And the result is that the preference gets held as a standard of what is faithful and not faithful, and others are then expected to conform to the said preference.

You can imagine this can be destructive to the life of the church. You catch Clayton's email when he read that? You can look at that and say it's not that big of a deal. No, that's a massive big deal.

You know what text came to my mind that makes it a massive big deal? 1 Timothy 4. What does 1 Timothy 4 say about things like that? Where do those teachings come from? Doctrines of demons. You can't eat that food. You know what? You can't get married.

It's more spiritual to not get married. Paul says that's doctrines of devils. So that's a little fox destroying the vineyard.

That's an example. And then I'll use an example for myself. If you were here two corporate prayer meetings ago at some point in the middle of it, I made a comment about a person who went on a cruise, and I made the statement that they went for it was paid for by someone else.

Remember that? I made that comment. And I'm sitting there in the middle of the psalm, the Holy Spirit, and I'm convicted that was absolutely legalistic for me to make that statement. And I asked you all, who saw something wrong with what I said? And after some thinking, someone said exactly the problem.

They said, James, yeah, your statement made it seem to imply the only legitimate reason to go on a cruise is if it is paid for by someone else. Therefore, putting some wrong thought in people's mind that if you use your own money to go on a cruise, somehow that is sinful and non-spiritual. You see, that's legalism.

So in the middle of a prayer meeting, I released a little fox, and he's starting to run around as a little baby, and I had to get up with my axe and kill him in the middle of a prayer meeting. And so sorry if he got hit with the blood on Wednesday night when I killed him. But brethren, that's exactly stuff we can't let happen.

All of us are preachers and teachers, and not just preachers and teachers, anyone in the body. You can share something at a fellowship where you bind someone's conscience with a preference or you make some sort of judgment that insinuates and infers something that you have no biblical authority to be saying that in a dogmatic way. And Clayton is saying that's what was destroying the church.

Not destroying, but it would, the church down there where he was laboring. These are serious things. Unbiblical ideas that we dogmatically assert as the standard are little foxes that destroy churches.

I don't think we need to be more sensitive in these areas. So this reference to little foxes clearly is added for abundant caution. To teach the church to prevent errors and heresies in the beginnings of them before they spread and grow strong and incurable to crush them in their beginning phase.

Let me give some other examples from church history. When Jonathan Edwards met George Whitefield, Edwards, who was older, detected a little fox that was ruining Whitefield. It was wrecking havoc to him.

And when it wrecks havoc to a leader of a church, what does that then do? The error of the leader then impacts the church and they all get negatively affected by that. You understand that, right? It's not just some isolated thing. If I've got 11 in my life, it's not just affecting me.

So, Edwards, Whitefield was too driven by subjective guidance and feelings. I don't know all the history behind it, but Edwards in talking to Whitefield, he was really concerned about this. And Edwards, he said this, he said, I thought Mr. Whitefield liked me not that well for opposing him in these things.

You see, Edwards sought to rebuke Whitefield and Whitefield didn't hear it. And so they felt like they didn't have a relationship because Whitefield got defensive. Well, you know what? The Lord has a way.

If someone else comes in to try to kill a fox in your life and it's in the stage of a baby and you're unwilling to call it a fox, that there's some issue, some error in your life, God has a way of dealing with it. And that's what happened with Whitefield. Years later, following his son's birth, Whitefield held a service at the tabernacle in which he made known his impression.

He kept giving in to too many impressions that he made authoritative and said dogmatically it was the Spirit of God in his life. And I'm not saying there isn't a subjective realm in Christianity. Don't hear me wrong.

I'm just saying this man, Edward, recognized Whitefield took this too far. In which he made known his impression to the whole church that the child he had would grow up to be a preacher of the everlasting Gospel. And in view of this assurance that Whitefield had, he gave his son the name John.

And he said this before thousands of people at his church. God gave me a son. We name him John.

He's going to be a preacher, a powerful preacher of God. Remember Ezekiel 13? Some would follow their own spirit. And at age of four months old, the child died of sickness.

