



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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That There May Be Equality

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The apostle Paul, in urging brethren in Corinth to follow through on their desire to aid needy saints in other congregations, expressed that he did not want them to be burdened, “but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality” (2 Cor. 8:14).

Though he never used the “equality” plea regarding evangelism and edification, we see that churches with financial ability made things more “equal” by supporting gospel preachers to work with other congregations (2 Cor. 11:8).

Here in the United States, scriptural co-operation flourished during the decades of the 1950’s and 1960’s with able churches helping new or struggling churches by supporting preachers. The struggles and ultimate division over unscriptural methods of benevolence and evangelism took a huge toll on many congregations which had formerly been good about supporting preachers working with smaller congregations.

Now, several decades later, in much more prosperous times, there are many congregations which, because of their numbers and/or economic situations, have an abundance of resources for their work, while many other congregations lack the funds needed for productive work.

There has always been some inequality in such matters. Needless to say, there always will be some disparity, but it is my observation that an ever-widening gap regarding financial abilities has produced two kinds of churches—the “haves” and “have-nots.” A growing number of congregations have huge treasuries. In regard to finances, they “have become wealthy, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17), but have grown “lukewarm” when it comes to the support of the gospel in needy places.

Perhaps we would do well to examine some of the reasons this inequity has become

so apparent, and look for ways that it can be lessened:

The problem has been increased in some areas by needless splintering. While we would like for there to be a thriving congregation in every town, in some areas that is simply not practical. If small congregations meeting within a few miles of each other would band together it would alleviate part of the problem. The expense of maintaining two or three meeting places could be cut significantly and make it more possible to become self-sufficient. Often the reasons there are multiple congregations within a given area is because of past divisions that have since been resolved, but neither group will budge to seek actual unity.

There are also some congregations which once were self-sufficient but have dwindled down to a point where they are merely “keeping house”—and not doing very well at that! If there are other congregations within reasonable distance, it may be time to fold up. If there are no other sound congregations reasonably close, these are the kinds of places that able congregations should be anxious to help by providing support for a man or two to work with them.

Speaking of having two preachers in one location, a growing number of large or affluent congregations are feeling the “need” for a second preacher, while ignoring the plight of many small or poor congregations which can’t even support one man. I’m not opposed to a church having two preachers, but it’s high time we realize that the need for two preachers in one congregation is more justifiable in new or needy places than it is in congregations with an eldership and many capable members.

Christians sometimes lament about a so-called “preacher shortage” among our brethren. I don’t really think there is as much a preacher shortage as there is a “support shortage.” As this is being written an online website has no less than 38 non-institutional churches seeking preachers, with only two claiming to be able to provide full support.

There are 31 on this list that reveal their inability to support, informing prospective preachers of having to raise what is lacking. We all know there are many more churches throughout the world that are not on such a list that are in the same situation.



Another thing which has contributed to the disparity is the temptation for affluent congregations to spend huge sums of money on luxuries which appeal primarily to the flesh. This is often manifested in the construction of church buildings which are opulent instead of commodious. At the same time there are brethren in other locations who not only don’t have adequate meeting places, but also can’t support a preacher to work with them.

This emphasis on luxury is being fueled by a few “church growth experts” who are convincing brethren that they cannot grow unless they follow the lead of the survey-driven “seeker-friendly” advocates in the evangelical movement.

Then there are churches which have huge sums of money setting in bank accounts with no specific purpose in mind, while churches in needy areas are deficit-spending and their preachers are having to beg for support. It should not have to be said, but the church is not in the money-saving business, and an unused treasury brings no glory to God.

I will likely be reminded that the bank balance a church maintains, what it spends on architecture, or whether to have two preachers, are all matters of judgment. That is true, but let me remind you that we will give account one day for the judgments we make. While I am obviously disturbed by this widening gap, I am happy to say that there are still a good many able congregations that are resisting the “inward-looking” trend and are doing their best to support gospel preaching in needy areas, while at the same time being effective in their local areas. God bless them!

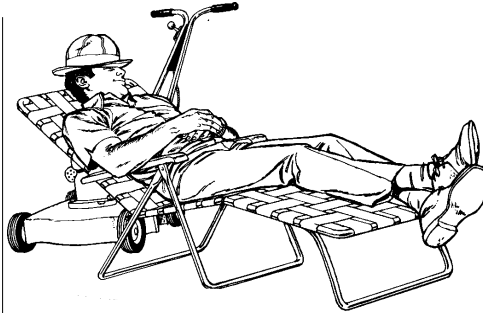
And Yet, We Still Call It 'The Lord's Day'

By AL DIESTELKAMP

No doubt, you've heard what the world thinks about Sundays. Sundays are for:

- Sleeping late...
- Leisurely breakfasts...
- Dressing down...
- Traveling...
- Family gatherings...
- Shopping...
- Sporting events...
- Homework...
- Yard work...
- Repairs around the house...
- Part-time jobs.....and the list goes on.

