

Welcome, New Readers

As we begin our thirty-third year of publication of this paper, we welcome a number of new readers. This labor of love is a family project initiated by my late father, Leslie Diestelkamp. Through the years many brothers and sisters in Christ have voluntarily provided funds to make it possible to offer this to you without a subscription price.

We hope that the articles will stimulate your thinking and be a source of edification to you. We also welcome your comments and questions.
—Al Diestelkamp



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RESTORATION NOW!

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Great cynicism has been expressed about our willingness as humans to learn from the past and its mistakes. George Santayana warned, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." George Bernard Shaw said, "If history repeats itself, and the unexpected always happens, how incapable must man be of learning from experience!" G. W. F. Hegel put it bluntly, "We learn from history that we do not learn from history." Perhaps a quote from Will Durant explains why this is. "We spend too much time on the last twenty-four hours and too little on the last six thousand years."

Since the first century those who have professed to be Christians have had to deal with issues (just read 1 Corinthians). The first churches had internal squabbles and doctrinal disagreements, and we are not immune from such. Everything from worldliness to traditions have a great impact on how we think and reason and even how we read Scripture. This in turn affects how professing Christians and the churches of which they are a part act. It doesn't take but one generation of warped thinking to produce apostasies.

Historical texts (both inspired and un-inspired) are full of examples of these digressions from doing the will of God to doing the will of man. Occasionally, some will awaken to the major drifting that has occurred and attempt to restore the original ways. True restoration rarely goes over well. The implication that we have drifted from the truth doesn't sit well with most people, especially with those who, like Pilate, question if there is such a thing as truth.

Restoration is a dominant theme throughout the Bible. Beginning with Genesis 3, when sin caused man to be denied access to the tree of life, God's word points us to the hope of that access being restored (Rev. 2:7; 22:14). The message of Scripture is that man

is the consummate sinner and God the ultimate restorer (Job 33:26-30). God offers restoration, but He does not force it. He will allow us to suffer the consequences of our sins. This truth comes through clearly in God's dealings with His chosen people of the Old Testament, the Israelites (Is. 42:21-25). When sin has overtaken a people, someone needs to cry out for restoration and deliverance. It is against God that we sin, and, thus, restoration must involve a return to His ways and obedience to His will. This is no less true today.

The basis for restoration is not what we think would be best. We are the sinners. We are the ones who have broken fellowship with God. The solution to the problem cannot come from us (Prov. 14:12; 16:25; Jer. 10:23). This does not mean that we have no ability to choose to do right, but that the correct way of life is not of human origin. What is right, true, and correct is determined only by God.

Another dominant theme in Scripture is the need to base restoration on a divine pattern. Again, God illustrated this for us in His dealings with the Israelite nation. Read Exodus 25:9,40; 26:1,7,11,30, and note the details! Could these be ignored? Of course, Israel fell away several times and neglected the temple and the law. When men set their minds on restoration, they were not at liberty to do it just any way their hearts desired (2 Chron. 24:1-4,12,13). Going back to the original is what restoration is all about.

The Mosaic covenant was a copy and shadow of heavenly things (Heb. 8:1-6). Though it is now obsolete (vs. 13), we can see why so much emphasis was placed upon following the pattern. Now that we are under a better covenant established on better promises, it would seem that faithfulness to the revealed pattern would be all the more important.

Many churches are following popular opinion and are more concerned with pleas-

ing men than with pleasing God. Political correctness appears to be more important than scriptural correctness. Believers, it is time for restoration. Let us throw off the creeds and traditions of men and get back to the pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13,14).

Of course, this restoration call has not resonated well in our current culture. However, this call is not just for other churches. It is a call for us. With each generation comes the need to point back to the pattern of God's word. If we fail to do this, then before you know it we will have raised up a generation that may be religious and following patterns, but not divine patterns. Restoration never stops! It must continue with each successive generation.

If we expect others to be willing to restudy and reevaluate their faithfulness to the divine pattern, then we must be willing to do the same with every doctrine and practice. Failure to do this will just lead us into doctrines of men, human creeds, and the elevation of our traditions over the commandments of God. It happened to Israel. It happened to the Pharisees. It even happened to those who named Jesus as Lord. If it could happen to them, it can happen to us. Therefore, we need to be diligent to present ourselves to God as workers who need not be ashamed (2 Tim. 2:15).

Are we willing to restudy and restore and then reject any traditions that hinder restoration, or are we content to simply be part of the Church of Christ denomination that has its roots in the American Restoration Movement?

Are we going to take the course that the so-called Disciples of Christ took and the Christian Church is taking? No, thank you! True churches belonging to Christ will be content to align themselves with Scripture and feel no loyalty to anything or anyone other than Christ.

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A Thousand Times... NO!

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Ever notice that you can say “no” a thousand times, but all those no’s are canceled by one “yes”? “No, you can’t have a cookie, can’t have a cookie, can’t have a cookie! Okay, yes!” The cookie will be eaten! To concede and fail you don’t have to say yes as many times as you must say no to remain steadfast and succeed.

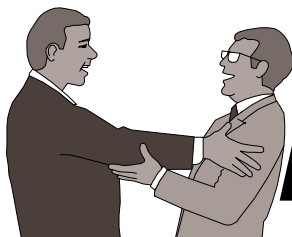
A thousand no’s to fornication are deleted by one yes that robs one of his virtue and virginity. A thousand no’s to adultery are swept away by a yes that destroys family, home and soul. A thousand no’s to drugs are erased by a yes that opens the door to all kinds of destruction and excess. A thousand no’s to stealing are forgotten by a yes on our record when we stand before the law. A thousand no’s to pornography are overwhelmed by a yes that writes indelible images in the mind. It applies across the board to all sin.

While it is certainly true that forgiveness in Christ is available for any sinful yes decision we make, this must not be seen as license to make that errant decision even once. We are called to completely die to sin (Rom. 6)—it is to have no part in us, or us in it.

Parents often tire of the “May I have a cookie?” question and finally concede with a yes. Kids know this. Satan knows this. We tire of saying no and looking different from others. We tire of our “no” answer causing abstinence from activities that appear pleasurable and fun. We tire of always being the one to say no. In time, sin nags us to the point where we finally want to say, “Okay, yes just this time.” How much more can God expect us to resist—how many more times must we say no?

The Hebrew writer reminds us, “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:4). We’re not just talking about saying no to the point of alienation and missing out on some of life’s pleasures. Resisting “to bloodshed, striving against sin” means saying no to sin until it kills us! That means a thousand times no to the sin that tempts us from within and from without. And when we have said no a thousand times it is then time to say it a thousand and one times, and more!

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By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

THE NEED FOR HUMILITY

The preacher walked into the building with confidence. Everything about him exuded confidence. His suit. His Bible. His hair. His smile. His handshake. His tie. The twinkle in his eye. His bulging briefcase. His laptop. His handouts. His shoes. His voice. Brethren swarmed to greet him, laud him and have him sign their copies of his book.

Other preachers (local) either sauntered up and looked for opportunities to share anecdotes with the man of the hour or harrumphed in their pews with their arms crossed, loaded for bear. Many of them were envious, the former ambitious, the latter bitter. An hour and 149 handshakes later, the preacher had been told what a good lesson he had preached 145 times (31 of those effusively). Two hours later he was in his Corvette keenly aware of his popularity, sitting alone with his check and his thoughts.

Perhaps you think that the previous paragraph was written with cynicism toward “big-name” preachers in preparation for a diatribe against the exaltation of men. Close, but think again. This article has application to all of us. Do you dare keep reading?

The warning of Paul that one should “not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly” was not only to be applied to popular preachers, but “to everyone who is among you” (Rom. 12:3). The point is that I, with my secondhand suits and well worn ties and shoes, am capable of thinking more highly of myself than I ought even while sitting in my ’91 Voyager alone with my check and my thoughts. Shameful!

Among brethren it seems that preachers are often the ones who get the most praise and notoriety. In a local congregation the preacher is often one of the more versed in the Scriptures and most capable in its presentation. Knowledge puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1). Isolated to some extent, it is certainly possible for a preacher to begin to think more highly of himself than he ought as he compares himself with those in a limited circle. Writers of articles and books can imagine themselves wielding influence over the brotherhood. It can be quite heady.

I just returned from the Florida College Lectures. Perhaps you think I am going to make application of the need for humility among those select few who are invited to speak. Think again. Of course they need to have humility, and the spotlight in which they are placed can make that a struggle as with any meeting preacher or local preacher. Some handle it better than others.

However, the lectureship was good for me because it was humbling. I was not there as a speaker. I had the opportunity to listen. Preachers need to do that just as much as anybody else (Jas. 1:19), but we are so often quick to speak. Of course, I was still a critical listener. I found myself disagreeing with some, but even then I was impressed with what they knew that I did not. I need to continue learning. I certainly don’t know it all. Perhaps that is difficult for some to admit, but that would make admitting it all the more important.

All preachers and teachers of God’s word need to approach their roles with humility. Unfortunately, not all do. Some are self-promoting. Others have envy and compete for attention in the brotherhood. Others so lose their perspective that they commit adultery and thus ruin families, reputations, and churches. Brethren, it does not matter how boldly a preacher goes toe to toe with denominationalists or liberals if he turns around in his arrogance and goes toe to toe in bed with someone other than the wife of his youth! Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Prov. 16:18).