And Whitefield, he hadn't just erred on a personal level, he had brought the whole church into his mistake. At this point, he recognized the little fox for what it was. He went back.

He edited many of his journals. He removed statements that he now realized were not sound and were unbiblical and he was being led by a different spirit. He sought to remove the little foxes that were destroying his own soul.

And he sought to remove the foxes that were affecting those who were under him. It was thus said, the experience became for Whitefield at the age of 29 a further step in the process of his spiritual maturing. Imagine that.

He had to go through that at 29 in order to grow in a specific area where something was off. Whitefield said, I frequently wrote and spoke in my own spirit. I thought I was writing and speaking by the assistance of the Spirit of God.

I have likewise made too much of inward impressions as my rule for acting. So that's an example of a little fox. I know some of you have went through this very thing.

You're waiting for some subjective word from God. And you might have a clear command from the Word of God to go and do something. And you're waiting for some feeling.

You're waiting for some impulse. You're waiting for some impression. Don't make that the great acting rule of your life.

So you see, the little foxes, they must be killed. Not just the adults, the little ones. They might seem minor, but they lead to larger problems.

They attack the body. They attack others. And I'm concerned for others.

Are you concerned for others? Are you concerned for one another? You go look in the mirror and think, I'm doing great spiritually. My health is great. You're a part of a body.

If you're looking in the mirror, all you're seeing is one member of the body. You get around and see how everyone else is doing. Romans 16, 17 talks about a fox.

Tells us the damage a divisive person will do. And who do they target? Who does Romans 16 say the divisive people target? Who do they deceive? The hearts of the who? Naive. Isn't that interesting? There are people in the church who are in the category of being naive.

And you might not want that to be true of you, but what if that's the category you're in? And you're more susceptible to being deceived and led astray by something someone is saying. It's almost like Paul sees someone in the church like a child who thinks the fox is a dog. They're naive to the reality it's a fox.

And they see the kid over there petting the fox thinking it's a cute little thing. You've got to go protect the kid. He's naive.

He doesn't realize what it is. It's a pit bull. It's going to bite him.

Do you have that concern when you see people being taken out by divisive people? When you see them soaking in slanderous statements or things that are not true? Do you have any concern to defend and protect this body and protect this group of believers? If they get bitten by the fox, being members of one body, you've been bitten. It's going to affect you when another one of your members is hurt. We should be jealous to protect one another.

What about that which doesn't build up or help? Right? Prince read that verse. 2 Corinthians 6.12 Something doesn't help, doesn't build up, you become enslaved to it. And I know many of you heard this example years ago, but I just thought about it recently.

It was Grimshaw's cow. Grimshaw's cow. You know, there's a pastor whose cow followed him into the pulpit.

You don't know what's following me into the pulpit today. Because you don't see it. It's in here.

It's in here. Who knows? Maybe something's following me into the pulpit today that I've got to go and sell. And Grimshaw, sure enough, that old pastor was great friends with Whitefield.

He had a cow and the milk was so great and he had his favorite food of milk and onions. And what happened to Grimshaw? He'd go to pray and guess what was on his mind? His cow. Or Don Johnson, his arrowheads.

I mean, you fill in the blank. That's a little fox affecting your own personal soul, which will then in return affect the body because you're a part of a body. His cow turned into an obsession.

It affected his walk with Christ. So he went and he cut the cow off and he sold it. Charles Bridges, he recorded how Mr. Cecil cut the strings of his violin.

He threw aside his painting brush when he detected his indulgence in those two things was diverting his mind from his present duty. Is there something in your life diverting your mind from the present works that Christ created you to do beforehand? And it's not something inherently sinful in and of itself, but that will affect the blossoming of the flowers and the grapes and everything on the vineyard. And that's a little fox.

And you say, it's not that big. Well, we've seen what happens with the little things that the Spirit of God convicts us of and we excuse them as not being dangerous. They will eventually become dangerous.

Robert Peterson, who wrote the book, The Roaring Lion, talking about warfare with satanic stuff. Listen to what happened in his life. He says, there was a time when my passion for stamps became greater than my love for the Lord.

