



# THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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## Reproductive 'Rights' and 'Wrongs'

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that whatever is legal is also moral. Just because the civil government permits something does not mean that it is authorized by God. Jesus sternly forbade putting away and marrying another (Matt. 19:9). That our state governments permit divorce and remarriage in no way means that we are at liberty to ignore Christ's teaching. There are many things that are legal but not moral: fornication, abortion, pornography, bankruptcy, lying, cheating, etc.

Certainly, our government has legislated on some of these matters, but for the most part our government allows us to live as we wish without mandating moral restraint. I will leave the debate over the degree to which government should legislate morality for another time. Suffice it to say that morality is legislated (Rom. 13:3,4), and only the naive or amoral think it should not be.

As Christians we must concern ourselves less with what our government legislates and more with the teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles and prophets. If our rights and wrongs are defined by cultural standards, then we will find ourselves morally adrift. A case in point is seen with the sensitive topic of reproductive rights. Essentially, our government defends the rights of men and women to reproduce as they see fit. It is neither illegal to reproduce nor to employ methods to avoid reproduction.

However, the government's interest in protecting the rights of all persons compels it to legislate against things like rape and infanticide. Thus the abortion debate revolves around the personhood of the conceived yet unborn life and balancing "its" rights with those of "its" mother.

While it is understandable that our government wrestles with such questions, those who are conversant with Scripture understand, and therefore respect, the personhood

of the unborn. When we read, "for that which is conceived in her," we do not wonder if at that point Jesus was a person worthy of protection (Matt. 1:20). Jesus came in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7); if that which was conceived in Mary had personhood, then it is reasonable to say that conception is the identifiable point of personhood for all of us. Biologically there is no question about the matter.

In 1981 our government held hearings on the issue of when life begins. The overwhelming testimony of the doctors and geneticists summoned was that life begins at conception. Dr. Jerome LeJeune, professor of genetics at the University of Descartes in Paris said, "To accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human being has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. The human nature of the human being, conception to old age, is not a metaphysical contention, it is plain experimental evidence." Professor Hymie Gordon, chairman of the Department of Medical Genetics at Mayo Clinic said, "By all the criteria of modern molecular biology, life is present from the moment of conception" (*Rites of Life*, Landrum Shettles, 1983, pp. 113, 114).

All we have learned scientifically in the last twenty-five years has further substantiated these opinions. Nevertheless, abortion has continued unabated. The methods of killing have expanded on both ends of the conception to birth process. From the "morning-after pills" (which are intended to prevent implantation of the newly conceived baby into the womb) to the grisly "partial-birth abortion" (which involves delivering the baby half way and stabbing "it" at the base and back of the head), man has not lacked for invention in disposing of inconvenient lives.

Some have suggested that methods which prevent implantation should not be considered abortive. Indeed, there is currently legislation being proposed in Virginia which

states, "Birth control shall not be considered abortion" (*Associated Press*, 1/19/07). The "right" to birth control has become so ingrained in our culture that even Christians are quite careless and undiscerning about the methods used. The truth is that abortion is a form of birth control.

While there is liberty in whether or not one chooses to conceive, let us not think we can label any method as "birth control" and it, therefore, be moral. Senator Bob Casey (D-Pa), an avowed opponent of abortion, is an example of falling into this trap in his support of the "morning-after pill." Kimberly Hefling (reporting for the *Associated Press*, 1/23/07) concluded her article about Casey by saying, "He said he supported the morning-after pill because he believed it was contraception, and was one way to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies." If it is called contraception, even those who oppose abortion may support it.

Brethren, contraceptive methods which make the womb inhospitable to implantation should not be employed by those who value life from conception. Hefling's article concluded by saying, "The [morning-after] pill is a high dose of the most common ingredient in regular birth-control pills that, taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex, can lower the chance of pregnancy by up to 89 percent."

The truth is, all hormonal methods of birth control—including the shots, implants, patches, and the regular pill—depend, in part, upon creating an inhospitable womb in order to have such a high "success rate." Some rationalize that an inhospitable womb as a result of taking the pill is just an unintended side effect (and therefore carries no moral culpability). Perhaps such naive reasoning will salve the consciences of some, but the conscientious lover of life will not take such risks merely for the convenience of "family planning."

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# 'When Will These Things Be?'