Christians have learned that most of these things can be done on Sundays as long as they squeeze in a couple of hours of worship. You'll notice that none of the aforementioned activities are wrong in and of themselves, and with the exception of sleeping late, any of them can probably be done



on Sunday without being guilty of sin. However, many Christians clutter their lives so full of non-spiritual activities—even on Sunday—that to call Sunday “the Lord’s day” is a bit of a stretch.

As a result, it’s best to stay out of the way of the church building door when the last “Amen” is said, lest you get run over by those rushing out to get to their other interests. Some even beat the rush by leaving during the invitation song. That way if someone responds to the Lord’s invitation they

won’t be intimidated into staying to witness a new birth or hear a confession of a brother or sister in Christ.

The “clutter” in Christians lives often affects more than the so-called Lord’s day. Congregations often make up worship assignment schedules which, after all the necessary changes, looks more like a baseball manager’s lineup card after a 15-inning game. Don’t even dream of planning for a week-long gospel meeting, even months in advance, without having several members announce that they have something that will get in the way of attending.

Please don’t get the idea that I’m opposed to Christians occasionally being away from their local congregations. We all have circumstances which force us to be away at times, and we need some time to be away on vacation. However, we all need to limit time away lest we hinder our collective work. After all, part of our “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1) involves sacrifice.

'Incredible' Beginning

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

The beginnings of things always intrigue us. We often mark them with great ceremony at the time if we anticipate their importance (weddings, ribbon-cutting grand openings, signings, etc.). We frequently research beginnings if only later we realize someone’s or something’s importance (the work of historians). It is therefore of no surprise that thinking men and women have often pondered the beginning of the physical universe.

While many are content to not give it *any* consideration and perhaps assume that because it is here it has *always* been here, most observe and realize that all physical things have measurable deterioration and, therefore, cannot be eternal but must have had a beginning point.

Essentially, there are two possibilities for how the physical began: 1) It happened by accident, or 2) It happened on purpose. Expressed another way: 1) It happened by random chance, or 2) It happened by design. Stated yet another way: 1) It began spontaneously from ignorant nothingness, or 2) It began intentionally from intelligence.

In modern parlance it is the debate between “Big Bang” and “Intelligent Design” or “evolution vs. creation.” While some have attempted to harmonize the general theory of evolution and creation theory, at its core such an attempt is futile. To borrow from the apostle Paul, “what fellowship has purpose with accident, what communion has

design with chance, what accord has intelligence with ignorance, what agreement has creation with evolution,” (adapted from 2 Cor. 6:14-16). The answer is none.

When anyone is challenged to give a historical explanation for the existence of something physical, spontaneous generation from nothing is never considered sound reasoning. Yet this is what modern science teaches is the best explanation for the beginning of all things. However, the ancient book of books, the Holy Scriptures, offers another explanation. Many find its explanation incredible, but it is far more credible than the spontaneous generation of something from nothing suggested by atheists and agnostics. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Indeed, mankind is without excuse for not drawing the basic conclusion that a powerful supernatural intelligence (God) is the cause of this physical existence (Rom. 1:20).

Scripture reveals that God simply spoke things into existence. “Then God said...and it was so,” is an oft repeated phrase in Genesis 1. To be able to speak material things into existence demands a power that is beyond nature and beyond our comprehension. It is super-natural. Therefore, it is understandable that atheists assume that this creation account (along with the rest of the first eleven chapters of Genesis) is mythical, legendary or, at best, allegorical, but certainly not literal. Yet, even some believers in God attempt to explain the creation using the naturalistic assumptions of unbelievers.

Forgetting that with God all things are possible (Matt. 19:26), many find these accounts incredible and unbelievable. However, again borrowing from the sayings of Paul, “why should it be thought incredible by you that” God spoke things into existence in six days? Of course, Paul was addressing Agrippa with regard to Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 26:8). But beware! If you find a six-day creation incredible, you might have the same problem with the resurrection from the dead. Most people do. Whenever we doubt the power of God’s spoken word, we have no foundation for faith in any aspect of His word.

