



THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Excellent Righteousness

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Does your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees? It is supposed to if you claim to be a disciple of Jesus. It *must* if it is your desire to be part of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20). Yet, many do not know exactly what this means or requires.

There have been various misunderstandings about the Pharisees of Jesus' day and what it was that He had against them. Some have thought that it was their strict interpretation and application of the Law of Moses. Others have thought that their scrupulous emphasis upon obedience reflected a belief in justification by works and not by grace.

An examination of Jesus' teaching reveals specifically what He had against the scribes and Pharisees. He was against their traditionalism. The problem was not traditions per se, but traditions which interfered with keeping the commandments of God (Matt. 15:1-20). While the Pharisees had quite the reputation for piety and for being scrupulous in their obedience, the truth was that because of their traditions they were not as obedient to God as they should have been.

It was not with the Pharisees' strict interpretation of the Law of Moses that Jesus had a problem but with their failure to practice what they preached (Matt. 23:1-4). This He labeled as hypocrisy. Their efforts to exalt themselves were arrogant (vs. 5). In their scrupulous pride, they conveniently overlooked foundational spiritual principles (vss. 23,24). They were guilty of gross inconsistency. Thus Jesus describes them as full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (vss. 25-28).

At first glance, the righteousness of the Pharisees looked good, but at its core it was selfish. Upon closer examination, it is clear that instead of being scrupulously obedient, they were very inconsistent and lawless. They stressed things that made them appear righteous to others, while neglecting the central values of God: justice, mercy and faith. They approached the law strictly in order to

find imaginary loopholes to justify themselves, ignoring the clear intent of the law.

Our righteousness must exceed that. We must look good on the surface because we are good at the core. We must be scrupulously obedient to God's will and not to the traditions of men. We must stress the weightier matters knowing that the consistent application of justice, faith, and mercy from the heart will reflect a light that cannot be hidden. We need to have ears to hear not merely the words of God in one context, but to understand God's intent through the greater context of the sum of God's word (Ps. 119:160).

Jesus does not leave us to wonder what He is talking about when He says that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. He establishes a pattern for great preaching by then making practical application of what He means. He illustrates so that we can understand how people can move from surface-righteousness, self-righteousness, or hypocritical righteousness to the excellent righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom.

Throughout the remainder of the chapter Jesus begins a series of contrasts marked by, "You have heard that it was said...but I say unto you." Some have suggested that Jesus is contrasting the Law of Moses with the Law of Christ. Yet, there are a couple of problems with such a simplistic answer. First, the immediate context (vs. 18) has Jesus declaring that the Law would not pass away until all was fulfilled. It is therefore unreasonable to say that Jesus is teaching anything that contradicts the Law. Secondly, the consistent phrase, "You have heard that it was said..." would be an indefinite and unauthoritative way of referring to Scripture that was not typical of Jesus. When quoting Scripture, Jesus boldly said things like, "It is written" (Matt. 4:5,7,10; 11:10; 21:13).

It is more contextually reasonable to conclude that Jesus is contrasting the "righteousness" of the Pharisees (which was actually

a corruption of the Law) with a more excellent righteousness. So when Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said..." He meant "it was said" by the scribes and Pharisees as a self-justifying proof-text. Thus Jesus was not pitting His teaching against the Law of Moses, but against the scribal and Pharisaical perversions of the Law.

On the other extreme, others have taught that all Jesus is doing is correctly teaching the Law of Moses. However, Jesus is not behaving as just another scribe or rabbi but is speaking authoritatively (Matt. 7:28,29) when He says, "but I say unto you." Certainly what Jesus teaches is in harmony with the Law, but we are mistaken if we think that Jesus' "but I say unto you" statements are direct interpretations of the misused "you have heard that it was said" proof-texts. For example, Jesus was not saying that "You shall not murder" actually meant "whoever is angry with his brother...shall be in danger of the judgment." Jesus responded to the Pharisees' misuse of scripture in much the same way that He responded to Satan's misuse of scripture. He used scripture (Matt. 4:7). Jesus' "but I say unto you" responses used the foundation of the Law—love of God and love of neighbor (Matt. 22:33-40; 7:12)—to influence and direct the correct interpretation and application of God's will. The scribes and Pharisees failed to do this. Kingdom citizens must not.

Simply put, Jesus' sermon on the mount is a call for men to lead lives of true righteousness that actually fulfill the intent of God's word. Let's not approach God's word with the intent of justifying ourselves and our traditions through proof-texts which bolster some kind of technical righteousness. Let's use the sum of God's word to understand the intent of God's commands. Let's lead lives that are outwardly righteous because we have crucified ourselves and Christ lives in us as we live by faith (Gal. 2:20).

