

Destroying Our Enemies

An ancient emperor, having threatened to slay all his enemies who had engaged in an insurrection, pardoned them all. On being taken to task for breaking his word, he declared he had kept it, for they are no longer enemies, but transformed into friends,

—An Overturned Barrel

THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Number 3

A Healthy Sense of Shame

By RICK LIGGIN

What ever happened to our sense of shame? Is there nothing that shocks us as a nation anymore? Have we forgotten what it means to be embarrassed? Is there anyone among us who still knows how to blush?

These questions came rushing to my mind recently when I learned that the city of Chicago has now named a street in honor of porn king and *Playboy Magazine* owner, Hugh Hefner. How in the world does a leading city in this “Christian nation” stoop to honor the king of smut? Hasn’t his magazine (and others like it) done enough to destroy our society as it is? And now we honor this evil man! Something is wrong with that! The report went on to inform us that after the street naming ceremony, Mr. Hefner was off to some southern university “to scout out new talent.” Is there no shame?

The question came to my mind again, as I watched a recent “Today” program with Katie Couric and Matt Lauer. In one segment, Katie spoke with ice-skating star, Rudy Galindo, about his testing HIV positive as a result of homosexual, “unsafe sex.” There was no expression of remorse for his participation in what the Bible calls a “degrading passion” (Rom. 1:26-27); no shame and no embarrassment. Just an effort to encourage the practice of “safe sex.” More than anything else, he wanted people to learn from his situation that “safe sex is not an empty slogan.” Isn’t there something wrong with that?!

Earlier this spring, we had an interesting conversation with one of our local high school guidance counselors. We were asking about whether or not the mandatory swimming classes are mixed (boys and girls in the same classes). She told us that their experience at this high school was that co-ed swimming just doesn’t work with ninth and tenth graders. “They’re just too embarrassed

for the opposite sex to see their bodies,” she said; but went on to say that by eleventh and twelfth grade, “the students are okay with it.” I want to know what happens between tenth and eleventh grade that makes this true? Somehow, by the eleventh grade our young people are losing their sense of shame! Something is seriously wrong with that!

Now you may not be surprised by these illustrations—and I guess I’m not really either. I’ve known for a long time that our world—and especially our nation—has been corrupted, has become totally immoral, and has lost all sense of shame. We are indeed a nation of people “whose glory is in their shame” (Phil. 3:19); that is we “glory” in (and are most proud of) the very thing that we ought to be ashamed of! Our ethical values are so inverted that what should embarrass us doesn’t, and what ought not to embarrass us does! And something is terribly wrong with that!

But what can I do about it? What can we—the people of God—do about it? Well, one thing that I know we can do is at least not allow ourselves to be forced into the world’s mold! We can keep ourselves from conforming to our age (Rom. 12:2)!

But right here is where I become most disturbed! I’m troubled by how corrupt our nation is, but I’m even more concerned by how many among us—the people of God—are being infected by our society! Like those

around us, we’re losing our sense of shame. We’re no longer embarrassed about sexual sin among us.

Adultery and divorce are commonplace in the church—even among its leaders—and we’re not ashamed! Problems with pornography are rampant—and we’re not embarrassed. Pregnancy outside of marriage is dismissed among us with a casual “kids make mistakes” excuse—and no one blushes! No longer is it just the young folks who slip off to the public swimming pool or wear the modern mini skirts; now it’s most people in the church who “can’t see anything wrong with” mixed swimming or immodest dress.

Where is that sense of shame that ought to be rooted fast within the individual’s character (1 Tim. 2:9-10)? Slowly, because of our own spiritual carelessness, that sense of shame has been eroded. We become desensitized to sin and hardened by its deceitfulness (Heb. 3:12-13). Suddenly, we’re not embarrassed by the language around us...or the undress...or the flirtation with sin. And the next thing you know, we’re involved in it...maybe a bit tentatively at first, but soon enough we get over it and then we’re “okay with it.” And the next thing you know we’re right there in it with the rest of the world! And the next thing you know...we’re lost!

Something has got to be done to recapture our sense of shame! It’s time for us to wake up, “for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone and the day is at hand.” It’s time for us to “lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” It’s time for us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provisions for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” (Rom. 13:11-14). It’s time for us to start thinking more soberly and start developing a healthy sense of shame!

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QUESTIONS ABOUT ELDERS

By DALE SMELSER

I commend *Think* for examining the subject of the leadership of elders. You have asked some pertinent and thought provoking questions. Though elders leading only by example is not my view, I have thought some elders have erred on the side of authoritarianism.

First I would like to observe that “authority” is never assigned to elders. In fact, such is denied to human beings in the kingdom (Matt. 20:25-26). Though elders lack personal authority, they are authorized to do something, to lead (the meaning of the terms translated “rule”). Inherent in exercising leadership is making sound and influential decisions, and then leading, rather than imposing, to implement them. The Lord ordained congregational function by leadership.

Leadership does not justify making every decision unilaterally and autonomously. That is by definition, lordly, and acting as the “rulers of the gentiles.” Leaders bring about a unity of action, if not of sentiment. The scriptures require us to yield to such leadership (Heb. 13:17). They do not require us to obey lords.

When we say elders do not have authority, it is more accurate to say there is a *kind* of authority they do not have. Authority means: “The body or person exercising power or command” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Jesus denied this to anyone. He possesses all of that (Matt. 28:18). But there is another kind of authority: “Power to influence the conduct and actions of others; personal or practical influence” (*ibid.*).

The ability of elders to so influence and lead comes from their recognized knowledge, godly character, and being appointed by the congregation to that end. Now the questions:

1. *Where is the need to appoint specific men just to be examples?*

In that evangelists are also to be examples (1 Tim. 4:12), why appoint men to that function and call them elders? I suppose one might suggest that appointment to such position, limited by specified qualifications, ordains a designated and visible pattern for us to follow. But elders are to be appointed to more. The passage that tells elders to be examples also tells them to “tend” (1 Pet. 5:2-3). In this they also are to equip the saints (Eph. 4:11-12). And while evangelists also do the latter, they are not assigned the position of shepherd, and guardian (the meaning of the word translated “bishop” and “over-

seer”). The Lord required appointment to this *combination* of responsibilities.

2. *Why a plurality? Why cannot one serve as an example?*

The Lord has not said why a plurality. We may see the wisdom in it, and that it prevents one person from becoming a Diotrophes. But in the absence of the Lord telling us why, we need not speculate so much as obey. Of course, if elders are *only* examples in the qualities specified, the question does pose a quandary, unless multiple examples provide more influence than one.

3. *If elders are only examples and there are two elders and one dies, and the remaining one can no longer serve as an elder, what would he do differently?*

He would do nothing differently, except that he lacks the authority of being a *designated* example, which designation does convey some of the moral authority mentioned above. However, the observation here should be that as shepherd and equipper, he does more than serve as an example. A former elder might still equip through teaching, just as he may continue to be an example, but it is the combination of those along with leading, shepherding, and thus watching over (the meaning of oversee), to which men are to be appointed in plurality.

4. *Why must elders be married with faithful children in order to be examples? Can't single people be examples?*

Not only can single people be examples, we are required to use one as an example, Paul (1 Cor. 4:16-17). The family qualification is to prove to brethren that elders can “take care of the church of God” (1 Tim. 3:5). The only other place the word translated “take care of” is used in the New Testament, is where the good Samaritan “took care of” the wounded man (Lk. 10:34). Positive vigilance, attentiveness, and husbandry are involved therein.

Let us not get caught in the conjectured necessity of choosing between authoritarian elders whose wills directly determine every congregational matter however mundane (though they *are* to watch over it all and guard against error), and elders who do no more than serve as examples. And note the spiritual emphasis in the responsibilities of elders, which is similar to that of the apostles (Ac. 6:2-4), who though they received the funds of loving assistance, left implementation of such material matters to qualified servants. Elders are spiritual leaders, not kings, dictators, or lords.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In the last issue of *Think*, I offered a page or less to any brother who would answer four questions I asked of those who claim that the “rule” of elders is limited to example. Brother Dale Smelser accepted and submitted the article which appears on this page.

Though I am not in agreement with some of his conclusions, I am happy to provide him an opportunity to express them. If nothing else, it serves as an example of how brethren can differ on a subject and still discuss it civilly.

I am not going to respond point-by-point to brother Smelser's article, but I would like to make a few comments, lest some think that I am fully satisfied with his answers.

In his first paragraph he concedes that the “lead” of elders extends beyond their example. Then he notes that some elders have been too “authoritarian.” On that we are in agreement. In my article I stipulated that some elders may overstep their authority, thus ignoring the apostle Peter's inspired instructions (1 Pet. 5:3).