I could hardly tear myself away from the collection. You think of this and you think this is ridiculous. Brethren, haven't you had something in your life that was ridiculous like this? I could hardly tear myself away from the collection to prepare properly for church services.

My ministry suffered. And I found my heart growing cold to the things of God. I was shocked into the realization of this when a very valuable... This is what happens, right? God wakes us up.

A valuable and irreplaceable stamp collection was stolen. It got taken away and he started to realize how much it really meant for him. This proved to be the Lord's mercy to me.

For only in this way did I realize that stamp collecting had become an idol in my life. You've got little foxes like that affecting the vineyard, gnawing at the root. They might be hiding in the hole.

They're small. You don't see it. You don't recognize it for what it is.

It comes out. It's gnawing away. And there Christ is.

He loves you. He's pursuing you. He recognizes this in your life.

And He's wanting you to deal with it. Because you're on the way to a marriage in heaven with Him. There's not going to be any place for that stuff in heaven.

Why should there be any place for it now in our hearts? Many other examples could be given of subtle little foxes. I don't know what examples come to your own mind. A little fox could just be isolation.

You're missing the meetings. You're not being transparent with people in the church when you're around them. That's exactly what the devil wants you to do.

He wants you to be hiding in the garden like Adam and Eve were and not going face to face with God. A little fox could be you hesitating, not hesitating, and praying to the Lord about a decision. It's shocking just having it in my morning reading.

Joshua made an alliance with Gibeon without consulting the Lord. And you just read it and you think, how did he do that? Brethren, we do the exact same thing. We get an idea.

This sounds great. Everything looks great. We don't consult the Lord.

You do that enough, it will mess you up. It's going to be a fox. A little fox.

You've got a lot of foxes, false teachers and heirs in the book of Revelation. He calls out the churches for specific matters. He's looking at the churches there corporately and he's seeing what is affecting them.

Tolerating the woman Jezebel who's seducing the servants. You've got all these different examples in Revelation. So is there something you see in your life or in this church, it might not be obvious, but it's a little fox and do and have it.

What are you doing about it? I don't think the point of the passage is to isolate this command to elders in the church. I absolutely agree. The elders in the church, we have a great responsibility to watch over your souls.

But, remember Galatians 6. Remember James 5. There's a call to everyone to go after the sinning brother. We need to deal with things that are messing up our own soul. We need to help others.

2 Timothy 2, Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable... Many people actually think he's talking about false teachers. Many commentators mention that. That's what this represents.

But at least, it's alluding to the heirs in the deeds that were just described earlier in verses 14-19 of 2 Timothy 2. So, you cleanse yourselves from what is dishonorable. He says this, He will be a vessel for honorable youth, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. You see, as we're trying to advance the Gospels, we're trying to do good works.

As we're trying to proclaim the riches of Jesus Christ, we've got to protect the base of this vineyard. We've got to protect it from the little foxes. We've got to take out the personal little foxes that affect your own personal communion with the Lord.

It might not be stamps. It might not be a cow. Well, what is it? Who knows what it could be? I don't know what it is.

You know what gets in the way of you and the Lord. And the Lord, He wants you, believer. The Lord not just wants you.

The Lord desires us as a body. We are His bri. Robert Murray McShane, he wrote in his journal, Oh, that I may remember my own words this day, that hour of communion is the hour for the little foxes, the little foxes to spoil the wine.

This is after he preached. And listen to his self-reflection. Two things that defile this day in looking back.

Love of praise running through everything I did. He had the honesty to admit that was a true motivation. And consenting to listen to worldly talk.

Oh, that these may keep me humble and be my burden, leading me to the cross. Then Satan will be outwitted. And Jerry Bridges, he wrote the book Respectable Sins.

You can call that Respectable Sins, little foxes destroying the believer's soul and spiritual walk with Christ. But he says this, he says, some when they hear about integrity and lying, they say I don't do these things. And it's probably true in the more obvious expressions of lying and stealing.

But what about the more subtle areas? Do we ever exaggerate the truth to create a false impression? Either of ourselves or of our accomplishments? Or in the opposite direction, to reflect negatively on another person, church, or organization? Are we somewhat loose with our facts when reporting an event or telling a story? Or do we strive to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? It may seem as if I'm dealing with ethical minutia here, but to borrow a word from Son of Solomon, it's the little foxes that spoil the vineyards. It's the little half-truths or embellishments of the facts that can compromise our commitment to absolute integrity. Do we ever plagiarize the writings or words of someone else without giving them credit? These little things.

These little foxes. And a couple of closing thoughts here. When did the foxes come? If you look at the verse, catch the foxes for us, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in what state? They're blossoming.

I think there's something there for us to think about. Fruit was nearing fruition and the enemy came. Right? Gifts were truly manifesting themselves at Corinth and the church was good and the enemy comes.

And so one rightly said, there are some heresies which spring up less readily while the church is dormant. But when bringing forth fruit, the foxes come for us. And if you read a lot of church history, you see that.

You read the book of Revelation, right? You have churches where God was really with, and then you see the sort of foxes that cropped up within their midst. You read that and you realize that could happen to us. We have to be on guard.

Also, hunt the foxes, but not all the foxes. Not all of them. Just hunt vineyard-destroying false teachers and errors that are attacking this body.

You see my point? There are many foxes and heretics in the world, but are they destroying you spiritually and this church? We dare not go beyond what is necessary in our fox hunting. Many a hunter has strayed from their own church hunting foxes, and they ended up drawing attention to more foxes whose focus was not even on that vineyard, and then they ended up following them back and they just made the whole situation worse. What do you do with the foxes? Well, you all know in the Old Testament, false prophets were stoned, killed, capital punishment.

In the New Testament, we find a different response. It's excommunication. It's marking people.

It's warning people. Titus 3. You're trying to warn them to stop. This person is not just a little fox.

It's a big error. You warn them once, then twice, and if they don't hear you, you have nothing more to do with them. Knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self-condemned.

So brethren, this matter of hunting and catching foxes, look what he says. Catch the foxes for us. Catch it for our relationship with the Lord as the people of God.

Do you want a deeper knowledge of God? Do you want a greater sense of Christ's presence in your life? Then how are you serving the church? Are you off there in some little individual world where you just have no deep interaction with the body? You feel like you're doing well spiritually, but it's just on some isolated island? I'll tell you, you're not really doing spiritually well if you're over there. You serve the church. You love the brethren.

It pleases the Lord. And as you do to the least of these, Christ says you've done it to Him. So, one way to look at this allegory in the Song of Solomon, the lover visiting the Beloved is happening when all is well corporately in the church.

Right? Again, we can be so individualistic. Me and Christ, and I'm doing well, and I want the baptism of the Spirit, and I want God to come. Brethren, you go read through church history, you find again and again, so many outpourings of the Spirit of God came about in a corporate way.

It wasn't just one individual. I'm not saying God might not meet you in that way. But brethren, when you've got confession of sin, when you've got people like McShane acknowledging they were worried about Maine's approval, or if you've got people who are holding on to bitterness, that's going to corrupt and leaven the church.

It's going to affect the body. So you want the lover to visit the Beloved? To come to us? Then love the brethren. For Paul, it's not just a matter of no little foxes were harassing him.

But heat might be a mouth in the body, but if the believers who were the feet were being harassed, Paul cared about it, and he went and he killed them. Excommunicated them, right? You understand. The foxes you kill.

But our command now is to put people out. And that can be a very difficult thing to do, right? It's very difficult. If you've got people whose hearts are naive and you mark someone as divisive, you might have people who don't realize what's going on.

They don't see the true danger. Brethren, you've got to trust leadership who has all the facts and the information on why they're doing what they're doing. So brethren, we're facing the end of another year.

Have there been any personal foxes chewing away at you throughout this last year? You don't want to take them into this week of prayer and fasting. You don't want to take them into this next year. Get your hunting license renewed.