323 E. Indiana Ave., Pontiac, Illinois 61764
e-mail: adiestel@bwsys.net

A 'Kingdom View' of the Church

By AL DIESTELKAMP

I'm afraid that many Christians are rather myopic in their concept of the Lord's church. The result is a failure to adopt a "kingdom view" of the church.

Perhaps our emphasis on local autonomy and strong opposition to centralized control is an environment in which isolationism can result if we're not careful.

Needless to say, I am not advocating a departure from the biblical concept of local autonomy—only that I fear some have become extreme in the application of it. Whether consciously, or unconsciously, some seem to have adopted a "none of our business" attitude.

Allow me to supply some examples which illustrate my point:

Gospel meetings afford Christians opportunities to recharge their spiritual batteries. If you are fortunate enough to live in an area where there are other congregations within reasonable driving distance, your interest in worshiping with them will encourage them, and you will be edified. However, the vast majority of Christians don't have enough of a "kingdom view" to make the effort. Then they wonder why Christians from other congregations aren't motivated to come encourage them when their local congregation is having a series of meetings.

Frequently I hear of Christians lamenting about "their" preacher being away from the local work too much. "After all, we pay him to preach here!" Of course, if the preacher is abusing his privileges with excessive vacationing, the criticism may be justified. Or, if he is in great demand to preach in gospel meetings at large, able congregations, and has not learned to limit his schedule, he may be failing to recognize the negative impact his absence is having on the local work.

**Which do you think most needs two preachers:
1) a large congregation with elders; or
2) a small, struggling congregation lacking elders?**

However, if a preacher has an opportunity to help out in places where Christians are few and far between, or where the gospel has not gone, the local brethren need to adopt a "kingdom view" and send him with their blessing.

There are many congregations which have been blessed with contributions that far exceed their budgets. Before they know it they are sitting on a large and growing treasury. Without a "kingdom view" the tendency is to "tear down their barns and build bigger," whether they need to, or not, overlooking the spiritual opportunities elsewhere.

A growing number of large congregations have opted to "hire" a second preacher. Ob-

viously, they have every right to do that. I just wonder if it is in the best interest of the kingdom of Christ. Don't get me wrong! I am not opposed to two preachers in one location, but let me ask a pointed question: Which do you think most needs two preachers: 1) a large congregation with elders; or 2) a small, struggling congregation lacking elders? If we adopt a "kingdom view" the answer is obvious.

A "kingdom view" deficiency has resulted in some churches actually drawing back on support of gospel preachers in needy fields. Furthermore, many congregations that continue to provide outside support have a double standard

regarding the amount of support they will provide. Often their local preacher is learning how to "abound," while the preachers they support in needy fields must learn how to "suffer need" (Phil. 4:12). This has resulted in preachers being forced to go where they can support their families, and small churches losing out on effective edification.

The work in the local congregation ought to be a high priority in our lives, and certainly must not be neglected, but at the same time we need to open our eyes and our hearts to the needs of our brethren in other locations.

The kingdom is much bigger than one congregation.

The Work of Preaching

By RICK LIGGIN

Preaching is unlike any other work in the world. It most certainly is "work," and it's even a way for one to make a living, since the Lord has "directed" that "those who proclaim the gospel" have the right to "get their living from the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14). But it's not a "job" in the sense that we most often think about "jobs." Those who think of the church as a "business" and who see preaching as a "career" or as "employment" will always struggle to understand the work of preaching. Preaching is much more than a job; it's a way of life!

Churches do not "hire" and "fire" preachers—not if they are following the Biblical pattern. I do not read in the NT of a church ever "hiring" a preacher, or of a preacher being an "employee" of the church.

Yes, the Bible does describe a preacher's support in terms of "wages"—the apostle Paul did say to the Corinthians, "I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you" (2 Cor. 11:8). But Paul doesn't literally mean, "wages" here any more than he literally means that he "robbed" other

churches. Paul is simply pointing out to the Corinthians that he had to receive financial support from other churches so that he could work among them. They (the Corinthians) should have supplied his need, but Paul did not ask them to do this (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7).

But didn't the Lord say—in reference to those whom He sent out to preach—that, "the laborer is worthy of his wages" (Lk. 10:7; cf. Matt. 10:10)? Yes, but here Jesus is pointing out a principle—that those who work at preaching should be supported for that work! He is not saying that preaching is employment; or that somehow this work puts a preacher in an employer/employee relationship with those who support him.

This ought to be clear from the fact that Jesus—not some church—is the One sending out the preachers in this context; and the text does not even hint at the fact that He somehow "hired" these men to go preach His message. In fact, the text specifically says that He "appointed" these "seventy...and sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city..." (Lk. 10:1).

