



# THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

Volume 39

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Number 2

## Doing Good for Our Nation

By AL DIESTELKAMP

God recognized the need for men to be governed. Ideally, men should be ruled by God's word, but He recognized that most would not submit to His rule, and so he ordained civil government to maintain order in this wicked world.

God revealed that governments are "sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good" (1 Pet. 2:14). Governments that fulfill this mandate, will not be a "terror to good works, but to evil" (Rom. 13:3).

The Lord has even given civil rulers authority to "bear the sword" in order to "execute wrath" on evildoers (Rom. 13:4). Clearly, capital punishment, is an option available to governments in their attempts to maintain order.

Since governments are ordained by God, "whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves" (Rom. 13:2).

However, governments sometimes become corrupt, and violate God's purpose. Christians need to be prepared with the right response should our government make laws which ask us to violate God's word. It's easy for us to see that if our government were to enact a law requiring Christians to bow down to an idol, or prohibiting us from assembling on the first day of the week, we would have to violate such laws. Our first century brethren, when commanded by civil authorities not to preach the gospel, cited the overriding principle: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Ac. 5:29).

Here in the United States our government has had a history of trying to accommodate religious belief, but there is a growing sentiment away from that practice. We should not fool ourselves into thinking that we will always be so blessed. Already we hear of secularists who want laws against public teaching against homosexuality, classifying

### Third in a series on *'Doing Good To All'*

it as a "hate crime." Then there are those who want to require churches to allow women to preach, and if they don't, to revoke tax-exempt status.

In such situations it should become clear that the command to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man" (1 Pet. 2:13) does not apply to man-made laws which would cause us to violate a command of God.

Perhaps a more difficult decision is what to do when the government steps beyond its authority and "binds" where God has "loosed." Consider what should be our response if the governing authorities imposed any of the following:

1. *A law allowing church assemblies only on Sundays.* Clearly, the Lord has authorized Christians to meet often—even daily (Ac. 5:42), and we have an example of a church that apparently met only on the first day of the week (Ac. 20:7). Since how often we meet in addition to the first day assembly is a matter to be determined by the local church, some may think that in such a case we must abide by the law of the land. I disagree, and perhaps the next couple of examples will show that when God looses, man (including government) cannot bind.

2. *A law prohibiting Christians from having children.* Don't scoff at that possibility. Already some nations restrict the number of children people can have. It's not a giant leap to think a government might feel they have the right to restrict the growth of Christianity by prohibiting believers from having children. If that were to happen, I believe we would have the God-given right to disobey such a law (1 Tim. 5:14).

3. *A law making spanking of children a crime.* This has become a reality in some parts of our nation. While there are other forms of correction available to parents,

God's word has clearly endorsed spanking as an authorized form of discipline (Prov. 13:24). Man, including the government, has no right to bind where God has loosed.

### What About Taxes?

One of the "good" things we can do for our government is to pay our taxes. Jesus, when asked about paying taxes during a time when Rome was in power said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Lk. 20:25). The apostle Paul told Christians in Rome to pay our taxes because governments are "God's ministers" (Rom. 13:6-7).

The fact that governments often use our tax money for evil purposes does not permit us to withhold from them. God will hold them accountable for how they minister for Him.

### What You Can Do for Your Country

It is "good and acceptable to God" that we pray for our nation and those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-3). God listens to His children, making prayer powerful and effective (Jas. 5:16). Who knows, our prayers may affect more positive change than our votes!

In his inaugural address, President John F. Kennedy issued the following challenge: "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you—ask what can you do for your country." Long before, Solomon supplied the best answer to that question: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). Therefore, the greatest good you can do for your country is to make it more righteous—by being righteous.



# Faith Comes By Hearing The Word of God

By STEVE FONTENOT

According to an article that was published in the New York Daily Times, August 24, 2007, written by Helen Kennedy, “Mother Teresa,” the famous humanitarian, had struggled with and lost her faith in God. According to her own letters, she felt “unwanted, unloved” by God, and instead of faith, had nothing “but emptiness and darkness.”

In 1946, when she was a 36-year-old convent teacher, she thought “Christ spoke to her directly” and she felt “a deeply personal bond with Jesus” and recounted “conversations and visions” she had with Him. However, the heavenly voices she thought she heard, ceased, and “it was that loss that she mourned the rest of her life,” spending “her last 50 years secretly struggling with doubts about her faith.” “She felt abandoned by Christ, referring to Jesus as ‘the Absent One.’” It seems her faith was built on hearing—hearing what she thought were voices, rather than on “hearing the word of God.” When the voices ceased, so did the faith. How sad.

God intended for our faith in Christ to be built on *historical, objective, evidence*. “Go...*preach the gospel...* He who has believed...” (Mk. 16:15,16). “Therefore [based on the evidence presented-*sf*] let all the house of Israel know for certain the God

has made Him both Lord and Christ... Now *when they heard this*, they were pierced to the heart... those who *received his word* were baptized...” (Ac. 2:36,37,41). “Many of those who *heard the message* believed” (Ac. 4:4). This was the work given to the apostles, prophets, and teachers of the 1st century—*preach the Word*. People were commended for “examining the Scriptures...to see whether these things were so.” Result...”Therefore many of them believed...” (Ac. 17:11,12). God’s plan was, “*Faith comes by hearing...the word of God.*”

**“So then  
faith comes  
by hearing,  
and hearing  
by the word  
of God.”**

~Rom. 10:17

Abraham told the rich man, “They [the rich man’s brothers on earth-*sf*] have Moses and the Prophets; *let them hear them.*” Moses and the prophets were long dead. His brothers had the writings of Moses and the prophets—they were to hear their written word.

The apostles, prophets, and teachers of the gospel in the 1st century are long dead. But, we have their writings. And this is where our faith should be based. “These have been *written so that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ...” (Jn. 20:31). “It seemed fitting...having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, *to write it out for you...so that you may know the exact truth...*” (Lk. 1:3,4). “By referring to this, *when you read you can understand* my insight into the mystery of Christ,” (Eph. 3:4).

“I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you *will be able to call these things to mind...* This is now...the second letter I am writing to you...” (2 Pet. 1:15...3:1). God’s plan still is, “Faith comes by hearing...the word of God”—the *written* word of God!

A song in our songbook says, “You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart... I know that He is living, whatever men may say; I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer, and just the time I need Him He’s always near.” What does the songwriter mean? What do we mean when we sing this? Is faith in Christ based on something “within my heart”? Yes, *faith* is “within my heart,” but is our faith *based* on something “within” or something *without—objective, historical evidence*?

If someone asks us why we believe in Jesus, is our answer, “I know it because of what’s within me”? One definition of faith is, “strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof” [*Oxford Dictionary*]. Is this how we view faith—a “spiritual apprehension” within—not dependent on proof? “I know that he is living...I see His hand of mercy...”? What if your friend you have been praying for dies? Does this mean Jesus is not living since you did not “see his hand of mercy” to give your friend life? Is our faith based on personal experience—“I hear his voice of cheer, and just the time I need him, he’s always near”? Maybe this isn’t what the songwriter alluded to. But, if our faith is based on “spiritual apprehension rather than proof,” on personal experiences, or on culture (mom and dad believed), when these fail we too may enter the terrible darkness of doubt where the saving of souls “holds no attraction. Heaven means nothing.” (from Teresa’s letters). *Faith comes by hearing*—not the voices within, not personal experiences, not parents, not the church—but by “hearing...*the word of God.*”

Build your faith on the Scriptures. Teach your children the evidences in God’s Word. If you want to convert your neighbor, equip yourself to present the evidences the Holy Spirit has given us in the written word of God. Why? “*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” Then, in all the storms and uncertainties of life, faith can remain sure for the foundation upon which it rests is sure—“the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.” (1 Pet. 1:25).

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## LIVING LIKE NO ONE ELSE

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Syndicated talk radio financial advisor, Dave Ramsey, urges his listeners to “live like no one else, so you can live like no one else.” His message is to live frugally while you rid yourself of debt so that later on you can live comfortably. For callers with overwhelming debt he often prescribes a “beans and rice; rice and beans” budget.

Since Ramsey often peppers his advice with scriptures, I trust he will not be upset if I “borrow” his motto to make a spiritual point. After all, our Lord does ask us to “live like no one else” while in the world (Jn. 15:19).

As with every analogy, we must be careful not to carry this one too far. Yes, we have an overwhelming “debt” which we cannot repay, even on a spiritual “beans and rice; rice and beans” lifestyle. That is, we cannot work our way out of the debt of sin merely by right living, but must throw ourselves on the mercy of God.

That being said, when God extends His grace to us by paying off our debt with the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, He requires that we “live like no one else” (cp. Rom. 12:1-2). When we think we have it hard, living righteously while the world indulges in sinful pleasures, we need to remember that Jesus promises that if we “overcome,” we will live “royally” in eternity (Rev. 3:21).

# ‘LEADING BROTHERS’

## Is This A New Office in the Church?

By KARL DIESTELKAMP

Recently, a Christian pointed to a man, saying: “He is one of our leading brothers. We don’t have elders, but we do have leading brothers.” When I inquired how the men became “leading brothers” I was told, “The minister in charge selected them.” It was clear that these men are separate from the rest of the men in the congregation in reference to their role.

Reading my New Testament, I have somehow missed the passages referring to “leading brothers” and their qualifications. The apostle Paul refers to “the office of bishop” (or overseer—1 Tim. 3:1), and uses the words *elder* and *bishop* interchangeably (Tit. 1:5-7). And while there is reference to deacons, the scriptures are silent about “leading brothers” as opposed to “non-leading brothers.”

I ask, “Just who put ‘the minister in charge’ of anything?” A preacher has “charge” of nothing by reason of the fact he preaches and as such he is not “over” anyone and has “oversight” of nothing in the church—he preaches the gospel! Only

elders have authorized “oversight” (1 Pet. 5:2; Ac. 20:28). By what stretch of his imagination does any preacher presume to “select” certain men and appoint them to be “leading brothers?”

Perhaps one who considers himself officially “The Minister” of a congregation will come forward and, *from his Bible*, instruct us as to both his official title and his authority to select “leading brothers” from among the other “brothers” and tell us what the difference is between them. While he is at it he can tell us what the scriptural qualifications are to become a “leading brother.”

No one objects to capable men filling roles that need to be filled and doing work that needs to be done in cooperation with all the brethren. No doubt in the process of this they “lead” others, but that does not make them “officers” with a title. This may be an effort to fill the hole where qualified elders cannot be found, *or are not wanted*. It is just one more thing borrowed from false religion and false teaching that takes brethren farther and farther from the truth. Wake up brethren!

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# Pointing Fingers

By RICK LIGGIN

I never cease to be amazed at some people’s knowledge of the Bible. It seems like some folks, no matter how ignorant they are about God’s Word, always know certain verses of Scripture—and often they know these verses for all the wrong reasons. They know, for example, that the Bible teaches that “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8), but usually because they want to “love” someone in an immoral way (like a live-in girlfriend, or a gay or lesbian “lover”). They also know about the verse that teaches: “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” but again, it’s usually for selfish reasons—they want to take revenge (with God’s approval) on someone who’s mistreated them.

And of course the one Bible verse that everyone knows is: “Judge not that you be not judged” (Matt. 7:1). Worldly folks want to quote this verse every time you try to point out some error in their lives that needs correcting.

Now, I have to admit that after all these years of preaching, I’m no longer surprised or even disappointed when a worldly person tries to throw this text up at me as I try to help him see the error of his way. But I do get disturbed when my own brothers or sisters in Christ try to use this text to get me “off their case” for the same reason.

Jesus *does* warn us about judging others (Matt. 7:1); but if you read further in this



context, you will see that Jesus more specifically is condemning one who is hypercritical and hypocritical in his faultfinding (7:2-5). When we go looking for a “speck” (or minor fault) in a brother’s “eye” (life), we are being hypercritical...and that’s wrong. And worse: when we do this while having a “log” (or major fault) in our own eye...that’s hypocritical. And this is the kind of judging that Jesus so strongly condemns.