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

The difficulty of Jesus' earliest disciples to grasp the nature of His coming kingdom was manifested in a number of ways. From their failure to understand and accept that Jesus would die (Matt. 16:21-23) to their jockeying for position and arguing amongst themselves about who would be the greatest (Matt. 20:20-28; Lk. 22:24), we realize that even those closest to Jesus had a very materialistic/physical concept of the Messiah and His reign. We may excuse the first disciples for these misconceptions on the basis of incomplete understanding; but nearly 2000 years after Jesus announced that His kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36), some insist that it will be of this world.

Another example of Jesus' disciples' initial failure to comprehend His mission as the Messiah is seen a few days before His crucifixion. The Jewish leadership had attempted to entrap Jesus in His words and had utterly failed. While their thoughts turned to more devious plots, Jesus continued to teach and uncover their hypocrisy and the futility of their external religion. How important Jesus' disciples must have felt to be the companions of this master teacher who was clearly on the verge of beginning His reign as Messiah. No doubt they were excited!

It was in this giddiness that; as they left Jerusalem with Jesus, they pointed out to Him the temple complex (Matt. 24:1) and observed its magnificence (Mk. 13:1) and its beauty (Lk. 21:5). This certainly was not the first time any of these men had seen these things, but they were looking at them with a new perspective. Their Master, their King, was a rising star who had demonstrated His mastery over the wicked and hypocritical powers that controlled the temple. No doubt they believed Jesus would soon rise to power and all of that beauty would be His, and they would reign with Him.

I wonder if we can imagine their shock when Jesus proclaimed that not one of those glorious buildings they found so remarkable would be left standing. Indeed, not one stone would be left upon another. I imagine gaping mouths and complete incredulity as Jesus turned His back to those buildings and led His disciples out the city gates and across the Kidron Valley. The wind had been knocked out of them. It was not until they had ascended the Mount of Olives that the disciples composed themselves enough to question their Master's words.

Jesus was likely seated facing the city in quietness when Peter, James, John, and Andrew approached Him privately (Mk. 13:3). This was the inner circle of Jesus' disciples;



they wanted to know more, to understand. "When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). The answer that Jesus gave them has been the source of much controversy because of a failure to understand the question He was asked. Notice that I said, "question" singular. Yes, it is a two-part question, as Luke also records (Lk. 21:7); but the question is *when* will this destruction take place.

In an attempt to harmonize the three gospel accounts of this question, some have imagined as many as four questions being asked with the additional questions coming from Matthew's record (Matt. 24:3). Thus, it is asserted, that one question is about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, one about the signs preceding the destruction, one about the sign preceding His final coming, and one about the end of the world. Yet it should be apparent that these relatively ignorant men who were struggling to grasp even the idea of Jesus' death and the destruction of Jerusalem did not have enough acumen among the twelve of them to ask anything about a "second coming."

It is more reasonable to understand their question about the *sign* of His coming (Matt. 24:3) to be identical to the question about the *sign* of when "these things" (Mk. 13:4; Lk. 21:7) were about to take place. Similarly, the question about the end of the world was not about the end of the planet, but the end of their Jewish world as they knew it. Thus "the end" corresponds to "when all these things are going to be fulfilled" (Mk. 13:4).

Jesus first answers the second part of their question by giving them *many* signs which would precede "these things." Conflicts would increase and persecutions would intensify (Mk. 13:5-13). Eventually Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies (Lk. 21:20). The description of turmoil in the heavens (Matt. 24:29) is like the figures used by the prophets of old to describe the fall of the human powers that were coming under divine judgment (Isa. 13:1,6-10,13,17-19; Joel 2:28-32).

The beginning of these signs were like the contractions of a pregnant woman (Matt. 24:8). The event was not imminent, but would come in a relatively short time. However, when people saw Jerusalem surrounded, they were to flee from Judea to the mountains (Lk. 21:21). It is then that many would comprehend that the One who had chastised the daughters of Jerusalem to not weep for Him but for themselves and their children (Lk. 23:28-31) was coming in judgment (Lk. 21:27). The desolation of Jerusalem was at hand, and the redemption of those who had endured her persecutions was near (cf. Matt. 23:37,38). No remnant of God would be found in that forsaken city; instead the chosen people of God would be gathered from all over the world (Matt. 24:31).

Jesus' parable of the fig tree illustrated what He meant by all these signs. Just as men observe a tree putting forth its leaves and understand that summer time is near, so they —when they saw these signs— would know Jerusalem's desolation was near. As Amos' basket of summer fruit meant Israel of old was ripe for picking (Amos 8:1,2), so it would be for Jerusalem.

To the first part of the disciples' question about specifically when these things would take place, Jesus gave a partial answer because it was all He knew. All three gospel accounts have the identical answer, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." Jesus was not speaking about two different events any more than the disciples were asking about two different events.

