

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter, of all things, will be about how the loyalty of a dog can help us learn to worship Jesus. The legend of old Shep began at St. Clare Hospital in Fort Benton, Montana in 1936. His master, a poor and obscure shepherd, was in the hospital and old Shep waited outside for him every day. When the shepherd died old Shep followed the hearse to the railroad station. The body was shipped to relatives back east but old Shep never left the station waiting for his master's return.

Some say the loyal dog was wary of people at first. Soon, however, he became a local celebrity and many people wanted to adopt him. Old Shep, however, chose to stay at the train station waiting for his master. Soon old Shep was receiving so much fan mail that the station master, T. F. Dixon, assigned his own secretary to take care of Shep's mail. In 1939 Robert Ripley made old Shep even more famous when he featured him in his famous cartoon "*Believe it or Not*".

Shep's life came to a tragic end January 12, 1942. Shep was getting old, slow, and hard of hearing. Sadly, he was struck by a train and killed. His faithful vigil had lasted almost six years. The Fort Benton River Press broke the story and hundreds showed up for his funeral. Taps was even played in his honor. Shep was buried not far away and in 1992 a local artist, Bob Schriver, produced a magnificent bronze statue of the famous dog with the caption "Forever Faithful".

Another famous dog lived in Missouri. George Graham Vest served in the United States Senate for 24 years (1879-1903), but he is best remembered for a eulogy he delivered for that dog while practicing law. Old Drum was a hunting dog belonging to a local farmer. The dog was killed by an irate neighbor who suspected him of killing his sheep. A trial took place in 1858 in Warrensburg, Missouri and George Graham Vest represented Old Drum. Rather than discussing the details of the alleged crime, he eloquently praised the loyalty of a dog. His eloquent words brought fame to himself and tears to the eyes of the jury.

After the trial the speech took on a life of its own. It has been repeated so many times, and made Old Drum so famous, that like the people of Montana, the town of Warrensburg erected a bronze statue in the dog's honor. Here is that eulogy as it appears in the *Congressional Record*. "*Gentlemen of the jury. The best friend a man has in the world may turn against him and become his enemy. His son or daughter whom he has reared with loving care may prove ungrateful. Those who are nearest and dearest to us, those whom we trust with our happiness and our good name, may become traitors to their faith. The money that a man has he may lose. It flies away from him perhaps when he needs it most. A man's reputation may be sacrificed in a moment of ill-considered action. The people who are prone to fall on their knees to do us honor when success is with us may be the first to throw the stone of malice when failure settles its cloud upon our heads. The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him, the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous, is the dog. Gentlemen of the jury, a man's dog stands by him in prosperity and in poverty, in health and in sickness. He will sleep on the cold ground when the wintry winds blow and the snow drives fiercely, if only he can be near his master's side. He will kiss the hand that has no food to offer, he will lick the wounds and sores that come in encounter with the roughness of the world. He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert, he remains. When riches take wings and reputation falls to pieces, he is as constant in his love as the sun in its journey through the heavens. If fortune drives the master forth an outcast into the world, friendless and*

homeless, the faithful dog asks no higher privilege than that of accompanying him, to guard him against danger, to fight against his enemies. And when the last scene of all comes, and death takes his master in its embrace and his body is laid in the cold ground, no matter if all other friends pursue their way, there by his graveside will the noble dog be found, his head between his paws and his eyes sad but open, in alert watchfulness, faithful and true, even unto death.” As you might have guessed, Old Drum won the case!

The most common word for worship in the New Testament Scriptures is “proskuneo” (pros = towards and kuneo = to kiss) James Strong in his Exhaustive Concordance defines this worship as “*to kiss like a dog licking his master’s hand*”. J. Anderson captures the loyalty of such “worship” in his poem *The Little Black Dog*.

I wonder if Christ had a little black dog,
All curly and wooly like mine;
With two silky ears and a nose round and wet,
And two eyes, brown and tender, that shine.

I'm sure if He had, that little black dog
Knew right from the start He was God,
That he needed no proof that Christ was divine
But just worshipped the ground that He trod.

I'm afraid that He hadn't, because I have read
How He prayed in the garden alone;
For all of His friends and disciples had fled--
Even Peter, the one called a stone.

And oh, I am sure that little black dog,
With a heart so tender and warm,
Would never have left Him to suffer alone,
But creeping right under his arm,

Would have licked those dear fingers, in agony clasped;
And counting all favors but loss,
When they took Him away would have trotted behind,
And followed Him quietly to the Cross.

Job said: “**Ask the animals, and they will teach you**” (Job 12:7). Let us therefore learn how to worship Jesus from the loyalty of a faithful dog licking his master’s hand.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce