

## **“Reinstalling Word – God’s Word”**

**First Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Dave Carlson  
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**New Testament Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29**

**Old Testament Lesson: Micah 6:1-8**

We had to get new computers for the church office and my study upstairs. After about eight years, the Windows operating system finally outpaced our computer processing power. We would log in and the computers would just sit there spinning, unable to get anything done.

And you know, that’s kind of what was happening with Israel – just spinning out of control - as God spoke to them through the Prophet Micah, in our Old Testament lesson for today. The ancient Israelites were struggling to process God’s new operating system, an operating system based – not on human justice – but on divine justice. Like our old church computers, the people of Israel were just sitting there unable to make any headway.

We’ve all been in that situation. Maybe you’re upset about something and you just move on. Or you have a goal – a dream in life – and you’re not sure how to get started. Some people get stuck in a cycle of poverty and homelessness and can’t seem to break free.

Others are consumed with getting ahead – moving up the ladder, making more money, having a nicer car, a better house or whatever – and yet they never achieve true happiness. Sometimes it’s wanting people to be nicer to you, more accepting, or more responsible, and yet we can’t control other people. Try as we might, it’s frustrating. It’s tiring. And in the end, it’s an exercise in futility – doing the same thing – responding in the same way – and expecting different results. It just doesn’t work.

What are we to do? Well, one woman who was having relationship issues decided to reach out for support – technical support, that is.

Dear Tech Support: Last year I upgraded from Boyfriend 5.0 to Husband 1.0, and I noticed a slow down in the overall performance, particularly in the flower and jewelry applications. In addition, Husband 1.0 uninstalled many valuable programs, such as Romance 9.5 and Personal Attention 6.5. Not only that, undesirable programs got installed, such as NFL 5.0 and NBA 3.0. Now, Conversation 8.0 no longer runs, and Housecleaning 2.6 just crashes the system. I’ve tried running Nagging 5.3 to fix these problems, but to no avail. What can I do? Signed, Desperate.

Dear Desperate: First keep in mind that Boyfriend 5.0 is an entertainment package, while Husband 1.0 is an operating system. Try to enter the command: C:/I THOUGHT YOU

LOVED ME, and download Tears 6.2. That will install Guilt 3.0. If all works as designed, Husband 1.0 should then automatically run the applications Jewelry 2.0 and Flowers 3.5. In summary, Husband 1.0 is a great program, but it does have a limited memory, and doesn't learn new applications quickly. You might consider buying additional software to improve memory and performance. I personally recommend Hot Meal 3.0 and Lingerie 7.7.<sup>1</sup>

That was a lot of fun, but the point is, we can try all the tricks in the book, but if we're operating based on the wrong system, things are never going to work right. So, how do we ensure that our central processor – those core values that drive our decision making – is able to handle the operating system God installed for us and for all creation?

Well, just like with a computer, we need to follow the instructions, that is God's word. And if we can't figure out how to apply God's word, we too need to seek technical support, which is the church.

The ancient Israelites didn't have computers to deal with, but like us, they did live in complicated times where their system was crashing all around them – their corrupt, unjust leaders were disregarding the poor and taking advantage of their wealth and power. As they all sat there just spinning, God came to them through the prophet Micah and said: "The Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel." And then God went on to remind them that it was he who delivered them from slavery in Egypt, thwarted the evil plans of King Balak of Maob, and brought them safely to the Promised Land, when they crossed the Jordan River at Shittim to reach Gilgal, the Israelites' first encampment in the Land of Canaan. Having been reminded of all this, they are given access to God's Word. God's word comes to them through the Prophet Micah and the Israelites turn to God and ask:

"With what shall (we) come before the LORD, and bow ... before God on high? Shall (we) come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

Here, the Israelites are turning to God for support, which is good, but they're still trying to use the old operating system. God doesn't want us going through life bowed down; God wants us to "walk humbly with (our) God, ." - to be active in making a positive difference.

God doesn't want us putting the blame on scapegoats – like those burnt offerings of old – nor does he want relying solely on our wealth – thousands of rams and rivers of precious oil.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.homileticsonline.com/>

And God certainly doesn't want us to give up on the future sacrifices; the fruit of our body for the sin of our soul.

No, God wants us to operate under a much simpler system. The new operating system that God has put in place is this: doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly alongside the Lord.

And yet, if that's what God desires for people – for humanity – is it any wonder that we are spinning out of control, struggling to make things work in this world? We each have a role in making God's divine system work. And that role is based, first and foremost, on faith. That's why God reminded the Israelites that he's always been with them, even in their darkest moments. That's why God reminded them he will always bring them through even the roughest patches.

And that's why God called them – and us – to a higher-level operating system. Instead of merely bowing down to God in worship, we are to stand up for God and walk alongside the Lord, applying God's word throughout the week, throughout our lives. God calls us to a higher operating system than scapegoat justice – being quick to place the blame but slow to seek a solution. Take homelessness and poverty for example. Too often, the poor get an unfair share of the blame in a system that just keeps juggling along without them?

And what about the system that says the rich get richer and might makes right? We can't shield ourselves behind piles of money or hide behind walls that get higher and higher. And finally, there's the prosperity-gospel belief system. This is where people who have health and wealth think they're better, in God's eyes, than those who struggle. That's not right. God loves us for who we are, not what we have.

Or as Micah said, all that God requires is that we do justice, love kindness and mercy, and humbly serve alongside the Lord. I know that's a lot, but it's not too much, not too much for God to ask of us. We can each do our part this week to advance God's sense of justice and mercy, by sitting with an outsider at school, standing up for what's right at work, taking a stand against homelessness in Independence. Or closer to home, offer a word of forgiveness to a family member, a helping hand to a neighbor.

Whatever you find to do this week in the Spirit of justice, mercy and humble service, know that you stand alongside a multitude of God's faithful people the world over, and that God will use even us to begin a system update, to bring the attitudes and practices of this world in line with God's will, in line with God's word. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, you desire to fill us with good things, to share your abundant life with us, to pour out your Spirit upon us.

You give us the gift of your presence. You grace us with your mercy and forgiveness. Your resurrection power is available to us always. Your word speaks to us of your purposes, revealing your will. Your prophets, old and new, proclaim your message of love and healing.

Despite all the ways you reach out to us, we turn aside. We are busy. We are distracted. We are unwilling to give up lordship of our lives.

When we inevitably reap what we have sown, we have the audacity to complain and point the finger of blame.

Yet all the while you never stop inviting us to listen to your voice, to return home, to be restored in your loving embrace. Thank you for your long-suffering patience, for being for us an immovable rock of salvation, and for your love which is everlasting.

We pray your Spirit of love and comfort, healing and renewal upon those in need this hour.

We pray all this in the name of he who embodied your Living Word, Jesus the Christ, praying as he taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**