While at the lectures my wife bought me *What It Is, Is Preaching*, a book by Robert Turner. Again, I was humbled as I read. What impressed me most was not all the preaching that Brother Turner has done. I was most impressed with pages 158-160 near the end of the book. I wish I had the space to quote it. Tears come to my eyes even as I type this. In those pages he describes how he and his wife lean upon one another in their old age, how important family is, and how infinitesimally small their story is in God’s grand scheme of things.

Whether we are well known in the brotherhood or hardly known is of little consequence in God’s plan. What is first and foremost is that we know God and humbly submit ourselves to his will. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God...Draw near to God...Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up. Do not speak evil of one another, brethren...” (Jas. 4:7-11). Let us certainly take a strong and courageous stand for God’s truth “with all boldness” (Ac. 4:29), but also “with all humility” (Ac. 20:19), and “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2,3).

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RADICAL!

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The word, “radical,” is one that has come to have more than one meaning. Originally, it meant “from the root.” Somewhere along the way it began to be used as a synonym of the word “extreme.” When used as an adjective to describe a person’s beliefs, it is usually intended as an insult. One might be called a radical conservative, or radical liberal. In politics we have come to be quite familiar with the term “radical right.”

Despite its original meaning the most common use of the word in our day is to denote that which is extreme. For that reason, most people don’t like to be put in the classification of being “radical” about anything.

When it comes to one’s spiritual values, convictions and life, being radical (from the root) is what we are called to be. As disciples of the Lord (our root), we must deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow Him

(Lk. 9:23). That’s radical (in the good sense), but it will be considered extreme by the world—and even by some in the church.

Recently I have seen and heard the word used by brethren as part of rallying calls for change. Let me cite two examples of this, along with my comments:

Radical Restoration is the title of a new book written by F. Lagard Smith. In his book the popular author calls for brethren to be radical in our approach to restoration of first century Christianity. I’m confident he would say that his call for “radical” restoration fits the original definition in that he outlines what he perceives to be the “root” pattern to follow.

However, calling something radical does not make it “from the root.” Much of what brother Smith sees as “precedent” is based on assumptions he makes. So, instead of going back to the root of what the New Testament actually says, he lets his imagination be his guide. That’s not radical in the

truest sense of the word! It is extreme—extremely liberal, that is.

Let me mention just one example from his book. He assumes (as do many sectarians) that the “love feast” of Jude 12 is a common meal. Then he tries to connect that common meal with the Lord’s supper by saying the Lord’s supper was a “meal within a meal.”

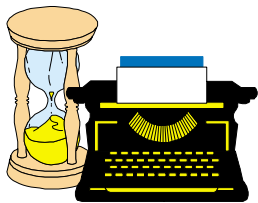
He sees the problem in Corinth (1 Cor. 11:16-34) not to be that they were not waiting for one another to eat the Lord’s supper, but that they were not sharing their meals with the less fortunate. Again, this is based on pure assumption, but even so, he completely ignores the fact that this is not an “approved” example, as well as Paul’s inspired solution: “But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home” (v.34).

Another phrase that I’ve heard recently is “radical autonomy.” Autonomy is the “state of being self-governing,” and is usually used by brethren in reference to the independence of local congregations. Though “autonomy” is not used in the Bible, it certainly is a biblical concept. Under Christ as King, each congregation is to be independent in organization from all other congregations.

Being independent, some congregations may choose to abandon some long-standing traditions—even some that are within God’s authority. They may find that it is in the best interest of the cause of Christ in their area to meet at non-traditional times, or to identify themselves by some scriptural description other than “church of Christ.” As long as these changes away from tradition are still within the authority of Christ, this is within their rights.

In this sense I join with those who call for radical autonomy. However, the context in which this phrase is sometimes used causes me to wonder if some are using it as an excuse to insulate themselves from any criticism or questioning of their practices. One of the great blessings we have in the Lord’s church is that our brethren look out for us. If a brother in another congregations sees that the congregation where I worship is doing something he thinks to be out of harmony with the New Testament, I should welcome his criticism—not shut him off by announcing that we are a “radically autonomous congregation.”

The fact of the matter is that we need to be radical—that is, we need to “from the root.” This requires that we allow Christ to dwell in our hearts so that we will be “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph. 3:17). True radical restoration cannot be based on speculation or assumption, nor should radical autonomy be used as a tool to ward off constructive criticism.