The Biblical pattern suggests that gospel preachers went to places where there was a

need and were welcomed by the local churches (Ac. 11:19-26; 18:27-28; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Tit. 1:5).

I recognize that for practical reasons there needs to be some kind of agreement between a preacher and a local church to work together and for that local church to supply the needs of the preacher as he works with and among the local saints, but there is no indication in the Scripture at all that local churches "hired" a preacher to work "for" them. That simply is not the Biblical way!

Preachers are co-workers with local saints. And yes, those that devote their full time to the work of preaching and teaching should be compensated for their service. Jesus is the One who "directed" this (Lk. 10:7; Mt. 10:10; 1 Cor. 9:14), but Jesus did not set up the local church to be an employer of preachers! Churches that see themselves as "hiring" a preacher to work "for" them are acting without Biblical authority! And preachers who work simply for a paycheck are "hirelings" (Jn. 10:12-13) and ought not to be supported!

824 - 19th Street, Rockford, Illinois 61104
e-mail: rcliggin@juno.com

False Teachers 'Just As' False Prophets **A RESPONSE**

By JAY HORSLEY

Many brethren currently admonish us to be very careful in marking or labeling any as a "false teacher" unless there is certain proof that they act with evil intent, ulterior motives or from bad character (Matt Hennecke, *Think*, Vol. 36, No. 1). They argue that the word "false" applies to both the man and his teaching, so one must have provably bad character in addition to teaching error to be a "false teacher." And, that without restricting the label "false teacher" in this way, we will end up calling "everyone a false teacher who disagrees with me."

There might be some intemperate brethren using the "disagrees with me" standard, but limiting use of the biblical term "false teacher" to only those whose motives become "obvious" is far more restrictive than scriptures warrant.

Bro. Hennecke used Strong's definition of "secretly" in 2 Peter 2:1 to establish his "intent to deceive," "motive becomes obvious" standard. Although this is not the right standard, this verse is the place to go to define the term "false teacher." Peter says much more about them than just that they work "secretly."

2 Pet. 2:1 — "But false prophets also arose among the people, just [even – KJV, NKJV] as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" [NASB].

First Peter tells us that "false teachers" will come "just as" ("even as") there were "false prophets" among the God's people in the Old Testament. Study "false prophets" to begin a study of "false teachers" (Rom. 15:4). The label "false prophet" is never used in the Old Testament, but they are often described, especially in Jeremiah:

Jer. 5:31 — "The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority..."

Jer. 14:14 — "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds."

See also Jer. 20:6; 23:25,26,32; 27:15; 29:9,21 and Zech. 13:3.

The problem was the error of their message! Messages not from God led to ruin, just as the "destructive heresies" of today's "false teachers" will lead to ruin. "False prophets" claimed direct revelation for their messages. "False teachers" claim Biblical authority by twisting and distorting the scripture (2 Pet. 3:16).

Secondly, they "secretly introduce destructive heresies." Bro. Hennecke concen-

trated on the "secretly" part referring to 2 Corinthians 11:4,13-16. "False apostles" disguise themselves as angels of light. This is parallel to what Jesus said about "false prophets," "who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15).

These passages reveal the weakness of the argument that the teacher's character must become "obvious" before we can label them as "false teachers." What if their "angel disguise" or "sheep suit" is so well tailored that we never become aware of their true inward nature? What if it never becomes "obvious" that they are really bad people inside? What if we are too loving, too unsuspecting, too wary of impugning motives, or too forgiving of inconsistencies in our brother's conduct (inconsistencies that might be the key to figuring out the true intentions of the "false teachers" heart) to ever mark or avoid him?

Some would reply that we were too trusting since: "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?" (Matt. 7:16). Yet what is the first fruit by which we can know any teacher? Is it not *what he teaches*? The rest of the phrase that the word "secretly" is lifted from is, "introduce destructive heresies." We can know "false teachers" by their "destructive heresies" re-

gardless of how well their disguise their character. It is their error, false doctrine, "destructive heresy" – *the teaching that leads men who follow it into sin* – that makes one a "false teacher." Using the "motive" standard instead of the "destructive heresy" standard is to ignore the first and obvious fruit; searching instead for the late blooming (or even hidden) and subjectively judged fruit.

God has better equipped Christians to compare a man's teaching the word (Ac. 20:28-32; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:16,17; Isa. 8:20) than to know the secrets of another's heart. "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11). God alone knows the heart (Job 10:13; Psa. 44:21; 94:11; 139:23; Lk. 9:47; 16:15; Ac. 1:24; 15:8; 1 Jn. 3:20).