My dictionary defines “authoritarian” as “relating to, or favoring blind submission to authority; 2: of relating to, or favoring a concentration of power in a leader or an elite not constitutionally responsible to the people.” Certainly I would not advocate “blind” submission to any human authority, and elders who sin are subject to discipline by the people (1 Tim. 5:22). If elders (or any in positions of authority) make decisions which conflict with God's will, we must “obey God rather than men” (Ac. 5:29).

I don't accept the idea that everyone who makes decisions which impact others is “authoritarian.” Indeed, God has given certain ones authority to make decisions which impact others. And, He has required others to “submit” and “obey” as long as they can do so without sinning. Such authority has been given to: husbands (Eph. 5:22-24) and fathers (Eph. 6:1-4) in the home (1 Tim. 3:4-5); governments in society (Rom. 13:1-3); and, I believe, elders in a local congregation (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17).

Brother Smelser admitted that some questions pose a “quandary” for those who say that elders are *only* examples. It is my view that the requirement for a plurality of elders as well as some of the qualifications imply that elders are more than examples.

I hope you'll read and consider brother Smelser's article.

—Al Diestelkamp

Criticism Among Brethren

By DAN RICHARDSON

I have observed through the years, as I've labored with different congregations, that negativism breeds negativism, and such can destroy the will to work. Every Christian must be on guard concerning this.

Of course, not all criticism is bad. There's "constructive criticism," as opposed to the "destructive" type. We can all use some good ol' constructive criticism from time to time. I've benefitted from it many times myself, and I know I'll continue to need it.

When our brethren need our help we should love them enough to help, especially if that help is needed to "restore" to the faith one who has been overtaken in sin (Gal. 6:1). The commands (in 1 Thess. 5:14) to "...admonish the disorderly, encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak, be longsuffering to all" are addressed to you and me.

But problems arise in the church whenever brethren begin to "dish out" criticism of the destructive kind. This is negativism and it is most effective in destroying the growth of God's people. This very fact is seen from a consideration of two scriptures.

Nehemiah 5 records a particular problem that arose among the Jews that could have been very effective in stopping the good work they were doing. The people had a mind to work (Neh. 2:18; 4:6), and were not

slowed by outside attacks from their enemies. However, the problems described in chapter 5 were from the inside. When there is discord among God's people, the "mind to work" gives way to conflict. When, under the leadership of Nehemiah, the problems were solved, the strife ceased and the work continued.

Acts 6 is another passage that shows the importance of loving unity among brethren. How easily this problem with the widows could have halted the growth of the church of Christ if not for the leadership of the apostles and the willingness of faithful brethren working together to solve their problems. This made possible the continued work of gospel preaching and the expanding borders of God's kingdom (Ac. 6:2-7).

To view the problem of destructive criticism among brethren from a Bible perspective will reveal several causes:

Self-Righteousness. Some brethren fail to see their own shortcomings because they are engrossed in finding everyone else's. They gripe, complain and criticize just about everything that is being done, developing an atmosphere of strife. Instead of using God's word as a "mirror" that reveals one's own sins (Jas. 1:23-25), they use it as binoculars for viewing everyone else!

Inactivity. When brethren, for lack of leadership, vision and faith, bury their "one

talent" (Matt. 25:24-30) and do nothing, they will have plenty of time on their hands to devote to criticizing one another. The growth of Christianity, according to the book of Acts, came about because brethren were busy spreading the word of God (Ac. 6:7; 8:4). We must not lose our perspective concerning the work we have to do lest we become guilty, like the Pharisees, of "straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel" (Matt. 23:24).

Worldliness. The truth is, we either love and serve the God of heaven, or we love and serve the "god of this world" (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Matt. 6:24; Rom. 6:16). To love and serve God is to love our brethren (1 Jn. 4:20-21). This means we will not be guilty of fault-finding and adverse criticism toward them. To the contrary, we will "consider one another unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24), and will view their spiritual needs of far greater importance than earthly matters (Gal. 6:1-2).

Brethren, let us not be guilty of putting the worst possible construction on what each of us may do. That is contrary to love, which "believeth all things" and "doth not behave itself unseemly," but "suffereth long and is kind" (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Instead, let us have a mind to work, and give glory to God

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Brethren Helping Brethren

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Readers of this paper might recall reading a short article by me that appeared in the January-February-March issue. It was titled, *Modern Problems*, an article in which I whined about how costly it is today to build a meeting place.