As disciples of Christ, we would do well to follow His lead concerning the authority of the Genesis account. In responding to His adversaries about a point of great controversy regarding divorce, Jesus refers to the Genesis account of the beginning (Matt. 19:3-8). Jesus’ authoritative use of Moses’ account of creation affirms that He believed it to be accurate. Indeed, we cannot claim Christ as our Lord and reject the accuracy of Moses’ words (Jn. 5:46,47). To adapt Jesus’ words to the Sadducees and apply them to the present controversy over creation/evolution, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). Beware, a rejection of these beginning truths undermines the whole foundation of the rest of Scripture and, therefore, our faith in God’s power to do anything.

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Why Go To Hell Twice?

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Arguably, the statement, “My life is hell on earth,” is false. Of course, exaggeration is understandable during times of intense suffering—but what if it wasn’t exaggeration? What if life really is so bad that worse cannot be imagined? Well, God still insists that eternal hell is worse, since it is total absence of the presence of His glory (2 Thess. 1:8). Faith says, no matter what happens in this life, to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9) is not the answer.

If someone maintains that their life truly is “hell on earth,” then surely they will get their fill of it here and do everything possible to go to heaven in eternity! If life is hellish, why go to hell twice? Why let temporary suffering lead to eternal suffering? Any glimpse of hell someone may think they get in this life should serve as driving motivation, pushing them to find the way to heaven and to do whatever is necessary to go that way.

Why do so many blame God for evil and suffering, rather than Satan? Why do so many choose an eternity in hell rather than in heaven? The biggest problem we face is that it hurts *now*! It’s hard, perhaps even impossible, to ignore searing pain, even if we are told it is temporary or that something better awaits us in eternity. The cry is, “Make it go away now!” The temptation is to deprecate future eternal spiritual bliss while desperately searching for and clinging to false promises of temporary physical relief.

Faith and hope say we have to wait to see and have what we desperately need (Heb. 11:1; Rom. 8:24-25). We hate waiting—especially when the deficiency is or seems urgent or unbearable. God does not ask that we ignore pain, depravation or loneliness. He does not suggest that these are not real. What God does ask is that we know and trust Him enough that we will accept His answer to these.

Most people contend that God sometimes answers “yes” to requests for relief from suffering, and sometimes He responds with a “no.” This, in turn, opens up a debate as to why God might give such replies in certain circumstances. Some conclude that a good and loving God wouldn’t sit by and do nothing as suffering and death ravage us—and they are right! God has done something!

Unbelief based on human suffering misses the theme of the Bible, it denies the value of God becoming flesh, and ignores the proclamation of the cross—God cares! “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). Is it possible that, as God told Paul, His grace is “sufficient”? (2 Cor. 12:9).

God knows that we need our tears wiped away—no more death, sorrow, crying and pain (Rev. 21:4). These are real needs and are addressed fully by God by giving His servants a home where none of these exist for eternity. It is not cruelty for God not to end suffering for everyone now, it is merciful for Him to give us a way to conquer even death “...through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

Suffering now pushes us toward God because He alone can end it for us. Focusing on heaven motivates faithfulness since “...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which

shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

What is the alternative? What is the point of being “...of those who draw back to perdition”? (Heb. 10:39). Will we let the feeling of being cursed in this life cause us to choose damnation? What is the point of going through a life of suffering while also holding to “...a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries”? (Heb. 10:27).

Why would anyone want to go to hell twice? God’s mercy and grace says we don’t have to.

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BORDER CROSSING

By MATT HENNECKE

They want citizenship. No, that’s not strong enough—they desperately want citizenship. Why? Because they have been living in horrible circumstances—in desolation, in despair, in distress. Every day sees them and their loved ones slip further and further away. And what do you expect? Just give them a glimmer of hope, just show them the promise of a new life in a new country and they’d be fools not to jump at the chance. Anyone would.

The problem is, they want citizenship without going through the proper channels. They want to have all the benefits of citizenship but don’t want to follow the established procedures. Laws? Rules? Regulations? Forget it.

And so they sidestep the entrance requirements. But here’s the thing: though they blend in and pretend to be citizens, they really aren’t citizens. They don’t really enjoy the benefits of citizenship. They’re aliens.

Oh, did you think I was talking about the thousands of Mexicans who illegally climb the border fences in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas every month for a chance to live and work in the United States? No, I wasn’t talking about them, I was talking about those who want to be Christians, but are unwilling to do what the Bible says to obtain citizenship.

Consider for a moment Paul’s words regarding our past alien status, and how we became citizens: “Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:12-13).