Ask for the power of the Spirit of God. And if a right hand is causing you to sin, you cut it off and you throw it away. It is better you lose one of your members than your own body, Jesus says, be cast into hell.

But brethren, you're leaven in your life. It might be a little leaven now, but it's already corrupting us. Do you love this body? It's not just some personal sin that has no effect on the church.

Brethren, you could be here today grieving the Holy Spirit in some way. I could be grieving the Holy Spirit if I'm up here wanting man's approval or have some carnal thought that I'm indulging in. It can grieve the Spirit of God.

The Lord's worried about us as a body. We need to be free to love one another and love Christ. And yes, obviously, how's your marriage literally doing? I mean, there's some of you, I haven't had an update on your marriage.

I'm trusting all is well. But what if there are actually things in your marriage that have crept in? And what's scary is your marriage can be such an isolated thing where maybe people don't have front row seats, where things become hidden, they become acceptable. The spouse just learns to live with the other spouse.

And yet, it isn't something they should just be covering over, but it's something that needs to be dealt with. So brethren, look out for the little foxes. They damage your relationship with your spouse, damage your relationship with Christ, damage your relationship with the Lord.

They affect the church. Are there any foxes you're aware of, but you haven't taken them? You're just watching them on the hunting camera or whatever, and you recognize them over here and over there. Maybe you're calling something a fox that isn't a fox, right? We could wrongly identify it, and you get close enough to it, and you realize it wasn't actually what you thought it was.

Ebenezer Irkshine, he said this, The foxes' tender brood destroy, Their cries for pity hush, Else they, thy buds of grace and joy, Thy tender branch will crush. You see what's at stake here? If we don't deal with the foxes, they will crush the vineyard. It's blossoming.

There's going to be something that's pleasing and glorifying to the Lord. A pure virgin presented a church, as Paul says, but he's afraid that their thoughts could be led astray from a simple and pure devotion to Christ. May God help you and I. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank You that You have such a desire and such a concern for us. Lord, there are people who, Lord, they manage property. They got all manner of property.

They don't even get to the vineyard, so to speak. They don't even know what's going on. Lord, that's not You.

You know what's going on in every single local church that's truly Yours and has a candlestick. Lord, You know everything going on in our body. Lord, You know the things that might be corrupting myself, might be corrupting different believers here in the church.

Lord, You know the things, the wrong thoughts, or maybe possible seeds of false teaching or wrong unbiblical idea, a preference or whatever that might be taken too far. Lord, You know what's happening. And we're thankful that You can look out and You can make us aware of some fox through Your Spirit that we can go and kill that fox, Lord.

That we can capture it. We can get rid of it, Lord. We want to bear fruit as a church in this coming year.

And so, Lord, I pray. I pray, Lord, You would continue to just manifest Yourself and protect us. And Lord, help us to love one another corporately.

Lord, that we would be a living sacrifice corporately as a body that is pleasing and acceptable to You. Lord, we want to do that. We want to present all our members in such a way.

And so, Lord, help us. Help us to guard our soul. And Lord, I do pray that.

Lord, You know the different desires we have for Your love and Your affection. And Lord, You know what we need. We do pray that You'd give us more of Your Spirit.

And Lord, that we'd rightly discern that it is Your Spirit. Lord, we're reading about Whitefield and different people in church history, Father. I pray You'd keep us from blind spots.

And so, Lord, we thank You. And Father, some here, they can't even relate to wanting to obey a command from You. They hear Your command and it just doesn't concern them.

Lord, I pray that they would come to You. They'd believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Lord, that they wouldn't lose their soul, but that they would enter in and have this relationship with You in relationship with one another.

So Lord, help us to be a faithful bride. Lord, we look forward to an eternity with You. We look forward to being out of the realm of the shadows.

We look forward to being in the realm that is totally full, that is absolutely everything. Lord, the veil is ripped back, Father. Everything is there.

And so, Lord, I just pray You'd help us. Help us to get there, Father. Help those who are struggling.

Lord, we just commit ourselves to You. In Christ's name, Amen.

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