Within days after putting that issue into the mail I started getting calls and e-mails from Christians offering their help. Shortly thereafter plans were underway for several brethren from Alabama and Mississippi to converge on Sycamore, Illinois to help us erect the interior walls.

The first week in August a total of seventeen brothers came prepared to work. From the youngest, 19, to the eldest, 79, they all "had a mind to work" (see Neh. 4:6), and so in less than a week all the interior walls were built and most of the drywall was hung.

Of course, we were not the first congregation this group has helped—nor will we be the last. Jackie Richardson, an Alabama preacher, usually coordinates these work efforts. He would have done so with our project had he not had to have surgery. In his place, brothers George Hutto and Johnny Richardson, spearheaded the work.

This volunteer labor saved us a great amount of money, but the greatest benefit was having these good men in our midst. Men we hadn't known before became dearly loved in a very short time. Their time and talent (as well as considerable expense to get here)

was only part of the sacrifice on our behalf. Wives, children and other loved ones "loaned" them to us for that time. In some cases congregations allowed their preachers to be away for this cause.

Some of the worldly sub-contractors were somewhat intimidated by their presence and their work ethic. Others, as well as the building inspector, were impressed.

Another good that came from this experience was having these men in our homes, and the women of the congregation feeding them. We wondered if our small congregation could handle this task, but we had no reason to be concerned. Our sisters were definitely up to the challenge. To contribute to the cause, the husband of one of our members—himself not a Christian—volunteered to take all seventeen men out to eat at a family-style restaurant for four of the meals.

Since they have left, their sacrificial service has motivated others to offer and provide assistance with the finishing of the building. One brother from another congregation did part of the drywall taping, and a sister from still another congregation (a painter by profession) has offered to donate her time and talent to do the painting.

We would still have been in a financial squeeze had it not been for a brother from a distant congregation and a sister from nearby who helped us by providing thousands of dollars to help us buy the lot. All this just illustrates and confirms what I remember hearing my father say: "My brethren are the greatest!"

Submitting To The Lord

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

What is a lord? A lord is one who has power and authority over others. Lord is sometimes used as a title for people in positions of power. In the government of England there is the House of Lords. We use lord in conjunction with the authority that comes with ownership. We call them landlords. It is not unusual to hear the word lord in religious circles, but what do people mean when they use that word? People will talk about serving the Lord, putting the Lord first, and making Jesus Lord of their lives, but what does all this mean? Sometimes religious jargon loses its meaning because it is spoken so often by so many without an understanding of the meaning.

God is Lord. Jesus refers to the Father as Lord of heaven and earth (Lk. 10:21). This makes sense if we understand God to be the creator of all. He made it all. He owns it all. He is Lord of all. The Apostle Paul refers to Him as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:13-16). Lord means that He has authority. Lord of all means that He has all authority. To possess all authority is the mark of deity.

Interestingly, this title is also used of Jesus. The Apostle Peter understood and taught that Jesus is Lord of all (Ac. 10:34-36). The Apostle John reveals Jesus wears the same title as His Father (Rev. 17:14; 19:11-16). Jesus is Lord! He is Lord of all. He bears the mark of deity. No wonder the apostle Thomas, upon seeing the resurrected Jesus, said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:24-29).

Whose Lord is Jesus? People will often talk about the need for you to make Jesus

Lord of your life. Friend, Jesus *is* Lord of your life! Our acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord no more makes Him Lord than our confession of Him as the Son of God makes Him the Son of God. Jesus is Lord of lords whether or not we confess that. Paul writes that God exalted Jesus that at his name every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). He is our Lord whether or not we'll admit it, but we will admit it, if not now, before the judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:9-12).

Is Jesus your Lord? The answer is yes. The question is, will you submit to Jesus as Lord? Only you can answer that. Jesus said that most would reject the way of righteousness (Matt. 7:13,14). However, there will even be many who claim Jesus as Lord who will then be rejected by Him. "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt. 7:22,23). Why? Because not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of God (Matt. 7:21).

To confess Jesus as Lord is not merely to utter the words, but to submit to the will of the Lord. To practice that which is against the law of the Lord is to fail to do His will. This gives greater meaning to Jesus' charge, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth [That sounds like a Lord]. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, [How?] baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all

things that I have commanded you..." (Matt. 28:18-20). A disciple of Jesus is therefore one who has been taught to observe all that Jesus commanded. A disciple is one who has been baptized. A disciple is one who submits to Jesus as Lord.

Jesus is your Lord. Have you submitted to His lordship?

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