Articles From the Days Gone By

Our Traditions

By LESLIE DIESTELKAMP

I once heard a Baptist preacher in a tent meeting. At a very climactic point in his sermon on repentance he suddenly said, “That’s all!” The whole crowd, stunned by the unorthodox action, found themselves unexpectedly dismissed—without song, prayer or announcements.

I believe we all went away remembering what the preacher had said about repentance, which was evidently his very intention. And why not? What would be wrong with such? Nothing but traditionalism would prevent us from doing the same if the occasion made it expedient.

I use the above incident to introduce a question which has become serious to me: Just how much of our religious activity is done only as a matter of tradition?

Some of our British brethren always stand while singing and always sit while praying (in the assemblies). We would not think of binding such customs here in America, but by our rigid, unbending “order of worship” do we not actually become just as bound by our own traditions? Indeed, under the guise of doing all things decently and in order, we often make our activities cold, formal, ritualistic and possibly meaningless.

Consider the following: Why do we *always* sing an invitation song before closing a service? Indeed, what if we had a gospel meeting once in which we didn’t sing at all—not even an invitation song? Actually, I have preached in hundreds of such meetings. These were in Nigeria. Thousands were baptized and I never once heard any song used as “the invitation” there. Never once did we say, “Come forward while we sing.” Seriously, is it not possible that there may be a better way—at least sometimes—even here in America?

But lest I be misunderstood I must emphasize that I am not suggesting that we sing less or pray less or that we discontinue use of an invitation song. Rather, I write these lines to plead that all of us take an inventory to see if we are engaging in spiritual activities as expressions of our hearts, or merely following orthodox customs which we have established for ourselves.

When we do sing, and when we do pray, are we “keepers of orthodoxy” or are we truly worshipers of God? “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord...and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord...” (Col. 3:17, 23).

This article appeared in THINK, Vol. 2, No. 1, dated November, 1970

Speaking the Lord's Message

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

My attention was recently drawn to a phrase we often gloss over: "Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people..." (Hag. 1:13). Imagine that—the Lord's messenger seeing his job to be that of speaking the Lord's message, and then doing just that!

A recent article by Ted Parks in *The Christian Chronicle* (Feb. 2002) expresses concern over an apparent shortage of "competent pulpit ministers" among churches of Christ. Flavil Yeakley, Bible professor at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, has polling results that show "approximately 4,000 students were preparing for the ministry." What concerns me most is that, of the 3,000 who were preparing for "full-time work," half of them did not want to be

Booklet Offered Free To 'Non-Anti' Brethren

When I published *A Brother At Our Door*, a booklet written in response to brother Wayne Jackson's, *A Church Divided* (his answer to those he calls "antis"), I did so not knowing how much interest there would be or if I would be able to sell enough to cover my costs.

Reaction has been favorable and I have been able to sell enough to recover my initial costs. Recently I started giving copies to brethren from whom we have been estranged by this controversy. I will continue to do so as long as sales from non-institutional brethren purchase enough to keep me out of the "red." Order from:

Al Diestelkamp, P.O. Box 891, Cortland, IL 60112 or <aldiestel@aol.com> \$2 per copy + postage; single copy \$2.60, postage included. Indicate "non-anti" if you wish to take me up on my offer of a free copy.

"pulpit ministers"—they did not want to preach. I was left wondering what they wanted to do.

For those who don't know it, according to many today the "church" has become a complex, multifaceted organization with specialized multi-staff ministers. Among the church staff are preachers, who are now what the article calls, "ministerial general practitioners." We are told that change in church members means that, "The expectations for preaching ministers right now are very high, very complex. Our churches are in transition, and ministers are in transition, too." I think this means that things are changing and therefore preachers are expected to do (and be good at) far more than just preaching the gospel.

Just what are the expectations we should have for a preacher? Shouldn't they be that he: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2)? What higher expectation could we have of a preacher? Why would this be viewed as complex? But I fear a man's faithfulness to unabashed speaking the words of God will be ignored by many today when his resumé is void of educational degrees, administration experience, training in counseling, entertainment skills, computer and media savvy, and the use of denominational religious jargon.

Will we accept a man who is just "the Lord's messenger" who speaks "the Lord's message to the people"? Faithfulness to the message determines the faithfulness of the messenger. This has always been the standard of God and His people. We must not abandon it now!

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We are ever grateful for the good response we receive to this publication, including the many donations we receive to offset the cost. The reason the cost for the last issue was more than we had previously estimated is due to the fact that the post office had failed to bill us for the annual permit fee that was actually due a few months ago. This issue is expected to cost approximately \$500, which would create a deficit of \$289.81.

Moving? Help keep down the cost of publishing this paper by sending us a change of address. *Thanks.*

THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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