Does the label "false teacher" polarize? Yes. It is intended to polarize the "wolves in sheep's clothing" from the lambs they wish to devour.

Bro. Hennecke concluded by saying that he "feel[s] inclined to avoid a label that only polarizes." But this label is the one of the ones God gave us for the purpose of polarizing the "wolves in sheep's clothing" from the lambs they wish to devour.

5000 Harbor Light, Dickinson, Texas 77539
e-mail: wjhorsley@academicplanet.com

Response To Response

By MATT HENNECKE

As I indicated in my article, if we define "false teacher" as one who teaches that which is false, then the label "false teacher" fits. But, if we look at the New Testament use of the term (and similar terms such as false apostle), motive seems a part of the definition.

The difference in my approach and that of Bro. Horsley is that he would use the term "false teacher" sooner than would I. His threshold is lower than mine. He would label anyone who teaches what is false a "false teacher," while I would look for motive behind the teaching. My question is this: would using the term prematurely encourage or discourage study and discussion? Paul told Timothy to "gently correct" those in error (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Calling someone a "false teacher" and then suggesting they come over for cup of coffee to discuss their teaching seems a bit incongruent.

Jesus said that motive would be revealed by the eventual fruits (Matt. 7:15-16). Hence, it is much easier for me to judge motive if I have regular contact with a man than it is to judge motive of someone I have

never met who lives across the country and worships in a congregation I have never visited. Sure, I can read his writings, and expose any error revealed therein, but I see little value in calling him a "false teacher" and ratcheting up the vitriol. Sadly, too, less studied brethren upon hearing one labeled a "false teacher" by someone they respect may be inclined to accept the assessment on its face without studying the matter themselves.

If Bro. Horsley and I would argue, refute, and expose error with the same energy, what value is there in prematurely labeling someone a "false teacher?" Again, please note, I am *not* against calling someone a false teacher, and have done so locally when motive was revealed. I agree with Bro. Horsley that it is imperative that "false teachers" be identified and disciplined so the church may remain pure, but such action is left to a local congregation (2 Thess. 3:14).

Finally, Bro. Horsley must certainly impose some guidelines on himself for determining when to use the term "false teacher" for I notice nowhere in his article does he call me a false teacher.

3026 Box Canyon Rd., Huntsville, AL 35803
e-mail: hennecke@biblemaps.com

THEY KNEW THEY WERE NAKED — DO WE?

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Although I'm not entirely comfortable adapting scripture even for the sake of shock value, something needs to be done to get the attention of so many who are dressing in unacceptable clothing. Adam and Eve knew they were naked and hid themselves. Why do so many today lack the spiritual sense to do the same?

Consider how the word "naked" is used in the Bible:

Naked: Wearing no clothing at all (Job 1:21).

Naked: Wearing only a "loin covering." This is what Adam and Eve made for themselves, yet they were still "naked" (Gen. 3:7, 10). Men and women, you are naked when you go topless.

Naked: Showing the buttocks (Isa. 20:4). I see no reason why this wouldn't include partial showing, as well as tight and form fitting clothing which does little to hide this part of the body.

Naked: Showing the waist and thighs (Ex. 28:42). Priests wore "linen breeches" which covered their loins and thighs to "cover their nakedness." These would have

Modern Society's Version of
Genesis 3:7-13

7 Then the eyes of both of them were not opened, and they did not know they were naked. And they sewed spandex together and made themselves loin coverings.
8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife went to the beach from the presence of the Lord God.
9 Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"
10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I wasn't afraid because I wasn't naked; and I went to the beach."
11 And He said, "Who told you that you were not naked?"
12 Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she went shopping and I wear whatever she buys."
13 And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The fashion world, style, and what is popular deceived me and I wore it."

covered them at least from the hips to the knee.

Naked: Exposing the breast (Ezek. 16:7).

In a word picture, Jerusalem is seen as a girl who matures, her hair grows, her breasts are formed, but she is naked. Her nakedness is "covered" by God clothing her (Ezek. 16:8, 10; the same word as when God "clothed" Adam and Eve's nakedness in Gen. 3:21). Showing the breast or part of it (top, side, cleavage) is part of nakedness that needs to be covered.

There is a lot more that needs to be said and studied about modest clothing, but it would be a big step in the right direction just to cover what God calls nakedness while in public. Adam and Eve were afraid to be naked. Why aren't we? God told us something when He "...made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:20).

940 N. Elmwood Drive, Aurora, Illinois 60506
e-mail: davidlestel@yahoo.com

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Editor AL DIESTELKAMP
P.O. Box 891
Cortland, IL 60112-0891
(815) 756-9840

E-mail al@thinkonthesethings.com

Web Page www.thinkonthesethings.com

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Cortland, IL 60112-0891

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