And then he concludes: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household” (Eph. 2:19).

Did you catch it? The entrance requirement for becoming citizens? It was there in verse 13: “in Christ Jesus.” Being “in” Christ Jesus is what makes us citizens. Okay, so

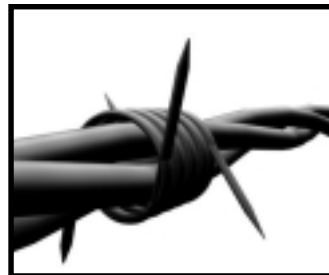
how do we get “in”? Paul tells us the entrance requirement: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27).

But people don’t want to obey the rules or follow the regulations. They want citizenship on their terms not God’s. They think all they have to do is be a “good person,” or attend worship, or simply believe in God. So, they think they are citizens, they believe they enjoy the benefits of citizenship, but in reality they are aliens—alienated from Christ himself. Here is how Paul put it: “being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18).

Dear reader, please simply read the first several chapters of the book of Acts—sometimes referred to as the book of conversions. In it are stories of people who became Christians; who followed the instructions for citizenship; who were once aliens but are now free; who were once lost, but now enjoy the blessings of citizenship in the kingdom. Be sure you have followed the proper procedures for entrance!

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TRANSFORMERS

By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

If you haven't seen the movie *Transformers*, you've probably seen the commercials for it, and if you've been around children you've likely been introduced to the toys that inspired the movie. What appears to be one thing, when manipulated turns into something completely different.

The apostle Paul, in writing to the Christians in Rome urged them to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). So, in one sense we should all be transformers.

However, a Christian must be quite different from the toy, which is able to be changed back to its original form at the whim of the child in whose hands it is found. The Christian, after being transformed must remain a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17)—a "new man" (Eph. 4:17-24), not allowing the world to manipulate him back into his former self.

The church member (I wouldn't call him a Christian) who appears to be spiritual and righteous on Sunday, but is worldly during the week, or in different surroundings, has become a transformer of the worst kind—a hypocrite.

MEN'S OVERNIGHT BIBLE STUDY

The fourth annual *Men's Overnight Bible Study* will be held Friday night through Saturday afternoon September 14-15, 2007 at a campground near Manteno, Illinois. It is hoped this event will encourage and edify men in their particular roles in the Kingdom—helping them be better Christians. Men can get away from the pressures of their lives and come together to focus on male issues which generally are not often, or as candidly addressed, in congregational Bible studies. It allows Christians from some distance to make or rekindle friendships, and to strengthen every man in Christ Jesus. Following are the topics and speakers:

- "We Are Normal" ~ Rick Liggin
- "What Does It Mean To Be A Man?" (ages 12-22) ~ Jeremy Dehut
- "Show Yourself To Be An Example" (post college age) ~ Bryan Bickford
- "The Blessings of Being Single" (for singles of any age) ~ Ryan Barclay
- "Would Your Wife Choose You?" (for married men) ~ Joe Novak
- "Is It Impossible for A 'Real Man' Not To Look?" ~ Andy Diestelkamp
- "He Must Increase, But I Must Decrease" ~ Steve Bonk
- "It's Not An Opinion" ~ Keith Barclay

This event is organized by Christians in the northern and central Illinois area, and is not the work of any congregation. It is the result of the efforts put forth by its organizers and those willing to lead the various Bible studies. For more information and online registration go to: www.freewebs.com/mensbiblestudy, or e-mail Tim Zydek at <timzzz61@core.com>

Voluntary Partners

Cost of past issue:	
Printing & Supplies	\$ 85.00
Postage (U.S. & Canada)	386.10
Foreign Postage	38.64
Return Postage (15)	<u>6.15</u>
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 515.89
Funds available for past issue	<u>101.39</u>
Deficit	\$ 414.90

Donations (as of 7/23):

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Anonymous, TX	<u>20.00</u>
TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 750.00
Deficit from past issue	<u>414.90</u>
Funds for this issue	\$ 335.10

We appreciate, so much, all the support we receive from readers who choose to help us continue this publication. Before the next issue is mailed the annual postage permit fee of \$160 will come due, so I expect this issue to cost about \$650 which would put the deficit at about \$315.

Directory of Churches

The Lord's Church in the Upper-Midwest, is a booklet containing directory information and brief histories of non-institutional churches in northern Illinois, northwest Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Single copies are \$7 including sales tax, postage and handling, if mailed. Additional copies in the same mailing (or copies not involving shipping) are \$5 each. Order from:

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