There is no reason to assume that the passing away of "heaven and earth" in Matthew 24:35 is any different than that which is described in Matthew 24:29,30. His point is that "heaven and earth" would pass away *before* that generation passed away and that His words would *never* pass away. Jesus knew that the destruction of Jerusalem would take place relatively soon (within the lifetime of at least some of those to whom He was speaking), but He did not know the day or the hour of that event (Matt. 24:36).

Unfortunately, many today (like the first century Jews) believe that the Messiah's kingdom is physical and, therefore, misunderstand Jesus' words in their context. They entirely miss Jesus' answer to His disciples. God is finished with physical Jerusalem. It is no longer part of His plan. Jerusalem has passed away, as has the generation that crucified Jesus. Yet, His words will never pass away, demonstrating that He rules now as King of kings.

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# Defending Non-Church Collectivities

By AL DIESTELKAMP

There are some brethren who call in question the authority for individual Christians to form a collectivity other than a local congregation to accomplish work that the Lord has authorized to be done by churches. While I hope the preceding sentence fairly represents the views of such brethren, I recognize that there are some variation in beliefs among those who are in general agreement in opposing what some have called “religious collectivities” or “para-church organizations.”

Since *Think* is a work of a collectivity of Christians involved in a work that is authorized to be done by local churches, I feel it is my obligation to defend our right to exist. This task is made a bit more difficult due to the fact that, as already noted, those who oppose such “collectivities” are not in full agreement as to what is allowed, and what is not allowed. As a result, I feel like one wrestling with an octopus—not knowing which tentacle is attacking.

For the sake of those who have never heard of this controversy, let me try to sum up the different views that have been put forth by those in opposition to such collectives:

- Some oppose all collectivities of Christians in *any* work that churches are charged to do. They note that it is the church which is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), and conclude that any other collectivity usurps the church’s mission. Specifically, they would deny the right of Christians to band together to teach or preach the gospel. This would include opposition to schools, camps and publications which teach from the Bible.
- Most of these brethren would claim that the family is the one exception to this rule.
- One variation of this view is to limit opposition only to collectivities that form legal organizations, such as corporations.
- Still another variation allows that Christians may form collectivities and propagate the gospel as long as they charge for such products and/or services. Thus they give an exception if it is a business. So, they do not object to a “gospel paper” published by an organization if they charge a subscription price, but if it is free, or accepts donations, they claim it is unauthorized.

From the foregoing you can easily see that some of these brethren would include *Think* in the unauthorized category, and others would not. Some have specifically given an exception to *Think* because it is a family

publication. I appreciate the gracious offer, but in reality this publication would have gone “belly up” long ago had it not been for our long list of “Voluntary Partners” who have financed a work that is beyond our family’s ability.

I have sometimes wondered if the criteria used to determine which organizations fit into their category of “unauthorized collectivities” and which do not, is based on their attitude toward the people who run the organizations. I’ve wondered that when reading what they write in one gospel paper, against another gospel paper.

To respond to the argument against such “collectivities” based on 1 Timothy 3:15, please note that the apostle did not refer to the the local church as the “pillar and ground of the truth.” The “house of God” is the universal church. Yes, a local church is to support the truth because it is part of the “house of God,” as are individual Christians.

Thus, Christians *must* band together in local congregations, and *may* band together in other ways to support the truth.

The claim is sometimes made that we have no first century examples of Christians forming collectivities other than local churches to spread the gospel. That simply is not so.

We have an example of the church in Jerusalem sending a letter to the Christians in Antioch in which they convey teaching (Ac. 15:20). This clearly shows that conveying truth in written form is an authorized work of a local church. If we were to embrace the “no-collectivities” doctrine that would mean that it would be unauthorized for individual Christians to band together to write letters to other brethren. However, many of the New Testament epistles were

the result of individual Christians pooling their talents and resources.

I would hope that no one would claim that the New Testament epistles were the work of any local congregation, but of individual Christians. Nine of the 21 epistles, while inspired by the Holy Spirit, were the works of more than one individual Christian.

Paul joined forces with Tertius to write to the Romans (Rom.16:22). Paul authored, and Sosthenes penned, the first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1). Paul and Timothy did the same for the second letter to that church (2 Cor. 1:1), as well as to churches in Philippi (Phil. 1:1) and Colosee (Col. 1:1). The same two worked together to produce the letter to Philemon (Phe. 1:1). Three Christians, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, all participated in the two letters to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1), and Silvanus helped Peter pen the first letter to the “dispersion” (1 Pet. 5:12).