But that’s not what we have here when people with real faults throw up the “judge not that you be not judged” verse. In such cases, we usually have one with a “speck” lovingly trying to help one with a real “log,”

and the one with the “log” starts yelling, “foul.”

The fact is that all of us have at least some “specks” (or faults) in our lives. If we look at anyone long and hard enough, we will find “specks” or faults...no matter how genuinely good the person might be. But the fact that we can point back at someone who is confronting us about our sin and say, “Hey, but you’re guilty of this”—even if it is a greater sin than the one he is pointing to in our life and even if he is being hypercritical and hypocritical—that *does not make our sin any less wrong or any less offensive or any less in need of repentance!*

When we point a finger back and use his “speck” or even his “hypocrisy” as an excuse for our sin, we prove that we are carnal, and (to borrow Peter’s words) we are “in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity” (cf. Ac. 8:23). If we really were spiritually minded and truly concerned about pleasing the Lord, we would appreciate his efforts to help us improve.

So, if some brother approaches us in an effort to correct some failing in our life, we need to be careful about pointing our finger back at him! His having a “speck” or even a “log” doesn’t take away the fact that we still may be at fault. And if that’s true, then we need to correct it—no matter how many sins may be in his life.

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# Now That I Am Old

By ROBERT E. SPEER

In the Volume 37, Number 1 issue of *Think* (January-February-March 2006), the editor expressed both encouragement and warning to “older gospel preachers.” Being of that order, I commend the article, accepting both the encouragement and the warning. Further, the article put me in a reflective mood, now that I am “old.”

My own father was “touchy” about his age. In fact, I don’t recall anyone who was more sensitive about growing “old” than my father. This is not meant a criticism; it is simply an observation. One simply grows old one day at a time, a natural process for which one need not make apology. I don’t mind, for instance, telling people I am 73 years of age. (Well, actually, at this writing I am only 72 years, ten months, one week and five days old.) And from that platform I have witnessed some good—and some bad—things.

One of the privileges and joys of the view from my platform is to see young men and women I knew when they were but children, some even from birth, who are now ones who have obeyed the gospel, having chosen mates who will help them go to heaven, who are helping bring up their children in the Lord, and who are faithfully serving His cause. Some have become elders or married men who became elders in the Lord’s church. From my aged platform I see many who have themselves become grandparents, grandparents who have grandchildren who have obeyed or soon will obey the gospel.

My family and I lived in Nigeria for two years (1965-1967). In addition to preaching there it was my privilege to have a number of training classes for young preachers. Since leaving that country I have returned

four times, again preaching and working with younger preachers. On my last trip (1993), while in a series of classes with preachers and others, one of my former students stood and said, “We older preachers must recognize and fulfill our responsibilities in training the young preachers among us, and set the proper example before them.” Two thoughts came to mind: 1) This is 2 Timothy 2:2 fulfilled, and 2) if my former students are among the “older preachers,” where does that put me!?!

Whenever I have the opportunity to teach, to work with, unmarried young people, I emphasize the need to marry Christians. It is such a joy to visit places where I have preached and have a young man or young woman come to me and enthusiastically introduce me to a spouse, saying, “He/she is a Christian!”

On a sad note, I have also witnessed the fall from faith of the young, the middle aged, the old. One can sense the pain when Paul wrote of a former co-worker (Col. 4:14; Phe. 24), stating, “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). Contributing causes may be listed at length, but it may be reduced to one word; namely, sin. The writer of Hebrews said, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12-13).

All in all, good memories far outweigh the bad. As John said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 Jn. 1).

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## PREACHERS NEEDED

The Northside Church in Trenton, Tennessee is seeking a preacher to work with them. They can provide partial support. Trenton is the county seat of Gibson County, and is located in western Tennessee. For more information contact:

Frank Paschall (731) 855-3999  
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The Long Avenue church in Chicago is seeking a gospel preacher to work with them. Any man interested in this challenge should contact:

Dennis Turner (773) 921-3371  
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|--------------------------------|------------------|
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| Return Postage (17)            | 6.97             |
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| Funds available for past issue | 945.21           |
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| Surplus from past issue   | 443.73           |
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