I suspect it will be argued that the foregoing examples “don’t count” because inspired men were involved in the teaching, but to me the very fact that they were inspired just strengthens the right of individual Christians to join forces in proclaiming the truth in other collectivities, as well as in local churches.

The fact that some of these non-church collectivities have lectureships that are similar to gospel meetings is a particular sore spot with some brethren. Even though care is taken not to schedule lectures at times which would “compete” with nearby local churches, some question the right of any collectivity other than a local congregation to provide opportunity for worship.

Worship, including collective worship, is not restricted to within the auspices of local churches. Preaching, prayer and singing are forms of worship in which individual Christians, and groups of individual Christians, can engage (Ac. 16:25).

Truth Magazine



## Hiram Hutto, J.D. Barnes

Gospel preachers, like all others, eventually go “the way of all the earth” (Josh. 23:14). We don’t try to report all such deaths, but sometimes feel the personal need to honor those who have touched our lives by their work within our sphere of influence. In recent months, two such men have passed from this life.

Hiram Hutto was an Alabama preacher who dedicated some of the best years of his life working in central Illinois. Though he died back in August of last year, his influence lives on, not only in Alabama, but also in the Peoria, Illinois area.

John (J.D.) Barnes was another Alabama preacher who spent many years working with small congregations in several regions of our nation, including Illinois and Iowa where we came to know him. He went to his eternal reward in December.

Both of these good men preached as long as health permitted, which was well beyond what is thought of as “retirement age.” We were blessed to know them.

# Denying God Secretly

By **RICK LIGGIN**

If I have put my confidence in gold, and called fine gold my trust, if I have gloated because my wealth was great, and because my hand had secured so much; if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon going in splendor, and my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth, that too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I

would have denied God above.” (Job 31:24-28).

Recently, when I once again came across these words of Job, I was struck by how serious he was about avoiding every form of sin and even the slightest of transgressions. In this text, Job is asserting his integrity before God and trying to argue his absolute faithfulness to God. Job recognized, and bluntly declares here, that any paganism at all—even in the smallest of forms—would constitute an utter denial of God.

When Job speaks in this text of looking at the sun or the moon in their splendor, he’s not talking about simply admiring these great heavenly bodies as God created them. All of us, from time to time, stand in awe of God’s creation and admire its beauty...and rightly so! We should admire what God has made.

But this isn’t what Job is talking about in this text. He’s talking about looking at the sun or moon with the intent of worshiping these created things. Job is saying that if somehow he felt a desire to worship the sun or the moon by throwing a kiss at them—if he only entertained these thoughts secretly in his own heart—even that would be an outright denial of the true God of heaven.

Job knew, as we do, that the moon and sun are only parts of God’s creation; they are not deities to be worshiped. Only God is God; and only He is worthy of our worship. And that means that even the slightest move by man in the direction of paganism would be an iniquity deserving of judgment.

Now, when I think about what Job says in this text, I cannot help but think of at least two lessons we need to learn from it:

1) A person does not have to overtly and openly deny God to be guilty of denying Him. One can deny the Lord secretly in his heart without ever doing anything openly to suggest that he has denied God. When we

longingly look at temporal things and begin to secretly think in our hearts that maybe these things can make us happy and give our lives real purpose, we are taking steps in the direction of denying God.

2) Even the slightest move in the direction of putting trust in something else or someone else other than God constitutes paganism and a denial of the true God. Now this may not mean a whole lot to us in a society that traditionally does not literally bow down to images and idols. But when we understand that Job, not only speaks of kissing the sun or moon, but also of putting confidence in wealth and in our ability to secure so much for ourselves (31:24-25), we begin to see the point.

We live in an extremely earthly (worldly) society. Oh, we may not literally bow to idols, but we most certainly devote ourselves to the pursuit of material things and material pleasures. And that makes us just as pagan as the man who throws a kiss to the moon or bows before an idolatrous sun god. And what we need to be acutely aware of is that even though we may consider ourselves to be Christians, and even though we may faithfully worship the true God on a regular basis, when we put (even some of) our confidence in physical pleasure or our material things or our ability to secure wealth, we have in essence denied God. And in denying God in this way, we are just as guilty of “an iniquity calling for judgment” (31:28).

Job’s words are sobering, but he knew his own heart—that he’d never been guilty of any of these iniquities. Can you honestly say the same for yourself? Before you answer, you’d better examine yourself—your own heart. You’d better recognize that God knows everything you do...even the things you do secretly in your heart.

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# THINK

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